

Thai party says junta helped 1MDB cover-up

● **The Future Forward Party, the third-largest party in parliament, was dissolved**

Reuters | Bangkok

A banned Thai opposition party on Sunday accused the former military junta of helping cover up Malaysia's multi-billion-dollar 1MDB scandal, urging Thais to demand the truth ahead of a censure debate against Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha.

The Future Forward Party, the third-largest party in parliament, was dissolved on Friday by Thailand's Constitutional Court over a loan it took from its billionaire founder.

The dissolution was decried by democracy advocates as a means of weakening opposition to the government of Prayuth, who first came to power in a 2014 military coup and led a military junta until after elections last year that his pro-army party won.

Future Forward's spokeswoman, Pannika Wanich, told a news conference on Sunday that the junta had worked with Malaysia's former government to ar-



Protest against court's decision that dissolved Future Forward party at Thammasat University in Bangkok

rest a whistleblower in the 1MDB case in 2015 and had allowed financial criminals to operate in Thailand, risking the country's international ties.

"The junta government yearned for international acceptance after the coup ... and formed a dark alliance with Malaysia," Pannika said.

"The only person who can issue these orders is Prime Min-

ister Prayuth Chan-ocha," Pannika said.

Pannika cited irregularities surrounding Thailand's arrest and the subsequent confession of Xavier Justo, the Swiss national who was arrested in Thailand in 2015 the first whistleblower in the 1MDB affair.

The government also harbored Malaysian financier Low Taek Jho, known as Jho Low,

allowing him to enter the country at least five times between October 2016 and May 2018, despite Low having an Interpol red notice from Singapore, she said.

Low has been charged in Malaysia and the United States over the alleged theft of \$4.5 billion from 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), set up by former Malaysian Prime Minister

Najib Razak with the help of Low, to promote economic development.

At least six countries, including the United States, have launched money laundering, financial mismanagement and criminal probes into 1MDB dealings.

Low has denied any wrongdoing. His whereabouts are unknown.

The government denied involvement.

"These accusations are not true ... and create confusion in society," government spokeswoman Narumon Pinyosinwat said.

"Anything said that was false will be followed with legal action," she added.

Future Forward Party said it would have opened an investigation on corruption and money laundering related to the 1MDB case if it were in power.

"If we were in government, we would investigate. We want a government that is a responsible neighbour and acts with dignity," Pannika said.

"Since we have been dissolved, we can't, but the Thai public can demand the truth."

A spokesman for the Malaysian prime minister's office did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Self-styled daredevil dies in crash after rocket launch



AP | Barstow, Calif.

A self-styled daredevil died Saturday after a rocket in which he launched himself crashed into the ground, a colleague and a witness said.

"Mad" Mike Hughes died after the homemade rocket crashed on private property near Barstow about 1:52 p.m. near Highway 247, the Daily Press of Victorville reported.

Waldo Stakes, a colleague who was at the rocket launch, said Hughes, 64, was killed.

"It was unsuccessful, and he passed away," Stakes told The Associated Press. He declined further comment.

Justin Chapman, a freelance journalist, told the AP that he and his wife witnessed the crash.

Sanders wins big in Nevada, stretching lead in Democratic race

Las Vegas

Progressive firebrand Bernie Sanders earned a decisive victory Saturday in the Nevada caucuses, solidifying his front-runner status in the race to choose the Democratic nominee who faces President Donald Trump in November's election.

His win is a substantial accomplishment in a state seen as an important bellwether because it is the first diverse electorate to weigh in on the 2020 presidential race.

It also shows that Sanders has been able to broaden a coalition beyond the narrow limits of leftist voters, refuting the argument used by several moderates in the race that he would not be able to bridge the divide between progressives and centrists.

By late Saturday Sanders was comfortably ahead with half of all precincts reporting.

The 78-year-old senator from Vermont was leading with about 46 percent, followed by former vice president Joe Biden at 19 percent.

South Bend, Indiana's former mayor Pete Buttigieg, who scored a shock narrow win in Iowa to start the race nearly three weeks ago, stood in third at 15 percent.

The two female US senators in the running, progressive Elizabeth Warren and pragmatist Amy Klobuchar, were on 10 and four percent respectively.

Sanders was quick to claim victory, saying his "multi-generational, multi-racial coalition" that won Nevada was "going to sweep this country."

His progressive policies, including universal health care, higher taxes on the wealthy and corporations, and raising the minimum wage have struck a chord with millions of Americans.

"The American people are sick and tired of a government which is based on greed, corruption,



Bernie Sanders said his 'multi-generational, multi-racial coalition' that won Nevada was 'going to sweep this country'



Despite her hard campaigning, Senator Amy Klobuchar had a poor showing in the Nevada Democratic caucus



Mayor Pete, a distant third in the Nevada contest, claimed that Sanders 'believes in an inflexible, ideological revolution that leaves out most Democrats, not to mention most Americans'

Paso, Texas, one of the 14 states that votes on "Super Tuesday" on March 3.

Buttigieg congratulated Sanders on his Nevada victory. But the

last week, he is in the driver's seat as the race turns toward South Carolina and then Super Tuesday.

"Looks like Crazy Bernie is doing well in the Great State of Nevada," Trump tweeted, maligning other candidates before adding: "Congratulations Bernie, & don't let them take it away from you!"

With the race soon taking on a national dynamic, several candidates like Klobuchar, Warren or congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard will be under pressure to decide whether they fight on or throw in the towel.

'Coming back'

The centrist Biden, desperate



'We're alive and we're coming back,' said onetime frontrunner Joe Biden, who came in second in the Nevada contest

moderate, 38-year-old military veteran offered a stern warning against picking a self-described democratic socialist who sees "capitalism as the root of all evil" to go up against the populist Trump.

"Senator Sanders believes in an inflexible, ideological revolution that leaves out most Democrats, not to mention most Americans," Buttigieg said.

With Sanders coming in virtually tied for first in Iowa and then winning New Hampshire

to right a listing ship after miserable showings in the first two states, told supporters he feels "really good" about his Nevada finish and shouldn't be counted out.

"We're alive and we're coming back," the onetime frontrunner insisted. "We're going on to South Carolina to win and then we're going to take this back!"

South Carolina has a majority black Democratic electorate, and Biden leads polling there, riding his popularity among African

Americans due in part to his eight years as popular president Barack Obama's deputy.

"Joe to me is like a thoroughbred -- a horse that's gonna come in and that's gonna overtake whoever is the favorite," Air Force retiree Wilbert Wilcox told AFP.

"He has the stamina going for him... I'm looking for him to really surprise some people."

Sanders leads national polls with an average of 28 percent support.

That is 11 points ahead of Biden and 13 points clear of billionaire media tycoon Michael Bloomberg, the former mayor of New York who skipped campaigning in the four early states, including Nevada, in order to focus on Super Tuesday.

Sanders has been largely unchecked by opponents who have focused more on blunting the advance of Bloomberg, who has poured hundreds of millions of dollars of his personal fortune into campaign advertising.

Warren, speaking late Saturday at a large rally in Washington state which votes on March 10, pledged to stay in the fight despite a third straight mediocre showing.

She repeated her attacks on Bloomberg, accusing him of seeking to "buy this election."

In Nevada, caucuses were held in several of Las Vegas's world-famous casinos and hotels, as well as dusty desert towns.

Keen to avoid the drawn-out embarrassment of the Iowa caucus, which relied on flawed technology to relay results, Nevada officials pivoted to a low-tech system that involved phoning in results to hotlines and backing them up with photographs of the tabulations.

The process was considerably slower than four years ago, but appeared to be relatively smooth.