

International

Malaysian king urges politicians to unite as new PM hunt starts

King has ruled out elections due to the coronavirus outbreak

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's king yesterday urged rival politicians to unite to battle a worsening coronavirus outbreak as the hunt began for a new prime minister, an opposition leader said. Analysts said the monarch, who appoints the premier, was trying to push the country's political parties towards forming a unity government following Muhyiddin Yassin's resignation Monday.



Country is facing political crisis

Following a turbulent 17 months in office, Muhyiddin finally quit when he lost his parliamentary majority and amid mounting public anger at his government's handling of Malaysia's worst COVID-19 wave.

The king, Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, has ruled out elections due to the outbreak, meaning it will likely be up to him to pick the next premier based on who commands most support. But there is no clear successor for 74-year-old Muhyiddin, as no alliance has majority backing in parliament. An opposition bloc is pushing for Anwar Ibrahim, remnants of Muhyiddin's collapsed gov-

ernment may try to build a coalition, while some have proposed a unity administration until the outbreak is under control. After a meeting at the national palace with other party chiefs, long-time opposition leader Anwar said the king had told them "the country is facing political and constitutional crisis".

"So we should unite to fight the coronavirus and help bolster the economy." "By the look of it, all the parties seem to have come to a consensus—that is to end 'old politics'... and focus on the development of the country," he added. The monarch was accompanied by the influential deputy king at the meeting.

This indicated agreement among Malaysia's revered Islamic royal families "with regards to the proposal for a unity government", said Oh Ei Sun, an analyst at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs. MPs have also been asked to submit the name of their choice for prime minister to the palace by today afternoon, and the drama is expected to take several days to play out.

A premier must have the support of at least 111 MPs out of 222 in the lower house of parliament. Malaysia's political landscape has been in disarray since polls in 2018 that saw a scandal-plagued coalition ejected after six decades in power, and replaced by a reformist alliance. But that alliance collapsed, and Muhyiddin came to power in March last year without an election. His government was unstable from the outset, however, with a razor-thin majority in parliament and facing constant questions over its legitimacy. — AFP



KUALA LUMPUR: Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim (C) gestures outside the National Palace after meeting with Malaysia's King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. — AFP



NAVALACRUZ, Spain: A helicopter drops water as fires rage in Navalmoral de la Sierra near Avila at center of Spain. Thousands were evacuated and more than 5,000 hectares burned with flames spreading up over a 40-kilometer perimeter. Spain saw its highest temperature on record on Saturday. — AFP

UN hot on trail of temperature records

ROME: During last week's heatwaves in Italy and Spain, meteorologists in both countries announced provisional data suggesting temperature records had been set there. But such claims need to be verified by the United Nations before being confirmed or rejected — a process that can take months of careful scientific checking.

The UN's World Meteorological Organization is responsible for signing off on temperature records around the planet. The Geneva-based agency maintains a global weather and climate extremes archive, which logs records for temperature, pressure, rainfall, hail, aridity, wind, lightning and weather-related mortality. Here is how the WMO validates record claims, and what the records can tell us.

Months of evaluation

Confirming a claimed heat record takes several months. The WMO first contacts the national weather service of the country concerned, and the specific organisation that captured the supposed record in order to get the raw data. That includes details on the exact location of the reading, the equipment used, its calibration, and the regional weather conditions at the time.

An initial assessment is carried out by the WMO Commission for Climatology and by Randall Cerveny, the organisation's rapporteur of weather and climate extremes, who heads up the records archive. An international panel of atmospheric scientists then reviews the raw data and provides Cerveny, a geographical sciences professor at Arizona State University, with recommendations for his final verdict.

A decision typically takes six to nine months after the panel is convened. Since the process was set up, "no findings of any WMO extremes evaluation committee have been overturned", he told AFP.

Database started in 2007

In 2005, while watching US news coverage of Hurricane Katrina's trail of destruction in New Orleans, Cerveny was struck by TV presenters repeatedly calling it the worst hurricane of all time. He knew otherwise: while Katrina caused 1,800 deaths, a tropical cyclone in 1970 killed an estimated 300,000 people in what is now Bangladesh. Cerveny co-wrote a scientific article calling for an official global records database. And in 2007, the WMO asked him to set one up, to keep world, hemispherical and regional records for particular extreme weather events.

Measuring climate change

A new report this month by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change showed unequivocally that the climate is changing faster than previously feared, and because of human activity.

Knowing the existing weather and climate extremes is critical in determining exactly how much and how fast the world's climate is changing, said the WMO, identifying that as the most important reason for holding the database. The information is also important for health

and civil engineering planning, Cerveny said in a WMO bulletin: Architects needed to know, for example, the maximum possible wind speed when designing a bridge. Another reason given for maintaining the records database was to advance science — and help the media to put weather events in perspective.

All-time heat record overturned

The WMO also re-examines records from before 2007, and sometimes delists them. Perhaps the best-known case is that of the long-standing world record temperature of 58 C (136 F) measured in 1922 in El Azizia, in what is now Libya.

Following a two-year investigation conducted in dangerous conditions during the Libyan revolution of 2011, the record was invalidated due to five major concerns, including potentially problematic instrumentation and "a probable new and inexperienced observer".

