

UK PM claims progress in Brexit talks

Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson says he's confident he can get a new Brexit deal

AFP | London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Saturday he was making a "huge amount of progress" towards a Brexit deal with the EU, in an interview in which he compared Britain to the Incredible Hulk.

"It's going to take a lot of work between now and October 17" when EU leaders gather for their final summit before Britain's scheduled exit from the bloc, he told the Mail yesterday newspaper.

"But I'm going to go to that summit and I'm going to get a deal, I'm very confident. And if we don't get a deal then we'll come out on October 31."

His comments came ahead of talks with European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker and the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier, in Luxembourg on Monday.

In an odd analogy, Johnson compared Britain to the comic book character Hulk.

"The madder Hulk gets, the stronger Hulk gets and he always escaped, no matter how tightly bound in he seemed to be -- and that is the case for this country," he said.

"We will come out on Octo-



Anti-Brexit activists wave EU flags whilst draped in Union flags as they demonstrate outside the Houses of Parliament

ber 31 and we will get it done, believe me."

But the extent of the parliamentary opposition to Johnson's approach was laid bare on Saturday when one of his Conservative MPs defected to the pro-European Liberal Democrats.

Former universities minister Sam Gyimah has strongly criti-

cised Johnson's threat to leave the EU with no deal, and has called for a re-run of the 2016 Brexit referendum.

'Progress'

Johnson took office in July promising to leave the EU next month with or without a deal, but has faced resistance from the

House of Commons.

Rebel Conservatives joined opposition MPs last week to rush through a law to delay Brexit until January if he does not get a deal in time.

Johnson wants to renegotiate the terms struck by his predecessor, Theresa May, which were rejected by parliament -- but EU

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leaders insist the deal is the best on offer.

The main sticking point is the so-called backstop plan to keep open Britain's border with Ireland, which could keep Britain tied to EU trade rules long after Brexit.

"When I got this job everybody was saying there can be absolutely no change to the withdrawal agreement," Johnson said.

"They have already moved off that and, as you know, there's a very, very good conversation going on about how to address the issues of the Northern Irish border.

"A huge amount of progress is

being made."

However, Downing Street has downplayed any major breakthrough in Monday's talks.

Johnson repeated that "under no circumstances" would he delay Brexit.

'Stark choice'

Twenty-one Conservative MPs defied Johnson to back the legislation blocking a "no deal" Brexit, and were swiftly expelled from the governing party.

One of them was Gyimah, who now becomes the Liberal Democrats' 18th MP in the 650-seat House of Commons.

The 43-year-old was once viewed as a rising star in the Conservatives and briefly ran against Johnson for the party leadership.

But he said Saturday: "Boris Johnson created a stark choice for moderate, progressive MPs in the Conservative party -- to accept a no deal Brexit or walk away from public life.

"I choose to continue to fight for the values I have always believed in, as a Liberal Democrat."

His defection is the sixth to the Lib Dems this year, and comes just days after a similar move by Conservative MP Philip Lee.

California Highway Patrol captures flightless fugitive emu

AP | Los Angeles

California authorities have captured an emu after the flightless fugitive led officers down a highway.

The Fresno Bee reported Friday that the bird was apprehended following a brief pursuit by California Highway Patrol officers.

Authorities say officers responded to a report that an ostrich was wandering along the right-hand shoulder of US Highway 99 northwest of Fresno.

Authorities say Madera County Animal Services took the bird into custody uninjured.



A California Highway Patrol car follows an emu as it ambled along the southbound lanes of Highway 99

Officers say they do not know whether the emu escaped a nearby farm or a moving vehicle.

Animal experts say the flightless native Australian birds can sprint at up to 30 mph (48 kph) and trot quickly for longer distances.

Snowden says he hopes France will grant him asylum

Reuters | Paris

Former US spy agency contractor Edward Snowden hopes France will grant him asylum, according to a France Inter radio interview to be broadcast on Monday.

In excerpts made available on the French radio station's Twitter account, Snowden says he would "love to see" French President Emmanuel Macron make a gesture enabling him to live in the country.

It was not immediately clear when or where the interview took place.

Snowden has been living in Russia since 2013 after he revealed details of secret sur-



Edward Snowden speaks via video link during a news conference in New York

veillance programs by US intelligence agencies.

Many civil rights activists see him as a hero, but at home in the United States authorities want him to stand trial for espionage.

Scores of tigers rescued from infamous Thai temple have died



A sedated tiger is seen in an enclosure as officials continue moving live tigers from the controversial Tiger Temple, in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok

Reuters | Bangkok

More than half of the tigers that Thai authorities confiscated in 2016 from an infamous Tiger Temple tourist attraction have died from a viral disease because their immune systems were weakened by inbreeding, media reported.

The Buddhist temple west of Bangkok was a tourist destination where visitors took selfies with tigers and bottle-fed cubs until authorities removed its response to global pressure over wildlife trafficking.

The confiscated animals were taken to two state-run sanctuaries but it soon became apparent they were susceptible to canine distemper virus, said a senior official from the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation.

"When we took the tigers in, we noted that they had no im-

mune system due to inbreeding," the department's deputy director-general, Prakrit Vongsvivattanakul, told the state-owned broadcaster MCOT on the weekend.

"We treated them as symptoms came up," Prakrit said.

Prakit did not give a figure for the number of tigers that had died but public service broadcaster Thai PBS reported that the toll was 86 of the 147 rescued animals.

The temple had promoted itself for years as a wildlife sanctuary, but it was eventually investigated for suspected links to wildlife trafficking and animal abuse.

Wildlife activists accused the temple's monks of illegally breeding tigers, while some visitors said the animals appeared drugged. The temple denied the accusations.

Government officials could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Russia's first sea-borne nuclear power plant arrives to its base

Reuters | Moscow

Russia's first-floating nuclear power plant has arrived to its permanent base near an isolated Russian town across the Bering Strait from Alaska, Russian state nuclear energy company Rosatom said on Saturday.

Developed by Rosatom, the plant, known as "Akademik Lomonosov", set off on a 5,000 km (3,100 mile) journey on Aug. 23 through Arctic waters to reach the Chukotka region.

Rosatom said it aims to make the floating station operational by the year-end. It would become the world's northernmost nuclear power station.

The plant will replace a coal-fired power plant and an aging nuclear power plant supplying more than 50,000 people with electricity in Chukotka.

Rosatom has long planned to launch the sea-borne power



Russia's floating nuclear power plant Akademik Lomonosov leaves Murmansk

units, which, with their mobile, small capacity plants, are best suited to remote regions. It has said they can help the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions blamed for global

warming.

The small plants were designed to make it possible to supply electricity to hard-to-reach areas of Russia. They can operate non-stop without

the need for refuelling for 3-5 years.

Environmental protection groups, including Greenpeace, have expressed their concerns over potential safety issues.