

International

Brexit in chaos; UK court rules PM's suspension of parliament 'unlawful'

Labor deputy calls for another referendum

LONDON: Prime Minister Boris Johnson's suspension of the British parliament was unlawful, a Scottish court ruled yesterday, prompting immediate calls for lawmakers to return to work as the government and parliament battle over the future of Brexit. Scotland's highest court of appeal ruled that Johnson's decision to prorogue, or suspend, parliament from Monday until Oct 14 was unlawful - a blow for the government as it seeks to leave the European Union on Oct 31 with or without a deal.

With seven weeks until Britain is due to leave the EU, the government and parliament are locked in conflict over the future of Brexit, with possible outcomes ranging from leaving without a deal to another referendum that could cancel the divorce. "We are calling for parliament to be recalled immediately," said Scottish National Party lawmaker Joanna Cherry, who led the challenge, after the verdict by Scotland's Court of Session.

"You cannot break the law with impunity, Boris Johnson." The government said it would appeal against the ruling to the Supreme Court, the United Kingdom's highest judicial body. Johnson announced on Aug. 28 that parliament would be prorogued, saying the government wanted the suspension so it could then launch a new legislative agenda.

Opponents said the real reason was to shut down debate and challenges to his Brexit plans. The court was shown documents that showed Johnson was considering prorogation weeks before he formally asked Queen Elizabeth to suspend the legislature. Buckingham Palace declined to comment on the ruling. Misleading the monarch, who under Britain's unwritten constitution must be apolitical, would be considered a grave affront.

Johnson, who was a figurehead for the Vote Leave campaign in the 2016 referendum, when 52 percent of voters backed Brexit, has rejected opposition complaints that he was denying parliament the right to debate Brexit in an undemocratic way. Dominic Grieve, one of 21 Brexit rebels

thrown out of Johnson's Conservative Party last week, said that if Johnson had misled the queen over the reasons for prorogation, he should resign. "If that were to be the case that this had happened, Boris Johnson would find himself in an untenable position in parliament," Grieve told BBC TV.

Brexit up for grabs

Johnson's bid to quit the bloc "do or die" on Oct. 31 has hit the buffers: parliament has ordered him to delay Brexit until 2020 unless he strikes a deal while a new Brexit Party is threatening to poach Conservative voters. After three years of tortuous Brexit crisis, British politics is in turmoil, with the prime minister blocked by parliament and an election or even a second referendum on the cards.

In an exonerating judgment, the Scottish judges ruled the principal reason for parliament's suspension was to stymie lawmakers and allow Johnson to pursue a no-deal Brexit policy. "This was an egregious case of a clear failure to comply with generally accepted standards of behavior of public authorities," concluded one judge, Philip Brodie, according to a summary of the court verdict. Judge James Drummond Young had determined that "the only inference that could be drawn was that the UK government and the Prime Minister wished to restrict Parliament", it added.

Labor splits

The 2016 Brexit referendum showed a United Kingdom divided about much more than the EU, and has given rise to soul-searching about everything from secession and immigration to capitalism, empire and modern Britishness. It has also triggered civil war inside both of Britain's main political parties as dozens of lawmakers put what they see as the United Kingdom's fate above that of party loyalty. The divisions in the opposition Labor Party over Brexit were on display yesterday, when its deputy leader, Tom Watson, said he supported pressing for a second referen-



LONDON: Anti-Brexit activists, and demonstrators opposing the British government's actions in relation to the handling of Brexit, protest near Downing Street in central London. — AFP

dum before an early national election.

"So let's deal with Brexit, in a referendum, where every person can have their say, and then come together and

fight an election on Labor's positive social agenda on our own terms, not on Boris Johnson's Brexit 'do or die'," he said in a speech in London. — Reuters

News in brief

Texas executes inmate

WASHINGTON: The US state of Texas executed an inmate on Tuesday, nine years after he took part in a week-long crime spree that included two murders. Mark Soliz, 37, was pronounced dead at 6:32 pm (23:32 GMT), the Texas Department of Criminal Justice said in a statement. In his last words, Soliz apologized "for the grief and the pain that I caused," the statement said. In June 2010, Soliz, who had already been convicted of theft several times, stole several weapons during a robbery with an accomplice named Jose Ramos. The following week, the two men robbed several people, wounded a man and killed the driver of a delivery truck in a parking lot. That same day, the crime spree ended when they broke into the home of a 61-year-old woman and murdered her. — AFP

