

Britain

Sunak brightest rising star

Conservatives set to go for top job if Boris 'falls'

LONDON, Jan 22, (AP): Revelations that Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his staff partied while Britain was in a coronavirus lockdown have provoked public outrage and led some members of his Conservative Party to consider ousting their leader.

If they manage to push Johnson out - or if he resigns - the party would hold a leadership contest to choose his replacement.

Here's a look at who could rise if Johnson falls:

Rishi Sunak, Treasury Chief
Sunak, 41, is widely regarded as the brightest rising star in the party, the best known of the contenders to the public - and the bookies' favorite to succeed Johnson.

Sunak was thrust into the spotlight when he became treasury chief in early 2020, tasked with the unenviable job of steering the British economy through its worst economic slump on record due to the pandemic.

Sunak has dished out billions of pounds in emergency spending to help businesses and workers, and his pandemic policies have generally been seen in a positive light.

A big "Star Wars" fan, Sunak nurtures his personal brand with a slick Instagram account. Opinion polls have suggested that he is one of the most popular Conservative ministers among voters, though his elite education and past work for the investment bank Goldman Sachs and a hedge fund means some see him as out of touch with ordinary people.

He would be Britain's first prime minister who is not white. Born to Indian parents who immigrated to the U.K. from East Africa, Sunak attended the exclusive Winchester College private school, studied at Oxford University, and is married to Akshata Murthy, daughter of an Indian billionaire.

Liz Truss, Foreign Secretary
Truss, 46, took on the high-profile job of foreign secretary in September after serving as trade minister and has been gaining momentum as a contender since.

As well as serving as Britain's chief diplomat, she is the U.K.'s new lead negotiator with the European Union to deal with lingering issues following Britain's exit from the bloc.

Once a campaigner for remaining in the EU, Truss has become a fervent champion for Brexit. Her prior role as international trade secretary saw her signing post-Brexit trade deals around the world and channeling Johnson's ambitions for "Global Britain."

Truss is popular with many Conservatives, who see in the free-market-loving politician echoes of the party's first female prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. Her supporters have coined the slogan "In Liz We Trust."

She is less well known to the general public. "When you ask about Liz Truss, 50% of voters say 'Liz who?'" said Chris Curtis, a pollster at Opinion Research.

Sajid Javid, Health Secretary

Javid, 52, has been health secretary since June, leading Britain's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before that he served as treasury chief, but resigned in early 2020 after clashing with Johnson over the prime minister's order to fire his team of advisers.

The fact Johnson brought him back to the government to handle the coronavirus response reflects his reputation as a competent and safe pair of hands.

The son of Pakistani immigrants, Javid has billed himself as a common-man alternative to his private school-educated rivals - although he had a lucrative career in investment banking before entering politics.

As with Sunak, he'd make history if he were to win.

Michael Gove, Levelling Up Secretary

Gove, a party heavyweight, has held many key Cabinet posts and is currently in charge of delivering on the government's promise to "level up" Britain, that is, address inequality by increasing opportunities in deprived areas.

Gove, 54, played a key role in the campaign to take Britain out of the EU and is widely respected in the party, but not completely trusted. In the 2016 Conservative leadership campaign, he backed Johnson for leader before deciding he would rather run himself - a betrayal that many Conservatives have not forgotten.

To the public, he may be best known for being filmed dancing to techno music at a nightclub in Aberdeen, Scotland, in August, in a clip that drew a lot of chuckles when it went viral on social media.

