British PM speaks on Brexit Deal

What is the issue?

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- Prime Minister Theresa May has recently spelt out some crucial details on Britain’s position on the Brexit deal.
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- But time is running out and the path ahead remains uncertain and thorny.
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What is the current situation?

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- Negotiations haven’t preceded much and positions still seem to be far apart even after 20 months form since the referendum.
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- **Irish Question -** If no other agreement is reached between the EU and UK, Brussels has proposed to retain Northern Ireland within the customs union.
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- This would in effect create a border within the U.K. between the mainland and Northern Ireland (a UK territory), which hasn’t been accepted by Britain.
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- But the Republic of Ireland (Sothern Ireland), which is an EU member, has supported the proposal as it would help in retaining a soft border with the Northern Ireland.
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- **Internal Contradictions -** Soft Brexit supporters have argued for entire UK remaining within the European Customs Union to address Ireland issue.
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- But there has been an overall lack of coherence among the British lawmakers and right wing hardliners are vouching for a clear breakaway from the EU.
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- **Other issues -** Brexit is speculated to hurt the poorer sections more, for which neither the Parliament nor the government is prepared for.
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- Considering the increasingly protectionist attitude of Mr. Trump, a trade deal with the U.S. post Brexit also doesn't seem likely now.
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- Notably, U.K. is betting big on post Brexit non-EU trade deals (India, Australia, US and other) to offset its market loss and sustain its economy.
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What are the details that the British PM has spelt out?

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- Till recently, Britain had been merely stating its vision for "Brexit" rather the substantive aspects, which the EU leaders and industry were awaiting for.
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- In her latest speech, the British PM spelt out the details of the expected deal which clearly seemed to contradict the rosy picture that was portrayed till now.
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- She also noted that there will inherently be lesser market access for both the EU and UK and that the negotiation will definitely involve compromises.
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- While the EU has been calling UK's approach as cherry picking of deals, PM May has asked the EU officials to display more flexibility.
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- **The Specifics -** Britain may choose to commit some areas of regulations like state aid and competition to remaining in step with the EU.
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- There was also a guaranteed that Britain would continue largely adhere to EU standards on worker's rights and the environment.
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- It has been stressed that, the U.K. law would not necessarily be identical to EU law but would attempt to "achieve the same outcomes".
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- She said that ways are being explored to retain U.K. within EU agencies such as those critical for chemicals, medicines and aerospace.
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- The PM also sought specific solutions on the Irish question - like an agreement to waive entry and exit declarations for goods moving across UK - EU borders.
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- A "trusted traders" scheme to reduce delays at borders has also been mooted.
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How does the future look?

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- Ms. May’s carefully crafted speech with reality checks appeared to offer something to a spectrum of views and was well received by most quarters.
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- While this offered a glimpse of the complexity ahead, materialising even the realistic expectations spelt out is a difficult task.
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- Irish Republic PM Leo Varadkar has sought more clarity on the proposed customs union and single market challenge, which is critical for his country.
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- As there is less than a year to go before Britain officially leaves the EU, the deal needs to be made soon in order to avoid an abrupt disruption.
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Source: The Hindu

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