

THAILAND PRO-DEMOCRACY PROTEST

Thousands gather as tensions rise

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thousands of Thai protesters chanting “down with dictatorship” and “the country belongs to the people” joined an anti-government demonstration in Bangkok yesterday that was one of the biggest since a 2014 coup.

Students have organised protests almost daily for the past month, but the latest drew wider support for the demands for the departure of former junta leader Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha’s government, a new constitution and an end to harrasing opposition activists.

Some students have also called for reform of the monarchy - once a taboo subject.

“We want a new election and a new parliament from the people,” student activist Patsalawalee Tanakitwiboonpon, 24, told the cheering crowd at Bangkok’s Democracy Monument. “Lastly, our dream is to have a monarchy which is truly under the constitution.”

Prayuth won elections last year that the opposition says were held under rules to ensure that he kept power. The most vocal opposition party was subsequently banned.

Anger has further been fuelled by accusations of corruption, the arrest of some student leaders over earlier protests and the economic fallout from the coronavirus epidemic.

Students have presented 10 reforms they seek to the monarchy of King Maha Vajiralongkorn - including curbing his powers over the constitution, the royal fortune and the armed forces.

Thailand’s lese majeste law sets a penalty of up to 15 years for criticising the monarchy, but Prayuth has said the king requested that it not be used for now.



A pro-democracy protester holding a placard does a three-fingered salute at a rally to demand the government to resign, to dissolve the parliament and to hold new elections under a revised constitution, near the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, Thailand, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Pranab ‘responding to treatment’

Former Indian President Pranab Mukherjee’s son Abhijit Mukherjee yesterday tweeted that his father is doing “much better and stable than the preceding days” and he is responding well to treatment at a hospital in New Delhi. “All his vital parameters are stable & he is responding to treatment! We firmly believe that he will be back among us soon,” Abhijit said in the Twitter post. The Army Research and Referral Hospital, where the 84-year-old former president is admitted and underwent a brain surgery for a removal of a clot, said yesterday that Mukherjee’s medical condition remained unchanged. In a statement, the hospital said Mukherjee remained on ventilatory support. Pranab Mukherjee had to undergo the “life-saving” brain surgery last week after he suffered a fall at his Rajaji Marg residence last Sunday. He also tested Covid-19 positive.

Australian surfer punches shark to save wife

An Australian man has been hailed a “hero” after repeatedly punching a shark until it released his wife’s leg. Police said the couple were surfing at a beach near Port Macquarie, four hours north of Sydney, on Saturday morning when she was bitten twice and injured on her right leg. “Her companion was forced to punch the fish until it let go,” police said in the statement. Paramedics treated the 35-year-old at the beach before she was later airlifted to a major hospital for surgery. One witness who was surfing nearby when the attack occurred called the man a “hero” for taking on what appeared to be a great white shark up to three metres (10 feet) long. The woman’s husband, Mark Rapley, played down his efforts, telling the newspaper he “did what anyone would have done in that moment”.

Trump’s younger brother dies



Donald Trump’s younger brother Robert, 71, died on Saturday after being hospitalized for an undisclosed illness, the US president said in a statement mourning his loss. “It is with heavy heart I share that my wonderful brother, Robert, peacefully passed away tonight,” Trump said in a White House statement. “He was not just my brother, he was my best friend. He will be greatly missed, but we will meet again. His memory will live on in my heart forever. Robert, I love you. Rest in peace.” The 74-year-old president had visited his brother on Friday at a hospital in New York, staying for about 45 minutes. Born in 1948 and the youngest of the five Trump siblings, Robert worked on Wall Street before joining the family real estate business. Quieter and less famous than Donald, Robert was fiercely loyal to his older brother.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS, ANN

No new polls in Belarus

Says Lukashenko as Russia says it is ready to help militarily if necessary; thousands march for new vote

AFP, Minsk

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko rejected calls to step down in a defiant speech to supporters yesterday as tens of thousands of opponents rallied for the biggest demonstration yet against his disputed re-election.

The strongman who has ruled the ex-Soviet country for the last 26 years is facing an unprecedented challenge to his leadership from a growing protest movement fanned by a brutal police crackdown.

In a rare campaign-style rally in front of flag-waving supporters in central Minsk, Lukashenko said: “I called you here not to defend me... but for the first time in a quarter-century, to defend your country and its independence.”

“The elections were valid. We will not hand over the country,” he said.

As he spoke, tens of thousands of people walked down Independence Avenue for a “March for Freedom” called by the opposition to keep up pressure after a week of demonstrations. Columns of protesters raised victory signs and held flowers and



balloons. Many wore white, the colour that has come to symbolise the opposition movement.

A violent post-polls police crackdown on protesters saw more 6,700 people arrested, hundreds wounded and two people dead.

With pressure growing from the street and abroad, Lukashenko has reached out to Russia and Moscow said yesterday it was ready to provide military help if needed.

European governments have condemned the election and police crackdown, and EU ministers on Friday agreed to draw up a list of targets in Belarus for a new round of sanctions.

New Israeli air strikes pound Gaza

AFP, Gaza City

Israel’s army launched new air strikes yesterday against Hamas positions in Gaza and closed the fishing zone around the Palestinian enclave in response to rockets and firebombs sent into Israeli territory.

Long simmering Palestinian anger has flared further since Israel and the UAE on Thursday agreed to normalise relations, a move Palestinians saw as a betrayal.