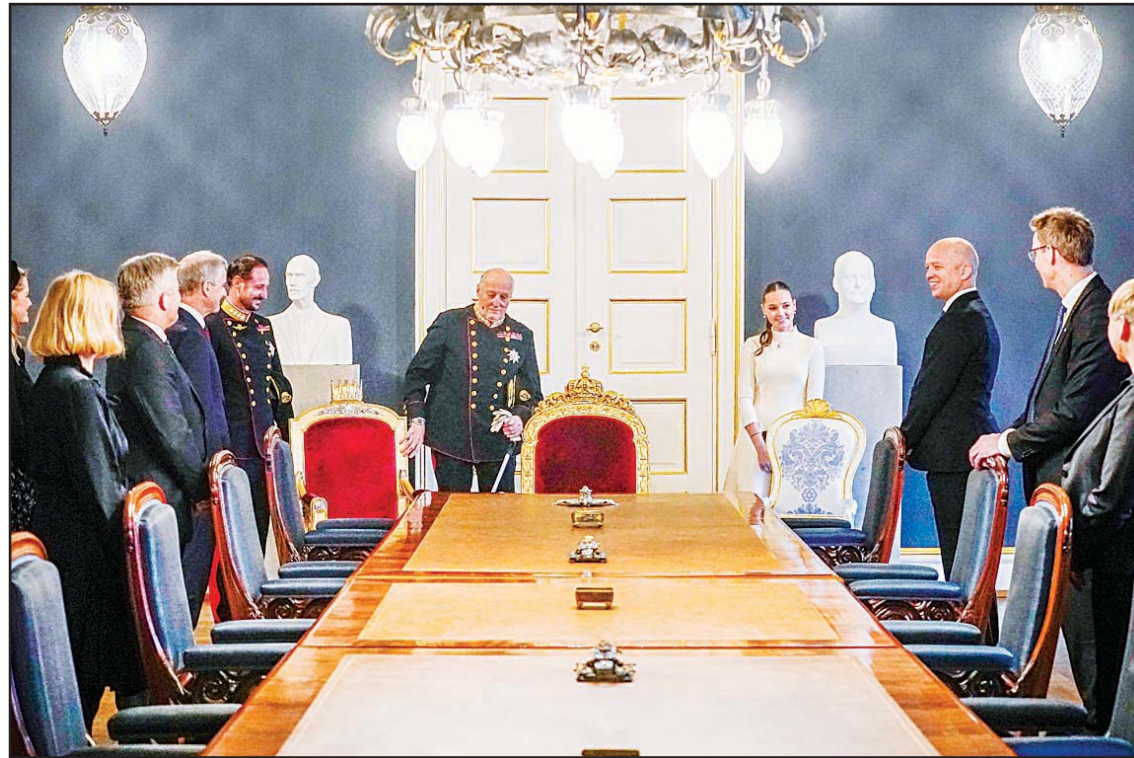
Jeremy Hunt, Former Cabinet Minister

Hunt, a former health secretary and foreign secretary, ran against Johnson in the 2019 leadership race, billing himself as the more sensible, serious candidate. He lost heavily, and was dumped from the Cabinet when Johnson took over.

In a recent interview, the 55-year-old was quoted as saying that his ambition to lead the country has not "completely vanished."

He has remained a lawmaker, and kept himself in the public eye by grilling ministers and experts as head of the Health and Social Care Select Committee in Parliament.

As a critic of the government's response to the pandemic, he may appeal to those seeking a change from Johnson - though some look on him unfavorably for implementing unpopular policies when he was health secretary.



Norway's Princess Ingrid Alexandra, background at right, joins Crown Prince Haakon, background left, and King Harald, centre, to attend a cabinet meeting in the Royal Palace, in Oslo Friday, Jan 21, 2022, on her 18th birthday. (AP)

Killer renounces violence

Breivik tests limits of system

STAVANGER, Norway, Jan 22, (AP): Convicted mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik spends his days in a spacious three-room cell, playing video games, exercising, watching TV and taking university-level courses in mathematics and business.

Halfway through a 21-year sentence and seeking early release, Breivik, 42, is being treated in a way that might seem shocking to people outside of Norway, where he killed eight in an Oslo bombing in 2011, and then stalked and gunned down 69 people, mostly teens, at a summer camp.

But here - no matter how wicked the crime - convicts benefit from a criminal justice system that is designed to offer prisoners some of the comforts and opportunities of life on the outside.

Still, Breivik's extreme case is testing the limits of Norway's commitment to tolerance and rehabilitation.

"We have never had anyone in Norway who has been responsible for this level of violence before. And there has been debate here about whether part of the justice system should be changed for someone like him," said Erik Kursetgjerde, who survived the slaughter on Utoya island as an 18 year old. However, he advises a slow approach that does not bend to Breivik's desire to subvert the system.

During a three-day parole hearing this week that was broadcast to journalists, Breivik renounced violence, but also flashed a Nazi salute and espoused white supremacy, echoing ideas in a manifesto he released at the time of his killing spree. The outburst was familiar to Norwegians who had watched him deliver rambling diatribes during his partially televised criminal trial.

"Obviously this has been extremely trying for survivors, the bereaved and Norwegian society as a whole," said Kristin Bergtora Sandvik, professor of law at the University of Oslo, adding that there is debate in Norway over whether parole regulations should be overhauled in a bid to prevent this type of grandstanding.

In 2016, Breivik successfully sued the Norwegian government for human rights abuses, complaining about his isolation from other prisoners, frequent strip searches and the fact that he was often handcuffed during the early part of his incarceration. He also complained about the quality of the prison food, having to eat with plastic utensils and not being able to communicate with sympathizers.

While Breivik's human rights case was ultimately overturned by a higher court, the episode showed just how far the Norwegian criminal justice system could bend in favor of prisoners' rights and living conditions.

"His conditions according to Norwegian standards are excellent," said his prison psychiatrist, Randi Rosenqvist. She testified at the parole hearing that Breivik is still a public threat.

Wavering

Even after Breivik's outbursts at this week's parole hearing, Norwegian authorities show no sign of wavering from treating him like any other inmate at Skien prison.

"In a Nordic prison sentence, the main punishment is deprivation of liberty. All the Nordic countries have systems based on a lenient and humane criminal policy that starts from the mutual understanding that punishment should not be any stricter than necessary," said Professor Johan Boucht from the University of Oslo Department of Public and International Law, who has also worked in Sweden and Finland. "The second aspect is rehabilitation, and the principle that it is better in the long run to rehabilitate the inmate than create a factory for criminals."

