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April 1, 2019 - Volume 11, Issue 7



Chinese woman carrying thumb drive with malware arrested at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort

By Devlin Barrett April 2 at 5:33 PM

Secret Service agents arrested a woman at President Trump's Florida resort this past weekend after she was found carrying two Chinese passports and a thumb drive with malicious software on it, according to court documents.

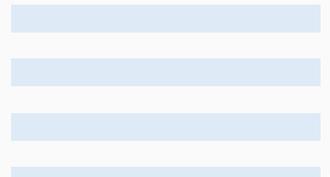
Prosecutors allege the woman, Yujing Zhang, first approached a Mar-a-Lago security checkpoint on Saturday shortly after noon and told security officials she was there to go to the swimming pool.

"Zhang was asked if the true member . . . was her father, but she did not give a definitive answer," according to the criminal complaint filed by Secret Service special agent Samuel Ivanovich. "Zhang additionally did not give a definitive answer when asked if she was there to meet with anyone. Due to a potential language barrier issue, Mar-a-Lago believed her to be the relative of member Zhang and allowed her access onto the property."

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Once inside the grounds, Zhang was approached by a receptionist and asked why she was there.

“After being asked several times, Zhang finally responded that she was there for a United Nations Chinese American Association event later in the evening,” the complaint said. “The Receptionist knew this event did not exist” but when the agent, Ivanovich, followed up with further questions, Zhang allegedly said she had arrived early for the event so she could “familiarize herself with the property and take pictures.”

At that point, Zhang presented documentation that she said was her invitation to the event, but it was in Chinese and the agent could not read it.

Agents then took Zhang to a different location to interview her, at which point she became “verbally aggressive,” according to the charging document.

“During the second interview of Zhang, she claimed her Chinese friend ‘Charles’ told her to travel from Shanghai, China to Palm Beach, Florida, to attend this event and attempt to speak with a member of the President’s family about Chinese and American foreign economic relations. Agents were unable to obtain any information more specifically identifying Zhang’s purported contact, ‘Charles,’” the complaint said.

Zhang also told the agents that she had never claimed she was going to the pool.

After Zhang was stopped and questioned, a search of her belongings turned up four cell phones, a laptop, a hard drive, and a thumb drive which contained “malicious malware,” according to the criminal complaint. Authorities said that despite her initial claim to be headed for the pool, she was not carrying a swimsuit.

She is charged with making false statements to a federal law enforcement officer and entering a restricted area.



Trump says he is withdrawing earlier North Korea-related sanctions

U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un shake hands before their one-on-one chat during the second U.S.-North Korea summit at the Metropole Hotel in Hanoi, Vietnam February 27, 2019. REUTERS/Leah Millis WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday said he was ordering the withdrawal of recently announced North Korea-related sanctions imposed by the U.S. Treasury Department.

“It was announced today by the U.S. Treasury that additional large-scale Sanctions would be added to those already existing Sanctions on North Korea,” Trump said on Twitter. “I have today ordered the withdrawal of those additional Sanctions!”

It was not immediately clear what sanctions Trump was referring to. There were no new U.S. sanctions on North Korea announced on Friday but on Thursday the United States blacklisted two Chinese shipping companies that it said helped North Korea evade sanctions over its nuclear weapons program.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders did not specify which sanctions Trump spoke of but said: “President Trump likes Chairman Kim (Jong Un) and he doesn’t think these sanctions will be necessary.”

The sanctions on the Chinese shippers were the first since the second U.S.-North Korea summit broke down last month. Hours after the sanctions announcement, North Korea on Friday pulled out of a liaison office with the South, a major setback for Seoul.

North Korea said it was quitting the joint liaison office set up in September in the border city of Kaesong after a historic summit between leader Kim Jong Un and South Korea’s President Moon Jae-in early last year.

Reporting by Susan Heavey; writing by David Alexander; editing by Tim Ahmann and Bill Trott

Australian National Sentenced to Prison Term For Exporting Electronics to Iran

Defendant Admitted Shipping Aircraft Parts to an Iranian Company

WASHINGTON –An Australian man was sentenced today to 24 months in prison on four counts of violations of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, which criminalizes knowing transactions with Iranian entities without a license from the U.S. Department of Treasury.

