

# Theresa May to press on with talks on Brexit deal

Prime Minister's political spokesman says the smaller margin of defeat shows that things are moving in the right direction

REUTERS  
LONDON

British Prime Minister Theresa May will press on with talks to secure support for her Brexit deal, her spokesman said on Friday, just minutes after Parliament rejected it for a third time.

Britain is now due to leave the EU on April 12, but her political spokesman said the smaller margin of defeat showed that things were moving in the right direction and that a number of senior Conservative MPs had voted with the government.

"Clearly it wasn't the result we wanted," the spokesman told reporters. "But, that said, we have had a number of senior Conservative colleagues who have felt able to vote with the government today... clearly there's also more work to do but in point of fact, we are at least going in the right direction."

After a special sitting of Parliament, lawmakers voted 344-286 against Ms. May's 585-page EU Withdrawal Agreement, agreed after two years of tortuous negotiations with the bloc.

The defeat means that Britain now has until April 12 to convince the 27 capitals of the EU that it has an alternative path out of the impasse, or see itself cast out of the bloc from that date with no deal on post-Brexit ties.

## Last opportunity

Ms. May had told Parliament the vote was the last opportunity to ensure Brexit would take place. She cautioned that if the deal failed, then any further delay to Brexit would probably be a long one beyond April 12.

"I fear we are reaching the limits of this process in this House," Ms. May told Parliament after the defeat. "The implications of the House's



**Mired in uncertainty**

After the House of Commons on Friday rejected British Prime Minister Theresa May's deal for the third time, the future of the Brexit process looked more uncertain than before

**Should MPs accept the deal?**  
A poll conducted by YouGov found that Britons remained split. More proportion of Remain voters were in favour of rejecting the agreement

**GENERAL POPULATION**  
Yes: 33%  
No: 38%

**REMAIN VOTERS**  
Yes: 22%  
No: 50%

**LEAVE VOTERS**  
Yes: 49%  
No: 30%

**Important dates**  
**April 1:** MPs hold another set of votes on various options  
**April 3:** Possibly another set of 'indicative votes'  
**April 10:** EU leaders meet in an emergency summit to consider any U.K. request for further extension  
**April 12:** Brexit day, if EU does not grant further extension  
**May 23-26:** Elections to European Parliament

An anti-Brexit demonstrator arguing with a Brexit supporter. AFP

	FOR	AGAINST
<b>a) First vote: January 15</b> More than 100 Conservative Lawmakers joined their Labour counterparts in handing Theresa May's deal a record defeat by 230 votes	286	577
<b>b) Second vote: March 12</b> Theresa May managed to win 40 Conservatives to her side, reducing the margin of defeat to 149	202	432
<b>c) Third vote: March 29</b> More Conservatives switched to supporting May's deal on Friday, as the government lost by 58 votes	242	391

	FOR	AGAINST
<b>Conservatives: 277</b>	286	577
<b>Labour: 5</b>	202	432
<b>Independents: 4</b>	242	391
<b>Conservatives: 34</b>	242	391
<b>Labour: 234</b>	242	391
<b>SNP: 34</b>	242	391
<b>DUP: 10</b>	242	391
<b>Others: 32</b>	242	391

**THE DEAL**  
**Ahead of Friday's vote, the government separated the two elements which make up the exit package - the 'Withdrawal Agreement' and the 'Political Declaration'. Only the first was up for vote**

**1) Withdrawal Agreement:**  
A legally binding document that has to be passed by both the British and the European Parliaments, which covers the following:  
a) Irish 'backstop'  
The deal outlines a 'backstop' arrangement to prevent the return of border checks between the British province of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland if the sides fail to agree a free trade pact following the transition period  
b) Citizens' rights  
The draft deal preserves the rights of

**2) Political Declaration**  
This relates to the post-Brexit relationship between the EU and the U.K. It is not legally binding

**POSSIBLE SCENARIOS NOW**

**a) No-deal Brexit on April 12**  
If no other course of action can be agreed upon, the default option would be that Britain crashes out of the EU on April 12