Swiss revoke citizenship

ZURICH: Switzerland has revoked the citizenship of a man convicted of helping recruit jihadist fighters, invoking a law allowing dual nationals to be stripped of their Swiss passports for conduct detrimental to national interests or reputation. Though the Swiss federal immigration office said this was the first time it had made such a move under the 66-year-old law, other Western nations have also stripped citizenship of people linked to extremist violence in the Middle East. Last year, Australia revoked the nationality of an Islamic State (IS) recruiter, despite some concerns the move would leave him stateless, while Britain in February stripped a 19-year-old teenager of citizenship on security grounds. The Swiss office did not release the other nationality of the man, who is in prison after receiving a multiple-year sentence for crimes including membership in a terrorist organization, spreading IS propaganda and seeking to convince fighters to participate in jihadist violence in the Middle East. — Reuters

US lawmakers renew fights

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers clashed on Tuesday over funding for President Donald Trump's border wall and women's reproductive health programs, flashpoints that could threaten funding to keep the federal government operating beyond this month. Last December, Trump's insistence on money to build a wall on the US-Mexico border to deter Central American immigrants, stymied passage of a wide-ranging government funding bill. It was opposed by Democrats and some Republicans and led to a record-long 35-day partial government shutdown that extended into January 2019. The standoff ended when Trump circumvented Congress and declared a national emergency, which he said allowed him to divert money appropriated for other programs to construct the wall, a major plank of his 2016 election campaign. — Reuters

Malaysia detains Shiites

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian authorities detained dozens of Shiite Muslims in raids over the past week as they marked a major festival, sparking fears that the minority is facing growing persecution. Malaysia has a Muslim majority but most follow Sunni Islam. Shiites have long faced discrimination, with religious authorities considering them deviant and imams regularly denouncing them in sermons. On Monday eight men were detained by religious authorities and police in southern Johor state during a Shiite event at a private residence, according to a participant. "They used violence on us, some of us were handcuffed. They accused us of insulting Islam," cleric Hasan Askari said yesterday. On Friday religious officials and police in central Selangor state arrested 22 Shiites at a private property as they recited the Koran and hauled them in to give statements, according to cleric Kamil Zuhairi. — AFP

John Bolton, warrior in White House goes out swinging

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump stunned Washington once again Tuesday with a tweet saying he had fired John Bolton, his national security adviser who has pushed US foreign policy to the right for decades. But just 20 minutes afterward, Bolton—a consummate insider despite his contempt for the establishment-hit back with his own tweet and text messages to reporters, already showing daylight with Trump by saying that he had quit on his own.

Bolton, who lasted 17 months at the helm of national security policy in Trump's turbulent White House, has always been a Washington fighter, more willing than virtually any other senior US official to deploy military force and waging his battle deep within the bureaucracy. An unapologetic campaigner for the Iraq invasion who at times advocated war against Iran and North Korea, Bolton was so controversial that former president George W. Bush had to bypass the Senate to appoint him ambassador to the United Nations.

After leaving the Bush White House, Bolton relished his role as a media commentator, stridently denouncing Barack Obama and flirting with his own presidential run. He had seemed like a relic from an earlier time—until the



Former US National Security Advisor John Bolton

television-loving Trump saw him on Fox News. The mogul-turned-president was impressed by the loquacious expert, although he reportedly was put off by one of Bolton's signature traits—his bushy moustache. Bolton joined despite clear philosophical differences with Trump, who has frequently called for less US involvement overseas.

"He has strong views on things but that's okay," Trump said in May. "I actually temper John, which is pretty amazing." Suzanne DiMaggio, a foreign policy scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said Bolton survived so long in part because he shattered the painstaking decision-making process, which Trump holds in contempt. "Bolton played an important role for Trump—he freed him from the bureau-

cratic constraints of a national security policy process by demolishing it," she said.

From 'human scum' to aide

But Bolton's differences with the rest of the Trump team had increasingly been out in the open. Bolton had been highly critical of talks with Afghanistan's Taliban, so much so that The Washington Post reported that he was excluded from seeing a draft plan on pulling US troops. He also would have furiously protested a summit with Iran, as mullied by Trump.

