

A small plane operated by a private airline in Nepal hit a parked helicopter on Sunday while preparing to take off in a mountainous area near Mount Everest, killing three people including a copilot, said airport official, Pratap Babu Tiwari.

# Democrats demand Trump tax returns by April 23

Democratic lawmakers on Saturday gave the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) a final deadline of April 23 to hand over President Donald Trump's tax returns, which Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said the administration was diligently considering.

"I am aware that concerns have been raised regarding my request and the authority of the committee. Those concerns lack merit," House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal said in a letter to IRS Commissioner Charles Rettig after an initial April 10 deadline lapsed, AFP reported.

On Wednesday, Mnuchin said the Treasury was handling the request and that a deadline set for that date would be missed, citing possible constitutional issues raised by the Democratic request.

But on Saturday, he said the administration would respond by the latest target date.

"I'm sure we'll respond by that deadline, not going to make a commitment prematurely whether we'll be able to conclude a legal review by that deadline," Mnuchin said. "We have people working on it diligently."

Calling Neal's new deadline an "arbitrary" date, Mnuchin said the Democrats' request could set "enormous precedent in potentially weaponizing the IRS."

Trump argues that he cannot release his tax returns because they are being audited, but the IRS has said this is no impediment to their release.



JIM WATSON/AFP

"It is not the proper function of the IRS, Treasury or Justice to question or second guess the motivations of the Committee or its reasonable determinations regarding its need for the requested tax returns

and return information," Neal said. "Concerns about what the Committee may do with the tax returns and return information are baseless."

Neal gave the government until 5:00

p.m. (2100 GMT) on April 23 to hand over the tax records.

"Please know that, if you fail to comply, your failure will be interpreted as a denial of my request," Neal wrote.

## India confident US cannot impose sanctions over S-400

India said it is confident it will avoid US sanctions over its purchase of Russia's S-400 missile system, which has become a lightning rod in American dispute with China and Turkey.

India's Defense Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stressed in an interview with AFP that her country needed arms from Russia to remain strong, Press TV wrote.

The US has warned of sanctions on countries buying Russian military equipment. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, however, defied the warning in October when he signed a deal worth more than \$5 billion on the delivery of S-400 anti-aircraft missiles with President Vladimir Putin.

Sitharaman said India has presented its reasons for the purchase to the US and expects Washington to accept them and avoid imposing sanctions on New Delhi.

"In the case of S-400 we have explained ourselves well. That has been heard and understood. They have appreciated the point of view put forward," AFP quoted her as saying.

Asked if she was confident that India would avoid sanctions, Sitharaman said, "US I hope so."

US President Donald Trump's administration imposed sanctions on China's military in 2018 over Beijing's purchase of the S-400 and other military hardware from Russia. The US is currently embroiled in a brewing dispute with Turkey and has warned the NATO member of sanctions for buying the S-400 after suspending Ankara's participation in the F-35 stealth jet program.

Washington has already cast scorn on New Delhi's efforts to obtain a waiver from the US Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) which monitors the S-400 system with a particular focus.

American officials have indicated that the US government is still hopeful to persuade India to forego the agreement.

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Randall Schriver told a hearing in March that Washington wanted to "work through" the problem given that India's contract with Russia had not been completed yet.

Schriver said the US was "very keen to see (India) make an alternative choice (to the S-400) and we are working with them to provide potential alternatives."

The US government, however, is not in a position to play hardball with India because Washington needs to keep the Asian giant on its side in order to counter China's growing power.

The US is especially in a tricky position in the face of efforts by China and India to patch up relations which went into sharp decline in 2017 when they had a military standoff over a Himalayan plateau.

In her interview, Sitharaman stressed the two sides' determination to sort out their differences.

"Sometimes there are differences and you have a faceoff," but "our attempt has been that these differences... cannot be allowed to become disputes."



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## Iraq unearths mass grave of Kurds killed by Saddam

Iraq must never forget Saddam Hussein's crimes or allow his party to return, President Barham Salih said on Sunday after attending the unearthing of a mass grave of Kurds killed by the former dictator's forces three decades ago.

The grave, found in the desert about 170 kilometers (106 miles) west of the city of Samawa, contained the remains of dozens of Kurds made to "disappear" by Saddam's forces, Salih's office said, Reuters reported.

"They were among up to 180,000 people who may have been killed during Saddam's 'Anfal' campaign that targeted Iraqi Kurds in the late 1980s when chemical gas was used, villages were razed and thousands of Kurds were forced into camps.

"He killed them because they did not accept the continuation of this regime, because they wanted to live a free and dignified life," Salih, a Kurd, told a news conference at the grave site.

"He brought them to Samawa to bury them but our people in Samawa embraced them," Salih added. Iraq's southern provinces are predominantly inhabited by Shia Arabs, who also suffered oppression and mass killings under Saddam.

"The new Iraq must never forget these crimes that were committed against Iraqi people from all groups," he said.