David Russell Levick, 57, of Cherrybrook NSW, Australia, pled guilty to the charges on Feb. 1, 2019, in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. He was sentenced by the Honorable James E. Boasberg. In addition to the prison term, Levick must pay a forfeiture amount of \$199,227, which represents the total value of the goods involved in the illegal transactions. Following completion of his prison term, Levick will be subject to deportation proceedings.

The announcement was made by Assistant Attorney General for National Security John C. Demers; U.S. Attorney Jessie K. Liu for the District of Columbia; William Higgins, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the Commerce Department's Office of Export Enforcement Boston Field Office; Nancy McNamara, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Washington Field Office; Peter C. Fitzhugh, Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Boston, and Leigh-Alistair Barzey, Special Agent in Charge of the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS), Northeast Field Office.

According to the plea documents, Levick was the general manager of ICM Components, Inc., located in Thornleigh Australia. He solicited purchase orders and business for the goods from a representative of a trading company in Iran. This person in Iran, referenced in court documents as "Iranian A," also operated and controlled companies in Malaysia that acted as intermediaries for the Iranian trading company.

Levick then placed orders with U.S. companies on behalf of "Iranian A" for the goods, which were aircraft parts and other items that "Iranian A" could not have directly purchased from the United States without the permission of the U.S. government.

The defendant admitted to procuring or attempting to procure the following items for transshipment to Iran, each of which required a license from the Treasury Department prior to any export to Iran:

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-Precision Pressure Transducers. These are sensor devices that have a wide variety of applications in the avionics industry, among others, and can be used for altitude measurements, laboratory testing, measuring instrumentations and recording barometric pressure.

-Emergency Floatation System Kits. These kits contained a landing gear, float bags, composite cylinder and a complete electrical installation kit. Such float kits were designed for use on Bell 206 helicopters to assist the helicopter when landing in either water or soft desert terrain.

-Shock Mounted Light Assemblies. These items are packages of lights and mounting equipment designed for high vibration use and which can be used on helicopters and other fixed wing aircraft.

When necessary, Levick used a broker in Tarpon Springs, Florida, through whom orders could be placed for the parts to further conceal the fact that the parts were intended for transshipment to "Iranian A" in Iran. Levick intentionally concealed the ultimate end-use and end-users of the parts from manufacturers, distributors, shippers, and freight forwarders located in the United States and elsewhere. In addition, Levick and others structured their payments between each other for the parts to avoid trade restrictions imposed on Iranian financial institutions by other countries. Levick and ICM wired money to companies located in the United States as payment for the parts.

The activities took place in 2007 and 2008. Levick was indicted in February 2012. At the request of the United States, Australia arrested him for the purposes of extradition, and Australia extradited him to the United States in December 2018. He has remained in custody here.

The investigation was conducted by agents from the FBI's Washington Field Office, the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry Security, and the Boston Office of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Assistance was provided by the Defense Criminal Investigative Service and the Justice Department's Office of International Affairs. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Thomas A. Gillice and Brenda Johnson, and investigated by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Denise Cheung and John Borchert, all of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia, as well as former Assistant U.S. Attorney Ann Petalas of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia and Trial Attorney Will Mackie of the National Security Division's Counterintelligence and Export Control Section.

Russian National Extradited From Estonia To Face Charges Of Illegal Procurement Of U.S. Electronics

Defendant allegedly used laundered funds to smuggle electronic U.S. components into the Russian Federation

SAN FRANCISCO— A federal grand jury handed down a 52-count indictment charging Valery Kosmachov with engineering a scheme to illegally procure sophisticated electronic components from the United States and to smuggle them into the Russian Federation, announced United States Attorney David L. Anderson; Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations Special Agent in Charge Ryan L. Spradlin; Department of Commerce, Bureau of Industry and Security Acting Special Agent in Charge Todd Harris; U.S. Customs and Border Protection Director of Field Operations Brian Humphrey; and U.S. Marshals Service Marshal Donald M. O’Keefe. Kosmachov was extradited to the United States from Estonia to face the charges.

According to the indictment filed September 21, 2017, and unsealed this morning, Kosmachov, 66, is a Russian national, naturalized citizen of Estonia, and resident of Tallinn, Estonia. He served as owner of Adimir OU and co-owner of Eastline Technology OU, along with co-defendant and Russian national Sergey Vetrov, 66. The indictment describes how Kosmachov and Vetrov used the Estonia-based companies as procurement “fronts” to obtain controlled U.S.-origin microelectronics, in part by misrepresenting that the end-users for the components were located in Estonia. The components included dual-use programmable computer chips capable of operating in austere environments making them useful in both civilian and military applications. Once in possession of the chips in Estonia, the co-defendants allegedly later smuggled them into the Russian Federation, in part by using laundered funds.

