

03/12/21 Friday

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UK to Increase Number of Nuclear Warheads it Can Stockpile - Report
by [Mary F.](#)

The UK is estimated to possess around 195 nuclear weapons, of which 120 are operationally available, according to an April 2020 report by the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation. The UK's deployed warheads are controlled by the Royal Navy.

The UK government is expected to increase the number of nuclear warheads it can stockpile, The Telegraph's deputy political editor Lucy Fisher tweeted Friday.

According to Fisher, an official announcement on the increased number of nuclear warheads is expected to be published in The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy on Tuesday. The review, set to be released on March 16, will describe the British government's foreign policy, defense, security and international development.

In her tweet, Fisher also noted that the UK has around 180 warheads stockpiled.

The potential increase in the number of stockpiled warheads would mark the first increase since the end of the Cold War. In its 2015 strategic defense review, the UK committed to reducing "the overall nuclear weapon stockpile to no more than around 180 warheads" by the mid-2020s.

"If this is confirmed, this would be a highly provocative move," David Cullen, director of the Nuclear Information Service, told [The Guardian](#) on Friday.

"The UK has repeatedly pointed to its reducing warhead stockpile as evidence that it is fulfilling its legal duties under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty," he added.

"If they are tearing up decades of progress in reducing numbers, it will be a slap in the face to the 190 other members of the treaty, and will be regarded as a shocking breach of faith," he continued.

The objective of the Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT, is to halt the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology and to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The motivation behind the alleged move to increase the number of UK nuclear warheads remains unclear.

In February 2020, the Pentagon revealed that the UK committed to a multibillion-pound replacement of its nuclear warheads with ones based on US technology.

"I think it's wonderful that the UK is working on a new warhead at the same time, and I think we will have discussions and be able to share technologies," Alan Shaffer, the Pentagon's deputy undersecretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment, said at the time, [the Guardian reported.](#)

The UK's stockpile of nuclear weapons spiked to about 500 in the late 1970s, but has decreased gradually ever since. During the Cold War, the US possessed a stockpile of nuclear weapons that were stored in the UK. Although the weapons were under US control, they could be deployed from British delivery vehicles.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Alabama House Votes to Remove Decades-Long Ban on Yoga in Schools

by [Mary F.](#)

Yoga, which first originated in ancient India, is practiced in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism due to its meditative and spiritual aspects. Alabama's Board of Education banned yoga and meditation from K-12 schools in 1993 due to its link to eastern religions.

The Alabama House of Representatives on Friday passed a bill to end the state's almost 30-year old ban on teaching yoga in public schools.

The House passed the bill by Rep. Jeremy Gray, D-Opelika with a vote of 73-25, [The Hill reported.](#)

The bill would allow students to learn and practice various yoga poses and stretching techniques.

"All poses shall be limited exclusively to sitting, standing, reclining, twisting, and balancing" and "all poses, exercises, and stretching techniques shall have exclusively English descriptive names," [the bill outlines.](#)

"Chanting, mantras, mudras, use of mandalas, and namaste greetings shall be expressly prohibited," adds the legislation, which would give students the option not to practice yoga. Gray, who has advocated to remove the ban for the past three years, believes yoga exercises will enhance students' mental and physical wellbeing. As a former cornerback at North Carolina State University, Gray has been practicing yoga for seven years himself.

"Concentration. Breathing. A lot of young people deal with their temperament. Anger. And so, yoga helps with that," Gray [told AL.com.](#)

"I've been in yoga for seven years. I know the benefits of yoga, so it was very dear to my heart, and I think Alabama will be better for it," Gray said.

"On a physical note, if you're an athlete or you just want to be flexible and mobile, it helps in that aspect. So, studies show that yoga has been proven to work," he added.

Gray also noted that many people may be misinformed when it comes to yoga.

"A lot of my colleagues just got a lot of emails about it being a part of Hinduism. If you can do it at the local YMCA, you can do it at churches, why is it a problem when it comes to K-12 public schools? Some people, you can never change their minds," he said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Childhood Vaccinations See 'Historic' and 'Substantial' Drop Amid Pandemic - CDC Director

by [Mary F.](#)

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that children through six years receive 14 vaccinations for diseases like Hepatitis A and measles. However, the

routine vaccination of children against those infectious diseases and others has been disrupted as the US continues to battle COVID-19.

During a virtual White House coronavirus briefing on Friday, CDC director Dr. Rochelle Walensky revealed that childhood immunizations have dropped by around 11 million doses since COVID-19 broke out in the US.

"I want to share with you another concerning way that COVID-19 is affecting the health of the nation and disrupting our ability to vaccinate children against other infectious diseases," Walensky said during the briefing, the [New York Post reported](#).

"On-time vaccination throughout childhood is essential because it helps to provide immunity before children are exposed to potentially life-threatening diseases," Walensky added.

"During the pandemic, we have seen substantial declines in pediatrician visits, and because of this, CDC orders for childhood vaccinations dropped by about 11 million doses," she continued, calling the steep decline in childhood immunizations "substantial" and "historic."

Walensky urged parents to approach their children's pediatrician to ensure that their children have received all the [recommended vaccines](#).

To date, the CDC recommends 14 different vaccines for children between birth and under the age of 6 to prevent diseases like diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, influenza, measles, mumps and rubella.

"When planning for your child's safe return to childcare programs or to school, please check with your child's doctor to make sure that they are up to date on their vaccines ... and if they did fall behind, they can get caught up by following CDC's catch-up immunization schedule," Walensky said.

This is not the first time that the CDC has identified a link between the COVID-19 pandemic and childhood vaccinations.

A [CDC study](#) published in May 2020 found that the number of childhood vaccinations administered in Michigan declined by as much as 22% during the pandemic.

"As the nation continues efforts to mitigate transmission of SARS-CoV-2, disruption of essential health services might occur, including in outpatient settings. Many provider offices have transitioned to telemedicine practices, where possible, to provide continuity of care in the medical home," the report explains.

"Although some components of a well-child visit can be completed through telemedicine video conferences, immunization services require an in-person visit," the report adds, warning that unvaccinated children will be more vulnerable to diseases like measles.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Hails Anti-China Quad Bloc as 'Vital' to Guaranteeing 'Free and Open Pacific' at First Meeting

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

When US President Joe Biden took office on January 20, he indicated his policy toward China would change little from that of his predecessor, Donald Trump, by inviting Hsiao Bi-khim, the

chief envoy to the US from Taiwan, to his inauguration. Taiwan is an island China claims as its territory.

At the first summit of the heads of state of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) on Friday, Biden hailed the bloc as a “vital arena” for maintaining a “free and open Indo-Pacific.”

“A free and open Indo-Pacific is essential,” [Biden told the leaders](#) of Japan, Australia, and India in the virtual meeting, which is the first he’s hosted since becoming US president in January, as well as the first time the heads of state of the four nations have held such a joint meeting.

“The United States is committed to working with you, our partners, and all of our allies in the region to achieve stability. This is a group particularly important because it is dedicated to the practical solutions and concrete results.”

Biden was joined by Vice President Kamala Harris and his chief diplomat abroad, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the latter of whom will soon participate in a meeting with his Chinese counterpart in [Alaska next week](#). Although it was formed in the aftermath of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami that devastated the Indian Ocean basin, the Quad is understood in its current formulation to be an anti-China alliance. It has been dubbed an “Asian NATO,” but the bloc has no similar formal declaration of mutual collective defense.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra [Modi similarly praised](#) the Quad as a “pillar of stability in the region,” saying the summit shows the alliance has “come of age.”

“As four leaders of great, liberal democracies in the Indo-Pacific, let our partnership be the enabler of peace, stability, and prosperity,” Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison added, urging that they must include the regional “vision” as expressed through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

“Know, friends, that Australia, while looking to our friends in all of these tasks, we never leave it to our friends. We’ll do our share of the heavy lifting to lighten the burden for us all,” Morrison added.

However, the Quad leaders also pledged to cooperate in other fields, including the restoration of democracy in Myanmar following the seizure of power by the military last month, the production and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines across the Indo-Pacific region, and the launching of a critical- and emerging-technology working group. They also hoped to hold an in-person meeting before the year is out.

The meeting comes days after the White House [National Security Council](#) published an Interim National Security Strategic Guidance in which the Biden administration postures as shedding the isolationism of Donald Trump’s four years.

“Under the Biden-Harris administration, America is back. Diplomacy is back. Alliances are back,” the document says.

“The alliances, institutions, agreements, and norms underwriting the international order the United States helped to establish are being tested,” the document continues, claiming that “China, in particular, has rapidly become more assertive. It is the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system.”

The Trump administration arrived at many of the same conclusions, saying in 2018 that “great power competition” with Russia and China was Washington’s primary strategic concern. In November 2020, the [State Department published](#) a document outlining a long-term strategy for curbing China’s rise that includes a strong effort to [encircle the socialist](#) nation diplomatically

and militarily, in a manner similar to how the US "contained" the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

However, Beijing has said its aim is internal development, not external expansion, and despite its steady [increases in defense](#) budget, China's National Security Law was amended in January to explicitly state the People's Liberation Army's purpose is fundamentally defensive. Ahead of the Alaska summit next week, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said he hopes for dialogue and cooperation, whereas Blinken plainly said he expects little use to come from the summit.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Bolivian Court Issues Warrants for Arrest of Former Interim President Jeanine Añez, Other Ministers

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Last week, Jeanine Añez, the former self-proclaimed interim president of Bolivia, refused a summons to meet with the state prosecutor in her home province of Beni, paving the way for her arrest for giving security forces a "license to kill" protesters who challenged her interim government's rule in 2019 and 2020.

A Bolivian court has issued arrest warrants for Jeanine Añez, the former interim president who seized power in a coup d'etat in late 2019, alongside several of her senior ministers, warning they are a "flight risk."

According to the court filing shared by Bolivian news outlet Kawsachun News, Añez and nine other senior officials from her administration are charged with terrorism, sedition and conspiracy. In response to the arrest warrants being issued, Añez took to Twitter on Friday to beg for support.

"The political persecution has begun," she wrote. "The MAS has decided to return to the styles of the dictatorship. A shame because Bolivia does not need dictators, it needs freedom and solutions."

Rise and Fall of the House of Añez

Añez left office in early November when Luis Arce from the Movement for Socialism (MAS) took office, having won in a landslide election on October 18. The vote was repeatedly postponed, sparking protests and fueling fears of a turn even further from democracy.

A former senator from the lowland Beni region in northeastern Bolivia, Añez rose to power in the chaos of November 2019, when a coordinated campaign by domestic and international forces attempted to void the re-election of MAS leader and then-President Evo Morales the previous month. After [right-wing militias](#) and sympathetic police forces locked out MAS lawmakers and Añez found herself the head of a rump parliament, she [declared herself](#) the interim president on November 12.

US media and the US government both provided support to the anti-MAS forces in the country, with then-US President Donald Trump and allies like Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro quickly extending recognition to Añez's declared interim government. However, after months of claiming

Morales had stolen the vote, US papers like the Washington Post [were forced to admit](#) that the Organization of American States report underpinning those claims was "deeply flawed." "There is not any statistical evidence of fraud that we can find - the trends in the preliminary count, the lack of any big jump in support for Morales after the halt, and the size of Morales's margin all appear legitimate," [the Post wrote](#) in February 2020, after [months of street violence](#) between Añez's police and military forces and the indigenous-led protests against them had solidified her rule.

New elections were originally slated for May 2020, but after the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic earlier in the year, Añez's government repeatedly postponed the elections until ten days of mass demonstrations [forced it to commit](#) to October 18. Ironically, the leading contender in the race was the MAS candidate Luis Arce, who swept the October elections with 55% of the vote.

In the weeks that followed, the new Plurinational Legislative Assembly, Bolivia's parliament, issued indictments for Añez in connection with a series of massacres of protesters by police under her watch. She and 11 of her then-ministers were [implicated in massacres](#) in the indigenous-majority communities of Senkata, Sacaba and Yapacani and [accused of genocide](#) for giving police a "license to kill."

Last week, she refused a summons to meet with the state prosecutor in Beni on pain of arrest.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

New York Senators Gillibrand, Schumer Release Joint Statement Demanding Governor Cuomo Resign

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has faced demands for his resignation since his state became the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic last spring, but the growing chorus from his own party has never been as strong as it is now.

Both US senators representing the state of New York joined dozens of Democratic politicians calling for Cuomo to step down amid a slew of sexual harassment accusations levied against him in recent days.

Sen. Chuck Schumer, who leads the majority Democrats in the Senate, and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, a former Democratic presidential candidate, called on Cuomo to step aside on Friday. "We commend the brave actions of the individuals who have come forward with serious allegations of abuse and misconduct," the senators' [joint statement reads](#). "Due to the multiple, credible sexual harassment and misconduct allegations, it is clear that Governor Cuomo has lost the confidence of his governing partners and the people of New York. Governor Cuomo should resign."

Seven women have so far come forward with accusations that Cuomo behaved in a sexually inappropriate way toward them, five of whom worked for or with him. The accusations have included sexually suggestive comments, as well as unwanted groping and kissing.

