

Sunak gets backing to be next UK PM

New PM to be announced on September 5

REUTERS, London

Ex-finance minister Rishi Sunak, the favourite to become Britain's next prime minister, kicked off his campaign yesterday promising "honesty", in an increasingly testy and divisive battle to succeed Boris Johnson.

An initial 11 candidates put their names forward to become leader of the governing Conservative Party and Britain's next premier after Johnson was forced to say he would step down when support drained from him over a series of scandals.

Only those who get nominations from 20 of their 358 Conservative colleagues in parliament will go forward to the first vote today. The field will be then be quickly whittled down a final two, with Conservative Party members making the final decision.

The winner, and Britain's new prime minister, would be announced on Sept. 5.

With most candidates saying they would cut taxes if they win, Sunak, the current bookmakers' favourite, has sought to portray himself as the serious candidate, promising "grown up"

honesty "not fairy tales".

"It is not credible to promise lots more spending and lower taxes," said Sunak.

He has the widest support among colleagues who have publicly expressed their view, including the backing of Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab.

Transport minister Grant Shapps became the first to end his bid, throwing his support behind Sunak.

Among the others to launch their campaigns yesterday were Tom Tugendhat, the chair of the foreign affairs committee, and Kemi Badenoch, a former junior minister who is scooping up some support on the right wing of the party.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss was also hoping to challenge those at the top of the leader board.

The main opposition Labour Party was to put forward a motion of no confidence in the government to try to force Johnson out of office straightaway. The vote will be held today and although some Conservatives have voiced concern at Johnson remaining as PM, they are very unlikely to support it.



People mourn for late former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe at Zojoji Temple in Tokyo, yesterday. Mourners lined the streets of central Tokyo yesterday to bid farewell to Shinzo Abe, as his hearse was driven past political landmarks after a private funeral. The country's longest-serving prime minister was gunned down on Friday while campaigning, in a crime that rattled Japan and prompted an outpouring of international condemnation and grief.

PHOTO: AFP

US drone strike kills IS Syria chief

AFP, Washington

The leader of the Islamic State militant group in Syria was killed in a US drone strike, the Pentagon said yesterday.

Maher al-Agal was killed while riding a motorcycle near Jindayris in Syria, and one of his top aides was seriously injured, Pentagon Central Command spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Dave Eastburn told AFP.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights confirmed that Agal was killed in a drone strike.

There was little information available about Agal.

The strike came five months after a nighttime US raid in the town of Atme in northern Syria led to the death of the overall Islamic State leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Qurashi.

How a band of activists helped bring down Rajapaksas

REUTERS, Colombo

In June, a few dozen activists started meeting regularly at a seaside tented camp in Colombo for hours-long sessions to think up ways to revive Sri Lanka's flagging protest movement.

The group, which included a Catholic priest, a digital strategist and a popular playwright, succeeded beyond their wildest hopes.

Within weeks, hundreds of thousands of people descended on Colombo. After initially clashing with police, protesters occupied key government buildings and residences, forcing President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his prime minister to promise to step down.

"I'm still trying to process it," said Chameera Dedduwage, a digital strategist at a major advertising firm who became part of the team that helped organise the uprising. "It was 50 percent premeditation and coordination, another 30 percent willingness of the people and 20 percent luck."

In interviews, veterans of those small meetings described how they agreed on a multi-pronged campaign to inject new life into the movement widely known as "Aragalaya", or "struggle" in Sinhala.



The movement had begun in March, when thousands took to the streets to vent their anger at lengthy power cuts and spiralling prices, and to call for the Rajapaksa family that had dominated the country's politics for much of the last 20 years to leave power.

On May 9, Rajapaksa's elder brother Mahinda - president from 2005-2015 and at that time serving as prime minister - had stepped down. On June 9, younger brother Basil had quit as a lawmaker.

So, the Aragalaya activists targeted July 9 as the day they hoped to unseat the president himself. A plan emerged to combine online agitation, meetings with political parties, labour unions and student groups and door-

to-door campaigning to get enough people back on the streets for a final push, according to the three attendees.

Riding on trains, buses, lorries and bicycles, or simply walking, huge crowds converged on Colombo on Saturday, outnumbering security forces deployed to protect government buildings and upending Sri Lankan politics.

