

THAILAND

New government could be in place by the end of 2017

By **REUTERS**
in Bangkok, Thailand

A democratically elected government will take power in Thailand at the earliest by December 2017, a senior Thai official said on Monday, after the country endorsed a military-backed constitution paving the way for a general election.

Thais handed the government of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha a convincing win in the referendum on Sunday, with preliminary results showing over 61 percent voted in favor. Full results are due on Wednesday.



A Thai student holds a poster that reads "vote no = no coup" at Thammasat University in Bangkok, Thailand, on Sunday, in protest of the constitution approved by voters. SAKCHAI LALIT / AP

A desire to see greater political stability drove the yes vote, analysts said. Thailand has been rocked by more than a decade of political turmoil that has stunted growth, two military takeovers and several rounds of often deadly street protests.

"We think there will be an election at the earliest in September or October 2017 and a new government by December 2017," Chatchai Na Chiang Mai, spokesman for the Constitution Drafting Committee, told Reuters.

Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam on Monday

also said an election will take place in 2017, confirming the timeline Prayuth laid out ahead of the referendum.

Before the vote, Thailand's major political parties had criticized the draft constitution, saying it would constrict democracy, including one provision calling for an appointed Senate with seats reserved for military commanders.

Few countries have had more constitutions and drafters have historically failed to produce anything lasting. Thailand has issued 19 constitutions since a constitutional monarchy replaced an absolute one in 1932.

Members of the opposition say they are biding their time until the 2017 election when, if a party they back takes power, they can try to scrap the military charter.

"We accept the result of the referendum and will wait and see what happens in the 2017 election," said Jatuporn Prompan, chairman of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship.

"We will decide our next steps soon," he said.

Opposition to the military-led government was muted ahead of the vote in Thailand's northeast, once a hotbed of resistance.

JAPAN



People watch a large screen showing Japanese Emperor Akihito's video address in Tokyo, Japan, on Monday. KIM KYUNG-HOON / REUTERS

Emperor Akihito hints at inability to fulfill his duties

Law would have to be changed for abdication

By **CAI HONG** in Tokyo and **MO JINGXI** in Beijing

In a rare televised speech on Monday, Japan's Emperor Akihito, 82, told the Japanese people directly about his health and indicated readiness to abdicate.

"When I consider that my fitness level is gradually declining, I am worried that it may become difficult for me to carry out my duties as the symbol of the state with my whole being as I have done until now," the emperor said.

Japan's Constitution does not envisage an abdication by a reigning emperor. To let Akihito's abdication happen, Japan's parliament needs to revise the law or have a special legislation.

The Constitution, promulgated in 1946, strips the

emperor of political power and relegates the monarchy to a purely ceremonial role.

As the symbol of his country, Akihito has traveled widely around the world. Together with Empress Michiko, he made a historic and cordial visit to China in October 1992, the first by a Japanese emperor.

At the welcoming banquet China threw for the Japanese imperial couple in the Great Hall of the People, Akihito acknowledged that Japan "inflicted severe suffering upon the Chinese people. This is a deep sorrow to me."

Their six-day China visit took them to Beijing, Xian and Shanghai. They came into brief contact with some ordinary Chinese. The imperial couple was treated with friendly politeness.

"I felt that most of the Chinese people hope for friendly relations between our two

peoples," Akihito said at a news conference in Shanghai on the eve of his departure. "If people deal sincerely with each other heart to heart, I believe borders can be bridged."

In his New Year statement last year when the 70th anniversary of Japan's defeat was observed, the emperor said: "I think it is most important for us to take this opportunity to study and learn from the history of this war, starting with the Manchurian Incident of 1931, as we consider the future direction of our country."

"Reflecting on our past and bearing in mind the feelings of deep remorse over the last war, I earnestly hope that the ravages of war will never be repeated," he said at the ceremony of observing Japan's war dead on Aug 15, 2015.

