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US Torpedoes WTO Panel on 'Made in China' Labels for Hong Kong Products
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Influential foreign policy think tanks in Washington are putting heavy pressure on newly-minted US President Joe Biden not to shred his predecessor's "get tough" approach on China, which has included sanctions, tariffs, and the blacklisting of Chinese companies.

The US has rejected a request made by Hong Kong at the World Trade Organization (WTO) for a dispute settlement panel over the Trump administration's extension of "made in China" labeling requirements to products from the semi-autonomous city. Hong Kong is likely to appeal, which would force the issue.

[According to Reuters](#), the US WTO delegate rejected the request by Hong Kong, which is a WTO member in its own right, reflecting its status as a Special Administrative Region of China. However, according to WTO rules, the defending member only gets unilateral refusal power on the first request. Hong Kong can later issue a second request for a panel, at which time it would take a consensus decision by all 164 WTO members in order to block it.

The US delegate said that the refusal stems from the recent change of administration in Washington DC, in which Biden took office just five days ago. His nominee for US Trade Representative, Katherine Tai, is not expected to go through her congressional [confirmation hearing](#) until next month. Until then, Biden has [temporarily appointed](#) Maria Pagan to head the office.

At issue is a July 2020 order by then-US President Donald Trump removing Hong Kong's special trade status. The US began requiring ["Made in China" labels](#) on goods manufactured in Hong Kong before they could be imported to the US.

Trump's move followed the recent passing of a new National Security Law in Beijing that for the first time included Hong Kong. The law banned, among other things, the transmission of funds to groups that China claims support secession or terrorism, and followed years of violent protests in Hong Kong that were purportedly led by [US-backed protest](#) groups. Washington claimed this law deprived Hong Kong of its autonomy, turning it into another mainland Chinese city.

At the WTO's closed-door meeting on Monday, the Hong Kong delegation argued the decision was blatantly discriminatory and failed to recognize that Hong Kong is a separate customs territory and a WTO member in its own right," according to the [South China Morning Post](#), who has offices in the city.

The representative said the labeling places an "unnecessary burden" on Hong Kong businesses as well as causing "confusion and concern" for consumers and markets. They also argued that Hong Kong is - in and of itself - its own "brand".

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US Troops to Remain on Mexico Border as 'Digital Wall' Likely to Replace Trump's Barrier
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

While the new Biden administration quickly sheds much of former US President Donald Trump's more unpopular policies, secretive agreements reportedly signed just days before Trump left office between the Department of Homeland Security and authorities in several US states could block significant changes in immigration policy for months.

In an executive order made just hours after his inauguration last week, US President Joe Biden ended the state of emergency at the US-Mexico border that was previously declared by former President Donald Trump to justify special appropriations of cash for his pet border-wall project.

Troops Stay at Border

The militarization of the US border with Mexico is not likely to end anytime soon, however, [as the Military Times reported](#) on Monday that the mission of the roughly 3,000 US troops stationed in the region in support of US Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) efforts "will continue as normal," according to a Pentagon spokesperson.

In a January 22 phone call with Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the two heads of state "agreed to work closely to stem the flow of irregular migration to Mexico and the United States," according to [a White House readout](#) of the call. The news release made no mention of the [roughly 15,000 Mexican troops](#) Trump strong-armed Mexico City into dispatching to the US-Mexico border in 2019 to halt northern immigration.

As a result of Biden's executive order, various projects authorized by the Trump declaration are being reviewed by the new administration. If the legislation Biden sent to Congress the next day is an indicator, his policy is not likely to differ much from that of his predecessors - and could even carry new and dangerous threats to American civil liberties.

Jessica Bolter, associate policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute, [told The Nation](#) that "it has been easy for politicians to point to border security technology as a fallback option if they just don't like the idea of physical barriers," which is likely to be attractive to Biden as he seeks to distance himself from Trump's hated policies while retaining the same basic conception of border control as a national security issue.

A Digital Border Fence

[A fact sheet](#) on Biden's US Citizenship Act of 2021 [introduced in the Senate](#) on Thursday hints at a new reliance on technology to police the border.

One part of the fact sheet addresses "supplement[ing] existing border resources with technology and infrastructure" and calls for the secretary of homeland security to "develop and implement a strategy to manage and secure the southern border between ports of entry that focuses on flexible solutions and technologies that expand the ability to detect illicit activity, evaluate the effectiveness of border security operations, and be easily relocated and broken out by Border Patrol Sector."

While this could include motion sensors or [facial recognition](#) technology, it would also almost certainly include unmanned aerial vehicles.

[Defense One reported](#) that two major drone manufacturers, Sikorsky and General Atomics, have lobbied the Federal Aviation Administration for years to update US regulations to allow for operating fixed-wing drones like the MQ-9B SkyGuardian in US skies. They expect to win such permission by 2025, and would then be able to deploy stateside the same citywide surveillance tech used over urban battlefields in the Middle East - a goal laid out by the Pentagon [as early as 2010](#).

Indeed, the DHS already has [special permission](#) to fly fixed-wing UAVs like General Atomics MQ-1 Predator over the more isolated parts of the border - and has even deployed them to surveil Americans well inside the border: after massive protests broke out in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in May 2020 following the in-custody death of George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, at the hands of white police, a CBP Predator drone from the US-Canada border [was spotted circling](#) the city.

Surveillance technology, even that restricted to border areas, has huge implications to US civil liberties. Within 100 miles of any US border exists a so-called "Constitution-free zone" established in 1953 by the US Department of Justice to give CBP agents almost unstoppable legal power to search and surveil people without a warrant. Two-thirds of the US population lives within such zones, which include sea borders. The [American Civil Liberties Union](#) has called attention to the extensive abuses of the system, calling it a "dragnet approach to law enforcement and national security" that is "increasingly turning us all into suspects."

Trump Policy Inertia

Biden's legislation also calls for a slew of advanced new technologies to "expedite screening and enhance the ability to identify narcotics and other contraband at every land, air, and sea port of entry," including "high-throughput scanning technologies to ensure that all commercial and passenger vehicles and freight rail traffic entering the United States at land ports of entry and rail-border crossings along the border undergo pre-primary scanning," according to the fact sheet.

The Nation suggested that the proposal appears to follow the same logic as underpinned the approach of Trump senior adviser [Stephen Miller](#), architect of the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) program that separated children from their parents and pushed asylum-seekers into squalid refugee camps south of the US-Mexico border until they get a hearing. The program has a backlog of [tens of thousands](#) of applicants and, as one lawyer [told Mother Jones](#) last year, is basically "a f**king disaster designed to fail." Biden has suspended MPP enrollment pending a review of the program, which continues to [admit applicants](#) to hearings at only a trickle. Biden's nominee to head the DHS, Alejandro Mayorkas, has [pledged to end the MPP](#). Mayorkas was formerly chief of US Citizenship and Immigration Services, a DHS agency. However, Edward Hasbrouck, a consultant with the Identity Project, told the Nation that agency officials are likely to continue pushing in the opposite direction in order to make border entry as predictable as airport arrivals, in an effort to ease the screening process.

At the border, anyone can show up and ask to cross, making a process of "pre-approval that externalizes and moves the borders further and further away" desirable, Hasbrouck said.

A readout of Biden's call with Lopez Obrador made only vague mention of "improving processing at the border to adjudicate requests for asylum, and reversing the previous administration's draconian immigration policies" and to "work closely to stem the flow of irregular migration to Mexico and the United States," leaving it unclear how Biden will respond.

The changes Biden has proposed are being fought by some GOP officials in four states, citing the Sanctuary for Americans First Enactment (SAFE) agreements they quietly reached with the DHS just weeks before Trump left office. According to [BuzzFeed News](#), the documents ensure they will get a six-month period in which to review and challenge any changes to DHS policies before they take effect - a move seemingly catered toward hamstringing any attempt by Biden to quickly change Trump policies.

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Minnesota Health Officials Detect First US Case of COVID-19 Strain Originating in Brazil
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Moderna announced earlier on Monday that early laboratory tests suggest its COVID-19 vaccine is effective against new coronavirus variants emerging around the globe.

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) announced on Monday that it had detected a highly-transmissible variant of COVID-19 that has been circulating in Brazil in recent weeks.

The case is the first detected in the US and comes the same day that US President Joe Biden extended travel restrictions on visitors from several countries, including Brazil, that outgoing US President Donald Trump sought to end in a last-minute executive order.

According to a Monday [news release](#), MDH detected the Brazil P.1 variant "in a specimen from a Minnesota resident with recent travel history to Brazil." The person was tested on January 9 and has been in isolation ever since.

On Sunday, former US Food and Drug Commissioner Dr. Scott Gottlieb said he was "fairly confident" the P.1 strain was already circulating in the US.

"I think we have to assume it's here. And I feel fairly confident that it is here and we're just not detecting it yet," Gottlieb told CBS [Face the Nation](#), noting that US officials only began looking for the new strain a few weeks ago.