Bolton has long been close to Iran's militant exiled opposition, telling them at a rally shortly before he was appointed that they would go together to Tehran to celebrate regime change "before 2019." And when Trump walked onto North Korean soil in June to see leader Kim Jong Un, Bolton—once branded "human scum" by Pyongyang for his hawkish stance—headed to Mongolia. Trump has also seemed increasingly uninterested in speaking about Venezuela, a major cause for Bolton who wants to oust leftist leader Nicolas Maduro. Of all issues, Bolton has said he is proudest of his efforts under both Bush and Trump to disrupt the International Criminal Court, believing it could target Americans and violate US sovereignty. In one of Bolton's most memorable remarks, he dismissed the United Nations in a 1994 speech, quipping that if the 38-floor secretariat in New York "lost 10 stories, it wouldn't make a bit of difference." Bolton traces his views, including his fervent denunciations of what he sees as elitism within an internationalist-minded foreign policy establishment, to his working-class childhood in Baltimore. — AFP



MANCHESTER: Attendees of the New Hampshire Democratic Party Convention hold up signs for Democratic presidential candidate, former Vice President Joe Biden at the SNHU Arena in Manchester. — AFP

Eyes on Biden as Democrats ready for third debate

WASHINGTON: Ten Democrats seeking the White House will gather today for their party's third debate of the 2020 cycle, with frontrunner Joe Biden sharing the stage with top rival Elizabeth Warren for the first time. The televised showdown in Houston will be the longest to date in the primary contest, a three-hour marathon that will give voters their first opportunity to see all the leading candidates onstage together.

The previous encounters, in June and July, featured 20 candidates over two nights, leaving viewers shell-shocked a full seven months before the first votes are cast, in Iowa next February, to determine the nominee.

While most of those candidates remain in the race, the debate is effectively halving the field as Democrats seek a challenger to President Donald Trump. Today's debate, airing on ABC from 7:00 pm (23:00 GMT), will bring America's diversity to the fore.

The 10 candidates are white, black, Hispanic, and

Asian-American; seven men and three women; three septuagenarians and four candidates 30 to 40 years their junior; and centrists, progressives and liberals. In a sign of the different political currents coursing through the party, the moderate Biden will take center stage sandwiched between the prominent progressives Warren and Senator Bernie Sanders, a self-described Democratic socialist who launched the universal health care approach known as Medicare for All.

All eyes will be on 76-year-old Biden, who maintains a grip on pole position with 29.8 percent support, according to a poll average compiled by RealClearPolitics. His summer of verbal miscues - and an apparent lack of preparedness for spirited attacks by rivals in the first debate - raised doubts about Barack Obama's deputy's age and mental clarity, and whether he will stand the test of a grueling political campaign.

To date, the Democratic veteran has largely kept those concerns at bay. He enjoys strong support in particular from African-American communities and from working-class whites who appreciate his blue-collar appeal and believe he is best able to beat Trump, a top priority for Democratic voters.

There is potential for fireworks between Biden and Warren, who trails at 18 percent but is the one candidate who has enjoyed a steady rise in support. — AFP

More Americans 'out of poverty', but more lack health insurance

WASHINGTON: More than a million Americans rose out of poverty last year but household incomes stagnated and - for the first time in nine years - the share of people with no health insurance crept higher, officials reported Tuesday. The annual snapshot offered a mixed portrait of prosperity in the year after US Republicans slashed income taxes and as President Donald Trump moved to undermine the health insurance system created by his predecessor Barack Obama.

The numbers showed Americans are at last recouping painful losses from the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009, but improvements may have stalled.

Individual worker wages are up and poverty is down but, after three years of growth, households overall did not bring in higher incomes in 2018.

Meanwhile, government health coverage intended for the poorest Americans weakened, notably affecting large numbers of children.

With unemployment holding near historic lows and wages rising, Trump has hailed his economic agenda as a blessing for American workers even though data suggests his trade wars are weighing on growth.

Republicans in last year's mid-term elections faced angry waves of voters who denounced attempts to dismantle the health coverage system known as Obamacare.

Democrats seized on the report's conclusions that coverage in public health care had shrunk.

"President Trump's cruel health care sabotage has left two million more people without health insurance, forced to live in constant fear of an accident or injury that could spell financial ruin for their families," Nancy Pelosi of California, speaker of the House of Representatives, said in a statement.

Health care is again a dominant issue among Democratic presidential candidates this year, with several calling for universal, state-run health coverage. According to the Census Bureau, the poverty rate fell in 2018 to 11.8 percent, or 38.1 million people, down 0.5 percent from 2017.

As a result, for the first time in 11 years, poverty was significantly lower than 2007, the year before the Great Recession. — AFP