Lyu Yaodong, researcher with the Institute of Japanese

Studies under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said it is noteworthy that Japan's emperor made public his intention to abdicate at the time when Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is intent on rewriting the country's Constitution. They, in Lyu's words, are divided on views of history and pacifism.

Akihito's abdication could redefine Japan's royal family, the world's oldest hereditary monarchy — the Chrysanthemum Throne — which has been held by the emperor's family for almost 2,700 years. Akihito is Japan's 125th emperor.

His abdication would only have an impact on Japan's domestic affairs, according to Jia Xiudong, researcher with the China Institute of International Studies.

Contact the writer at cai-hong@chinadaily.com.cn

AUSTRALIA

Man may face more charges over alleged far-right plot

By **REUTERS**
in Sydney, Australia

A member of an Australian anti-immigration group accused of planning an attack may face additional charges in what the government said was the first time federal terrorism laws had been used to target such right-wing groups.

Phillip Galea, 31, has been charged with acts done in preparation for a terrorist act and collecting or making documents likely to facilitate a terrorist act, after being arrested in Melbourne on Saturday.

Victoria state Assistant Commissioner Ross Guenther told reporters that he or his associates may face additional charges. Galea will return to court on Tuesday for his next hearing.

"That's always a possibility given that we're in an early part of the investigation," Guenther said on Monday.

Australia, a staunch U.S. ally, has been on heightened alert for attacks by homegrown Islamist radicals since 2014 and authorities say they have thwarted a number of plots.

"I'm not going to lie, I did know him and he did attend our events."

Kane Miller, co-founder of True Blue Crew, which has previously been involved in violent clashes with pro-immigration groups.

But far-right activist groups and political parties opposed to Islam and Asian immigration are on the rise in Australia.

A fixture at rallies

One Nation, a political party headed by right-wing firebrand Pauline Hanson, secured four senate seats and kingmaker status in national elections held last month by running on a protectionist, anti-Islam platform.

Justice Minister Michael Keenan said that the charges

showed that Australia's tough new counterterrorism laws, which some Muslim leaders have said unfairly subjected them to racial profiling, were unbiased.

"This is the first time in the history of Australia that we have used Commonwealth terrorism laws to charge someone who is alleged to have been a right-wing extremist," Keenan told reporters in Perth.

Galea was a fixture at rallies held by the far-right True Blue Crew, which has previously been involved in violent clashes with pro-immigration groups, group co-founder Kane Miller told Reuters.

Miller on Monday distanced himself and the organization from Galea, whom he said had never openly discussed any alleged plot. The group does not condone violence, Miller said.

"I'm not going to lie, I did know him and he did attend our events," Miller said.

"All lives are precious. Muslim lives over in Saudi Arabia, although I don't agree with them, are precious."

CAMBODIA

Health questioned, PM pokes fun at potbelly

By **ASSOCIATED PRESS**
in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Prime Minister Hun Sen says his growing potbelly is getting in the way of his golf swing.

Hun Sen, who is known for his casual comments, went off track while responding to a Facebook comment on his health to talk about his weight. He said someone had reposted on Facebook a two-year-old video clip, purporting to show he had suffered a stroke.

"If you need to broadcast



Hun Sen

the news of the prime minister's health, you better say that the prime minister is worrying about his belly that is now getting big," Hun Sen said on Monday in the southern Kandal province.

"Don't say that the prime minister suffered a stroke. Better say that the prime minister

is worrying his weight is increasing and at the same time the belly also getting big, which makes it difficult for my swing while playing golf."

Added 3 kilograms

Hun Sen, 64, went on to say that he has put on 3 kilograms in recent days, attributing it to a lot of time spent sleeping in the car while touring the country as part of his program to tour all 25 provinces in the country to meet people.

Addressing the unidentified

man who posted about Hun Sen's alleged stroke, the prime minister said: "I wish to advise you that you better take care of your health, take care of your parents' and grandparents' health. You need not take care of Hun Sen's health."

Hun Sen is a self-styled leader and one of the world's longest serving prime ministers, with more than 30 years as Cambodian prime minister. He often likes to talk about himself and his achievements.

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