

BREXIT DEAL DEFEAT

WORLD REACTION

The EU and European governments warned that the British parliament's rejection of a Brexit deal heightens the risk of a disorderly withdrawal from the bloc.

"If a deal is impossible, and no one wants no deal, then who will finally have the courage to say what the only positive solution is?"

EU Council president Donald Tusk

"I urge the United Kingdom to clarify its intentions as soon as possible. Time is almost up. The risk of a disorderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom has increased."

European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker

"We still have time to negotiate but we're now waiting on what the prime minister proposes. 'We want to limit the damage, and there certainly will be damage.... But we are also ready in case there is no such orderly solution.'"

German Chancellor Angela Merkel

"Maybe we'll make improvements on one or two things, but I don't really think so because we've reached the maximum of what we could do with the deal."

President Emmanuel Macron

"We will not say and are not saying anything on Brexit, even though someone constantly says and writes that Russia is rubbing its hands and gloating."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to reporters.

"In any case, there will be no renegotiations on the withdrawal agreement."

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz

"Preparations for all scenarios will continue and be intensified, including the inauspicious scenario of a withdrawal without a deal on March 29."

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte.

"An unordered exit would be negative for the EU and catastrophic for the UK."

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

"Legally, technically, it's possible."

France's Europe Minister Nathalie Loiseau said the EU could push back the March 29 deadline if London made such a request.

'A complete humiliation'

World media react to British PM's Brexit defeat at parliament

AFP, London

Britain is in "uncharted waters" after Prime Minister Theresa May was "humiliated" by the "crushing defeat" of her Brexit deal in parliament, according to scathing reactions in the British and world press yesterday.

"May's Brexit deal dead as a dodo", Britain's biggest-selling newspaper The Sun said, with a mock-up picture of the PM as the extinct flightless bird, under the front page headline "Brextinct".

The Daily Telegraph's front page read: "A complete humiliation". Times columnist Matthew Parris branded May "a zombie prime minister".

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

The Daily Mail tabloid said May was "fighting for her life".

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! the Daily Express said under the headline "Dismay".

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

"A democracy that cannot change its mind is not a democracy," wrote New York Times columnist Roger Cohen, suggesting Britain hold another referendum on leaving the EU.

The Washington Post said in an editorial that "Brexit has gridlocked the British political system," warning against a "no-deal" Brexit.

"Great Britain, the homeland of democracy, was once known as the 'island of reason'. That is over," Germany's Bild tabloid said, under the headline "What a Brexitshit".

"Attention Brussels: your time is coming! As the British obviously don't know how to help themselves, someone else must come to the rescue, and it can only be the partner on the other side of the table," said German newspaper Die Welt.

French newspaper Le Figaro's headline read: "Plan B, what Plan B?"

"All this may lead to the inevitable postponement of the exit date from the EU," it said.

NEWSINbrief

Palestinians push for full UN membership

AFP, United Nations

The Palestinians will launch a bid to become a full member of the UN even though such a move will be blocked by the US, the Palestinian foreign minister said Tuesday. The Palestinians have the status of non-member observer state at the UN and full membership would amount to international recognition of Palestinian statehood.

Gillibrand launches US presidential bid

AFP, Washington

Democratic US Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, an outspoken Trump critic and champion of women's issues, announced Tuesday she is running for president. Nearly 22 months before the 2020 election, the battle for White House is already firming up.

UK PM's probable next Brexit steps

WHAT IS MAY PROPOSING?

Immediately after Tuesday's 432 to 202 defeat was announced, May stood up in parliament and said: "I will then hold meetings with my colleagues, our confidence and supply partner the Democratic Unionist Party, and senior parliamentarians from across the House to identify what would be required to secure the backing of the House. The government will approach those meetings in a constructive spirit, but given the urgent need to make progress we must focus on ideas that are genuinely negotiable and have sufficient support in this House." May and her spokesman have refused to say if this means engaging directly with Corbyn.

WHAT IS UP FOR DISCUSSION IN THE TALKS?

