

## International

# Zionist entity heads towards snap election, Lapid poised to be PM

## Former television anchor set to head caretaker government

**JERUSALEM:** Zionist entity's parliament is expected to dissolve Wednesday, ending Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's year-long tenure and triggering a fifth election in less than four years that could see ex-premier Benjamin Netanyahu reclaim power.

Barring an 11th-hour shock agreement to save the coalition or form a new government within the existing parliament, Bennett's eight-party alliance is due to end by midnight, installing Foreign Minister Yair Lapid as prime minister.



**"Not to let dark forces tear us apart"**

The former television anchor is set to head a caretaker government, ahead of polls due in late October or early November. Bennett's motley alliance formed in 2021 offered a reprieve from an unprecedented era of political gridlock, ending Netanyahu's record 12 consecutive years in power and passing Zionist entity's first state budget since 2018.

Netanyahu — a divisive hawk aligned with far-right nationalists and Zionist entity's ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties — has promised victory in new elections but may again struggle to rally a parliamentary majority, opinion polls show.

He is currently on trial over corruption charges, which he denies. The anti-Netanyahu camp will likely be led by Lapid, a centrist who has surprised many since being dismissed as a lightweight when he

entered politics a decade ago.

As he and Bennett announced last week that their coalition was no longer tenable, Lapid sought to cast Netanyahu's potential return to office as a national threat. "What we need to do today is go back to the concept of Zionist entity unity. Not to let dark forces tear us apart from within," Lapid said.

While parliament's collapse appeared a near certainty, last-minute surprises remained possible given Zionist entity's volatile political climate. Factions across the political spectrum fear fresh polls will see them lose seats or end up out of parliament entirely by falling below the minimum support threshold, which is 3.25 percent of votes cast.

But options to avoid another election were vanishing, according to Zionist reports.

That means Lapid is expected to take office at midnight after parliament gives final approval to a dissolution bill, in accordance with the power-sharing deal he agreed with Bennett last June.

A parliamentary committee was meeting Wednesday to finalise the bill that must clear two more plenum votes before becoming law. One reported holdup was a dispute over the election date.

Netanyahu and his allies are fighting for an October election when their supporters will be on a break from religious study centres, hoping that might boost turnout in what could be another extremely close contest, media said.

### 'Fought like lions'

Bennett, a religious nationalist, has led a coalition of right-wingers, centrists, doves and Islamists from the Raam faction, which made history by becoming the first Arab party to support an Zionist government in the Jewish state's 74-year history.

The alliance, united by its desire to oust Netanyahu and break a damaging cycle of inconclusive elections, was imperilled from the outset by its ideological divides.

al places of detention in Libya since 2016," it said.

Migrants are routinely detained by authorities, human traffickers and others in Libya — a key departure point for tens of thousands of people mainly from sub-Saharan Africa hoping to reach Europe. Human traffickers have profited from the chaos that has raged since the 2011 toppling and killing of Libyan dictator Moamer Gaddafi. Talks between rival Libyan governments are being held in Geneva this week over the rules for long-awaited elections, with an aim to end the chaos.

### 'Inhumane acts'

The fact-finding mission report, to be presented to the UN Human Rights Council next week, said it had gathered broad evidence of "the systematic use of prolonged arbitrary detention" of migrants in Libya. The investigators, who made several trips to Libya, described how migrants in detention face "acts of murder, torture, rape and other inhumane acts."

The sources said imposing health insurance on every expat has become a serious government thought which will be implemented after legal, administrative and technical aspects are reviewed, so that every expat in Kuwait must obtain health insurance like those who are 60 years or older without a university degree, and this will be a prerequisite to granting residency and work permits.

The sources said a decision to ban work permits for citizens of countries with large communities in Kuwait will be seriously discussed, so only technical and qualified labor can be brought in from these countries. They said the new residency law will be supervised directly by the Cabinet, as each department must take the approval of the Cabinet first and it will not be up to their directors to decide who will be authorized to enter and work in the country.

pledge to "address Turkey's pending deportation or extradition requests of terror suspects expeditiously and thoroughly". "Finland and Sweden confirm that the PKK is a proscribed terrorist organization," says the agreement. "Finland and Sweden commit to prevent activities of the PKK and all other terrorist organizations and their extensions, as well as activities by individuals... linked to these terrorist organizations."

Erdogan's office hailed the agreement as a full victory. "Turkey got what it wanted," his office declared in a statement. Erdogan also secured the promise of a long-sought meeting with US President Joe Biden on the sidelines of the NATO talks. A US official told reporters that Biden was "keen" to improve relations with Turkey after a difficult spell caused in part by Turkey's crackdown on human rights.

