

News in brief

Disbanded Thai opposition party relaunches under new name, leader



◆ Thailand's main opposition party relaunches with a new leader and name yesterday, two days after it was disbanded by the nation's top court for campaigning to reform defamation laws. The new party will be led by tech entrepreneur Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut, 37, and known as "Prachachon", or "People" in English, a spokesperson told journalists in Bangkok.

"I have been elected to become the leader of the party," Natthaphong said. "Our mission is to set up the 'change' government for the 2027 election." The Constitutional Court in Bangkok voted unanimously on Wednesday to dissolve the Move Forward Party (MFP), the vanguard of the country's youthful pro-democracy movement, and ban its executive board members from politics for 10 years.

◆ The former chairman of the Philippines election commission was indicted

by a US federal grand jury in Florida on Thursday for allegedly taking bribes from a company that provided voting machines for the country's 2016 elections. Andres "Andy" Bautista, 60, faces one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering and three counts of international laundering of monetary instruments, the Justice Department said in a statement. Three executives of the voting machine company were also indicted for their roles in an "alleged bribery and money laundering scheme to retain and obtain business related to the 2016 Philippine elections," it said.

Ex-Philippines election official facing US bribery charges



Brazil, Nicaragua expel each others' ambassadors



◆ Brazil and Nicaragua expelled each others' ambassadors on Thursday, as souring relations between the two Latin American nations deepened into a fresh diplomatic feud. A Brazilian diplomatic source told AFP the latest flareup in tensions came after Brazil's ambassador to Nicaragua skipped an official ceremony in Managua. The event was the 19 July commemoration of Nicaragua's Sandinista revolution that would eventually lead to

President Daniel Ortega coming to power, several exiled Nicaraguan opposition media reported. Brazil's ambassador was not the only diplomat absent from the ceremony, the source noted. Nicaragua nonetheless asked the Brazilian ambassador to leave the country, leading Brasilia to reciprocate on Thursday.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Almost a new 'heist of the century' in Argentina



A hole in the street in front of a Banco Macro branch in San Isidro -- Argentina

AFP | Buenos Aires

It could have been a new heist of the century -- if it hadn't been for a metal rod popping up in the middle of a cobblestone street.

Authorities in San Isidro, Argentina -- location of the fabled 2006 "heist of the century" -- announced Thursday that they had prevented a repeat crime.

On Wednesday, a parked driver heard a noise in the chassis of his car that turned out to be caused by the rod emerging from the street surface.

After police arrived at the scene on the northern outskirts of Buenos Aires, an excavation found a tunnel beginning in a warehouse about 220 meters from a branch of Macro bank.

Large amount of earth had been moved and extraction machines were discovered.

The tunnel was lined with

wood, had ventilation and electric light, and ended almost at the door of the bank, according to police. So far, police have not found the would-be robbers.

Investigators said construction took between six and nine months, and called the tunnel an engineering feat "better than the one El Chapo Guzman" used to escape from prison in 2015 in Mexico.

The incident was reminiscent of the so-called "heist of the century," which took place in 2006 in the same up-market town, when criminals, with meticulous planning, stole nearly \$19 million from a bank and escaped through a tunnel.

In that robbery, which spawned books, TV series and films, the robbers used toy weapons and left a note in the vault that read "In a neighborhood of rich people, with no weapons or grudges, it's just money."

Japan PM scraps overseas trip after 'megaquake' advisory



A cyclist navigates through traffic in the business district of Otemachi in central Tokyo

AFP | Tokyo

Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida yesterday cancelled a trip to Central Asia after earthquake scientists warned the country should prepare for a possible "megaquake".

The Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) issued the advisory on Thursday after eight people were injured by a tremor of magnitude 7.1 in the south.

Kishida was due yesterday to travel to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Mongolia and had planned to attend a regional summit.

"As the prime minister with the highest responsibility for crisis management, I decided I should stay in Japan for at least a week," he told reporters.

Kishida added that the public must be feeling "very anxious" after the JMA issued

its first advisory under a new system drawn up following a major magnitude 9.0 earthquake in 2011 which triggered a deadly tsunami and nuclear disaster.

"The likelihood of a new major earthquake is higher than normal, but this is not an indication that a major earthquake will definitely occur," the JMA said.

Traffic lights and cars shook and dishes fell off shelves during Thursday's earthquake off the southern island of Kyushu, but no serious damage was reported.

