

UK ELECTION IN NUMBERS

Voters across United Kingdom yesterday voted in the third general election in four and-a-half years. Here are some of the key numbers:

650

The number of seats in the House of Commons being contested. That comprises 533 constituencies in England, 59 in Scotland, 40 in Wales and 18 in Northern Ireland.

326

The theoretical "magic number" of seats needed to form a working majority. At least four MPs serve in speaker roles, so they never vote, while any lawmakers elected from republican Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland do not take up their seats.

70

The number of seats in the last election in June 2017 that changed hands between political parties -- just 11 percent of the total.

3,321

The total number of candidates standing in the election. Only around a third -- 1,124 -- are women.

10

The number of teenagers standing for election, according to reports. The minimum age for candidates is 18.

40,000+

The number of polling venues around Britain where people can cast their votes.

500

The deposit, in pounds, paid by each candidate to stand. It is refunded if the candidate gains five percent or more of the valid votes cast.

8,700

The baseline spending limit, in pounds, for each candidate during the "regulated" five-week election campaign period. They can also spend an additional small and variable amount based on the number of registered electors in the constituency that they are contesting.

SOURCE: AFP



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his dog Dilyn leave from a Polling Station, after casting his ballot paper in central London yesterday, as Britain holds a general election. Inset, Britain's opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn gestures after casting his vote.

PHOTO: AFP



UK GENERAL ELECTION POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

Britain went to the polls yesterday to decide the future of Brexit in a snap pre-Christmas election aimed at ending years of political deadlock and bitter divisions over the country's European Union membership. Opinion polls, which were almost unanimously wrong about last general election in 2017, show ruling Conservative party in the lead, but possibly by a margin too small to form his own government. And the opposition Labour Party was seen closing in gap. Here is an outline of the possible outcomes:

CONSERVATIVE MAJORITY: A Johnson victory, regaining the Conservative majority lost in 2017, is the most likely result according to bookmakers and pollsters. But what seemed like a comfortable lead a few days ago now looks more precarious following the release of a major new survey on Tuesday. The YouGov poll indicated the expected Conservative majority would be slashed from 68 seats to 28 since the last survey at the end of November, with a hung parliament now within the margin of error. With 650 seats in parliament's lower House of Commons, the poll takes 326 as the magic number, predicting the Tories will win 339 seats. But with Irish Republican party Sinn Fein having a policy of not sending MPs to the British parliament, and with the speakers not normally involved in parliamentary votes, a working majority can be obtained with fewer seats. Any kind of majority should allow Johnson to get through his Brexit deal agreed with Brussels, putting Britain on course to leave the European Union by January 31.

LABOUR MAJORITY: Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn could upset the odds and secure a majority for his left-wing agenda, which includes the re-nationalisation of key sectors, including the railways and energy, and a massive public spending spree. Britain would also vote again on whether to leave the EU with the options being a "softer" Brexit deal negotiated by his party or remaining in the union. A Labour victory would represent a major breakthrough on the global stage for the far-left movement backed by younger voters.



HUNG PARLIAMENT: If no party achieves a working majority, then Britain would have another hung parliament, as in 2010 and 2017. The Conservatives are still expected to win the most seats and, as incumbent, Johnson would remain prime minister and get first crack at striking a deal with opposition parties, either to join a formal coalition or for them to agree to back him on crucial votes in an informal pact. But he has few friends outside his own party and is unlikely to win the support of the DUP, who floated the previous government with the support of 10 MPs, this time round as they are unhappy with his Brexit deal. Johnson could then quit or try to go it alone in a minority government, which would require him to win key votes when parliament returns. He would be obliged to resign if his attempts failed. Corbyn would then try to form a government, with the Scottish National Party (SNP) indicating they would back him if he agreed to a second Scottish independence referendum. The Liberal Democrats could also be tempted by Labour's commitment to a second Brexit referendum, but have so far "absolutely categorically" ruled out backing Corbyn, citing his radical economic agenda and anti-Semitism within his party. Without them, Corbyn would probably fall short of forming a government or securing the backing needed to sustain a minority government. Another election would be the only way to break the deadlock.

SOURCE: AFP

Trump 'on verge of dictatorship'

Warn Democrats as debate opens with fiery partisan battle

AFP, Washington

Democrats warned that US President Donald Trump was on the verge of dictatorship while Republicans fiercely defended his record at the opening of a stormy, historic debate on impeachment charges Wednesday.

The parties held tightly to diametrically opposed views of Trump as they weighed articles of impeachment at the beginning of a two-day debate.

Trump is alleged to have wielded the power of the presidency for personal and political gain by pressuring Ukraine to interfere in the 2020 US election.

There is little question about the outcome in the House Judiciary Committee: by the end of the week the majority-Democrat panel is expected to approve the charges and send them to the entire House of Representatives for passage next week.