Most of Turkey's demands and past negotiations have involved Sweden because of its more robust ties with the Kurdish diaspora. Sweden keeps no official ethnicity statistics but is believed to have 100,000 Kurds living in the nation of 10 million people.

Stockholm recognized the PKK as a "terrorist" organization in the 1980s but has adopted a more supportive stance toward the YPG. Pro-government Turkish media were outraged by two meetings Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde held last year with Ilham Ahmad - the leader of the political wing of the YPG-led forces that expelled IS from a large swathe of Syria. Linde called her two meetings "good" and "fruitful" on Twitter.

It was not immediately apparent whose extradition Turkey sought. Finnish President Sauli Niinisto told reporters that his country has "not been presented with any list so far, at least as far as I know". —AFP



**JERUSALEM:** Zionist entity's Minister of Foreign Affairs Yair Lapid (C) takes part in a Knesset (parliament) session in Jerusalem. — AFP

But Bennett said the final straw was a failure to renew a measure that ensures the roughly 475,000 Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank live under Zionist law.

Some Arab lawmakers in the coalition refused to back a bill they said marked a de facto endorsement of a 55-year occupation that has forced West Bank Palestinians to live under Zionist rule.

For Bennett, a staunch supporter of settlements, allowing the so-called West Bank law to expire was intolerable. Dissolving parliament before its June 30 expiration temporarily renews the measure.

"We fought like lions, down to the very last

moment, until it simply became impossible," Bennett said days after announcing his coalition's demise.

Bennett is expected to stay on as alternate prime minister and be responsible for Iran policy, as world powers take steps to revive stalled talks on Tehran's nuclear programme. Zionist entity opposes a restoration of the 2015 agreement that gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for limits on its nuclear programme. Lapid will retain his foreign minister title while serving as Zionist entity's 14th premier. He will find himself under an early microscope, with US President Joe Biden due in Jerusalem in two weeks. — AFP

## Migrants in Libya forced into rape for food: UN

**GENEVA:** Migrants detained in Libya face horrific abuse, with women especially facing sexual violence, and often forced to submit to rape in exchange for food, UN investigators said Wednesday. In a fresh report, the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya reiterated that the worst crimes under international law were likely being committed in the war-ravaged country, with migrant women suffering some of the worst abuse.

"The mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the crimes against humanity of murder, torture, imprisonment, rape, enforced disappearance and other inhumane acts have been committed in sever-

The report highlighted "sexual violence at the hands of traffickers and smugglers, often with the aim of extorting families." "The mission has also documented cases of rape in places of detention or captivity whereby migrant women are forced to have sex in order to survive, in exchange for food or other essential items," it said.

In fact, the known risk of sexual violence is considered to great, the report said, that "some migrant women and girls get fitted with a contraceptive implant before travelling there to avoid unwanted pregnancy due to such violence."

### 'No choice'

The investigators relayed some heartbreaking stories heard from migrants in Libya. One woman, who was held in the northern town of Ajdabiya, "described how her captors demanded sex in exchange for access to water she direly needed to wash her six-month-old sick child's soiled clothes," the report said.

"I let them rape me. I had no choice. It was for my daughter. I could not leave her like that," she said, according to the report. The fact-finding mission, which was created by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2020, will see its mandate expire in a few days.

But a group of African countries has presented a draft resolution to the council that would allow it to continue its work for another nine months. In a big report presented last October, the investigators concluded that crimes against humanity had likely been committed in the country, including in detention centres and against migrants.

They have drafted a list of individuals and groups believed to be behind those crimes, but it remains confidential. They are due to present another report in a few days providing more details on crimes committed in the town of Tarhuna, southeast of Tripoli, where dozens of mass graves have been discovered over the past two years. — AFP

## Kuwait plans new rules to control...

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residency fees, with the possibility of imposing annual fees on each resident in exchange for state services. Every employer will have to pay new fees for bringing in an expat from abroad in order to reduce the number of expat workers in the private sector and end iqama trade, in addition to preventing any employer from having employees more than needed, because the more employees they have, the more fees they will have to pay, closing a loophole that was exploited for iqama trading.

## Turkey seeks extraditions...

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"We ask them to fulfil their promises." The unnamed suspects were identified as being members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and a group led by a US-based Muslim preacher that Erdogan blames for a failed 2016 coup attempt.

