

International

# Kamala Harris dons running shoes, but is the White House her goal?

## Harris is no novice at breaking through glass ceilings

WASHINGTON: With not one but two new books out, coupled with a frenetic series of interviews that saw her alternately sharing a laugh, solemnly contemplating "the soul of the nation" or relating poignant memories of her immigrant parents, one could be forgiven for suspecting that Kamala Harris is about to join the Democratic field seeking the presidential nomination in 2020. For political observers, that much is obvious — you can almost see their eyerolls — since Harris's are the classic moves of someone preparing a White House run.

"I might," she said, just a bit coyly, before bursting into contagious — and revealing — laughter in an appearance Thursday on the set of celebrated comedian and CBS television host Stephen Colbert. The coming days should bring a more definitive answer. But her calls for unity in her newly published memoir — "The Truths We Hold: An American Journey," from Penguin Press — clearly set the tone for what a Harris candidacy might mean in an America sorely divided by the unsettling presidency of Donald Trump.

If she does announce her candidacy, the 54-year-old California senator — whose first name should be pronounced like "comma-la," she insists — would be aspiring to become not only the first female president of the United States but also the first black female. As someone who seems to personify the "American dream" and its melting-pot ideal, Harris is no novice at breaking through glass ceilings.

After two terms as district attorney of San Francisco (2004-2011), she was twice elected as attorney general of California (2011-2017),

becoming not only the first woman but the first black person to serve as chief law enforcement officer of that populous state. Then in January 2017, she took the oath of office as California's junior US senator, making her the first woman of South Asian descent (her mother is a Tamil Indian) and only the second black woman senator in American history, after Carol Moseley Braun.

Her focused and often tough-sounding lines of questioning during closely watched Senate hearings reflect her past as a prosecutor. Harris often proudly recalls her past as a prosecutor in California when she fought big banks in the midst of the financial crisis in order to benefit families. She casts herself as a defender of middle class families "living paycheck to paycheck" and denounces police brutality and the killing of unarmed black men.

### 'As though she were dumb'

The daughter of immigrants — her father is from Jamaica — Harris grew up in the 1960s in the progressive hotbed of Oakland, California, proud of the struggle her parents waged for civil rights. "My mother was the strongest person I have ever known," she has written on Twitter. Mother Shyamala was only 19 when she arrived in California in 1960 to pursue her studies, eventually becoming a renowned cancer researcher.

Harris mentions her father, Donald, as well, calling him "a respected economist" who is an emeritus professor at Stanford University. But after her parents separated when she was about five years old, it was Kamala's mother who raised her and her younger sister, Maya, who went on to become a lawyer and an advi-

sor to Hillary Clinton during the 2016 presidential campaign.

Hers was a happy childhood, Harris now says, where education was highly valued, and it inspired her to write her second new book, "Superheroes Are Everywhere," a children's picture book that was also published last week. But Harris has also experienced discrimination. "I have too many memories of my brilliant mother being treated as though she were dumb because of her accent," she wrote in her autobiography. Asked about that, she shared some tough words about Republican president Trump. "There are powerful forces — including this president — that are attempting to vilify immigrants because they were born in another country," she said recently on CNN.

### 'Charismatic' and 'compelling'

But her political ascent does share one small link to that of the wealthy president: she was elected to the Senate on November 8, 2016, the day of Trump's unexpected victory. In her book she describes the shock she felt that night, but also the stirring realization that soon followed: "We are better than this," she wrote, "but we're going to have to prove it."

Her resolutely optimistic message stands in stark contrast to the much darker landscape described by Donald Trump, who referred in his inaugural speech to "American carnage." "It's a smart move on her part," said Dena Grayson, a Democratic strategist. Grayson added: "She's taking a page out of the Obama playbook, which was 'hope and change,'" a message that resonated, particularly among Democrats, after the George W.



SANTA CLARITA: In this file photo taken on November 3, 2018 Democratic Party Senator Kamala Harris speaks at a rally for California gubernatorial candidate Gavin Newsom before the mid-term elections. — AFP

Bush presidency. Both Grayson and Jennifer Lawless, a professor of politics at the University of Virginia, see Harris as a compelling and charismatic candidate who should be well-positioned in the emerging Democratic field. But both analysts emphasized that with that field expected to be huge

and diverse — as Democrats see a chance to run against an embattled president many of them detest — prediction is difficult. "The question is, is she — and is her message — going to break through when you have a group of 10 or 12 or 15 people running for office," Lawless said. — AFP

## Million dead fish cause ecological stink in Australia

SYDNEY: As many as a million fish are believed to have died along the banks of a major river system in drought-battered eastern Australia, and the authorities warned yesterday of more deaths to come. The banks of the Murray-Darling Rivers are thick with rotten fish, with officials putting the number of dead at hundreds of thousands and saying the toll is likely closer to one million.

