

Johnson accused of cowardice as he dodges public scrutiny

Boris Johnson has been accused of "not having the guts to face the people" in the Conservative leadership race, coming under fire for dodging interviews and refusing to confirm his participation in a BBC debate with other candidates.

Johnson, the clear frontrunner with MPs and the Tory membership, was implicitly criticized by several of his rivals who said the race must put all the candidates under proper scrutiny, the Guardian reported.

The former foreign secretary is expected to launch his campaign today, when he faces some media questioning. However, he has refused to say whether he will appear on a televised hustings next Tuesday and has avoided broadcast interviews.

All 10 candidates have been invited to the BBC debate, with Michael Gove, Sajid Javid, Rory Stewart, Dominic Raab, Andrea Leadsom and Mark Harper having all confirmed to the Guardian that they would take part.

If Johnson takes questions at his campaign launch, he is likely to be asked about his admission of having taken cocaine at university, after the controversy over Gove's use of class-A drugs.

Johnson has done just one newspaper interview, with the Sunday Times, and no major broadcast interviews since the campaign began, and has only made paid corporate appearances in Manchester and Switzerland. His main policy announcements have been made through his Daily Telegraph columns, for which he is also paid.

Several of the other candidates appeared to criticize Johnson for apparently trying to get through the next few weeks of voting among MPs without too much scrutiny of his policies and views.

Harper, one of the outsiders, said all candidates must be open to public questioning and scrutiny, and that any other route would risk a similar situation to the 2017 general election, when Theresa May's campaign style stumbled.

"If you want to lead this country, you have to be prepared to set out your stall," he said.

"I think you have to open yourself up to questioning and be prepared to level with people and be questioned about it. We had a general election campaign two years ago and the prime minister demonstrated she was not as good at campaigning as we all thought she would be."

Hancock added, "I certainly think that everybody who puts their name forward to be prime minister should be open to



PETER SUMMERS/GETTY IMAGES

scrutiny, should be accountable.

"Everybody should participate in the proposed TV debates. And I think we've got to ask the question: why not? I've got nothing to hide and that's why I am here."

David Lammy, a Labor MP who supports the People's Vote campaign for a second referendum, criticized Johnson for wanting to "force a destructive no deal on our country, when he doesn't have the guts to face the people".

"His reluctance to appear in public or to answer questions about his dangerous Brexit proposals suggests he wants to win this contest by speaking only to the membership of the Conservative Party rather than the other 65 million people of the United Kingdom who will have to live [with] the consequences," Lammy said.

"Saying nothing, other than through a lucrative column in the Telegraph, is no way for a potential prime minister to conduct themselves. The country is crying out for leadership, not cowardice."

Johnson's strategy does not appear to have harmed his chances with MPs. He won several more high-profile backers on Tuesday, with the former contender Kit Malthouse and former leader Iain Duncan Smith both supporting him. He now has at least 65 MPs behind him, making it very likely he will make the shortlist of two candidates to be put to a vote of the

membership. The controversy came as Leadsom launched her campaign, insisting that parliament would be unable to block a no-deal Brexit and that the October 31 deadline was a "hard red line" for her.

Leadsom, who resigned as the leader of the Commons last month, claimed her plans for a "managed Brexit" would be likely to win over both MPs and the EU27 – but even if MPs objected, they would not be able to force the government to extend article 50.

While MPs forced May's hand in March to ask for an extension, Leadsom said, "I do not think that parliament actually has the ability to prevent us leaving at the end of October."

In contrast, Hancock refused to rule out extending Britain's membership of the EU beyond October, but insisted he could secure a time limit to the backstop from the EU that would pass parliament.

The health secretary said his rival candidates who had pledged to leave – deal or no deal – by October 31 were making false promises because parliament would block any no-deal departure.

He said the outcome would be a general election, which would be a "catastrophe for my party and extremely damaging for the country."

Hancock claimed his plan for renegotiation was detailed, "unlike some of the

other candidates", and would involve first putting a deal to parliament that included a backstop with a time limit, to prove to the EU27 that it could pass. He would then restart the negotiations.

The backstop is a device intended to ensure there will not be a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, even if no formal deal can be reached on trade and security arrangements.

Hancock told BBC Radio 4's Today program his plan had the support of David Lidington, the de facto deputy prime minister, and that Brussels was open to the change.

"It is eminently deliverable by October 31. Once you have a majority in the House of Commons things can move quickly," he said.

All the leadership candidates will take part in private hustings before the vote, with the first round taking place on Tuesday night.

Defending Johnson, the former defense secretary Michael Fallon said he hoped the contest would not focus on personalities.

"There's a wide range of candidates but I hope we can agree to leave some of the personal stuff out of this ... in the end we have all got to rally round, support the new prime minister, bring the party together again."

More bodies found as Hungary lifts sunken tourist boat from river

Hungarian police recovered more bodies on Tuesday after raising a sightseeing boat that sank in the River Danube in Budapest last month, an accident that has claimed at least 24 lives.

Police removed four bodies from the Mermaid tourist boat, AFP reported.

Another four people are still missing some two weeks after the tragedy, the worst such incident in Hungary in 75 years.

The operation to lift the vessel out of the river onto a waiting barge began at around 6:00 a.m. (0400 GMT) and took more than six hours to complete.

Several dozen rescue workers took part in the operation, including members of a diving team sent from South Korea.



ATTILA KISBENEDEK/AFP

The Mermaid was carrying mostly South Korean holiday-makers when it capsized and sank on the evening of May 29, seconds after colliding with a bigger river cruise boat on a busy stretch of the river.

Those on board included a six-year-old girl travelling with her mother and grandparents, and the Mermaid's Hungarian captain.

Early on in the operation, divers removed four bodies from the vessel.

"It is presumed that the only child victim and the captain are two of the four victims recovered today," a police spokesman Kristof Gal told reporters later.

"The identification process is still ongoing," said Gal. Only seven of the 35 people on board are known to have survived the accident, with the prospect of finding any more passengers alive considered to be practically zero.

The Mermaid will be transported to a dock in southern Budapest later Tuesday, said police.

"Four people are still missing, and while it is still possible that further bodies will be found on the boat on later examination, the forces deployed in the search operation of the southern sections of the Danube have been doubled," Gal told AFP.

Several of the victims found before Tuesday were discovered along the Danube, dozens of kilometers south of the Hungarian capital.

Strong river currents

Since the accident, divers had been unable to enter the submerged boat due to the strong current in the river, which is swollen from weeks of rain.

The salvage crew instead focused on fixing wire harnesses underneath the vessel to prepare it for hoisting by a powerful crane mounted on a barge.

Hungarian police, who led the team of divers and experts, initially estimated the lifting would take around six hours, but work was delayed several times.

Temperatures soaring above 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit) and strong river currents slowed the divers' work, while an extra wire rope was needed to support the damaged part of the Mermaid after it surfaced.

"This rescue operation was greatly taxing physically and mentally," Peter Kolozsi, a spokesperson for emergency services members of the salvage team, told a Hungarian public media news program.

During the operation, divers periodically entered the vessel to search for bodies of any victims still inside.

At one point, a member of the rescue crew fell into the fast-flowing water and had to be rescued after almost being swept away.

On Monday the river cruise boat, the Viking Sigyn, was again searched by Hungarian police who have launched a criminal probe into the cause of the accident.

After the incident, the boat had travelled on to Germany before returning to Hungary according to its schedule.

The investigation, at a river port in Visegrad 50 kilometers (30 miles) north of Budapest, was to "acquire more evidence... and to gain wider context of the accident," said Gal.

Its 64-year-old Ukrainian captain was arrested by Hungarian police days after the incident on suspicion of "endangering waterborne traffic resulting in multiple deaths".

According to Hungary's association of passenger shipping companies, the sinking of the Mermaid is the first such accident to cause mass fatalities in Hungary for 75 years.

For many in South Korea the tragedy has brought back memories of the 2014 Sewol ferry sinking, which claimed more than 300 lives in one of the deadliest maritime disasters in the country.

The Mermaid accident happened on a popular part of the Danube River for pleasure trips, from where passengers can view the city and parliament building illuminated at night.

Dozens of small sightseeing boats ply the river through Budapest every day.

Larger river cruise boats travelling on the Danube between Germany and the Black Sea typically spend several days moored in the capital.

US submits extradition request for WikiLeaks founder Assange

The United States government formally submitted an extradition request to the United Kingdom for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, according to a US official.

Assange faces an 18-count indictment that accuses him of soliciting and publishing classified information and of conspiring with former Army private Chelsea Manning to crack a Defense Department computer password, The Associated Press reported.

The 47-year-old Assange was evicted on April 11 from the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, where he had been holed up since 2012 after Ecuador granted him political asylum. He was arrested by British police and is currently serving a 50-week sentence for jumping bail in 2012.

Sweden also seeks him for questioning about an alleged rape, which Assange has denied.

The US official spoke on condition of anonymity because the official wasn't authorized to speak publicly.

Trump promises more 'to be revealed' in US-Mexico deal

U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday stood by his comments that part of the migrant deal with Mexico announced over the weekend had yet to be made public, even after Mexican officials unveiled new details of the agreement.

"Biggest part of deal with Mexico has not yet been revealed!" Trump tweeted without giving further details, Reuters reported. Representatives for the White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Trump's statement.

On Monday, Trump also said Mexico would soon disclose part of the agreement with no details other than saying that portion would have to be taken up by the Mexican Congress.

Announcing previously undisclosed details of Friday's deal, Mexican officials said on Monday they had 45 days to show that increased enforcement efforts were effective in reducing flows of migrants. If not,

they would have to talk with the United States about additional measures.

The United States wants Mexico to be declared a safe third country in which asylum seekers would have to seek safe harbor instead of the United States, a demand Mexico had long rejected.

Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard dropped his previous opposition to that idea in comments on Monday, but said

any such arrangement should share the asylum load with other Latin American countries.

He said these measures would have to be taken up with the Mexican Senate. "If we don't have results on what we're doing (in 45 days), we'll start conversations on what they want," Ebrard said.

The deal struck on Friday averted import tariffs on all Mexican goods, which Trump had vowed to impose unless Mexico did more to curb migration.



REUTERS