



Politics latest news: Nicola Sturgeon slaps down Boris Johnson for using Covid-19 as 'campaign tool'

Catherine Neilan, POLITICS LIVE EDITOR

23 July 2020 • 5:17pm



Coronavirus latest news: Masks must be worn in shops, cafes and banks - but not hairdressers, cinemas or concert halls

'Boris Bridge' linking Scotland to Northern Ireland could be as essential as M25, says minister

UK is making post-Brexit trade deal 'unlikely', Michel Barnier warns

Don't worry about UK-EU talks collapsing, we'll strike a better deal in a few years

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Nicola Sturgeon has told Boris Johnson he should not “crow” about the union’s success in tackling coronavirus, saying: “It’s not politics”.

The Prime Minister is in Scotland today, to champion the “might” of the union, and ruling out a second referendum as support for independence grows.

Boris Johnson said the crisis had shown how the UK was “working together with money for supporting people through furlough, the Army working on the testing, moving people around”.

Although the pair aren’t meeting, his trip has clearly ruffled feathers within the SNP, with the First Minister using her press conference to call him out.

“I don’t think any of us should be trying to use Covid, the pandemic and the crisis situation we are facing... As some kind of political campaigning tool.

“This is a pandemic that has taken the lives of more than 50, 000 people across the UK,” she added. “We have all tried to do our best but I don’t think any of us have grounds to crow or feel satisfied about this. It’s not politics, it’s not a constitutional argument.”

Ms Sturgeon added: "Do I think there are things the UK Government could learn from Scotland? Yes I do. An approach that is very much driven by elimination I think is one thing they could learn.

"I would encourage the UK Government to do that because I think that would help all of the countries of the UK to drive the infection to the lowest possible level and put us into the strongest position going into winter."

5:17PM

UK accuses Russia of launching weapon-like projectile

The UK has accused Russia of launching a "projectile with the characteristics of a weapon" during a satellite test.

It is the first time the UK has called out Russia for this sort of activity, which Air Vice-Marshall Harvey Smyth said "threatens the peaceful use of space".

Air Vice-Marshall Smyth, the head of the UK's space directorate, added: "We call on Russia to avoid any further such testing.

"We also urge Russia to continue to work constructively with the UK and other partners to encourage responsible behaviour in space."

5:07PM

Boris Johnson lands at RAF base

Boris Johnson has arrived at an RAF base in Moray after spending time in Orkney on his one-day visit to Scotland.

His visit to RAF Lossiemouth coincides with a £100m home for submarine hunter planes at the base being handed over from Boeing to the Ministry of Defence.



Boris Johnson looks at a Typhoon fighter jet Credit: PA

4:55PM

Watch again: EU must 'internalise and accept' that UK is independent state, says Brexit negotiator David Frost

David Frost struck a cautiously upbeat note about the prospect of a Brexit deal this side of Christmas - but he said it could only happen if the EU accepted that the UK is now an independent state.

Watch what he had to say again



4:35PM

Watch: Boris Johnson's turbulent and unforgettable first year in office

We'll be making a splash over Boris Johnson's first anniversary tomorrow, looking back at the highs and lows of his time at Number 10 so far.

But ahead of that here's something we made earlier.



4:24PM

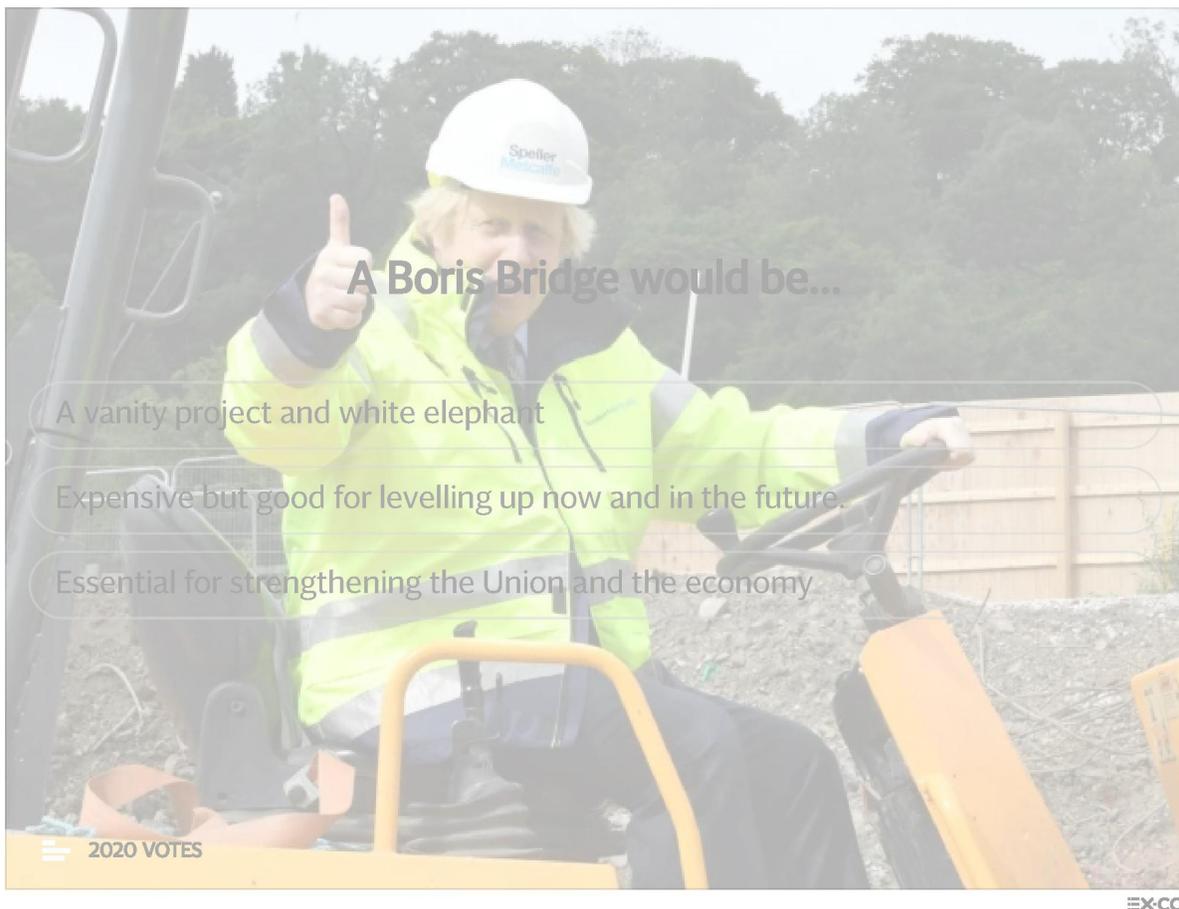
Have your say on: the Boris Bridge

We are expecting to hear from the Prime Minister this evening, where he might be asked about plans for the bridge linking Scotland with Northern Ireland.

