



Melania Trump, son Barron move into White House

## ISRAEL TO REDUCE GAZA POWER, FEEDING FEARS OF UNREST



MOSCOW: Protesters hold posters reading "Corruption steals the future" and "Miserable cowardly thief" during an unauthorized opposition rally in central Moscow yesterday. —AFP

# PROTESTERS MARCH ACROSS RUSSIA

## KREMLIN CRITIC NAVALNY DETAINED IN MOSCOW

**MOSCOW:** Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny was detained in Moscow yesterday as he headed to a protest in Moscow, as thousands of his supporters rallied across the country. The demonstration is the second mass action since March 26 called by Navalny, who has announced his intention to run for president next year and has drawn a new generation to the streets through a relentless online campaign. "Alexei has been detained in the stairwell," his wife Yulia wrote on his Twitter account about 40 minutes before the anti-corruption rally called by the Kremlin critic was set to start in the city center. She posted a photo of him getting into a police car in the street outside their home.

Navalny supporters were demonstrating across Russia, with several arrested as police warned organizers against holding an unauthorized rally in Moscow. The 41-year-old's anti-corruption videos have needed the country's most powerful and drawn to the streets crowds unseen since a wave of protests against President Vladimir Putin's reelection to a

third term in 2012. Local media said roughly 3,000 people protested in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk. Smaller rallies also gathered in Krasnoyarsk, Kazan, Tomsk, Vladivostok and many other cities.

Navalny's team have been broadcasting about the various actions from a studio set up in Moscow, but it went off air just as Navalny was being picked up by police. "They turned off the electricity in the studio," said presenter Leonid Volkov in complete darkness shortly before the channel went off air, to come back online after a few minutes. Russian website OVD Info, which operates a hotline and tracks detentions at protest events, said 27 people were detained in other cities before the Moscow protest was set to begin at 2 pm (1100GMT).

### 'We support Navalny'

The wave of protests called by Navalny coincides with public holiday, Russia day, with Putin handing out awards

and holding a reception in the Kremlin. On the eve of the event, which authorities had authorized in central Moscow, Navalny announced the protest was changing location after authorities blocked his efforts set up a stage and sound equipment. Authorities "are forbidding any contractors from getting us a stage and sound," he wrote on his blog Sunday. "We are cancelling the rally on Sakharov Avenue and moving it to Tverskaya Street," a main thoroughfare to the Kremlin, he said.

Moscow City Hall labelled the decision a "provocation" while the police warned that a different event was being held at Tverskaya and that the protest would clash with festivities. "Any provocative actions by the protesters will be viewed as threat to public order and immediately thwarted," the police said. To mark Russia Day, the City Hall closed off Tverskaya Street to road traffic and set up a chain of events like reenactment of various eras in Russian history, from World War I trenches to a Renaissance fair and sword-fighting.

In surreal scenes, dozens of civilian buses filled by policemen were parked nearby ahead of the unsanctioned rally while ordinary people gawked at actors in period costumes. The mood was tense as some groups of protesters vowed to go to the authorized location and worried doing otherwise could get them arrested. Some protesters however heeded his call to change locations. "We support Navalny," said 16-year-old Yegor with a poster saying "Corruption steals the future". "We want the turnover of power, like in ordinary countries," he said.

The protest on March 26 was the biggest anti-Kremlin event in years and saw hundreds of people detained in the capital, including Navalny himself who subsequently spent 15 days in jail. Navalny called the anti-corruption protesters after releasing a film alleging that Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev controls a vast fortune through a network of foundations. The video has been viewed on YouTube over 22 million times. —AFP

## MAY TO FACE FURY OF OWN MPs

**LONDON:** British Prime Minister Theresa May's future was hanging in the balance yesterday as she prepared for a showdown with angry MPs from her Conservative party following its disastrous performance in last week's election. May's Conservatives unexpectedly lost their majority in parliament in Thursday's snap vote, causing political chaos ahead of Brexit talks with the European Union set to start next week. She was due to face MPs later yesterday, where she could face more demands to quit over her lackluster campaign and decision to call the election in the first place.

The chaos has weighed on the pound, which has plunged almost two percent since Thursday, and London's FTSE stock index, which was down 0.2 percent yesterday. May however has vowed to stay on, and on Sunday unveiled a largely unchanged new cabinet, which was to meet for the first time yesterday. The visibly weakened premier denied she was feeling "shell-shocked" after her election gamble backfired.

