



Congress supporters celebrate the party's victory in the Karnataka state legislative assembly election in front of the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) office in Bengaluru yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

THAI ELCTION

Candidates make last-day pitch to voters

AFP, Bangkok

Thai opposition leaders toured Bangkok in open-top jeeps yesterday in a final-day bid to woo voters, urging them to turn out in force to oust the military-backed government.

The kingdom goes to the polls today with voters tipped to issue a damning verdict on former coup leader Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha after nearly a decade in power.

But in a country where coups and court rulings have often overturned election results, there are fears the military could seek to cling on – despite the army chief insisting there would be no intervention this time.

Today's poll is the first since major youth-led pro-democracy protests erupted across Bangkok in 2020 with demands to curb the power and spending of Thailand's king – breaching a long-held taboo on questioning the monarchy.

Those protests fizzled out as Covid-19 curbs were imposed and dozens of leaders were arrested, but their energy has led into growing support for the rival opposition Move Forward Party (MFP).

MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat made his own push on an open-top truck tour yesterday, rallying support through a loudhailer.

"Please give the younger generation the opportunity to govern the country – we will take care of the older generation," he told passersby.

The election has shaped up as a generational clash between the pro-democracy opposition, backed by young and rural voters, and the conservative, military-allied royalist establishment embodied by Prayut and his United Thai Nation party.

Israel rules out immediate truce

2 killed in West Bank; Egypt keeps up peace effort

REUTERS, Gaza/ Jerusalem

Israel yesterday ruled out an immediate truce in Gaza, saying the onus was on Palestinian militants to stop launching rockets from an arsenal it suggested could be depleted within days, while its aircraft kept up strikes in the enclave.

"We're not holding ceasefire talks," National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi told a municipal event near Jerusalem, adding that Israel's top priority was presently firing on militants.

Two Palestinians were killed in an Israeli raid on the outskirts of Nablus in the northern West Bank, where clashes had erupted, the Palestinian Health Ministry said. A military spokesman said gunmen exchanged fire with Israeli forces.

Islamic Jihad's armed wing said it would press on with rocket salvos as fighting entered a fifth day. "The resistance prepared itself for months of confrontation," Islamic Jihad said in a statement.

The Israeli military said aircraft struck Islamic Jihad command centres and rocket launchers in Gaza. Huge clouds of smoke rose as loud explosions ripped through areas bombed.

In the Deir Al-Balah area of the central Gaza Strip, a building was flattened as houses nearby were knocked down. There were no reports of casualties as residents sifted through piles of rubble.

"Destruction is miserable, the mind doesn't accept it," a resident, Marwan Al-Dirawi, told Reuters.

Air strikes on a house also damaged the nearby Shuhada Al-Aqsa hospital, wounding a number of nurses and patients with flying shrapnel, Eyad Abu Zaher, the

hospital's director, said.

Israel's military says it has made every effort to limit civilian casualties and damage to houses and accuses Islamic Jihad of deliberately locating its command centres in residential areas.

From dawn, Gaza militants fired rockets, setting off sirens and sending Israelis across the border running to bomb shelters. At least two people were badly wounded by shrapnel, Israel's ambulance service said.

Egypt has been trying to mediate a truce to the latest outbreak of violence, which has so far killed at least 33 Palestinians and one Israeli.

A Palestinian official familiar with the truce talks described them as "complicated" and "tough" but also said that Cairo was pressing ahead with its efforts.

Six top commanders of the Iranian-backed Islamic Jihad have been killed since Tuesday, when Israeli forces launched a campaign against the group, which it said was planning attacks.

Israeli military officials have said they have seen no sign that Hamas, the Islamist group that controls the Gaza Strip, has fired missiles itself and air strikes have so far targeted only Islamic Jihad sites.

Islamic Jihad, the largest armed group in Gaza after Hamas, has since fired more than 1,000 rockets, some deep into Israel.

Hanegbi said its arsenal had stood at 6,000 rockets. Islamic Jihad has not provided details on its weaponry but 5,000 remaining projectiles would enable it to keep up an intense rate of fire for several days. That timeline would likely change were Hamas to join the fighting.

Like Hamas, Islamic Jihad spurns coexistence with Israel and preaches its

Russia 'bound to lose'

Says Kyiv as Germany unveils more arms for Ukraine, claims further advances along Bakhmut; Moscow says Kyiv using UK missiles to hit 'civilian targets'

AFP, Kyiv

Kyiv yesterday said that the massive new weapons package from Germany was another sign that Russia would lose in its war against Ukraine.

"States declare large defence aid packages for Ukraine," said Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, adding that the aid indicated that Russia was "bound to lose and sit on the bench of historical shame."

Germany is preparing a new weapons package for Ukraine worth 2.7 billion euros, reportedly Berlin's largest since Russia invaded last year, the defence ministry said yesterday.

Meanwhile, a senior Ukrainian military commander said yesterday that Kyiv's forces were advancing against Russian forces near Bakhmut.

Russia, on the other hand, said its forces were still pushing inside Bakhmut.

Moscow said yesterday also said that Kyiv used British long-range missiles to target civilian sites in the eastern city of Lugansk, wounding six children.

The defence ministry said that on Friday evening Ukraine's armed forces had struck two civilian enterprises.

"Storm Shadow air-to-air missiles supplied to the Kyiv regime by Great Britain were used for the strike, despite London's declarations that these weapons

would not be used against civilian targets", the ministry said in a statement.

"Nearby residential buildings were damaged. Civilians were injured, including six children," the statement added.

The ministry said a Sukhoi Su-

24 jet that carried the missiles and a MiG 29 aircraft had been shot down.

By announcing it would deliver the air-launched deep-strike weapon, Britain became first country to provide longer-range armament to Kyiv. Russia branded the move an "extremely hostile step."

About Bakhmut, commander of the Ukrainian ground forces Oleksandr Syrskyi said on social media that, "our soldiers are

moving forward in some areas of the front, and the enemy is losing equipment and manpower."

Meanwhile Russian defence ministry said, "in the Donetsk direction, assault detachments liberated a block in the northwestern part of the city

"This is why Germany will supply all the help that it can, for as long as necessary," he said.

The package, worth \$3 billion, will include 30 additional Leopard-1 tanks, Marder armoured vehicles, air defence systems and surveillance drones, the ministry said.

Der Spiegel magazine said it would be Germany's largest since the outbreak of the war.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is scheduled to visit Germany today to meet with leaders of Europe's top economy, a government source in Berlin told AFP.

Zelensky is currently on a visit to Rome to thank Italy for its support and meet with Pope Francis.

Details of Zelensky's Germany trip have not been released, but media reports say he will meet with both Chancellor Olaf Scholz and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

Reports also suggest Zelensky could travel to the western city of Aachen to pick up the Charlemagne Prize, awarded for work done in the service of European unification.

"For the first time in its long history, the Charlemagne Prize is recognising that the freedom and fundamental principles of Europe must be defended with force if necessary," the prize committee's director Juergen Linden told Germany's Tagesspiegel newspaper this week.



A Palestinian child carries belongings salvaged from the rubble of a building, damaged in Israeli air strikes on Gaza city yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

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