Up until about 50 years ago, Norway's justice system focused on punishment. But in the late 1960s there was a backlash to the harsh conditions of prisons, leading to criminal justice reforms that emphasized kinder treatment and rehabilitation.

Norwegian sentencing and prison conditions are sharply at odds with other European countries such as France, where the worst

criminals can face life imprisonment, with the possibility of an appeal only after 22 years.

Relatively few French defendants get the longest sentence, but among those facing it are Salah Abdeslam, who is the only surviving member of the Islamic State cell that attacked Paris in November 2015. Abdeslam has complained bitterly about his conditions in the Fleury-Mérogis prison, where he is under 24-hour surveillance in solitary confinement, the furniture is fixed to the floor of his tiny cell and he can exercise for just one hour daily.

Breivik's comparatively lenient treatment inside prison does not mean he'll get out anytime soon, or even in 2032, when his sentence ends.

While the maximum prison sentence in Norway is 21 years, the law was amended in 2002 so that, in rare cases, sentences can be extended indefinitely in five-year increments if someone is still considered a danger to the public.

Breivik's lawyer, Øystein Storrvik, said in his closing arguments at the parole hearing that Breivik should be released to prove that he is reformed and no longer a threat to society, and that is not possible to prove while he is in total isolation.

But Breivik's behavior during this week's parole hearing was proof enough to some that he should never again see freedom.

Kristine Roeyneland, who leads a group for families of Breivik's victims and survivors, said his comfortable prison conditions and ability to spread extremist views through publicized parole hearings are reprehensible.

Whatever the outcome of Breivik's request for early parole, which will be decided by a three-judge panel in coming weeks, some take an enlightened view of the Norwegian government's apparent commitment to treat him like any other prisoner.

"People might be afraid that he's using the law as a stage," said Sandvik, the law professor. "But you can also say that, you know, he is being used by the law. He's a megaphone for the rule of law."

Ratzinger faulted

Pope vows justice for abuse victims

ROME, Jan 22, (AP): Pope Francis vowed to provide justice to victims of clergy sexual abuse and German authorities called for further investigation after an independent audit faulted retired Pope Benedict XVI for having botched four cases of abuse when he was archbishop of Munich, Germany.

The fallout from the report continued to reverberate Friday as church officials digested the findings that a pope credited with having turned the Vatican around on the abuse issue had in fact mishandled cases earlier in his career.

One day after the report's release, Francis met with the members of the Vatican office that handles sex abuse cases in a previously scheduled audience. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger for nearly a quarter-century before he became Pope Benedict XVI in 2005.

In his speech, Francis didn't refer to the findings of the report into how the Munich archdiocese handled abuse cases from 1945 and 2019. Ratzinger was archbishop there from 1977-1982.

But Francis said the church was continuing to discern the way forward in the abuse scandal, which has discredited the Catholic hierarchy at the Vatican and around the world.

Justice

"The church, with God's help, is carrying out the commitment with firm determination to do justice to the victims of abuse by its members, applying with particular attention and rigor to the canonical legislation envisaged," Francis told the group.

He recalled he had recently updated the Vatican norms to handle abuse cases to make them more effective.

"This alone cannot be enough to stem the phenomenon, but it is a necessary step to restore justice, to repair scandal and reform the offender," he said.

The German report prepared by an independent law firm found that Ratzinger mishandled four cases of abusive clergy during his tenure as archbishop. Until Thursday, only one known case implicating his Munich tenure had been made public; the report found that the church's claim that Ratzinger was unaware of the priest's background lacked credibility.

Prosecutors in Munich said Friday they are examining 42 cases of possible wrongdoing by church officials arising from Thursday's report. Spokesperson Anna Leiding told German news agency dpa that the cases were referred to them by the law firm that prepared the report last year.

If any suspicion of "possible criminally relevant behavior" emerges from the examination, Leiding said, prosecutors will seek further details from the law firm.

The law firm said on Thursday that the cases involve living officials who are still in office.

Investigated

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's spokeswoman, Christiane Hoffmann, said Friday it was "urgent that these matters be fully investigated and a comprehensive reappraisal be carried out."

The report makes "the extent of the abuse and breach of duty by church dignitaries shockingly clear," she said. "It is crucial that confidence in the process of coming to terms with the past is strengthened in the Catholic Church and by individual dignitaries," she said.

The Vatican didn't immediately comment on the report, saying it would read it carefully in the coming days. Benedict's longtime secretary, Monsignor Georg Gaenswein, also said the retired pope hadn't yet read the report, but would.

Benedict, who provided information to the report's authors, expressed his upset and shame about the scandal, Gaenswein said.

Benedict's legacy as pope had already been colored by the 2010 global eruption of the clergy abuse scandal, even though as a cardinal he was responsible for turning around the Vatican's approach to the issue.

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