**b) New plan, long Brexit delay**  
MPs held "indicative votes" on Wednesday on a range of alternative Brexit options. But none of the eight options achieved a majority  
A series of more such votes are scheduled to be held next week

**c) Stop Brexit**  
This is the least likely option  
A petition asking the government to stop Brexit gathered 5.8 million signatures but was rejected  
Up to one million people are said to have marched last week, calling for a second referendum

**d) General election**  
If the stand-off over between Parliament and government over future course of action persists, MPs or the executive could trigger a general election

it. Next Monday, lawmakers who have tried to grab control of the process will attempt to agree on an alternative Brexit plan that could command majority cross-party support in Parliament, something largely unheard-of in Britain's political system. Many eurosceptics see a no-deal exit as their preferred option but businesses say it would cause huge damage not only to the world's fifth-biggest economy, but also to that of neighbouring Ireland.

However, any further extension would not only require Britain to take part in European Parliament elections in May, but also bring months of fresh uncertainty.

## Call for snap election

A second referendum could then be in play, although many lawmakers believe the most likely outcome and only way to solve the crisis will be a snap election.

The 2016 referendum vote to leave the EU revealed a United Kingdom divided over many more issues, and has provoked impassioned debate about everything from secession and immigration to capitalism, empire and what it means to be British.

Meanwhile the uncertainty around Brexit has left allies and investors aghast.

Opponents fear Brexit will make Britain poorer and divide the West as it grapples with both the unconventional U.S. presidency of Donald Trump and growing assertiveness from Russia and China.

Supporters say that, while the divorce might bring some short-term instability, in the longer term it will allow the United Kingdom to thrive if cut free from what they cast as a doomed attempt to forge European unity.

## Red Cross to send aid to crisis-hit Venezuela

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
CARACAS

The Red Cross announced on Friday that it would begin impartially distributing humanitarian aid in crisis-torn Venezuela in two weeks, saying it would not allow any political "interference" in the operation.

"We estimate that in a period of approximately 15 days we will be ready to offer help," said Francesco Rocca, head of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

Mr. Rocca told reporters in Caracas the organisation would begin distributing aid that President Nicolás Maduro has to date refused to allow into the country - leaving it stockpiled since mid-February on the borders with Colombia and Brazil.

## 'No interference'

The Red Cross would act according to its principles of "impartiality, neutrality and independence," he said, "without accepting interference from anyone."

"We hope to help 650,000 people at first," Mr. Rocca told a news conference in the Venezuelan capital. About 24% of Venezuela's population - seven million people - are in dire need of humanitarian aid, according to an internal UN report that showed malnutrition and disease were on the rise as living conditions plummet.

"Seven million people - or about 24% of the total population currently living in the country - are estimated to have urgent priority needs for assistance and protection," said the 45-page report.

## ELSEWHERE



## Pope issues legislation against child abuse

VATICAN CITY  
Pope Francis issued stringent child abuse legislation for Vatican City employees on Friday, as part of the Church's bid to address sex abuse allegations against priests. Previous church guidelines on handling sexual abuse cases did not cover officials and employees in Vatican City or the Curia. AFP

## Activist released after five years in Egypt jail

CAIRO  
Egypt's most prominent pro-democracy activist, Alaa Abdel Fattah, was released on probation on Friday after five years in prison on charges of organising an illegal protest. The outspoken dissident and blogger was an iconic figure of the Arab Spring revolution that unseated Hosni Mubarak in 2011. AFP

## 17 Afghan policemen killed in Taliban attacks

KABUL  
Afghan officials say the latest Taliban attacks have killed 17 policemen across the country. Nik Mohammad Nazari, spokesman in northern Badakhshan province, says three policemen were killed on Friday in the district of Arghanj Khowa. Provincial police chief Ghulam Daoud Tarakhil says the Taliban launched massive attacks in eastern Ghazni province. AP