Last week, Trump issued an [executive order](#) that would have lifted travel restrictions imposed on Brazil, the UK, and the European Union on January 26, but after Biden took office, his administration quickly reversed the move, adding [South Africa](#) to the list after a new immunity-resistant variant of COVID-19 was detected there.

In Brazil, the highly infectious strain has added a new layer of havoc to the country's out-of-control pandemic outbreak. In the city of Manaus, deep in the Amazon rainforest, [42% of the new](#) COVID-19 cases are from the P.1 strain and officials said in December 2020 that over [three-quarters](#) of the city's population has been infected with COVID-19.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who has consistently downplayed the dangers of the deadly coronavirus, [dismissed calls](#) for new lockdowns, calling the health moves "crazy." Over the weekend, mass protests in Rio de Janeiro by both right-wing and left-wing groups have called for [Bolsonaro's removal from power](#) over his handling of the pandemic, which has killed at least 216,000 people in Brazil.

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Singapore Activists Appeal High Court Ruling Upholding Colonial-Era Gay Sex Ban
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

More than three dozen former British colonies have retained the anti-LGBTQ laws imposed on them by London - roughly half of the world's nations that criminalize homosexuality or being transgender. Enforcement varies wildly, however.

LGBTQ rights activists in Singapore are challenging the city-state's High Court for a 2020 ruling upholding a colonial-era anti-homosexuality law after India's court overturned an identical law. In March 2020, the High Court upheld Section 377a of the penal code, which criminalizes "any act of gross indecency" by a male person "with another male person." The law is rarely applied, but it carries a maximum sentence of two years in prison.

Brought by Johnson Ong Ming, a 43-year-old DJ; 42-year-old Bryan Choong Chee Hoong, the former executive director of LGBT organization Oogachaga, and Roy Tan Seng Kee, a 61-year-old retired medical doctor, the case argues that the law contravenes the right to free speech and assembly, as well as equality before the law. The court disagreed and now the trio has appealed, saying that the judge's interpretation is wrong, [according to AFP](#).

"In declining to strike out this archaic and discriminatory law, the Court has reaffirmed that all gay men in Singapore are effectively un-apprehended criminals," Téa Braun, director of international LGBT legal support group Human Dignity Trust (HDT), [said at the time](#) of the ruling.

A British colony until 1959, Singapore's anti-homosexuality law dates to 1938, making it one of dozens of countries to have retained colonial-era anti-sodomy laws after independence.

While Singapore's High Court first ruled to uphold the anti-homosexuality law in 2014, [a 2018 decision](#) by India's High Court to shred the provision prompted Singaporean activists to issue a new challenge, hoping their courts would follow suit. Similar assumptions followed in several [African countries](#) that had also been colonized by the British, but with mixed results: Botswana's High Court struck down the law in 2019, but Kenya's upheld it.

Nearby Brunei, just across the South China Sea from Singapore, also [doubled down](#) on anti-sodomy laws inherited from the British Empire, adding in 2019 new Sharia-based punishments for the sultanate's Muslim population.

Asked about the future of Section 377a, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong predicted it [would be around](#) "for some time."

"You know our rules in Singapore. Whatever your sexual orientation, you are welcome to come and work in Singapore," Lee said in 2019, noting that the city holds the annual LGBTQ Pink Dot Festival, which he [attended that year](#), alongside his wife and his son, who is gay. "It is the way this society is: We are not like San Francisco, neither are we like some countries in the Middle East," Lee said. "(We are) something in between, it is the way the society is."

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'Champion for the American People': Trump Sets Up Post-Presidency Office in Florida
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Former US President Donald Trump relocated to Florida on the morning of Inauguration Day, and is expected to call the Sunshine State his official residence, despite a past agreement with Florida officials that stipulated he could not use his Mar-a-Lago resort as his personal residence in exchange for transforming the mansion into a resort.

Trump on Monday established his first post-presidency office in Palm Beach County, Florida, a move which will reportedly serve to release statements and create a formal vehicle in which to set up public appearances.

In [a statement](#) announcing the development, the newly-formed "Office of the Former President" explains that Trump's communications headquarters will be managing "correspondence, public statements, appearances and official activities to advance the interests of the United States." Additionally, the announcement indicates the office will also "carry on the agenda of the Trump administration through advocacy, organizing, and public activism." It adds, "President Trump will always and forever be a champion for the American people."

Although Trump has hinted he may run for public office again, the chosen name for his new base is more than likely to fuel speculation that the former president will focus his efforts on other political matters.

It's presently unclear what former White House aides, if any, will stick around to strengthen Trump's new office; however, despite the few details known, the news was quickly met with laughs and jeers from netizens eager to tackle Trump's latest effort.

In light of Trump's permanent suspension from Twitter, he has largely remained silent on what his post-presidency days will entail, although he did recently tell the [Washington Examiner](#) that he was planning to "do something."

The announcement of a new Trump office comes as the managers of the House of Representatives handed its second impeachment case against the 45th president over to the US Senate, initiating the start of a trial.

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US Supreme Court Sends Emoluments Lawsuits Against Trump Back to Lower Courts,
Declares Cases 'Moot'
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

After former US President Donald Trump took office, concerns emerged that he was in violation of the US Constitution's emoluments clause, as prominent visitors to the US leader - and their entourages - often stayed at his hotels. Two legal cases on the matter were passed to the US Supreme Court after lower courts refused to toss out the arguments.

The Supreme Court has refused to hear two lawsuits on Monday that accused Trump of illegal business dealings in unlawfully receiving financial benefit from state or foreign officials while the president actively served in office.

In [an order](#) with no noted dissents, the panel of associate justices indicated that the judgements for the lawsuits were vacated and would be remanded back to the lower courts with instructions to close the cases as “moot” since Trump was no longer in office and thus no longer in violation of the constitutional clause regarding sitting presidents.

Under the US Constitution, the [emoluments clause stipulates](#) that no official holding office may accept “any present, emolument, office, or title, of any kind whatever, from any king, prince, or foreign state,” without first obtaining clearance from congressional lawmakers. As such, officials are expected to divest from any business dealings while in office.

Although Trump turned over control of his business network to his kids as he prepared to assume the presidency, he also did not divest from his company. The decision quickly drew scrutiny as ethics experts highlighted that Trump would profit off the presidency.

The pair of cases were filed in 2017 and argued by officials from New York, Maryland and Washington DC, including the nonprofit Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW).

The filings argued that Trump was in violation of the clause by receiving money when guests - often foreign dignitaries and their sizable entourages - stayed at one of his branded hotels in the nation’s capital, instead of in other locations, with similar complaints made in a second lawsuit that shed light on dealings involving Trump hotel and restaurant properties in New York state. Both cases were subsequently left in limbo after they were advanced by two federal appeals courts, and then passed on to the Supreme Court, which was asked by Trump political appointees within the US Justice Department to toss out both legal challenges. Once US President Joe Biden won the 2020 election, it was largely believed both cases would be thrown out.

In a statement following the high court’s decision, District of Columbia Attorney General Karl Racine and Maryland Attorney General Brian Frosh issued a [joint statement](#) hailing the development as a historic achievement.

“We are proud that because of our case, a court ruled on the meaning of ‘emoluments’ for the first time in American history, finding that the Constitution prohibits federal officials from accepting almost anything of value from foreign or domestic governments,” reads the release. “This decision will serve as precedent that will help stop anyone else from using the presidency or other federal office for personal financial gain the way that President Trump has over the past four years.”

“History will note that at every step of this case, President Trump and political appointees at the Department of Justice went to extreme lengths to prevent us from uncovering the true extent of his corruption. He attempted to short-circuit the rules of legal procedure to have our case dismissed and avoid discovery into his finances, arguing that the law did not apply to him,” the statement continues.

[A release](#) issued by CREW similarly underscores that the legal challenges “made the American people aware for four years of the pervasive corruption that came from a president maintaining a global business and taking benefits and payments from foreign and domestic governments.”

“Only Trump losing the presidency and leaving office ended these corrupt constitutional violations and stopped these groundbreaking lawsuits,” it added.

A third emoluments lawsuit was previously brought forth by over 200 Democratic congressional lawmakers but was [ultimately dismissed](#) in February 2020 by a federal appeals court. The Supreme Court declined to hear the case in October 2020.

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US Police Arrest Juvenile Suspect in Indianapolis' Largest Mass Shooting Case in Years
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Over the weekend, reports emerged from Indianapolis, Indiana, detailing a grisly shooting that killed five, as well as an unborn child. Law enforcement officials believe the killings were intentional.

Officials with the Hoosier State's Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) revealed in [a news release](#) that officers on Monday had arrested a juvenile suspected of being involved in the weekend murders.

The minor suspect, however, was not publicly identified by the department and an image was not released, due to his age. Additionally, although officials earlier believed there to be one or more suspects tied to the killings, officials confirmed via the release that they “do not believe any additional persons were involved.”