Cabinet minister Brandon Lewis seemed very enthusiastic about it this morning, comparing it to the M25, which once seemed a controversial piece of infrastructure but "no one can imagine life without it around London now".

Do you think the bridge could become that vital? Or is it destined to become a white elephant?

Have your say in the poll below.



4:14PM

Liz Truss refuses to discuss leaked border letter

Liz Truss has been challenged over her letter, which warned that Boris Johnson's Brexit border plans could result in smuggling and the breaking of international rules in a leaked letter.

The International Trade Secretary's letter to Cabinet ministers, which warned that the new regime risks the UK's international credibility, and was leaked to Business Insider earlier this month.

But Ms Truss refused to answer the questions put to her by Lord Kerr, saying: "I am not going to respond to issues that arise from a leaked document."

Challenged about the substance of the letter, she added: "I am very confident we have robust plans in place at the border."

3:57PM

Labour urges Government not to 'waiver' as China moves to block Hong Kong offer

I'm just going to break away from Liz Truss' evidence as Labour has responded to the news that China has moved to block the UK's offer of citizenship to Hong Kong residents, suggesting it will not recognise their passports as valid documents.

Lisa Nandy, the shadow foreign secretary, said this move reinforces the need "to coordinate a global response to China's erosion of the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong" as well as Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang.

She urged the Government not to "waiver in its commitment to Hong Kong", saying her counterpart Dominic Raab must seek a guarantee from China that citizens' travel will "not be restricted on illegitimate grounds".

She added: "The Foreign Secretary must summon the Chinese Ambassador without delay to reiterate the UK's commitment to the people of Hong Kong and demand assurances that the validity of British passports will be upheld."

Earlier today a spokesman for China's foreign ministry said the UK's visa offer to BNO-passport holders meant its "previous assurances are no longer valid" and accused it of "politically manipulating" the issue.

"It has broken its promises and violated international law and basic norms," the spokesman said, adding: "So China will consider not recognising BNO as a valid travel document."

3:46PM

UK would back off US trade deal if gin levies are imposed, says Liz Truss

The UK may walk away from trade talks with the US if tariffs are imposed on gin, Liz Truss has hinted.

Last month the US threatened new trade tariffs on beer, chocolate, gin and olives from the EU as part of a long-running row over subsidies to plane manufacturer Airbus. The US has already imposed tariffs on products including Scotch whisky.

The Trade Secretary told peers that if tariffs were imposed on gin this would be "hugely detrimental to our negotiations and I think the British public would lose support for negotiations to continue were there to be additional tariffs levied".

She said that while this was not part of the main set of trade talks there was a "separate track" of conversations with her counterpart Robert Lighthizer "to get tariffs removed". She told the peers she would present the US trade representative with a bottle of gin to show "what the Americans could be missing out on" if tariffs are imposed.

"It is a very frustrating situation for an industry that has absolutely nothing to do with original dispute," she added.

The Cabinet minister told a House of Lords committee: "We are certainly not going to accept the US hitting British industries like gin with additional tariffs... No-one is more outraged than me about these retaliatory tariffs and I have been speaking to affected businesses this week and I share their concerns and frustrations.

"These tariffs are completely unnecessary and they harm industry on both sides of the Atlantic.

3:39PM

Farming industry 'very closely involved' in trade talks, says Liz Truss

Liz Truss has insisted the UK will not undermine food standards as part of any future trade deal, telling peers the UK's farming industry is "very closely involved" in talks.

The International Trade Secretary said she was looking at detailed economic analysis, scenario planning and price levels with other countries.

"We are pursuing these trade deals because we want to benefit British businesses," she added. "Otherwise there isn't the justification for doing these trade deals."

Ms Truss said she was "doing a lot of work to make sure the farming industry is very closely involved in our negotiations, but it does require confidentiality" with those representative groups involved having to sign NDAs.

Asked how they could consult with members in that scenario, Ms Truss said there can be "general discussions about the terms" but not specifics such as tariffs or analysis on certain products "giving our interlocutors information".

3:33PM

Liz Truss shrugs off suggestion EU trade deal must come before US and Japan

Liz Truss has shrugged off suggestions that a trade deal must be agreed with the EU before anything can be struck with the US and Japan trade deals.

That is "not the view" our negotiating partners take, she says. They can be negotiated in parallel with EU talks.

The Trade Secretary points to the Canada-style deal the UK is seeking as showing it is "perfectly possible" to agree a good deal with all partners.

3:30PM

Liz Truss: Deadline for trade deals 'dangerous' because it can be used against us

Liz Truss has said she will not put a deadline on agreeing a trade deal with the US or Japan, despite the UK "falling out" of the EU's deal scope.

The International Trade Secretary said it was "very deliberate" that the UK had not made a timeline public because it could be "used against us".

"It is dangerous to make a prediction because I don't want our interlocutors to use it against us," she added.

We "don't want to sacrifice quality for speed", Ms Truss told peers of the EU International Agreement Sub-Committee.

It hasn't been "the most auspicious" start, she notes, given the pandemic, but we are "progressing as fast as we can".

3:09PM

Parents warned not to buy face masks for young children

Public Health England (PHE) has warned parents not to buy face coverings for babies and young children due to the risk of choking and suffocation.

It made the move after becoming aware that masks and coverings are being sold in shops and online aimed at youngsters.

Professor Viv Bennett, chief nurse at the agency, said: "PHE has been made aware that face coverings for babies and very young children are available for sale in England.

"Guidance is clear that children under the age of three years should not wear face coverings or masks.

"These masks should not be used as they are potentially dangerous and can cause choking and suffocation.

"If you or your child is unwell with the symptoms of Covid-19, then you should get a test and stay at home until you get the result.

