

UK GENERAL ELECTIONS

World leaders react to Johnson's victory

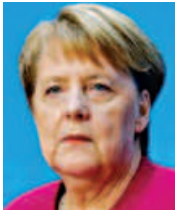
US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP
Trump said Johnson's win meant Britain and the United States would be free to strike a "massive" new trade deal after Brexit. "This deal has the potential to be far bigger and more lucrative than any deal that could be made with the EU. Celebrate Boris," Trump tweeted.



EUROPEAN COUNCIL PRESIDENT CHARLES MICHEL
Michel said the EU was ready to negotiate a free-trade agreement with Britain but called on London to work in good faith. He said the EU hoped for a quick British parliamentary vote on withdrawal from the block. "We expect, as soon as possible, a vote by the British parliament ... It's important to have clarity," he said.

GERMAN CHANCELLOR ANGELA MERKEL

"Congratulations, Boris Johnson, on your resounding victory. I look forward to working with you for the friendship and strong cooperation between our nations," her spokesman tweeted.



CZECH PRIME MINISTER ANDREJ BABIS
Andrej Babis tweeted: "He is a charismatic leader, we share the same kind of thinking. He received strong mandate to deliver Brexit. I'm sorry that Czech Republic loses strong ally in the EU."

SPAIN'S ACTING PM PEDRO SANCHEZ

Sanchez tweeted: "We will continue to work for an orderly #Brexit that guarantees the rights and freedoms of citizens and provides certainty to economic sectors. We are committed to the closest possible future relationship between the EU and the United Kingdom."



RUSSIA'S KREMLIN SPOKESMAN DMITRY PESKOV
"Of course we hope every time that political forces that win elections in any country share the ideology of and aim to build good relations with our country. I don't know how appropriate such hopes are in the case of the Conservatives," Peskov told reporters.

ISRAELI FOREIGN MINISTER ISRAEL KATZ

Johnson's election win is a "victory of values" over anti-Semitism. Britain's opposition Labour Party has been accused of allowing prejudice against Jews to exist within its ranks.



LUXEMBOURG PM XAVIER BETTEL
"Boris won the election by telling everyone he wants to deliver, so now it's time to deliver," Bettel said. Source: Reuters



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

'Bad news for Europe'

EU greets Johnson victory with relief and reluctance

REUTERS, Brussels

EU leaders yesterday welcomed Prime Minister Boris Johnson's election triumph as a chance to put three years of Brexit frustration behind them, but the Czech premier spoke for many in the bloc when he said Brexit was "bad news for Europe."

Leaders said they now wanted a quick divorce and to move on to talks on a free-trade accord with the EU, even if they are likely to be difficult.

"I'm relieved for my country," Ireland's Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said at an EU summit.

A so-called orderly Brexit with a transition period is crucial for investors and businesses who fear a "no-deal" departure would disrupt trade and financial markets.

"We expect a vote on the withdrawal agreement as soon as possible," European Council President Charles Michel told reporters, referring to the deal that Johnson and the EU struck setting the terms of Britain's exit on Jan. 31, 2020.

"It's important to have clarity as soon as possible," Michel said.

Leaders from Italy to the Netherlands echoed that sentiment, with Luxembourg's Prime Minister Xavier Bettel saying: "Boris won the election by telling everyone he wants to deliver, so now it's time to deliver."

Senior German conservative lawmaker Norbert Roettgen, an ally of Chancellor Angela Merkel, said on

EU leaders now want a quick divorce and to move on to talks on trade accord

Bloc's leaders, like many British voters, tired of stop-start Brexit talks

Twitter that now the size of Johnson's victory was clear "Brexit has become inevitable."

EU leaders, like many British voters, have tired of stop-start Brexit negotiations and the three extensions to Britain's departure date they have granted, although all deeply lamented the British decision to leave.

"It is obviously a giant success for Boris Johnson. He is a charismatic leader," Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis said.

"He won and now they will leave, unfortunately. That is bad news for Europe," he said.

For many in Europe, Britain was seen as a pragmatic, free-trading nation whose position as one of the EU's two military powers along with France gave the EU a bigger voice in the world.