“Yesterday, we promised swift justice for this heinous act. Today, we delivered on that promise,” IMPD Chief Randal Taylor said in a statement accompanying the release. “While removing the alleged perpetrator of yesterday's mass murder from our neighborhoods does not bring back the lives senselessly lost, hopefully, it will bring us one step closer to healing as a community.”

“I am grateful to all of the IMPD officers and criminal justice partners who have worked tirelessly for the last 30-plus hours to bring justice for these victims, their friends and families, and our entire community. I ask community members to join me in praying for the continued recovery of the young man whose life has been forever changed.”

Taylor described the deadly Sunday gun deaths as one of the largest mass casualty shootings in over a decade, according to local news outlet [Indianapolis Star](#).

The IMPD was made aware of the mass shooting at about 4 a.m. on Sunday, when dispatchers were informed that a juvenile male, whose age was not disclosed, was found with a gunshot injury in the Indianapolis community. After the individual relayed to officers what unfolded, officials discovered [five others](#) who had died from gunshot wounds inside a nearby residence.

Officials subsequently determined that one of the victims, identified as 19-year-old Kiara Hawkins, was pregnant; however, despite life-saving efforts, the child did not survive. The four other shooting victims were identified as 42-year-old Kezzie Childs, 42-year-old Raymond Childs, 18-year-old Elijah Childs and 13-year-old Rita Childs. The juvenile male shooter was transported to a local area hospital and is expected to survive his injuries.

An investigation into the incident is ongoing.

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US Justice Dept. to Probe if Employees Sought to Alter Election Outcome
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Earlier, reports emerged detailing that former US President Donald Trump and Jeffrey Clark, a lawyer with the US Department of Justice (DoJ), had been working hand-in-hand on ways to cast doubt over the results of the highly contested 2020 presidential election and strengthen Trump's repeatedly shot down legal battles.

Michael Horowitz, the DoJ's inspector general, revealed in a [Monday-released](#) statement that this office would be initiating an investigation to determine whether any of the agency's employees sought to alter the outcome of the 2020 election.

"The DoJ Office of the Inspector General... is initiating an investigation into whether any former or current DoJ official engaged in an improper attempt to have DoJ seek to alter the outcome of the 2020 presidential election," Horowitz said in a statement, which underscored that the probe would "encompass all relevant allegations that may arise."

However, the statement noted that while the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) has the reach to investigate allegations against former and and current DoJ employees, its "jurisdiction does not extend to allegations against other government officials."

"The OIG is making this statement, consistent with DOJ policy, to reassure the public that an appropriate agency is investigating the allegations. Consistent with OIG policy, we will not comment further on the investigation until it is completed. When our investigation is concluded, we will proceed with our usual process for releasing our findings publicly in accordance with relevant laws, and DOJ and OIG policies," the release concludes.

The department's announcement came days after the New York Times reported on Friday that Clark, who served as the former assistant attorney general, held discussions with Trump that touched on measures to boot acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen from his newly-acquired post, challenge the election results and spread claims that the 2020 election was riddled with fraud - an unsubstantiated allegation that was voiced on multiple occasions by the Trump team before and after the November election.

In fact, months before the start of the US election, the Trump camp, as well as the former president, voiced allegations that election fraud would be rampant, as many Americans opted to use the mail-in ballot system amid the COVID-19 pandemic. And then, as the election was called for US President Joe Biden, the Trump team doubled down on claims that ranged from votes being submitted by deceased Americans to voting systems being rigged in favor for the Democratic candidate. Both allegations have been rejected and even prompted the launch of [two lawsuits](#) by Dominion Voting Systems, which came under fire during the election cycle.

The [Times article](#) notes that since Rosen had refused Trump's calls to place pressure on the Georgia state over the electoral vote count, the former commander-in-chief wanted him fired and replaced with Clark; however, Trump ultimately stood down after several department officials vowed to resign in protest.

For his part, Clark told the Times that the reported accounts, which were based off interviews with four unidentified former Trump administration officials, "contained inaccuracies." The official also "categorically denied" he ever took part in attempting to oust Rosen or push any false narratives surrounding the election.

"My practice is to rely on sworn testimony to assess disputed factual claims," Clark told the outlet, highlighting that he was a signer on a DoJ request that sought to reject a lawsuit that called on former US Vice President Mike Pence to overturn the election results.

"There was a candid discussion of options and pros and cons with the president. It is unfortunate that those who were part of a privileged legal conversation would comment in public about such internal deliberations, while also distorting any discussions."

Clark did not provide specifics of the discussions, as "legal privileges" prevented him from doing so.

The DoJ's latest move also came after Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) called the findings of the Times report "[unconscionable](#)," and urged for the inspector general to initiate an investigation into the development.

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REVIEW - US Sees Brazil COVID-19 Variant Emerge as Biden Ramps Up Pandemic Response

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The Brazil strain of COVID-19 has been confirmed for the first time in the United States just as President Joe Biden's administration is escalating a multipronged effort to contain the disease, including travel restrictions and a vaccine distribution campaign that is now in a high pressure race against an invisible mutating enemy.

The US is by far the global leader in COVID-19 casualties - with more than 25 million cases and more than 420,000 deaths. In recent days, Biden has launched what the administration has called a comprehensive campaign to control COVID-19, which includes acceleration of the vaccine distribution and expanding mitigation measures. However, Biden has also painted a dark near-term forecast, warning that the US death toll will surpass 500,000 by next month.

BRAZIL VIRUS EMERGES

Although the figures have dropped over the past couple weeks in the wake of a holiday surge, the US COVID-19 death rate remains alarmingly high. And now the emergence of a new threat will likely only raise fears even further that the US will not reverse the tide anytime soon.

On Monday evening, the US state of Minnesota Health Department confirmed in a statement that the first case of the novel coronavirus strain found in Brazil has been transmitted in the United States.

"The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) today announced that its Public Health Laboratory has found the variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus known as the Brazil P.1 variant in a specimen from a Minnesota resident with recent travel history to Brazil," the release said on Monday. The new strain found in Brazil is more transmissible but it is not yet known if it causes more severe illness, the release said. The release said the individual infected with the Brazil strain became ill the first week of January.

The development comes the very day President Joe Biden signed an order to maintain restrictions on travelers from Europe and Brazil, while adding South Africa to the list. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has warned that the UK-origin B.1.1.7 could become a dominant strain in the United States by March. With respect to the B.1.351 South African strain, the CDC warned that this variant contained a set of additional mutations that may affect its ability to be recognized by antibodies.

Moderna announced on Monday that its COVID-19 vaccine has demonstrated a neutralizing impact on UK and South African variants of the coronavirus. However, US Director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases said existing vaccines against the coronavirus may need to be upgraded to tackle the UK and South African strains.

BIDEN ESCALATES ANTI-COVID-19 CAMPAIGN

Last week, the Biden administration unveiled a comprehensive COVID-19 strategy that aims to administer 100 million shots in 100 days. In addition to the vaccine, the White House vows to expand mitigation measures such as social distancing, masking, testing, and travel restrictions and promises to roll out an effective plan to safely reopen schools and businesses.

Biden said during a press conference that the United States will be well on its way to herd immunity from the novel coronavirus by this summer. He also sounded even more optimistic about the vaccine strategy.

"I think we may be able to get to... 1.5 million a day rather than 1 million a day," Biden said.

The president clarified that he was referring to the number of daily inoculations since vaccines approved in the United States require two shots per person with an interval of a couple of weeks.

Earlier, at the first day of the Davos Agenda virtual event, Fauci said the lack of cooperation both at the federal and local levels, as well as the divisiveness in the society, have seriously undermined the US efforts to battle the COVID-19 pandemic including the vaccine campaign. Many Republicans have attacked the Biden administration for blaming current supply shortages on Trump. The second ranking House Republican, Whip Steven Scalise, in a statement on Friday said because of Trump's Operation Warp Speed the United States is already administering close to a million vaccines a day.

Last week, Baylor College of Medicine infectious disease expert Peter Hotez told VOX the US should aim for at least 2 million shots a day considering some 80% of Americans need to be vaccinated to reach herd immunity. At the proposed rates, the US would not reach sufficient immunization levels until September or October, according to the report.

The US is also taking steps towards boosting global engagement. Last week Biden signed an order reversing the Trump administration decision to exit the World Health Organization.

Rodney Hunter, Political Coordinator at the US Mission to the United Nations said in a Security Council meeting on Monday that the US was ready to back the organization.

"The WHO must play a central role in our combined response to this pandemic," Hunter said.

"As a WHO member state, the United States will work closely with all of you to ensure the WHO is strengthened and reformed appropriately, not only to face this current challenge but also to effectively stand up to other challenges yet to come."

Hunter also said that the United States looks forward to working with the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, COVAX and Gavi Vaccine Alliance to help facilitate a rapid vaccine rollout worldwide.