2:47PM

Face mask legislation clears Pret-a-Manger confusion

Face coverings must be worn in shops, supermarkets, indoor shopping centres and transport hubs - such as train stations and airports - in England from Friday, under new legislation laid today.

After several days' confusion with ministers giving mixed messages, the new law makes it clear it is compulsory to wear a face covering when buying food and drink to takeaway from cafes and shops. If you are in a premises where you are able to sit down and consume food or drink that you have bought, then you can remove your face covering in order to eat and drink on site.

Face coverings will not be mandatory for anyone under the age of 11, those with disabilities or certain health conditions, such as respiratory or cognitive impairments that make it difficult for them to wear a face covering.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said: "Everyone must play their part in fighting this virus by following this new guidance. I also want to thank the British public for all the sacrifices they are making to help keep this country safe."

As well as shops and supermarkets, face coverings must be worn in banks, building societies and post offices. However they are not mandatory in eat-in restaurants and pubs, hairdressers and other treatment salons gyms and leisure centres, cinemas, concert halls and theatres.



2:42PM

City Hall rejects Shaun Bailey's claim about high-paid TfL execs

I've finally been sent a response from City Hall, following Shaun Bailey's comments regarding the Mayor of London this morning (10:11am).

Mr Bailey, who is campaigning as the Conservative candidate for mayor, has written to the Transport Select Committee claiming that Sadiq Khan gave the wrong figures during his appearance yesterday, saying this was either "ignorance" or misleading MPs.

City Hall rejects Mr Bailey's claim that the number of people on salaries of more than £100,000 has risen during Mr Khan's tenure.

A spokesperson for the Mayor of London said: "Sadiq has frozen the salaries of top TfL executives for the duration of his Mayoral term, and has reduced the number of senior managers earning salaries over £100k.

"Sadiq has himself committed to taking a 10 per cent pay cut - and to freeze the salaries of his 15 direct appointments. This is on top of the 11 per cent saving to taxpayers arising from the Mayor's decision in 2016 not to take a pension, unlike previous Mayors."

2:24PM

Further 19 coronavirus deaths in England, as three regions are fatality-free

A further 19 people who tested positive for coronavirus have died in English hospitals - but there have been zero deaths in London and two other regions yet again.

The total number of confirmed reported deaths in hospitals in England to 29,231, NHS England said.

Patients were aged between 35 and 89 years old. All had known underlying health conditions.

As well as London, no deaths were recorded in the East of England and the South West. However there were two deaths recorded in the Midlands, four in North East & Yorkshire, five in the North West and eight in the South East.

2:04PM

Almost nine in 10 Britons say face masks essential or important in public places

Almost nine in 10 (86 per cent) Britons say it is either essential or important for people to wear a face mask when shopping or using public transport, a new survey has found.

More than 1 in 3 (37 per cent) of respondents to an Ipsos Mori survey say it is essential. Just 1 in 10 say it is not important.

One in four (25 per cent) say that having rules in place making it mandatory to wear a mask while visiting shops will make them more likely to go shopping, while 21 per cent say less likely and half (51 per cent) say it will make no difference.

1:47PM

Government figures play down decision to stick with Brexit talks

Figures from within Government have sought to play down the fact that the UK has not walked away from talks at this stage, despite having previously threatened to do so if sufficient progress had not been made.

A senior UK Government official involved in the EU-UK trade talks said: "We've always said there is no cut-off date other than in the sense we will have to allow time to ratify and prepare texts, working through the process and so on.

"What we have said is when the process stops being useful and it is clear we are not going to reach an agreement, that is the point when we don't need to keep talking any longer.

"We are not at that point at the moment. We have stuff to talk about and we are moving forward in lots of areas.

"The sooner the better (for reaching an agreement) from our point of view, is all I have to say."

1:46PM

Fisheries deal hinges on EU acceptance of UK control: Govt sources

A deal on fisheries is unlikely unless the European Union accepts that the UK will control who can fish in British waters after the transition period, according to a source.

A senior UK Government official involved in the talks told reporters: "What we have said is that we need to capture the value of the fish which are in our waters.

"The PM went on to say that there needs to be a huge change in the current situation.

"At the end of the year, we will have the right to control the economic exploitation of our EZ - ie our fishing grounds - and we will set the terms on which that is done.

"That doesn't necessarily require the exclusion of EU trawlers from our waters, what it means is an agreed abatement in which we have the right to control access to that zone and that is what at the moment they find difficult to accept.

"Until they do, it is going to be difficult to get to a fisheries agreement."

1:44PM

Sound familiar? Brexit talks to intensify in summer, sources say

Brexit trade talks will intensify over the summer between the UK and EU, according to Government sources.

A senior UK Government official involved in the talks said the "only way forward now is to have a textual negotiation to get into the detail", which is scheduled to happen in August and September.

Formal talks are "pre-programmed in" for the week of August 17 and fringe discussions will continue next week.

"I'm sure we will be talking pretty intensely over the second half of August and through to September and see where we get to," the source continued.

"Now that the EU's financial negotiation is wrapped up, they should be able to pay their full attention and I still believe it is a real possibility we could get agreement in September."

Issues over the level playing field, fisheries and a mechanism for resolving trade disputes remain outstanding, the source confirmed.

1:43PM

Lobby latest: Public not expected to report those breaking face mask rule
Downing Street said it did not expect members of the public to report those who were not wearing masks in shops from Friday due to voluntary take-up of the policy.

The Prime Minister's official spokesman told reporters: "You've seen over the course of recent months the British public have voluntarily chosen to follow the guidance because they want to help slow the spread of the virus and I'm sure that will be the case with face coverings as well.

"With shops, we would expect them to give advice to customers and remind them that they should be wearing a face covering and I'm sure the overwhelming majority of the public will do so."

Those not wearing their masks properly over both mouth and nose will be "advised as to the right and safest way to wear a face mask" rather than be immediately fined up to £100 for non-compliance, said the Number 10 spokesman.

"That would be the sensible approach," he said.

1:42PM

Watch again: Michel Barnier claims UK is 'making Brexit trade deal unlikely'
Michel Barnier claimed that the UK is "making Brexit trade deal unlikely" - watch what the EU's chief negotiator had to say again in the video below.



1:14PM

EU must 'internalise and accept' that UK is independent state, says David Frost

Until the EU has "internalised and accepted" that the UK is an independent state a trade deal will be "difficult", David Frost has said.

