

business

# Mayday! moment



## British press says May 'crushed' by Brexit defeat



London, United Kingdom



Britain's main opposition Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn (C bottom) giving his response and informing the House that he has tabled a motion of no confidence in the Government in the House of Commons in London

● After Brexit humiliation May faces confidence vote

● EU warns UK faces a hugely disruptive "no deal"

● London asked to clarify its intentions

● Ireland intensifies preparation for a 'disorderly Brexit'

AFP | London, United Kingdom



British Prime Minister Theresa May was expected to win a confidence vote despite a crushing defeat over her Brexit deal with the EU that triggered warnings of a chaotic "no-deal" divorce.

MPS on Tuesday rejected May's deal on leaving the European Union, leaving the Brexit process in total disarray with just 73 days to go before the official departure date.

She suffered the biggest government defeat in modern British history when the House of Commons rejected by 432 votes to 202 her agreement in a devastating blow to her entire Brexit strategy.

The result left Europe reeling, with various countries saying they would intensify preparations in case Britain

crashes out of the EU on March 29 with no agreement.

At a heated session in parliament on Wednesday, May faced calls from MPs to give up the red lines she has imposed on Brexit negotiations and come up with a different plan.

She has said she will hold cross-party talks and announce the way forward on Monday.

But she insisted she was sticking to two key principles -- to limit migration from the EU and ensure Britain had its own trade policy. These would seem to rule out membership of a customs union or the EU's single market, which the main opposition Labour party wants.

May appeared to hint at the possibility of delaying Brexit, saying the EU would allow this "if it was clear that there was a plan towards moving towards an agreed deal".

EU officials have said this could be possible but only until the newly-elected European Parliament meets in June. However, her Downing Street office insisted the government intends to leave the EU on March 29.

### 'Fundamental change'

Ahead of the 2016 Brexit referendum, most lawmakers, including May, were against leaving the EU after almost half a century of membership.

Nearly three years later, the country is deeply divided and politicians are still struggling to form consensus around any plan, with MPs criticising May's

deal both for keeping Britain too closely tied to the EU, and for not keeping it closer.

Former foreign minister and leading Brexit supporter Boris Johnson said Tuesday's vote gave May a "massive mandate" to renegotiate the deal.

### High-stakes

The defeat blows the starting whistle on a no-holds-barred struggle to direct the course of Brexit.

Increasing numbers of pro-European MPs are calling for a second referendum with an option to cancel Brexit.

On Wednesday, 71 Labour MPs signed up to a letter calling for a public vote. Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said it was the "only credible option".

"We don't have any more time to waste," she said.

On Wednesday, the pound mostly held its ground as investors considered the next likely developments in the saga.

Bank of England chief Mark Carney said he believed sterling's relative strength reflected "some expectation that the process of resolution would be extended and that the prospect of no deal may have been diminished". British businesses urged politicians to unite.

"Financial stability must not be jeopardised in a game of high-stakes political poker," warned Catherine McGuinness, policy chair at the City of London Corporation, the body governing the British capital's massive financial district.

Prime Minister Theresa May was left "crushed" and "humiliated", Britain's newspapers said yesterday as they raked over the fallout from parliament's huge rejection of her EU divorce deal. Daily papers said May's deal was sunk after the huge vote against the agreement struck between May's government and Brussels, as she prepared to fight a no-confidence motion on Wednesday.

The *Daily Telegraph's* front page read: "A complete humiliation", following the 432 to 202 vote by MPs to reject the deal.

Its editorial said May had misjudged parliament and the EU had failed to understand the "essential issues of sovereignty and freedom" behind the Brexit vote.

"The government must regain the confidence of the house, rethink the agreement and go to the Europeans with a united front. Whether or not Mrs May leads that effort is a decision upon which she will now have to think very hard."

The broadsheet's parliamentary sketch writer Michael Deacon said May's pre-vote plea to MPs "had all the brio of a mouldy gym sock".

"She sounded as winningly persuasive as a mother snapping at her children to eat up their cabbage or go to bed hungry."

"Brextinct" said *The Sun* tabloid's front page.

"May's Brexit deal dead as a dodo", said Britain's biggest-selling paper, with a mock-up picture of the PM as the extinct flightless bird.

### 'Zombie PM'

The *Times* columnist Matthew Parris said it was time for senior MPs to take over the Brexit process.

"There exists no leadership in either the government or the opposition capable of taking us through this mess," he wrote following the vote.

"Theresa May isn't any good; she doesn't have a fiendish, secret strategy... she doesn't know what to do.

"Parliament must wrest control from a zombie prime minister, a zombie cabinet and a zombie opposition."

The *Daily Mirror's* front page said: "No deal, no hope, no clue, no confidence".

The tabloid called her "the humiliated PM".

The *Daily Mail's* headline said: "Fighting for her life".

The tabloid said the defeat left May's power "hanging by a thread", calling it a "devastating result, which threatens to plunge the Brexit process into chaos".

The *Financial Times* newspaper ran a headline reading: "May's defeat spells trouble for the EU's Brexit approach."

### 'Don't fail us!'

The *Daily Express* headline said "Dismay".

"Now it's time for MPs to do their duty and work with Theresa May for a deal that satisfies the 17.4m who voted for Brexit... Don't fail us!" it said on its front page.

The Scotsman's front page headline simply said: "Crushed".

"May suffers historic defeat as Tories turn against her," said *The Guardian's* front page.

"The PM leads a party that is divided and a country stockpiling food and medicines as if preparing for war. She needs to humbly reach out to her opponents and find a way to prevent Britain crashing out of the EU," its editorial said.



Pro-EU supporters celebrate outside the Houses of Parliament in London