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Biden Does Not Believe Enough Senate Republicans Will Vote to Convict Trump - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden in a recent interview said he does not believe enough Senate Republicans will break from the party to vote to convict former President Donald Trump in his impeachment trial. Biden told CNN on Monday that he does not believe Senate Democrats will get support from 17 colleagues on the Republican side in Trump's impeachment trial. Earlier on Monday, the House of Representatives delivered the articles of impeachment to the Senate, which accuse Trump of inciting an insurrection at the US Capitol on January 6. US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said last week that Trump's impeachment trial is scheduled to begin the week of February 8. It will be the first time in US history that any president faced two impeachment trials or that any president was impeached after he left office.

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Biden Expands Travel Restrictions to US for Fear of Mutated Coronavirus Strains Spreading

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden signed a proclamation keeping in place restrictions for travelers to the United States from most of continental Europe, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Brazil and expanded the restrictions to South Africa in an attempt to slow the spread of the mutated strains of the novel coronavirus. "I have determined that it is in the interests of the United States to take action to restrict and suspend the entry into the United States, as immigrants or non-immigrants, of non-citizens of the United States who were physically present within the Schengen Area [an area comprising 26 European countries], the United Kingdom (excluding overseas territories outside of Europe), the Republic of Ireland, the Federative Republic of Brazil, and the Republic of South Africa," Biden said in the proclamation on Monday. The action targets persons who visited the listed countries during 14 days preceding their attempted entry in the United States. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) determined that South Africa is experiencing widespread, ongoing person-to-person transmission of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, including a strain known as B.1.351." Another variant strain, known as B.1.1.7, was traced to the United Kingdom, while a third strain B.1.1.28.1, was identified in Brazil, the proclamation said, adding that the restrictions will remain in effect until terminated by the US president.

"The Secretary of Health and Human Services shall, as circumstances warrant and no more than 30 days after the date of this proclamation and by the final day of each calendar month thereafter, recommend whether the President should continue, modify, or terminate this proclamation," the proclamation said.

Beginning on Tuesday, all air passengers arriving in the United States must also provide a negative COVID-19 test or proof of recovery before boarding. The order applies to both foreign nationals and US citizens two years of age and above.

The White House announced last week that travelers flying to the United States will be required to quarantine upon their arrival but no specifics have been released so far.

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US Confirms Nation's First COVID-19 Case Associated With Brazil P.1 Variant - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The Minnesota Health Department confirmed in a statement that the first case of the novel coronavirus strain found in Brazil has been transmitted in the United States.

"The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) today announced that its Public Health Laboratory has found the variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus known as the Brazil P.1 variant in a specimen from a Minnesota resident with recent travel history to Brazil," the release said on Monday. The new strain found in Brazil is more transmissible but it is not yet known if it causes more severe illness, the release said.

The release said the individual infected with the Brazil strain became ill the first week of January.

The development comes the very day President Joe Biden signed an order to maintain restrictions on travelers from Europe and Brazil, while adding South Africa to the list.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has warned that the UK-origin B.1.1.7 could become a dominant strain in the United States by March. With respect to the B.1.351 South African strain, the CDC warned that this variant contained a set of additional mutations that may affect its ability to be recognized by antibodies.

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US Needs Comprehensive Strategy to Address Range of Issues Related to China - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The United States needs a comprehensive strategy to address a full range of issues on China, including in the US technology sector, a State Department spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik.

"We need a comprehensive strategy and a more systematic approach that actually addresses the full range of these issues, rather than the piecemeal approach of the past few years," the spokesperson said on Monday.

The spokesperson said the United States must hold China accountable for unfair and illegal practices, adding that US technology must not be used to support China's military buildup or its malign activities.

In addition, the United States must invest in boosting its technological strength in order to maintain an edge in innovation, the spokesperson said.

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US House Delivers Articles of Impeachment Against Trump to Senate

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives has delivered to the Senate the latest articles of impeachment against former President Donald Trump, which accuse him of inciting the riot at the Capitol building on January 6.

US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said last week that Trump's impeachment trial is scheduled to begin the week of February 8.

It will be the first time in US history that any president faced two impeachment trials or that any president was impeached after he left office.

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US Senate Confirms Janet Yellen to Be Next Treasury Secretary

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The US Senate has confirmed Janet Yellen to be the next Secretary of the Treasury Department.

The Senate on Monday voted 84-15 to confirm Yellen's nomination.

Yellen is the first woman to serve as US Treasury Secretary.

Yellen previously served as the first-ever female Chair of the Federal Reserve from 2014 to 2018.

She was appointed by President Barack Obama and was often publicly criticized for her cautious financial policies by his successor, President Donald Trump.

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Biden, Merkel Agree to Cooperate on Ukraine, Russia, Other Global Matters - White House

WASHINGTON, January 26 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in a recent telephone call agreed to work together on key global matters including Ukraine and Russia, the White House said in a readout of the conversation.

"The leaders agreed to work together on common foreign policy priorities, including Afghanistan, China, Iran, Russia, Ukraine, and the Western Balkans," the readout said on Monday.

Biden conveyed his desire to deepen the United States' relations with Germany, especially through NATO and the European Union, the readout said.

Both leaders also agreed to work together to combat the novel coronavirus and climate change, the readout added.

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US Senate Committee Advances Blinken's Nomination to be Next Secretary of State

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee has advanced Antony Blinken's nomination to be the next Secretary of State.

The panel voted 15-3 to advance Blinken's nomination on Monday, which will now head to the Senate floor for a final confirmation vote.

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Canada MP Booted From Liberal Party After Accusing Colleague of Links to Indian Separatism

TORONTO, January 25 (Sputnik) - A Canadian parliamentarian has been removed from the Liberal Party caucus after suggesting that a former colleague has links to an Indian separatist movement, Chief Government Whip Mark Holland said in a statement.

Ramesh Sangha, a member of parliament for a Toronto-area suburb, was expelled from the caucus by Rodriguez after suggesting that former Innovation, Science and Industry Minister Navdeep Bains has links to the Khalistan separatist movement, which seeks to create a homeland for Sikhs.

"Late last week, the Chief Government Whip's office was made aware that the Member of Brampton Center made baseless and dangerous accusations against a number of his caucus colleagues... as of this afternoon, Mr. Sangha has been removed from the Liberal caucus," Holland said on Monday.

Sangha made the allegations during a Punjabi-language interview with Y Channel, in which he said "when I think back, someone who says I am extremist and I am Khalistani and I declare these things, is he fit to be a minister? I said before he wasn't" about Bains, as quoted by Baaz News.

Rodriguez said that the decision was made after consultation with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, adding that the caucus would not tolerate "conspiracy theories, or dangerous and unfounded rhetoric about Parliamentarians or other Canadians."

Bains has repeatedly shot down the accusations and in an exchange with Senator Linda Frum on Twitter he said "we all have a responsibility to reject disinformation from foreign actors." Ottawa and New Delhi have long been at odds over perceived deference to the Khalistan movement in the Canadian government. Chief Minister of the Indian state of Punjab, Amarinder Singh, has previously accused Bains, Canadian Defense Minister Harjit Sajjan and other Canadian parliamentarians of Sikh descent of sympathizing with the separatist cause.

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Twitter Says New 'Birdwatch' Feature Will Allow Users to Fix Misleading Information

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - Twitter said in a statement it has launched a new feature called "Birdwatch" to allow users to fix misleading information that the company had to continuously label as such.

"We also want to broaden the range of voices that are part of tackling this problem, and we believe a community-driven approach can help," Twitter Product Vice President Keith Coleman

said in the statement on Monday. "That's why today we're introducing Birdwatch, a pilot in the US of a new community-driven approach to help address misleading information on Twitter." Coleman said Birdwatch allows people to identify information in Tweets they believe is misleading and write notes that provide informative context.

"We believe this approach has the potential to respond quickly when misleading information spreads, adding context that people trust and find valuable. Eventually we aim to make notes visible directly on Tweets for the global Twitter audience, when there is consensus from a broad and diverse set of contributors," he said.

Coleman pointed out that users came to Twitter to stay informed and they seek credible information.

"We apply labels and add context to Tweets, but we don't want to limit efforts to circumstances where something breaks our rules or receives widespread public attention," he said.

Coleman explained the corrected notes left by users will only be visible on a separate Birdwatch site and pilot participants could rate the helpfulness of the notes.

"These notes are being intentionally kept separate from Twitter for now, while we build Birdwatch and gain confidence that it produces context people find helpful and appropriate. Additionally, notes will not have an effect on the way people see Tweets or our system recommendations," he said.

As Twitter continues to develop algorithms that power Birdwatch - such as reputation and consensus systems - it aims to publish that code publicly in the Birdwatch Guide, Coleman said. "We hope this will enable experts, researchers, and the public to analyze or audit Birdwatch, identifying opportunities or flaws that can help us more quickly build an effective community-driven solution," he added.

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New York City Pension Funds Divest \$4Bln From Fossil Fuel Investments - Mayor

NEW YORK, January 25 (Sputnik) - New York City pension funds are divesting some \$4 billion from securities of fossil fuel companies to avoid investments that are bad for the climate, Mayor Bill de Blasio said in a statement.