The European Union and Washington both recognize the PKK as a "terrorist" organization because of the brutal tactics it employed during a decades-long insurgency against the Turkish state. But the agreement also stipulates that Sweden and Finland vow to "not provide support" to the YPG - a PKK offshoot in Syria that played an instrumental role in the US-led alliance against the Islamic State group.

Sweden and Finland abandoned decades of military non-alignment in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and were formally invited into the alliance at Wednesday's summit in Madrid. Their applications appeared to be headed for swift approval until Erdogan stepped in. The Turkish leader accused Finland and particularly Sweden of providing a haven to Kurdish fighters and financing terror.

Erdogan also wanted the two countries to lift embargoes on weapons deliveries they imposed in response to Turkey's 2019 military incursion into Syria. The memorandum appears to address many of Erdogan's concerns. It says Finland and Sweden

## World Bank lends \$500m to Egypt...

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On Tuesday, state bakeries in New Valley province in the southwest hailed successful trials of "sweet potato bread", Egyptian media reported. The adjusted recipes use sweet potato to supplement wheat in the flour used to make state-subsidized flatbread - an everyday staple for the country's 103 million people.

Some 71.5 million Egyptians rely on bread subsidies, which account for 57 percent of the state's subsidy budget, according to official figures. Soaring world commodity prices helped to push Egyptian inflation to a three-year high of 15.3 percent in June, according to official figures. In late March, the Central Bank of Egypt allowed the Egyptian pound to depreciate against the dollar, causing it to lose around 18 percent of its value overnight.

Foreign currency reserves fell around \$6 billion in April and May to stand at \$35.5 billion, as a result of

moves "to calm the markets" as well as "external debt repayments", the bank said. To help weather the crisis, Egypt has requested a new loan from the International Monetary Fund, that will add to an already sizeable foreign debt equivalent to almost 90 percent of GDP. On a visit to Cairo earlier this month, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen pledged "immediate relief of 100 million euros" to support food security in Egypt.

Meanwhile, the World Bank announced a \$130-million loan to help Tunisia cover the cost of cereal imports whose prices have spiraled since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The package aimed "to lessen the impact of the Ukraine war by financing vital soft wheat imports and providing emergency support to cover barley imports for dairy production," the lender said. It would also help buy "seeds for smallholder farmers for the upcoming planting season," it said in a statement late Tuesday.

Tunisia was already dealing with heavy public debt, a low credit rating and steep inflation before the Ukraine war, and has been left reeling by Russia's military blockade of Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea. "Tunisia faces a major grain supply shock due to difficulties in accessing financial markets and rising global prices which affected the ability to procure imported grain," said the World Bank's Tunisia country manager Alexandre Arrobbio. — AFP

## Lockdown in Udaipur after...

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waved saffron flags - the color of the Hindu faith - and shouted slogans demanding the death penalty for the accused. "Hang them, hang them. My husband has gone," the man's distraught widow told reporters. "If the law doesn't want to do anything, give them to us so that we can kill them," said another relative.

The two young men were arrested on Tuesday as they attempted to flee Udaipur by motorbike, news reports said. The central National Investigation Agency (NIA) said that the men circulated the video "in order to trigger panic and strike terror among the masses across the country". To prevent potential sectarian violence, authorities deployed 600 extra police and put the city of around 450,000 people under curfew, cutting mobile Internet access there and in other parts of Rajasthan state.

Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot appealed to people not to share the video as it would "serve the attackers' motive of creating discord in society". "The involvement of any organization and international links will be thoroughly investigated," Indian Home Minister

Amit Shah tweeted. On social media, members of the ruling BJP party and supporters depicted the killing as an attack on all Hindus.

Indian Muslim organizations condemned the killing, but Surendra Kumar Jain from the far-right Hindu group Vishwa Hindu Parishad said that many Muslim leaders have "insulted Hindu beliefs". "You should be afraid of the day when Hindus too start giving reply to the insult in the same coin," Jain said in a video message. A demonstration in New Delhi called by a far-right Hindu group drew around 100 people shouting slogans.

The remarks about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) by BJP spokeswoman Nupur Sharma at a TV debate in late May sparked protests that turned violent in some parts of India and demonstrations across the Islamic world. She was sacked by the party after her comments, which prompted the governments of nearly 20 countries to summon their Indian envoys to express their displeasure.

Lal's wife told broadcaster NDTV that on June 10 her husband was arrested over a social media post supporting Sharma and released on bail a day later. Five days later the father of two said he had received death threats but on Tuesday returned to work in his shop, she said. The purported video of the killing - which police have not yet confirmed is genuine - showed Lal measuring one of the men for new clothes before he and his accomplice attacked him. — AFP