Giving an interview after his counterpart gave a press conference, the UK's chief negotiator said the team would work "energetically" to get a deal but it was possible that one would not be reached.

Some progress had been reached around the role of the ECJ and the structure of a future agreement, he noted.

But the outstanding issues such as the level-playing field and fisheries were "intrinsic to our future as and independent state", Mr Frost said.

"The EU has heard some of [our argument], but not all of it," he said. "The EU has not recognised it needs to adapt.

"It is clear that until the EU has internalised and accepted that we are independent state... it will be difficult to reach an agreement."

1:05PM

There are 'potential landing zones' in Brexit trade deal, says former DexEU official

The fact that the UK has not walked away from Brexit talks suggests the will is still there to reach a deal, a former senior Brexit official has said.

Philip Rycroft, the former permanent secretary in the now-defunct DexEU, told Sky News that it appeared the EU had shifted on its position regarding the ECJ, while the UK had shifted regarding the overall deal.

Both of those were promising, he noted.

On "the dreaded level-playing field", Mr Rycroft suggested both sides might be "just keeping things in reserve so they can land all of this in negotiations in autumn, he added. There are "potential landing zones that would preserve the dignity" of both sides.

12:53PM

No change to Brexit timetable, Michel Barnier says

Asked by the Daily Telegraph's Gordon Rayner if he would accept an offer to continue talks next week, Michel Barnier laughs.

He says the timing was established by both sides over a month ago, and next week is "not a round" although he will be back in London.

"We will be meeting next week, both sides feel the need for that," he adds. But the next round will be in mid-August.

He says he will take "a few days holiday" but will be available and "still be making progress".

12:49PM

Michel Barnier: Do not waste time with blame game

Asked if he accepts that a no-deal would be the EU's fault, Michel Barnier says the sooner a deal can be reached the better.

"Every day counts... every hour is going to count," he adds, pointing to the complexity of the legal text.

The blame game is something we are familiar with, he adds, but says he has "never been very impressed with the blame game" and as there is not much time he says we should not waste it with that.

"We respect the British positions, they should respect ours," he says.

12:47PM

Michel Barnier rejects 'skinny deal' hopes

Asked about a "skinny deal", Michel Barnier says whatever happens there will be big changes.

"We are preparing for those changes - lots of extra customs posts... have been created," he adds.

The cumulative effect of all these checks - which are the reality from January 1 - with the further restraint of the tariffs if there is no trade deal would "mean serious effect and impact on many sectors".

"I am not working for light and skinny... I am working for high quality," he adds.

12:46PM

October is 'latest possible moment' for deal, says Michel Barnier

If the UK does not move, a deal will be very difficult, Michel Barnier says.

But if they do shift a deal can be done in October, and it will need to be done at that point to meet other deadlines.

We hope there will be movement, and a shift in the right direction.

October is the "latest possible moment an agreement could be reached", he adds.

12:44PM

Negotiators must 'take the drama' out of Irish discussion

Asked about the Irish border, Michel Barnier says they need to "take the drama" out of things to "preserve the process".

"It is about men and women who live in Ireland, who have memories of this very difficult crisis," he adds.

Our aim is to preserve peace.

Mr Barnier says he believes the UK is committed to this, and thanks Michael Gove and team.

But "time is flying - there are technical issues, legal conditions and framework that need to be sorted out in a rolling, weekly, basis" to be operational in time.

12:42PM

Michel Barnier rejects suggestion talks have been abandoned

Michel Barnier rejects suggestions that either negotiator has sought to abandon talks, saying they continue to "bounce ideas off each other, and clarify and work" towards an agreement.

For the Court of Justice point, he says the EU was prepared to look for ways that they could accommodate the UK's position, although this would result in "narrower scope for cooperation in some areas", he says

He would "reject such an outcome", he adds.

12:39PM

UK must show 'reciprocal openness' says Michel Barnier

Asked if he would set out areas where he would compromise, Michel Barnier says that is not how you negotiate, although he points to previous statements where he has shown a little wiggle room.

But before going forward, he says we need reciprocal openness.

"When the UK come to us with a real wish to compromise on areas that are important for us", then "you will see that it won't take very long for these dynamic compromises" to be reached.

Once there is a basis for a real, unambiguous agreement, he adds.

12:37PM

Michel Barnier rejects suggestion he doesn't want Brexit deal

Asked if the lack of progress is because he doesn't want it, Michel Barnier rejects this outright. He says he never liked Brexit, but "for the last four years" he has worked "for an orderly Brexit and an agreement".

He says the divorce has been done in an orderly money and it is his objective to do the same with the trade deal "but we are not there yet".

12:36PM

There is 'objectively' a risk of no deal, says Michel Barnier

Michel Barnier says as there are serious risks of a no-deal.

But until there is "reciprocal openness" on the UK side in terms of fisheries and level-playing field, there is "objectively" a risk of no deal.

The EU's positions are "not tactical, short-term ones" and "dynamic compromise" needs to be sort, he adds.

We are prepared to negotiate until the 11th hour.

12:34PM

Brexit talks 'too serious' for brinkmanship, says Barnier

Asked if he thinks the UK is deploying brinkmanship in the talks, Michel Barnier laughs. But then he says he doesn't believe in brinkmanship in such complex talks.

"It's far too serious for that," he adds.

We need a sustainable, long-term partnership between the two sides. There are enormous consequences, he adds, and could "greatly improve" lives if they get it right.

"I don't think we have time for these games."

12:32PM

EU wants 'to see what is ahead of us' on UK state aid regime

Asked what explanation the UK gives for not setting out its state aid regime, Michel Barnier says the two sides are talking about the conditions for open and fair competition. "We want trade that is fair and open, it is useful for everyone," he adds.

This is a major challenge, and within that we need robust oversight for state aid.

"We need consistency or some kind of equivalence," he says, noting the UK knows the EU's regime "well".

The EU "wants to see what is ahead of us".

He understands that Parliament and the Government are still working through that but they need to know where it is heading.

12:30PM

It is in 'common interest' to strike a deal, says Michel Barnier

Michel Barnier says the EU is willing to reach an ambitious partnership in all areas "including even later on, external security and defence".

He says this is the wish of the European Council President Charles Michel and the leaders of the EU 27.

Boris Johnson wants to find an agreement because it is "in our common interest", he adds, noting climate change and financial stability.

He will return to London next week "as planned" although the next formal round is not until mid-August.

