

International

Lula launches new presidential campaign to 'rebuild Brazil'

'We need to send fascism back to the sewer of history'

SAO PAULO: Former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva launched his campaign for a new presidential term Saturday, vowing to rebuild Brazil after what he called the "irresponsible and criminal" administration of far-right incumbent Jair Bolsonaro. The campaign launch sealed a remarkable political comeback for Lula (2003-2010), four years after the 76-year-old leftist icon was jailed on controversial corruption charges.

"We're ready to work not only to win the election on October 2, but to rebuild and transform Brazil, which will be even more difficult," the charismatic but tarnished steelworker-turned-politician told a rally in Sao Paulo, standing before a giant Brazilian flag.



Won't leave power without a fight

Speaking in his trademark gravelly voice, he said Bolsonaro-whom he did not mention by name-had made Brazil a "pariah" with polarizing policies, attacks on democratic institutions and surging destruction of the Amazon rainforest.

"We need to change Brazil once again... We need to return to a place where no one ever dares to defy democracy again. We need to send fascism back to the sewer of history, where it should have been all along," he told a cheering crowd of thousands, calling on "all democrats" to join him.

It was hardly a secret Lula, who has enjoyed a long-though shrinking-lead in the polls, would jump into the



SAO PAULO, Brazil: Former Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (2-L) celebrates the launch of his campaign for Brazil's October presidential election in Sao Paulo, Brazil. — AFP

campaign, which does not officially start until August. He has been in unofficial campaign mode since March last year, when the Supreme Court annulled the corruption convictions that sidelined him from politics. The ruling instantly set up this year's elections as a polarizing clash between arch-enemies Lula and Bolsonaro.

Surprise return

Lula left office with approval ratings of 87 percent, after presiding over a golden period that lifted some 30 million Brazilians from poverty. But the one-time shoeshine boy's towering legacy came crashing

down with the explosion of "Operation Car Wash," a sweeping investigation that uncovered a massive corruption scheme centered on state-run oil company Petrobras.

Lula, who calls the case a conspiracy, was convicted on bribe-taking charges and jailed from April 2018 to November 2019 — missing the 2018 presidential race, which Bolsonaro won. In a Brazil deeply divided over Bolsonaro's combative style, social media polemics, weak performance on the economy and chaotic handling of COVID-19, Lula returned to the ring with the immediate status of front-runner.

Hamis threats

The Elad killings followed a tense period in which the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, the Jewish festival of Passover and the Christian holiday of Easter overlapped. Tensions have boiled over into violent clashes between Zionists and Palestinians at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, a highly contested site in Jerusalem's Zionist-annexed Old City.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas had condemned the Elad attacks, warning that the murder of Zionist 'civilians' risked fuelling a broader cycle of violence. But the Gaza Strip's Islamist rulers Hamas and Islamic Jihad, another Palestinian armed group, praised the latest violence, calling it a consequence of unrest at Al-Aqsa. Neither claimed responsibility.

"This operation demonstrates our people's anger at the occupation's attacks on holy sites," Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said of the Elad attack. "The storming of the Al-Aqsa mosque cannot go unpunished."

Hamas last week threatened Zionist entity with rocket fire and attacks on synagogues if its security forces carry out further raids on the Al-Aqsa mosque compound. "Whoever has a rifle must have it ready, and whoever does not have a rifle must prepare their knife or their axe," said Yahya Sinwar, Hamas chief in the Zionist-blockaded Gaza Strip.

A string of anti-Zionist attacks since March 22 have killed 18 people, including an Arab-Zionist police officer and two Ukrainians. Two of the deadly attacks were carried out in the Tel Aviv area by Palestinians.

A total of 27 Palestinians and three Zionist Arabs have died during the same period, among them perpetrators of attacks and those killed by Zionist security forces in West Bank operations. — AFP



ELAD: This image grab taken from a video released by the Zionist police on May 8, 2022 shows police detaining a Palestinian suspect following a manhunt near the central city of Elad. Two Palestinians suspected of killing three Zionists in an axe attack in Elad were arrested after a more than two-day manhunt. — AFP

Yonatan Habakuk, 44, and Boaz Gol, 49, both from Elad, as well as Oren Ben Yiftach, 35. The bloodshed unfolded as Zionist entity marked the 74th anniversary of its founding, which has previously been a tense day in the Zionist-Palestinian conflict.

For Palestinians, the anniversary of Zionist entity's 1948 declaration of independence marks the Nakba, or "catastrophe", when more than 700,000 fled or were expelled during the war surrounding Israel's creation.

ple that this war has to stop and this war has been brutal and that the people of the United States stand with the people of Ukraine."

Separately, Canadian leader Trudeau visited Irpin, a suburb on the northwest edge of Kyiv that was the scene of heavy fighting in the early weeks of the conflict. Local mayor Oleksandr Markushyn posted pictures on social media and said Trudeau "came to Irpin to see with his own eyes all the horror that the Russian occupiers had done to our city".

