

# Netanyahu on path for victory in Israeli election

Jerusalem, Undefined

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was on path for victory in Israel's election yesterday after nearly complete results put him in position to form a right-wing coalition and further extend his long tenure in office.

The results from Tuesday's vote came despite corruption allegations against the 69-year-old premier and put him on track to become Israel's longest-serving prime minister later this year.

His Likud party looked set to finish with a similar number of seats in parliament to his main

rival, ex-military chief Benny Gantz's centrist Blue and White alliance, Israeli media reported.

But with 97 percent of the votes counted, results showed the Likud and other right-wing parties allied to him with some 65 seats in the 120-seat parliament. The results would seem to leave President Reuven Rivlin, whose task it is to ask one of the candidates to form a government, with little choice but to pick Netanyahu.

Intensive coalition negotiations will follow and could drag on for days or even weeks.

Final results were expected



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (C) greets supporters at his Likud Party headquarters in the Israeli coastal city of Tel Aviv

by Thursday afternoon, with ballots for soldiers and other special categories of voters yet to be counted.

The close race between the two main parties had led to uncertainty after polls closed on Tuesday night and exit surveys were released.

Both Netanyahu and Gantz claimed victory after the initial exit surveys that gave Blue and White the most seats.

But even then Netanyahu appeared best placed to form a coalition, with both parties in any case falling far short of an outright majority.

## New Zealand gives final okay to gun laws

Sydney, Australia

New Zealand lawmakers have almost unanimously passed sweeping gun reforms, paving the way for a ban on military-style semi-automatic weapons to enter into force as soon as Friday.

Lawmakers passed the legislation on final reading, less than a month after a gunman entered two mosques in Christchurch killing 50 people.

During the debate

Wednesday Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told parliamentarians she "vividly" recalled the moment after the massacre when she, without consulting widely, decided the government had to act.

Ardern, her voice filled with emotion, said it was during a briefing with the police commissioner when she was told about the "nature of the attack", the weapons used and how they were notified but had been obtained legally.

"I could not fathom how weapons that could cause

such destruction, and large-scale death could have been obtained legally in this country. I could not fathom that," she told lawmakers.

She could not, she said, face the public or "the victims that had been left behind from this terror attack and tell them hand-on-heart that our system and our laws allow these guns to be available and that was okay. Because it was not."

The new rules amend permissive 1983 gun laws that had the subject of multiple reform attempts.



New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern (R) speaks during a meeting

## Wreckage of missing Japan fighter jet found

Tokyo, Japan

Wreckage from a Japanese F-35A stealth fighter jet has been found a day after it disappeared off the radar over the Pacific, the country's defence minister said Wednesday.

There was no word yet on the fate of the one pilot on

board the jet, Defence Minister Takeshi Iwaya said.

It was the first reported case of a crash by an F-35A, according to Japan's Air Self-Defence Force.

"We have collected part of its tail" in search operations at sea with planes and vessels, Iwaya told reporters.

"We believe it crashed,"

he added.

The fighter jet went missing around 7:30 pm (1030 GMT) Tuesday as it was flying some 135 kilometres (85 miles) east of Misawa, northeastern Japan, on a training mission.

The plane lost contact about

30 minutes after taking off from Misawa Air Base with three other aircraft.

An F-35A fighter aircraft of the Japan Air Self-Defence Force



# New blackout hits Venezuela

Caracas, Venezuela

A new blackout across large parts of crisis-hit Venezuela, including the capital Caracas, forced many to spend another night in the dark on Tuesday.

The electricity shortage -- the biggest in a week -- hit a large section of the capital, with social media posts from residents across the country suggesting significant areas in at least 20 of the 23 states of Venezuela were also affected.

An hour after the lights went out, some areas of the capital regained power.

No reason for the blackout was immediately given by the government or the state electricity company Corpoelec. The company set up to confront the crisis "is working to reestablish the service", said state TV channel VTV.

Opposition leader Juan Guaido -- whose claim to be interim president is supported by around

50 nations -- had previously called for protests against public service failures to be held Wednesday.

