Vote raises hopes and fears in N. Ireland

For the first time, the election returned more Irish republican than unionist lawmakers to Parliament

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's crushing election victory gives Britain a chance to move past years of gridlock over Brexit - especially in Northern Ireland, where social and political divides run deep. "We're leaving limbo," said Orlaith McKeever, preparing food for the lunchtime rush at St. George's Market in Belfast, a redbrick rabbits' warren of stalls and

Thursday's snap general became a re-run of the 2016 EU membership referendum in which Mr. Johnson championed the Brexit cause. He ran this campaign on the promise to "get Brexit done" - a simple but effective message with profound implications for Britain's most politically volatile region.

Constitutional change? Northern Ireland voted by 56% to remain in the EU in 2016. Since then, it has become central to a Brexit deal with Brussels. Unease spread about the prospect of a nodeal Brexit and the re-emer-

gence of a hard border with

EU neighbour Ireland to the

south. Border checks are as-



Pro-Brexit demonstrators outside Downing Street in London on Friday. • NYT

sociated with three decades of sectarian violence over British rule of Northern Ireland that left some 3,500 people dead. The potential removal of an open border - a plank of the 1998 agreement that ended "The Troubles" has been seen as an unwelcome return to the past.

It also reopened the issue of Northern Ireland's place in the U.K. with England. Scotland and Wales, and the potential of a united Ireland.

For the first time, the election returned more Irish republican than British unionist lawmakers to the U.K. House of Commons.

The largest republican party Sinn Fein even took the seat of North Belfast from unionist hands for the first time since it was drawn up in 1885. Sinn Fein leader Mary Lou

McDonald called it a "historic moment". "The discussion constitutional around change is now under way." "It's safe to say that Irish unity will be firmly on the agenda in a way that it has never been before," said Queen's University Belfast politics

lecturer Jamie Pow. But he said the combined republican vote share from Thursday "still amounts to a minority". Those describing themselves as neither republican nor unionist will be key in any vote. They would likely be swayed by changes in economic or political circumstance, including those Brexit is forecast to bring.

On a wider scale, the DUP's loss of influence in London could help kick-start talks for the resumption of the devolved legislative assembly in Belfast. The Assembly has not functioned since January 2017 after the power-sharing executive between the DUP and Sinn Fein collapsed over a mismanaged heating scheme.

'Scots want to have the right to choose'

REUTERS

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson needs to "focus on reality" and recognise that the Scottish National Party (SNP) has been given a mandate for a second independence referendum, Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said on Saturday.

The SNP won 48 of Scotland's 59 seats in the U.K. Parliament in Thursday's national election, prompting Ms. Sturgeon to step up her demands for another independence referendum. However, Mr. Johnson told Ms. Sturgeon by phone on Friday that he opposed another independence vote.

"Scotland very clearly wants a different future to the one that's been chosen by much of the rest of the U.K., and Scotland wants to have the right to choose its own future," Ms. Sturgeon said on Saturday.

I will repay your trust, Johnson tells former Labour voters

PM visits erstwhile Labour strongholds in northern England

REUTERS

Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited former strongholds of his Labour opponents in northern England on Saturday and pledged to repay their trust for helping to deliver a stunning victory for his Conservative Party in Britain's national election.

The election saw the crumbling of Labour's "Red Wall" of formerly safe seats in working class areas across northern and central England where most people voted in a 2016 referendum to leave the European Union (EU). Mr. Johnson, the face of the "Leave" campaign in that referendum, fought the election on the slogan "Get Brexit done".

"I know that people may have been breaking the voting habits of generations to vote for us," Mr. Johnson told supporters in Sedgefield, a symbolically important seat as it was once held by former Prime Minister Tony Blair. "I want the people of the north-east to know that we in the Conservative Party, and I, will repay your trust."



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaking to supporters on a visit to Sedgefield on Saturday. • REUTERS

Brexit was widely seen as the decisive factor in the election, with Mr. Johnson's promise to take Britain out of the EU by January 31, 2020, winning over many former Labour voters.

"What an incredible thing you have done, you have changed the political landscape, you've changed the Conservative Party for the better and you've changed the future of our country for the better," said Mr. Johnson. "First of all, what are we going to do to repay that trust? We are going to get Brexit done," he asserted.

Mr. Johnson, who called the snap election to break years of deadlock in Parliament over Brexit, has also promised to spend more money on health, education and the police.

Meanwhile, Labour's finance spokesman John McDonnell will not be in his party's next shadow Cabinet.

"The new leader will come in place, appoint the shadow cabinet, I won't be part of that shadow cabinet, I've done my bit," Mr. McDonnell told BBC television. "We need to move on at that stage with that new leader.'

North Korea conducts test at satellite site

REUTERS

North Korea said it had successfully conducted another test at a satellite launch site on Friday to bolster its strategic nuclear deterrence, North Korean state media outlet KCNA reported on Saturday.