May has already set out the terms on which she is willing to talk. She refers to them as principles for the discussion, opponents call them "red lines". She has committed to:

- 1) Deliver a clear, smooth and orderly Brexit.** This demonstrates May's preference for leaving the EU with a deal, despite some in her party wanting to leave without a deal. But it does not rule out leaving without a deal, despite a majority in parliament having expressed their view that this option should be taken off the table. May has stressed that she does not want to delay Brexit, although she has not explicitly ruled that possibility out since Tuesday's vote. On Wednesday, she said the EU would only entertain any delay if there were a clear new plan. She has committed to make a statement on her new approach by Jan 21 at the latest.
- 2) Protecting United Kingdom's unity.** This ambition is largely uncontroversial in parliament but there is huge disagreement on the means of achieving it. May has agreed to an insurance policy designed to prevent a hard border between EU-member Ireland and the British province of Northern Ireland. This approach has cost her the support of the Northern Irish party Court of Justice and stop making membership payments to the EU. This is important because ending free movement of people would appear to rule out forms of Brexit preferred by some lawmakers modelled on either membership of the single market or a deal similar to Norway's relationship with the EU.
- 4) Allowing Britain to have an independent trade policy.** This principle is crucial

single policy change she can make which both respects those principles and brings in enough lawmakers to win parliamentary approval.

WHAT HAS THE REACTION BEEN?

May has been criticised by opposing lawmakers for engaging with them too late in the process, a reluctance to engage with the Labour Party leadership, and for not changing the principles, or red lines, she is willing to negotiate with.

Parliament's Brexit committee has called on May to hold a series of votes on different Brexit options to see which, if any has the support of a majority in parliament.

Vince Cable, leader of the Liberal Democrats who have 11 seats in parliament, said: "She shouldn't even bother lifting the telephone to opposition parties unless she is willing to rule out categorically a no-deal Brexit and unless she is willing to enter into a constructive conversation about a people's vote."

The leader of the Scottish National Party's 35 lawmakers in parliament, Ian Blackford, said: "The EU will not renegotiate. The Prime Minister has no answer. She has failed."

Arlene Foster, leader of the DUP which has 10 seats in parliament and supports May's government but not her Brexit deal said: "Reassurances, whether in the form of letters or warm words, will not be enough. The Prime Minister must now go back to the European Union and seek fundamental change to the Withdrawal Agreement. We will work with the government constructively to achieve a better deal. That is our focus."

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

IF MAY LOSES TRUST VOTE

Under the 2011 Fixed-Term Parliaments Act, losing a confidence motion begins a two-week process that could end in fresh elections. If the vote is lost, the government has 14 days to regain the confidence of parliament's lower House of Commons -- majority support -- confirmed by the passing of a motion to that effect. If it cannot, then theoretically, Corbyn himself could seek to build a coalition with other opposition parties to take office. In the event that no alternative government can be formed from the current composition of the house, parliament is automatically dissolved and elections called.

because it appears to rule out Britain remaining a member of the EU customs union or, as the Labour Party leadership are demanding, a new permanent customs union with the EU.

CAN SHE SUCCEED?

May has largely kept to the negotiating principles she has used throughout the Brexit talks, which have alienated different groups of lawmakers on different points. There is no

that props up her minority government and a large cohort of eurosceptic lawmakers in her own party. Scottish lawmakers have also complained their interests have not been given enough prominence by the government.

3) Giving Britain control of its borders, laws, and money. This refers to May's ambition to end free movement of people with the EU, end the jurisdiction of the European



Mueller probe no 'witch hunt'

Says Trump's attorney general nominee

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump's US attorney general nominee Bill Barr pledged Tuesday to protect the investigation into possible election collusion with Russia and rejected the president's characterisation of the probe as a "witch hunt."

Asked in a Senate confirmation hearing whether he would obey an order from Trump to fire Special Counsel Robert Mueller, who leads the Russia probe, Barr replied: "Assuming there was no good cause... I would not carry out that instruction."

Barr said he was a long-time friend of Mueller and said it was "unimaginable" that the prosecutor would do anything in the investigation that would justify reeling in or shutting it down.