At a press conference earlier on Friday, he parried away demands for his resignation, saying that two investigations were already underway and denying that the claims were true. “People know the difference between playing politics, bowing to cancel culture and the truth. Let the review proceed,” he told reporters. “I am not going to resign.”

Gillibrand and Schumer join [nearly five dozen](#) Democratic state lawmakers calling on Cuomo, also a Democrat, to step down. They have also been joined by [several House federal lawmakers](#) representing New York districts, including Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Jerry Nadler, and Jamaal Bowman, as well as New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio.

However, the White House has so far distanced itself from demands Cuomo resign. Press Secretary Jen [Psaki told reporters](#) on Friday that US President Joe Biden, who has dodged [his own accusations](#) of sexual misconduct, supports the independent investigation and that each woman “deserves to have her voice heard, should be treated with respect and should it be able to tell her story.”

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Video: New French Scarabée Armored Vehicle Can Drive Sideways Like a Crab
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The French Army has initiated a massive overhaul of its armored vehicle fleet dubbed “Project Scorpion,” buying thousands of new scout and light armored vehicles by 2025. A new armored vehicle with a novel design allowing it to roll sideways like a crab is now ready for the global market, French defense firm Arquus has announced.

Scarabée (“Beetle”), the new armored wheeled vehicle from Arquus, is “the world’s first truly hybrid armored vehicle,” CEO Emmanuel Levacher told [reporters on Wednesday](#).

The truck is powered by two engines: a 300-horsepower diesel engine and an electric 75-kilowatt motor capable of delivering 103 horsepower. According to [defense sources](#), the engine block is located in its aft section, enabling it to be completely replaced in just 45 minutes. On top of that, the Scarabée also has a [special “boost” mode](#) that will immediately funnel all available power to its wheels. Since electric motors are capable of delivering maximum torque at 0 revolutions per minute, that means a ton of get-up-and-scoot power at the driver’s fingertips, in case the crew finds itself in a bad situation.

However, by far its most unique feature is the 4x4 truck’s forward and rear axles, which can be independently steered a full 90 degrees in either direction. That gives it unequalled tight-corner navigation as well as the ability to go sideways like a crab - an extremely useful feature in a light reconnaissance vehicle.

It is reported to weigh around 8 tons and is capable of carrying another two tons of cargo. It has two suspension systems, one for off-roading and another for transport, and can easily be hoisted in a cargo plane or underneath a heavy-lifting helicopter.

[According to Aquus](#), Scarabée can also host a wide array of weapons systems, including a multi-caliber cannon, man-portable anti-tank missiles, anti-drone systems, and reconnaissance

systems like cameras and radar. What's more, they can be fitted at a remote-controlled station, too.

A part of Volvo Group, Aquus was once called Renault Trucks Defense and fills the vast majority of the French Army's wheeled vehicle needs, including the [Griffon and Jaguar](#) vehicles at the core of the Scorpion project. Levacher said that several potential clients have "already expressed interest," but no buyers as of yet. Scarabée is the company's first solo-funded project.

Last September, Russia unveiled its own transforming armored scout car: [the Drozd \("Blackbird"\)](#) is an all-wheel drive amphibious vehicle boasted to have considerable seaworthiness and to be capable of up to 100 kilometers per hour on land and 70 kilometers per hour on water. Its wheels can pull inward in just 12 seconds, enabling it to quickly switch between water and land travel.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Rochester Officials Suppressed Info About Police Restraint Death of Daniel Prude, Probe Finds by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Daniel Prude died in early 2020 after police in Rochester, New York, placed him in a full-face "spit hood," and then proceeded to hold him face down on the pavement. Prude subsequently suffocated under the circumstances. An investigation was later launched into the officer-involved death incident.

Investigators examining how the city of Rochester handled the Prude case revealed on Friday that officials had knowingly suppressed information regarding both the arrest and death. In an [80-page report](#), special investigator Andrew Celli noted that Mayor Lovely Warren, then-Police Chief La'Ron Singletary, Corporation Counsel Timothy Curtin, and Communications Director Justin Roj all knew about Prude's death, and had failed to disclose the incident prior to the September news conference held by Prude's family.

The report states that by mid-April 2020, the four Rochester city officials "had learned that [Rochester Police Department] officers had physically restrained Daniel Prude during the course of an arrest on March 23, 2020; that the restraint had caused Mr. Prude's death; and that the officers were the subjects of a criminal investigation."

"None of this was disclosed to the public before the Prude family's September 2 news conference," the report highlights.

Although the release of body camera footage was delayed over a variety of procedural reasons, Celli's investigation also found that senior officials with the Rochester Police Department, including Singletary, had purposely held off on the video release. Celli determined the halt was over concerns that the release "might cause civil unrest and violence" similar to that seen after the killing of Minnesota resident George Floyd, who died after an officer knelt on his neck. Additionally, Celli's probe highlighted a variety of statements made to the public by Warren, Singletary and Curtin after the family's September conference that were false. Among those

false statements were claims that the office of the attorney general had issued instructions to the city to not disclose any facts surrounding the case.

The report further states that during conversations in April 2020 between Singletary, Warren, senior police department officials and the city's communication department, the former police chief acknowledged the March incident, but "consistently deemphasized the role of police restraints in the death of Daniel Prude, and his statements did not capture the disturbing tenor of the entire encounter."

Incidentally, after Warren watched the body camera footage and sought to publicly disclose the arrest, the report states that Curtin had "actively discouraged" her from doing so.

[A statement](#) released by Celli underscores that the investigation found that there was no reasonable explanation for decisions the city of Rochester took in the wake of Prude's death.

"Did officials of City government suppress information about the arrest and death of Daniel Prude between March 23, 2020, when the arrest occurred, and September 2, 2020, when the Prude family publicly released body-worn camera footage of the incident?" Celli wrote.

"The straightforward answer is yes. The investigation revealed no explanation that fully accounts for the more than four-month delay between the death of an unarmed man at the hands of Rochester police, and public disclosure of the facts and circumstances under which the death occurred — other than a decision or series of decisions not to make such disclosure."

The latest development came days after Prude's children announced a [federal lawsuit](#) against the city of Rochester, accusing both the city and its police department of violating their father's civil rights and attempting to "cover-up" the incident. Earlier, a [grand jury](#) in February declined to bring criminal charges against the officers involved in Prude's death.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

'Very Honorable Consideration': Matthew McConaughey Plays Up Running for Texas Governor Again

by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The next gubernatorial election in Texas will take place in 2022, with contenders likely to include current Gov. Greg Abbott and former Rep. Beto O'Rourke (D-TX). However, as of late, it seems the race may also see the participation of a certain Texan from the silver screen whose well-known tagline is "alright, alright, alright."

Oscar-winning actor Matthew McConaughey, known for films such as the 1993 indie "Dazed and Confused" and 2013's "Dallas Buyers Club," has teased Americans yet again by hinting that he may toss his name into Texas' upcoming gubernatorial race.

In a [recent interview](#) with NBC's "Today," McConaughey told host Al Roker that he is seriously considering running in the 2022 race, but that he remained unsure whether he would "be most useful" in public office.

"It's a very honorable consideration. So am I considering that? Sure. It's a great thing too, and an honorable thing to be able to consider," the actor said. "What I've got to choose for myself is, I want to get into a leadership role in the next chapter of my life."

"Now, what role am I going to be most useful in? I don't know that that's in a political position or if that's me as a free agent. So that's something I'm personally working on, is: What is my position of most use in a leadership role?" he questioned.

When pressed on whether he wanted to make a certain political announcement to viewers, McConaughey redirected the attention to urge the audience to tune into his March 21 [virtual benefit](#) concert, which was organized to help Texans in the aftermath of the deadly winter storm that affected much of the state.

McConaughey, however, is no stranger to flirtations with public office. In fact, earlier this week during an [interview](#) with Rania Mankarious of "The Balanced Voice," the Texas native stated that running was a "true consideration" for him. He later made statements that were largely echoed during the Roker sit-down.

Even earlier, when McConaughey was on a promotional book tour for his memoir "Greenlights," he [told](#) conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt in November that he would be interested in a life of politics when it "redefines its purpose."

At the time, the "True Detective" actor argued that "politics seems to be a broken business," and that he wants to "get behind personal values to rebind our social contracts with each other as Americans, as people again."

While McConaughey has yet to officially make any announcement on the subject, netizens have some mixed feelings about his potential steps into the political world.

Born and raised in the Lone Star State, McConaughey has most recently spent his time aiding with relief efforts in Texas and running his Just Keep Livin' foundation to empower today's youth. A graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, McConaughey has also served as a professor at the institution since 2015.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UK Police Officer Charged With Kidnapping, Murder of Sarah Everard
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Sarah Everard, a 33-year-old marketing executive working in the UK's London, went missing on March 3 as she walked home after leaving a friend's house. Her body was discovered days later in a wooded area.

UK authorities announced on Friday that charges had been filed against PC Wayne Couzens for the kidnapping and murder of Sarah Everard.

The move to charge Couzens, who was first arrested on Tuesday, was authorized by attorneys with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). A [statement](#) issued by Rosemary Ainslie, the head of special crimes at CPS, indicated the decision was made "following a referral of evidence by the Metropolitan Police."

"The function of the CPS is not to decide whether a person is guilty of a criminal offence, but to make fair, independent and objective assessments about whether it is appropriate to present charges to a court to consider," Ainslie noted.

"Criminal proceedings are now active and nothing should be published that could jeopardize the defendant's right to a fair trial."

Couzens is scheduled to appear before the Westminster Magistrates' Court on Saturday.

A [subsequent release](#) by the Metropolitan Police states that Couzens had been with the service since September 2018. After his initial posting to the South Area, Couzens was later moved to the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command in February 2020.

On the night of Everard's disappearance, she is believed to have walked through Clapham Common, a large triangular park in the London borough of Wandsworth.

After investigators searched through various security footage, they determined that the last known sighting of Everard was of her walking towards Tulse Hill, some 30 minutes after leaving her friend's Battersea home.

[Images](#) released by authorities show Everard on the phone. It was previously reported that she had been talking with her partner at the time. Everard's walk was estimated to take about 50 minutes.

Although a body was found on Wednesday in a wooded area in Kent, it was not until earlier Friday that British police confirmed that they had identified the remains as those of Everard. Earlier, Everard's family released a statement calling the Durham University graduate "bright and beautiful - a wonderful daughter and sister."

"She was kind and thoughtful, caring and dependable. She always put others first and had the most amazing sense of humour," they added. "She was strong and principled and a shining example to us all. We are very proud of her and she brought so much joy to our lives."

Couzens' trial is expected to take place at the Old Bailey; however, it's unclear when the trial will begin.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Murder of Sarah Everard Prompts Online Outpouring of Abuse, Harassment Stories
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Earlier, the UK's Crown Prosecution Service announced that it had filed charges against serving Metropolitan Police Officer Wayne Couzens for the kidnapping and murder of Sarah Everard. The 33-year-old marketing executive initially disappeared last week while walking home alone after leaving a friend's house in London's Wandsworth borough.

Thousands of individuals have begun to voice their own experiences with abuse and harassment in public spaces after initial reports began to surface surrounding the shocking disappearance of Everard.

Many on social media have recounted their own [personal experiences](#) at work or in the general public, while others have even exchanged notes on the [habitual steps](#) they take before going outdoors alone, especially at night.

The detainment of Couzens, who had been with the Metropolitan Police since 2018, and had been assigned to the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command since last February, has only heightened concerns and feelings of an ever-present threat.

From facing catcalls and [being followed](#), some netizens [detailed](#) how they use their keys as a potential weapon in the event that someone attempts to attack them, as others discussed how they opted to stick to routes that were well-lit at night.

“This is a constant preoccupation of women and girls of all ages; I am 74 and still go through the mental risk assessment each time I am out on my own especially, but not exclusively, at night,” Twitter user Linda Redford [wrote](#) in a post. “I taught the same to my daughters. Fear passed on from woman to girl [through] generations.”

One individual highlighted an app they used that sends a text message with the person’s exact location to an emergency contact when the application detects a [“panic scream.”](#) Similar online applications have been launched by [ride-share companies](#).

Another netizen [remarked](#) that they often take the “long way home” as opposed to taking shortcuts through alleyways. “I’m 14, I should be worrying about wether [sic] my crush likes me back, or the next math test, I should not be worry [sic] about wether I will make it home safely or not,” they wrote.

For television and radio presenter Shelagh Fogarty, Everard’s disappearance prompted her to recount all the instances in which she experienced sexual harassment, dating back to when she was just 10 years old.

“This is what women face. This and worse. Throughout our lives,” Fogarty wrote. “It’s shit. It’s frightening. It has to stop.”

Alice Birdwood, a project manager based in Manchester, England, [recalled](#) an instance when she crossed the street to avoid a group of men, and one of the men “threatened to slash me for not walking past.”

Men also joined the discussions, underscoring that the rising argument of “not all men” are bad is tired and beside the point, as violence against women has remained heightened.

