

Syrians stroll through Assad's looted palaces

DAMASCUS: (news desk) Celebrations erupted around Syria and crowds ransacked President Bashar al-Assad's luxurious home on Sunday after rebels swept into Damascus and declared he had fled the country, in a spectacular end to five decades of rule by the Assad dynasty.

Residents in the capital were seen cheering in the streets as the rebel factions heralded the departure of "tyrant", saying: "We declare the city of Damascus free." Most Syrians are too young to remember a time when the country was not ruled by the Assads.

Syrians strolled through the president's palace after it was looted on Sunday following his ouster, with many wandering from room to room, posing for photographs, and with some taking items of furniture or ornaments. Women, children and men could be seen touring the home and its large garden, with the rooms completely empty, save some furniture and a portrait of Assad thrown on the floor. The rooms of the residence had been left completely empty, save some furniture and a portrait of Assad discarded on the floor, while an entrance hall at the presidential palace not far away had been torched. Video obtained by Reuters showed people entering the Al-Rawda Presidential Palace, as children ran through the grand rooms and men slid a large trunk across the ornate floor. Several men carried smart chairs over their shoulders. In a storeroom, cupboards had been ransacked and objects strewn across the floor. Video of another palace, the Muhajreen Palace, verified by Reuters, showed groups of men and women walking across a white marble floor and through tall wooden doors.

Israel, US carry out air strikes in Damascus after

JERUSALEM: (news desk) Israel conducted three air strikes in the Syrian capital on Sunday against a security complex and a government research centre which it has said in the past was used by Iran to develop missiles, two regional security sources told Reuters on Sunday. The strikes caused extensive damage to the main customs headquarters and buildings adjoining the military intelligence offices within the security complex, which is located in the Kafr Sousa district of Damascus, the sources said. The research facility was also damaged, they said, speaking on condition of anonymity. One source said the strikes had hit infrastructure used to store sensitive military data, equipment and guided missiles parts. Earlier on Sunday, Israel struck at least seven targets in southwest Syria that included the Khalkhala air base north of Sweida city that Syrian army troops withdrew from last night, the sources said. Strikes near Mezzah military airport southwest of the capital hit other ammunition depots, the sources said. On the other hand, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) claimed its forces conducted more than 75 air strikes in central Syria on Sunday. American warplanes struck over 75 Islamic State targets in Syria on Sunday, hitting the group's leaders, operatives and camps, the US military said.

Trump to end birthright US citizenship

WASHINGTON: (news desk) US President-elect Donald Trump in an interview aired on Sunday vowed to make immediate and sweeping changes after he takes office on Jan 20, such as pardons for those convicted in the attack on the US Capitol, and said he wants to find a legislative solution to keep Dreamers in the country legally. Mr Trump said he would "have to" deport all undocumented immigrants in the United States, as he doubled down on his hardline campaign pledges including ending birthright citizenship. "You have to do it," he said during an interview with NBC's "Meet the Press," after being asked if he planned on deporting "everyone who is here illegally over the next four years" of his term. He also used his first formal television interview after the November election to insist he would end birthright citizenship — enshrined in the US Constitution — "if we can, through executive action," calling it "ridiculous". Mr Trump also said he'll work to extend the tax cuts passed in his first term. He said he will not seek to impose restrictions on abortion pills. He plans to deport millions of undocumented immigrants and try to end birthright citizenship. He said the pardons for Jan 6 rioters will happen on day one, arguing many have endured overly harsh treatment in prison. "These people are living in hell," he said. Mr Trump did segue into familiar grievances. He would not concede that he lost the 2020 election. Asked how, in his view, Democrats stole that election but not this one even though they control the White House, Mr Trump said, "Because I think it was too big to rig." Mr Trump said he would consider raising the federal minimum wage, which has been \$7.25 an hour since 2009, but would like to consult with the nation's governors.



A bridge damaged by floodwaters.—Courtesy The Phnom Penh Post

Impeachments, coups and deaths: Dark side of Korean presidency

London (news desk) The short-lived martial law decree by President Yoon Suk Yeol along with an array of controversies, including legal risks related to his spouse, have already made Yoon part of the troubled history of Korean presidents. The following is a list of presidents whose careers are marked by disgrace or tragedy.

1. Park Geun-hye, the first South Korean president to be impeached
Park Geun-hye, who became Korea's first female president in 2013, was also the first sitting president to be impeached and removed from office. A political scandal in the fall of 2016 uncovered myriad irregularities in her administration. In Park's impeachment

trial, the Constitutional Court heard accusations of abuse of power, infringements on freedom of speech, corruption, neglect of her duty to protect the citizens' lives, and a violation of the people's sovereignty by allowing her civilian confidante to manipulate state affairs. This included accusations that Park accepted bribes from conglomerates, black-

listed artists and celebrities who were critical of her policies, and dismissed officials who opposed her. She is also believed to have received billions of won in bribes from Lee Jae-yong, the now-chair of Samsung Electronics who served time for the bribes. The Constitutional Court in 2017 upheld the impeachment in a unanimous 8-0 decision.