He said he had no reason to rein in or defund Mueller's probe, both of which Trump has called for as part of his campaign against what he labels "rigged" and "illegal."

"I don't believe Mr Mueller would be involved in a witch hunt," Barr said.

Barr was testifying on the first of two days of hearings on his nomination by Trump to lead the Justice Department.

The 68-year-old was previously attorney general from 1991-1993 and then spent 25 years as a corporate lawyer, most of it advising telecommunications giant Verizon.

He also maintained close links to the Republican mainstream and has been a major donor to the party.

The hearing focused on whether Trump recruited Barr to replace Jeff Sessions, who was fired in November, in order to help the White House inhibit the Mueller investigation.

He was interviewed once last year as a possible personal lawyer for the president.

Siege ends after 20 hours

14 people killed; president says all terrorists eliminated

AFP, Nairobi

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta yesterday said that gunmen who stormed a luxury hotel complex, killing 14 people, had been "eliminated" after an almost 20-hour operation in which hundreds of civilians were rescued.

The attack was claimed by the al-Qaeda-linked Somali group Al-Shabaab, which has targeted Kenya since it sent its army into Somalia in October 2011 to fight the jihadist group.

At least one suicide bomber blew himself up and others swapped gunfire with security forces as the assault on DusitD2, a complex which includes a 101-room hotel, spa, restaurant and offices, unfolded on Tuesday.

"There were five terrorists and all of them are no more," Kenyan police chief Joseph Boinnet told AFP. "It is a clearing exercise now going on there."

For many Kenyans, news of the attack revived traumatic memories of a 2013 Shabaab raid on Nairobi's Westgate shopping mall that left 67 dead -- a siege played out over four days that led to sharp criticism of the authorities' response.

AL-SHABAAB ATTACK ON NAIROBI HOTEL

Two of the gunmen are pictured as they made their way into a hotel and office complex in Nairobi, Kenya, on Tuesday.

But this time, local media heaped praise on the security forces for their intervention, which Kenyatta said entailed the evacuation of some 700 civilians.

George Kinoti, the director of criminal investigations, told AFP that "two principal suspects" had been arrested in connection with the attack.

CCTV footage broadcast on local media showed four black-clad, heavily-armed men entering the complex on Tuesday afternoon.

At least one of them blew himself up at the start of the attack. A police source said two attackers were shot dead Wednesday morning after a prolonged shootout.

The attack began at about 3pm (1200 GMT) on Tuesday, with a loud blast followed by gunfire and rapid calls for help spreading on Twitter.

Among the dead was an American citizen, a State Department official said. The British foreign office confirmed the death of a British-South African dual national and said another British person was injured.

A mortuary official said there were also 11 Kenyan victims, one with no papers, as well as an unidentified torso of a male adult.

It was a tormented night for families of those trapped as they waited outside the hotel while sporadic gunfire rang out.

After dawn, explosions and shooting intensified until the complex was secured mid-morning.

One survivor rescued from the building told a local television station the attackers were "very confident; they were people who knew what they were doing".

The last major attack in the country took place in 2015, when Shabaab killed 148 people at the university in Garissa, eastern Kenya. Since then sporadic attacks have targeted security forces mostly in the remote northeastern parts of the country.



EL CHAPO TRIAL

'Pena Nieto took \$100m as bribe'

REUTERS, Mexico City

Accused Mexican drug lord Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán once paid a \$100 million bribe to former Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, an ex-Guzmán associate testified on Tuesday that he previously told US authorities.

Alex Cifuentes, who has described himself as Guzmán's onetime right-hand man, discussed the alleged bribe under cross-examination by Jeffrey Lichtman, one of Guzmán's lawyers, in Brooklyn federal court. Asked if he told authorities in 2016 that Guzmán arranged the bribe, he answered, "That's right."

Reuters could not immediately reach Peña Nieto or his former spokesman for comment. He has previously denied taking bribes.

His former chief of staff, however, took to social media to reject the accusation.

"The declarations of the Colombian drug trafficker in New York are false, defamatory and absurd," wrote Francisco Guzmán in a post on Twitter, adding that the Peña Nieto government "located, detained and extradited" the Mexican kingpin.