Jay Rayner, a London local, [remarked online](#) that when he finds himself walking behind a woman on a quiet street, he “always” crosses the road and tries to “accelerate as quickly as possible.”

“I am a big man and absolutely aware [of] what my silhouette looks like in the darkness,” he added.

Mandu Reid, the leader of the British Women’s Equality Party who is running for mayor of London, [told](#) The New York Times that the Everard case has been a reminder of the violence that women constantly face.

“We’re scared, we’re shaken and we’re intimidated,” Reid said. “While we have been confined to our homes, going out for walks has been an important release. ... Now this has happened, and we feel under threat and under siege.”

The [latest developments](#) surrounding the Everard case came as the UK branch of the UN Woman issued a [report](#) that found over 70% of women within the UK had experienced sexual harassment in public spaces. It also found that globally, every 10 minutes an adolescent girl dies as a result of violence.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

'Naked Corporate Opportunism': Google Strikes Back at Microsoft Amid Ongoing News Feud
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Big Tech companies Google and Microsoft have recently engaged in a war of words amid new legislation attempting to regulate how online distributors handle content being put out by news publishers. The battle between the pair has echoed the Microsoft advertising attack against Google that became known as the so-called "Scroogled" era.

Popular search engine company Google blasted rival Microsoft on Friday, accusing the tech company of dusting off its old undermining practices, and opting to "break the way the open web works."

The day's unusual public squabbling between the top tech companies began with Google releasing a scathing statement moments before Microsoft President Brad Smith was scheduled to appear at a House Judiciary subcommittee hearing on competition in the news industry. "We welcome the discussion of ways to create a better economic future for quality journalism, especially as the news media business model has been facing increased challenges for many years," Kent Walker, Google's senior vice president of global affairs, noted in a Friday [blog post](#). "We also believe that this important debate should be about the substance of the issue, and not derailed by naked corporate opportunism ... which brings us to Microsoft's sudden interest in this discussion."

And this, folks, is where the gloves have been tossed to the ground.

"We respect Microsoft's success and we compete hard with them in cloud computing, search, productivity apps, video conferencing, email and many other areas. Unfortunately, as competition in these areas intensifies, they are reverting to their familiar playbook of attacking rivals and lobbying for regulations that benefit their own interests," Walker noted.

"They are now making self-serving claims and are even willing to break the way the open web works in an effort to undercut a rival. And their claims about our business and how we work with news publishers are just plain wrong."

Hammering another nail, Walker highlighted how Microsoft's recent step into the news publishing arena came as the company had been dealt a blow with the devastating SolarWinds hack.

"Microsoft was warned about the vulnerabilities in their system, knew they were being exploited, and are now doing damage control while their customers scramble to pick up the pieces from what has been dubbed the Great Email Robbery. So maybe it's not surprising to see them dusting off the old diversionary [Scroogled](#) playbook," he continued.

While reaffirming that Google has all intention to "collaborate with news organizations and policymakers" to ensure the future of journalism, Walker further characterized Microsoft's history of supporting news organizations as "spotty." He also stated the rival paid publishers less for content.

The growing dispute between Google and Microsoft was largely the result of new regulations that would require distribution platforms to pay publishers for linking to news sites. In fact, Australia in February passed legislation that would prompt such payments, a move which has already led to a three-year [licensing deal](#) between Google, social media giant Facebook and News Corp.

During Smith's Friday testimony, he remarked that Australia's legislation was reasonable, and that Microsoft would be willing to run its own search engine, Bing, at a lower margin than Google so that all parties could "succeed together."

"When companies start threatening countries and saying that if their legislators pass laws they don't like they'll pull up and leave, then something seems a little out of whack," Smith told lawmakers.

"No one should be above the law. No person, no government, no company, no technology."

The latest exchanges between the pair came as a bipartisan group of congressional lawmakers reintroduced the Journalism Preservation and Competition Act, a piece of legislation that would effectively offer a four-year safe harbor from antitrust laws for news outlets to negotiate with tech platforms.

Smith stated during the hearing that he was in support of the bill "with full recognition that Microsoft likely would be designated as an online content distributor subject to it."

It's presently unclear how Google stands on the legislation.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

GOP Lawmaker Demands Answers on Vaccine Distribution After US Troops Report Canceled Appointments

by [Evan Craighead](#)

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, stressed this month that US service members who refused to get the COVID-19 vaccine would inadvertently be "part of the problem." However, at least one overseas US military hospital has reported delayed vaccine shipments, and may cancel appointments outright.

Rep. Michael McCaul (R-X), a ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, penned [a letter](#) to General Gustave Perna, chief operating officer of the US COVID-19 response for vaccine and therapeutics, on Thursday, requesting an explanation for apparent vaccine distribution hiccups.

"Unfortunately, it has been brought to my attention some troops and their families stationed abroad are experiencing significant delays, causing appointments to be cancelled," McCaul wrote.

The Republican lawmaker specifically cited a March 10 Facebook post by Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, a Germany-based [US Army](#) medical facility and the largest American hospital outside the states.

"We are currently waiting for a resupply of vaccines and do not anticipate receiving any for the next several weeks. Based on diminishing vaccine quantities, we have made the difficult decision to cancel some upcoming appointments," the post originally said.

McCaul asserted "soldiers and their family members are, rightfully, very frustrated and confused, unsure what this means for them."

However, the US Army hospital in question has since updated the post and highlighted its "leadership team is working hard to find a way to prevent us from having to cancel second-dose appointments, as previously announced."

The Republican lawmaker also called attention to the fact that some service members - like some civilians - "are hesitant to take the vaccine," which was also pointed out by Dr. Fauci, the White House's chief medical adviser, during a virtual town hall with military family nonprofit Blue Star Families.

The health expert stressed that US service members are "part of the solution to this outbreak," but could become "part of the problem" if they are eligible for the vaccine and refuse to receive it.

"Because by getting infected, even though you may not know it, you may be inadvertently transmitting the infection to someone else, even though you have no symptoms," Fauci said, as reported [by CNBC](#).

McCaul wrote that, considering these reports of hesitancy, "it's incredibly disappointing to hear those who desperately want the vaccine are having a hard time receiving it."

The Republican lawmaker concluded his letter by asking a number of COVID-19 vaccine distribution questions, including queries about plans for vaccinating families of service members.

US Defense Secretary General Lloyd Austin was also issued a copy of McCaul's letter.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Get Your Own: Netflix Cracking Down on Password Sharing With New Feature
by [Evan Craighead](#)

A study conducted by research firm Park Associates found that password piracy and sharing cost streaming services approximately \$9.1 billion in losses for 2019. The firm estimated losses soar to \$12.5 billion by 2024, unless features are implemented to curb lax password-sharing policies.

From this week on, Netflix account owners may be greeted with a new sign-in pop-up asking them to verify their identity via SMS, or emailed verification code.

"If you don't live with the owner of this account, you need your own account to keep watching," the message reads, along with the option to "Join Free for 30 Days."

While Netflix has been exploring ways to curb password sharing [for years](#), a representative for the leading on-demand streaming service stressed the importance of maintaining account security for customers.

"This test is designed to help ensure that people using Netflix accounts are authorized to do so," a company spokesperson for the streaming service [told Reuters](#) this week.

Naturally, netizens of all ages took issue with the change, and some even accused the company of attempting a money-grab under the guise of digital security.

This is like when fast food spots made us start paying for water cups to stop us from getting Pepsi. <https://t.co/PtzTgxsZMR>

— Roy Wood Jr- Ex Jedi (@roywoodjr) [March 12, 2021](#)

Netflix presently offers basic (\$8.99), standard (\$13.99) and premium (\$17.99) packages. Customers paying for the standard and premium packages are allowed to simultaneously stream content on two and four devices, respectively.

It's worth noting that users are able to skip the new prompt and verify their identity at a later time. It is unclear how many skips are allowed, or if skips will eventually lock a user out of the Netflix account.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Dual US, Mexico National Pleads Guilty for Dealing With Drug Traffickers - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Jessica Johanna Oseguera Gonzalez, a dual US-Mexican citizen, has pleaded guilty for dealing with Mexican companies designated by the US government as narcotics traffickers, the Department of Justice said in a release on Friday. "A dual US-Mexican citizen pleaded guilty today to willfully engaging in financial dealings with Mexican companies that had been identified as Specially Designated Narcotics Traffickers by the US Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)," the release said. The Justice Department said Oseguera Gonzalez engaged in property transactions with six Mexican businesses previously designated by OFAC as narcotics traffickers for providing support to the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion.

The CJNG is a Mexican drug trafficking organization headed by with Oseguera Gonzalez's father, who was sanctioned by OFAC in April 2015.

According to the release, the defendant is scheduled for sentencing on June 11 and faces a sentence of up to 30 years in prison.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Judge Allows US City of Austin to Defy Texas Order to Lift Mask Mandate - Mayor

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - US Judge Lora Livingston has allowed the Texas city of Austin to defy Governor Greg Abbott's order that terminated the statewide mask mandate, Mayor Steve Adler said in a statement.

"Austin's mask rules will remain in effect for the next two weeks," Adler said on Friday. "We return to court March 26. No matter what happens then, we will continue to be guided by doctors and data. Masking works."

Earlier on Friday, Judge Livingston did not approve Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's request for a temporary restraining order on Austin's mask mandate. The judge scheduled a second court hearing on March 26 to further address the matter because the city of Austin did not have adequate time to prepare for the legal challenge.

Paxton filed a lawsuit against the city of Austin after Mayor Adler and Travis County Judge Andy Brown refused to comply with Abbott's executive order to lift the mask mandate by Wednesday afternoon.

Abbott's executive order also allowed all businesses in Texas to operate at 100 percent without any coronavirus-related health measures. However, the governor's order includes a provision that would require public-health measures to be reinstated if the number of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in Texas counties reach dangerous levels that threaten hospital space.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UNSC Welcomes Forming of New National Unity Government in Libya - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, March 12 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council adopted a statement welcoming the forming of a new national unity government in Libya headed by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah.

On Wednesday, Libya's parliament voted in favor of Dbeibah's government, which will replace two rival administrations - one in the East of the country and another in the West - that have been in power since 2014.

"The Security Council welcomes the vote of confidence by the House of Representatives to endorse the cabinet of a new unified interim Libyan government charged with leading the country up to elections and stresses the importance of this step in the Libyan political process," the statement adopted on Friday said.

The new government will consist of 26 ministers, two deputy prime ministers and five state ministers who have never occupied posts in Libya's previous governments and will lead the country toward holding national elections on December 24.

In the statement, the Security Council also stressed the importance of the unification of Libya's institutions and called on the Libyans to ensure a smooth handover of all competencies and duties to the new interim government.

The Security Council called on the new cabinet to improve the delivery of services to the Libyan people and prioritize the implementation of the October 23 ceasefire agreement.

It further stressed the importance of the UN-led ceasefire monitoring mechanism and welcomed the deployment of the advance team to Libya earlier this month.

By adopting the statement, the Security Council also reiterated its call for full compliance with the United Nations arms embargo on Libya.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Canada, Netherlands Warn Syria of Legal Action Unless Assad Resolves 'Torture' Claims

TORONTO, March 12 (Sputnik) - Canada and the Netherlands are warning Syria with legal action under the UN Convention Against Torture unless the government of President Bashar Assad cooperates during negotiations on the matter, Canada's Foreign Minister Marc Garneau said.

The Netherlands deemed the Syrian government liable for human rights violations under the UN charter on September 18, 2020 and Canada followed suit on March 3.

"We are committed to making a genuine attempt to resolve our dispute with Syria through negotiations. However, should this not result in a timely resolution of the dispute, we will explore the possibility of joint legal action under the Convention against Torture," Garneau said in a statement on Friday.

The Syrian Civil War has been ongoing since 2011, with government forces fighting against a multitude of insurgent groups.

Damascus has been accused by Western governments of numerous atrocities, including the use of chemical weapons against civilian populations without offering tangible proof. The Syrian side has vehemently denied the allegations and pointed to independent journalistic investigations, which suggest widespread state-sponsored subversive activity against the nation.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UN Security Council Adopts Resolution Expanding Size of Peacekeeping Mission in CAR

UNITED NATIONS, March 12 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council agreed to increase the size of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) by nearly 3,700 troops to enhance the ability of the mission to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian access.

Under the resolution adopted on Friday evening, the UN Security Council will "increase the authorized size of MINUSCA's military component by 2,750 and increase [the mission's] policing component by 940," in efforts to boost MINUSCA's ability to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian access, the document said.

The document also said reinforcements would enable the mission to prevent and reverse the deterioration of the security situation in the CAR while creating space for the advancement of the political process there.

The reinforcements should be implemented in a phased approach, the Security Council said in the resolution. Through the document, the council further requested the UN Secretary-General to include in his report due October a proposal on the overall configuration of MNUSCA's force. Under another resolution adopted in November last year, the Security Council decided that MINUSCA should continue to comprise up to 13,730 troops, including 11,650 military personnel and 2,080 police personnel.