In sum, Kosmachov, Vetrov, and their two companies are charged with one count of conspiracy to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and one count of conspiracy to commit international money laundering, in violation of 18 U.S.C. §§ 1956(a)(2)(A) and (h). In addition, Kosmachov and Vetrov are charged with 12 substantive counts of violating the IEEPA, in violation of 50 U.S.C. § 1705, 19 counts of smuggling, in violation of 18 U.S.C. §§ 554 and 2; and 17 counts of international money laundering, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § § 1956(a)(2)(A).

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Kosmachov was arrested in Tallinn on September 12, 2018, and was extradited to the United States on March 14, 2019, to face prosecution. Vetrov remains at large. Kosmachov appeared this morning before Chief U.S. Magistrate Judge Joseph C. Spero, for a detention hearing. He remains in federal custody pending his next court appearance. Kosmachov is next scheduled to appear on March 28, 2019, before the Honorable William H. Orrick, U.S. District Judge, for further proceedings.

An indictment merely alleges that crimes have been committed, and all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. If convicted, Kosmachov could face a maximum 20-year term of imprisonment for each IEEPA and money laundering-related count, and a maximum 10-year sentence for each count of smuggling. Additional periods of supervised release, fines, and special assessments also could be imposed. However, any sentence following conviction would be imposed by the court after consideration of the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and the federal statute governing the imposition of a sentence, 18 U.S.C. § 3553.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Philip J. Kearney of the Northern District of California United States Attorney’s Office, and Amy Larson, of the U.S. Department of Justice’s National Security Division, are prosecuting the case. The prosecution is the result of an investigation by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Investigations, the Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Industry and Security, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the Internal Revenue Service, and the U.S. Marshals Service with assistance from the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of International Affairs.

Staten Island Attorney Pleads Guilty to Fraud and Extortion Scheme

Richard Luthmann Lured Victim to His Law Office, Where Co-Defendants Extorted Him Using a Firearm

Earlier today in federal court in Brooklyn, Richard Luthmann, a Staten Island attorney, pleaded guilty to wire fraud conspiracy and extortion conspiracy before United States Magistrate Judge Ramon E. Reyes, Jr. As part of his guilty plea, Luthmann stipulated that he obstructed justice following his arrest, by sending a threatening letter to a potential witness whom he believed was cooperating with the government and violating a court order regarding discovery materials.

Richard P. Donoghue, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, William F. Sweeney, Jr., Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation,
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New York Field Office (FBI), and Jonathan Carson, Special Agent-in-Charge, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Industry and Security, Office of Export Enforcement, New York Field Office (Commerce), announced the guilty plea.

Beginning in summer 2015, Luthmann, co-defendant George Padula and the victim participated in a scheme in which they contracted with overseas companies to sell and ship them containers of valuable scrap metal, but instead packed the containers with cheap filler material, such as concrete blocks. As part of the scheme, Luthmann registered shell companies, including Omni Metal Corporation, with the New York Department of State and recruited a client of his law practice to be the nominal president of Omni. At the direction of Luthmann and Padula, the client opened bank accounts to facilitate the fraud, and between October 2015 and December 2015, the over-seas companies wired over \$500,000 to those accounts. That money was then transferred into accounts controlled by Luthmann or a co-conspirator.

On December 5, 2016, Luthmann lured the victim to his law office, ostensibly to sign some paperwork. Once there, Padula and co-defendant Michael Beck blocked the victim from leaving. Beck then pulled out a firearm, aimed it at the victim's head and knee, and claimed the victim owed him \$10,000 because Beck had purchased a \$7,000 debt that the victim owed Padula, plus a \$3,000 "vig," or interest payment, that Beck had added. The victim was then permitted to leave, but not before being warned by Padula not to contact the police. When sentenced, Luthmann faces a maximum sentence of 20 years' imprisonment on each count.

Padula and Beck have previously pleaded guilty, respectively, to wire fraud conspiracy (Padula), kidnapping conspiracy (Beck), extortion conspiracy and use of a firearm in connection with a crime of violence (Padula and Beck).

The government's case is being handled by the Office's Organized Crime and Gangs Section. Assistant United Attorneys Moira Kim Penza and James P. McDonald are in charge of the prosecution.

The Defendants

RICHARD LUTHMANN

Age: 39

Staten Island, New York

GEORGE PADULA III

Age: 30

Staten Island, New York

MICHAEL BECK

Age: 60

Staten Island, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 17-CR-664 (JBW)

So Far Capitol Hill will not back New NAFTA

By Erica Werner , David J. Lynch and Emily Rauhala
March 29 at 7:46 AM

President Trump's effort to rework a major trade deal with Canada and Mexico is showing signs of faltering on Capitol Hill, straining under a variety of angry complaints from lawmakers of both parties who won't commit to backing the plan.

Trump reached agreement with Canada and Mexico last year to update the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement. But Congress must approve the deal, and the White House has been unable to mollify the growing complaints.

The administration's goal is to get the pact approved ahead of Congress' annual August recess. It's not clear if that timeline is realistic. But delaying action past Labor Day could greatly increase political risk because of the accelerating presidential campaign.

In the latest obstacle, key Republican senators including Finance Committee Chairman Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) have begun insisting stridently that Trump lift steel and aluminum tariffs imposed on Canada and Mexico as a precondition to any congressional vote.

Grassley said in an interview Thursday that he'd made the case directly to Trump at a recent meeting, but that the president refused to budge. Nonetheless, Grassley predicted Trump would have no choice but to give in if he wants the new NAFTA deal — one of the signature promises of his presidential campaign — to advance.

"The tariffs are going to come off because the president has a good agreement," Grassley said. "It's just a matter of his realizing that nothing's going to happen until the tariffs go off. And so the tariffs come off if he wants to get a win."

Trump's top advisers, including U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, are refusing to cancel the tariffs until Canada and Mexico accept quotas on their metals exports. The tariffs were imposed last year in response to a flood of Chinese steel that depressed global prices and dented the fortunes of American steelmakers. The administration now wants quotas as a fallback defense against shipments from China making their way to the U.S. market via Canada or Mexico.

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But for Canada, too, the tariffs are the biggest sticking point to consideration of a deal. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government, weakened by domestic political controversy, faces voters in October. Canada's House of Commons has an ever-narrowing window to ratify the deal on their end, and it could be near impossible if the tariffs remain.

"The existence of these tariffs for many Canadians raises some serious questions about NAFTA ratification," Chrystia Freeland, Canada's foreign minister, told reporters after a meeting with Lighthizer this week.

"I don't want to sound threatening, because that is not helpful, but practically speaking, we have an election coming up in Canada. It will be extraordinarily tough if steel and an aluminum tariffs are in place," said David MacNaughton, Canada's ambassador to the United States.

The revised trade deal, which Trump calls the USMCA, would require more automobile components to be assembled in North America in order to avoid import penalties, impose higher wage provisions, open up Canada's dairy sector, and include stricter rules for intellectual property and internet commerce.

Support from House Democrats would be crucial for the new trade deal to advance, but they have raised a host of issues. Some liberals have insisted the deal is a non-starter because of a provision related to prescription drugs — an uncompromising stance that has irked a group of their fellow Democrats who are more oriented toward free trade.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) can single-handedly determine the pact's fate by deciding whether to put it on the floor. But she said Thursday that she needs to see stronger enforcement provisions in the deal before agreeing to embrace it.

"We need to see enforcement, I've said it all along, it's no mystery," Pelosi told reporters at the Capitol. "You can say all the nice things you want in the world and write them up, but unless you have enforcement you're just going down a path that isn't going to be helpful to America's workers."

Pelosi is referring to a common complaint from Democrats and labor groups, which is that they want to know what specific penalties Mexico and Canada might face if they flout the rules.

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Underlying all the maneuvering are the complicated politics of trade, which have long divided Democrats and have grown only more complex in the Trump era. The president has forced his protectionist impulses onto a Republican Party that traditionally supported free trade. With a presidential campaign looming and numerous Democrats vying for their party's nomination — including some who've already denounced the deal -- passage will only get tougher as time goes by. But lawmakers on both sides say much work remains to be done for the agreement to stand a chance on Capitol Hill.

"It's going to be a tough fight, but it's certainly one that's workable and doable," said Phil Cox, a veteran of numerous Republican political campaigns, who is helping lead a business-funded campaign to marshal support for the deal.

All the unresolved issues has left the entire process up in the air. White House officials have said they will work with lawmakers to try and address concerns, but they rule out reopening the trade deal to satisfy Democrats' demands for tougher labor, environmental and enforcement provisions, because identical versions must be approved by Mexico and Canada.

If U.S. lawmakers don't eventually pass the deal, Trump has threatened to try and terminate the existing NAFTA, a prospect that has mortified lawmakers from both parties and the business community.

"I don't think trying to jam Congress is a good idea," said Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas), who warned that the deal doesn't currently command the votes to pass, partly because of the tariff issue. Passing so-called "fast track" trade rules was a struggle during the Obama administration, Cornyn recalled, and "My impression is that trade's taken a little bit of a battering since that time, in both political parties."

But Trump administration officials are in the middle of several trade-related fights elsewhere, and it's unclear how much bandwidth they have been willing to devote to the Canada and Mexico deal. They are in tense discussions with Chinese leaders that have already missed several deadlines. Talks with European Union leaders, meanwhile, appear to have flatlined in an dispute over agricultural imports.

Trump already declared victory on the Mexico and Canada talks last year, when he notched a tentative agreement with leaders from both countries, but the deal is not complete until it is ratified by Congress.

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In the House, progressives have coalesced against provisions codifying exclusive rights to a class of drugs known as biologics for 10 years, something they say makes the entire deal a non-starter.

The bottom line is it's a total giveaway to Big Pharma," said Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.).

At the same time, administration efforts to woo organized labor thus far have fallen short. The AFL-CIO said earlier this month it would not back the agreement unless the Mexican parliament first approves promised labor reforms to comply with its USMCA promises.

"There's a lane, but everything has to fall just right," said Dan Ujcz, an attorney with Dickinson Wright who follows trade issues closely and recently met with White House officials. "The relationship between the White House and Congress would have to work perfectly and there's no objective evidence that can happen."

No one has given up on the agreement, however. Little overt opposition has hardened, according to William Reinsch, a former Commerce Department official now at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"Trump is his own worst enemy here. If he would just shut up and let Lighthizer manage it, it would get through," Reinsch said.

In 2018, the White House imposed a 25 percent tariff on steel imports and a 10 percent tariff on aluminum imports from a range of countries, including Canada, Mexico, Japan, and members of the European Union. Trump justified the unilateral move by saying steel and aluminum imports threatened the national security of the United States. This allowed him to bypass Congress, but now lawmakers have much more sway.

The U.S. does import a large amount of steel and aluminum, and the U.S. and other countries for years have complained that China has flooded the world with cheap metal in such a way that it destroyed domestic producers.

But U.S. companies do not directly import much steel and aluminum from China, so it was difficult for Trump to target Beijing with the move. Instead, the higher costs largely hit U.S. allies that Trump was trying to crack down on anyway, particularly as he was hoping to create leverage to tighten trade rules with Canada and Mexico last year.

Trump has said the imposition of tariffs has helped revive the U.S. steel and aluminum industries, and it has proven to be very popular with a number of chief executives. But the tariffs have drawn fury from manufacturers and other companies that have complained they have to pay higher prices to import products and that they are passing those costs along to U.S. consumers.

In September, the U.S., Canada and Mexico agreed to overhaul the 24-year-old North American Free Trade Deal. Trump and several cabinet officers had suggested they would lift the tariffs once a deal was signed, but opted at the last minute to retain them as leverage in their drive for quotas.

Sen. Patrick J. Toomey (R-Pa.) acknowledged that imposition of the tariffs helped convince Canada and Mexico to negotiate seriously over a new North American trade deal. But he criticized the resulting USMCA as "not a good outcome," saying that its 16-year sunset clause and restrictions on the process for resolving disputes would result in less trade.

There is still time to iron out these concerns. Congress won't act on legislation to implement USMCA until lawmakers receive the International Trade Commission's analysis of the deal's economic impact, which is expected by April 19. Once that happens, they will have several months to reach a decision.

"They've got some serious hurdles and the clock is not their friend," Toomey said.

Damian Paletta contributed to this report.

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Brexit: What just happened?

Members of Parliament have rejected eight different proposals on Britain's withdrawal from the European Union (EU).

