

With three years left of her term, British PM Theresa May seeks early election on June 8

18/04/2017 21:12 by admin

London: In a surprise announcement, British Prime Minister Theresa May on Tuesday called for an early general election to be held June 8 to seek a strong mandate for her vision of a "hard" Brexit.

British Prime Minister Theresa May

"It is necessary to secure the strong and stable leadership the country needs to see us through Brexit and beyond," the Prime Minister said, in a shock announcement on the steps of 10 Downing Street.

May said she would ask the House of Commons on Wednesday to back her call for an election, just two years after the last vote and three years before the next scheduled date in May 2020.

Under Britain's Fixed-Term Parliaments Act, elections are held every five years, but the Prime Minister can call a snap election if two-thirds of lawmakers vote for it.

She said that since people voted to leave the EU in June last year, the country had come together, but politicians had not. She said the political divisions "risk our ability to make a success of Brexit."

"At this moment of enormous national significance there should be unity here in Westminster, but instead there is division. The country is coming together, but Westminster is not. In recent weeks Labour has threatened to vote against the deal we reach with the European Union," May said.

May took office in July after predecessor David Cameron stepped down following his failed attempt to get voters to back remaining in the EU. Since then she has repeatedly ruled out calling an early election to get her own mandate. But she said Tuesday she had "reluctantly" changed her mind.

At present, May's governing Conservatives have a small majority, with 330 seats in the 650-seat House of Commons. May said that "our opponents believe that because the government's majority is so small, our resolve will weaken and that they can force us to change course" on leaving the EU.

"They are wrong," she said, adding, "They underestimate our determination to get the job done and I am not prepared to let them endanger the security of millions of working people across the country."

May triggered a two-year countdown to Britain's exit from the EU last month, and negotiations to settle divorce terms and agree on a new relationship are expected to start within weeks.

May said that if there is not an election soon, "the negotiations with the European Union will reach their most difficult stage in the run-up to the next scheduled election."

"Division in Westminster will risk our ability to make a success of Brexit and it will cause damaging uncertainty and instability to the country," she said.

The leader of the main opposition Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, said he welcomed May's decision "to give the British people the chance to vote for a government that will put the interests of the majority first."

Corbyn, whose party is trailing May's Conservatives in opinion polls, said: "We look forward to showing how Labour will stand up for the people of Britain."

Polls give May's Conservatives a double-digit lead on Labour, which is divided under left-wing leader Corbyn.

- (With AP inputs)