In January 2021, MINUSCA's head Mankeur Ndiaye asked the UN Security Council for a "substantial increase of troops and the mission," following the loss of seven peacekeepers in less than a month.

The request came a month after the deterioration of the security situation in CAR caused by the violent clashes around a disputed election between the forces backing incumbent President Faustin Archange Touadera and the supporters of his main rival and predecessor, Francois Bozize.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Launches New \$7.5Mln Military Tactical Awareness Networking Center - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The US military has established a new \$7.5 million Center of Excellence in Networked Configurable Command, Control and Communications for Rapid Situational Awareness (COE-NC4), the Department of Defense announced in a news release. "The Department of Defense through the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering (OUSD (R&E)), launched a \$7.5 million Center of Excellence in Networked Configurable Command, Control and Communications for Rapid Situational Awareness at the University of California, Riverside, the release said on Friday.

The University of California, Riverside is a Hispanic-serving minority institution and the new center was awarded to it through the OUSD (R&E)'s Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority-Serving Institutions Research and Education Program, the Defense Department said.

"By focusing on large-scale networked systems for next-generation computing and communications, the Center will conduct research that enables systems and subsystems for sensing, data analysis, communications and networking, to be seamlessly integrated and adaptive to novel mission needs," the release explained.

The COE-NC4 will connect the university's students, faculty, and staff with fundamental research questions in the development of a robust, resilient, secure, and fully networked infrastructure while responding to failures and security threats, the Defense Department said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Senate Majority Leader Urges Cuomo to Resign Over Sexual Misconduct Allegations

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand said in a joint statement that New York Governor Andrew Cuomo should resign due to allegations of sexual misconduct.

"Due to the multiple, credible sexual harassment and misconduct allegations, it is clear that Governor Cuomo has lost the confidence of his governing partners and the people of New York. Governor Cuomo should resign," the senators said on Friday.

The senators, who both represent New York in the Senate, said it is important to have steady leadership in the state as it deals with the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Earlier on Friday, Cuomo vowed he would not resign over the sexual misconduct allegations, describing it as political pressure.

Some 60 members of the 213-member New York State legislature have called on Cuomo to resign, prompting the Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie to authorize on Thursday the start of what he called an "impeachment investigation" against the governor.

Five women have accused the 63-year-old Cuomo of harassment, with one claiming that he forcibly tried to kiss her, and another saying that he effectively propositioned another for sex. The most explosive allegation is that he put his hand uninvitingly under the shirt of a female colleague and groped.

New York Attorney General Letitia James has opened an independent investigation into the allegations. James is also leading a probe into allegations Cuomo covered up the deaths of elderly residents who contracted COVID-19 in state nursing homes and did not get appropriate care under the governor's watch.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden, Irish Prime Minister to Hold Talks on March 17 to Discuss COVID-19 - White House

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will hold a virtual meeting with Irish Prime Minister Michael Martin to discuss a range of issues on March 17, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement.

"On Wednesday, March 17, President Joe Biden will host Micheal Martin, Taoiseach of Ireland, for a virtual bilateral meeting. They will reaffirm the deep, historic partnership and extraordinary people-to-people ties between the United States and Ireland. They will also discuss combatting COVID-19, addressing global challenges, increasing our shared prosperity, and supporting political and economic stability in Northern Ireland," Psaki said on Friday.

Earlier this week, Irish lawmakers called upon their prime minister to seek purchasing unused AstraZeneca vaccines from the US at the meeting with Biden.

The White House will not celebrate St. Patrick's Day in a traditional way this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, the release added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden, Irish Prime Minister to Hold Talks on March 17 to Discuss COVID-19 - White House

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will hold a virtual meeting with Irish Prime Minister Michael Martin to discuss a range of issues on March 17, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement.

"On Wednesday, March 17, President Joe Biden will host Micheal Martin, Taoiseach of Ireland, for a virtual bilateral meeting. They will reaffirm the deep, historic partnership and extraordinary

people-to-people ties between the United States and Ireland. They will also discuss combatting COVID-19, addressing global challenges, increasing our shared prosperity, and supporting political and economic stability in Northern Ireland," Psaki said on Friday.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US to Complete Policy Review on North Korea in 'Coming Weeks' - State Dept. Official

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will complete its policy review on North Korea in the coming weeks, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Asian and Pacific Affairs for the State Department Sung Kim said in a conference call.

"With the North Korea policy review, as you know, we're conducting a thorough and comprehensive policy review," Sung said. "I don't have an exact timeline for the completion of the review but we're working expeditiously and I think maybe in the coming weeks we'll be able to complete the review."

Sung said that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during high-level meetings with officials in Tokyo and Seoul on March 16-18 will provide his counterparts a preview of the Biden administration's North Korea policy review and will possibly receive input from them to take into consideration before the review is finalized.

Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will discuss matters concerning North Korea's nuclear weapons program, among other topics, during their trip to Japan and South Korea. Former US President Donald Trump during his time in office held three summits with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, however, the two sides never achieved a breakthrough on denuclearization due to a deadlock on sanctions relief.

The South Korean military has said that in 2019 alone, Pyongyang carried out a total of 13 missile tests and showcased several new types of ballistic missiles, including a super-large multiple rocket launcher and an advanced submarine-launched ballistic missile.

The United Nations has imposed several rounds of sanctions on the North in a bid to force it to halt nuclear and ballistic missile research.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Mass Vaccination of Border Patrol Agents Will Take Place in Texas - Governor

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - A mass vaccination of border patrol agents will start next week in Texas, Governor Greg Abbott and National Border Patrol Council (NBPC) President Brandon Judd said in a joint statement.

We are glad to hear that the Biden Administration is finally stepping up and holding a mass vaccination clinic next week for Border Patrol agents in the Rio Grande Valley who had been left vulnerable and exposed to COVID," the statement said on Friday.

According to both officials, it took several months of unfortunate inaction before their calls were heard by the federal government and the border patrol agents were provided with necessary vaccine allocations.

Earlier this week, governor Abbott accused Biden's administration for failing to provide vaccines to members of the US Border Patrol.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Senate Majority Leader Urges Cuomo to Resign Over Sexual Misconduct Allegations

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand said in a joint statement that New York Governor Andrew Cuomo should resign due to allegations of sexual misconduct.

"Due to the multiple, credible sexual harassment and misconduct allegations, it is clear that Governor Cuomo has lost the confidence of his governing partners and the people of New York. Governor Cuomo should resign," the senators said on Friday.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UPDATE - Dow Jones Rises 4% After Week of Record Highs

NEW YORK, March 12 (Sputnik) - The Dow Jones Industrial Average on Friday posted its biggest weekly gain since November after the broad Wall Street indicator hit a streak of record highs through the week on confidence over an economy seen recovering rapidly from the coronavirus-imposed restrictive measures.

The Dow hit record highs for a fifth day running, peaking at 32,793 before pulling back slightly to settle at 32,778, up 1.0 percent on the day. For the week, it rose 4.0 percent, its biggest weekly gain since the first week of November.

The S&P500, which groups the top 500 US stocks, hit record highs for a second day in a row, reaching 3,945. The S&P closed at 3,944, up 0.1 percent on the day.

Both the Dow and S&P500 rallied as investors celebrated President Joe Biden's signing into law on Thursday his signature \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill.

The technology-laden Nasdaq Composite index - which had tumbled on many days the past two weeks on concerns about overvaluation in stocks such as Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google - entered a new phase of weakness on Friday, losing 0.6 percent to settle at 13,320. Despite the slide on the day, Nasdaq gained 3.1 percent on the week, helped by a strong performance on Tuesday and Thursday. The weekly advance was also the index's largest since the end of January.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Grants Myanmar Nationals Temporary Protected Status - Homeland Security Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has designated Myanmar citizens living in the United States as being eligible for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in the United States, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said in a statement.

"Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas is designating Burma for TPS for 18 months," the statement said on Friday. "This new designation of Burma for TPS enables Burmese nationals (and individuals without nationality who last habitually resided in Burma) currently residing in the United States to file initial applications for TPS."

Mayorkas decided to designate Myanmar for TPS after consultation with interagency partners and consideration of the extraordinary conditions in the country caused by the military coup last month, which has led to continuing violence, arbitrary detentions and use of lethal violence against peaceful protesters, the statement explained.

"Due to the military coup and security forces' brutal violence against civilians, the people of Burma are suffering a complex and deteriorating humanitarian crisis. ...I have designated Burma (Myanmar) for TPS so that Burmese (Myanmar) nationals and habitual residents may remain temporarily in the United States," Myaorkas said.

Only individuals who are already residing in the United States are eligible for TPS. Individuals who can demonstrate continuous residence in the United States as of March 11, 2021, are eligible for TPS under the designation, according to the statement.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Blinken, UN Chief to Stay in Close Touch on Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Myanmar - State Dept.

UNITED NATIONS, March 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres discussed the situations in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Myanmar this week and agreed to remain in close contact on the issues, Department of State spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres yesterday to discuss Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Burma [Myanmar]" Price said on Friday. "They agreed to remain in close touch on these and other pressing matters."

Price said Blinken thanked the UN chief for his commitment to advancing talks on permanent and comprehensive ceasefire in Afghanistan.

With respect to Ethiopia, the two officials discussed the importance of an independent international investigation into reports of human rights violations in Tigray and efforts to restore peace in the embattled region.

On Myanmar, Blinken stressed the importance of unity among UN member states to prevent further violence by security forces and restore the democratically-elected government following the military coup.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Dow Jones Rises 4% After Week of Record Highs

NEW YORK, March 12 (Sputnik) - The Dow Jones Industrial Average on Friday posted its biggest weekly gain since November after the broad Wall Street indicator hit a streak of record highs through the week on confidence over an economy seen recovering rapidly from the coronavirus-imposed restrictive measures.

The Dow hit record highs for a fifth day running, peaking at 32,793 before pulling back slightly to settle at 32,778, up 1.0 percent on the day. It was the Dow's biggest weekly gain since the first week of November.

The S&P500, which groups the top 500 US stocks, hit record highs for a second day in a row, reaching 3,945. The S&P closed at 3,944, up 0.1 percent on the day.

Both the Dow and S&P500 rallied as investors celebrated President Joe Biden's signing into law on Thursday his signature \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill.

The technology-laden Nasdaq Composite index - which had tumbled on many days the past two weeks on concerns about overvaluation in stocks such as Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google - entered a new phase of weakness on Friday, losing 0.6 percent to settle at 13,320.

Despite the slide on the day, Nasdaq gained 3.1 percent on the week, helped by a strong performance on Tuesday and Thursday. The weekly advance was also the index's largest since the end of January.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Grants Myanmar Nationals Temporary Protected Status - Homeland Security

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has designated Myanmar citizens living in the United States as being eligible for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in the United States, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said in a statement on Friday. "Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas is designating Burma for TPS for 18 months," the release said. "This new designation of Burma for TPS enables Burmese nationals (and individuals without nationality who last habitually resided in Burma) currently residing in the United States to file initial applications for TPS."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Blinken, UN Chief to Stay in Close Touch on Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Myanmar - State Dept.

UNITED NATIONS, March 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres discussed the situations in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Myanmar this week and agreed to remain in close contact on the issues, Department of State spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres yesterday to discuss Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Burma [Myanmar]" Price said on Friday. "They agreed to remain in close touch on these and other pressing matters."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

G7 Ministers Express 'Grave Concern' Over Electoral Changes in Hong Kong - Joint Statement WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The top diplomats of the G7 group of countries issued a joint statement in which they expressed "grave concerns" about the electoral changes in Hong Kong.

"We, the G7 Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America and the High Representative of the European Union, are united in expressing our grave concern at the Chinese authorities' decision to fundamentally erode the democratic elements of the electoral system in Hong Kong," the statement said on Friday. "Such a decision strongly indicates that the authorities in mainland China are determined to eliminate dissenting voices and opinions in Hong Kong."

On Thursday, the National People's Congress of China adopted a resolution at the final parliamentary session with 2,895 votes in favor of an electoral reform package in Hong Kong and just one abstention.

In a statement published on the Hong Kong government's website, regional Chief Executive Carrie Lam said that Beijing implemented the initiative to adjust Hong Kong's electoral system in accordance with the One Country, Two Systems principle.

The G7 ministers said the package of changes combined with mass arrests of pro-democracy activists and politicians, undermines Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy under the One Country, Two Systems principle.

"The package will also stifle political pluralism, contrary to the aim of moving towards universal suffrage as set out in the Basic Law. Furthermore, the changes will reduce freedom of speech, which is a right guaranteed in the Sino-British Joint Declaration," the statement said.

The G7 ministers urged China to act in accordance with the Sino-British Joint Declaration, restore confidence in Hong Kong's political institutions and end the oppression of those who promote democratic values and the defense of rights and freedoms, the statement added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik)

QUAD GROUP MEETING

- * The leaders of the United States, Japan, Australia and India are set to cooperate on expanding the safe and affordable vaccine production as well as ensuring a safe access to vaccines, the leaders of the four countries said in a joint statement following the virtual summit on Friday.
- * Coronavirus vaccination around the world will be a critical tool to maintaining economic growth in 2021, US President Joe Biden said.
- * The Quad group leaders discussed cyber attacks during talks earlier in the day, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said.

