

International

Brexit chaos deepens; British PM faces hostile parliament

Johnson cuts short New York visit after shock ruling

LONDON: A defiant Boris Johnson faces parliament yesterday after a Supreme Court ruling that he had unlawfully shut it down, with opponents seeking new ways to block him from taking Britain out of the European Union on Oct 31 without a deal. After three years of Brexit crisis and Johnson's tumultuous two-month premiership, it remains unclear when, if or on what terms the United Kingdom will leave the bloc it joined in 1973.

Having lost his majority and a series of votes about Brexit in the House of Commons, Johnson had suspended the legislature for five weeks. But the country's top court said on Tuesday he had done so without justification and that the closure was void. Cutting short a visit to New York, Johnson arrived back in London yesterday morning and was due to address a reconvened Commons after flatly rejecting calls to resign and insisting that Brexit would take place on Oct 31 come what may.

Before the suspension, an alliance of opposition lawmakers backed by rebel members of Johnson's Conservative Party forced through a law requiring him to ask the EU to push back the deadline if no exit deal was agreed by Oct 19. "We simply cannot afford to wait until the 19th of October to see whether the prime minister will refuse to obey the law again," said Jo Swinson, leader of the anti-Brexit Liberal Democrats, adding that opponents did not trust Johnson to obey the legislation.

The leader of Britain's main opposition Labor Party, Jeremy Corbyn, said now was not the time for parliament to try to bring Johnson down because the priority was to rule out an EU exit without an agreement.

Parliament remains deadlocked over Brexit, with Johnson intent on leading Britain out of the EU with or without an exit agreement while most lawmakers are determined to block a no-deal scenario, which they fear will cause huge economic disruption.

Johnson has repeatedly said he can strike an exit deal with the EU's 27 other members at an EU summit on Oct. 17-18. However, EU negotiators say he has made no new proposals capable of breaking the deadlock over the issue of how to manage the border between Ireland, an EU member, and Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, after Brexit.

This parliament is dead

While opponents demanded he resign after the court judgment, Johnson was in combative mood. He complained that opponents of Brexit were trying to thwart the will of the people and that an election should be called immediately. Speaking at the United Nations, Johnson even quipped that some in parliament were seeking to turn Brexit into torment - comparing himself to Greek mythological figure Prometheus whose liver was repeatedly eaten by an eagle.

Parliament has twice refused his demand for an election as opposition parties want first to ensure that a no-deal Brexit on Oct 31 is ruled out completely. Some lawmakers shouted and jeered at Johnson's top legal adviser, Attorney General Geoffrey Cox. Under questioning, Cox said the government would comply with a law forcing the prime minister to request a Brexit delay if no deal was struck.

But Cox provoked ire when he said the current par-



LONDON: Speaker of the House of Commons John Bercow (center) speaks in the House of Commons in London yesterday as Parliament resumes. —AFP

liament was a disgrace, casting Johnson's opponents as cowards for avoiding an election and trying to block Brexit. He argued that the lawmakers were preventing the government from governing while blocking any route out of the impasse. "This parliament is a dead parliament. It should no longer sit," Cox said. "This parliament should have the courage to face the electorate. But it won't."

Labor leader Corbyn told the BBC that Johnson should apologize to Queen Elizabeth - who formally suspended parliament at his request - and to the British people for acting unlawfully. Corbyn said that once a no-deal Brexit had been averted, it would be appropriate to move a motion of no-confidence to force out the government and then hold a national election. —Reuters



'This parliament is dead': Johnson's top legal adviser

Jeremy Corbyn: Britain revolutionary survivor

BRIGHTON: UK opposition Labor Party leader Jeremy Corbyn is a silver-haired vegetarian cyclist who believes in "revolution" but has frustrated with his ambiguity about the biggest issue of his generation: Brexit. The 70-year-old socialist has energized leftist supporters and polarized public opinion in equal measure since being elected, almost by accident, as the boss of the 119-year-old party in 2015.

His rejection of capitalism drives his scepticism of the European Union, and his belief in the "people's power" makes him the bogymen of London bankers. Corbyn's dogged commitment to social justice and underdog causes such as the Palestinian state have sparked an anti-Semitism row that has shadowed his inner circle. "To share wealth, we need to share power," Corbyn told his adoring supporters at the party's annual conference on Tuesday.