On the ground, the key battles were being fought in Ukraine's east. Civilians have now been evacuated from Mariupol's Azovstal steelworks, leaving a small force of defenders holed up in its sprawling network of underground tunnels and bunkers. The complex - the final pocket of Ukrainian resistance in the Black Sea port city - has taken on a symbolic value.

"We, all of the military personnel in the garrison of Mariupol, we have witnessed the war crimes performed by Russia, by the Russian army. We are witnesses," said Ilya Samoilenko, an intelligence officer with the far-right Azov regiment defending the site. "Surrender is not an option because Russia is not interested in our lives," he said.

Taking full control of Mariupol would also allow Moscow to create a land bridge between the Crimean peninsula, which it annexed in 2014, and regions run by pro-Russian separatists in the east. In one of those regions, Lugansk, Ukrainian forces are now mounting a last-ditch defense of the city of Severodonetsk, formerly an industrial city of 100,000 people, now Russia's next target.

In the same region, governor Sergiy Gaiday said 60 civilians were feared dead after a school in the village of Bilogorivka was hit in an air strike. "The bombs fell on the school and unfortunately it was completely destroyed. There were a total of 90 people, 27 were saved," he said on Telegram. "Sixty people who were in the school are very probably dead."

Rescuers could not work overnight because of a threat of new strikes but resumed their work on Sunday. Rescuers were also looking for survivors in the neighboring village of Shepilivka after a strike hit a house where 11 people were sheltering in the basement, Gaiday said. — AFP

Zionist police arrest two Palestinian axe murder suspects

ELAD: Zionist security services on Sunday arrested two Palestinians suspected of axing to death three Zionists after a more than two-day manhunt, the latest in a spate of deadly attacks. The security services — who previously identified the suspects as Assad Yusef al-Rifai, 19, and Subhi Imad Abu Shukair, 20 — said the pair were spotted near a quarry just outside the central town of Elad, where the axe attack took place on Thursday.

"We said we would get the terrorists, and so we did," Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said ahead of his weekly cabinet meeting on Sunday. The suspects had been hiding in a forested area, near the quarry, and did not fight with security forces as the arrest was carried out, security personnel at the scene told AFP. The deadly attack in Elad, populated by mainly ultra-Orthodox Jews, was the sixth in which Zionists have been targeted since March 22. Witnesses said two assailants leapt from a car swinging axes at passers-by, leaving three dead and four wounded, before fleeing in the same vehicle.

The manhunt included "intelligence and special forces units" from the police, domestic security agency and the army, along with helicopters and drones, the security forces said. Army chief Aviv Kohavi praised the operation, vowing "to strengthen the security... of Zionist civilians."

Zionist entity has identified the three dead as

Ukraine battles to hold bastion...

Continued from Page 1

"Decades after World War II, darkness has returned to Ukraine, and it has become black and white again," Zelensky said, in a monochrome social media video shot against the backdrop of a bombed-out apartment block. "Evil has returned, in a different uniform, under different slogans, but for the same purpose," he warned, trying to turn Russian leader Vladimir Putin's "anti-Nazi" rhetoric back on itself.

Russia, meanwhile, was gearing up for Monday's Victory Day parade designed to associate the invasion of its neighbor with the national pride felt over the Soviet Union's defeat of Germany. "Today, our soldiers, as their ancestors, are fighting side by side to liberate their native land from the Nazi filth with the confidence that, as in 1945, victory will be ours," Putin said.

Zelensky was also to meet G7 leaders via video conference to discuss the crisis. The group - which includes France, Germany, Canada, Italy, Japan, Britain and the United States - in a statement on Sunday said Putin's "unprovoked war of aggression" had brought "shame on Russia and the historic sacrifices of its people".

The White House said the G7 was "committed to phasing out or banning the import of Russian oil". But EU diplomats will meet again next week to hammer out the details of their latest sanctions package against Moscow, after a proposed embargo on Russian oil exposed rifts in the bloc. In a separate statement, the White House added that the United States would sanction three major Russian television stations and deny all Russian companies access to US firms' consulting and accounting services.

The US first lady met her Ukrainian counterpart Olena Zelenska at a school sheltering civilians, including children displaced by the conflict, near Ukraine's border with Slovakia. "I wanted to come on Mother's Day," Jill Biden told reporters. "I thought it was important to show the Ukrainian peo-

Slipping poll numbers

But Bolsonaro, 67, has narrowed the gap in the latest polls-and made it clear he won't leave power without a fight. Lula has meanwhile made a series of recent gaffes, including politically tone-deaf remarks on abortion, the police and the middle class. He has also looked out of sync with world leaders he aspires to rub elbows with again-saying, for example, that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is "as responsible as" Russia's Vladimir Putin for the Ukraine war.

Lula has reportedly shaken up his campaign team recently, removing long-time ally Franklin Martins as communications chief. "He has made several disastrous statements in recent weeks," Sylvio Costa, founder of news site Congresso em Foco, told AFP.

"And, above all, Lula needs to go to the street." The Workers' Party founder said he would now do just that, crisscrossing the country to meet with "the people." Wearing a sharp navy suit, his shirt open at the collar, Lula stuck strictly to the script at his rally, rather than speaking off the cuff as he typically does.