KIDNAPPING INCIDENT IN NIGERIA

- * Local police confirmed to Sputnik that 30 students were kidnapped after an armed group attacked a school in Nigerian Kaduna State early Friday.

YEMEN DEVELOPMENTS

- * US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking said on Friday that his recent talks with Yemenis and Gulf leaders have achieved a "sound plan" for a ceasefire in the war-torn country, but the plan awaits approval of the Houthi movement's leaders.
- * The United States has resumed humanitarian aid deliveries to territories controlled by the Houthi rebels in Yemen, Lenderking said.
- * The Saudi leadership is providing its full support for Washington's efforts to achieve a nationwide ceasefire in the Yemen, Lenderking said.
- * United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric on Friday urged all parties in Yemen to immediately find a solution that will allow commercial fuel imports to enter through all ports of the country.

NORMANDY SUMMIT

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin's schedule does not currently feature participation in the April summit of the Normandy Four leaders, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sputnik on Friday, soon after the head of the Ukrainian delegation in the Trilateral Contact Group announced that the top-level talks were planned for April.
- * The Russian side did not receive any proposals, invitations or other official documents regarding the summit in the "Normandy format" (Russia, Ukraine, Germany, France) to resolve the conflict in Donbas, and Moscow will consider any possible invitations, but any meeting of leaders in the absence of implemented decisions from the previous summit is meaningless, an informed source in Moscow told Sputnik.

GEORGE FLOYD CASE

* The city of Minneapolis has agreed to pay \$27 million to the family of George Floyd to settle legal proceedings over his death in police custody, the city council said on Friday.

CORONAVIRUS VACCINES

* Brazil's Health Ministry signed an agreement on Friday to import 10 million doses of the Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine from Russia in the second quarter of 2021.

* The United States and its allies are plotting a large-scale information campaign against Russia's Sputnik V vaccine against the coronavirus, a high-ranking source in the Kremlin told reporters.

* Canada will receive weekly shipments of one million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine beginning the week of March 22 until May 10, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Friday.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Approves Sale of Five P-8A Surveillance Aircraft to Germany - Defense Security Agency
WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The US Department of State has approved the sale of five Boeing P-8A Poseidon maritime surveillance aircraft to Germany, a US ally in NATO, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) in a press release on Friday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Germany of P-8A Aircraft and Associated Support, and related equipment, for an estimated cost of \$1.77 billion," the release said. "The DSCA delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale today."

Germany has requested to buy five P-8A Patrol Aircraft; nine Multifunctional Distribution System Joint Tactical Radio Systems 5 and twelve LN-251 with Embedded Global Positioning Systems/Inertial Navigations Systems, the DSCA explained.

"Also included are commercial engines; Tactical Open Mission Software (TOMS); Electro-Optical (EO) and Infrared MX-20HD; AN/AAQ-2(V) I Acoustic System; AN/APY-10 radar; ALQ-240 Electronic Support Measures; NexGen Missile Warning Sensors [and] AN/PRC-117G Manpack radios," the release said.

The sales package will also include Global Positioning Systems 524D precise positioning system; AN/ALQ-213 electronic counter measures; AN/ALE-47 counter measures dispensing systems; AN/UPX IFF interrogators and APX-123A(C) IFF digital transponders, the release added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Administers Over 100M In COVID-19 Vaccines - Centers for Disease Control

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has administered more than 100 million COVID-19 vaccine doses, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data revealed on Friday.

President Joe Biden had vowed that his administration would administer 100 million vaccine doses within his first 100 days. On Thursday, during his first prime time address, Biden said the US was on pace to reach this mark on his 60th day in office.

However, according to the CDC data released earlier - on Biden's 43rd day in office - 101,128,005 vaccine doses have already been administered.

The US is the world leader in both confirmed COVID-19 cases (29.3 million) and deaths (nearly 532,000), Johns Hopkins University data showed as of Friday afternoon.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Minneapolis to Pay George Floyd's Family \$27Mln to Settle Legal Battle - City Council

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The city of Minneapolis has agreed to pay \$27 million to the family of George Floyd to settle legal proceedings over his death in police custody, the city council said on Friday.

"The City has reached a settlement in the civil lawsuit filed by Floyd's family against the City of Minneapolis. The City Council unanimously voted today to approve the settlement in an action that will be signed by Mayor Frey. The settlement is \$27 million, which includes a \$500,000 contribution from the George Floyd family to the community at 38th and Chicago," the city council said in a statement.

Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, was killed on May 25, 2020 when a Minneapolis police officer placed him in a chokehold despite pleas that he could not breathe. Video of Floyd's death was captured on a bystander's cellphone and sparked a wave of protests across the United States against racially motivated police brutality.

The lawsuit against the city of Minneapolis was filed on July 15, 2020. The lawsuit also targeted Minneapolis police officers Derek Chauvin, Tou Thao, Thomas Lane, and J. Alexander Kueng, who were involved in Floyd's fatal arrest.

Family attorney Ben Crump in a press conference on Friday afternoon said Floyd's death was a watershed moment for America, one of the most "egregious" documentations of a US citizen being tortured by police officers.

Crump further said this settlement is historic because of the impact the lawsuit had in forcing policy reforms in the city, something that can benefit everyone.

Moreover, Crump urged protesters to remain calm and peaceful as the jury selection for Chauvin's trial is underway.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Welcomes New Unity Government in Libya - National Security Adviser

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has welcomed the establishment of Libya's new Government of National Unity, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said in a statement on Friday.

"On behalf of President Biden, I congratulate the Libyan people on establishing a Government of National Unity that will guide Libya to national elections on December 24, 2021," Sullivan said. "Now is the opportunity for Libyans to lay down their arms, resolve their differences peacefully, subscribe to a new era of law and order, and write for themselves a more stable and prosperous chapter in their history."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Seeks Closer Cooperation with EU, OAS on Venezuela - State Department

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United States seeks closer cooperation with international partners, including the European Union (EU) and the Organization of American States (OAS) to bring democracy to Venezuela, State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters on Friday.

"The United States will continue to work through all appropriate venues to support the Venezuelan people and to support their aspirations for human rights and democracy. We look forward to strengthening coordination with those international partners. And they include the EU, the OAS, the Lima Group, the Contact Group and others as we work toward a peaceful democratic transition in Venezuela," Price said during a daily briefing.

He added that recognizing Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro as a dictator is not the subject of an ongoing foreign policy review.

The United States does not recognize Maduro as Venezuela's president, supports opposition leader Juan Guaido and works through sanctions and diplomatic pressure to bring about "free and fair" elections in the country. Maduro has accused Guaido and the United States of trying to topple the government in Caracas to seize Venezuela's national resources.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

New York Governor Cuomo Vows Not to Resign Over Sex Allegations Amid Political Pressure

NEW YORK, March 12 (Sputnik) - New York Governor Andrew Cuomo vowed on Friday not to bow to political pressure and step down over allegations that he sexually harassed and assaulted women who worked under him, saying he was confident a state investigation would clear him.

"I'm not going to resign," the governor told reporters during a phone briefing held to discuss the state's coronavirus statistics and response. "I was not elected by the politicians. I was elected

by the people. Part of this is that I am not part of the political club. Politicians who don't know a single fact but yet form a conclusion and then [an] opinion are, in my opinion, reckless and dangerous. That, my friends, is politics at its worst. People know the difference between playing politics, bowing to cancel culture, and the truth."

Cuomo's response came as some 60 members of the 213-member New York State legislature demanded he resign, prompting the Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie to authorize on Thursday the start of what he called an "impeachment investigation" against the governor.

Five women have accused the 63-year-old Cuomo of harassment, with one claiming that he forcibly tried to kiss her, and another saying that he effectively propositioned another for sex. The most explosive allegation is that he put his hand uninvitingly under the shirt of a female colleague and groped.

New York Attorney General Letitia James has opened an independent investigation into the allegations. James is leading another probe that Cuomo covered up the deaths of people who originally contracted the COVID-19 in state nursing homes that did not get due care under his watch.

Cuomo said he was confident the investigations will clear him and said he was focused on getting New York back on its feet from its worst financial crisis ever.

"I am confident in the decision based on the facts," he said. "In the meantime, I'm going to avoid distractions and I'm going to focus on my job. We have a budget due in two weeks for a state that is in a fiscal crisis. It will be the most difficult budget we have done. We have to perform 15 million vaccinations and we have to be ready on May 1 for eligibility for the entire state [for vaccinations]."

As a former attorney-general himself before becoming governor, he knew of the importance of "waiting for the facts" and how "irresponsible it is to form opinions without facts," he added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Singapore Man Charged With Stock Fraud in New York - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Shamoan Rafiq, a previously convicted resident of Singapore, has been charged with fraud and identity theft in a pre-Initial Public Offering (IPO) stock scheme in New York State, the US Department of Justice said in a release on Friday.

"As alleged, Shamoan Rafiq exploited investors' fear of missing out on the potential gains to be earned from investing in companies before they go public, and solicited millions of dollars from investors through brazen lies and deception," the release said.

The Justice Department said Rafiq elicited millions of dollars under the false pretense that he would sell shares of pre-IPO stocks, which - unbeknownst to his investors - he did not even own and therefore could not sell.

In addition, the Justice Department said Rafiq sent faked emails impersonating senior officials of a reputable family office investment firm that supposedly backed his claims, the release also said.

Rafiq engaged in the fraudulent activity since at least July 2020 when he began soliciting millions of dollars from investment firms in New York claiming he would sell them investment interests in a company that supposedly owned pre-IPO stock in Airbnb, Inc., among other companies, the release added.

The defendant was previously convicted for the similar fraud scheme in 2004 for which he served a 41-month prison sentence, but was eventually relocated to Singapore after being deported from the United States, according to the release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UN Calls on Parties in Yemen to Urgently Resolve Fuel Blockade - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, March 12 (Sputnik) - United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric on Friday urged all parties in Yemen to immediately find a solution that will allow commercial fuel imports to enter through all ports of the country.

"Last month, no commercial fuel imports were allowed through Hudaydah port. This is the first time since the escalation of the conflict in 2015 that we see the level drops to zero," Dujarric said in a press briefing. "We call on all parties to urgently find a sustainable solution that will allow commercial fuel imports to resume through all ports."

Dujarric said in recent years, half of the commercial fuel imports had been coming through the Hudaydah port. The current fuel blockade, he went on, contributes to an increase in prices of food, water and other goods, worsening the already catastrophic humanitarian situation in Yemen.

Earlier this week, World Food Program Executive Director David Beasley told the UN Security Council that most hospitals in Yemen only had electricity in intensive care units due to low fuel reserves. He also warned that unless the blockade is lifted, millions more people will spiral into crisis levels of hunger in the country, where 16 million are already facing famine.

3/12/2021 10:09:21 PM +03:00

Biden Administration to Increase Number of COVID-19 Vaccinators - Health Agency
WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's administration took steps to increase the number of professionals who can serve as vaccinators, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) said in a release in Friday.

"As part of President Biden's national strategy to defeat the pandemic, and following his speech last night outlining the Administration's next steps in the war-time effort to speed COVID-19 vaccinations, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has taken action to expand the pool of qualified professionals able to serve as vaccinators," the release said.

Additional categories of qualified people who are now authorized to prescribe, dispense, and administer COVID-19 vaccines include dentists, EMTs, midwives, optometrists, paramedics, physician assistants, podiatrists, respiratory therapists, veterinarians as well as medical students with proper training, the release added.

As of today, over 32.2 million Americans are fully vaccinated and over 98 million vaccine doses administered in total, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trudeau Says Pfizer to Deliver 1M In Vaccine Doses Per Week March 22 - May 10

TORONTO, March 12 (Sputnik) - Canada will receive weekly shipments of one million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine beginning the week of March 22 until May 10, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Friday.

"I can confirm that Canada will receive at least one million Pfizer doses per week from March 22 to May 10," Trudeau told reporters in Ottawa.

The Prime Minister and other government officials reiterated that Canada remains on track to offer an inoculation against the disease to anyone that wants it by September.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Appoints Senior Official to Lead Response to 'Havana Syndrome' Incidents - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The US administration appointed Ambassador Pamela Spatlen to lead the task force charged with responding to alleged acoustic attacks against American officials in Cuba, the State Department said in a statement on Friday.

"The Department has designated Ambassador Pamela Spratlen to serve as the Senior Adviser to the Health Incident Response Task Force (HIRTF), reporting directly to the Department's senior leadership," the statement said.

US diplomats in Cuba suffered a set of health problems, collectively described as the Havana syndrome, in 2016 and 2017. Similar medical signs were reported among US diplomatic staffers in China in 2018. Victims of the supposed attacks were hearing strange noises, which some of them perceived as vibrations or pressure. Some of the diplomats experienced long-term health effects. The US Department of State assumed the diplomats could be exposed to some unidentified acoustic attack, however, it did not reach a definite conclusion on what exactly caused the syndrome.