But now the world's biggest trading bloc is resigned to London leaving and wants to get on with unraveling more than 40 years of British membership, even if that is likely to take more than the 12 months that some in London are hoping for.

Leaders said the EU was ready to negotiate a free-trade agreement but called on London to work in good faith, underlining EU fears that Britain might try to reinvent itself as a low-regulation rival.

"#EU is ready for the next phase. We will negotiate a future trade deal which ensures a true level playing field," Michel tweeted.

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 Uttoxeter 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

Lawsuits filed challenging the act as Centre says states not empowered to block it

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,

"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

Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh said they will have nothing to do with 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.

Yesterday, Mamata announced a series of rallies against the law. "We will not allow the Citizenship Act

in Bengal even though it has been passed in the parliament," she said.

The bill became a law late on Thursday night, after it received President Ram Nath Kovind's assent, amid violent protests in the Northeast.

The Kerala-based Indian Union Muslim League and a TMC MP have already challenged the bill in the Supreme Court, and the Congress and other parties opposed to it are expected to follow suit.

NDTV yesterday, citing, a top Union home ministry official, reported that Individual state governments were not empowered to halt the implementation of a law that comes under the centre's mandate.

"States do not have the power to say 'no' to a central law enacted under the Union List of the Constitution's 7th Schedule," the official said, adding that the granting of citizenship is a central prerogative.

Trade deal with China imminent

Says Trump; Beijing says any deal must be 'beneficial'

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump has declared that a deal to de-escalate the trade war with China was imminent but Beijing remained coy yesterday and cautioned that any agreement must be "mutually beneficial."

Reports Washington and Beijing had struck a bargain at last -- subject to approval by US President Donald Trump -- sent US stocks sailing to their first record closes of December. "Getting VERY close to a BIG DEAL with China. They want it, and so do we!" Trump tweeted in a markedly optimistic tone on Thursday.

But Beijing declined to confirm a possible signing of a "phase-one" deal yesterday.

"We always adhere to the principle that consultation must be based on equality and mutual respect, and the agreement must be mutually beneficial and a win-win solution," Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said at a regular briefing.

In a sign that tensions remain high between the two powers, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said

Washington was "suppressing" China across a number of fields, including the economy, trade and technology.

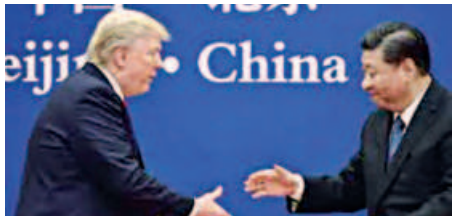
Speaking at a symposium on international affairs in Beijing, Wang said the United States has "seriously damaged the foundation of hard-earned trust between China and the US."

Washington has angered Beijing by backing Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement and criticising China's mass detention of mostly Muslim minorities in the northwest region of Xinjiang.

Trump's flagging of a trade breakthrough comes ahead of new tariffs planned to take effect Sunday and also just as he is almost sure to become only the third US president to be impeached.

With his 2020 re-election battle heating up, Trump is keen to seize the political initiative and show voters his punishing struggle with China has brought results.

The US ultimately wants China to open its vast economy to more goods and to conduct sweeping reforms of what Washington has long called systemic abuse against foreign investors.



COP25 talks struggle to

stave off climate chaos

AFP, Madrid

United Nations climate negotiations in Madrid were set to wrap up 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 comes on the heels of climate-related disasters across the planet, including unprecedented cyclones, deadly droughts and record-setting heatwaves.

Scientists have amassed a mountain of evidence pointing to even more dire impacts on the near horizon, while millions of youth activists are holding weekly strikes demanding government action.

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.

Old splits between rich polluters and developing nations re-emerged

Negotiators failed to live up to conference's motto: delegates

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 -- may further stymie progress.

To not lose time, the 12-day meeting was moved at the last minute from original host Chile due to social unrest.

But observers and delegates said negotiators had largely failed to live up to the conference's motto: Time for Action.

"We are appalled at the state of negotiations," said Carlos Fuller, lead negotiator for the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS), many of whose members face an existential threat due to rising sea levels.

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.

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