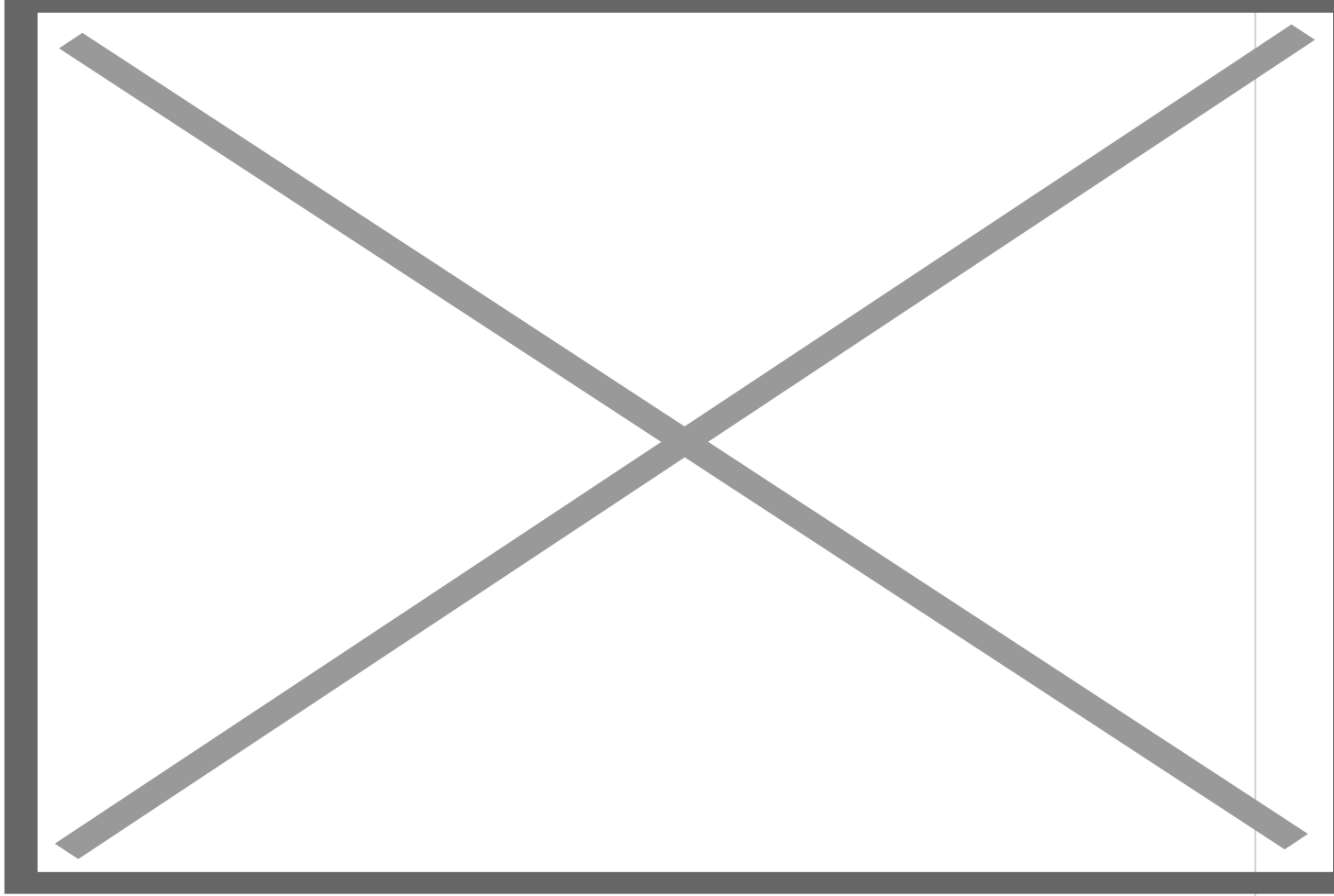


UK prime minister aims to relax COVID rules amid threat to position

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British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to announce the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in the country

London, January 19 (RHC)-- British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to announce the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in the country, in a bid to placate members of the ruling Conservative party as he

tries to avert a possible revolt in his own ranks following revelations of parties at his residence during the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021.

Johnson's cabinet will review the current restrictions – imposed last month amid an Omicron surge – at a meeting on Wednesday, according to UK media reports. He is scheduled to announce the decision to the House of Commons later in the day amid expectations the government will end work from home rules as well as ease rules on entry for sporting venues and nightclubs for fully vaccinated people.

Since the number of COVID cases peaked at more than 218,000 in early January, infections in the UK have gradually declined. The latest government data showed just over 94,000 cases on January 18th.

The removal of the restrictions would be welcomed by many in his party who want to return to something akin to normal life as Johnson seeks to contain a rebellion triggered by a series of revelations about rule-breaking parties at 10 Downing Street, the prime minister's office.

Anger towards the prime minister continues to simmer with the right-wing Daily Telegraph and ITV News reporting that the required number of 54 signatures from his own Members of Parliament calling for a no-confidence vote in his leadership could be reached on Wednesday.

As many as 20 Conservatives elected at the last general election in 2019 plan to submit letters of no confidence in Johnson, according to the Telegraph. Under Conservative rules, a no-confidence vote in the party's leader can be triggered if 54 party MPs write to a party official demanding it. Johnson's office did not respond on Tuesday to a request for comment.

His former aide Dominic Cummings earlier accused Johnson of lying, saying that he had been warned that holding a "bring your own booze" party during lockdown would break the rules. When questioned by Sky News on Cummings' claim, Johnson denied lying. "Nobody warned me it was against the rules," he said.

Senior ministers in Johnson's government said they believed his denials — but added the prime minister would have to resign if he is proven to have lied. Senior civil servant Sue Gray is investigating the alleged rule-flouting parties, including a boozy May 2020 event in the garden of Downing Street and reports of "wine time Fridays."

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