

UK GENERAL ELECTION
WORLD REACTION

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's resounding election victory was largely welcomed by governments around the world, with hopes it will put an end to years of Brexit deadlock. Here are some of the initial reactions:

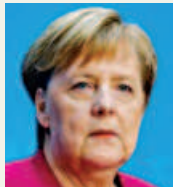


US President Donald Trump

"My hope is that the United Kingdom remains an ally, a friend and an extremely close partner. The condition is to define the rules of a fair relationship. We do not want Britain to be an unfair competitor."



French President Emmanuel Macron



"There will be a competitor at our door... that may also encourage us to be quicker in our decisions."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel

"We expect, as soon as possible, a vote by the British parliament ... It's important to have clarity."

European Council President Charles Michel



Russian President Vladimir Putin

"I am sure that the development of constructive dialogue and cooperation in various spheres would be fully in the interests of our countries' peoples and the entire European continent."

"This is not just a political victory, it is first and foremost a victory of values. The spectre of anti-Semitism loomed large over this campaign, and the British public overwhelmingly voted against it."



Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz

"Looking forward to the stability this brings and a new deal for Oz with the UK. Say g'day to the quiet Britons for us."

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison



Britain's prime minister and Conservative Party leader Boris Johnson is greeted by staff as he arrives back at 10 Downing Street in central London yesterday, following an audience with Britain's Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace, where she invited him to become Prime Minister and form a new government.

PHOTO: AFP

Can UK remain united?

Independence movements in Scotland, N Ireland gather steam after strong show by nationalists

AFP, London

Prime Minister Boris Johnson may be revelling in his mighty election victory but the results in Scotland and Northern Ireland have hinted at battles ahead in trying to keep the United Kingdom together.

Strong performances by Scottish and Irish nationalists in Thursday's snap vote will increase concerns about independence movements gaining momentum north of England's border and in Northern Ireland.

The Scottish National Party (SNP) won 48 seats, almost matching its performance in the 2015 election and setting up a showdown between Johnson and its combative leader Nicola Sturgeon.

Sturgeon said it had been an "exceptionally good night" for her party, leaving Scotland and the rest of Britain on "divergent paths".

"I accept that Boris Johnson after this election has a mandate to take England out of the European Union, but he does not have a mandate to take Scotland out of the European Union," she said, adding she would push for another independence referendum after losing a 2014 vote.

"I have a mandate, a renewed, refreshed,

strengthened mandate, to offer people in Scotland the choice of a different future.

"I don't pretend everybody who voted SNP yesterday will necessarily support independence, but there is a clear endorsement Scotland should get to decide our future and not have it decided for us," she said.

Sturgeon is expected to write to Johnson



before Christmas to formally demand Holyrood -- the seat of the Scottish government -- be given the power to hold a second independence vote.

But Johnson's Conservative government is unlikely to accept her demands, and has little incentive given its massive majority. Conservative party chairman James Cleverly told the BBC that Thursday's result was not a mandate for a second independence vote.

"The majority of votes in Scotland went to parties that are pro-union," he said. "The 2014 referendum was meant to be a once in a generation referendum."

In that poll, Scotland -- a country of 5.4 million -- voted by a margin of 55 percent to 45 percent to stay in the United Kingdom.

Johnson is also facing the serious but less urgent threat of keeping Northern Ireland part of the United Kingdom, in the wake of demands by nationalists for a united Ireland.

Both Scotland and Northern Ireland voted against Britain's departure from the EU in the shock 2016 referendum.

And Brexit has raised concerns that a possible "hard border" with EU-member Ireland to the south could lead to a return to the tensions and bloody sectarian violence of the past.

Nationalists now -- for the first time since the partition of Ireland in 1921 -- hold more seats in the British parliament than those who want to stay part of the United Kingdom.

Unionists have also warned that Johnson's Brexit deal creates a customs border down the Irish Sea, which they fear nationalists will exploit to pull Northern Ireland away from London's orbit.

HOW JOHNSON'S GAMBLE PAID OFF

It was a straight forward message: "Get Brexit done." The mantra of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his Conservative Party during the national election campaign was aimed at harnessing voter frustration at a parliamentary logjam over Britain's exit from the European Union. It worked.

Beyond the traditional strategy of swaying voters in swing districts held by the main opposition Labour Party, Johnson wanted to strike directly at Labour's heartlands in the hopes of winning support from people who had never voted Conservative but for whom Brexit had come to trump even traditional party allegiances.