Power cuts have occurred sporadically since the massive blackout of March 7 left the country in the dark for five days, with electricity being rationed outside of Caracas.

Water supplies have also been interrupted, along with transport and communications, forcing many people to trim their work days to six hours.

The government of President Nicolas Maduro has blamed US-backed sabotage for the massive blackouts that have deprived millions of power, blaming "electromagnetic, cyber and physical" attacks against the Guri hydroelectric power plant, which produces 80 percent of the country's energy.

The opposition blames a failure to maintain critical infrastructure and Guaido on Saturday launched what he promised will be a "definitive" escalation of pressure to force the country's embattled leftist leader from office.

## Young entrepreneur aims to send 3D-printed rockets to space

● **Relativity Space has raised \$45 million so far, Canadian satellite operator Telesat has entrusted it with the launch of part of its future 5G satellite constellation and the US military has given it a launch pad at Cape Canaveral**

Colorado Springs, United States

To see Tim Ellis hunched over his laptop, alone in a room at a major space industry conference in Colorado, you can hardly imagine that he might be the next Elon Musk.

But Relativity Space, the company he co-founded in December 2015 with the vision of launching 3D-printed rockets, has grown from 14 to 80 employees in one year and will recruit another 40 this year.

At age 28, Ellis has lured several industry veterans, including from SpaceX, the US market leader for launches that was

founded by billionaire entrepreneur Musk.

Relativity Space has raised \$45 million so far, Canadian satellite operator Telesat has entrusted it with the launch of part of its future 5G satellite constellation and the US military has given it a launch pad at Cape Canaveral.

And Ellis, who six years ago was still studying for his masters in aerospace engineering at the University of Southern California, now sits on the White House's National Space Council along with former astronauts and the heads of the largest American aerospace groups.

"I'm the youngest person by more than 20 years, and we're the only venture capital backed start-up," Ellis told AFP during

the 35th annual Space Symposium in Colorado Springs, a major annual event for the space industry that will welcome 15,000 participants from 40 countries.

Dozens of start-ups have announced plans in recent years to build small and medium rockets to launch small satellites. Many will probably fail before having made their first rocket, but that's the game, Ellis explained.

"The notion in Silicon Valley is you're going to take tons of big bets, where lots of them will totally lose money. But the ones that succeed will pay for all of the losers -- and in a huge outcome, if it's the next Google or

the next SpaceX," he said.

Relativity Space, which like SpaceX is based in Los Angeles, has so far printed nine rocket engines and three second stages for its rocket model, called Terran 1, whose first test flight is scheduled for the end of 2020.

Small satellites With its large 3D-printing machines, the startup claims that its rockets will require 100 times fewer parts than traditional rockets.

"We'll only be experts in like two or three (technological) processes," he said, compared to traditional manufacturing with complex supply chains. "It's far easier."

Only the electronics are not 3D-printed.

"It's much cheaper, because of the labor reduction in the automation with 3D-printing," said Ellis, who will charge \$10 million for a launch, at least at first.

"Also, it's more flexible," he said: eventually, Relativity Space will adapt to the

size of the fairings of the rockets to the requirements of individual customers, depending on the size of their satellite.

Speed is the other advantage: "Our target is to get from raw material to flight in 60 days," Ellis said.

If Relativity Space succeeds in this feat -- which it has not yet demonstrated -- it would revolutionize the launch industry. Today, a satellite operator can wait for years before having a place in the large rockets of Arianespace or SpaceX.

The Terran 1 will be 10 times smaller the SpaceX Falcon 9, able to place a 1,250 kilogram (2,755 pounds) payload into very low orbit (185 kilometers or 115 miles above the Earth's surface).

This could be suitable for a constellation of small satellites for telecommunications or imaging the Earth, but also for one of the largest customers in space: the US military.

This is another reason for the young executive's arrival in Colorado Springs: meeting senior Pentagon officials.

"I rarely wear a suit, but I will for the military," Ellis said.



Tim Ellis founder and CEO of Relativity Space