But he refused to call an immediate vote of no-confidence in Boris Johnson's government - or commit himself one way or another to Britain's future membership in the European Union. "As a Labor prime minister, I pledge to carry out whatever the people decide," he said, giving the impression of a revolutionary who wanted to wait this particular crisis out. This approach has drawn its share of critics and seen Labor's support in the polls drop. But it also reflects a calculating tenacity that has helped Corbyn survive past power struggles and repeatedly beat the odds.

'Never in awe'

Corbyn could hardly cut a more contrasting figure to the blue-blooded Eton and Oxford-educated Johnson. He did not attend university - noting in 2015 that he "never held in awe those who have" - and entered politics in the 1960s as a member of the Young Socialist youth wing of the Labor Party. His early causes included nuclear disarmament in the geopolitically tense Cold War era and the anti-apartheid movement.

He has backed Sinn Fein and Irish republicanism during the bloody Troubles. His support for striking miners who faced off with Conservative icon Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s was less controversial. But his commitment now to a sweeping redistribution of wealth that would hand 10 percent of big companies' shares to workers over the coming decade has sent chills through the UK investment community. The Financial Times called it "one of the biggest state expropriations of assets seen in a western democracy".

Rank outsider

Corbyn only stood for Labor leadership as a 100/1 outsider because few others appeared willing to lead the party after its general election loss to David Cameron's Conservatives. He benefited from his party's decision to change its leadership election rules so that rank-and-file members' votes counted — on aggregate — as much as those of labor union bosses and MPs. Corbyn's ability to mobilize the far-left and the youth drew immediate comparisons to the effect Bernie Sanders had on US election politics.

Yet his leadership style and policies proved to be just as divisive with his own shadow cabinet - the group of party officials who would become ministers were Corbyn to become premier. More than half of them quit after his lacklustre campaign against Brexit during the 2016 referendum. Cameron complained this month that Labor under Corbyn never truly backed his anti-Brexit campaign efforts. "They were AWOL," Cameron recalled in a television interview. Corbyn has since faced repeated questions about which way he voted in the referendum. He has always said that he ticked the "remain" box. —AFP

Limbleless chickens and killer robots: UK PM bemuses in UN speech

UNITED NATIONS: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson delivered an unconventional speech at the UN General Assembly Tuesday that referenced "terrifying limbleless chickens" and "pink-eyed terminators" but only mentioned Brexit once. During a late-night, 20-minute address that drew laughs and baffled looks from delegates, Johnson struck a light tone on a serious subject as he warned of technology's capacity to control citizens.

He made no mention of Britain's highest court ruling earlier in the day that his decision to suspend parliament amid a Brexit impasse was unlawful. The shock ruling plunged his plans to exit the European Union by October 31 into crisis and sparked calls by opposition MPs that he resign immediately. At the UN, Johnson painted the possibility of a future where devices in every household "monitor your nightmares, monitor your fridge," and where smart cities are "as

antiseptic as a Zurich pharmacy."

"'Alexa' will pretend to take orders but this Alexa will be watching you, clapping her tongue and stamping her foot," Johnson boomed, suggesting "there may be nowhere to hide." "As new technologies seem to race towards us from the far horizon we strain our eyes as they come, to make out whether they are for good or bad, friends or foes. 'AI, what will it mean?'" he asked of artificial intelligence.

"Helpful robots washing and caring for an ageing population or pink-eyed terminators sent back from the future to cull the human race?" Johnson pondered. He went on to wonder whether synthetic biology could restore tissues "like some fantastic hangover cure" or "bring terrifying limbleless chickens to our tables." Johnson also referenced one of his favorite subjects, Greek mythology, by telling the story of Zeus punishing Prometheus by ensuring that an eagle ate his liver over and over again.

"This went on forever. A bit like the experience of Brexit in the UK if some of our parliamentarians had their way," he said, drawing laughs from the remaining delegates in the largely deserted hall. The Conservative leader made an impassioned plea for technology to be a force for good and said he was optimistic it could "serve as a liberator and to remake



LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson arrives at 10 Downing Street in central London yesterday after travelling back from New York. —AFP

the world wondrously and benignly." He called on world leaders to agree to a set of guidelines to ensure that new technologies are designed ethically before inviting them to join him at a tech summit in London next year.

