

Johnson wins key Brexit backing

London

British leadership favourite Boris Johnson won the endorsement of a key Brexit-backing rival yesterday despite accusations he was softening his rhetoric on leaving the EU.

Ahead of another round of voting among Conservative MPs, former Brexit secretary Dominic Raab said Johnson was the "only candidate" who would take Britain out of the European Union as planned on October 31.

On Tuesday, Raab was eliminated from the contest to replace Theresa May as the leader of the governing Conservative Party and therefore as prime minister, leaving five candidates standing.

One of them will be eliminated in another ballot later Wednesday, before further votes on Thursday to whittle the field down to a final pair.

Former foreign minister Johnson is leading the pack after securing the support of 126 of the 313 Conservative MPs in Tuesday's ballot.

A figurehead of the 2016 referendum campaign for Brexit, he insists there must be no more delays to Britain's EU exit, after May postponed it twice.

During a television debate on Tuesday, watched by an average 5.3 million viewers, Johnson said further delay would cause a "catastrophic loss of confidence in politics".

But he declined to guarantee this would happen -- and one of his main rivals, Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, suggested afterwards that his position was not clear.

"I am not entirely sure what he believes on this," Hunt told BBC radio.

Johnson keeps low profile

Hunt came second in Tuesday's ballot with 46 votes, followed by Environment Secretary Michael Gove -- another leader of the 2016 Brexit campaign -- on 41.

International Development Secretary Rory Stewart, the only candidate to rule out leaving the EU with no deal, continued his unlikely progress with 37 votes.

Sajid Javid, Britain's first Muslim interior minister, scraped through with 33 votes -- the minimum to avoid elimination -- while Raab fell short with 30. Raab was viewed as the can-

Since 1987
Eurosceptic journalist and commentator

2001-08, 2015-to date
Conservative member of parliament

2008-16
Mayor of London

2015-16
Key figure in the Vote Leave (Brexit) campaign

2016
Ditches bid to become prime minister after chief ally Michael Gove withdraws support

2016-2018
Theresa May's foreign minister



BORIS JOHNSON

2019 CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP PLEDGES

- Leave the EU on Oct 31, with or without a deal
- Withhold the £39-billion EU divorce bill as a negotiating tactic
- Cut taxes for Britain's richest 3 million people



On his party
"We are facing an existential crisis and will not be forgiven if we do not deliver Brexit on 31 October" -2019

On Brexit
"I am not aiming for a no-deal outcome... but it is only responsible to prepare vigorously and seriously for no-deal" -2019

IN HIS OWN WORDS

Vote Leave campaign slogan
Let's give our National Health Service the £350 million the EU takes every week -2016
claim challenged by UK Statistics Authority

Source: AFP, UK media © AFP

didate with the most hardline policy on Brexit, even suggesting he could suspend the session of parliament if it tried to block "no deal".

Stewart said Wednesday that he was in talks with Gove about joining forces.

Tuesday's BBC debate was the first of the campaign to feature Johnson, who dodged a previous one on Sunday and has kept his public and media appearances to a minimum.

But none of the candidates made any major headway or gaffes, and Johnson remains the runaway favourite.

Opposition leaders on Wednesday targeted the front-runner's past comments, with the Scottish National Party's leader in parliament Ian Blackford telling MPs: "not only is the member racist, he is stoking division in communities."

Johnson's most uncomfortable moment in Tuesday's debate came when, following up a question from a British imam, he was challenged over his description of Muslim women wearing burkas as looking like "letter boxes",

in a 2018 article against banning the full face veil.

But the BBC was later forced to explain its vetting process after the imam was found to have posted allegedly anti-Semitic messages on his Twitter page.

'None of us want no deal'

After Conservative MPs whittle them down to two candidates by the end of Thursday, the final pair will be put to a ballot of 160,000 party members, with the winner taking over in Downing Street likely in late July.

May stepped down last month over her failure to deliver Brexit on time, although she remains prime minister until her successor is chosen.

She struck an exit deal with Brussels last November, but failed three times to get it through parliament's lower House of Commons.

All the candidates except Stewart insist they can renegotiate the text with the EU -- despite repeated warnings from Brussels that it will not do this. Stewart wants to try again to

get the deal agreed with Brussels through parliament, but the others warn that without a change, Britain must be ready to leave with no deal at all.

Johnson said in Tuesday's debate: "None of us wants a no-deal outcome."

"We are going to make sure we come out on terms that protect the UK and protect the EU as well."

Both Hunt and Gove repeated that a further delay might be required if a Brexit deal was within reach.

But Javid said it was "fundamental" to get out by the new deadline no matter what.

Votes obtained as of June 18



BORIS JOHNSON
Former Foreign Secretary
Votes: 126



JEREMY HUNT
Foreign Secretary
Votes: 46



MICHAEL GOVE
Environment Secretary
Votes: 41



RORY STEWART
International Development Secretary
Votes: 37



SAJID JAVID
Home Secretary
Votes: 33

Position on Brexit

- Open to no-deal on Oct 31
- Dislikes no-deal but doesn't rule it out
- Opposes no-deal



Donald Trump-Xi meeting at G20 raises hope for trade truce

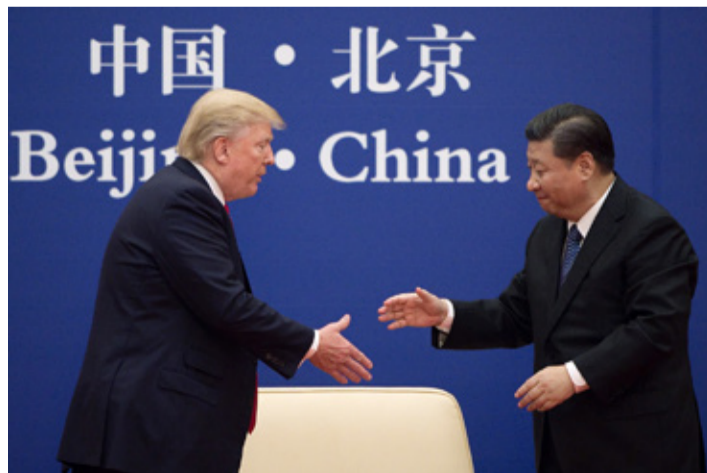
Washington, United States

US President Donald Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping have agreed to meet at the G20 summit in Japan next week, raising hopes for a truce in the bruising trade war between the world's top two economies.

The two leaders spoke on the phone on Tuesday, weeks after negotiations broke down when Trump accused Beijing of reneging on its commitments, hiked tariffs on \$200 billion in Chinese goods and then blacklisted Chinese telecom giant Huawei.

The US president took a conciliatory approach this time.

"Had a very good telephone conversation with President Xi of China. We will be having an extended meeting next week at the G-20 in Japan," Trump said



China's President Xi Jinping shakes hands with US President Donald Trump (L) during a business leaders event at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

on Twitter.

"Our respective teams will begin talks prior to our meeting,"

he said ahead of the June 28-29 summit.

Xi noted that bilateral rela-

tions had encountered difficulties that were "not in the interest of either side" but he warned that dialogue must be conducted on "an equal footing."

"China and the US will both gain by cooperating and lose by fighting," Xi told Trump, according to state media.

Global shares were buoyed by the announcement, with Wall Street rallying on Tuesday and Asian stock markets surging on Wednesday.

The White House readout of the call said the leaders "discussed the importance of leveling the playing field for US farmers, workers, and businesses through a fair and reciprocal economic relationship."

"I think we have a chance. China wants a deal. They don't

like the tariffs," Trump told reporters at the White House. "I have a very good relationship with president Xi. We'll see what happens."

North Korean 'bargaining chip'

The White House repeated that the focus of the talks will be to address "structural barriers to trade with China and achieving meaningful reforms that are enforceable and verifiable."

The United States and China seemed close to an agreement when talks collapsed last month.

Beijing retaliated to Trump's tariffs and moves against Huawei by increasing custom taxes on \$60 billion in US goods, creating its own list of "unreliable" companies and individuals and threatening to ban exports of

rare earths to the United States.

Xi told Trump that the two countries must "accommodate each other's legitimate concerns" and that "China hopes the US side can treat Chinese firms in a fair manner," according to the official Xinhua news agency.

Trump had requested the call between the two leaders, according to Xinhua.

A week before the G20, Xi will visit North Korea on Thursday and Friday, his first trip there as president.

China is North Korea's sole major ally, and analysts say Xi could use any leverage Beijing may have in the nuclear standoff between Washington and Pyongyang as a "bargaining chip" in his talks with Trump.