Over the past week Israeli forces have carried out repeated night-time strikes on targets linked to Hamas in response to makeshift firebombs attached to balloons and kites which have been sent into southern Israel, causing thousands of fires on Israeli farms and communities.

US can’t trigger ‘snapback’ sanctions on Iran: EU

AGENCIES

The United States is not entitled to force the reinstatement of sanctions on Iran via the so-called “snapback” mechanism linked to an international nuclear deal, the European Union’s foreign policy chief said.

Since the US unilaterally withdrew from the agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), it cannot be considered a part of it, the official added yesterday.

“Given that the US unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA in May 2018 and has not participated in any JCPOA structures or activities subsequently, the US cannot be considered as a JCPOA participant,” a spokesperson for EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said, according to dpa news agency.

“We therefore consider that the US is not in a position to resort to mechanisms reserved for JCPOA participants [such as the so-called snapback].”

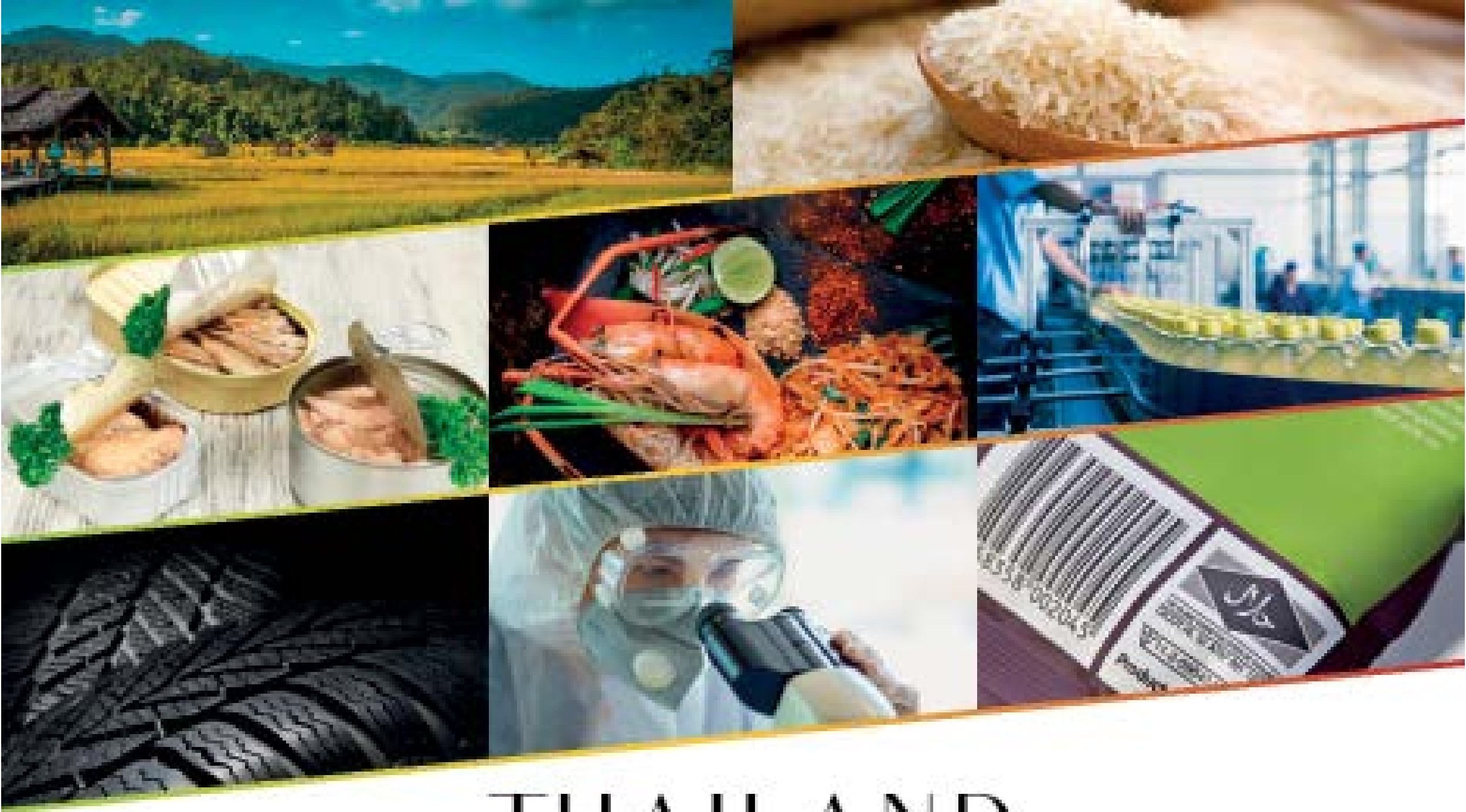
The nuclear agreement is intended to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons while granting it an internationally monitored civilian nuclear power programme. In the course of the agreement adopted by the United Nations, the dismantling of sanctions against Iran was also regulated.

An arms embargo that is part of the deal is due to expire in October. The US wants an extension of the embargo, but it failed to push this through in the UN Security Council earlier this week.

Now, President Donald Trump wants to force the reinstatement of all international sanctions on Iran against the will of the other members of the UNSC via the “snapback”.

“We’ll be doing a snapback,” Trump told reporters on Saturday at a press conference in New Jersey. “You’ll be watching it next week.”

The snapback was granted to the participants in the nuclear agreement in the event of a violation of the terms by Iran.



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