"Fossil fuels are not only bad for our planet and our frontline communities, they are a bad investment," de Blasio said on Monday as the city announced the divestment, which it said would be one of the largest in the world.

According to the statement, the New York City Employees' Retirement System and New York City Teachers' Retirement System have already voted to approve the divestments while the New York City Board of Education Retirement System was expected to cast its vote for the same imminently.

In 2018, the release added, New York City became the first major city to commit to divest major public pension funds from fossil fuel reserve companies.

Since the initial announcement, the release added, hundreds of other institutions, governments, and entities joined this commitment. New York City has also partnered with C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group and London to engage other cities to pursue such divestments.

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US Treasury 'Resuming Steps' to Put Ex-Slave Harriet Tubman on \$20 Bill - White House

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The US Department of the Treasury is resuming steps to put escaped slave and abolitionist Harriet Tubman on the front of the new \$20 notes replacing 19th century president who was also slave owner Andrew Jackson, White House Press Secretary Jan Psaki told reporters.

"It is important that our notes, our money, reflect the history and diversity of our country and Harriet Tubman's image gracing the new \$20 note would certainly reflect that," Psaki said.

We're exploring ways to speed up that," Psaki said on Monday.

Tubman, who escaped to freedom and helped at least 70 more slaves escape, became a leading abolitionist before the Civil War. She lived to the age of 91 and became a national heroine.

Jackson, a twice elected president was the most successful general in US history before the Civil War, commanded several notorious battles that involved the slaughter of Native American communities.

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US Tech Stocks Hit Record Highs on Forecast of Strong COVID-Driven Earnings

NEW YORK, January 25 (Sputnik) - US technology stocks hit record highs on expectations of strong quarterly earnings at companies that benefited from providing stay-home services and products amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The technology-laden Nasdaq index, which counts on the performance of industry giants such as Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google, was the outperformer among US equity markets, hitting a record high of 13,729 on Monday before settling at 13,636, up 0.7 percent on the day.

Tech stocks rallied ahead of a widely-anticipated week of positive fourth-quarter earnings.

Microsoft reports on Tuesday after the closing bell, while Apple, Facebook and Tesla are due on Wednesday.

The S&P 500, a barometer for the top 500 US stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, settled at 3,856, up 0.4 percent. It came just a point short of matching Thursday's record high of 3,861.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, Wall Street's broadest stocks gauge, fell 0.1 percent to finish at 30,960.

The Dow fell investors lose some of their appetite for industrial stocks amid concerns over the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic. Energy was the biggest industrial sector in the red on Monday, weighed down by weaker oil prices amid ongoing worries over pandemic-fueled weakness in crude.

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Biden Says US Will Be 'Well on Our Way' to Herd Immunity From Coronavirus by Summer

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said during a press conference that the United States will be well on its way to herd immunity from the novel coronavirus by this summer.

"I feel confident that by summer we're going to be well on our way heading toward herd immunity," Biden said on Monday.

Biden said the US public should be able to have more access to coronavirus vaccines by the summer.

In addition, Biden said that in the next three weeks, the United States should be able to administer one million vaccine doses per day.

The United States has reported more than 25 million positive cases and more than 420,000 coronavirus-related deaths as of Monday afternoon, according to Johns Hopkins University.

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Canadian Government Concerned by Biden's 'Buy American' Program - Freeland

TORONTO, January 25 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government is concerned by an executive order expected to be signed by President Joe Biden in the near future intended to support domestic businesses and require federal government agencies to buy American products, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland told reporters in Ottawa.

"I am concerned. We are always concerned by 'Buy American' ... for sure that is going to be an issue very, very high on our agenda in our work with the Biden administration," Freeland said on Monday.

While Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has spoken at length about the "alignment" that exists between his government and the Biden administration, the newly inaugurated president has already ruffled feathers in Ottawa with the expected signing of the "Buy American" plan and the revocation of the presidential permit for the Keystone XL pipeline extension project.

In her remarks, Freeland said that Trudeau and Biden discussed the "Buy American" program when the two spoke on Friday and that the incumbent Liberal government will work to ensure that Canadian interests are protected in Washington.

However, some Canadian premiers have said that merely expressing disappointment and concern is not enough and that Trudeau needs to take tougher stance against new US administration through concrete measures.

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White House Urges Russia to Release Navalny, People Detained in Weekend Protests

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The United States is calling on the Russian authorities to release opposition activist Alexey Navalny as well as persons who were detained during protests over the weekend, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters.

"First, I'd like to point all of you to a statement that was release this weekend by the State Department strongly condemning the use of harsh tactics against protesters and journalists in cities throughout Russia," Psaki said on Monday. "So, I'll just reiterate our call from here in Russian authorities to release all those detained for exercising their universal rights and for the immediate and unconditional release of Alexey Navalny."

Psaki emphasized that the United States is urging the Russian authorities to cooperate with the international community's investigation into Navalny's alleged poisoning in Russia.

Psaki also said that a comprehensive US intelligence review of alleged Russian activities is ongoing and is a priority for President Joe Biden, who reserves the right to respond in a time and manner of his choosing.

The initiative, unveiled by the White House last week, consists of a full assessment of alleged Russian involvement in the SolarWind cyberbreach, the 2020 US election and the alleged Navalny poisoning, among others.

Russia has repeatedly denied all of the accusations put forth by the United States.

On Saturday, protests broke out in several cities throughout Russia in support of Navalny, who was detained upon arrival in Moscow from Germany. Navalny had undergone treatment in Germany for allegedly being poisoned with a nerve agent. He was detained for 30 days for violating his probation terms for an earlier embezzlement conviction.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has advised foreign officials and lawmakers to avoid commenting on the situation regarding Navalny.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said last Tuesday that Moscow does not intend to listen to the opinions of Western states with respect to the situation concerning Navalny.

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Biden Promises 1Mln Vaccinations Daily in 3 Weeks

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden told reporters that in three weeks the country will be able to perform one million of vaccinations a day with a potential of reaching 1.5 million.

"I am quite confident that we will be in a position within the next three weeks or so to be vaccinating people at the range of a million a day and an excess of that," Biden said at a press briefing.

The president clarified that he was referring to the number of daily inoculations since vaccines approved in the United States require two shots per person with an interval of a couple of weeks.

"I think we may be able to get to... 1.5 million a day rather than 1 million a day. But we have to meet that goal of a million a day," Biden said.

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Biden Says US Can Cooperate With Russia on New START, Express Concerns at Same Time

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) – The United States can cooperate with Russia on the extension of the New START Treaty and simultaneously express its concerns over the detention of opposition figure Alexey Navalny, US President Joseph Biden said on Monday.

"I find that we can both operate in mutual self-interest of our countries as a New START agreement and make it clear to Russia that we are very concerned about their behavior, whether it's Navalny, whether it's the SolarWinds, whether it's reports on bounties on the heads of Americans in Afghanistan," Biden said.

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Democratic Senator Leahy Vows to Preside Over Trump Impeachment Trial 'With Fairness'

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - Democratic Senator Pat Leahy in a statement promised to preside over the impeachment trial of former US President Donald Trump with fairness.

Trump's impeachment trial is scheduled to begin the week of February 8, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said last week.

"When I preside over the impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump, I will not waver from my constitutional and sworn obligations to administer the trial with fairness, in accordance with the Constitution and the laws," Leahy said.

Leahy has served as a senator from the US state of Vermont for 46 years since being first elected in 1975. As the longest serving senator he serves as president pro tempore of the Senate, chairing the upper chamber of Congress when Vice President Kamala Harris is not available to do so.

"The president pro tempore has historically presided over Senate impeachment trials of non-presidents. When presiding over an impeachment trial, the president pro tempore takes an additional special oath to do impartial justice according to the Constitution and the laws. It is an oath that I take extraordinarily seriously," Leahy said.

The president pro tempore of the Senate is third in line to succeed President Joe Biden after Vice President Harris and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIA TALKS ON NEW START TREATY

* Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev and US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan discussed the extension of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) and prospects for developing cooperation in the field of security, the Russian Security Council said.

* Practical work has begun at the level of experts on the extension of the New START, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

PUTIN-OBRAADOR TALKS

* Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Mexican counterpart, Manuel Lopez Obrador, discussed by phone the organization of deliveries of Russian vaccine Sputnik V to Mexico, as well as the training of Mexican doctors in Russia, the Kremlin said in a statement on Monday.

* Lopez Obrador invited Putin to visit Mexico during the two leaders' phone conversation.

US EXTENDS LICENCE FOR HOUTHIS TRANSACTIONS

The US Department of the Treasury has issued a license to allow transactions that involve Yemen's Houthis until February 26, the Office of Foreign Assets Control said in a notice on Monday.

ITALIAN PRIME MINISTER ANNOUNCES RESIGNATION

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte will announce his will to resign tomorrow amid political crisis in the country, the statement by the presidency of the council reads.

