

UK ‘can prosper mightily’ under no-deal Brexit

Says Johnson a day after extending talks with EU

AFP, London

Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday said that Britain “can prosper mightily” without a post-Brexit trade deal with the European Union, the day after agreeing to extend stalled talks with Brussels.

Johnson, who accepted prolonging negotiations in a video-call Saturday with EU chief Ursula von der Leyen, told the BBC he believed a deal is “there to be done” before Britain leaves the bloc’s regulatory regime in 2021.

But he cautioned the EU needed to understand that his government is “utterly serious about needing to control our own laws and our own regulations”, including its fisheries policy.

Britain formally left the bloc in January but remains bound by most of its rules until the end of the year under the terms of its Brexit divorce.

The current 11-month transition phase was intended to allow the two sides to agree their future trading relationship after nearly five decades of economic and political integration.

However, nine scheduled rounds of negotiations ended Friday with both parties saying significant obstacles to an agreement remain, prompting Johnson and von der Leyen’s intervention.

The two leaders, who last held Brexit

talks in June, asked their negotiators to “work intensively in order to try to bridge those gaps”.

But fears are growing of travel and trade chaos if progress is not made and a so-called no-deal Brexit ensues.

“I don’t want the Australian, WTO (World Trade Organisation)-type outcome particularly, but we can more than live with it,” Johnson said of the scenario.

“I think that we can prosper mightily under those circumstances,” he said.

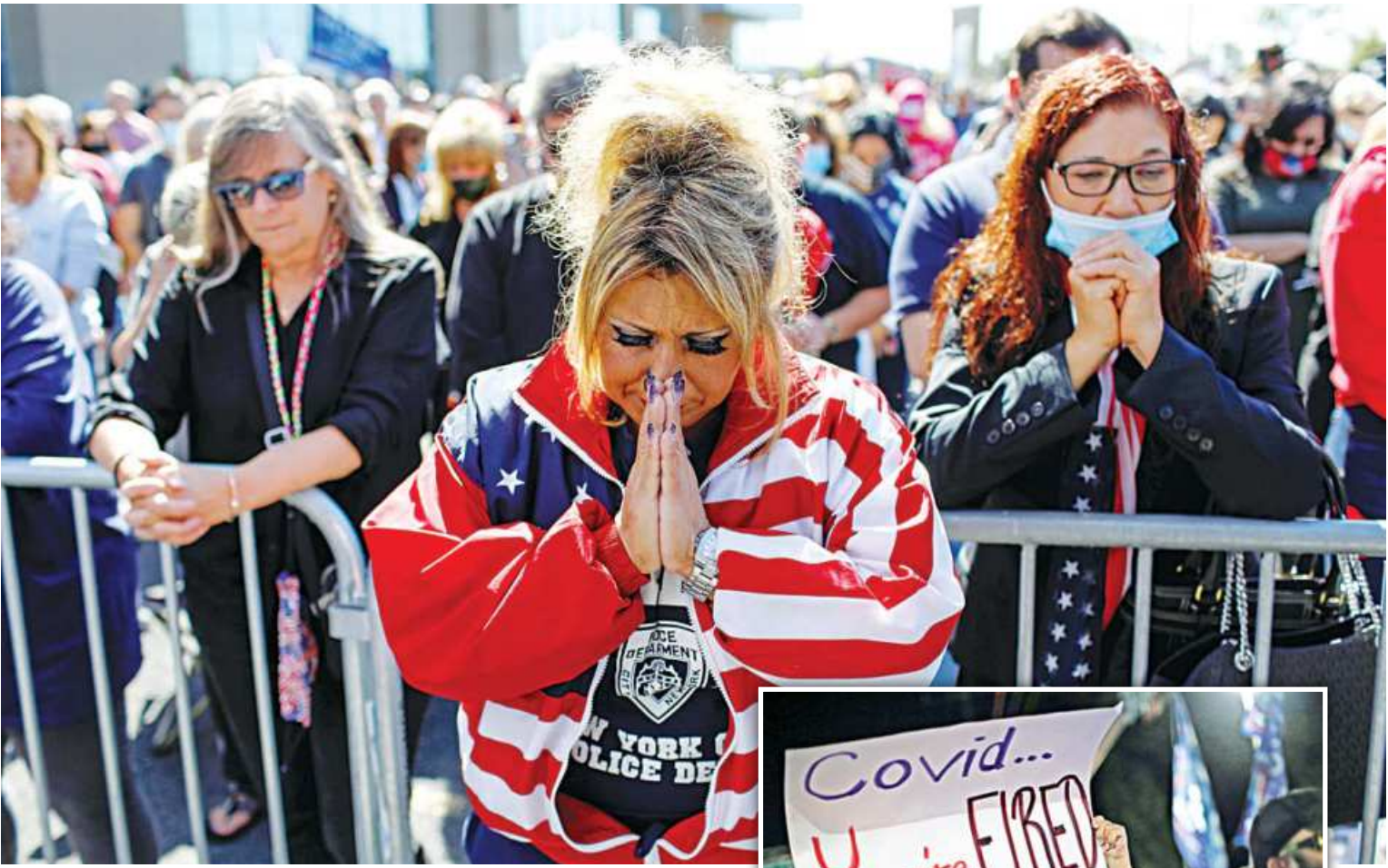
London and Brussels had pinpointed a European summit on October 15 as the latest an agreement could be reached for it to be ratified in time to take effect

by 2021. Reports suggest the talks could now continue for the rest of October, but British officials are stressing the need for clarity on whether a deal is feasible by the summit.

Neither side appears ready to make a big shift in their entrenched positions.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who meets the bloc’s chief negotiator Michel Barnier today, said Friday she believed a deal was still possible, though warned the coming days were crucial.

Meanwhile the atmosphere has been soured by London taking steps to overturn parts of the divorce agreement struck last year, prompting Brussels to launched legal action this week.



A woman cries while participating in a prayer with fellow supporters of US President Donald Trump, who was diagnosed with the coronavirus disease, at the commencement of the New York Triumph Rally on Staten Island in New York City, US, on Saturday. Inset, Supporters rally at a vigil for Trump outside of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, where he is being treated for COVID-19 in Bethesda, Maryland.

PHOTO: REUTERS



WHAT HAPPENS IF A CANDIDATE EXITS THE RACE?

A US presidential nominee has never died or had to withdraw from a White House race this close to an election. But President Donald Trump’s hospitalization for coronavirus just a month from the November 3 vote has raised the question of what happens if such an event should occur. Here is a look at some of the potential scenarios in the event a nominee exits the race:

Delay the presidential election?

Unlikely. Congress set the date for the election and this one has already been scheduled, as per US law for the Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Both the Republican-controlled Senate and the Democratic-majority House of Representatives would have to agree on a postponement, which is unlikely. Even during the Civil War between the North and South, the 1864 election was held as scheduled with Abraham Lincoln winning another term.

Can a candidate be replaced?

Trump’s Republican Party and Biden’s Democratic Party both have rules outlining how to fill a vacancy on the presidential ticket should one occur. In the case of Trump’s GOP, the 168 members of the Republican National Committee could vote to select the replacement. The RNC could also reconvene its national convention of more than 2,500 delegates to select a new candidate but time pressure probably makes this unworkable. A simple majority would be all that is needed to choose a new candidate in either scenario. In the case of the Democrats, a new presidential nominee would be selected by the nearly 450 members of the Democratic National Committee.

US ELECTION 2020



Can a replacement candidate be on the ballot?

Probably not. “The problem at this point is that we are so far along in this 2020 election that not only have people cast ballots, ballots have already been printed,” Cafaro said. “You really don’t have enough time to reprint ballots which say Mike Pence or Kamala Harris,” she said, referring to the Republican and Democratic vice presidential nominees respectively. More than 3.1 million Americans have already cast their ballots, according to a tally kept by the US

Elections Project at the University of Florida. In addition, deadlines for ballot access vary from state to state and they have already passed in most cases.

What about the Electoral College?

While the United States holds a popular vote, the president is elected by an absolute majority of the 538 members of the Electoral College. In every state but two (Nebraska and Maine), the candidate winning the majority of the popular vote in that state wins all that state’s electors. Nothing in the Constitution obliges electors to vote in one way or another but the Supreme Court ruled in July that states could fine so-called “faithless electors” who do not respect the popular vote. The members of the Electoral College will gather in their respective states on December 14 and vote for president and vice president. In the event a candidate dies or withdraws before the Electoral College casts its votes, things could get messy. Individual state laws come into play but each party could theoretically direct its electors to vote for a replacement candidate. On January 6, 2021, Congress will certify the results, with the winner being sworn in as president on January 20.

