

Boris Johnson denies plot to topple tottering Theresa May

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London: British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has denied plotting to topple Prime Minister Theresa May, whose hold on power remained tenuous Sunday as she tried to finalize a deal with a small Northern Irish party to prop up her minority government after a disastrous election.

File pic - Boris Johnson denies plot to topple tottering Theresa May

Former Treasury chief George Osborne "who was fired by May last year" called her a "dead woman walking," and opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn said he was ready to contest another election at any time.

Johnson, one of the Conservatives' most popular politicians, tweeted that an article in the Mail on Sunday newspaper headlined "Boris set to launch bid to be PM as May clings on" was "a tripe."

"I am backing Theresa May. Let's get on with the job," he said.

The Conservatives lost their parliamentary majority in Thursday's election. May called the snap vote in a bid to strengthen her mandate ahead of exit talks with the European Union. Instead, she has left Britain's government ranks in disarray, days before the divorce negotiations are due to start on June 19.

May's party won 318 seats, 12 fewer than it had before the snap election, and eight short of the 326 needed for an outright majority. Labour surpassed expectations by winning 262.

Many senior Conservatives say May should stay, for now, to provide stability. But few believe she can hang on for more than a few months.

"I think her position is, in the long term, untenable," Conservative lawmaker Anna Soubry told Sky News. "I just don't see how she can continue in any long-term way."

May called the election to win explicit backing for her stance on Brexit, which involves leaving the EU's single market and imposing restrictions on immigration while trying to negotiate a free trade deal with the bloc. Some say her failure means the government must now take a more flexible approach to the divorce, potentially softening the exit terms.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson, who took the party from one Scottish seat to 13, said there would now have to be "a consensus within the country about what it means and what we seek to achieve as we leave."

To stay in power, the Conservatives are seeking support from Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party. May's office said Saturday principles of an agreement had been reached, but the two sides later clarified that they are still talking.

"We have made good progress but the discussions continue," said DUP leader Arlene Foster.

Downing Street said it hopes to finalize the deal next week, after Parliament resumes sitting.

The two sides are looking to form a "confidence and supply" arrangement. That means the DUP would back the

government on confidence motions and budget votes, but itâ€™s not a coalition government or a broader pact.

The alliance makes some modernizing Conservatives uneasy. The DUP is a socially conservative group that opposes abortion and same-sex marriage and had links to Protestant paramilitary groups during Irelandâ€™s sectarian â€œTroubles.â€•

Conservative lawmaker Nicky Morgan told ITV that she could support a confidence and supply arrangement with the DUP, but any closer deal would be â€œa step too far.â€•

A deal between the government and the DUP could also unsettle the precarious balance between Northern Irelandâ€™s British loyalist and Irish nationalist parties, whose power-sharing administration in Belfast collapsed earlier this year.

Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny tweeted Sunday that he had spoken with May â€œand indicated my concern that nothing should happen to put (the Good Friday Agreement) at risk.â€•

The 1998 Good Friday agreement set up power sharing in Northern Ireland, largely ending years of sectarian violence.

The British government does not have long to ink a deal. It is due to present its platform for the next session in the Queenâ€™s Speech at the State Opening of Parliament on June 19. The speech will be followed by several days of debate and a vote. By tradition, defeat on a Queenâ€™s Speech vote topples the government.

Corbyn said Labour would try to amend the Queenâ€™s Speech to include its own commitments to end austerity and boost public spending. Without the amendments, he said Labour would try to vote down the speech.

â€œI donâ€™t think Theresa May and this government have any credibility,â€• Corbyn said, predicting that there could be another election within months.

â€œI can still be prime minister,â€• Corbyn said. â€œThis is still on.â€•

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