

Imran Khan ousted as Pakistan prime minister

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan was ousted on Sunday when he lost a vote of confidence in parliament, after being deserted by coalition partners who blame him for a crumbling economy and failure to deliver on his campaign promises.

The result of the vote, which was the culmination of a 13-hour session that included repeated delays, was announced just before 0100 (2000 GMT on Saturday) by the presiding speaker of parliament's lower house, Ayaz Sadiq.

Mr. Khan, 69 was ousted after 3-1/2 years as leader of the nuclear-armed country of 220 million, where the military has ruled for nearly half its nearly 75-year history.

Parliament will meet on Monday to elect a new prime minister.

Sunday's vote followed multiple adjournments in the chamber, called due to lengthy speeches by members of Khan's party, who said there was a US conspiracy to oust the cricket star-turned-politician.

Opposition parties were able to secure 174 votes in the 342-member house in support of the no-confidence motion, Mr. Sadiq said, making it a majority vote.

"Consequently the motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan has been passed," he said to the thumping of desks in the chamber. Khan, who was not present for the vote, had no immediate comment.

Just a few legislators of Khan's ruling party — Tehreek-i-Insaf, or Pakistan Movement for Justice — were present for the vote.

The house voted after the country's powerful army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa met Khan, said two sources who spoke on condition of anonymity, as criticism mounted over the delay in the parliamentary process.

The front-runner to become Pakistan's next prime minister, Shehbaz Sharif, said Mr. Khan's ouster was a chance for a new beginning. "A new dawn has started... This alliance will rebuild Pakistan," Mr. Sharif, 70, said in parliament.

Mr. Sharif, the younger brother of three-time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, has a reputation as an effective administrator.

Parliamentary elections are not due until Aug. 2023. However, the opposition has said it wants early elections, but only after it delivered a political defeat to Khan and passes legislation it says is required to ensure the next polls are free and fair.

Mr. Khan's ouster extends Pakistan's unenviable record for political instability:

no prime minister has completed their full term since independence from Britain in 1947, although Mr. Khan is the first to be removed through a no-confidence vote.

He surged to power in 2018 with the military's support, but recently lost his parliamentary majority when allies quit Mr. Khan's coalition government. There were also signs he had lost the military's support, analysts said.

MILITARY SOURED ON KHAN

The military viewed Mr. Khan and his conservative agenda favorably when he won the election, but that support waned after a falling-out over the appointment of the country's next spy chief and the economic troubles.

"They (the military) don't want to be seen as supporting him and be blamed for his failures," opposition leader and former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi told Reuters earlier. "They've pulled their support."

Opposition parties say he has failed to revive an economy battered by COVID-19 or fulfill promises to make Pakistan a corruption-free, prosperous nation respected on the world stage.

Reema Omar, South Asia legal adviser to the International Commission of Jurists, said it was an ignominious end to Mr. Khan's tenure. On Twitter, she posted, "3.5 years marked by incompetence; extreme censorship; assault on independent judges; political persecution; bitter polarization and division; and finally, brazen subversion of the Constitution."

Mr. Khan's allies blocked the no-confidence motion last week and dissolved parliament's lower house, prompting the country's Supreme Court to intervene and allow the vote to go through.

Mr. Khan earlier accused the United States of backing moves to oust him because he had visited Moscow for talks with President Vladimir Putin just after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24. Washington rejected the charge.

Muhammad Ali Khan, a legislator from Mr. Khan's party, said the prime minister had fought till the end and would return to lead parliament in the future.

Prime Minister Khan has been antagonistic towards the United States throughout his tenure, welcoming the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan last year and urging the international community to work with them. — Reuters

China labels US concerns over COVID regulations 'groundless accusations'

SHANGHAI — China's foreign ministry expressed "strong dissatisfaction" with the United States late on Saturday after it raised concerns over China's coronavirus control measures.

The US State Department said on Friday that non-emergency staff at its Shanghai consulate and families of US

employees could leave due to a surge in COVID cases and coronavirus restrictions in the city.

"We express strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition to the groundless accusations against China's pandemic prevention policy from the US in its statement, and have lodged solemn rep-

resentations," foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said in a statement.

Shanghai is fighting China's worst coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak since the virus first emerged in Wuhan in late 2019, with almost 25,000 new local cases reported on Sunday for the previous day. — Reuters

FULL STORY



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Ukraine calls for more weapons to stop Russia's 'catastrophe'

KYIV — President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia's aggression was never limited to just Ukraine and the whole of Europe was a target as he urged the West to impose a complete embargo on Russian energy products and to supply Ukraine with more weapons.

Ukraine said it was ready for a tough battle with Russian forces massing in the east where the Ukrainian military says Russia is seeking to establish a land corridor from Crimea, which it annexed in 2014, and the eastern Donbas region, which is partly held by Moscow-backed separatists.

Mr. Zelensky, in an address late on Saturday, said Russia's use of force was "a catastrophe that will inevitably hit everyone."

"Russian aggression was not intended to be limited to Ukraine alone ... the whole European project is a target for Russia," he said.

Russia has failed to take one major city since the start of the invasion on Feb. 24 and has retreated from near the capital Kyiv and was instead building up forces in the east.

"Russia can still afford to live in illusions and bring new military forces and new equipment to our land," Mr. Zelensky said.

"And that means we need even more sanctions and even more weapons for our state."

Some cities in the east are under heavy shelling with tens of thousands of people unable to evacuate.

