

No retreat from party's reform agenda

Says Thai PM hopeful Pita, urges senators to follow will of people

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand's prime ministerial hopeful said yesterday he was willing to adjust the pace of his Move Forward party's ambitious reform drive if he becomes premier, but vowed no retreat from a plan to change a law that forbids insulting the monarchy.

In an interview with Reuters on the eve of his second bid to win the top job, Pita Limjaroenrat, who led his party to election victory in May, described the military establishment's effort to block him as like a "broken record" and said Thailand had entered a new era with a public hankering for change.

The 42-year-old Pita will contest his second parliamentary vote on the premiership today, after failing last week to win the required backing of more than half of the legislature, as the conservative, military-appointed Senate closed ranks to thwart him.

"It was absolutely expected, the same thing, same venue. Broken record. But the sentiment of the era has changed," he said.

"Despite what happens tomorrow [today] there has been progress in society.

They demand something new, something fresh."

Move Forward captured massive youth support for its disruptive, anti-establishment reform agenda and was the surprise winner of the May 14 election, thrashing conservative rivals in what was seen as a resounding rejection of nearly a decade of government led or backed by the royalist military.

But it is hamstrung by an electoral system designed by the military in which the Senate, which has typically voted in line with the powerful army and conservative establishment, can effectively block elected parties from forming a government.

Pita was backed by just 13 of the 249 senators last week. Yesterday, he urged lawmakers not to make their vote about him, but about the principals of democracy.

"It would be an absurd strangeness that a winning party by a four million margin, a 10% margin, becomes opposition leader and not even in the coalition government," he said.



Black thick smoke fills the air near the settlement of Pournari, as wild fires engulf the area of Magoula, some 25km southwest of the Greek capital Athens yesterday. Inset, a Greek policeman evacuates a child from wild fire at the village of Agios Charamlabos, near the capital Athens.

PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

Pakistan govt to retire early to move polls ahead

Say media reports

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's ruling coalition will dissolve parliament and hand over the reins to a caretaker government next month four days before it is constitutionally required to do so, in preparation for a general election by November, local media reported yesterday.

Several TV news channels reported that the two main parties - the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan's Peoples Party (PPP) - agreed to dissolve parliament on August 8. Parliament's tenure constitutionally expires on August 12.

Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, however, said no date had been set for the general election. "No decision has so far been taken on the dissolution of the parliament," she said in a tweet, adding a formal announcement would be made about the election date after a consultation among all coalition partners.

The elections are approaching after months of political and economic turmoil, with uncertainty even to the extent that the vote might be delayed for at least one year.

A caretaker government has 90 days in which to hold a general election when a government hands over power early, but it would have had 60 days if the government had handed over power at the designated time.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's coalition took over after his predecessor, Imran Khan, was ousted in a vote of no confidence in parliament in April 2022.

World must prepare for more intense heatwaves

Says UN as countries from North America to Europe and Asia reel from soaring temperatures; health authorities urge people to stay hydrated, shelter from burning sun

AFP, Geneva

The world should prepare to face increasingly intense heatwaves, the United Nations warned yesterday, as countries across the Northern Hemisphere reeled from soaring temperatures.

"These events will continue to grow in intensity, and the world needs to prepare for more intense heatwaves," John Nairn, a senior extreme heat advisor at the UN's World Meteorological Organization (WMO), told reporters in Geneva.

His comments came as Europe was bracing for new high temperatures yesterday under relentless heatwaves and wildfires that have scorched swathes of the Northern Hemisphere, forcing the evacuation of 1,200 children close to a Greek seaside resort.

Health authorities have sounded alarms from North America to Europe and Asia, urging people to stay hydrated and shelter from the burning sun, in a stark reminder of the effects of global warming.

Heatwaves are amongst the deadliest natural hazards, with hundreds of thousands of people dying from preventable heat-related causes each year, Nairn said.

Heat is a rapidly-growing health risk, due to burgeoning urbanisation, an increase in high temperature extremes, and demographic changes in countries with ageing populations.

Nairn said that the number of draw-out and simultaneous heatwaves in the Northern Hemisphere had swelled sixfold since the 1980s.

"This trend shows no signs of

decreasing," he said. "So we're in for a bit of a ride, I'm afraid, and they will have quite serious impacts on human health and livelihoods."

In the normally hot and dry western and southern US states, more than 80 million people were under advisories for a "widespread and oppressive" heatwave that sent temperatures at California's Death Valley to a near-record 52C Sunday.



Last weekend, the WMO said that excessive heat warnings and advisories covered more than 100 million people in the United States.