"What I'm feeling is that actually there is a job to be done and I think what the public want is to ensure that the government is getting on with that job," May said in an interview with Sky News. Foreign minister Boris Johnson, who was reported by British media to be lining up a leadership bid, insisted May should stay. "The people of Britain have had a bellyful of promises and politicking," he wrote in The Sun tabloid. "Now is the time for delivery - and Theresa May is the right person to continue that vital work." May's party fell eight seats short of retaining its parliamentary majority, and is now in talks with Northern Ireland's ultra-conservative Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) - which won 10 seats - to forge an informal alliance.

### 'Walk away' with no deal

Brexit minister David Davis insisted the government still aimed to take Britain out of the EU single market. "The reason for leaving the single market is because we want to take back control of our borders, they're not com-

patible," he told BBC radio. He also said the government would "walk away" with no deal if talks broke down on ending Britain's four-decade membership of the bloc. But Ruth Davidson, the pro-EU leader of the Conservatives in Scotland, called on May to "reopen" the government's Brexit plans. She warned her 13 MPs "will vote entirely as they believe they should" in parliament, raising doubts the government could secure enough votes to pass a deal taking Britain out of the single market.

### 'Dead woman walking'

Former finance minister George Osborne, who May sacked after taking office following the historic Brexit vote last June, on Sunday said May was now a "dead

woman walking". May has a busy schedule ahead, with the cabinet meeting yesterday and talks with French President Emmanuel Macron the following day. Brexit will likely be on the agenda at the Paris meeting, after May confirmed she will stick to the negotiating timetable.

May tried to reassert her shattered authority at the weekend by announcing her new cabinet - with no changes among her top team. In a surprise move, Michael Gove was appointed environment and agriculture minister less than a year after the prime minister sacked him as justice minister. After the opposition Labour party made hefty election gains by focusing heavily on national issues, May listed areas such as education and housing as top priorities. —AFP



LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May (center left) holds the first Cabinet meeting of her new team at 10 Downing Street yesterday. —AFP

## MACRON HEADED FOR A HUGE MAJORITY, TURNOUT A CONCERN

**PARIS:** French voters have put President Emmanuel Macron's party on course for a crushing parliamentary majority, though a record low turnout in the first round of voting raised concerns yesterday over the strength of his future mandate. Projections showed Macron continuing his centrist revolution, with his *Republique en Marche* (Republic on the Move, REM) party and its ally *MoDem* tipped to win between 400 and 445 seats in the 577-member National Assembly in next Sunday's second round.

Such a share would give Macron - who founded his party just a year ago - one of the biggest parliamentary majorities the modern French state has seen. "France is back," Prime Minister Edouard Philippe declared triumphantly, calling the result a vote for the president's "confidence, will and daring". But government spokesman Christophe Castaner admitted the 49 percent turnout - the lowest for six decades in such a vote - was "a failure of this election" and that Macron's team would need to reach out to those who stayed away.

### 'Monochrome parliament'

Former prime minister Alain Juppe of the rightwing Republicans said the mass stayaway by voters was a sign of "deep malaise" in the electorate and that a clean sweep by Macron would be bad for democracy. "The stakes of the second round are clear," said the Bordeaux mayor, calling for Republicans voters to turn out in force on Sunday. "Having a monochrome parliament is never good for democratic debate."

Ifo pollster Frederic Dabi said a virtual monopoly on power would up the ante for Macron. "The French will expect results," he warned. Only four MPs - two of them from Macron's slate - topped the 50 percent mark needed for election at the first round. Official final results showed his year-old REM and allies *MoDem* winning 32.32 percent, ahead of the right-wing Republicans and its allies on 21.56 percent and the far-right National Front (FN) of Marine Le Pen on 13.20 percent.

The Socialists and their allies secured just 9.51 percent while the radical left and communists were on 13.74 percent. Macron's camp is expected to significantly boost its score in Sunday's second round with voters fed up with mainstream politics keen to try out his team, half of which is composed of rookie politicians. They include Marie Sara, a retired bullfighter, who is running neck-and-neck with FN stalwart Gilbert Collard in southern France, and star mathematician Cedric Villani running for office in the southern Paris suburb of Essonne.

The Republicans - who had hoped to rebound from their humiliation in the presidential vote - are shown trailing in second with a predicted 70-130 seats. The FN, which has long complained that France's winner-takes-all system discriminates against small parties, is meanwhile forecast to garner only between one and 10 seats. The party's result showed it struggling to rebound from Le Pen's bruising defeat by Macron in May's presidential run-off. —AFP