"This will be a hard battle, we believe in this fight and our victory. We are ready to simultaneously fight and look for diplomatic ways to put an end to this war," Mr. Zelensky said.

Ukrainian negotiator Mykhailo Podolyak said Mr. Zelensky and Russian President Vladimir Putin would not meet until after the Russia was defeated in the east.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson met Zelensky in Kyiv on Saturday and pledged armored

vehicles and anti-ship missile systems, along with additional support for World Bank loans.

Britain will also ratchet up its sanctions on Russia and move away from using Russian hydrocarbons.

"Other democratic Western states should follow the example of Great Britain," Mr. Zelensky said as he met reporters with Mr. Johnson. "It's time to impose a complete ban on Russian energy supplies, and increase the delivery of weapons to us."

Mr. Johnson said support for Ukraine aimed to ensure it "can never be bullied again, never will be blackmailed again, never will be threatened in the same way again."

Mr. Johnson was the latest foreign leader to visit Kyiv after Russian forces pulled back from the area.

The visits are a sign that Kyiv is returning to some degree of normality.

Some residents are coming back and cafes and restaurants are reopening. Italy said it planned to re-open its embassy this month.

'NEVER FORGET'

But in the east, Ukrainian officials have urged civilians to flee after a missile attack on Friday on a train station crowded with women, children and the elderly.

Ukrainian officials said more than 50 people were killed in the strike in the city of Kramatorsk in the Donetsk region, where thousands of people had gathered to evacuate.

Russia has denied responsibility, saying the missiles used in the attack were only used by Ukraine's military. The United States says it believes Russian forces were responsible.

Reuters was unable to verify the details of the attack.

Teleserye, from S1/1

MEASURING SUCCESS

A TV series production costs P15 million to P25 million, which includes the cost of shooting and hiring known actors. A 30-50% mark-up is the usual expectation, he added.

A TV series is deemed a success if there's wide viewership and good social media feedback and engagement.

"Ratings are still the main factor when determining a program's success," Ms. Barcelona said. "Unfortunately, not all clients subscribe to rating providers and not all territories have TV ratings readily available. This is why we regularly communicate and receive feedback from our clients."

Social media feedback on the social media pages of GMA and its clients is also a good indicator of a show being considered a hit, she said. "The success of a drama also results in increased foreign social media followers for our artists."

"The best indicator is a client's decision to buy more dramas from GMA," Ms. Barcelona said. "A program can be so successful that a client decides to also acquire its format rights to do a remake in their country," she added, noting that they have sold a number of their drama formats in Vietnam, Cambodia and Latin America.

Another measure of success is ad revenue if the TV series is offered on an advertising-based video on demand service, which is free to consumers, said Pia Laurel, ABS-CBN head of international distribution. "If the platform is subscription video on demand-based, its benchmark is whether the title could drive new subscriptions or renewals."

For "over-the-top" — where material is distributed directly to viewers on the internet — and other streaming platforms, the number of views and minutes spent on a show is a good measure of success, Mr. Remigio said.

"GMA has embraced a 'glocal' outlook in producing content, or content both for the local and global markets," Ms. Barcelona said. This is aside from trying to keep up with the technical aspects of TV production and be at par with international standards, she added.

The network's syndication business also paved the way for co-production and partnerships with major international players.

"As a content company, our dream and primary focus is to create and produce more original stories that will resonate and reach every audience worldwide," Ms. Laurel said.

Signal's plan has always been to create a library of content not only for TV but also for over-the-top and theatrical release, Ms. Santilan said. "When we do that, we are cognizant of the other platforms where we can distribute them."

Whatever the narrative is, the human experience should bridge cultural differences.

"We think about the human experience and how it's told," Mr. Cahilig said. "Because people have access to so much content now, I think being distinctly Filipino will really help you stand out."

Ms. Balderama, the Filipino-Canadian, wants to see more morena actors, queer topics and stories of people like her who have succeeded elsewhere.

"I see stories about migrant Filipinos dealing with many realistic problems, but I also would like to see more stories of them flourishing in their chosen new lands."

Banks, from S1/1

Ms. Fonacier said they have not yet received an application for issuance of Certificate of Eligibility from BSP-supervised financial institutions on the transfer of NPAs pursuant to the FIST Act as of now.

"However, submission of master list applications to the BSP by these banks signifies their intention to avail of the incentives under the said law," she said.

The Certificate of Eligibility of a financial institution looking to sell NPAs will be provided to the SEC and Bureau of Internal Revenue for reference on tax incentives.

Among big banks, Philippine National Bank (PNB) and Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. (RCBC) said they are interested in selling NPAs through the FIST Law.

"We are considering offloading consumer and business loans which are not susceptible to the normal collection process and those will take too much time to collect," PNB said in an e-mail to BusinessWorld.

"RCBC is looking to offload some of its assets through the FIST Law, as we would like to take advantage of the investors' increased appetite to invest in distressed assets, given the tax incentives that they can avail," the Yuchengco-led lender said in an e-mail.

When asked, BDO Unibank, Inc. and Metropolitan Bank & Trust Co. said they are not keen on tapping the provisions of the FIST Law.

Latest BSP data showed the NPL ratio of the banking industry hit a three-month high of 4.24% in February. Bad loans rose 2.38% to P472.774 billion from a year earlier.

During the pandemic, the NPL ratio hit a 13-year high of 4.51% from July to August 2021, which is still much lower than the 17.6% seen in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis in 2002.

Sa darating na halalan,
Huwag mo akong kalimutan
Sa boto mo, apektado ang buong bayan