SOURCE: AFP

Biden leads by 10 points

Says survey as majority of Americans say Trump could have avoided Covid if he took it seriously

REUTERS, New York

Democrat Joe Biden opened his widest lead in a month in the US presidential race after President Donald Trump tested positive for the coronavirus, and a majority of Americans think Trump could have avoided infection if he had taken the virus more seriously, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll released yesterday.

The Oct 2-3 national opinion poll gave little indication of an outpouring of support for the president beyond Trump’s core group of followers, some of whom have gathered outside Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, where the president has been hospitalized.

Trump has repeatedly dismissed the severity of the pandemic as something that would disappear on its own, chiding Biden as recently as last week for wearing a protective mask, even as the coronavirus infected millions of people and forced businesses and schools to close.

Among those adults who are expected to cast ballots in the Nov. 3 election, the

poll found that 51% were backing Biden, while 41% said they were voting for Trump. Another 4% were choosing a third-party candidate and another 4% said they were undecided.

Biden’s 10-point edge over Trump is 1 to 2 points higher than leads Biden posted over the past several weeks, though the increase is still within the poll’s precision limits of plus or minus 5 percentage points.

With about a month to go before the election, Biden has maintained an early advantage in securing the national popular vote. But to win the presidency, a candidate must prevail in enough states to win the Electoral College, and state polls show that Trump is nearly as popular as Biden in battleground states.

Most Americans continue to be deeply worried about the virus, and the poll found that 65%, including 9 in 10 registered Democrats and 5 in 10 registered Republicans, agreed that “if President Trump had taken coronavirus more seriously, he probably would not have been infected.”



An opposition supporter argues with a police officer during an opposition rally to reject the presidential election results in Minsk, Belarus, yesterday. Tens of thousands of people marched through the centre of the Belarusian capital Minsk yesterday to demand that authorities free political prisoners, prompting police to turn water cannon on them.

PHOTO: REUTERS

We won’t let them destroy farmers

Says Rahul as he launches rally in Punjab; CBI to probe UP gangrape case

AGENCIES

Congress’s Rahul Gandhi yesterday promised Punjab farmers that the party will remove the contentious farm sector laws once it comes to power in the Centre. Calling Minimum Support Price, food procurement and wholesale markers the “three pillars” of the country, Gandhi said “Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants to destroy this system”.

“Their (the BJP’s) only aim is to destroy MSP and food procurement... The Congress is never going to let this government to do it,” he added, flagging off the three-day tractor rally by farmers in Punjab.

Farmers and the opposition claim the new laws -- which enable them to sell produce to corporates anywhere in the country -- lays them open to exploitation by big companies. The protests against the two laws are the loudest in the northern states of Punjab and Haryana, the grain bowl of the country.

CBI TO PROBE GANGRAPE IN UTTAR PRADESH

India’s federal investigators will take over the probe into the alleged gang-rape and murder of a low-caste teenage woman that has sparked nationwide outrage and days of protests.

The 19-year-old woman from the marginalised Dalit community was attacked in mid-September in northern Uttar Pradesh state and died on Tuesday, in the latest case highlighting India’s epidemic of sexual violence. Five senior police officers have already been suspended over the investigation amid criticism of law enforcement’s actions -- including the cremation of the woman’s body in the middle of the night against the wishes of her family.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Geneva adopts world’s highest minimum wage

Voters in Geneva, Switzerland, have agreed to introduce a minimum wage in the canton that is the equivalent of \$25 an hour -- believed to be the highest in the world. According to government data, 58% of voters in the canton were in favor of the initiative set the minimum wage at 23 Swiss francs an hour. While Switzerland has no national minimum wage law, Geneva is the fourth of 26 cantons to vote on the matter in recent years after Neuchâtel, Jura and Ticino. The Swiss system of direct democracy calls voters to exercise their right four times a year, and allows citizens to collect signatures to introduce “popular initiatives” to be enacted.