Our resolve remains unchanged, he concludes.

12:26PM

More trade friction is 'the truth of Brexit', Michel Barnier says

If a trade deal is not reached there will be "far more friction", including tariffs and quotas, Michel Barnier says.

This is the truth of Brexit, he adds.

An agreement must be reached in October which means "we only have a few weeks left and we should not waste them", he adds.

In the same time the withdrawal agreement will need to be implemented, he adds.

12:23PM

UK makes trade deal unlikely, says Michel Barnier

Michel Barnier says a less ambitious agreement on goods and services will not lead the EU to drop its demands on the level playing field.

He turns to the UK's fisheries position, which he says is "simply unacceptable".

The EU has always insisted an economic partnership must include robust level playing field rules and an equitable agreement on fisheries, he says.

The UK makes a trade deal at this point unlikely, he adds.

12:21PM

EU 'respects' UK's choice - but must have clarity on standards, says Barnier

Michel Barnier has said he "respects" the fact that the UK wants to regain its regulatory autonomy, but the EU must know that the UK won't seek to "distort competition with us".

The EU wants reassurances on areas such as climate, labour and social law, he says.

The EU's chief negotiator added that the bloc wants to trade without tariffs but also "free from unfair competition".

The UK will also want that, he says.

12:15PM

Michel Barnier; The time for answers is quickly running out

The UK is still refusing to commit to maintaining high standards, Michel Barnier says.

There has been no progress on this area, which is "all the more worrying" because the EU has "no visibility" about what the UK is planning in terms of future domestic subsidy control system.

He says "the time for answers is quickly running out".

12:13PM

UK seeking 'Single Market-like benefits', claims Michel Barnier

Michel Barnier says the UK is seeking "Single Market-like benefits".

He reiterates the EU's position on level playing field demands, such as state aid, which he describes as "core" for all 27 EU member states and fisheries.

This should not come as a surprise, he adds, because they have been saying the same things constantly over the last three years and appear in the political declaration.

12:10PM

UK has not shown same level of engagement as EU on Brexit talks, claims Barnier

Michel Barnier is giving his press conference, praising the EU's 11th hour agreement on the budget earlier this week.

But turning to Brexit, he says that despite agreeing to intensifying talks "over the past few weeks the UK has not shown the same level of engagement" as the EU.

The EU has attempted to work out "how to square those red lines" set out by Boris Johnson.

There have been constructive conversations on goods and services, he adds, but talks are complex and "we are still far away" from an agreement. Talks took place in a "positive atmosphere" which has allowed some progress and has "narrowed our divergence" in some areas, he says.

12:06PM

Brexit talks fail to progress as David Frost issues warning over time

Brexit trade talks have not reached the "early understanding on principles" stage, David Frost has said, as he issues a warning about time running out before transition ends.

The Prime Minister's sherpa said that "substantial areas of disagreement remain", specifically on level-playing field and fisheries.

" We have always been clear that our principles in these areas are not simple negotiating positions but expressions of the reality that we will be a fully independent country at the end of the transition period", Mr Frost said.

"We remain unclear why this is so difficult for the EU, but we will continue to negotiate with this in mind.

He added: "When the next round of negotiations begins there will be not much more than four months left until the end of the transition period.

"Although we will continue energetically to seek an agreement with the EU, we must face the possibility that one will not be reached, and we must therefore continue preparing for all possible scenarios for the end of the transition period at the end of this year.

"Despite all the difficulties, on the basis of the work we have done in July, my assessment is that agreement can still be reached in September, and that we should continue to negotiate with this aim in mind. Accordingly we look forward to welcoming the EU team back to London next week as planned for informal discussions and to the next negotiating Round beginning on 17 August."

12:01PM

Have your say on: the Boris Bridge

Boris Johnson has talked a lot in recent weeks about his aspiration for large-scale infrastructure projects as he looks to "build back better" after the pandemic.

But does that extend to a bridge linking Scotland with Northern Ireland?

Cabinet minister Brandon Lewis was certainly enthusiastic about it this morning - but there are questions about the cost and purpose of the scheme.

What do you think? Have your say in the poll below.



11:49AM

Tory members back Boris Johnson a year into premiership

Conservative Party members overwhelmingly back Boris Johnson a year into his premiership, with 85 per cent saying he is doing a good job.

Even 69 per cent of those who voted for Jeremy Hunt are supportive of his performance, a YouGov survey has found.

Despite Rishi Sunak's rising star prompting some to suggest he could rival the Prime Minister, just nine per cent think Mr Johnson should stand down and be replaced by

someone else, with 89 per cent thinking he should currently remain leader.

More than three-quarters (76 per cent) say he should lead the party into the next election, with just 17 per cent saying someone else should.

The Chancellor would win by a landslide against all of the other eight candidates tested, including Dominic Raab - who deputised for the PM while he was hospitalised - with Mr Sunak getting 75 per cent support, compared with the Foreign Secretary's 25 per cent.

11:38AM

Boris Johnson rules out second referendum after 'once in a generation' 2014 vote

Boris Johnson has ruled out a second referendum, saying the 2014 vote was "decisive" and a "once in a generation event".

Speaking from Orkney, where people voted 67 per cent in favour of staying part of the union, the Prime Minister said the coronavirus response had proved "the strength of union in dealing with certain crucial things - supporting people through the furlough scheme [and] the work of the army, testing and moving people around".

"We had a referendum... only six years ago - that is not a generation by any computation," he added.

11:25AM

Nearly a quarter of contacts not reached through Track and Trace

Nearly a quarter of contacts of people who have tested positive for coronavirus have not been reached through the Government's Track and Trace programme, new figures show.

A total of 38,877 people had their cases transferred to the NHS Test and Trace contact tracing system with 77.1 per cent were reached and asked to provide details of recent contacts.

However 19.6 per cent of contacts were not reached while a further 3.3 per cent could not be reached because their communication details had not been provided.

The figures cover the period May 28 to July 15.

Since the launch of Test and Trace, 169,546 close contacts of people who have tested positive for Covid-19 have been reached through the tracing system and asked to self-

isolate.

This is 83.6 per cent out of a total of 202,781 people identified as close contacts.

11:08AM

Small group of Indy ref protesters gather in Orkney ahead of PM's arrival

A small group of protesters have gathered on the road to Stromness, Orkney, where Boris Johnson is expected to meet fishermen at Copland Dock.