The plan early in the campaign was to target around 40 traditionally Labour supporting seats in northern and central England, a party source close to the campaign said.

"The strategy is to woo Brexit Party supporters of all colours and to specifically court Labour leave voters especially in the North and Midlands," said the source.

CORE MESSAGE

Johnson and his team concluded that the only way to change the arithmetic in the House of Commons was to force a new election. But he needed a united front -- no easy feat for a party where the issue of Europe has caused infighting and played a role in the downfall of the previous four Conservative prime ministers. The election campaign officially started in early November and Johnson sought to convince voters that his party was the only one which could break the impasse among politicians in Westminster to enable the country to move forward.

The campaign focused heavily on core Brexit-related messages and was relatively light on policy detail, several members of his campaign team said.



FAIRY TALE

Johnson's pitch included a pledge to lower immigration and that Brexit would free up money that Britain would otherwise pay to the EU that could be redirected to spending on public services, including the NHS, at home.

One pledge was to add 50,000 more nurses but, under scrutiny from the opposition and media, the prime minister acknowledged that 19,000 were already working in the NHS, adding that his policies would retain those workers that might otherwise leave. During an October 13 visit to the northern town of Doncaster, a female member of the public accused him of peddling fiction by promising a rosy future for Britain outside of the EU and being part of a government that had made cuts to public services. Johnson has repeatedly said that any breach of trust should be blamed on parliament, not him.

POTENTIAL LIABILITY

Conservative strategists considered Johnson's personal popularity and proven ability to reach across party lines a key election asset. The charismatic politician helped lead the successful Brexit campaign in the 2016 referendum and is the only Conservative to have been London mayor.

By contrast, recent polls have ranked Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn the least popular opposition leader in decades.

In the final days of the campaign, Johnson crisscrossed districts in the north and central England, regions where Labour has traditionally had strong support.

At a factory of British construction equipment maker JCB near Uttroter in central England on Tuesday, Johnson drove a digger emblazoned with "get Brexit done" through a makeshift wall emblazoned with the word "GRIDLOCK."

SOURCE: REUTERS

'DISCRIMINATORY' AND 'UNCONSTITUTIONAL' CITIZENSHIP ACT IN INDIA

5 states vow to prevent its implementation

NDTV ONLINE

Days after West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee declared that she will not allow the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill to be implemented in West Bengal even if it becomes law, her counterparts in Kerala, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh said they will have nothing to do with

"Don't be scared of this bill. We are with you, and as long as we are here, nobody can impose anything on you."

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee

"A move to decide citizenship on the basis of religion amounts to rejecting the Constitution."

Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan

"Any legislation that seeks to divide the people of the country on religious lines is illegal and unethical."

Punjab CM Amarinder Singh

the BJP-led centre's alleged attempts to strip the country of its secular credentials either.

Terming the bill as an attack on the secular and democratic character of India, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said that his state has no place for such an "unconstitutional" law. "The Constitution of India guarantees the right to citizenship for all Indians, irrespective of their religion, caste, language, culture gender or profession. This very right is being made void by the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. A move to decide citizenship on the basis of religion amounts to rejecting the Constitution," he claimed.

The bill, which intends to make it easier for non-Muslim migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan to obtain Indian citizenship, has been accused by rights groups and opposition parties of being discriminatory and violating the constitutional right to equality. Punjab CM Amarinder Singh said



that the Congress, with the majority it commands in the Punjab assembly, will block the "unconstitutional" bill from being implemented in the state. "This law is of a very divisive nature. Any legislation that seeks to divide the people of the country on religious lines is illegal and unethical," he said.

Mamata Banerjee had voiced her opposition to the act even before it was passed by the parliament on Wednesday. "Don't be scared of this bill. We are with you, and as long as we are here, nobody can impose anything on you," she told a gathering in Kharagpur three days ago.

'We are in a fantasy land here'

UN climate talks deadlocked, detached from climate emergency

AFP, Madrid

United Nations climate negotiations were deadlocked and heading deep into overtime yesterday with even the best-case outcome likely to fall well short of what science says is needed to avert a future ravaged by global warming.

The COP25 summit in Madrid arrives on the heels of climate-related disasters across the planet, including unprecedented cyclones, deadly droughts and record-setting heatwaves.

As pressure inside and outside the talks mounts, old splits between rich polluters and developing nations have re-emerged over who should slash greenhouse gas emissions by how much, and how to pay the trillions needed to live in a climate-addled world.

