

## International

## UK sleaze crisis: What's it all about?

## Dozens of other Tory MPs have second jobs

**LONDON:** British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's ruling Conservative party is facing a slew of sleaze allegations, largely centred on some of its lawmakers with lucrative second jobs. Johnson faced a barrage of questions about the claims on Wednesday, forcing him to deny that Britain and its political institutions were corrupt.

**What are the claims?**

UK MPs are permitted to hold second jobs, as long as they declare them, but are not allowed to use their parliamentary offices or resources for such work. Paid lobbying is also forbidden, with wrongdoing accusations probed by parliamentary standards watchdogs.

The current scandal erupted last week when Johnson tried—and failed—to overhaul how the watchdogs system operates after Owen Paterson faced suspension over lobbying ministers for two firms that had him on the payroll.

It soon emerged numerous other MPs had high-paying second jobs, in particular lawyer and former attorney general Geoffrey Cox. He has been accused of using his parliamentary office for outside legal work, which has netted him more than £6 million (\$8 million, 7 million euros) since becoming an MP in 2005, on top of his annual MP's salary—currently around £82,000. Cox denies breaking the rules.

**Who is involved?**

Dozens of other Tory MPs have second jobs collectively earning them more than £1.7 million this year alone, according to reports yesterday based on parliament's register of interests. They include Health Secretary Sajid Javid, who will have been paid £150,000 by the end of 2021 by the international investment bank JP Morgan.

Meanwhile Mark Pawsey made £30,000-a-year as chairman of a packaging lobby group. He was reported to have spoken in parliament on

multiple occasions in favour of watering down environmental laws to benefit plastic producers.

Former Conservative defence minister Philip Dunne has also been paid £51,000 by aerospace company Reaction Engines, while consistently asking questions in the House of Commons suggesting more defence spending.

The issue has also started to impact other political parties, with The Times reporting Labour leader Keir Starmer, a former chief prosecutor, has earned tens of thousands of pounds from legal work in recent years.

In addition to the furore around second jobs, a weekend report said the Conservatives have been “systematically” awarding seats in the unelected House of Lords, parliament's upper chamber which scrutinises legislation, to its high-value donors.

**What are the implications?**

The revelations have renewed scrutiny about MPs' potential conflicts of interest and evoked memories of a damaging scandal more than a decade ago over their expenses. That stoked intense public anger, prompted a string of resignations and is widely seen as contributing to a significant loss of trust in politicians preceding the 2016 anti-establishment Brexit vote.

The latest scandal has already led Owen Paterson to resign from parliament and heightened speculation that Cox and others in the firing line may follow suit. Parliamentary watchdogs are likely to probe Cox's case after Labour wrote to the independent standards commissioner, Kathryn Stone, demanding she investigate the alleged use of his MPs office for legal work.

An opposition MP has written to police asking officers to examine the Tory donations-for-pepages accusations. Meanwhile, calls are growing for more wholesale reform of standards rules, with Labour demanding paid directorships



**HEXHAM:** Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (L) speaks with Marion Dickson, Executive Director of Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professionals during a visit to Hexham General Hospital. Johnson faced pressure to appear before British lawmakers debating the standards system Monday, as days of sleaze and cronyism claims against his government intensified with new revelations. —AFP

and consultancy roles are outlawed.

Johnson does not favour an outright ban on all second jobs, because it would target lawmakers also working in health, education and other public service roles. But the British leader has said he is eager to see expected proposals from House of Commons Speaker Lindsey Hoyle, the current holder of the politically impartial post overseeing the chamber.

**What about Johnson?**

More than a week of damning headlines have cast Johnson's government in a dismal light just as he browbeats world powers to show moral leadership over climate change at the ongoing

COP26 summit in Glasgow. The 57-year-old Brexit architect is himself facing questions about who paid for his recent holidays to the Caribbean and Spain, as well as the expensive makeover of his Downing Street flat.

The results of several probes are expected soon. “All my declarations are in conformity with the rules,” Johnson insisted Wednesday to a question from AFP. But the past week has seen his poll ratings slump, with his personal ratings for trustworthiness and competence at record lows. Tory MPs are reportedly increasingly dissatisfied with their leader. “I can't recall a moment quite like this since he became leader,” one Tory lawmaker told the Politico website. —AFP

## Gulf states in joint naval exercise with Zionists

**MANAMA:** The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain are holding their first joint naval exercise with Zionists, a year after normalising ties with the Jewish state, the US Navy said yesterday. The five-day manoeuvres in the Red Sea, which is linked to the Mediterranean through the Suez Canal, are intended to “enhance interoperability between participating forces”, a statement said.

“It is exciting to see US forces training with regional partners to enhance our collective maritime security capabilities,” said Vice Admiral Brad Cooper, commander of US Naval Forces Central Command, or NAVCENT. “Maritime collaboration helps safeguard freedom of navigation and the free flow of trade, which are essential to regional security and stability.”

The exercises, which began on Wednesday, include boarding, search and seizure training on the USS Portland, an amphibious transport dock ship. It is the first publicly announced military cooperation by the UAE and Bahrain with the Zionist entity since they opened diplomatic relations in September last year.

The normalisation agreements, which also involved Morocco and Sudan, broke with decades of Arab consensus that there should be no diplomatic ties without a resolution to the Palestinian conflict. Zionist entity, UAE, Bahrain and the United States share concerns about Iran, which has previously been accused of orchestrating attacks on shipping in the region.

The Red Sea borders Yemen where a Saudi-led coalition has been fighting alongside government forces against Iran-backed rebels since 2015. It lies next to the Gulf of Aden, which saw a rash of attacks on shipping by Somali-based pirates in the first decade of the 21st century before patrols by navies from around the world largely halted them. —AFP

## Iran drones ‘splinters in eyes’ of enemies

**TEHRAN:** Iran's drones have become “splinters in the eyes” of its enemies, the aerospace commander of the country's Revolutionary Guards said yesterday. The US and Israel, the sworn enemies of Iran, accuse it of using drones and missiles to attack American forces and Israeli-linked ships in the Gulf to destabilise the region.

Tehran insists its military strategy is defensive, and has blasted Washington for tying talks on reviving the Iran nuclear deal to future negotiations on its missile programme. “Our enemies say we should negotiate on missiles... and our drones have become splinters in their eyes,” said Brigadier General Amirali Hajizadeh.

“If they insist on limiting the capabilities of our missiles and drones, it shows our strength,” he was quoted as saying on the Guards' Sepahnews

website. “We don't need to mention our strength because the enemy talks enough about Iran's missiles and defensive capabilities,” he added.

Hajizadeh was speaking on the sidelines of commemorations honouring general Hassan Tehrani Moghaddam, the architect of Iran's missile programme who was killed in a blast at a Guards' base near Tehran in November 2011. The US last month announced sanctions targeting Iran's drone programme, saying the Guards had supplied them to its allies in the Middle East, including Lebanon's Hezbollah, Yemen's Huthis and the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

In his comments yesterday, Hajizadeh said Zionist “threats” against Iran, especially against its nuclear facilities, were statements meant for “internal consumption”. “The Zionists can launch (an attack on Iran) but we will decide the outcome,” he said. Iran warned the Zionist state in October against “any military adventure” aimed at its nuclear programme, after Zionists said it reserves the right to use force against the Islamic republic. — AFP