The masked protesters held signs with slogans including "Hands off Scotland" and "Our Scotland, our future" while an "Indy Ref Now" placard was seen on the side of a van.

They also flew Saltires and the flag of Orkney.



Not found

Getting set up now [#stromness#orkney pic.twitter.com/iJ4BMbjBru](https://pic.twitter.com/iJ4BMbjBru)

— Yes Orkney (@AyeOrkney) [July 23, 2020](#)

10:55AM

Nine in 10 UK firms trading as lockdown eases

Around 92 per cent of UK firms were trading in the two weeks to July 12 as more businesses opened their doors to customers on the easing of lockdown restrictions, according to new figures.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said the proportion of active firms jumped from 86 per cent in the first two weeks of June, as the economy was boosted by the reopening of non-essential shops and hospitality venues.

Businesses currently trading said seven per cent of their total workforce had returned from furlough in the past two weeks.

Meanwhile, the firms said four per cent of workers had returned from remote working over the period.

Trading firms also said that six per cent of their workforce are expected to return from furlough in the next two weeks.

10:41AM

Allister Heath: The home-working revolution will derail the middle-class gravy train

Britain's upper-middle-class professionals cannot believe their luck. They have, once again, emerged as the great winners from a crisis: ensconced in spare rooms, they are coping so well with the Zoom economy that they want to make it the new normal.

They shouldn't rejoice too soon. When pushed to its logical conclusion, the working from home phenomenon has the potential to annihilate the middle class's vice-like grip on the best jobs. Their bid to commute less will cost the jobs of hundreds of thousands of support staff, sandwich shop assistants, security guards and public transport workers.

But they, Allister Heath argues, will have the last laugh.

10:31AM

Quarter of Britons oppose face mask legislation, survey finds

More than a quarter of UK citizens oppose the new law coming into force in England tomorrow requiring the wearing of masks in shops and supermarkets, a new survey has found.

The study, of 11,297 members of Pick My Postcode, found that 26 per cent of people were against the new law, with opposition strongest in the East Midlands (34 per cent), West Midlands and East of England (both 32 per cent).

Those aged 35-44 are most resistant (33 per cent) compared to 18-24s (21 per cent) and over 65s (22 per cent). Brexit Party voters (37 per cent) are the most reluctant, followed by non-voters (34 per cent), and Conservative voters (28 per cent).

When asked why, the most common answer was difficulty breathing. Responses also included scepticism about their effectiveness, to speculation of "mind control".

Nearly half (47 per cent) of those opposed to the legislation said they would stop going into shops if and when the legislation came into force.

10:21AM

Nearly three-quarters of adults wear face masks out, ONS figures show

Nearly three-quarters of adults are wearing face masks when they leave their home, as footfall climbs to the highest level since lockdown began.

The proportion of people wearing face masks when they leave their home has risen to 71 per cent, up from 44 per cent this time last month.

ONS figures show a steady rise, up from 61 per cent last week and 52 per cent the week before, according to the latest Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)

The upwards trend has been spurred after face coverings became mandatory on public transport in England on 15 June and in Scotland on 22 June as well as in shops in Scotland on 10 July.

Footfall has reached the highest levels since lockdown began, with July 17 rising to two-thirds of its level the same day a year ago.

Am I exempt from wearing a face mask?

According to the official Government guidance, the below groups are not required to wear a mask:

A child under the age of 11

An employee of the transport operator, when they are acting in the course of their employment

A constable or police community support officer acting in the course of their duty

An emergency response member of staff, such as a paramedic or fire officer acting in the course of their duty

An official such as a border force officer, acting in the course of their duties

If you are on board public transport but remain in your own vehicle, such as a car ferry

Other legitimate exemptions listed include those with a disability or a physical or mental illness, and anyone travelling with a deaf person who relies on lip reading to communicate.

Wearers are also permitted to remove them if it is necessary to avoid harm or injury, as well as to eat or drink if required, to take medication, or if a police officer or other official requests you to do so.

Customers in shops will also be allowed to remove them if they are required to present identification for purchasing alcohol and other age-restricted products.

10:11AM

Sadiq Khan attacked over TfL top staff pay claims

Sadiq Khan has been accused of "ignorance of his own job or a deliberate attempt to mislead Parliament" following his appearance before MPs yesterday.

Speaking to the Transport Select Committee yesterday the Mayor of London said the numbers of TfL staff earning more than £100,000 had gone down "hugely" since he took the reins at City Hall.

But Conservative rival Shaun Bailey claims the total has risen from 458 to 557.

"While the Mayor is entitled to defend his record, he's not entitled to do so using inaccurate statistics," Bailey wrote. "The Mayor's statement earlier today is not a failed attempt at political spin. It is either ignorance of his own job or a deliberate attempt to mislead Parliament."

City Hall has been contacted for a response.

9:55AM

Government attacked for making economic response to coronavirus 'on the hoof'

Parliament's financial watchdog has criticised the Government for not planning for the economic consequences of a pandemic, saying it is "astonished" that the UK was not better prepared.

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) said the Treasury waited until mid-March to design schemes to support the economy, claiming this created "initial uncertainty for many businesses and individuals".

Committee chair and Labour MP Meg Hillier said the Government had made policy "on the hoof".

"Pandemic planning is the bread and butter of government risk planning, but we learn it was treated solely as a health issue, with no planning for the economic impacts," she said.

"This meant that the economic strategy was of necessity rushed and reactive, initially a one-size fits all response that's leaving people – and whole sectors of the economy – behind."

9:46AM

Protect core health services ahead of winter spike, Jeremy Hunt demands

The Government must act to protect core NHS services during the pandemic ahead of a possible winter spike, a group of MPs have urged.

The Health and Social Care Committee has written to Matt Hancock and NHS England & Improvement Chief Executive Sir Simon Stevens highlighting three key areas that vital action be taken, including clearing the "mounting backlog of cases".

Committee chair Jeremy Hunt MP said: "People understand why this has happened and recognise the huge effort made by frontline staff during the crisis. However, patients report a failure by the NHS to let them know what is going to happen to their treatment going forward and put their fears to rest.

"There is going to be a huge backlog and people with illnesses - sometimes life-threatening - need to know where they stand.

"Likewise, NHS staff want to know they will get the weekly testing that has now been offered to care home staff so they can be confident they won't pass on infections to patients."