Newer fissures, meanwhile, between poor, climate-



vulnerable nations and emerging giants such as China and India -- the world's No.1 and No.4 emitters -- are further stymying progress. The nations accused these big countries of lacking ambition and hurting the cause of others and the Earth.

The narrow aim of the Madrid negotiations is to finalise the rulebook for the 2015 Paris climate accord, which enjoins nations to

limit global temperature rises to "well below" two degrees Celsius. But "raising ambition" on emissions remains the overarching goal in Madrid and especially next year, when Glasgow will host the last climate summit before the Paris treaty becomes operational.

The draft Madrid agreement under negotiation, which must be approved by consensus, lays out two options.

The first -- favoured by nations reluctant to enhance their targets in the short term, including the US, India, China and Saudi Arabia -- simply repeats language in the 2015 treaty.

Another potential deal-breaker is so-called "loss and damage" -- how countries already counting the cost of the climate emergency can be compensated.

The US, which is leaving the Paris agreement, has aggressively blocked any provisions that might leave them and other developed countries on the hook for damages that could total more than \$150 billion per year by 2025, observers have said.

"It's basically like what's happening in the real world and in the streets, the protesters, doesn't exist," said Alden Meyer, policy and strategy director at the Union of Concerned Scientists. "We are in a fantasy land here."

US axes tariffs on China goods

AFP, Washington

The United States and China yesterday announced a major thaw in their trade war, including immediate cuts to punishing import tariffs, but a lack of detail left markets cautious.

"We have agreed to a very large Phase One Deal with China," President Donald Trump tweeted after officials in Beijing made a similar announcement.

The news could be a boon to Trump, who has made trade wars a keystone of his foreign policy, just as a congressional committee set up a full vote on his impeachment next week for alleged abuse of office.

After multiple false dawns in the tussle between the world's top two economies, which Trump launched in March 2018, investors were at least relieved that he canceled a new round of tariffs due to kick in tomorrow (Sunday).

Those levies, which would have hit consumer electronics like cell phones and computers, "will not be charged because of the fact that we made the deal," Trump tweeted.

In a major concession, Washington will slash in half the 15 percent tariffs imposed on \$120 billion in Chinese goods, like clothing, that were imposed September 1 and had a bigger impact on American shoppers than previous rounds.

But Trump said existing tariffs of 25 percent on \$250 billion of Chinese imports would stay in place pending further negotiations on a second phase deal.

US Congress recognises Armenian genocide

The US Congress on Thursday formally recognized the 1915-1917 murder of up to 1.5 million Armenians as genocide. The Senate's passage of the repeatedly stalled resolution is expected to anger Turkey, which denies there was a genocidal mass murder, insisting the Armenians died as a result of World War I. In passing the resolution, the United States joined 30 other countries recognizing Armenia's claim of genocide, which took place in the final years of the Ottoman empire that was centred in Istanbul. "It is fitting and appropriate that the Senate stands on the right side of history," said Senator Robert Menendez, who pushed the resolution through. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan called the Senate move "a victory of justice and truth."

Russian TV pulls Ukrainian president's sitcom



A Russian television channel has abruptly stopped airing the sitcom that launched the political career of Ukraine's president, after viewers noticed it had edited out an obscene joke about Vladimir Putin from the first episode. The TNT channel, part of the media arm of Gazprom, raised eyebrows when it announced it would air "Servant of the People", whose star Volodymyr Zelenskyy, playing a schoolteacher who becomes president, went on to win Ukraine's presidency in real life this year. TNT began airing the series on Wednesday, but the Russian-language service of the BBC noted it had edited out a play on words about Putin and an expensive make of Swiss watch, Hublot, which sounds like an obscenity in Russian.

Rahul Gandhi refuses to apologise for rape remarks

Rahul Gandhi's "Rape in India" comment attacking the government at an election rally in Jharkhand exploded in parliament yesterday as the ruling BJP tore into the Congress leader. "For the first time in history, a leader is giving a clarion call that Indian women should be raped. Is this Rahul Gandhi's message to the people of the country? He should be punished," Smriti Irani said in the Lok Sabha. Rahul Gandhi told reporters outside: "I won't apologise... Let me clarify what I said. I said the PM keeps talking about 'Make In India'. So when one opens the newspaper one hoped that one would see news about it, but what do we see when we open the papers? We see so many cases of rapes."

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS, NDTV