## Sharif advised complete rest by doctors

LAHORE  
Ousted Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who was released from a high-security jail here for six weeks on medical grounds, has been advised "complete rest" by doctors after increase in angina pain and kidney complications. Mr. Sharif, 69, was released from the Kot Lakhpat jail on Tuesday night after being granted bail. PTI

## Democrats intensify call for full Mueller report

They may issue subpoena next week

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON

Democrats intensified their demands for Robert Mueller's full report after learning that the Special Counsel's findings from his Trump-Russia investigation run to more than 300 pages, while President Donald Trump boasted of total exoneration. Democrats say they may subpoena the report if it's not forthcoming by their Tuesday deadline, which Attorney-General William Barr has said will not be met.

Shaking her fist for emphasis, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Mr. Barr's summary, which cleared Mr. Trump of campaign collusion with Russia and criminal obstruction of Mueller's federal probe, was "condescending" and "arrogant."

"Mr. Attorney-General," she said, "show us the report and we'll come to our own conclusions." She asked what Mr. Trump and the Republicans were afraid of and mocked them as "scaredy-cats."

Mr. Trump himself headed to Grand Rapids, Michigan, for a Thursday campaign rally, where he deemed the probe "the greatest hoax in the history of our country" and warned that those behind it "would be held accountable."

The phenomenon is so widespread in Japan it even has its own name - *hikikomori* - defined as someone who does not go to school or work for six months and does not interact with anyone outside his family during that time.

## 75% of them male

A government survey published on Friday estimated there were 6,13,000 *hikikomori* aged between 40 and 64, nearly three-quarters of whom were male. "The number was bigger than we



U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. AFP

## Candidates file complaints with Thai EC

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BANGKOK

Several anti-military candidates in Thailand lodged fresh complaints with the Election Commission on Friday over bungled tallies and alleged vote-buying following a controversial ballot that has left politics in the junta-ruled kingdom in limbo.

Candidates from at least two parties issued complaints with the Commission on Friday over alleged irregularities they claim could skew final vote counts.

A member of the anti-junta Future Forward party accused the pro-military Phalang Pracharat of currying favour among local officials by gifting them cash and gifts.

Another Future Forward candidate reported voter intimidation inside a Bangkok polling station.

## 'Anti-stall system was active before crash'

Investigators give details after examining Boeing 737 Max jet's black boxes

REUTERS  
WASHINGTON

Investigators looking into a Boeing 737 MAX crash in Ethiopia that killed 157 people have reached a preliminary conclusion that an anti-stall system was activated before the plane hit the ground, *The Wall Street Journal* reported on Friday, citing people briefed on the matter.

U.S. safety investigators have reviewed data from the "black boxes" that were aboard Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302, four people briefed on the investigation said on Thursday. A preliminary report is expected as early as next week, the U.S. officials said.

The plane crashed on March 10 shortly after taking off from Addis Ababa.

Investigators of a deadly 737 MAX crash in Indonesia in October have also focused on the new anti-stall system, called MCAS. Boeing on



Not airbound: Southwest Airlines's Boeing 737 MAX aircraft at the Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville. AFP

Wednesday said a planned software fix would prevent repeated operation of the system that is at the centre of safety concerns.

## 737 MAX jets grounded

Boeing's fastest-selling 737 MAX jet, with orders worth more than \$500 billion at list prices, has been grounded globally by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and other regulators.

The manufacturer said it had developed a training package that 737 MAX pilots

are required to take before the worldwide ban can be lifted, proposing as it did before two deadly crashes that those pilots do not need time on flight simulators to safely operate the aircraft. On Thursday, a lawsuit against Boeing was filed in Chicago federal court by the family of Jackson Musoni, a citizen of Rwanda, who died in the Ethiopian Airlines crash.

The lawsuit alleges that Boeing had defectively designed the automated flight control system. Boeing said

it could not comment on the lawsuit. The amount and quality of training that Boeing and airlines provided to 737 MAX pilots is one of the issues under scrutiny as investigators around the world try to determine the causes of two 737 MAX crashes within five months.