They quickly broke into the president's colonial-era house, before storming a portion of the presidential office and entering the prime minister's official residence 2.5 km (1.6 miles) away.

Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had been moved to undisclosed safe locations, and within hours they separately announced they would resign to allow an all-party interim government to take over.

If he resigns today as promised, Rajapaksa, once a war hero who was both revered and feared, will become the first sitting Sri Lankan president to quit.

"There were so many elderly, teenagers, youth, women," recalled Jeevanth Peiris, a Catholic priest who is part of the activist group. "People didn't want to give up, didn't want to withdraw."

Myanmar junta chief visits Moscow

AFP, Moscow

Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing visited Moscow yesterday, Russian media reported, as the US vowed to put pressure on his military regime over a 2021 coup. Russia's embassy in Myanmar told the Interfax news agency that Hlaing was in Moscow on a "private" visit. The announcement of the visit comes two days after Secretary of State Antony Blinken vowed to keep pressuring Myanmar's junta as he met democracy activists on a visit to neighbouring Thailand.

EU freezes Russian assets worth \$13.8b

AFP, Prague

The European Union has frozen Russian assets worth \$13.8 billion since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, EU Justice Commissioner Didier Reynders said yesterday. "For the moment, we have frozen - coming from oligarchs and other entities - 13.8 billion euros (\$13.8 billion), so it's quite huge," Reynders told reporters in Prague. At the end of June, an international sanctions task force said its members had blocked \$30 billion in assets belonging to Russian oligarchs and officials.



This file handout photo made available by the Iranian Army office on January 5, 2021, shows drones on display prior to a military drone drill at an undisclosed location in central Iran.

Iran to supply Russians with combat drones: US

AFP, Washington

Iran is planning to supply hundreds of drones with combat weapon capabilities to Russia for use in Ukraine, a top US official said Monday.

Jake Sullivan, the White House national security advisor, said the information received by the United States supported views that the Russian military is facing challenges sustaining its weaponry after significant losses in Ukraine.

"The Iranian government is preparing to provide Russia with up to several hundred UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles), including weapons capable UAVs, on an expedited timeline," Sullivan told reporters.

"Our information further indicates that Iran is preparing to train Russian forces to use these UAVs, with initial training sessions slated to begin as soon as early July," he said.

Iran responded yesterday by saying that "no special development" had taken

place in technological cooperation with Russia following its invasion of Ukraine in February.

Without specifically mentioning drones, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said cooperation with Russia "in the field of some modern technologies predates the war in Ukraine, and there has been no special development in that regard recently."

Tehran's position regarding the war "is quite clear and has been officially announced many times," he added.

Iran has maintained that it is against the war in Ukraine and called for a political solution, while blaming the roots of the crisis on the United States and Nato's expansion.

"The claim of the American official (Sullivan) comes as the US and the Europeans have for years turned the occupying and aggressor countries, including in the West Asia region, into a storehouse of their various deadly weapons," Kanani added.

Covid-19 pandemic is 'nowhere near over': WHO

AFP, Geneva

Fresh waves of Covid infections show the pandemic is "nowhere near over", the World Health Organization's chief warned yesterday, voicing concern the virus is "running freely".

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he was worried that case numbers were continuing to rise, putting further pressure on stretched health systems and workers.

"New waves of the virus demonstrate again that Covid-19 is nowhere near over," he told a news conference, adding: "As the virus pushes at us, we must push back."

As Covid-19 transmission and hospitalisations rise, governments must also deploy tried and tested measures like masking, improved ventilation and test and treat protocols," Tedros insisted.

The WHO's emergency committee on Covid-19 met on Friday and determined the pandemic remains a Public Health Emergency of International Concern - the highest alarm the WHO can sound.

WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan told the meeting global Covid cases reported to the WHO increased by 30 percent in the last two weeks, largely driven by Omicron sub-variants BA.4, BA.5.

Official document from Bangladesh government regarding public procurement. Includes title 'গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার', 'পুলিশ কমিশনার এর কার্যালয়', and a table with columns for 'ক্রম নং', 'লট নং', 'কাজের বিবরণ', 'সিডিটির মূল্য', 'সরকারি জামানতের পরিমাণ', and 'কাজ সমাপ্তির সময়'.