Further high temperatures forecast for this week could make the situation worse, the New South Wales government has warned. Low water conditions and the heat may also have encouraged an algae bloom that starves the fish of oxygen and produce toxins. "We do expect to see more fish kills across parts of the far west and Northern Tablelands this week," said state minister Niall Blair. The deaths have become a national issue, sparking angry allegations about the cause and who is responsible.

"It's a devastating ecological event," said Prime Minister Scott Morrison yesterday, pointing to apocalyptic scenes. "The sheer visual image of this is just terribly upsetting," he said. Morrison's government has blamed the fish deaths on drought, and defended policies which some locals say has caused the systemic depletion and pollution of the river system. "There's a drought and this is one of the consequences of drought. There are many, and my focus on drought has not shifted one inch," Morrison said.

But for years scientists have been warning of people extracting vast amounts of water without check for irrigation or other uses, undercutting billions of dollars of investment. "Dead fish and dying rivers are not because of



MENINDEE: Member of parliament Jeremy Buckingham shows Buckingham (R) holding a decades-old native Murray cod, which was killed during a massive fish kill in Menindee on the Darling River, as local residents Dick Arnold (L) and Rob McBride from Tolarno Station (C) look on. — AFP

the drought, it's because we are extracting too much water from our river," said John Williams, an expert in water economics at the Australian National University.

Opposition leader Bill Shorten called on the government to set up an "emergency task force" to address the issue. "You can't ignore a million dead fish, that's a shocking development," said Shorten. Morrison insisted the management plan for the Murray-Darling Basin was bipartisan, adding that his government was only following on the policies of the opposition Labor government. "I'm concerned today that some might want to play politics with that," he said. "There were reports done by scientists under Labor's contribution to that plan back in 2012 and the plan has been operating in accordance with that advice." Scientists are calling for politicians to be held to account. — AFP

## Italian ex-militant extradited after decades on run

ROME: Former communist militant Cesare Battisti, wanted in Italy for four murders in the 1970s, arrived in Rome yesterday after an international police squad tracked him down and arrested him in Bolivia. Jailed in 1979 for belonging to an armed revolutionary group outlawed in Italy, Battisti escaped from prison two years later, and has spent nearly four decades on the run.

An Italian-flagged Falcon 900 plane carrying Battisti landed at Rome's Ciampino airport on Monday morning. Battisti, who was not wearing handcuffs, smiled grimly as he was escorted off the plane by a dozen policemen. He was expected to be taken to Rome's Rebibbia jail, where according to media reports he will begin life behind bars with six months solitary confinement.

Italy had repeatedly sought the extradition of the militant, who lived in Brazil for years under the protection of former leftist president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, himself now in prison for corruption. Battisti, 64, was seized late Saturday in the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra in an operation carried out by a joint team of Italian and Bolivian officers, Italian state police said. Italy's far-right Interior Minister Matteo Salvini and Justice Minister Alfonso Bonafede were at the airport for Battisti's arrival.

### 'Rot in jail'

The fugitive could be seen walking casually about Santa Cruz in sunglasses and a blue T-shirt, in surveillance footage taken hours before his capture. He gave up with-

out a struggle, according to Italian government sources. "We've got him. And now he'll have to rot in jail. He's a communist terrorist. A killer. A coward," Salvini said.

Battisti was sentenced to life imprisonment for having killed two Italian policemen, taking part in the murder of a butcher and helping plan the slaying of a jeweler who died in a shootout that left his teenage son in a wheelchair. "It's over, now the victims can rest in peace," said Alberto Torregiani, the son of the slain jeweler. "It should have happened years ago." Battisti has admitted to being part of the Armed Proletarians for Communism, a radical group which staged a string of robberies and attacks, but has always denied responsibility for any deaths, painting himself as a political refugee.

However Rome is determined to punish one of the last figures from Italy's so-called Years of Lead, a decade of violent turmoil which began in the late 1960s and saw dozens of deadly attacks by hardline leftwing and rightwing groups. Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said in a Facebook post that he had expressed gratitude to Brazil's recently inaugurated President Jair Bolsonaro in a telephone call.

During his presidential campaign the far-right Bolsonaro — who took office on January 1 — vowed that if elected he would "immediately" send Battisti back to Italy. Battisti had filed for asylum without receiving any response from authorities, Bolivia's ombudsman said in an article published in the local El Deber de Santa Cruz newspaper. He had been hoping to find favour with Bolivia's left-wing President Evo Morales after saying in his asylum request he had been forced to quit Brazil due to "the ominous coincidence" that Italy and Brazil were both now run by "far-right" governments. Salvini thanked the Italian and foreign police who captured "a delinquent who did not deserve the comfortable life on the beach, and who should spend the rest of his days in prison". — AFP

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