ESSAM AL-SUDANI/REUTERS  
Iraqi members of the Civil Defense cover the bones from an unearthened mass grave of Kurds in west of the city of Samawa, Iraq, on April 14, 2019.

## Philippines confirms death of Daesh-linked leader

Philippine officials on Sunday confirmed that a leader of an alliance of pro-Daesh terrorists was one of four killed in a clash with the military last month.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana confirmed Abu Dar's death based on the findings of a DNA test, Reuters wrote.

"It is confirmed, it's Abu Dar's remains," he said. Security forces believe Abu Dar had led an alliance of pro-Daesh terrorists in southern Philippines that include foreigners.

The four terrorists were killed in a clash in Lanao del Sur Province in March. Major General Roberto Ancan, commander of the army's 1st Infantry Division, also confirmed Dar's death. He called it a "significant accomplishment of the government and the people of Lanao del Sur who worked together to rid their beloved province of terrorists."

The pro-Daesh alliance carried out the siege of southern Marawi City for five months in 2017 before some leaders were reported killed by the military in airstrikes and street battles, among them Isnulon Hapilon, Daesh's anointed "emir" in Southeast Asia.

Abu Dar, who was seen in a seized video footage sitting beside Hapilon, had managed to escape before government forces were able to take back Marawi, according to local media.

"Well, for now his group is leaderless," Lorenzana said. "We are monitoring who will replace Dar."

AARON FAVILA/AP  
Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana

## OPINION

### May cannot come back from her Easter 'holiday' empty-handed

By Jane Merrick\*

Sending lawmakers off on an unexpected Easter break after the Brexit deadline was extended for six months, Theresa May told them to use the opportunity to "reflect" on how to get out of the current stalemate that has left the UK in limbo.

For herself, the prime minister is thought to be taking a few days off – perhaps on one of her favorite walking holidays with her husband – before returning to Westminster, clearheaded and refreshed, to try to finally find a deal on Brexit. And yet, arguably, while she deserves the break, leaving the scene is the last thing she should be doing right now.



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The decision by EU leaders to extend the deadline for Brexit until October 31, at the end of a fraught summit that ran into the early hours of Thursday morning, was akin to a pressure valve being released in Westminster.

Lawmakers tired and – in some reported cases, ill – from the repeated late nights and close-run votes on Brexit were relieved that the Easter recess, which had been canceled to try to reach a deal before the old deadline of Friday April 12, was back on.

It is their first break since Christmas. Yet that release of pressure has created a vacuum into which the more hardcore Brexit enthusiasts have rushed to seize the agenda from the prime minister.

On Friday, Nigel Farage, who as UKIP leader was at the forefront of the campaign to leave the EU, launched his new Brexit Party's campaign for the European elections.

Prominent Conservative Brexiters, who have their eyes on the leadership and job of the prime minister when May finally steps down, are also staying around to get their slice of the agenda.

Boris Johnson, the former foreign secretary and now a leading contender to succeed May, has been in secret talks with the pro-Brexit Northern Ireland party the DUP, which holds the balance of power in the Commons. Ambition never sleeps.

Although May needed more time to secure a compromise on Brexit, this vacuum is a dangerous period – even for the prime minister who has survived many parliamentary defeats and attempts to unseat her.

While the Brexit process was in a state of deadlock, May nevertheless had some control over that deadlock. She could not find a way out, but at least she was the one dictating the terms of the talks with the Labour Party, the person representing the UK at that Brussels summit, and, to some extent, in control of the news agenda.

By taking her foot off the gas – even temporarily – May has let other, louder voices overtake her.

If she wants to take back control, to borrow a phrase from Brexit campaigners, she should not stay away for long. While Westminster was in stasis, it suited the PM, relatively speaking. Now there is more time on the Brexit countdown clock, anything could happen.

Crucially, the prime minister needs to redouble the efforts of talks between the government and Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party to reach a compromise deal that will have enough votes in the Commons to enable Brexit to take place.

Talks between the UK government and Jeremy Corbyn's opposition Labour Party are ongoing, to try to find a Brexit solution.

Those talks are ongoing between ministers and Corbyn's representatives, but they can't be allowed to dwindle to nothing just because parliament is on a timeout.

May needs to take charge of them personally and to make a breakthrough by next weekend, before the Commons returns the following week – to not only prove to Brussels she is making real progress but also to prevent a challenge to her own leadership by increasingly rebellious Brexiteer Conservatives.

If they fail, she must either press again for her original deal, or accept that lawmakers should have another attempt at indicative votes to come up with the most popular alternative.

If she can't prove she has an answer, there will be a concerted attempt by her own party to force her to resign.

The next official deadline for Brexit is June, when the UK must produce a progress report to EU leaders on how it's trying to solve the Brexit deadlock. But in reality, the date looming for the prime minister is April 23, when parliament returns. She cannot come back from her "holiday" empty-handed.

\* This analysis by Jane Merrick, a freelance journalist specializing in commentary on politics and Brexit, was first published by CNN on Sunday.