The task force was created in 2018 and serves as the coordinating body for the US government response to these incidents, the State Department added.

"The selection of Ambassador Spratlen will help us make strides to address this issue wherever it affects Department personnel and their families. She will streamline our coordination efforts with the interagency community, and reaffirm our commitment to make certain that those affected receive the care and treatment they need," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in the release.

Spratlen previously served as a Senior Adviser of the Office of Inspector General in the State Department. She also was the US. Ambassador to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in Kazakhstan.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UK Security Review to Focus on Countering Threats From Russia, China, Terrorism - Official

TORONTO, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United Kingdom's large-scale review of the country's foreign, defense and security policies will zero in on response to threats posed by Russia, China and international terrorism, UK Secretary of State for Defense Ben Wallace said on Friday. Last year, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson initiated the large-scale review of the country's foreign, defense, security and development policies - termed the Integrated Review - to determine the "UK's place in the world." Wallace said that the review, set to be unveiled next week, will focus on three pillars.

"First, the United Kingdom will be threat-focused. Recognizing that threat must drive our day-to-day business, whether that is deterring a resurgent Russia, shutting down global terrorist networks, or being clear-eyed in our relationship with a rising China," Wallace told a virtual panel during the Ottawa Conference on Security and Defense.

Wallace said the United Kingdom must be proactive in dealing with threats and not merely responding to them as they emerge.

The review will also set out guidelines for modernizing the United Kingdom's security and defense apparatus and leveraging international partnerships in deterring actors, including Russia and China.

Johnson announced the review immediately after his Conservative Party won the parliamentary elections. With the country out of European Union, it is seeking ways to re-establish its relations with the bloc and the rest of the world, London said at the time.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Minneapolis to Pay George Floyd's Family \$27Mln to Settle Legal Battle - City Council

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The city of Minneapolis has agreed to to pay \$27 million to the family of George Floyd to settle legal proceedings over his death in police custody, the city council said on Friday.

"The City has reached a settlement in the civil lawsuit filed by Floyd's family against the City of Minneapolis. The City Council unanimously voted today to approve the settlement in an action that will be signed by Mayor Frey. The settlement is \$27 million, which includes a \$500,000 contribution from the George Floyd family to the community at 38th and Chicago," the city council said in a statement.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

White House Security Adviser Says Quad Leaders Discussed Cyber Attacks

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The leaders of the so-called Quad countries discussed the issue of cyber attacks during talks conducted earlier in the day, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Friday.

"Without getting into too much detail, they discussed both recent cyber attacks and semiconductors in the course of the conversation today," Sullivan said during a briefing. "But also the cyber attacks that have hit Japan, India and Australia just in the past few weeks and months."

Sullivan explained the impetus behind the new cyber working group of the Quad countries is not solely the recent massive SolarWinds or Microsoft cyber attack incidents. He stressed that such attacks are a common challenge the Quad is facing from both state and non-state actors. Sullivan also said the scale and scope of the Microsoft cyber attack is yet to be determined, but noted that it is significant.

On Tuesday, Microsoft released emergency security updates saying it had uncovered exploits that a China-based hacking group was able to access email accounts and install malware. Within three days, reports emerged alleging that some 30,000 organizations in the United States were subjected to a cyberattack.

Microsoft explained the hackers targeted institutions in the United States to obtain information from infectious disease researchers, law firms, universities, defense contractors, think tanks and non-governmental organizations.

The Chinese authorities have asked the media and companies accusing Beijing of cyberattacks to provide evidence instead of baseless accusations.

3/12/2021 9:52:31 PM +03:00

Biden Ends Deal Requiring Health Agency to Share Info on Migrant Children With ICE
WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have terminated the agreement which provisioned exchange of information about potential sponsors of migrant children, the departments said in a joint statement on Friday.

"Today, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced the termination of a 2018 agreement that undermined the interests of children and had a chilling effect on potential sponsors (usually a parent or close relative) from stepping up to sponsor an unaccompanied child placed in the care of HHS," the statement said.

Instead of the terminated agreement, a new Memorandum of Agreement between HHS and DHS was signed today promoting the safe and timely transfer of children while ensuring unaccompanied children are unified with properly vetted sponsors who can care for them while they await immigration proceedings, the statement added.

Since 2018, the information about potential sponsors of unaccompanied migrant children was allowed to be shared with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and in this way precluded the sponsors from stepping forward to unite with a child placed in the care of HHS.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UN Chief Condemns Abduction of 30 Students in Nigeria, Calls for Their Release - Spokesman UNITED NATIONS, March 12 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres decried the most recent kidnapping of students in northwestern Nigeria and called for their immediate release, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Friday. Earlier in the day, local police confirmed to Sputnik that 30 students were kidnapped after an armed group attacked a school in Nigeria's Kaduna State.

"The Secretary-General strongly condemns the reported abduction of another group of students in [Nigeria], this time from the Federal College of Forestry Mechanization in Kaduna," Dujarric said. "The Secretary-General calls for the immediate and unconditional release of those students that remain in captivity."

Kaduna Governor Nasir Ahmad el-Rufai said the security troops deployed to the site were able to rescue 180 people, but 30 students were still reported missing.

Guterres called on Nigeria to safeguard schools and ensure that students can enjoy the right to education in a safe environment.

The kidnapping comes several days after Kaduna State Internal Security Samuel Aruwan unveiled in a report that more than 900 people were killed, and nearly 2,000 were kidnapped across the state in 202. Boko Haram, the militant group linked to the Islamic State terrorist organization (banned in Russia), appears to have intensified its attacks and abductions of schoolchildren across the Western African nation over the past several months.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US, Other Countries Should Act to Move 2022 Winter Olympics From Beijing - Congressman

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United States and other countries should pursue moving the upcoming 2022 Winter Olympic Games from Beijing to another place because of China's human right violations and its responsibility for the novel coronavirus pandemic, US Congressman Michael McCaul said on Friday.

"We need to think about moving it [from Beijing] elsewhere," McCaul said during virtual conversation at the Hudson Institute.

McCaul accused China of engaging in the worst human rights violations and in irresponsible behavior with respect to the coronavirus pandemic.

The congressman urged Biden administration to educate US athletes about surveillance, use of cell phones and other security issues should they end up going to Beijing next year. The United

States has to teach and train them with respect to security measures because they will be under surveillance, he said.

The Winter Olympics will be held in Beijing February 4-20, 2022.

In mid-February, US Congressman Michael Waltz introduced a resolution calling on the United States Olympic Committee to withdraw from the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing unless the International Olympic Committee finds an alternative site.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

RPT - Canadian Economy Returns Jobs Lost in December, January - Statistics Agency

TORONTO, March 12 (Sputnik) - The Canadian economy has recouped nearly all of the job losses experienced in December and January after employment increased by 259,000 last month, Statistics Canada said on Friday.

"Employment increased by 259,000 (+1.4%) in February, after falling by 266,000 over the previous two months," Statistics Canada said in its Labor Force Survey for February.

Most of the job gains were in the retail trade, and accommodation and food services industries as many businesses reopened their doors following government-mandated lockdowns in the previous two months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Statistic Canada said the national unemployment rate declined by 1.2 percent to 8.2 percent, the lowest level since March 2020. However, the labor force participation rate remained at its lowest level since August, currently sitting at 64.7 percent, it added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

White House Security Adviser Says Quad Leaders Discussed Cyber Attacks

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The leaders of the so-called Quad discussed cyber attacks during talks earlier in the day, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Friday.

"Without getting into too much detail they discussed both recent cyber attacks and semiconductors in the course of the conversation today," Sullivan said at a briefing. "But also the cyber attacks that have hit Japan, India and Australia just in the past few weeks and months."

Sullivan the impetus behind this new cyber working group is not just the SolarWinds or Microsoft exchange incidents.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UPDATE - Two Democratic Lawmakers Join Calls for New York Governor Cuomo to Resign

NEW YORK, March 12 (Sputnik) - New York Governor Andrew Cuomo on Friday came under renewed pressure to resign over allegations of impropriety of women who worked under him as US Democrat lawmaker Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and her colleague Jerry Nadler joined in earlier calls for his ouster.

More than 50 members of the 213-member New York State legislature had already asked Cuomo to step down as of Thursday, prompting the Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie to authorize the start of what he called an "impeachment investigation" against the governor. Another 11 New York legislators, as well as Ocasio-Cortez and Nadler, demanded Cuomo's resignation via Twitter.

"We believe these women, we believe the reporting, we believe the Attorney General," Ocasio-Cortez said.

The congresswoman attached on Twitter a statement jointly issued with US Congressman Jamaal Bowman that referred to Cuomo's accusers, the newspapers that carried the stories about his alleged misbehavior and the investigation of him authorized by New York Attorney General Letitia James.

Nadler, who serves as chairman of the US House Judiciary Committee, struck a similar tone in his own message on Twitter.

"The repeated accusations against the Governor, and the manner in which he has responded to them, have made it impossible for him to continue to govern at this point. Governor Cuomo has lost the confidence of the people of New York. Governor Cuomo must resign," Nadler said. Six women have so far accused the 63-year-old Cuomo of sexual misconduct, including of sexual assault.

Cuomo has also been accused of forcibly trying to kiss one woman who had worked under him while effectively propositioning another for sex, but denies all accusations.

The New York Attorney General is investigating Cuomo in another case regarding his response to the coronavirus outbreak a year ago. In that case, Cuomo is accused of covering up the deaths of thousands of elderly residents in nursing homes without due care under his watch.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

WFP Chief Says Houthis Show Cooperation in Scaling Up Aid Assistance in Yemen

UNITED NATIONS, March 12 (Sputnik) - World Food Program (WFP) Executive Director David Beasley said the Houthi movement has recently been very cooperative in the UN's efforts to strengthen humanitarian action in Yemen.

Earlier this week, Beasley conducted a two-day visit to Yemen, where he had an opportunity to meet with the leaders of the opposition movement and the government of Yemen.

"It was a completely different atmosphere in terms of cooperation. I was literally shocked at the cooperation that we were getting," Beasley said during a press briefing. "They [Houthis] were

now asking me 'what can we do to scale up?' And they there was a tremendous improved cooperative spirit."

Beasley pointed out that the tone of communication with the Houthi leaders considerably shifted from the situation last year, which Beasley described as catastrophic.

The WFP last year was considering to halve the aid to the rebel controlled areas of Yemen after many donors cut funding claiming Houthis hindered aid deliveries. Over the same concerns, in May 2019, the UN food agency paused its food distribution to Houthi-held areas for two months. When asked about the reason for such a change in communication, Beasley said Houthi leaders had preciously expressed their appreciation for him being vocal about the negative implications of the foreign terrorist organization designation imposed on the rebels by the previous US administration.

In January, Beasley called on the United States to abandon its plans to designate Houthis, warning of catastrophic humanitarian consequences for Yemen's population.

A month after, the new US administration of President Joe Biden revoked Houthis' designation as a global terrorist entity.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US, EU Executed 'Strong Joint Response' to Navalny Case - White House Security Adviser

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) – The United States and the European Union have strongly and jointly responded to the case of Russian opposition figure Alexey Navalny, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Friday.

"We revitalized our alliances in Asia and Europe. Last week with the Europeans we agreed to a pause in tariffs in a long running Boeing - airbus dispute and we executed a strong joint response to Russia's poisoning of Alexey Navalny," Sullivan said at a briefing. "We've begun deep consultations with our European partners on a common approach to our concerns with China."

Russia has denied all US allegations related to the Navalny case. On February 2, a Moscow court substituted Navalny's suspended sentence in corruption case with a real prison term of 3.5 years for multiple violations of his probation terms. A Moscow city court reinstated the ruling but reduced the sentence to 2.5 years.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Almost Two-Thirds of US Citizens Over 65 Now Vaccinated Against Coronavirus - White House

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Sixty-five percent of all Americans over the age of 65 have already been vaccinated against the novel coronavirus, White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator Jeff Zients told a press conference on Friday.

"On Inauguration Day [January 20], only 8 percent of Americans over age 65 were vaccinated. Today, that number is nearly 65 percent," Zients said. "That number is important because 80 percent of COVID-19 deaths have been (aged) 65 or over."

Zients said an average of 2.2 million people were receiving coronavirus vaccinations per day across the United States.

"By the end of May, we expect to have enough vaccine shots available for all adults in this country. ... We will continue to prioritize getting all Americans vaccinated as quickly as possible," he said.

More than 64 million people in the United States had received at least one dose of the vaccine, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky told the briefing. The pandemic continues to generate 50,000 to 55,000 new cases per day with an average of 1,500 virus-related deaths per day, she said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Quad Leaders Discuss Freedom of Navigation in S. China Seas, N. Korea, Myanmar - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The leaders of the so-called Quad addressed the freedom of navigation in the East and South China Seas, North Korea as well as the coup in Myanmar among numerous topics during the very first meeting at such a level, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Friday.

