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The Daily Telegraph

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING QUALITY DAILY

May pushed towards a second referendum

Prime Minister's team discuss new Brexit vote with Labour if cross-party deal fails

By Gordon Rayner and Steven Swinford

THERESA MAY'S ministers have discussed the possibility of giving MPs a vote on a second referendum during talks to try to agree a Brexit deal with Jeremy Corbyn, it emerged last night.

A team of four ministers led by David Lidington, the Cabinet Office minister, held four and a half hours of talks with their Labour counterparts yesterday during which the option of offering a second referendum was discussed.

Sir Keir Starmer, the shadow Brexit secretary, is believed to have said that a public vote had to be one of the options put to MPs in a series of indicative votes which will take place next week if a cross-party deal cannot be agreed.

In a letter to Labour MPs, Mr Corbyn said a "confirmatory" referendum, which would offer voters a choice between a Brexit deal or remaining in the EU, had been discussed by the teams.

Last night, Government sources played down the idea that such a plan had been agreed, as Downing Street rebuked Philip Hammond for suggesting that MPs should have another chance to vote on a second referendum.

The issue has proved deeply divisive in both parties. After the Chancellor argued in favour of a vote on a "confirmatory" referendum, Downing Street pointed out that the notion had already been voted down twice by MPs.

Nigel Evans, executive secretary of the 1922 Committee of Tory MPs, said: "Over the past two years Theresa May has taunted Jeremy Corbyn from the despatch box over the idea of a second referendum. If that became all of a sudden possible under these negotiations, the little bit of credibility she has left would be completely shattered." Mrs

May faces a mass walkout of up to 10 ministers if she pivots to a customs union after the idea was discussed at a meeting of senior Eurosceptics.

Meanwhile, 25 Labour MPs, including several front-benchers, wrote to Mr Corbyn warning him not to seek a second referendum because it would "simply divide the country further".

Tory peers yesterday warned MPs that they risked a voters' revolt if they refused to accept the result of the EU referendum. As the Lords debated a Bill passed by the Commons on Wednesday that would force Mrs May to seek a Brexit extension, Lord Lawson, the former chancellor, said "constitutional vandalism" was causing a rift between Parliament and the people.

Geoffrey Cox, the Attorney General, warned that Britain would be stuck in the EU for another year if Mrs May and Mr Corbyn could not agree a deal. Mr Cox said that Mrs May would have "little choice" but to accept whatever the EU offered her next week.

Mrs May was understood to be drafting a letter to Mr Corbyn last night summing up the result of two days of talks between the two parties, which will continue today, as well as suggesting the alternatives MPs should vote on if there is no cross-party deal.

Labour sources said they expected a referendum to be one of the choices. Government sources insisted Mrs May remained opposed to a second referendum. But the threat of one in the indicative votes could be a useful device for Mrs May to get her original deal passed as the "least worst" option for Brexiteers.

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Royal tribute to Attenborough



Sir David Attenborough was joined by the Duke of Cambridge, Prince of Wales and Duke of Sussex at the premiere of his Netflix series Our Planet at the Natural History Museum in London. Prince Charles paid tribute to Sir David for his work in broadcasting the 'wonder, fascination and increasingly the desperate plight of the natural world' *Pictures: Page 3*

And so a jailbird manages to pervert the course of British history

Allison Pearson



Could it be that the farcical proceedings in the Houses of Parliament are being scripted? Just as the Greek gods were once pictured moving mortals around a chessboard for their own amusement, perhaps some master satirist, a 21st century Ben Jonson, is busy inventing deranged actions and hypocritical

speeches for outrageous comic characters such as Sir Oliver Wetwin (the strategic genius who let a burglar into his house for a wee), the boiled hobgoblin Bercow and that screeching pantomime dame Soubry. If so, the satirist excelled themselves on Wednesday night when a vote on the Cooper Bill, which would delay Brexit, was passed by a majority of one.

And who was that one, the singular soul whose vote overturned the will of 17.4 million people? None other than Fiona Onasanya, the convicted criminal and MP for Peterborough,

released from imprisonment on Feb 26. Previously, Ms Onasanya had limited herself to perverting the course of justice; now she took a giant step forward and perverted the course of British history.

It would take Sir Tom Stoppard, at the very least, to craft a coup de theatre in which a jailbird Member of Parliament, who represents one of the most fervent Leave constituencies in the country, scores the winning goal in the final minute for Remain.

And the aghast brethren of Britain cried out as one, "But how can such a

scoundrel be permitted to vote on matters which affect our national future when she has been cast out by Labour and has worn the Anklet of Shame?"

Even after the frankly demented activities of the past few days this is a scarcely credible plot development.

We still have a Prime Minister who announces the latest horrendous setback as if the crisis had nothing to do with her and decides, unilaterally, that a solution to that crisis will be found once she embraces the *Continued on Page 4*

NEWS BRIEFING

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NEWS

Middle-class families hit by £1bn stealth tax

More than a million middle-class families and individuals are losing more than £1 billion in tax allowances and child benefits because of fiscal drag, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has revealed. The number of people affected has risen from 647,000 to 986,000. Their tax bills would have been cut by more than £1 billion if the £100,000 threshold had been increased in line with inflation. A further 110,000 people have been dragged into the highest 45 per cent tax rate. *Page 8*

WORLD

Warlord orders troops to march on Tripoli

A renegade Libyan general brought the country to the verge of civil war yesterday after ordering his forces to overthrow the government. Gen Khalifa Haftar's instruction to his self-styled Libyan National Army to march on Tripoli resulted in Fayez al-Serraj, the prime minister, mobilising his own forces to defend the capital, authorising air strikes if necessary. António Guterres, the UN Secretary General, expressed concern as he arrived in Tripoli for talks. *Page 12*

SPORT

Rose 'can't wait' to quit football over racism

Tottenham defender Danny Rose said he could not wait to "get out" of football after the racist abuse he suffered in England's Euro 2020 qualifying victory over Montenegro last week. The Spurs left back revealed he had expected abuse after a similar incident seven years earlier while playing for England Under-21s in neighbouring Serbia, and had been dismayed by the £65,000 fine handed out by Uefa, which also ordered Serbia to play one game behind closed doors. *Sport: Page 2*

FEATURES

Marvellous Mary Quant

Shy and retiring fashion great back in the limelight

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