ATTACK ON RUSSIANS IN TURKEY

* A knife-wielding man attacked three Russians with a knife in the Istanbul district of Besiktas, all three were injured, a police source told Sputnik.

* A suspect in an armed attack on three Russians in Istanbul was detained, a police source told Sputnik.

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

* The situation with the coronavirus is stabilizing in Russia, paving the way for gradual lifting of the previously imposed restrictions, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Monday.

RUSSIA PROTESTS US INTERFERENCE

* Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov expressed protest to the US ambassador in Moscow over the US embassy's support for the unauthorized rallies in Russia this weekend, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Monday.

* The Russian authorities will look into the fake stories published on Facebook and other US social media platforms during the unauthorized rallies, Zakharova said.

* Moscow will raise the issue of United States' interference in Russia's internal affairs at international platforms, Zakharova said.

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Trudeau Government to Begin Pre-Budget Consultations, Precursor to Possible 2021 Election

TORONTO, January 25 (Sputnik) - The government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is beginning consultations in advance of the 2021 federal budget, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland told reporters on Monday.

"Today, I am so pleased to announce the launch of consultations that will help inform and guide our growth plan and feed into the measures and investments that will make up Budget 2021," Freeland said.

Freeland reiterated that the new budget will be a reflection of Trudeau's pledge to "build back better" from the COVID-19-induced economic crisis, including a greater emphasis on facilitating a transition to a green economy and more sustainable growth.

The incumbent Canadian government has not presented a federal budget since March of 2019, and there are reports that the budget could trigger another federal election.

Earlier this month, Trudeau announced a cabinet shuffle and since a number of ministers and Liberal caucus members have announced their intention to run for re-election.

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National Guard to Draw Down Troops in US Capital to 7,000 by Week's End - General

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The National Guard will draw down the number of troops in Washington from 13,000 to 7,000 by the end of this week, Gen. Daniel Hokanson said in a press briefing on Monday.

"As requested by the federal agencies we are supporting, we're drawing down to 7,000 soldiers and airmen by the end of this week," Hokanson said.

Acting Army Secretary John Whitley said National Guard troops are still in Washington because local law enforcement partners are concerned about potential security threats amid lawful protests planned in the US capital in the coming weeks.

More than 26,000 troops from all 50 US states were brought to Washington to secure the capital during the inauguration of President Joe Biden.

The decision to deploy guardsmen to the capital was made in response to the January 6 Capitol riot, when a group of supporters of former President Donald Trump entered the building to protest lawmakers approving electoral slates from US states Trump claims are invalid and robbed him of election victory.

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US Republican Senator Portman Will Not Seek Re-Election, Cites Polarized Politics

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - Republican Senator Rob Portman on Monday said he will not seek re-election to a third term in 2022 because the United States is now so politically divided.

The Democrats seized majority control of the Senate from the Republican Party in the 2020 elections. The departure of Portman, who won by wide margins in 2016, casts more uncertainty over whether the Republicans will retain the seat in the 2022 midterms.

"I am announcing that I have made a decision not to run again in 2022," Portman, a senator from Ohio, said in a statement. "It has gotten harder and harder to break through the partisan gridlock and make progress on substantive policy, and that has contributed to my decision. We live in an increasingly polarized country where members of both parties are being pushed further to the right and further to the left, and that means too few people who are actively looking to find common ground"

The senator said the problem, albeit not new, has gotten worse over the past few decades. The 100-member chamber is divided evenly along partisan lines but Vice President Kamala Harris, who doubles as senate president, gives the Democrats a tie-breaking vote when needed.

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White House to Resume Regular COVID-19 Press Briefings - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The US administration will hold press briefings on its coronavirus response three times a week starting this Wednesday, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters on Monday

"I wanted to briefly preview the first of our public health briefings which will begin this Wednesday and will be done regularly for the foreseeable future. These will be science-led

briefings featuring our public health officials and members of our COVID-19 response team. These briefings will typically happen three times a week," Psaki said during her daily briefing. She added that briefings will provide "key updates on the virus and our government response." Psaki hailed new events as "a reflection of our commitment of being transparent and honest with the public about the pandemic and the work the whole of government team is doing every day.

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US Intel Community's Russia Review Ongoing, Top Priority for Biden - White House

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - A comprehensive US intelligence review of alleged Russian activities is ongoing and is a priority for President Joe Biden who reserves the right to respond in a time and manner of his choosing, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said in a briefing on Monday.

"That [review] is ongoing... It's a priority, of course," Psaki said during a daily briefing. "We want to see that review conclude. But as has always been the case, the president reserves the right to respond in a time and manner of his choosing. And I am not going to take options off the table from here."

The initiative, unveiled by the White House last week, consists of a full assessment of alleged Russian involvement in the Solar Wind cyberbreach, the US election and poisoning of opposition activist Alexei Navalny, among others. Russia has repeatedly denied all of these accusations.

When asked about possible phone conversation between Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, Psaki said, "I have no calls to predict for you at this point."

Psaki also reiterated a call on Russian authorities to release Navalny and all those detained during unauthorized opposition protests.

On Saturday, protests broke out in several cities throughout Russia in support of Navalny detained in Moscow upon arrival from Germany. Navalny had undergone treatment in Germany for allegedly being poisoned with a nerve agent. He remains in custody for 30 days for violating his probation terms for an earlier embezzlement conviction.

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Biden to Regularly Receive Briefings by COVID-19 Task Force Team - White House

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will be regularly briefed by the task force on COVID-19, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters on Monday.

"He will be briefed regularly, I suspect far more regularly than the past president was briefed on Covid and the developments," Psaki said. "I wouldn't expect he attends every task force

meeting, no, but he expects and requests regular briefings from the team and I expect he'll get them."

Earlier, at the first day of the Davos Agenda virtual event, US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony Fauci said the lack of cooperation both at the federal and local levels, as well as the divisiveness in the society, have seriously undermined the US efforts to battle the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked to describe possible faults of the US approach, Fauci said that there has been a considerable amount of politically mixed motivated messaging about what needed to be done from the top level.

The United States has the highest case count in the world, with over 25 million COVID-19 cases, including more than 419,600 fatalities.

Shortly after his inauguration, Biden signed a number of decrees, reversing some key policies of former President Donald Trump, aimed to battle the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in the country. One of the key documents signed by the newly-elected leader was the US rejoining of the World Health Organization and supporting the COVAX Facility, a global vaccine initiative.. The move was hailed by the WHO and many other countries.

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US Issues License Allowing Transactions With Yemen's Houthis Until February 26 - Treasury

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The US Department of the Treasury has issued a license to allow transactions that involve Yemen's Houthis until February 26, the Office of Foreign Assets Control said in a notice on Monday.

"All transactions and activities involving Ansarallah, or any entity in which Ansarallah owns, directly or indirectly, a 50 percent or greater interest, prohibited by the Global Terrorism Sanctions Regulations, 31 C.F.R. part 594 (GTSR), the Foreign Terrorist Organizations Sanctions Regulations, 31 C.F.R. part 597 (FTOSR), or Executive Order (E.O.) 13224, as amended, are authorized through 12:01 a.m. eastern standard time, February 26, 2021," the notice said.

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Biden to Sign Order Today Keeping Travel Restrictions on Europe, Adding S. Africa - Psaki

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will sign a proclamation later in the day to keep travel restrictions for Europe and Brazil in place while adding South Africa to the list over COVID-19 concerns, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters on Monday. "Today, the President will sign a presidential proclamation to reduce the spread of COVID-19 through travel, especially as we see faster spreading variants emerging across the world," Psaki

said. "President Biden has decided to maintain the restrictions previously in place for the European Shenzhen area, the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland and Brazil... And in light of the contagious variant B1351, South Africa has been added to the restricted list."

Psaki also said beginning Tuesday international travelers coming into the United States must provide proof of a negative test within three days of travel to airlines prior to departure. Biden announced last week that travelers flying to the United States from foreign countries will be required to quarantine upon their arrival and pass a coronavirus test before departure. Biden also announced a new executive action that will extend masking requirements to interstate travel "like on trains, planes and buses." On Wednesday, he mandated wearing face masks and observing social distancing on federal property.

The president also urged "every American to mask up for the next 100 days."

Biden predicted that the US death toll will top 500,000 next month from its current level of nearly 419,000.

Biden called wearing masks "the single best thing we can do" and citing health experts estimated that this measure alone if implemented from now until April would save over 50,000 lives.

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California Ends Stay-at-Home Orders Amid Drop in COVID-19 Hospitalizations - Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - California has ended the stay-at-home orders for all three of its COVID-19 hotspot regions after experiencing a decline in intensive care unit (ICU) hospitalizations, the state Department of Public Health said in a notice on Monday.

"Officials with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) today ended the Regional Stay at Home Order, lifting the order for all regions statewide, including the three regions that had still been under the order - San Joaquin Valley, Bay Area and Southern California," the notice said. "Four-week ICU capacity projections for these three regions are above 15 percent, the threshold that allows regions to exit the order."