"During the meeting the leaders addressed key regional issues including freedom of navigation and freedom from coercion in the South and East China Seas, the DPRK nuclear issue and the coup and violent repression in Burma," Sullivan said at a briefing.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Two Democratic Lawmakers Join Calls for New York Governor Cuomo to Resign

NEW YORK, March 12 (Sputnik) - New York Governor Andrew Cuomo on Friday came under renewed pressure to resign over allegations of impropriety of women who worked under him as US Congresswoman Democrat lawmakers Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and her colleague Jerry Nadler joined in earlier calls for his ouster.

Earlier on Friday, more than 50 members of the 213-member New York State legislature had already asked Cuomo to step down before at least another 11 did the same via Twitter.

"We believe these women, we believe the reporting, we believe the Attorney General," Ocasio-Cortez said.

Ocasio-Cortez attached on Twitter a statement jointly issued with US Congressman Jamaal Bowman that referred to Cuomo's accusers, the newspapers that carried the stories about his

alleged misbehavior and the investigation of him authorized by New York Attorney General Letitia James.

Nadler, who serves as chairman of the US House Judiciary Committee, struck a similar tone in his own message on Twitter.

"The repeated accusations against the Governor, and the manner in which he has responded to them, have made it impossible for him to continue to govern at this point. Governor Cuomo has lost the confidence of the people of New York. Governor Cuomo must resign," Nadler said. Six women have so far accused the 63-year-old Cuomo of sexual misconduct, including of sexual assault.

Cuomo has also been accused of forcibly trying to kiss one woman who had worked under him while effectively propositioning another for sex, but denies all accusations.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Quad Leaders to Join Forces to Expand Vaccine Production, Access - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The leaders of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India are set to cooperate on expanding safe and affordable vaccine productions as well as ensuring a safe access, the heads of the four countries said in a joint statement following the virtual summit on Friday.

"We will join forces to expand safe, affordable, and effective vaccine production and equitable access, to speed economic recovery and benefit global health," the statement said. "We will... collaborate to strengthen equitable vaccine access for the Indo-Pacific, with close coordination with multilateral organizations including the World Health Organization and COVAX."

The leaders of the so-called Quad - the United States, Japan, Australia, and India - held a virtual meeting earlier in the day to discuss security in the Indo-Pacific region.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US, Japan, Australia, India Will Hold In-Person Quad Leaders' Summit By End of 2021

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The leaders of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India in a joint statement on Friday said they will participate in an in-person Quad Leaders' Summit by the end of this year.

"At the leader level, we will hold an in-person summit by the end of 2021," the statement said. The leaders of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India held a virtual meeting earlier in the day to discuss security in the Indo-Pacific region.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Canadian Economy Returns Jobs Lost ed in December, January - Statistics Agency

TORONTO, March 12 (Sputnik) - The Canadian economy has recouped nearly all of the job losses experienced in December and January after employment increased by 259,000 last month, Statistics Canada said on Friday.

"Employment increased by 259,000 (+1.4%) in February, after falling by 266,000 over the previous two months," Statistics Canada said in its Labor Force Survey for February.

Most of the job gains were in the retail trade, and accommodation and food services industries as many businesses reopened their doors following government-mandated lockdowns in the previous two months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Statistic Canada said the national unemployment rate declined by 1.2 percent to 8.2 percent, the lowest level since March 2020. However, the labor force participation rate remained at its lowest level since August, currently sitting at 64.7 percent, it added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

WFP Chief Says Expects Substantial Support to Flow to Yemen After US Resumption of Aid

UNITED NATIONS, March 12 (Sputnik) - World Food Program Executive Director David Beasley said he expected substantial support to flow again to Houthi-controlled territories in the north of Yemen with the resumption of US humanitarian aid on Friday.

Earlier in the day, US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking announced Washington will resume assistance to Houthi areas after the previous US administration halted some funding last April.

"I was talking to Tim [Lenderking] extensively yesterday about these issues. He didn't give me yesterday the indication of exactly how much, but we expect to have substantial support coming from the donor community," Beasley said in a press briefing.

The armed conflict in Yemen between the government and the Houthi movement has been ongoing since 2011. The conflict peaked in 2015 when the Saudi-led coalition joined the military action in support of the government.

The United Nations considers the situation in Yemen to be the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with more than 80 percent of the population, or 24.1 million people, in need of humanitarian assistance.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Four Persons Charged With \$21.9M In COVID-19 Relief Fraud - US Dept. Justice

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Four individuals have been charged by a federal grand jury in Los Angeles for their alleged participation in a conspiracy to commit fraud with COVID-19 relief funds, the US Department of Justice said in a release on Friday.

"A federal grand jury in Los Angeles returned a superseding indictment, unsealed Thursday, charging four additional individuals for their alleged participation in a scheme to submit over 150 fraudulent loan applications seeking over \$21.9 million in COVID-19 relief funds guaranteed by the Small Business Administration (SBA) under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act," the release said.

The Justice Department said Manuk Grigoryan, Arman Hayrapetyan, Edvard Paronyan, and Vahe Dadyan conspired to commit wire fraud, bank fraud and money laundering, but it additionally charged Grigoryan and Hayrapetyan with one count of identity theft.

The four were recognized as co-defendants of the previously indicted Richard Ayvazyan, Marietta Terabelian, Artur Ayvazyan and Tamara Dadyan in the same case, the release said. According to the indictment, the defendants used the fraudulently obtained funds as down payments on luxury homes and to buy precious jewelry, designer handbags, clothing and cryptocurrency.

If convicted, each defendant face up to 30 years in prison, the release said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Justice Department to Charge 100 More People in Capitol Riot - Court Filing

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - More than 100 additional individuals will face federal government charges for participating in the riot that broke into the US Capitol Building on January 6, bringing the total number of those currently being prosecuted to more than 400, the Justice Department said in a court filing on Friday.

"Over 300 individuals have been charged in connection with the Capitol Attack. The investigation continues and the government expects that at least one hundred additional individuals will be charged," the Justice Department said in court filing in the US District Court for the District of Columbia.

The investigation and prosecution of the Capitol Attack will probably be one of the largest in US history, both in terms of the number of defendants prosecuted and the nature and volume of the evidence, the filing noted.

Most of the cases involve charges against individuals, but the Justice Department is also investigating "conspiratorial activity" involving "a large number of participants," the filing said. The Justice Department in the filing asked for a 60-day continuance of the proceeding, arguing that prosecutors need more time to evaluate the massive amount of evidence in the "complex case."

Evidence in the case includes more than 15,000 hours of surveillance and body-cam footage, 1,600 electronic devices and more than 210,000 tips from the public, it added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Envoy for Yemen Lenderking Says 'We Now Have Sound Plan For Ceasefire'

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking said on Friday that his recent talks with Yemen and Gulf leaders have achieved a "sound plan" for a ceasefire in the war-torn country, but the proposal awaits approval of the rebel Houthi movement's leaders.

"I have been intensively engaged with UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, leadership in Saudi Arabia, Oman, the government of Yemen as well as other regional states and parties to put the elements together for a nationwide ceasefire," Lenderking said. "We now have a sound plan for a nationwide ceasefire with elements that would immediately address Yemen's dire humanitarian situation directly. That plan has been before the Houthi leadership for a number of days."

On Thursday, the US State Department issued a statement saying Lenderking made some progress in talks on the Yemen war during his trip to the region, however, more commitment is required from all parties to the conflict.

The State Department emphasized that the Houthis should end their offensive on Marib as well as cease attacks against Saudi Arabia.

Lenderking's efforts were fully coordinated with the United Nations throughout his trip, which concluded with a meeting with UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and senior Jordanian officials in Jordan on March 9.

The war in Yemen has been ongoing since 2014 between the government forces and the Houthis, also known as the Ansar Allah movement. In 2015, the Saudi-led Arab coalition joined the war in support of the Yemen's government.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Restores Humanitarian Assistance to Northern Yemen - Special Envoy

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has resumed humanitarian aid deliveries to territories controlled by the Houthi rebels in the north of Yemen, US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking said on Friday.

"Just today, the US restored humanitarian assistance, funding to the North Yemen," Lenderking said during a virtual briefing.

The US government has said that assistance to north Yemen was scaled down last April because of interference by the Houthis.

The armed conflict in Yemen between the government and the Houthi movement has been ongoing since 2011. The conflict peaked in 2015, when the Saudi-led coalition joined the military action in support of the government.

The United Nations considers the situation in Yemen to be the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with more than 80 percent of the population, or 24.1 million people, in need of humanitarian assistance.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Over 900 US, NATO Military, Civilian Personnel Conduct Virtual Exercise - EUCOM

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Some 1,000 US and NATO military and civilian personnel have carried out virtual exercise dubbed Austere Challenge 2021 that sought to train response to a fictional scenario, the US European Command (EUCOM) said on Friday.

"In response to a fictional scenario, more than 900 military and civilian personnel came together to conduct exercise Austere Challenge 2021 (AC21) this week," EUCOM said in a release.

EUCOM pointed out that its leadership, strategists, planners and operators all took part in the week-long command post exercise.

"Austere Challenge 21 is part of an ongoing exercise series that has taken place since the 1990s and focuses on training combatant command coordination, command and control and the integration of capabilities and functions across USEUCOM's headquarters, its component commands and US interagency," the release said.

EUCOM said its leadership acknowledged the need to hold such exercises in the future in order to prepare the troops, exercise deterrence principles as well as better integrate and synchronize with NATO.

The exercise is linked globally to another US combatant command exercise, US Strategic Command and US Space Command's exercise Global Lightning 2021, according to the release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Boeing to Provide 737-8 Jets to Aircraft Leaser 777 Partners - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Boeing has teamed up with the investment firm 777 Partners to provide single-aisle 737-8 jets for the company's growing cache of low-cost carriers, the two companies announced in a statement on Friday.

"The 737-8 aircraft are a fantastic addition to our aviation portfolio and will enable our partners to leverage the jets' superior economic performance to deliver low fares for their passengers while reducing their carbon footprint," Joshua Wander, founder and managing partner of 777 Partners, said in the statement.

The Miami-based 777 Partners is involved in aircraft leasing and also invests in aviation businesses that include carrier operations to technology-driven aviation solutions.

Boeing will add 24 737-8 jets to the 777 Partners' portfolio, giving the investment the rights to purchase an additional 60 jets, the statement said.

"This is a significant order that speaks to 777 Partners' belief in the 737-8 and the market recovery ahead," Ihssane Mounir, Boeing senior vice president of Commercial Sales and Marketing, said, referring to the potential reopening of global aviation from the coronavirus pandemic.

Boeing said the 737-8 can fly 3,550 nautical miles, about 600 miles farther than its predecessor, allowing airlines to offer new and more direct routes for passengers. The aircraft also reduces fuel use and carbon dioxide emissions by 16 percent compared to the airplanes it replaces, making for more efficient cost and environment-friendly operations.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Coronavirus Vaccination to Be Key Driver to Global Growth - Biden

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Coronavirus vaccination around the world will be a critical tool to maintain economic growth in 2021, US President Joe Biden said on Friday.

"Increased vaccination will be a key driver in global growth this year," Biden said during a virtual meeting with the Prime Ministers of Japan, India and Australia.

Biden said that on Thursday he signed into law the American Rescue Act, which provides \$1.9 trillion to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The measure seeks to help Americans go through the pandemic and return the US economy on the path of recovery. In a televised address on Thursday night, Biden said the US government will try to increase the vaccination rate from 1 million people per day to 2 million people per day and pleaded with Americans to get vaccinated while at the same time continue wearing masks and keeping physical distancing protocols.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Has 'Full Support' of Saudi Leaders for Efforts to Achieve Ceasefire in Yemen - Envoy

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The Saudi leadership is providing its full support for Washington's efforts to achieve a nationwide ceasefire in the Yemen, US Special Envoy Tim Lenderking said on Friday.

"When you talk about the support from the Coalition, it is there," Lenderking said in a virtual briefing. "The Saudi leadership is prepared to, you know, address the conflict in a way that maybe they were not prepared to six months ago or 12 months ago. They are providing full support for my efforts, and I do think that it is absolutely critical. I am looking for the same response from the other side."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Restores Humanitarian Assistance to Northern Yemen - Envoy Lenderking

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has resumed humanitarian aid deliveries to territories controlled by the Houthi rebels in Yemen, US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking said on Friday.

"Just today, the US restored humanitarian assistance, funding to the North Yemen," Lenderking announced in a virtual briefing.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Envoy for Yemen Lenderking Says 'We Now Have Sound Plan For Ceasefire'

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking said on Friday that his recent talks with Yemenis and Gulf leaders have achieved a "sound plan" for a ceasefire in the war-torn country, but the plan awaits approval of the Houthi movement's leaders.

"I have been intensively engaged with UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, leadership in Saudi Arabia, Oman, the government of Yemen as well as other regional states and parties to put the elements together for a nationwide ceasefire," Lenderking said, stressing that he has also been in contact with the Yemeni people. "We now have a sound plan for a nationwide ceasefire with elements that would immediately address Yemen's dire humanitarian situation directly. That plan has been before the Houthi leadership for a number of days."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Commits to Cooperation with Quad Countries on Indo-Pacific Stability

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden on Friday in his first virtual multilateral summit pledged to cooperate with the leaders of Australia, India and Japan to maintain stability in a "free and open" Indo-Pacific region.