But lawmakers in the televised hearing appeared focused on speaking to voters, whose sentiment will be crucial if, as expected, Trump goes on trial in the US Senate in January.

In a grave voice, Democratic committee chairman Jerry Nadler opened the hearing. "Today we begin consideration of two articles of impeachment against President Donald J. Trump," he said.

IMPEACHMENT PROBE IN US



President Trump with placing his private political interests above our national security, above our free and fair elections, and above our ability to hold public officials accountable," he said.

"If the president can first abuse his power and then stonewall all congressional requests for information, Congress cannot fulfill its duty to act as a check and balance against the Executive -- and the president becomes a dictator."

Troug Collins, the senior Republican on the committee, argued that Democrats have been seeking to impeach Trump ever since he came into office in January 2017, and have no clear case beyond "abuse of power."

"It's just generic vague statements," Collins said. "You go home and pick something you don't like about the president, and there's your abuse of power."

Trump faces becoming only the third president in US history to be impeached and placed on trial in the Senate.

He is accused of pressuring Ukraine for help against his Democratic challenger Joe Biden ahead of next year's national elections, and holding up military aid to the country which it needed to face Russian aggression, unless it did his bidding.

YouTube bans 'implied' threats

YouTube yesterday broadened its anti-harassment policies to include a ban on "implied" threats along with insults based on race, gender identity or sexual orientation. "We will no longer allow content that maliciously insults someone based on protected attributes such as their race, gender expression, or sexual orientation," global head of trust and safety Matt Halprin said in an online post. "This applies to everyone, from private individuals, to YouTube creators, to public officials." YouTube already bans explicit threats. The changes stem in part from YouTube's pledge earlier this year to crack down on harassment by video creators. YouTube and other sharing platforms have been under pressure to filter out hateful and violent content while fending off concerns about censorship.

Human remains found in search for Chilean plane

Rescuers have found human remains during the search for a Chilean air force plane that went missing en route to Antarctica with 38 people aboard, a provincial government leader said Wednesday. Search teams are combing waters off the southern tip of South America for any sign of the C-130 Hercules transport aircraft, which disappeared late Monday. Chile's military have yet to publicly announce the discovery but said earlier that search and rescue teams had recovered floating debris and personal items suspected to come from the plane. But Jose Fernandez, the governor of sparsely populated Magallanes region in Chile's far south, said the air force had confirmed the find to him.

Algeria holds presidential polls as thousands rally against vote



Thousands of people took to the streets in central Algiers yesterday chanting "No vote! We want freedom!" as the authorities held a presidential election that a mass protest movement views as a charade intended to keep the ruling elite in power. Police rushed the crowd with sticks to disperse the marchers, but then fell back as more protesters arrived. The army, the strongest political player, sees the election as the only way to restore order by naming a successor to Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was toppled by a popular uprising earlier this year after two decades in office. All five candidates that won approval to stand in the election are former senior officials, including two former prime ministers, and protesters say none is likely to challenge the army's dominance.

Greta Thunberg: Time's Person of the Year

Trump slams 'ridiculous' choice; Obama, Hillary hail the teenage climate icon

AFP, New York

Greta Thunberg, the Swedish teenager who became the voice of a generation facing the climate change emergency, was Wednesday named Time magazine's 2019 Person of the Year.

Unknown to the world when she launched a solo strike against global warming in mid-2018, the 16-year-old has since inspired millions in a worldwide movement that saw her tipped as a Nobel laureate.

"Wow, this is unbelievable!" Thunberg tweeted after the announcement -- which came as she pressed her call for action at a high-stakes UN climate gathering in Madrid.

"I share this great honor with everyone in the #FridaysForFuture movement and climate activists everywhere."

The magazine interviewed Thunberg aboard the sailboat that took her from the United States back to Europe, after a months-long journey through North America aimed at raising environmental awareness.

"We can't just continue living as if there was no tomorrow, because there is a tomorrow. That is all we are saying," Thunberg told Time.

"The politics of climate action are as entrenched and complex as the phenomenon



itself, and Thunberg has no magic solution," Time wrote of the teenager. "But she has succeeded in creating a global attitudinal shift, transforming millions of vague, middle-of-the-night anxieties into a worldwide movement calling for urgent change. "She has offered a moral clarion call to those who are willing to act, and hurled shame on those who are not." Some have mocked her youth -- or sought to discredit her because she has Asperger's syndrome, a mild form of autism. Her diagnosis

means that Thunberg "doesn't operate on the same emotional register as many of the people she meets," Time magazine wrote.

"She dislikes crowds; ignores small talk; and speaks in direct, uncomplicated sentences. She cannot be flattered or distracted," and according to the magazine, "these very qualities have helped make her a global sensation."

US President Donald Trump yesterday slammed Time magazine's decision, saying the climate activist should "chill" and go see a movie.