The region that includes California's capital Sacramento had exited the order on January 12 while North California, which had been under close watch, never entered the order.

The Department of Public Health said the decision is an encouraging sign in California's battle against COVID-19, but warned that the pandemic is far from over.

"It is still critical that Californians continue to wear masks when they leave their homes, maintain physical distance of at least six feet, wash their hands frequently, avoid gatherings and mixing with other households, follow all state and local health department guidance and get the vaccine when it's their turn," the notice said.

California, with an estimated population of 40 million, has reported 3.2 million positive cases and 37,118 coronavirus-related deaths.

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UN Condemns Attempted Air Attack on Saudi Arabia's Capital Over Weekend - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, January 25 (Sputnik) - The United Nations strongly condemns the attack on Saudi Arabia's capital of Riyadh over the weekend that appeared to target civilians, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Monday.

The attempted assault on the Saudi capital occurred on Saturday and was reportedly prevented by the forces of the counter-Houthi alliance, comprising several Arabian nations.

"We are aware of reports that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's forces intercepted an aerial attack headed towards its capital, Riyadh. We strongly condemn all attacks targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure," Dujarric said.

When asked about the origin of the weapon fired on Riyadh, Dujarric said the United Nations had no information on where it could have come from.

The rebel Houthi group has denied its involvement in the attempted attack.

Saudi Arabia, leading the coalition against Houthi separatists in war-torn Yemen since 2015, has been exchanging air and drone attacks with the rebels, who control the Yemeni Sanaa capital and major parts of the country's north and west.

Yemen has been engulfed in an armed conflict between the government forces led by President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and the Houthi rebels for several years.

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UN Chief Urges Not To Detain People for Solely Expressing Opinion During Russian Protests

UNITED NATIONS, January 25 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres reaffirmed the right of freedom of peaceful assembly and discouraged detaining people for merely expressing their opinion during the protests in Russia over the weekend, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Monday.

"The Secretary-General reaffirms the basic right of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly," Dujarric said, when asked state the United Nations' reaction to the arrests. "People should not be detained solely for expressing their opinion."

Moscow ombudswoman Tatiana Potyaeva said the Russian authorities arrested more than 1,000 protesters on Saturday for participating in an unauthorized rally in Moscow.

Yulia Ivanova, a senior aide to the head of Moscow's Investigative Department, told Sputnik that four criminal cases have been opened against protesters on charges of assaulting a police officer. Four officers were injured during the rally, including one who run over by a car.

On Saturday, protests were organized in several cities throughout Russia in support of opposition figure Alexey Navalny who was detained in Moscow upon arrival from Germany. Navalny had undergone treatment in Germany for allegedly being poisoned with a nerve agent. He has been detained for 30 days for violating his probation terms for an earlier embezzlement conviction.

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Biden to Sign Order Today Keeping Travel Restrictions on Europe, Adding S. Africa - Psaki

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Sullivan, Patrushev Discuss US Intention to Seek New START Extension - Senior Official
WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - A senior Biden administration told Sputnik that US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev spoke on Monday about the United States' intention to seek a five-year extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) that is set to expire on February 5. "I can confirm that Jake Sullivan spoke today with Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev about our intent to seek a five-year extension for the New START Treaty," the official said.

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US Sees WHO in Central Role in Pandemic Fight, Vows to Support Organization - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, January 25 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that the World Health Organization (WHO) has a central role to play in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and is committed to strengthening the organization, Rodney Hunter, Political Coordinator at the US Mission to the United Nations said in a Security Council meeting on Monday.

"The WHO must play a central role in our combined response to this pandemic," Hunter said. "As a WHO member state, the United States will work closely with all of you to ensure the WHO is strengthened and reformed appropriately, not only to face this current challenge but also to effectively stand up to other challenges yet to come."

Hunter also said that the United States looks forward to working with the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, COVAX and Gavi Vaccine Alliance to help facilitate a rapid vaccine rollout worldwide.

US President Joe Biden immediately upon taking office on January 20 announced the United States will rejoin the WHO, reversing the move by former President Donald Trump to exit the organization.

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Biden Signs Order to Reverse Trump's Transgender Military Ban - White House

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden signed an executive order that set a policy of including all qualified Americans to serve in the US military, effectively overturning a ban on transgender persons that was introduced by the former Trump administration, the White House said on Monday.

"President Biden signed today an Executive Order that sets the policy that all Americans who are qualified to serve in the Armed Forces of the United States should be able to serve," the White House said. "President Biden believes that gender identity should not be a bar to military service, and that America's strength is found in its diversity."

In a separate statement, the Defense Department said it was ready to immediately implement Biden's Executive Order.

"The Department will immediately take appropriate policy action to ensure individuals who identify as transgender are eligible to enter and serve in their self-identified gender" Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said. "These changes will ensure no one will be separated or discharged, or denied reenlistment, solely on the basis of gender identity."

Austin said the revised policy will also ensure all medically-necessary transition related care authorized by law is available to all service members and will re-examine all cases of transgender service members that may be in some form of adverse administrative proceedings. "Over the next 60 days, I look forward to working with the senior civilian and military leaders of the Department as we expeditiously develop the appropriate policies and procedures to implement these changes," Austin said.

Transgender people were officially allowed to serve in the military by the Obama administration in 2016. However, in 2017 former President Donald Trump said transgender individuals would not be allowed to serve in any capacity in the US military. Trump explained he introduced the ban because the military could not be burdened with the tremendous medical costs of transgender persons undergoing sex change operations.

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Supreme Court Dismisses Trump Emoluments Case Rulings - Order

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The Supreme Court has dismissed as moot lawsuits against President Donald Trump saying that he violated the US Constitution's Emoluments Clause by accepting gifts from foreign officials, a Court announcement said on Monday.

"The petition for a writ of certiorari is granted. The judgment is vacated, and the case is remanded to the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit with instructions to dismiss the case as moot."

The Supreme Court also threw out the parallel case of "Trump, President of the United States versus Crew," taking similar legal actions.

"The motion of Scholar Seth Barrett Tillman, et al. for leave to file a brief as amici curiae is granted. The motion of Professor Lawrence A. Hamermesh for leave to file a brief as amicus curiae is granted. The petition for a writ of certiorari is granted. The judgment is vacated," the Supreme Court said.

This case was also remanded to the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit with instructions to dismiss the case as moot, the ruling said.

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US Justice Dept. Watchdog to Probe If Employees Sought to Alter 2020 Election Outcome

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - Inspector General of the US Department of Justice (DOJ) Michael Horowitz announced on Monday that he will probe if any of the department's current or former employees sought to alter the outcome of the 2020 presidential election.

"The DOJ Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is initiating an investigation into whether any former or current DOJ official engaged in an improper attempt to have DOJ seek to alter the outcome of the 2020 Presidential Election," Horowitz said in a statement.

The probe was announced after US media alleged that former President Donald Trump tried to invalidate his rival Joe Biden's win by pushing the Justice Department to appeal at the US Supreme Court. Officials, however, refused to file the lawsuit, media reported.

"The investigation will encompass all relevant allegations that may arise that are within the scope of the OIG's jurisdiction," the statement said.

Horowitz noted that he has jurisdiction to investigate allegations concerning the conduct of former and current Justice Department's employees and the investigation does not extend to other government officials.

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UN Chief Urges International Community to Prevent World From Splitting in Two

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at the World Economic Forum on Monday said the international community must not allow the world to split into halves, each dominated by a leading global power.

"I continue to fear the possibility of a great fracture: the world splitting in two, with the two largest economies on Earth leading two areas with different dominant currencies, trade and financial

rules, each with its own Internet, and its own zero sum geopolitical and military strategies. We must do everything possible to avert such a division," he said.

Guterres underscored the need for one global economy with respect for international law and the importance of the multipolar world with strong multilateral institutions. Guterres said that there is a unique chance to close the gap by using recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic to move from fragilities to resilience.

In terms of cyberspace, the UN chief said there is no consensus on how to take full advantage of the digital world while avoiding the risks.

"We are still far from putting in place the multi-stakeholder mechanisms that will ensure safe and equitable governance of cyberspace," he said.

Guterres also expressed concern over the global disarmament regime and the increasing risks of nuclear and chemical proliferation.

"All these threats - all these obstacles to progress - demand dialogue and collaboration," he said. "Governments, international organizations, the private sector and civil society need to work together. That is why I have been repeatedly calling for a reinvigorated, inclusive and networked multilateralism."

The 51st World Economic Forum is being held from January 25-29.

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US Army's Modernization Priorities Will Not Change Under Biden Administration - General

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - The modernization priorities of the US Army will not change under President Joe Biden despite the fact that every new administration makes its own assessment of key issues, Army Futures Command Head Gen. John Murray said on Monday. "A new administration brings in its own priorities. ... [However] our modernization priorities are not going to change," Murray told a Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) podcast. "We have realigned more than \$30 billion within our equipment portfolios to make sure we are servicing our most important priorities."