Al-Golani: The man who led overthrow of Syria's President Assad

Syria (news desk) AS THE commander of Al Qaeda's franchise in the Syrian civil war, Abu Mohammed al-Golani was a shadowy figure who kept out of the public eye, even when his group became the most powerful faction fighting President Bashar al-Assad. Today, he is the most recognisable of Syria's triumphant insurgents, having gradually stepped into the limelight since severing

ties to Al Qaeda in 2016, rebranding his group and emerging as the de facto ruler of rebel-held north-western Syria. The transformation has been showcased since rebels led by Golani's Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), formerly known as the Nusra Front, swept through the nation and declared they had ousted Assad on Sunday after seizing the capital.

Golani has featured prominently in the takeover, sending messages aimed at reassuring Syrian minorities who have long feared the rebels. "The future is ours," he said in a statement read on Syria's state TV, urging his fighters not to harm those who drop arms. When the rebels entered Aleppo, pre-war Syria's largest city, at the start of their sweep to Damascus, a video

showed Golani in military fatigues issuing orders by phone, reminding fighters to protect the people and forbidding them from entering homes. He visited Aleppo's citadel accompanied by a fighter waving a Syrian revolution flag: once shunned by Nusra as a symbol of apostasy but recently embraced by Golani in a nod to Syria's more mainstream opposition.



Hayat Tahrir al-Sham leader Abu Mohammed al-Golani waves to the crowd before his address at Umayyad Mosque

Bewildered, elated prisoners pour out as jails flung

DAMASCUS: (news desk) Bewildered and elated prisoners poured out of Syrian jails on Sunday, shouting with joy as they emerged from one of the world's most notorious detention systems and walked to freedom following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's government. All across Syria, families wept as they were reun-

ed with children, siblings, spouses and parents who vanished years ago into the impregnable gulag of the Assad dynasty's five-decade rule. A video showed newly freed prisoners ran through the Damascus streets, holding up the fingers of both hands to show how many years they had been in prison, asking

passers-by what had happened, not immediately understanding that Assad had fallen. "We toppled the regime!" a voice shouted and a prisoner yelled and skipped with delight in the same video. A man watching the prisoners rush through the dawn streets put his hands to head, exclaiming with

wonder: "Oh my God, the prisoners!" Throughout the civil war that began in 2011, security forces held hundreds of thousands of people seized into detention camps where international human rights organisations say torture was universal practice. Families were often told nothing of the fate of their loved ones.

Umar, Amad shine in Panthers' first victory

RAWALPINDI: (news desk) Opener Umar Siddique struck an aggressive half-century and all-rounder Amad Butt grabbed three wickets to help Lake City Panthers outclass Engro Dolphins by eight wickets to open their account in the Bahria Town Champions T20 Cup here at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on Sunday. Umar's unbeaten 78 off 53 balls was laced with four sixes and eight fours, and gave Panthers a flying start with 33 coming in the first three overs. By the tenth over they had reached 86 for the loss of Sharjeel Khan (14). Umar, who was later named player-of-the-match, and stand-in skipper Haider Ali, deputising for unfit Shadab Khan, added a rapid 101 for the second wicket to bring their team within 23 runs of victory. Mubasir Khan, who scored 16 not out, hit the winning six as the 161-run target was achieved in 16 overs. Haider's 28-ball 46 contained five boundaries and two sixes. Dolphins' 160-8 showed most of the batters got starts but failed to capitalize as Mohammad Huraira top-scored with a 32-ball 37 featuring four boundaries and a six. Mohammad Suleman struck two sixes and a boundary in his 27-ball 34 while Mohammad Ghazi Ghorri (27 off 16 balls, three fours, one six) and Shayan Sheikh (20 off 12, four fours) made useful contributions as 55 runs came in the last five overs.

Bellingham-inspired Real cut Liga gap after Barca draw

BARCELONA: (News desk) Jude Bellingham guided champions Real Madrid to a comfortable 3-0 victory at Girona on Saturday in La Liga, with Kylian Mbappe also on the scoresheet after two high-profile penalty misses in recent games.

Los Blancos cut the gap on league leaders Barcelona to two points after the Catalans drew 2-2 at Real Betis, with Real having played one fewer match. Bellingham opened the scoring before half-time and set up Turkish playmaker Arda Guler for Real's second, before Mbappe produced a clinical finish for their third. Girona started the stronger but Madrid soon clicked into gear. Bellingham pounced after 36 minutes when Diaz's cross was blocked and the ball fell kindly to the England international to drill home. Los Blancos got their second in the 55th minute when Bellingham threaded through a fine pass for Guler to finish. Mbappe rattled in Real's third from a tight angle after Bellingham hobbled off with a knock after Luka Modric played him in down the right. Earlier Real Betis twice came behind to stop Barcelona from triumphing in Seville.