"A free and open Indo-Pacific is essential to each of our futures, our countries," Biden said at a virtual summit of the so-called Quad group of countries. "The United States is committed to working with you, our partners, and all our allies in the region to achieve stability." Biden said the Quad would be "a vital arena for cooperation" in the region for the coming years, adding that he looks forward to working with his counterparts in the group.

The meeting was the first leader-level summit of the Quad group of nations, which was established in 2007 in the wake of the devastating tsunami the same year. The forum aims to showcase the allies' readiness to pool together their capabilities and address common challenges, first and foremost their biggest rival China.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

RPT - US Has 8,800 Unaccompanied Migrant Children in Federal Care Facilities - Health Agency

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - A total of 8,800 migrant children who came to the United States alone are in federal care facilities, a US Health and Human Services (HHS) spokesperson told Sputnik.

"Currently, there are approximately 8,800 unaccompanied children (UC) in ORR [Office of Refugee Resettlement] care," the spokesperson said on Thursday.

On February 18, there were about 6,800 unaccompanied migrant children under the care of the ORR.

HHS in a fact sheet released on March 1 said that the average length of time migrant children spend in federal care facilities is 42 days.

The United States has seen an influx of unaccompanied migrant children apprehended at the US-Mexico border since October.

Data from US Customs and Border Protection shows 9,457 unaccompanied migrant children were apprehended at the southern border in February, which is a substantial increase from the 5,858 unaccompanied migrant children apprehended in January.

Last month, influx caused the Biden administration to open a facility in Carizzo Springs, Texas, that can house up to 700 migrant children.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

RPT: FEATURE - Refugee From Honduras Reveals How Situation on Border Changing Under Biden

EL PASO, March 12 (Sputnik) - Gabriel and his family from Honduras are facing less obstacles seeking asylum in the United States under the Biden administration compared to his first attempt in 2019, which was followed with a 15-month stay at a makeshift migrant camp in the border town of Matamoros, Mexico, due to strict Trump-era immigration policies.

In late February, Gabriel and his family were among the first groups of asylum-seeking migrants allowed into the United States after the Biden administration decided to grant entry to 25,000 individuals who had pending immigration proceedings.

"The treatment from CBP [US Customs and Border Protection] when we arrived [in 2019] was rude and a bit intimidating, but now that we crossed, it was more friendly," Gabriel told Sputnik. "The difficult thing about the US immigration facilities [in 2019] is that they separated you from your family, they yell at your children and that makes you feel bad because they are very young children sometimes and they do not know what is happening and there are shouts of mockery." Gabriel declined to give further information about his and his family members' identities over privacy concerns.

In a press briefing Wednesday, White House Coordinator for the US Southern Border Ambassador Roberta Jacobson said 1,400 MPP migrants have been granted entry into the United States so far. US immigration authorities are processing small groups of MPP migrants each day, beginning with 25 and ramping up to 300 in the coming weeks.

Although there is no guarantee Gabriel and his family will have their asylum claims approved, he is thankful for the glimpse of hope.

"We are going to court so that our asylum application is heard, it will be a judge who defines what will happen to us, but just being here [in United States] means that we are saved," Gabriel said. "I hope the judge can see and hear our request and make a favorable decision."

US immigrant rights groups have provided Gabriel and his family with housing while he waits for his request for a temporary work permit to process, he said. Regarding novel coronavirus concerns, Gabriel noted they do not have access to vaccines but they recently tested negative for the disease before coming to the United States.

In the last 15 months, Gabriel and his family were required to wait in Mexico due to the Trump-era Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) program, which required asylum-seeking migrants to wait in Mexico as they waited for their immigration court proceedings to process in the United States.

The wait in Mexico was drawn-out by the novel coronavirus pandemic that broke out in the United States at the beginning of January 2020, leading to postponed US immigration court hearings throughout the year.

"I [first] crossed to the United States on November 20, 2019 and waited 15 months," Gabriel said. "My children had a difficult time, we lived 10 months in the [migrant] camp."

The Honduran family found residence in a makeshift migrant camp in Matamoros, Mexico, a town that shares the US-Mexico border with the Texas city of Brownsville just across the Rio Grande river. The towns are located in the southern tip of Texas near the Gulf of Mexico. The region is known as the Rio Grande Valley and stretches 320 river miles, covering 19 Texas counties. For many years, the region has been a major destination for migrants seeking asylum in the United States.

Criminal organizations engaged in extortion, climate change affecting agricultural jobs, and corrupt government institutions have pushed millions of nationals from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala to migrate to the United States. However, the situation has remained dire for MPP migrants waiting along the border in Mexico, where they faced extortion from criminal organizations that control major drug corridors where illicit drugs flow across the border.

"Emotionally, we were all affected and our health was a little affected at the beginning due to the conditions that were in the place: flu, cough, stomach infections," Gabriel said. "The camp was a difficult place but leaving it was very difficult because we hardly knew Matamoros and it is dangerous."

In Honduras, Gabriel worked as the manager at an appliance company and also sold food from his home to support his family, but extortion from criminal gangs left him unable to make a living for his family. He said he moved three times during his time Honduras, but was then left with no choice but to leave the country.

"I left my country because of extortion that began since 2017 and on October 27, 2019 I left because I could no longer take it," Gabriel said. "When I left it took me 23 days to arrive [to the US border]."

LOOMING CRISIS AT THE US SOUTHERN BORDER

On Tuesday, Texas Governor Greg Abbott said Border Patrol agents have apprehended more than 100,000 illegal migrants in the Rio Grande Valley sector, which includes Brownsville and other nearby border towns like McAllen, since the beginning of this year.

The current apprehension numbers are on pace to beat the previous mass migration flow that happened in fiscal year 2019, which saw a total of 977,509 apprehensions.

Republican lawmakers and state officials in the Republican state of Texas have been expressing deep concern about the influx of migrants illegally crossing into the United States because it is starting to strain US immigration resources along the Texas-Mexico border.

Data from US Customs and Border Protection data shows that 100,441 migrants were apprehended at the US southern border in February, a significant jump from 78,442 migrants that were apprehended in January.

A total of 396,958 migrants have been apprehended at the US southern border in fiscal year 2021, which began in October.

The data shows that since October, about 317,590 migrants have been "expelled," turned away immediately at the border under a public health-related policy known as Title 42. The highest number of migrants expelled in fiscal year 2021 occurred in February with 70,183 expulsions.

As of February 27, ICE has completed 29,944 deportations since October.

The White House has warned asylum-seeking migrants coming to the border that they will be turned away since the Biden administration does not have a "humane" policy to process their claims.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

RPT - Canadian Deportation Process Against Ex-Nazi Oberlander Could Take Up to 2 Years - Lawyer

TORONTO, March 12 (Sputnik) - Canadian deportation proceedings against former Nazi Helmut Oberlander could be prolonged for up to an additional two years after the country's Federal Court ordered a stay of hearings, international criminal lawyer John Philpot told Sputnik. Last month, Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) postponed proceedings against Oberlander until March 19, at the earliest, after a federal judge ordered a review, citing the defense's arguments regarding health issues and potential civil rights violations.

"It could take another year or two," Philpot said, noting that the fact the Federal Court of Canada chose to review the case is significant, considering that only 3 to 4 percent of deportation cases are reviewed.

Philpot said the review process could take a considerable number of months after the leave was granted while parties file their briefs. The case, he added, could wind up in the Federal Court of Appeal, should a Federal Court justice rule the case a "significant legal issue," which could exceed the length of the initial review.

If the case was taken up by the Supreme Court, Philpot added, the process could last three to four years. However, he assessed this to be an unlikely scenario.

The veteran attorney said the defense's strategy is to prolong the case until the 96-year-old's death.

Federal Court of Canada Justice Richard Southcott, who ordered the review, sided with Oberlander's lawyers that the procession would have a debilitating impact on the former Nazi's health and that his hearing disability combined with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic could impair his ability to comprehend and respond to the questions. The lawyers also raised concerns about an alleged abuse of process, violations of Oberlander's Charter rights and the ineffectiveness of any judicial reviews if the admissibility hearings are allowed to proceed. Philpot added that Oberlander's advanced age and numerous reported ailments could make his deportation "problematic." He, however, downplayed the possibility of COVID-19 playing a significant role in the decision, explaining that someone of Oberlander's age has either been immunized against the disease or will be inoculated in the near future.

Philpot also underscored the foreign policy aspect of the case, saying that Canada's poor standing in the international community – citing Canada's failed bid at a United Nations Security Council seat, support for failed Venezuelan coup leader Juan Guaido and close alignment with US foreign policy – is influencing its effort to deport an individual like Oberlander.

"I think what Canada, maybe, is trying to do is curry favor with the international community by deporting Nazis," Philpot said.

However, Philpot noted that the country's foreign policy-based immigration system is responsible for allowing Oberlander safe haven in Canada in the first place. The international criminal lawyer purported that in the aftermath of the Second World War, Canadian officials either didn't care who entered to country or tacitly abated the admission of ex-Nazis as a means of undermining the union movement.

Federal Court of Canada Justice Richard Southcott and that his hearing disability combined with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic could impair his ability to comprehend and respond to the questions. The lawyers also raised concerns about an alleged abuse of process, violations of Oberlander's Charter rights and the ineffectiveness

While allowing a stay of proceedings, Southcott did throw out a motion from Oberlander's defense team to suspend the hearings until the leave and the potential judicial review of the case are completed, with the justice stating that the application did not meet the "exceptional circumstance" threshold and ruling that the IRB's Immigration Division has jurisdiction to hear the case.

In December, an IRB adjudicator ruled that Oberlander's admissibility hearings could commence in January citing the numerous delays in the case and dismissing the defense's assertions that

COVID-19 restrictions could impair the former SS member's communication with his legal counsel.

The IRB had previously consented to a number of procedural accommodations, including attending hearings via teleconference and appointing Oberlander's daughter as his designated representative due to his numerous ailments.

Legal representatives for Oberlander declined or did not respond to requests for an interview. The 96-year-old Oberlander has been embroiled in legal battle with the Canadian government since 1995, when the latter began trying to strip Ukrainian-born ex-SS member of his citizenship, citing his failure to disclose his links to death squads. After a lengthy legal battle, Oberlander was stripped of his citizenship for the fourth time and final time in 2017 and Canada's Supreme Court issued a ruling last December that blocked any possibility for Oberlander to appeal this decision.

An adjudicator ruled in October that the IRB has the jurisdiction to pursue the deportation of Oberlander, concluding that no abuse of process had occurred.

Additionally, Oberlander faces legal scrutiny in Russia, where investigators say that Oberlander was complicit in the World War II massacre of 27,000 civilians, including orphaned children, in Russia's Rostov region. Federal Security Service (FSB) files obtained by Sputnik revealed that Oberlander, a former interpreter for the Sonderkommando SS-10A death squad, played a role in the massacre.

Russia's Investigative Committee has sent a request to the Canadian authorities to provide legal materials related to the probe of Oberlander's role in the massacre.

However, in an interview with Sputnik in December, the Russian Embassy in Ottawa said the Canadian government did not request documents related to the case and has refused to cooperate despite Moscow's request for legal assistance. The Russian Embassy added that "influential defenders" are working to delay former Nazi's deportation process.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

RPT - Health Canada Says AstraZeneca Vaccine Benefits Continue to Outweigh Risks

TORONTO, March 12 (Sputnik) - Health Canada stands by its assessment that the benefits of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine outweigh its risks despite multiple European nations halting its use over the fears of possible adverse effects, the department told Sputnik.

A number of European states have suspended vaccination with the AstraZeneca drug as a precaution after reports of severe side-effects, including blood clots, which were allegedly triggered by the vaccine.

"Health Canada is aware of reports of adverse events in Europe following immunization with the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, and would like to reassure Canadians that the benefits of the vaccine continue to outweigh its risks," Health Canada said in a statement on Thursday evening.

Health Canada echoed the European Medicines Agency, in saying that there is currently no indication that the reported negative effects had been caused by the inoculation. The

department added that no adverse reactions have been reported to it or the Public Health Agency of Canada.

None of AstraZeneca vaccine batches currently under investigation have been shipped to Canada, Health Canada confirmed.

Canadian health regulators authorized the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine along with the Serum Institute of India version of the vaccine on February 26 for use in individuals over the age of 18. However, Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunizations (NACI) later said it is not recommending AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine for Canadians age 65 and older.

The Canadian government has secured 2 million doses of the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine version produced by the Serum Institute. The first shipment of 500,000 vaccine doses arrived last last week.

Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg and Norway have suspended the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine after citizens reported side-effects following inoculation from the ABV5300 batch of the AstraZeneca vaccine. The batch in question was distributed among 17 EU countries.

A spokesperson for the World Health Organization (WHO) told Sputnik that its Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety (GACVS) was carefully assessing the reports on risks related to the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine against COVID-19