The test was conducted at the Sohae satellite launch site, KCNA said, citing a spokesman for North Korea's Academy of Defence Science, without specifying what sort of testing occurred. It was the second such test at the facility in a week.

KCNA on Sunday said that North Korea had carried out a "very important" test on December 7 at the Sohae satellite launch site, a rocket-testing facility that U.S. officials once said North Korea had promised to close. That KCNA report called the December 7 event a "successful test of great significance". South Korea's Defence minister Jeong Keong-doo said it was an engine test.

The reported tests come ahead of a year-end deadline North Korea has put forth for the U.S. to drop its insistence on unilateral denuclearisation.

Pyongyang has warned it could take a "new path" amid the stalled talks with the United States.

Sudan leader Bashir gets 2 years in corruption case

Former President convicted for receiving \$25 million from Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Sudan's former President Omar al-Bashir was sentenced on Saturday to two years' detention in a correctional centre for corruption in the first of several cases against him. The charges stemmed from millions of dollars received by him from Saudi Arabia. Mr. Bashir, who was de-

posed by the army in April after months of mass protests against his three-decade rule, appeared in court in a metal enclosure wearing a traditional white ialabiva and turban for the verdict. He was convicted of "corruption" and "possession of foreign currency", judge Al Sadiq Abdelrahman said, charges which can carry a prison sentence of up to 10



Sudan's ex-President Omar al-Bashir sitting in an enclosure during the hearing in Khartoum on Saturday. • REUTERS

years. Instead, the court, taking into account his age, ordered the 75-year-old to serve two years in a correctional centre for the elderly.

Second case Mr. Bashir will serve his sentence after the verdict has been reached in another case in which he is accused of ordering the killing of demonstrators during the protests that led to his ouster, the judge said. The court also ordered the confiscation of 5.7 million Sudanese pounds (\$1,28,000) found at Mr.

Bashir's home. The ex-President will appeal the verdict, said one of his lawyers, Ahmed Ibrahim. Sudan is now ruled by a

joint civilian and military sovereign council, which is tasked with overseeing a transition to civilian rule.

Mr. Bashir admitted to having received a total of \$90 million from Saudi leaders and the trial centred on the \$25 million received from Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Mr. Bashir said the money seized from his home came out of the \$25 million. The funds, he said, formed part of Sudan's strategic relations with Saudi Arabia and were "not used for private interests but

as donations". The trial does not relate to charges Mr. Bashir faces at the International Criminal Court (ICC) for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Mr. Bashir has been wanted by the ICC for years for his role in the Darfur war that broke out in 2003, when ethnic minority rebels took up arms against his Arabdominated which they accused of marginalising the region.

The Darfur conflict left around 3,00,000 people dead and 2.5 million displaced, according to the UN.

Sudan's umbrella protest movement, which now has significant representation on a sovereign council that in August became the country's highest executive authority - recently said it has no objection to his extradition.

among Britain's Muslims' U.K. Muslim body expresses concern PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

'Palpable sense of fear

LONDON

A prominent British-Muslim organisation issued a statement expressing a "palpable sense of fear" within the Muslim community in the U.K. following Prime Minister Boris Johnson's massive victory in the country's general election. Muslim Council of Britain

(MCB), which has been calling for a full-fledged inquiry into anti-Muslim conduct within the Conservative Party, used one of the key slogans from the election campaign to express fears that the strong majority in the House of Commons could mean that, like Brexit, Islamophobia is also "oven-ready" for the new govern-Johnson commands a majority, but there is a palpable sense of fear amongst Muslim communities around the country," said MCB secretarygeneral Harun Khan in a statement on Friday.

He said: "We entered the election campaign period with long-standing concerns about bigotry in our politics and our governing party. Now we worry that Islamophobia is 'oven-ready' for government... Mr Johnson has been entrusted with huge power, and we pray it is exercised responsibly for



Harun Khan, who heads Muslim Council of Britain.

Describing the 2019 general election campaign as being the most "divisive in living memory", the group called on Mr. Johnson and his team to work towards national unity. The MCB's statement came as the former Conservative Party chair, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, re newed her call for an independent inquiry into Islamophobia. "My party must start healing its relationship with British Muslims," she tweeted. "Independent Inquiry into Islamophobia is a must first step. The battle to root out racism must now intensify," she said.

On the campaign trail, Mr. Johnson was forced to formally apologise for any "hurt and offence" as he was confronted on the issue of Islamophobia and his own perceived anti-Muslim statements in newspaper columns in the past.

House panel approves impeachment charges

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump stood on the verge of impeachment on Friday after a House panel approved charges he abused his power and obstructed Congress, setting up a historic vote in the chamber next week.

In a grave moment for a deeply divided nation, members of the Judiciary

Committee voted along party lines to approve two articles of impeachment against the President.