Juventus rescue point with Mbangula stunner

MILAN: (news desk) Samuel Mbangula curled in a superb equaliser two minutes into stoppage time to salvage a point for Juventus against Bologna on Saturday. The 2-2 draw left Juventus sixth, seven points adrift of Serie A leaders Atalanta but it could have been worse as Bologna had appeared to be heading for victory at the Allianz Stadium. Dan Ndoye put the visitors ahead with a deft finish from a tight angle after half an hour and Tommaso Pobega doubled their lead seven minutes into the second half. Juve finally got going when Teun Koopmeiners pulled back a goal 10 minutes later but despite applying intense pressure it looked as if they were heading for their first league defeat of the season. With the clock ticking down, second-half substitute Mbangula picked up a pass on the edge of the Bologna area and the Belgian international placed a shot beyond the reach of keeper Lukasz Skorupski. Roma thrashed Lecce 4-1 as the club's decision to bring in 73-year-old Claudio Ranieri as the club's third coach of the season begins to pay off.

Norris wins Abu Dhabi Grand Prix as McLaren seal F1 title

ABU DHABI: (news desk) Lando Norris won the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on Sunday to deliver McLaren's first Formula One constructors' title since 1998 after team-mate Oscar Piastri collided with Max Verstappen on the opening lap and finished 10th. Carlos Sainz and Charles Leclerc were second and third for Ferrari, McLaren's historic rivals and the only team that could have beaten them to the championship. "You all deserve this. Thank you so much. It's been a special year," said Norris over the team radio after taking the chequered flag. "Next year is going to be my year too." Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton finished fourth in his last race for Mercedes, overtaking team-mate George Russell on the 58th and final lap. He joins Leclerc at Ferrari next season. "Lewis, that was the drive of a world champion," said Mercedes boss Toto Wolff. Red Bull's Verstappen, who took his fourth successive drivers' title in Las Vegas last month, ended up sixth after collecting a 10-second penalty for a collision that left McLaren's hopes totally in Norris's hands. Pierre Gasly was seventh for Alpine with Nico Hulkenberg eighth for Haas and Fernando Alonso ninth for Aston Martin. McLaren finished with 666 points to Ferrari's 652 and Red Bull's 589. There was drama from the start as Verstappen and Piastri clashed, with McLaren locking out the front row in qualifying but Verstappen right behind in

Assad gets asylum in Russia

DAMASCUS: (news desk) Bashar al-Assad and his family are in Moscow, where he has been granted asylum on humanitarian grounds, Russian news agencies Interfax, TASS and Ria Novosti announced on Sunday evening, citing a Kremlin source, hours after he fled Syria. The Kremlin had earlier said he had "stepped down" as president and "left Syria" hours after rebel forces took control of the Syrian capital,

BBC News reported on Sunday. Assad has not been pictured since he met the Iranian foreign minister in Damascus a week ago. That day, he vowed to "crush" the rebels seizing territory with dizzying speed. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said Assad left on a private plane that took off from Damascus international airport at 1900 GMT on Saturday night, without specifying

where he headed. After that, the army and security forces pulled out of the airport, with commercial flights already suspended earlier, the UK-based Observatory added. The rebels, who began a lightning offensive on Oct 27, quickly announced they had toppled "tyrant" Assad and that Damascus was a "free" city, calling on millions of Syrians who fled the war for safety abroad to return home.

Assad's location was not clear on Sunday morning, and it was being speculated that he had headed to Russia, Iran or the UAE. Meanwhile, Reuters cited two unnamed senior Syrian army officers as saying that Assad had boarded a Syrian Air plane at Damascus airport early on Sunday. It noted that a Syrian Air Ilyushin Il-76T cargo plane took off from the airport at 01:59 GMT with an undisclosed destination.

According to data from Flightradar24, the plane initially flew east away from the capital before turning to the north-west and heading towards the Mediterranean coast. After flying over the central city of Homs - which fell to the rebels on Saturday night - at an altitude of 20,000ft (6,095m) the plane made a U-turn and started flying eastwards again while also losing altitude. The plane's transponder

signal was lost at around 02:39 GMT, when it was about 13km west of Homs and flying at an altitude of 495m. Flightradar24 said in a post on X that the aircraft "was old with an older transponder generation, so some data might be bad or missing," that it was "flying in an area of GPS jamming, so some data might be bad," and that there was not aware of any airports in the area where the signal was lost.