Murray explained that priority programs that the US Army was focusing on included advancing long-range precision fire, the successful testing of hypersonic missiles, advancing air missile defense to deny operational capacity against US forces to enemy forces and developing extended artillery fire beyond 70 kilometers (40 miles).

"We will be seeing man-machine interface-integration. It is absolutely crucial to what we are doing. ... We are going after the Bradley [fighting vehicle] replacement," he said.

The US Army was also developing two new rifles, one fully automatic and the second semi-automatic to replace the current standard issue carbine as well as new vertical transportation and assault aircraft, Murray added.

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US Justice Dept. to Probe if Employees Sought to Alter Election Outcome - Watchdog

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UN Rights Experts Deplore Sri-Lanka's Cremation of Dead Bodies Suspected of COVID-19

UNITED NATIONS, January 25 (Sputnik) - Sri Lanka's policy to cremate anyone who dies from COVID-19 discriminates against the beliefs of the minority Muslim population, a group of UN experts from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said in a statement on Monday.

"The imposition of cremation as the only option for handling the bodies confirmed or suspected of COVID-19 amounts to a human rights violation," the statement said. "We deplore the implementation of such public health decisions based on discrimination, aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism amounting to the persecution of Muslims and other minorities in the country." As of January 21, Sri Lanka recorded 274 COVID-19-related deaths, a significant number of them being Muslims, according to the experts. All of the bodies were cremated according to the national guidelines.

The experts explained that the decision to make cremation mandatory followed in alleged expert advice that burials could contaminate ground drinking water. However, the World Health Organization has stated there is no evidence to suggest that cremation prevents the spread of the COVID-19 disease.

"While we must be alert to the serious public health challenges posed by the pandemic, COVID-19 measures must respect and protect the dignity of the dead," the experts said, warning that such hostility against the religious minorities only exacerbates existing intolerance. Such compulsory cremation also risks deterring the poor and most vulnerable from accessing public healthcare, which in turn, impacts the public measures to contain the pandemic, the experts said.

The Sri Lanka government should stop the forced cremation of COVID-19 bodies, combat disinformation, stigmatization of Muslims and ensure accountability for cremations that were carried out by error, the experts added.

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Biden Signs Order to Reverse Trump's Transgender Military Ban - White House

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US Police Fatally Shot 135 Unarmed Blacks since 2015 - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - At least 135 unarmed African-American men and women have been shot and killed by police officers in the United States over the last five years, NPR media outlet reported on Monday citing its investigation.

The latest incident happened earlier in January in Killeen, Texas, where an officer fatally shot Patrick Warren, the report said.

At least three quarters of the police officers involved were white. The killings have led to at least 30 judgments and settlements totaling over \$142 million, the report added, with dozens of lawsuits and claims pending.

Last year, a televised in-custody death of George Floyd sparked a nationwide wave of popular protests against racially motivated police brutality and prompted the authorities to vow sweeping law enforcement reforms.

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Global Economy to See Uncertain, Uneven Recovery in 2021 After Major COVID-19 Crisis - ILO

UNITED NATIONS, January 25 (Sputnik) - The global economy is expected to rebound in the second half of 2021 but the recovery is likely to be uneven following the unprecedented crisis and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Labor Organization (ILO) said in a new report on Monday.

"While there are expectations that a robust economic recovery will occur in the second half of 2021 with the roll-out of vaccination against COVID-19, the global economy is still facing high levels of uncertainty and there is a risk that the recovery will be uneven," the report said.

In its seventh since March report, the ILO revealed that the pandemic has resulted in some 8.8 percent of global working hours being lost in 2020, which is equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs. The losses in the global working hours last year have been approximately four times greater than the global financial crisis of 2009.

The disruption has been spread unevenly throughout the world and mostly felt in the countries in Latin America, Southern Europe, and Southern Asia. Overall, global unemployment increased by 33 million and reached 220 million in 2020.

Women and young people have been hit hardest by the crisis with the latter group dropping out of the labor market and delaying entry into it. This highlights "the all too real risk of a lost generation," the report said.

Looking ahead, the report suggested that the speed and the quality of the recovery will depend on vaccination programs and the implementation of national policies to control the pandemic. It offers three scenarios for recovery: baseline, pessimistic and optimistic.

Under the baseline scenario, global working hours losses will amount to 3 percent in 2021, equivalent to 90 million full-time jobs, while in the pessimistic scenario, working-hour losses will remain at 4.6 percent, equivalent to 130 million jobs.

The optimistic scenario envisages an upsurge in consumer and business confidence with the pandemic being under control. However, a gap of 1.3 percent of global working hours will remain in 2021, corresponding to 36 million full-time jobs, the report said.

To promote the recovery and mitigate the effects of the pandemic, the report recommended a series of policy measures, including fiscal stimulus, targeted measures to reach the most vulnerable social groups, international support for low and middle-income countries and creating jobs in fast-growing sectors.

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Moderna Says COVID-19 Vaccine Has Neutralizing Impact on UK, South African Virus Strains

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - Moderna announced on Monday that its COVID-19 vaccine has demonstrated a neutralizing impact on UK and South African variants of the coronavirus.

"Results from in vitro neutralization studies of sera from individuals vaccinated with Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine (are) showing activity against emerging strains of SARS-CoV-2," Moderna said. "Vaccination with the Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine produced neutralizing titers against all key emerging variants tested, including B.1.1.7 and B.1.351, first identified in the UK and Republic of South Africa, respectively."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the B.1.1.7 variant of the coronavirus, initially reported to be 50-70 percent more contagious, has also been discovered to also be 30 percent deadlier.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has warned that the B.1.1.7 could become a dominant strain in the United States by March. With respect to the B.1.351, the CDC has warned that this variant contained a set of additional mutations that may affect its ability to be recognized by antibodies.

Moderna said aside from its own studies, a December 3 letter to the editor published in The New England Journal of Medicine reported that participants in the Phase 1 study of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine retained high levels of neutralizing antibodies through 119 days after the first vaccination dose and 90 days after the second dose.

On December 18, the US Food and Drug Administration authorized emergency use for Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine a week after it extended an authorization for Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine.

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Biden to Sign Order to Require US Federal Government to 'Buy American' - White House

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) – US President Joseph Biden will sign an executive order on Monday to support domestic businesses and require federal government agencies to buy American products, the White House said in a statement.

"With this order, President Biden is ensuring that when the federal government spends taxpayer dollars they are spent on American made goods by American workers and with American-made component parts," the statement said on Monday.

The order fulfills Biden's promise to strengthen "Buy American" rules and close loopholes that allow US companies to make products abroad and still qualify for domestic preferences, it added.

The measure should help to create well-paid jobs and support the US economy, the White House said.

The executive order directs federal agencies to close current loopholes in how domestic content is measured and increase domestic content requirements. It also increases oversight of potential waivers to domestic preference laws and requires additional measures to support US economy, such as conducting cross-agency reviews and supporting federal program to purchase domestic products.

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Former White House Spokeswoman Announces Run for Arkansas Governor

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - Sarah Huckabee Sanders, a former White House press secretary who served for ex-President Donald Trump's communications team, on Monday officially announced her bid to run for Arkansas governor.

"Today, I announce my candidacy for Governor of Arkansas and ask for your prayers and your support," Sanders said. "As Governor I will your right to be free of socialism and tyranny, your second amendment right to keep your family safe and your freedom of speech and religious liberty. Our state needs a leader with a courage to do what's right, not what's politically correct or convenient."

Sanders, the daughter of Mike Huckabee, who served as the state's governor for over a decade, has long been planning to run for the post. Trump has reportedly supported his former aide's decision.

The 38-year-old politician will run to replace Asa Hutchinson, racing against incumbent Arkansas Lieutenant Governor Tim Griffin and state Attorney General Leslie Rutledge. Sanders, the third woman to serve as the White House press secretary following in the footsteps of Dee Dee Myers in 1993 and Dana Perino in 2007, worked for Trump's communications team from 2017-2019.

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Dominion Sues Trump Lawyer Giuliani for \$1.3Bln Over Election Fraud Claims - Complaint

WASHINGTON, January 25 (Sputnik) - Dominion Voting Systems has filed a defamation lawsuit seeking \$1.3 billion in damages from former President Donald Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani over his election fraud claims, court documents showed on Monday.

"Giuliani launched a viral disinformation campaign about Dominion that reached millions of people and caused enormous harm to Dominion," the company said in a complaint filed with the US District Court for the District of Columbia.

The company is seeking compensatory damages of not less than \$651,735,000 and punitive damages for the same amount, as well as any other relief that the Court deems appropriate, according to the court document.

The 107-page complaint details how Giuliani used his Twitter account, radio and podcast shows to spread false claims that the company "fixed" the election to ensure President Joe Biden's victory over Trump.

Dominion earlier filed a similar lawsuit against Republican lawyer Sidney Powell, requesting \$1.3 billion in compensation for money the company has spent increasing security for its employees and doing damage control to its reputation, as well as loss of future business.