The allegations are among the most explosive to emerge from Guzmán's trial, which began in November and has so far featured testimony of lower-level corruption.

Guzmán, 61, was extradited to the United States in 2017 to face charges of trafficking cocaine, heroin and other drugs into the country as leader of the Sinaloa Cartel.

Cifuentes testified that he had told US prosecutors that Peña Nieto initially reached out to Guzmán, asking for \$250 million. Cifuentes told the prosecutors that the bribe was paid in October 2012, when Peña Nieto was president-elect, he testified.

BITS OF HISTORY (JANUARY 16)

2001: Congo President Laurent Kabila shot by bodyguard.

2006: Liberia's Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf took office as Africa's first elected woman president.

2011: French far-right National Front party elects Marine Le Pen to replace her father.

2016: Burkina Faso troops rescue hostages.

UN peacekeeping missions at risk

Guterres warns of \$2b budget gap

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations is struggling with close to \$2 billion dollars in unpaid contributions to its peacekeeping budget, with current cash balances covering less than two months of operations, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned.

Guterres told UN member-states in a letter sent last week that the world body was forced to tap into a capital fund and special account to cover expenses from the regular UN budget at the end of last year.

"Active peacekeeping missions are soon expected to face liquidity gaps due to late payments and increasing arrears," Guterres wrote in the letter seen by AFP on Tuesday.

"As of today, arrears are nearing US \$2 billion and are likely to keep growing. Current cash balances cover less than two months of operations, compared to four months last year," he added.

The UN peacekeeping budget that runs from July 2018 to June 2019 totals \$6.7 billion, with the United States, China and Japan paying the bulk of that amount.

More than 100,000 peacekeepers are deployed in 14 missions worldwide including major operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali and South Sudan that cost more than \$1 billion annually to run.

IS attack kills US forces in north Syria

AFP, Qamishli

A suicide attack killed US servicemen in northern Syria yesterday, causing the United States to suffer its worst combat losses in the war-torn country since 2014 as it prepares to withdraw.

The bombing claimed by the IS group comes after US President Donald Trump's shock announcement last month that he was ordering a full troop withdrawal from Syria because the jihadists had been "largely defeated".

Reports said two Americans soldiers, nine Syrian civilians, and five US-backed fighters were killed in the attack on a restaurant in the northern city of Manbij near the Turkish border.

The bombing comes as Syrian Kurds present in areas around Manbij reject any Turkish presence in a planned "safe zone" to include Kurdish-held areas along the frontier.

West destabilising the Balkan states: Putin

Russia urges Europe's help to save arms treaty

AFP, Belgrade

Ahead of a visit to Belgrade today, Russian President Vladimir Putin has blamed Western countries for "destabilising" the Balkans, returning an accusation often lobbed in his direction.

"As for the situation in the Balkans, a serious destabilising factor there is the policy of the US and some other Western countries aimed at securing their dominance in the region," he told the Serbian Vecernje Novosti newspaper in an interview published on the Kremlin website.

The Balkans are often cast as a battleground between Eastern and Western powers, though all countries in the region aspire to join the European Union and most are already allied with Nato.

However Serbia, while also an EU candidate, remains a staunch Moscow ally and is set to welcome Putin with a parade today.

The two countries share Slavic roots and the Orthodox Christian faith, which Putin described as their "spiritual and cultural kinship".

They are also united over the issue of Kosovo -- the former Serbian province whose independence Belgrade refuses to acknowledge. Moscow has supported Serbia on this front and can use its veto to block Kosovo from the United Nations.

The US, a strong ally to Kosovo, has frequently accused Russia of meddling in the affairs of the region, including in last year's referendum in Macedonia to change its name, a prerequisite for joining Nato.

Putin however accused the West of pressuring Macedonia and Montenegro, a new Nato candidate, against the will of their people.

The Nato expansion efforts are drawing "new dividing lines on the European continent," he told the newspaper Politika.

Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday said Moscow was ready to work with Washington to save a crucial arms control treaty, calling on Europe to help in faltering talks.

"We are still ready to work to save the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty," Lavrov told reporters.