The Fire and Disaster Management Agency said eight people were hurt -- including several hit by falling objects.

Sitting on top of four major tectonic plates, the Japanese archipelago of 125 million people sees some 1,500 quakes every year, most of them minor.

Russia scrambles to counter Ukraine advances into Kursk

Ukraine advances into Kursk

Ukrainian push into Russia's Kursk region with 1,000 troops and tanks

Moscow sends artillery, tanks, and troops to bolster defenses

Thousands flee Kursk region as Ukrainian forces advance

AFP | Washington

Russia said yesterday it was deploying more troops and munitions to a border region where Ukraine had mounted a major ground offensive, as Ukraine said a Russian strike on a supermarket in its east killed 11 people.

Kyiv's troops have been driving into Russia's western Kursk region since Tuesday in a surprise offensive that appears to be the most significant attack on Russian soil since Moscow invaded in February 2022.



A Russian battle tank T-72 drives outside the

Russia's defence ministry said it was sending columns of military hardware, including rocket launchers, artillery, tanks and heavy trucks to reinforce its defences in the region, state media reported.

Around 1,000 Ukrainian troops and more than two dozen armoured vehicles and tanks were involved in the initial attack, according to Russia's estimates, although it has since claimed to have destroyed many more pieces of equipment.

Kyiv has not officially taken responsibility, but Ukrainian Presi-

Musk's misleading election posts viewed 1.2 bln times: study

AFP | New York

False or misleading US election claims posted on X by Elon Musk have amassed nearly 1.2 billion views this year, a watchdog reported Thursday, highlighting the billionaire's potential influence on the highly polarized White House race.

Ahead of the November election, researchers have raised alarm that X, formerly Twitter, is a hotbed of political misinformation.

They have also flagged that Musk, who purchased the platform in 2022 and is a vocal backer of Donald Trump, appears to be swaying voters



Elon Musk speaks at the Milken Institute's Global Conference in Beverly Hills, California (file photo)

by spreading falsehoods on his personal account.

Researchers from the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) identified 50 posts since

January by Musk -- who has more than 193 million followers on the social media site -- with election claims debunked by independent fact-checkers.

None of the posts displayed a "Community Note," a crowd-sourced moderation tool that X has promoted as the way for users to add context to posts, CCDH said, raising questions about its effectiveness to combat falsehoods.

"Elon Musk is abusing his privileged position as owner of a... politically influential social media platform to sow disinformation that generates discord and distrust," warned CCDH chief executive Imran Ahmed.

New finds in treasure-laden shipwreck off Colombia

AFP | Bogota

New artifacts have been found on the legendary Spanish galleon San Jose, Colombia's government announced Thursday, after the first robotic exploration of the three-century-old shipwreck.

In February, the Colombian government announced it would begin extractions from the ship off its Caribbean coast, with the wreckage believed to be holding treasures worth billions of dollars.

"Results of this exploration have revealed an unprecedented set of archaeological evidence, which has greatly expanded our knowledge," the institutions in charge of exploring the wreck said in a statement.



Cannons of the wrecked Spanish galleon San Jose, off the coast of Cartagena, in the Caribbean Sea, Colombia

It said a robot surveyed the wreck, whose exact location has been kept secret since its discovery in 2015, between May 23 and June 1.

"Although a concentration of archaeological remains was

detected in 2022 in the area of the shipwreck, the recent exploration has allowed to characterize these accumulations in more detail and to discover new isolated elements," the statement said.

Maduro heads to Supreme Court hoping to cement disputed vote win



Nicolas Maduro AFP | Caracas

President Nicolas Maduro is set to appear before Venezuela's Supreme Court yesterday, as he asks the top judicial body to affirm his disputed reelection.

The court appearance comes as the country's main opposition leader continues to challenge the July 28 vote, saying that she would offer Maduro "guarantees and incentives" for a "negotiated transition" of power which sees him leave office.

The nation has been in political crisis since election authorities declared Maduro the winner of last month's poll, a decision questioned both domestically and abroad.

The National Electoral Council (CNE) has yet to release detailed results from the vote, while the opposition has released copies of 84 percent of ballots cast, showing an easy win for their candidate, Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia. The government says those results are forged.

The Supreme Court -- widely seen as aligned with Maduro -- has summoned all presidential candidates before it, though some of the opposition have refused to attend.