9:37AM

People with treatable cancers will die due to Government scaremongering, warns NHS nurse

People with treatable cancers are going to die because hospitals have been laid empty due to Government scaremongering, an NHS nurse has warned.

An NHS nurse called Holly* has said that throughout the lockdown period "hospitals were empty" beyond the ICU units and Covid wards and that people have died as a result.

Speaking to Telegraph columnist Allison Pearson on the Planet Normal podcast, which you can listen to on the audio player above, the experienced district nurse, said: "We've been saying for months now that services just aren't running at anywhere near normal capacity and we're building up more problems than Covid has caused by a mile.

Telegraph subscribers can listen to Allison Pearson's full interview with "Holly" on the audio player below.



9:25AM

Government failure to plan for economic impact of coronavirus pandemic 'astonishing', MPs say

The Government's failure to plan for the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic has been described as "astonishing" by MPs.

A report by the Commons public accounts committee has said a lack of preparedness could have a "long-term" impact on the economy.

[Read the full story here.](#)

9:08AM

Have your say on: the Boris Bridge

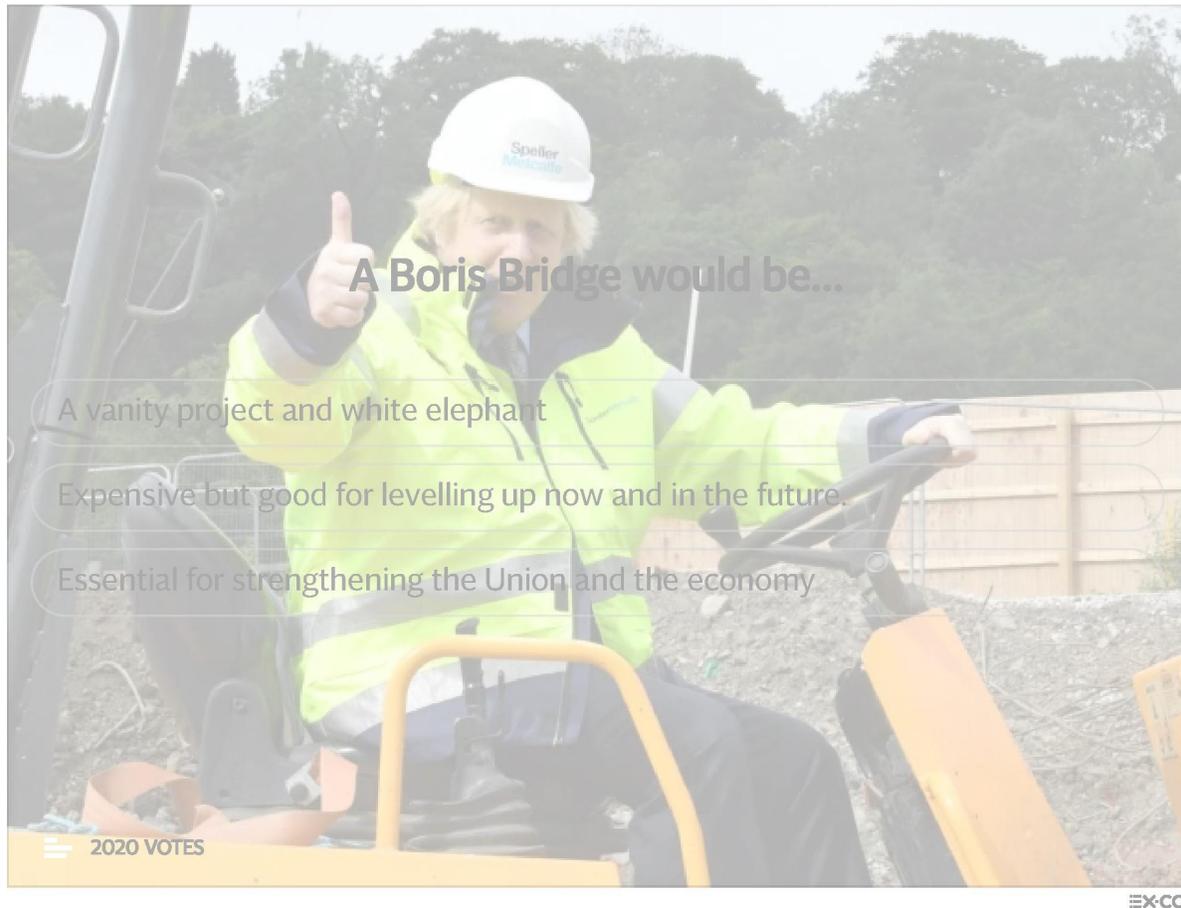
Boris Johnson is expected to confirm that he is ordering a feasibility study into a bridge between Scotland and Northern Ireland later today, as part of his trip to the nation.

The main purpose of his trip is to shore up enthusiasm for the union, as the polls show that independence is gaining support in the wake of perceptions about his handling of the coronavirus response.

Brandon Lewis, the Northern Ireland Secretary, this morning said it could become as vital a part of infrastructure as the M25, arguing that all major infrastructure projects are controversial before they are built.

But Ian Blackford has argued there are better uses of money, and pointed to Mr Johnson's poor track record with such schemes.

So is it a vanity project or could it be a key move in strengthening the Union? Have your say in the poll below.



8:50AM

Ian Blackford attacks Boris Bridge proposals

The SNP's Westminster leader has attacked proposals to build a bridge between Scotland and Northern Ireland, saying there would be "better uses" for the cash.

Ian Blackford told Sky News the Prime Minister should leave such decisions to the Devolved Administrations, saying there was "a long list" of projects they would rather spend the estimated £20bn price tag.

Mr Blackford attacked him for "bluff and bluster", noting other projects such as London's Garden Bridge and Boris Island airport had failed to get off the ground.

"This is a bridge too far for Boris Johnson", he added.

8:43AM

Scotland- Northern Ireland 'Boris Bridge' could be as essential as M25, minister says

A bridge linking Scotland and Northern Ireland could become as critical a part of UK infrastructure as the M25, a Cabinet minister has said.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to announce his decision to finance a feasibility study into the construction of a bridge between the two nations during his visit to Scotland today.

Brandon Lewis, the Northern Ireland Secretary, told Sky News the so-called 'Boris Bridge' would boost connectivity for the regions and was "a good thing, not just for Scotland and NI, for the whole of our economy".