But he was short on tangible planks for his platform. "Instead of promises, I present the immense legacy of our administration," he said. Courting the wary business sector and seeking to build a broad base, Lula has tapped market-friendly centrist Geraldo Alckmin the opponent he defeated in the 2006 presidential race-as his running-mate.

"Brazil today has the most disastrous and cruel government in its history. Lula is our only hope," Alckmin, a former Sao Paulo governor who was home with a mild case of COVID-19, told the rally by video link.

Cheering the veteran leftist on, 63-year-old retiree Odilon da Silva Freire agreed. "Lula governed for everyone, especially the poor," he said. "He has to be president again. He's the best we ever had." — AFP

Hundreds rally in support of Tunisia's Saied

TUNIS: Hundreds of Tunisians demonstrated Sunday in a show of support for President Kais Saied and a series of extraordinary measures he took since last July that critics have slammed as a "coup". The rallies come as Saied faces mounting criticism over his July 2021 power grab, in which he sacked the government and suspended parliament before moving on to rule by decree.

Demonstrators gathered in the capital's central Bourguiba Avenue — the epicentre of vast protests that toppled former leader Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 2011 — in response to a call by a pro-Saied alliance. They held banners reading "We are all Kais Saied" and demanded the prosecution of "corrupt" politicians, echoing a frequent refrain uttered by the head of state.

Critics have warned that Saied's moves mark a shift towards autocracy, threatening the only democracy to have emerged from the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. In late April, several Tunisian opposition parties announced the formation of a National Salvation Front to "save" the country from the deepening political crisis. Prominent leftist Ahmed Nejib Chebbi said at the time that the alliance aimed to unite political forces, re-establish constitutional and democratic processes and guarantee freedoms and rights in the country. Saied in early May announced the launch of a "national dialogue" to help resolve the crisis — but excluded critical opposition groups, including his arch-rivals, the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party. — AFP

Scholz's party soundly beaten in regional vote

BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's SPD suffered a stinging defeat at regional elections on Sunday, with the opposition conservatives securing a thumping win in the northern state of Schleswig-Holstein a week before a bigger test. The Social Democrats saw their vote share diminish to around 16 percent from 27.3 percent in the last election in 2017, exit polls by national broadcasters showed.

They were overtaken by the Greens, who were in

Jabeur seeks to inspire more...

Continued from Page 1

With a tour-leading 12 victories on clay so far this season - and with Australia's world number one Ashleigh Barty having retired - the omens seem positive for her. However, she has another glass ceiling to crack in reaching the last four of a Grand Slam for the first time - so she has two quarterfinals to her credit in Australia in 2020 and Wimbledon last year.

Jabeur - the junior champion at Roland Garros in 2011 - is, though, armed with a powerful weapon apart from her strokeplay. "Definitely all those matches I've won on clay will give me a lot of confidence," she said as she absorbed her Madrid victory. "When you're confident like that and you win a lot of matches, I think I should take this opportunity to go, like, really forward and win." Jabeur admits to not watching much tennis when she was growing up and it was her husband Karim Kamoun who was more "obsessed by Roland Garros".

Kamoun was on hand in Madrid - he planted a kiss on her cheek courtside after her triumph - as were her siblings and the head of the Tunisian tennis federation to see her momentous win. Jabeur wel-

second place with between 17-19 percent, after the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), who were comfortably in the lead with 41-42 percent, the polls showed. The CDU's Daniel Guenther was therefore poised for a second term as the state premier.

The northern state bordering Denmark is one of the smallest in Germany's 16 regions, but both the CDU and the SPD were hoping for momentum to carry them into next Sunday's regional election in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). A far bigger prize, NRW is Germany's most populous state, and currently in the hands of the CDU, although surveys show the SPD running neck and neck.

A win in NRW would give a major boost to Scholz, who has been under fire domestically over what critics deem to be a stuttering response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

comes such attention but she would like to see more company in the locker room on the tour as Arab female players have been a rarity. Her compatriot Selima Sfar reached a career high of 75 in the world in 2001 but there was little progress for other Arab women players until Jabeur came on the scene.

"Being the only Arab is not easy to be on tour right now," she said at Wimbledon last year. "I just want to say if I did it (succeed on tour), it's not impossible. Like I said before, I always try to inspire other generations." Jabeur's favorite player of all time is America's three-time Wimbledon finalist and 2003 US Open champion Andy Roddick - but it is Morocco's four-time Grand Slam quarterfinalist Hicham Arazi who has been her role model.

Jabeur said just as Arazi inspired her, so she hopes she can do the same for Arab women. "Honestly, he really inspired me, and I am trying to do the same here," she said. "I like to see how French people are together (on tour), Americans, Australian, and I feel like I want to see this, you know, with my country. It doesn't matter, Tunisia or Egypt or Morocco, I really want to see more and more players."

Even before her great run at Wimbledon last year, Jabeur's force of personality and talent had already convinced others, including American legend Venus Williams, that she will achieve her goal. "You're gonna see a whole other generation of women from North Africa coming into tennis," said Williams. "It's going to be all owed to her." — AFP