The U.S. Department of Justice is investigating Boeing's development process and what Boeing disclosed about MCAS. The U.S. Transportation Department said on Monday that a new blue ribbon commission will review how the Federal Aviation Administration certifies new aircraft.

U.S. and European regulators knew at least two years before the Indonesian crash that the usual method for controlling the 737 MAX's nose angle might not work in conditions similar to those in two recent disasters, Reuters reported on Friday, citing a document.

## 6,13,000 older Japanese live in isolation

Until recently, 'hikikomori' was thought to be an issue affecting only the young

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
TOKYO

More than 6,00,000 Japanese people over 40 are living in complete isolation from society, staying at home for more than six months without social interaction, the government estimated on Friday.

The phenomenon is so widespread in Japan it even has its own name - *hikikomori* - defined as someone who does not go to school or work for six months and does not interact with anyone outside his family during that time.

## 75% of them male

A government survey published on Friday estimated there were 6,13,000 *hikikomori* aged between 40 and 64, nearly three-quarters of whom were male. "The number was bigger than we



Worrying trend: 'Hikikomori' is someone who does not go to school or work for six months. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

had imagined. *Hikikomori* isn't an issue only for younger people," said a Cabinet Office official in charge of the survey. Until recently, it was thought to be an issue mainly affecting teenagers and people in their 20s but ageing Japan is seeing a growing number of middle aged *hiki-*

*komori* cloistering themselves away for longer periods of time. Around half of those included in the survey had been reclusive for more than seven years, the government said.

The figure is higher than the estimated number of *hikikomori* under the age of

39, thought to be around 5,41,000 according to a similar government survey published in 2016. Many of the *hikikomori* are thought to be financially dependant on their ageing parents.

Rika Ueda, who works for a non-profit group that supports parents of *hikikomori* children, said she was not surprised by the survey. "The government data backs our own survey showing there are many older *hikikomori*," said Ms. Ueda. "But we were unaware that there are those in their 60s," she said. "It shows that Japanese society is tough to live in. *Hikikomori* people would rather stay at home without meeting anyone," she said.

Ms. Ueda argued that high-pressure, conformist and workaholic Japan places a huge amount of pressure on individuals.

## Southern Chinese city offers cash for information on 'illegal religious groups'

'The meaning of this document is to crack down on crimes'

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
BEIJING

A southern Chinese city is offering cash rewards for information about "illegal religious groups" as the ruling Communist Party continues to tighten its grip over faith communities.

A notice posted on the official website of the Guangzhou Department of Ethnic and Religious Affairs said up to 10,000 yuan (\$15,000) would be paid for verified information and assistance in hunting down key members and leaders of illegal foreign religious groups.

## Smaller rewards

The department said smaller rewards would be offered for reports about religious venues set up without permission and behaviour en-

couraging "religious extremism". "The meaning of this document is to protect the lawful, prevent the illegal, contain extremism, resist infiltration and crack down on crimes," the department said in commentary on the incentives.

Under President Xi Jinping, the officially atheistic ruling party has sought to eliminate all religious expression not under its direct control, especially by Uighurs, Kazakhs and other Muslim ethnic minority groups now being held in internment camps in Xinjiang where they are forced to swear allegiance to Mr. Xi and the party and condemn Islam and their traditional culture.

China's reputation for taking a hard line against reli-

gions has drawn growing global attention. The man arrested in the March 15 New Zealand mosque attacks said in his online manifesto that China is the nation that most aligns with his political and social values.

## Call for investigation

Earlier this month, a U.S. envoy on religion called for an independent investigation of the detentions and for the release of those being held, describing the situation in Xinjiang as "horrific".

Sam Brownback, U.S. Ambassador-at-large for religious freedom, said China has done nothing to assuage concerns from the U.S. and others over the detentions and accused it of being "at war with faith," drawing a furious response from Beijing.