

Successor to UK's Boris Johnson to be announced on September 5th

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London, July 12 (RHC)-- The United Kingdom's new prime minister will be announced on September 5, with the first votes to begin eliminating candidates in a crowded field to replace Boris Johnson expected this week.

So far, 11 members of parliament have said they will take part in the contest for the leadership of the ruling Conservative Party after Johnson quit following a series of scandals. Whoever wins will also become prime minister and have the opportunity to call a snap election.

The party committee organising the leadership race said nominations would officially open and close on Tuesday. Contenders need at least 20 nominations from the party's 358 legislators to take part in the first round of voting on Wednesday. A second vote to narrow the field is scheduled for Thursday, with the final two candidates facing a postal ballot of party members.

"I am very keen we get this concluded as smoothly, cleanly, and rapidly as possible," said Graham Brady, the committee's chair.

Former ministers, including Rishi Sunak and Sajid Javid whose resignations helped lead to the collapse of Johnson's government following a series of scandals, are among those bidding to replace the 58-year-old Johnson.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and newly-installed Finance Minister Nadhim Zahawi have also declared they will run, while Home Secretary Priti Patel is reportedly mulling a bid.

But a poll of grassroots members by the influential ConservativeHome website released on Monday showed strong support for less well-known candidates, with former Defence Minister Penny Mordaunt holding a narrow lead over Equalities Minister Kemi Badenoch.

"There seems to be a quite a big field at the moment, a lively contest," Brady said. "I hope we will have a very constructive contest, but [also] a really good opportunity for a proper, healthy, constructive debate about the future direction of the Conservative Party."

Taxation has already emerged as a big issue among the candidates with many promising to cut business or personal taxes, but whoever wins the leadership race will be faced with a daunting in-tray.

Britons are facing a cost of living crisis and the tightest squeeze on their finances in decades, against a backdrop of surging gas and fuel prices exacerbated by the war in Ukraine.

Support for the Conservatives has evaporated following Johnson's landslide election victory in December 2019, with a survey by Savanta ComRes on Monday putting the opposition Labour Party at 43 percent compared with 28 percent for the Conservatives, its biggest poll lead since 2013.

Labour leader Keir Starmer accused the candidates of an "arms race of fantasy economics", claiming that more than 200 billion pounds (\$238bn) of commitments made by them over the weekend were unfunded.

Johnson has so far declined to endorse any of the candidates, six of whom are from Black and minority ethnic communities.

"The job of the prime minister at this stage is to let the party decide, let them get on with it, and to continue delivering on the projects that we were elected to deliver," he said on a visit to a science research institute.

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