Since then, the 56.7 C (134.1 F) registered on July 10, 1913 in Furnace Creek, in Death Valley in the United States has held the world heat record. The coldest temperature on record is the minus 89.2 C (minus 128.6 F) recorded on July 21, 1983 at Russia's Vostok research station on Antarctica. — AFP

Rohingya to give first testimony in Myanmar army probe

YANGON: Rohingya refugees expelled from Myanmar in a bloody crackdown are to testify in court for the first time yesterday to urge a full judicial investigation into allegations of war crimes committed against them. A military campaign in Myanmar in 2017 is believed to have killed thousands and forced some 750,000 members of the Muslim minority to flee to refugee camps in Bangladesh, bringing accounts of rape, murder and arson.

The witnesses will testify remotely to a court in Argentina, which is considering invoking the principle of "universal jurisdiction" to bring a case against Myanmar's leaders for genocide and crimes against humanity. The legal premise holds that some acts—including war crimes and crimes against humanity—are so horrific they are not specific to one nation and can be tried anywhere. Argentina's courts have taken up other universal jurisdiction cases in the past, including in relation to ex-dictator Francisco Franco's rule in Spain and the Falun Gong movement in China.

Proceedings against Myanmar and its leaders are already under way at the International Criminal Court and the UN's International Court of Justice. But yesterday's hearing "will be the first time... that the Rohingya will have the opportunity to tell a court of all the atrocities they suffered", former UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar Tomas Ojea told AFP.

Five survivors of sexual violence will testify to the Federal Criminal Appeal Court in Buenos Aires remotely from refugee camps in Bangladesh, according to activist group Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK. — AFP

International Editorial

Strengthening the role of civil society institutions and the media in countering corruption

Every citizen must be active for the prosperity of the state, the well-being of the population, in general, for the achievement of all the noble goals set before the state. The active participation of citizens in the implementation of the tasks set by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in the ongoing reforms, in the decisions taken, will undoubtedly further increase their effectiveness.

Achievement of these goals, along with many factors, depends directly on the transparency of the state bodies. In the absence of transparency, it is impossible to ensure accountability of state bodies and officials to the public or elements of public control.

Ensuring transparency in the activities of public authorities depends on many factors. The world community itself is witnessing and acknowledging that the situation has completely changed in the last four years. The beginning of these actions is based on the strategy of actions on five priority directions of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021. This document stipulates the need to ensure transparency in the activities of public authorities and administration, the introduction of modern forms of providing information on the rights and freedoms and legitimate interests of individuals and legal entities in Uzbekistan.

Most importantly, the process of adoption of this document was organized in an open and trans-

parent spirit. Every proposal made about it was studied. At the same time, the people's liaison offices, virtual reception centers and citizen's offices of every organization have been set up to foster relations between the population and government agencies.

At the same time, conditions have been created for the realization of the right of our people to appeal to the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Continuous communication with the people and service to the interests of the people is becoming not only an obligation but a vital principle for leaders at all levels.

In accordance with the Constitution of the country, everyone has the right to seek, receive and impart information of their choice, with the exception of information directed against the existing constitutional order and other restrictions established by law. This provision fully complies with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the norms of international UN conventions on obtaining information, public participation in decision-making, and the rights and interests of citizens in the sphere of information.

Akmal Burkhanov,

Director of Anti-Corruption Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Libya political upturn boosts migrant exodus

TRIPOLI: As violence in Libya has waned this year, the number of would-be migrants to Europe intercepted so far has doubled compared to the same period of 2020, experts say. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) says 20,257 people have been intercepted at sea and returned to Libya so far this year.

The North African country remains one of the main departure points for tens of thousands of migrants, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, hoping to attempt the dangerous Mediterranean crossing. Most try to reach the Italian coast around 300 kilometres (186 miles) away. A Libyan navy official, speaking on condition of anonymity, also told AFP of a "100 percent increase in departures from January to July" compared with the same period last year, without giving figures. Lawyer Anwar al-Werfalli, a specialist in migration law, attributes the rise in migrant numbers "in particular to the end of the fighting" in Libya.

The 2011 uprising that brought about the downfall and death of dictator Moamer Gadhafi plunged the country into chaos and years of infighting between militias. But a UN-brokered ceasefire in October 2020 has been generally respected, and a transitional government was installed this year.

Werfalli said this has created some "stability which, though relative, encourages migrants to undertake the crossing". The central Mediterranean crossing between Libya and Italy or Malta is by far the deadliest in the world, according to IOM figures.

People traffickers

The most recent tragedy was last month, when at least 57 migrants drowned. According to UN refugee agency the UNHCR, more than 10,000 migrants and refugees made landfall in Italy in the first four months of 2021, an increase of about 170 percent over the same period of 2020. Werfalli said people smugglers have now boosted operations "to compensate for the shortfall during the many months of lockdown" for the COVID-19 pandemic. "Many migrants who had to put their plans on hold are now back on the road," he said. Miloud el-Hajj, a professor of international relations, told AFP that traffickers had exploited the conflict in Libya, to the extent that the country became a hub for people smugglers. — AFP



TRIPOLI: File photo shows migrants rescued off the coast of al-Khums, about 120 kilometres east of the capital, sit on the pier in Tripoli's naval base. — AFP