"So ridiculous. Greta must work on her Anger Management problem, then go to a good old fashioned movie with a friend! Chill Greta, Chill!" he tweeted.

But the Greta has fanous supporters too.

"No one is too small to have an impact and change the world," tweeted The Obama Foundation as it welcomed the Time announcement.

Democratic White House hopeful Joe Biden echoed that sentiment, saying the "honor is well-deserved."

"I couldn't think of a better Person of the Year," agreed former secretary of state Hillary Clinton, thanking Thunberg for her "willingness to tell hard, motivating truths."

#METOO MOVEMENT

Weinstein agrees to \$25 m settlement with accusers

AFP, New York

Disgraced Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein has reached a \$25 million settlement with dozens of women who accused him of sexual misconduct, one of the women's lawyers told AFP on Wednesday.

The once-powerful producer of "Pulp Fiction" and "Sin City", whose case sparked the #MeToo movement against sex crimes, faces a criminal trial next month that could see him jailed for life.

The payout from a separate civil case will be shared among more than 30 actresses and former employees who have sued the 67-year-old for offenses ranging from sexual harassment to rape.

Weinstein will not have to admit wrongdoing or pay from his own pocket, celebrity news portal TMZ said, with the bill instead being met by insurers for his bankrupt former movie studio, The Weinstein Company.

The deal will have to be signed by all parties and get court approval to resolve almost every misconduct lawsuit brought against him since 2017 and insulate company directors from future liability.

Weinstein's accusers include some of the



world's most famous actresses -- including Angelina Jolie, Gwyneth Paltrow and Salma Hayek -- although none is part of the proceedings.

"Boardwalk Empire" actress Paz de la Huerta, who accused the producer of raping her in 2010, is expected to be part of the settlement, her lawyer Aaron Filler told AFP.

The criminal claims against him involve just two accusers, meaning the civil settlement represents the only chance of justice for the many women who have accused Weinstein of abuse.

But several accusers and their lawyers have denounced the deal.

One of his accusers, 50-year-old Katherine Kendall, told The New York Times she was disappointed by the deal but had agreed to sign on because she didn't want other women to miss out on the payout.

"I don't love it, but I don't know how to go after him. I don't know what I can really do," said Kendall.

Israel to vote in third polls in a year

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's political system was facing an unprecedented crisis yesterday, after the country's politicians failed to form a government and dissolved for a new election -- the third in a year.

Less than three months after an inconclusive general election, with both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and challenger Benny Gantz failing to form a governing coalition, the Israeli parliament dissolved itself in the early hours of yesterday, setting a new vote for March 2.

The September election followed a similarly deadlocked vote in April and opinion polls suggested next year's vote could again be tight, with neither Netanyahu's right-wing bloc nor Gantz's centre-left alliance currently on course for a majority.

Pro-Netanyahu newspaper Israel Hayom labelled the deadlock a "circus" on its front page yesterday.

For Netanyahu, who was last month indicted on a series of corruption charges, the immediate challenge is to make sure he leads his Likud party into the election -- with a leadership primary set for later this month.

In September, Gantz's Blue and White alliance won 33 seats in the 120-member parliament, while Netanyahu's Likud got 32.

Opinion polls found that around 40 percent of respondents blamed Netanyahu primarily for the deadlock, with only 5 percent naming Gantz as the main cause.

CARBON NEUTRAL ECONOMY GOAL BY 2050

Easterners threaten to wreck EU climate push

REUTERS, Brussels/Prague

Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were threatening yesterday to wreck the European Union's new push for climate neutrality by 2050, just a day after the bloc's executive trumpeted it as Europe's "man on the moon" moment.

The 27 EU national leaders will meet in Brussels and push to agree to put their bloc on net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by mid-century, luring the reluctant eastern member states with extra money to transform their economies.

With floods, fires and droughts wrecking lives around the world, Greenpeace climate activists climbed the Brussels building where the leaders were to meet, unfurling banners reading "Climate Emergency", firing off red flares and blaring fire alarm sirens. Some were detained by police.

The eastern countries want more money to fund a transition to a future of lower emissions, including a role for nuclear

power which emits no carbon but which Germany and others aim to phase out.

"It is important to have certainty that nobody will stop us in the construction of nuclear power units," Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis told reporters before leaving for Brussels. A senior diplomat from one of those hesitant countries said of the latest draft summit decision: "For us, it definitely does not go far enough. Both in terms of nuclear, but also on burden-sharing and financial support."

Another EU diplomat estimated chances for an agreement at the summit - which must be unanimous - at 50/50.

The bloc's new chief executive proposed a Green Deal this week to mobilise 100 billion euros worth of investment to help economies move away from fossil fuels. But Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic are not yet on board, demanding that any decision spells out in more detail the scale and scope of financing available, and pushing to include funding for nuclear energy.