Whether Johnson is still prime minister then remains to be seen. Following his UN address he was due to fly back

to Britain where a political storm awaits him, cutting his New York trip short. He also poked fun at France during his speech, reminiscing about how when he was mayor of London the city had more Michelin stars than Paris. "The French somehow rapidly recovered - by a process that I wasn't quite sure was entirely fair," he joked. —AFP

Caribbean gets smart to cope with hurricanes

ST JOHN'S: After monster Hurricane Irma annihilated the farm sector of Barbuda in 2017, growers got smart: among other changes, they moved their crops to higher ground. There and elsewhere across the Caribbean, as tourism-dependent island nations cope with record-breaking storms and rising sea levels blamed on global warming, the region is devising savvy ways to diversify islands' economies and boost food security. Another taste of pain came this month as Hurricane Dorian devastated parts of the northern Bahamas. Indeed, the Caribbean and its 44 million people could be facing their biggest crisis to date as extreme weather delivers a double whammy to tourism and the region's ability to feed itself. "Climate change has affected everything. How we eat, how we build, how we live our day-to-day lives," said Kendra Beazer of the Barbuda Council, which runs the internal

affairs of the island, part of Antigua and Barbuda.

The Category 5 storm in September 2017 was the worst ever recorded in Barbuda, crippling its infrastructure and damaging 90 percent of its buildings. Today, some islanders still live in tents. Besides moving crops to higher ground to escape storm surges, planters have switched to hardier root vegetables and fruits that are resilient to unpredictable rainfall. Smart greenhouses that are powered by clean energy and grow produce in a self-regulating, controlled micro-climate - rather than at the mercy of nature's whims - are also among methods tipped to boost food security, said Beazer.

In Jamaica, increasingly volatile weather patterns are manifested in erratic rainfall, higher temperatures and rampant wildfires, said Glenroy Brown of the island's Meteorological Service. Drought wiped out most of Joan Johnson's 18-acre plantain farm this year, and a bush fire took the rest. Where the crops that provided her income once thrived, little more than brittle, parched land remains.

'It's been rough'

"I've lost 2,000 plants since spring," she



ENFIELD, Jamaica: Farmer Joan Johnson plants a banana tree in Enfield, St Mary, Jamaica. After monster Hurricane Irma annihilated the farm sector of Barbuda in 2017, growers got smart: among other changes, they moved their crops to higher ground. —AFP

told AFP. "I live off this. It's been rough." Fellow farmer Conrad Williams knows how she feels. His holding a short drive away has also suffered from months without rain, wreaking havoc on his peppers and pump-

kins. Johnson and Williams are two of 5,000 Jamaican farmers taking part in a climate-smart agriculture program run by the Netherlands-based Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation. —AFP

Impeachment of a US president and how it works

WASHINGTON: The announcement Tuesday of a formal impeachment inquiry by the Democrats in the House of Representatives into President Donald Trump for abuse of power is a high-stakes gambit with uncertain consequences. Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic

speaker of the House, had shown little appetite for impeachment during the first three years of Trump's tumultuous presidency. But the political scandal over Trump's attempt to seek dirt from Ukraine on his potential 2020 Democratic presidential rival Joe Biden was the last straw for the top Democrat in the House.

Pelosi said the six House committees already investigating Trump on various grounds would proceed with their probes under the umbrella of an official impeachment inquiry. "The president must be held accountable," Pelosi said. "No one is above the law." More than 150 of the 235 Democratic members of the 435-seat House have shown support for impeachment or the

opening of an inquiry into removing the chief executive.

No House Republicans have come out in favor of impeachment and Republicans currently control the Senate, making conviction unlikely. Trump tweeted that impeachment was "presidential harassment" and "witch hunt garbage." No president has been ousted from office by impeachment, but even the threat can bring one down - Richard Nixon resigned in 1974 to avoid certain removal in the Watergate scandal. Two presidents beat the process: the House formally impeached Andrew Johnson in 1868 and Bill Clinton in 1998, but in both cases they were acquitted in the Senate. —AFP