The panel recommended by 23 votes to 17 that the Democratic-led House ratify both articles, ahead of a vote by the entire chamber that is expected to make Mr. Trump only the third U.S. President in history to be

Hong Kong leader Lam visits Beijing

REUTERS

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam visited Beijing on Saturday for her first trip to the Chinese capital since her government was handed a crushing defeat in local elections last month, prompting speculation about changes to her leadership team.

During a four-day visit, Ms. Lam is due to discuss the political and economic situation in China-ruled Hong Kong with Chinese officials. She will meet Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday.

Protests on for 6 months Hong Kong has been convulsed by daily and sometimes violent protests for the last six months as demonstrations against a now-withdrawn extradition Bill broadened into demands for greater democratic freedom.

Hundreds of thousands of people marched last Sunday

to protest against what is seen as Beijing undermining freedoms guaranteed when the former British colony was handed back to China in

"Our sincerity to have dialogue with citizens has not changed," Ms. Lam said in a Facebook post on Saturday. She said her governing team would continue to pursue "different formats of dialogue to listen to citizens

SUDOKU

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2			9		1					
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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆										

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

8	7	6	4	1	2	5	9	3
1	3	4	5	7	9	2	6	8
5	2	9	6	8	3	4	1	7
	6							
2	8	7	1	4	5	6	3	9
9	5	1	2	3	6	8	7	4
6	4	2	9	5	7	3	8	1
3	9	5	8	6	1	7	4	2
7	1	8	3	2	4	9	5	6

Ami Bera to chair key sub-committee on Asia

It also has jurisdiction over India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA WASHINGTON

Congressman Ami Bera, the longest-serving American lawmaker, has been named the chairman of a key Congressional subcommittee that has jurisdiction over India Mr. Bera, a four-time De-

mocratic Congressman from California, replaces Brad Sherman as the chairman of the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and Nonproliferation. "I am honoured to chair the subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and Nonproliferation. Asia is one of the most important and consequential regions of the world and the United States has deep and enduring ties to the continent," Mr. Bera said in a statement.

As the Chair, he said he will work to ensure that the U.S. is utilising all of its political, military, cultural and economic tools to support



Four-time Indian-American lawmaker Ami Bera.

American interests, and maintain and enhance the U.S. commitments in Asia and the Pacific. He said he looked for-

ward to working with Ranking Member Ted Yoho and his colleagues on the subcommittee to ensure a sustained U.S. strategy that would help foster a more stable, free and open Asia. Mr. Bera also serves as the Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Korea and previously chaired the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans.

New Zealand police identify volcanic eruption victim

Australian Krystal Browitt was on a family holiday

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE WELLINGTON

Divers searched seas around New Zealand's volatile White Island on Saturday for two people still missing five days after the volcano erupted, while police formally named the first victim.

Police deputy commissioner John Tims said the divers faced "unique and challenging conditions" as they searched waters "with between zero and two metres visibility". They were focusing on an area where a body was seen floating in the water earlier in the week.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, meanwhile, has called for a minute's silence to be observed at 2.11 p.m. (0111 GMT) on Monday in honour of the victims of the eruption. "Together we can express our sorrow for those who have died and been hurt, and our support for their grieving families and



Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern at a prayer meeting in Whakatane. ■ REUTERS

friends," Ms. Ardern said, with the minute's silence to start exactly one week after the eruption began. Of the 47 people on the is-

land at the time of the eruption, at least 16 were killed while 28 remain in hospitals in New Zealand and Australia with 21 listed as being in a "critical" condition.

Scientists monitoring the island said the likelihood of another eruption over the weekend was decreasing but the risk remained. "Their new calculation was that there is a 35-50 per percent chance of an eruption occurring," Natalia Deligne, a volcanic hazard and risk modeller, said. New Zealand police on Sa-

turday officially identified the first victim as Australian woman Krystal Browitt. Ms. Browitt, 21, was on a family holiday to celebrate her birthday in New Zealand when she joined her older sister Stephanie and father Paul on a visit to the island.

Her mother Marie stayed behind on the boat, and has since been by the bedside of her daughter and husband who were both originally in a coma in a hospital burns unit following the eruption, according to a GoFundMe page set up for the family.

All 13 Australians hospitalised have been repatriated. The current condition of Stephanie and Paul is unknown.

ELSEWHERE



Mahathir could stay as PM beyond 2020

Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. 94, again raised the prospect on Saturday that he could stay in office beyond 2020, declining to give a definitive pledge to step down. Anwar Ibrahim, seen as the likely successor to Mr. Mohamad, has previously said that he expects to take office by May

Nine killed in 'insider attack' on Afghan militia

2020. REUTERS

At least one member of an Afghan militia opened fire on his fellow militiamen early Saturday, killing nine, in what the country's Interior Ministry called an insider attack. The Taliban, however, claimed the attack was actually a coordinated insurgent assault on the checkpoint where the shooting took place. AP