Solomon Islands record first coronavirus case

The Solomon Islands announced they have lost the battle to stay free of the coronavirus, leaving just nine small, remote territories that have not reported a single case. Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare told the Pacific island nation in a televised address that a student who recently arrived from the Philippines on a repatriation flight carrying 96 passengers had returned a positive test. He urged the population of 600,000 in the archipelago to remain calm and said contact tracing and other measures to prevent the spread of the virus had been activated and there was no need for a lockdown. Only the small and remote island nations and territories of Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu are believed to be still free of the virus.

New Caledonia rejects independence from France

The French South Pacific territory of New Caledonia narrowly rejected independence in a referendum yesterday, the archipelago’s high commission said after a partial count of the votes. The vote rejecting a breakaway from France after almost 170 years fell to 53.3 percent, according to 70 percent of ballots counted, down from 56.7 percent in a previous referendum two years ago, it said. Turnout was much higher than last time, reflecting enthusiasm of voters who had formed long queues to cast their ballots. Yesterday’s referendum was part of a carefully negotiated decolonisation plan agreed in 1998 which ended a deadly conflict between the mostly pro-independence indigenous Kanak population and the descendants of European settlers. Another referendum can be held by 2022 so long as the poll is requested by at least a third of the local legislature.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

CORONAVIRUS VACCINE

India seeks up to 500m doses by July

REUTERS, New Delhi

India hopes to receive up to 500 million doses of coronavirus vaccine by July to inoculate about 250 million people, health minister Harsh Vardhan said yesterday, as infections in the world’s second-worst affected country continue to surge.

India’s has recorded some 6.55 million infections, with 75,829 in the past 24 hours, while Covid-19-related deaths have totalled 101,782, health ministry data showed.

“There is a high-level expert body going into all aspects of vaccines,” Vardhan wrote on Twitter. “Our rough estimate and the target would be to receive and utilise 400 to 500 million doses covering (200 million-250 million) people by July 2021.”

India has set up committees to look into various aspects of the vaccine supply chain, including availability timelines for various vaccines, while obtaining commitments from manufacturers to ensure the maximum doses are available, Vardhan said.

To prioritise the distribution of coronavirus vaccines, the health ministry aims to prepare a list of key personnel, such as frontline health workers, by the end of the month.

ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN DISPUTE OVER NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Cities hit as fighting intensifies

AFP, Stepanakert

Armenian and Azerbaijani forces exchanged rocket fire as fighting intensified over Nagorno-Karabakh yesterday, with the breakaway region’s capital and Azerbaijan’s second-largest city bombarded.

Yerevan said Nagorno-Karabakh’s main city Stepanakert, which has been under artillery fire since Friday, was hit again yesterday and AFP journalists said there were regular explosions and smoke rising in parts of the city.

Azerbaijan’s defence ministry said Ganja, a city of more than 330,000 in western Azerbaijan, was also “under fire” while separatist forces claimed to have destroyed an airbase there.

The two sides accused each other of targeting civilian areas, as the conflict appeared to be widening a week after heavy fighting broke out in the decades-old dispute over Karabakh. The clashes have killed more than 350 people on both sides.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have resisted



international calls for a ceasefire and clashes have intensified in recent days, with both sides claiming victories on the front and saying they are inflicting heavy losses.

Sirens were sounding and explosions were heard at regular intervals in Stepanakert, where residents were taking shelter in basements. Armenia’s foreign ministry said Stepanakert and the town of Martakert were under rocket attack.

Azerbaijan said Ganja was under fire, including from areas outside of Karabakh.

It said Armenian forces had also used heavy artillery and rockets against the towns of Terter and Goradiz in Azerbaijan.

Karabakh’s separatist forces said they had targeted and destroyed an airbase in Ganja, while the region’s leader, Arayik Harutyunyan, warned that it would now consider “military facilities in Azerbaijan’s big cities” as legitimate targets.

Karabakh’s declaration of independence from Azerbaijan during the collapse of the Soviet Union sparked a war in the early 1990s that claimed 30,000 lives.

Talks to resolve the conflict have made little progress since a 1994 ceasefire agreement.

The breakaway province is not acknowledged as independent by any country, including Armenia.

Yerevan has accused Turkey of dispatching mercenaries from Syria and Libya to the fighting -- an allegation confirmed and denounced by Russia and France.