It was an "exciting project", Mr Lewis added, noting that big infrastructure projects like this were always "controversial, difficult but the right thing to do".

He compared it to the M25, saying despite facing criticism at the time, "no one can imagine life without it".

8:38AM

Nicola Sturgeon 'obsessed' with 'refighting' referendum, says Scots Tory leader

Scottish Conservatives leader Jackson Carlaw has hit back at Nicola Sturgeon's comments on Scottish independence, saying: "There she blows again."

Ms Sturgeon this morning said she welcomed Boris Johnson's trip to Scotland today, saying it helped to make the case for independence.

But Carlaw said she was "obsessed" with "refighting arguments the SNP lost in the largest participative vote in Scotland's history."

He added: "Scotland chose a future and a path in the UK. No SNP spin alters facts - it's the strength of Great Britain protecting jobs and energising recovery."

8:35AM

Russian donors are Britons who should play 'full part in democracy', says minister

Brandon Lewis has defended accepting donations from wealthy individuals with links to Russia and President Vladimir Putin, insisting the benefactors are "British citizens".

Following the publication of the much-delayed report into Russian interference in UK politics - which Mr Lewis insisted had not been "suppressed" - it has emerged that two of Conservative MPs on the intelligence watchdog committee and 14 ministers have accepted donations linked to Russia.

But the Northern Ireland Secretary told the Today programme it was important "we don't get the facts wrong".

He added: "These are British citizens, they are properly declared, we do not accept funds from foreign nationals.

"I absolutely defend the right of any British citizen... to play the full part in our democracy.

"That doesn't just mean voting," he added. "I am very proud of the fact that as a country we allow British citizens do that."

He said it would be "inappropriate" and "wrong" to stop this he added, saying he would "defend all British citizens rights" to do so.

8:25AM

Scotland's independence referendum 'once in a generation', says minister

Scotland was only able to get the support it had during the pandemic because it was part of the UK, a Cabinet minister has confirmed.

Brandon Lewis told the Today programme that this claim was "absolutely" the message the Government was seeking to get across, saying: "We were able to put in place unprecedented support... because we are part of an entire United Kingdom."

Asked about the polls showing a rise in support for Scottish independence, the Northern Ireland Secretary said he would not be "distracted by polls", saying the 2014 referendum was "once in a generation".

8:20AM

Boris Johnson's Scotland trip 'highlights' need for independence, says Sturgeon

Nicola Sturgeon has tweeted that she welcomes Boris Johnson to Scotland today, saying his presence highlights the need for another independence referendum.

The First Minister said: "One of the key arguments for independence is the ability of Scotland to take our own decisions, rather than having our future decided by

politicians we didn't vote for, taking us down a path we haven't chosen. His presence highlights that."

The pair are not scheduled to meet today.

Nicola Sturgeon 

@NicolaSturgeon · [Follow](#)

X

I welcome the PM to Scotland today. One of the key arguments for independence is the ability of Scotland to take our own decisions, rather than having our future decided by politicians we didn't vote for, taking us down a path we haven't chosen. His presence highlights that.

7:47 AM · Jul 23, 2020 ⓘ

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8:18AM

Nicola Sturgeon's pandemic response 'tips polls in favour of independence' says Sir John Curtice

Nicola Sturgeon's handling of the pandemic has "tipped the polls in favour of independence", one of the country's most respected pollsters has said.

Sir John Curtice told the Today programme that although the outcomes had been "not that dissimilar" the perception was "highly positive" for Scotland's First Minister, while Boris Johnson was suffering "highly negative" perceptions.

Although the increase in support for independence pre-dates the crisis, evidence suggests that this is the case even among those who voted to Leave in 2016 and who voted No in the independence referendum of 2014.

"It is not dramatic movement, but because we were already at a point where 50 per cent of people supported independence, this has been enough to tip the polls in favour of independence," Sir John said.

8:11AM

Banks and Pret to be treated like shops for face masks (unless you're eating in)

People eating in at a Pret-a-Manger will not have to wear a face mask - but those who are buying food to take-away will do, a minister has confirmed.

After days of confusion over the rule for the sandwich chain, Brandon Lewis told Sky News there would be a two-pronged approach whereby people who are treating it as a cafe don't have to wear one while those who are "treating it like a shop" do.

Speaking to BBC Breakfast shortly afterwards, he confirmed that face masks would also be required in banks, saying: "If you are going in there to pay money in or withdraw money, it's the same as if you're going to buy a sandwich or a book."

The Northern Ireland Secretary defended the Government's mixed messages, saying: "With any kind of change there will be some kind of confusion. What colleagues have been doing in various outlets is taking their own decisions about what was safe."

8:07AM

Ian Blackford attacks Boris Johnson over Scotland trip

Ian Blackford has attacked the Prime Minister ahead of his trip today, saying "the days of telling Scotland that we are either too wee, too poor or too stupid" are over.

The SNP's Westminster leader told the BBC Radio 4's Today programme Boris Johnson would find "that this message is going to go down particularly badly in Scotland".

Mr Blackford added: "Is he really saying that any other small nation in Europe and any other part of the world doesn't have the capability to deal with the Covid crisis?"

"I think what we've demonstrated over the past two months in the areas of devolved responsibility and of public health is that the leadership that has been shown by our First Minister is in sharp contrast with the bluster we have seen from Boris Johnson."

But challenged on the fact that Scotland's fatality rate is 30-times that of Norway's, Mr Blackford insisted that there would be inquiry into the response, adding "all four nations were working together".

7:49AM

'Sheer might of Union' protected Scotland during pandemic, says Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson has declared the "sheer might of our Union" has helped protect Scotland during the coronavirus pandemic as he marks the first anniversary of his premiership with a visit north of the Border.

The Prime Minister said the last six months demonstrate "exactly why the historic and heartfelt bond that ties the four nations of our country together is so important", highlighting the 900,000 Scottish jobs shielded by the Treasury's furlough scheme.

Speaking ahead of his visit, Mr Johnson said the unprecedented financial support businesses, along with an additional £4.6 billion handed to the SNP government, had "kept the wolves at bay" during the crisis.

Despite polls showing a surge in support for independence and Nicola Sturgeon's approval ratings, Mr Johnson said the Union is "stronger than ever" and reaffirmed his "unwavering commitment" to defending it.

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