

May's cabinet in chaos as Brexit minister quits

Raab, who had been in place since July, resigned less than an hour after Shailesh Vara quit as a junior Northern Ireland minister

- May had secured her cabinet's collective approval for the agreement

- She was due to set out the terms of the draft withdrawal agreement

- Raab had backed Britain leaving the EU in the 2016 referendum

London, United Kingdom



Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May gives a statement outside 10 Downing Street in London

British Prime Minister Theresa May suffered a huge blow yesterday as Dominic Raab quit as her Brexit secretary over a proposed EU withdrawal agreement.

May was preparing to start selling her Brexit deal to parliament, boosted by news that Europe is preparing a rapid summit to sign off on the agreement.

But the ground began to shift beneath her when Raab said he could not back the draft deal.

"I cannot reconcile the terms of the proposed deal with the promises we made to the country in our manifesto," he said.

"You deserve a Brexit secretary who can make the case for the deal you are pursuing with conviction.

"I must resign."

Raab, who had been in place since July, resigned less than an hour after Shailesh Vara quit as a junior Northern Ireland minister over the draft accord.

The pound sterling lost nearly one percent of its value against the dollar following Raab's resignation, wiping out gains since Tuesday as the draft agreement

"I cannot reconcile the terms of the proposed deal with the promises we made to the country in our manifesto"

DOMINIC RAAB

emerged.

At 0900 GMT, the pound stood at around \$1.2870, compared to \$1.2992 at 2200 GMT on Wednesday.

May had secured her cabinet's collective approval for the agreement during a five-hour meeting on Wednesday, an important step that helped allay growing fears in the business community of a disorderly divorce.

She was due to set out the

terms of the draft withdrawal agreement with the European Union to parliament's lower House of Commons, which must approve the deal before Brexit day on March 29.

European Council President Donald Tusk said in Brussels that unless problems emerge as EU member states examine the deal, he will host a summit to sign the accord in Brussels on November 25.

May's governing centre-right Conservative Party -- which does not command a Commons majority -- was already split between Brexiteers and those who wanted to remain in the union, and now many on both sides of that divide oppose her deal.

Raab had backed Britain leaving the EU in the 2016 referendum, while Vara wanted the UK to stay in the bloc.

'Threat' to UK unity

In quitting the cabinet, Raab said he believed the regulatory regime proposed for Northern Ireland presented a "very real

threat" to the United Kingdom's integrity.

Raab added that he was opposed to "an indefinite backstop arrangement" to guarantee the Irish border remains free-flowing, saying the EU would hold "a veto over our ability to exit".

Vara said the withdrawal agreement fails to leave Britain as a "sovereign, independent country".

The outraged response by many MPs to the deal has heightened concerns that even when finalised, it will not pass parliament.

Hardline Brexit supporters have cried betrayal over the agreement's vision of a close future relationship between Britain and the EU.

May insisted it "brings back control of our money, laws and borders, ends free movement (of people), protects jobs, security and our union".

But she conceded there were "difficult days ahead" as she seeks to woo MPs.



UK voted to leave the European Union on June 23rd 2016 by a majority of 51.9 to 48.1 per cent, with a turnout of just under 72 per cent



Britain's Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Brexit Minister) Dominic Raab leaves Downing Street in London

China opens luxury hotel in a disused quarry

The waterfall is one of the development's most eye-catching features. Adventurous guests can also indulge in rock climbing.

AFP | Shanghai, China

A hotel development sunk into a disused quarry in China opened its doors yesterday to deep-pocketed clientele.

Preventing the 88-metre-deep (290 feet) pit from flooding was among the chief challenges for engineers working on the swanky 336-room InterContinental Shanghai Wonderland -- part of a \$288 million development that also includes a theme park.

The hotel, which is one of a growing number of bold architectural designs springing up in China, hugs one side of the pit wall, with a waterfall cascading down the opposite face.

The subterranean 17-floor hotel is about an hour's drive from the centre of Shanghai, with room charges starting at 3,394 yuan (\$490) a night.

There is a floor of suites below the water level, but don't expect



The InterContinental Shanghai Wonderland, built inside a formerly abandoned quarry, about 32 kms (20 miles) southwest of Shanghai

to gaze directly into the depths of Shenkeng Quarry -- the windows are instead buffered by large fish tanks.

"Why do we say there is nothing in the world that compares to the quarry hotel project?" Chen

Xiaoxiang, chief engineer with the real estate giant, Shimao Property, said. "It's a project that's completely new, a project we have never encountered before. "There were no references, cases or experience we could

learn from to solve all the difficulties," he said.

That meant engineers were met with unexpected problems.

Before construction started in 2013, for example, heavy rainfall caused a nearby river to over-

flow into the quarry, filling half of it. "If something like that had happened after construction was complete, it would have been a devastating blow," Chen said.

Designers built an embankment around the edge of the pit to prevent that happening in future, when hundreds of well-heeled guests are sipping cocktails on the deck far below.

A pump house is used to help regulate water levels.

'Totally unique'

The project's masterminds talk up its environmental bona fides, saying abandoned quarries often become landfills.

"This was a totally unique idea, to really do something special with a site that was forgotten and nobody knew what to do with, and to give it new life," said Martin Jochman, a British architect with the project since it started 12 years ago.

"I never lost my belief that it

"It's a project that's completely new, a project we have never encountered before"

CHEN XIAOXIANG
CHIEF ENGINEER

would be done one day, but it is here now, and I am really excited and amazed by the whole thing," he said. China's rapid economic growth has been accompanied by a construction boom that often throws up outlandish designs.

The Beijing headquarters of state broadcaster China Central Television has been nicknamed "The Big Underpants" because it resembles a giant pelvis.

A skyscraper built this year in southwestern China features a 108-metre waterfall tumbling down one side.