The plans - proposed and then voted on during a turbulent day in Westminster - ranged from holding a second referendum to leaving the EU without a deal on 12 April.

This all came on the day that Prime Minister Theresa May said she was willing to step down if the Withdrawal Agreement her government has negotiated with the EU was finally passed - after already being rejected by MPs on two occasions.

What just took place?

A series of votes on Brexit options - known as "indicative" votes, designed to see what MPs would and would not support amid the Brexit deadlock - were held on Wednesday evening in the House of Commons, the main decision-making body of the UK Parliament, following hours of debate.

Unusually, MPs indicated their preferences using printed voting forms rather than trooping through the voting lobbies of the chamber.

House of Commons Speaker John Bercow announced the results, revealing that MPs had rejected:

- Leaving the EU with no deal on 12 April
- Unilaterally dropping the plan to leave the EU if no deal is reached by 12 April
- A new referendum on any deal/s to leave the EU
- Leaving the EU but staying in a customs union with the 27 EU states
- Two variations on leaving the EU but staying in the European Economic Area (EEA) and rejoining the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)
- Negotiating changes to the Withdrawal Agreement more in line with the Labour Party's position

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- Agreeing with the EU a period of two years in which UK goods have full access to EU markets

MPs from Mrs May's Conservative Party were allowed by the leadership to vote as they saw fit, with the exception of her most senior ministers, who were expected to abstain.

Labour MPs were expected to back motions supported by the party's leadership, including the option to hold a second referendum.

Mrs May and her government would not have been obliged to act on any of the MPs' decisions even if they had been backed by a majority of MPs.

However, Mrs May is under pressure to chart a new course after twice failing to get the Withdrawal Agreement her government has negotiated with the EU passed by the Commons.

Also on Wednesday, Mrs May told a meeting of MPs from her Conservative Party that she would step down if her Withdrawal Agreement were to get through the Commons at the third time of asking.

How did we get here?

Wednesday's votes were held after Mrs May and her government were defeated on Monday in a vote that allowed MPs to seize control of business in the chamber from the government for at least a day.

Mrs May was forced to ask EU leaders to delay Brexit last week, after the House of Commons again rejected the deal she had agreed with the EU on how Britain would withdraw from the bloc by a large majority, and then also voted against a no-deal exit.

EU leaders are among those who fear the UK leaving the bloc without a deal would lead to chaos.

The 27 EU leaders offered her two dates:

- A delay until 22 May if MPs approved her withdrawal deal at the third time of asking
- A shorter delay until 12 April if they rejected it; by that time the UK must set out its next steps - either another extension or leaving without a deal

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But the EU says a further extension beyond 12 April is only possible if the UK agrees to hold European elections on 23 May. Mrs May has said she does not wish the UK to take part in those elections.

What happens next?

A good question.

Mrs May had been expected to make a third attempt at getting her deal with the EU passed later this week, amid news that some of her biggest critics within the party - including ex-Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson - were now willing to back it.

This came amid fears by pro-Brexit MPs that leaving the EU might be seriously delayed or even abandoned, and following Mrs May's statement that she would step down soon after her deal getting through the Commons.

But in a blow to hopes of her deal going through, the Democratic Unionist Party - a Northern Irish party whose members back continued unity with Britain, and whose votes have been key to Mrs May's ability to pass legislation as leader of a minority government - said its 10 MPs would not be backing it.

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“Work for a cause not for
applause.”

Whether Mrs May will be allowed to return with her deal for a third vote has in any case been thrown into fresh doubt by the House of Commons Speaker. Wednesday saw Mr Bercow once more cite parliamentary precedent to rule that another vote could only take place if the proposal tabled by the government was "substantially different" from the previous one.

Some supporters of the "indicative" vote process are now arguing that the most popular of the rejected proposals - including a second referendum - should now be put to the Commons for a second time, possibly next Monday. Others are insisting that the only way forward is a general election to create a new House of Commons that will hopefully be able to break the deadlock.

The UK could still leave with no deal on 12 April if a way forward is not found. Although this is now regarded as unlikely, given the opposition of most MPs, by what method this can be avoided - and even who will be in charge of the process - is not entirely clear.

Are we anywhere near the end of all this?

No.

It is worth remembering that the debate now is focused on the terms of the UK's exit from the EU.

The conditions of the future relationship between the country and the bloc, assuming the UK leaves at all, still have to be negotiated.

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