Europe, the world's fastest-warming continent, was bracing for the peak of the current heatwave to hit Italy's islands of Sicily and Sardinia, where a high of 48 degrees Celsius (118 degrees Fahrenheit) has been forecast by the European Space Agency.

The current European temperature record is the 48.8C recorded on Sicily in 2021, according to the UN weather agency.

In parts of Asia, record temperatures

have triggered torrential rain.

Nearly 260,000 people were evacuated in southern China and Vietnam before a typhoon made landfall late Monday, bringing fierce winds and rain, but weakening to a tropical storm by yesterday.

China reported a new mid-July high of 52.2C in the northwestern Xinjiang region's village of Sanbao, breaking the previous high of 50.6C set six years ago.

In Japan, heatstroke alerts were issued in 32 of 47 prefectures, mainly in central and southwestern regions, with at least 60 people were treated for heatstroke.

The record-setting heat came as US climate envoy John Kerry met with Chinese officials in Beijing, as the world's two largest polluters revive stalled diplomacy on reducing planet-warming emissions.

In the US state of Arizona, state capital Phoenix tied its record of 18 consecutive days above 43C, and temperatures were expected to hit 47C yesterday.

In Southern California, several wildfires have ignited in recent days, including the largest, the Rabbit Fire, between Los Angeles and Palm Springs.

As of Monday night, it was only 45 percent contained after burning nearly 8,200 acres, authorities said.

The heatwaves across Europe and the globe are "not one single phenomenon but several acting at the same time," said Robert Vautard, director of France's Pierre-Simon Laplace climate institute.

"But they are all strengthened by one factor: climate change."

Climate co-op could redefine US-China ties

US envoy Kerry tells Chinese officials

REUTERS, Beijing

China and the United States could use climate cooperation to redefine their troubled relationship and lead the way in tackling global warming, US climate envoy John Kerry told senior Chinese officials yesterday.

Kerry's three-day visit to China aimed at reviving climate cooperation between the world's top greenhouse gas emitters has coincided with waves of extreme weather across the planet, including a heat dome in the western United States that brought temperatures in California's Death Valley to 53 Celsius on Sunday.

"Our hope is that this can be the beginning of a new definition of cooperation and capacity to resolve differences between us," Kerry told top diplomat Wang Yi in a meeting in the Great Hall of the People, China's cavernous legislative building.

Addressing Premier Li Qiang, Kerry warned that the situation could get worse this summer.

Trump says he is a target in US 2020 election probe

REUTERS, Washington

Former US President Donald Trump said yesterday he had received a letter from Special Counsel Jack Smith stating that he is a target of a grand jury investigation into efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election result. If so, it would represent the clearest sign to date that Trump may face federal criminal charges stemming from his efforts to remain in power after losing the election to his rival, President Joe Biden. Officials have testified that during his final months in office, Trump pressured them with unsubstantiated claims of widespread voter fraud.

US soldier crosses into North Korea

REUTERS, Washington

A US soldier has crossed the inter-Korean border into North Korea, two US officials told Reuters yesterday, speaking on condition of anonymity. One of the officials said the soldier was believed to be in North Korean custody. The officials did not immediately offer further information. The United Nations Command that oversees the demilitarised zone area at the border earlier yesterday identified the individual as a US national but offered no further details about their identity. "A US National on a JSA orientation tour crossed, without authorization, the Military Demarcation Line into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)," the UN Command said on Twitter.

UK's migration crackdown plan to become law

AFP, London

Britain's controversial plan to deter migrants without papers from landing on British shores was yesterday poised to become law, prompting criticism from the United Nations. The legislation would outlaw asylum claims by all arrivals via the Channel and other "illegal" routes, and transfer them to third countries, such as Rwanda. It was proposed in response to years of growing numbers of dangerous cross-Channel journeys from northern France in small boats. Opposition to the bill was finally crushed at a late night sitting just hours before a barge that will be used to house migrants arrived at a port on England's south coast.

Flash floods in Assam kill eight

REUTERS, Guwahati

Flash floods in India's Assam state have killed at least eight people and displaced more than 115,000 after a regional river burst its banks earlier this month following heavy monsoon rains, officials said yesterday. Water from the swollen Brahmaputra River has engulfed nearly 450 villages in 17 districts in the hilly state in northeastern India, inundating large swathes of wildlife sanctuaries as well. Floods and landslides are common in Assam due to monsoon showers every year. "Eight people have died in separate incidents of drowning since the first wave of flooding that began a fortnight ago," said Pijush Hazarika, Assam's water resources minister.



Migrants sit on board an inflatable boat before attempting to illegally cross the English Channel to reach Britain, off the coast of Sangatte, northern France yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP