

UK's Boris Johnson under pressure

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● Johnson also came under scrutiny on Sunday for his relationship with Steve Bannon, the controversial former adviser to US President Donald Trump

London, United Kingdom

Boris Johnson, the strong favourite to become Britain's next prime minister, came under pressure from figures in his own party yesterday to explain reports of a domestic "row" that led to a police visit.

Although still heavily backed to beat Jeremy Hunt to become Conservative Party leader, and therefore prime minister, a snap poll published in the Mail on Sunday suggested that the incident had cut his support.

The *Guardian* reported that police were alerted early on Friday after a neighbour heard a loud altercation involving screams, shouts and bangs at the

south London property, shortly after Johnson had secured his place in the final run-off to become prime minister.

The paper said Johnson's partner Carrie Symonds could be heard telling the former London mayor to "get off me" and "get out of my flat".

The former foreign minister refused to answer questions about the incident on the first day of the month-long contest to win over Conservative grassroots members, saying "I don't think people want to hear about that kind of thing."

He instead tried to focus on his policies, saying "we need to get Brexit done" and promising to prepare Britain for a no-deal exit from the EU, if a deal cannot be reached.

'Lack of discipline'

Johnson's leadership rival Hunt told Sky News on Sunday that "someone who wants to be prime minister should answer questions on everything".

Trade minister Liam Fox -- who is backing Hunt for leader -- told BBC1's *The Andrew Marr Show*: "I think it is always easier to just

give an explanation."

Former Tory foreign office minister Alan Duncan -- another Hunt supporter -- told the *Guardian* newspaper his former boss now had a "big question mark over his head". Johnson had shown a "lack of discipline" throughout his career, he added.

According to the Survation poll in the Mail yesterday, Hunt is now the preferred candidate to become prime minister among voters for all parties, as Johnson saw a seven-percent decline in support.

His lead over Hunt with Conservative voters had

been slashed from 27 per cent to nine percent since Friday, the poll suggested.

But only the Conservative Party's 160,000 members get to choose between Johnson and Hunt. And their support for Johnson appeared undimmed on Saturday, at the first of a series of "hustings" -- internal party debates to decide the new leader.

The Conservative members in the central English city of Birmingham gave Johnson a standing ovation, and loudly heckled interviewer Iain Dale as he quizzed the for-

mer London mayor over Friday's domestic incident.

Bannon claims

"Stuff happens at home all the time... someone spills the wine, we can't really be making headlines out of that," supporter Hasnain Ahmed, 23, said.

"What's important is what's this guy going to be delivering for you in Brexit."

With Sunday marking the three-year anniversary of the vote to leave the EU, the issue still dominates British politics.

Hunt also received a warm reception, promising that if he couldn't strike a Brexit deal with the EU, "then I will leave without a deal".

"I was probably leaning towards Boris but I was very impressed with what Jeremy Hunt said today," Tory councillor Karen Shakespeare, told AFP.

"He surprised me with his directness and honesty so I have to say I am now leaning very heavily towards Jeremy Hunt."

Johnson also came under scrutiny on Sunday for his relationship with Steve Bannon, the controversial former adviser to US President Donald Trump.

Footage published by the *Observer* showed Bannon claiming that he had helped craft Johnson's resignation speech as foreign minister last year.

The pair got to know each other when both were in office, and were reported to have met again in an unofficial capacity last summer.

Johnson said at the time that "the so-called relationship" with Bannon was a "lefty delusion" and his office dismissed the latest claims of a working relationship as "totally preposterous to the point of a conspiracy".



Boris Johnson

Jeremy Hunt

Protectionism slammed as SE Asian leaders rally to trade pact

Bangkok, Thailand

Thailand's premier made an impassioned plea against protectionism on Sunday at a meeting of Southeast Asian leaders where the fallout from the US-China tariff war has dominated talks.

A controversial repatriation plan for the persecuted Rohingya Muslim minority and ongoing disputes over the South China Sea will also be tackled by leaders at the final day of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit.

But trade has topped the agenda at the Bangkok meeting, as tit-for-tat tariffs between China and the US cast a dark cloud over global growth.

Thailand, which is chairing ASEAN this year, rallied against global protectionism and called for urgency in concluding talks on RCEP -- a China-led trade pact, which once inked will be the world's biggest.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) includes all 10 ASEAN economies, plus India, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

"The winds of protectionism are hurting our multilateral trading system," Thailand's junta leader-turned-premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha said Sunday.

"ASEAN must hold our hands tightly in negotiating... on the RCEP, so it is concluded this year.



(L-R) Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, Myanmar's State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha, Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen, Indonesia's President Joko Widodo and Laos Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith pose for photos during the opening ceremony of the 34th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Bangkok

It will help off-set any impact from the ongoing trade conflict."

RCEP is seen as a mechanism for China to draft the rules of Asia-Pacific trade, following a US retreat from the region as it withdrew from another trade pact at the start of President

Donald Trump's administration. The trade war between the world's biggest two economies have sent reverberations across the world, said Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte.

The two countries "must both take the high road and resolve

their differences before the situation spirals out of control", warned Duterte during an ASEAN leaders meeting Saturday.

But progress on RCEP has stuttered in recent months, with India digging in over fears the cheap Chinese goods could flood

its massive consumer markets.

Australia and New Zealand have also raised concerns over a lack of labour and environmental safeguards.

Plastic pollution

The leaders also adopted a

"Bangkok Declaration" to combat maritime debris, including plastic waste, in one of the most polluted waters in the world.

But disputes in the flashpoint South China Sea and Myanmar's persecution of Rohingya Muslims are expected to be tussled over on Sunday.

ASEAN leaders often put out an image of unity during the annual summits, but the forum has been criticised for allowing diplomatic niceties to outweigh concrete action on the sharpest problems facing the region.

But Malaysia on Saturday called for the perpetrators of the persecution of the Rohingya to be brought to "justice."

More than 740,000 of the stateless minority have fled Myanmar following a crackdown by its security forces in 2017.

Their repatriation to Myanmar "must include the citizenship", Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Bin Abdullah said according to a tweet by his ministry.

That flies in the face of Myanmar's official policy, which denies the Rohingya full citizenship, instead labelling them "Bengalis" - illegal migrants from Bangladesh.

The crisis has spread across the region with boatloads of refugees arriving on the shores of Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia.