

UK ELECTION

Youth turnout swings result

AFP, London

A surge in youth turnout fuelled by last year's shock Brexit vote played a pivotal role in stripping British Prime Minister Theresa May of her parliamentary majority, observers said yesterday.

An energising campaign by Labour's firebrand leader Jeremy Corbyn and simmering anger among many voters over uncertain plans to leave the European Union sent young Britons streaming to the ballot box.

Corbyn, a 68-year-old staunch leftist, harnessed popular anti-establishment sentiment to lead Labour to beat expectations and gain 29 seats in the House of Commons.

After a campaign marked by rallies that had the buoyant mood of music festivals, Corbyn said this success was built on hope for change.

"Politics isn't going back into the box where it was before," he told cheering supporters.

Some 56 percent of under-35s voted, according to an exit poll for NME magazine, which recently splashed Corbyn's face across its cover.

They showed overwhelming support for Labour, at 60 percent, with 36 percent of them being first-time voters, according to the survey among 1,354 voters.

Half cited Brexit as the "main factor" in their decision to cast a ballot.

While an official breakdown of voting patterns was still outstanding, official data showed a spike in both youth registrations ahead of the vote as well as turnout in districts with large numbers of younger voters on election day.

By contrast, only 45 percent of British voters aged 18 to 34 voted in 2015 compared to 84 percent of over-55s, which the OECD has called the biggest gap in the Western world.

"The movement of Remainers and young voters towards Labour explains why the Conservatives have lost their overall majority," political scientist John Curtice of the University of Strathclyde said yesterday.

Brexit now more complicated

Europe leaders react to UK election results

Britain was plunged into political turmoil yesterday after Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservatives lost their parliamentary majority in a snap election just days before negotiations on leaving the EU were set to begin.


We need a government that is capable of action, which can negotiate Britain's exit... the British need to negotiate their exit but with a weak negotiating partner, there is a danger that the talks are bad for both parties

GÜNTHER OETTINGER
EU BUDGET COMMISSIONER




Mrs May, who was supposed to emerge strengthened, lost her bet and is therefore in a less than clear situation because the truth is that we don't really know what the governing situation is this morning.

PIERRE MOSCOVICI
EU ECONOMY COMMISSIONER


Brexit negotiations should start when UK is ready; timetable and EU positions are clear. Let's put our minds together on striking a deal.

MICHEL BARNIER
THE EU'S POINT MAN ON BREXIT TALKS


We don't know when Brexit talks start. We know when they must end. Do your best to avoid a 'no deal' as result of 'no negotiations'.

DONALD TUSK
EU PRESIDENT


I don't think we should read these results as calling into question the stance on Brexit which was clearly expressed by the British people.

EDOUARD PHILIPPE
FRENCH PRIME MINISTER


"It's going to be difficult for Britain as I believe we've only seen the tip of the iceberg concerning the difficulties linked with leaving the EU."

BORGE BRENDE
NORWAY FOREIGN MINISTER


As far as the commission is concerned we can open negotiations tomorrow morning at half past nine.

JEAN-CLAUDE JUNCKER
EUROPEAN COMMISSION CHIEF


The message from this vote is -- hold fair talks with the EU and think again whether it is really good for Britain to leave the EU in this manner.

SIGMAR GABRIEL
GERMAN FOREIGN MINISTER

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Ready to serve' in govt

Says Jeremy Corbyn, calls on Theresa May to resign

AGENCIES

British Prime Minister Theresa May should step down after losses for her Conservative Party in the general election, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said yesterday.

May "has lost Conservative seats, lost votes, lost support and lost confidence. I would have thought that's enough to go," Corbyn said after being re-elected in his Islington North constituency in central London.

May's Conservative party won the snap election but lose its parliamentary majority. May's party seats fall from 330 to 318, short of a majority in the 650-seat House of Commons.

Jeremy Corbyn has said the Labour Party is "ready to serve" following the election result, but added that he would not do any deals or pacts.

The Labour leader said the party would serve the country because it is "what they fought the election for", and mocked Theresa May for her pledges for a "strong and stable" leadership.

Speaking to the BBC on Friday morning,

Mr Corbyn said: "We are ready to serve this country. That is what we fought the election for. And this is the programme we put forward in this election."

He mocked May's election campaign slogan that she would provide "strong and stable" leadership, saying: "She fought the election on the basis that it was her campaign, it was her decision to call the election, it was her name out there, and she was saying she was doing it to bring about strong and stable government."

"Well this morning it doesn't look like a strong government, it doesn't look like a stable government, it doesn't look like a government that has any programme whatsoever."

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell has said Labour expects to oust Ms May from No 10 and to form a minority government, saying: "I don't want to be derogatory, but I think [Theresa May] is a lame duck now."

He added that Labour would not attempt to delay the Brexit talks, he said, which the EU hopes to start within two weeks.



UKIP leader quits after election flop

AFP, Boston

Paul Nuttall resigned as leader of the anti-EU UK Independence Party yesterday after its support evaporated in the British election and it failed to win a single seat.

UKIP spearheaded the push for Brexit and Nuttall insisted that the party would still remain influential as Britain heads into divorce talks with the European Union.

Under the leadership of the charismatic Brexit figurehead Nigel Farage, UKIP won 12.6 percent of the vote in the 2015 general election, though only one MP under Britain's first-past-the-post system.

The party was at the forefront of the Brexit campaign as 52 percent opted to leave the bloc in the shock June 2016 vote.

Scottish secessionist dream takes a blow

Ruling party's position weakens as it loses seats

REUTERS, Edinburgh/london

Scottish secessionist dreams of a swift second independence referendum were dashed yesterday when they lost 21 of their 56 seats to parties that want to keep the United Kingdom intact.

As Britain slipped closer to political deadlock after Prime Minister Theresa May's disastrous gamble on a snap election, the losses by the Scottish National Party (SNP) undermined Nicola Sturgeon's bid for a second independence vote.

Sturgeon's party, which nearly swept the board in Scotland two years ago, lost heavyweights to a Conservative Party reinvigorated by Scottish leader Ruth Davidson.

Those losses included former leader Alex Salmond, who led Scotland in the unsuccessful bid for independence in 2014, and the SNP's top lawmaker in the British Parliament, Angus Robertson.

"The union is safer than it was," political commentator David Torrance said.

While the loss of seats pushes the issue of

a second referendum onto a back burner for now, opinion polls show about 45 percent of Scottish voters support independence.

Sturgeon said it was "a disappointing result" for her party, two years after it won a landslide in Scotland, and admitted that the focus on independence was undoubtedly a factor in the poor result.

She has argued that last year's Brexit ballot called the future of the United Kingdom into question because England and Wales voted to leave the European Union but Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to stay.

Sturgeon said she would now seek an alliance with like-minded parties to try to keep the Conservatives out of government and to keep both Scotland and the UK within the single European market.

The SNP still took 35 of Scotland's 59 seats in Britain's 650-seat national parliament, while the Conservatives won 13 Scottish seats, achieving the second largest share of the vote. Labour won seven and the Liberal Democrats four.



Iran turns wrath on US, Saudi Arabia

Dead mourned; 41 more arrested

AFP, Tehran

Tehran yesterday hit out at Washington and Riyadh as tens of thousands attended the funerals for those slain in the first attacks in Iran claimed by the Islamic State group.

The intelligence ministry, meanwhile, said Friday that 41 people suspected of being "agents of Daesh (IS)" had been arrested in the aftermath of Wednesday's attacks.

"Death to America", "Death to the Saud" ruling family, and "We are not afraid", shouted the crowd behind a lorry bearing the coffins of 15 of the 17 people killed.

Burials were held in the provinces for the two others killed when gunmen and suicide bombers stormed Tehran's parliament complex and the shrine of revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Fifty people were wounded.

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had initially called the attacks "firecrackers" that "will not have the slightest effect on the will of the people".

But yesterday, he turned his wrath over the attacks on the United States and Saudi Arabia, Iran's fiercest rivals.

"Such acts will have no other result than to reinforce hatred for the US government and its agents in the region, like the Saudi (government)," Khamenei wrote in a message of condolence.

At a ceremony held in parliament, attended by newly re-elected moderate President Hassan Rouhani, speaker Ali Larijani also attacked the United States and Saudi Arabia.



Smoke billows following a reported air strike on a rebel-held area in the southern Syrian city of Daraa early yesterday. US-backed Syrian fighters seized part of a district on the western edge of the Islamic State group's Raqa bastion and battled to advance inside the city's east, a monitor said.

NEWSIN brief

Catalonia announces date of referendum

AFP, Barcelona

The leader of Spain's Catalonia region, where a separatist movement is in full swing, yesterday announced an independence referendum for October 1 in defiance of Madrid. If a majority votes "yes," the northeastern region's pro-independence government has said it will immediately start proceedings to separate from Spain.

Catalonia, a wealthy, 7.5-million-strong region with its own language and customs, has long demanded greater autonomy.

IS blast kills 20 people in south of Baghdad

AFP, Hilla

A suicide bomber blew himself up in a market in the town of Musayyib, south of Baghdad, yesterday, killing at least 20 people, medical and security sources said. At least 34 other people were wounded in the attack in the centre of Musayyib, a town that lies about 60 kilometres (35 miles) south of the capital, a police officer and a medic at the local hospital said.

Japan clears way for emperor to abdicate

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's parliament passed a law yesterday that clears the way for its ageing Emperor Akihito to step down, in what would be the first imperial abdication in more than two centuries. The abdication must take place within three years -- and it only applies to Akihito. Tokyo is eyeing the end of 2018 as a likely timeline for his retirement.

'Complete vindication'

Trump dismisses ex-FBI director Comey as a 'leaker'

REUTERS, Washington

President Donald Trump called James Comey a "leaker" yesterday, the day after his former FBI director accused him in a US Senate hearing of lying and trying to quash an investigation into former national security adviser Michael Flynn.

"Despite so many false statements and lies, total and complete vindication... and WOW, Comey is a leaker!" Trump tweeted in his first comments since Comey appeared before the Senate Intelligence Committee on Thursday.

Trump broke his silence on Comey's testimony with a single tweet that echoed the points made by his private lawyer after the hearing: Trump himself was not under investigation and Comey gave an account of his conversation with him to a lawyer friend who shared it with a news outlet.

The Republican president stopped short of saying that Comey lied under oath at the hearing, which occurred a

month after Trump fired him on May 9.

In his public testimony, Comey did not disclose any links between Trump advisers and alleged Russian attempts to meddle in the 2016 US presidential election, an issue that has distracted from White House policy goals such as

overhauling the US healthcare system and cutting taxes.

Russia has denied such interference. The White House has denied collusion with Moscow.

In the highly anticipated hearing, Comey delivered a scathing indictment

of his former boss, accusing him of trying to block the Flynn probe and saying the White House defamed him and the Federal Bureau of Investigation in trying to explain his dismissal.

He told the Senate panel he took meticulous notes of each meeting or conversation he had with Trump because "I was honestly concerned that he might lie about the nature of our meeting, and so I thought it really important to document."

Comey said he shared an unclassified memo of their conversation about Flynn because he hoped it would lead to the appointment of a special counsel.

Robert Mueller, a former FBI director, was appointed as special counsel the week after Comey's firing, which set off a political firestorm and raised suspicions among Democrats and others that the White House was trying to blunt the FBI probe.



First time in 17 months

India, Pakistan PMs exchange greetings at summit, join China and Russia-led security bloc

AFP, New Delhi

The leaders of rivals India and Pakistan have met for the first time in 17 months, at a summit in Kazakhstan, officials said, despite renewed tensions over Kashmir.

Indian premier Narendra Modi and his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif shook hands and exchanged greetings late Thursday at the opening of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting in Astana.

Modi and Sharif last met on the sidelines of the Paris climate summit in December 2015 before Modi surprised the world with an impromptu visit to Pakistan the same month.

An Indian foreign ministry official said that as it was the first contact between the leaders since Sharif underwent surgery, Modi enquired about the Pakistani leader's health.

"He also enquired about Sharif's mother and his family", the official said on condition of anonymity.

Following Modi's visit to Pakistan, relations quickly deteriorated after suspected Pakistan-based militants attacked an Indian airbase in Pathankot in January 2016 killing six Indian soldiers.

Yesterday, India and Pakistan formally joined the SCO, a security bloc spearheaded by China and Russia.

Leaders of the largely symbolic body -- including Russia's Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping -- formally signed off on the sub-continent duo's accession at the annual summit.

Modi hailed India's accession as a "landmark moment in the journey of the SCO" and pledged India would play a "constructive and active role" in the organisation.

