

**03/29/21 Monday**

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US Says Suspending Trade With Myanmar Following Military Violence Against Civilians  
by [Mary F.](#)

Myanmar security forces on Sunday opened fire on protesters over the weekend, killing at least 114 civilians in 40 cities and towns across the country. Two UN officials have condemned the attacks on peaceful demonstrators in the country and have urged the international community to help safeguard the country's population.

The Biden administration on Monday suspended a trade pact with Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, following the violent attacks against protesters. Demonstrators [have been protesting](#) since last month, when democratically elected members of Myanmar's ruling party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), were toppled by Myanmar's armed forces, the Tatmadaw.

"The killing of peaceful protesters, students, workers, labor leaders, medics and children has shocked the conscience of the international community," United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai said in a statement [obtained](#) by The New York Times, noting that trade would be halted until a democratically elected government is restored.

"These actions are a direct assault on the country's transition to democracy and the efforts of the Burmese people to achieve a peaceful and prosperous future," Tsai noted.

Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, also confirmed during a Monday briefing that the suspension would take effect immediately.

"We're deeply concerned by the recent escalation of violence against peaceful protesters in Burma," Psaki said. "Burmese security forces are responsible for hundreds of deaths in Burma since they perpetrated a coup on February 1st."

Figures from The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) in Myanmar, a nonprofit organization, [show](#) that as of March 29, at least 510 people have been killed by the junta since the coup, including 90 people killed during protests on Saturday alone.

After the widespread bloodshed over the weekend, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, and Michelle Bachelet, High Commissioner for Human Rights, condemned the attacks against the protesters.

"The shameful, cowardly, brutal actions of the military and police – who have been filmed shooting at protesters as they flee, and who have not even spared young children – must be halted immediately," they said in a [joint statement](#) released Sunday.

They also called on the international community to "take timely and collective action in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations to protect civilian populations that are at risk of atrocity crimes."

On February 1, Myanmar's military seized power and announced a one-year state of emergency and vowing to take action against alleged voter fraud during the November 8 general election.

The military said it was committed to the democratic system and vowed to hold new and fair elections after the state of emergency ends.

The United States and the United Kingdom have imposed sanctions against multiple individuals and entities affiliated with Myanmar's military, as well as some of Myanmar's conglomerates.

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Gum Disease Linked to High Blood Pressure, Study Finds

by [Mary E.](#)

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is a condition in which the pressure of blood against artery walls is too high. High blood pressure can lead to blood vessel damage, which in turn can cause heart disease, kidney disease and stroke.

A new [study](#) published in the journal Hypertension has found that gum disease is linked to high blood pressure. The researchers studied 250 adults with generalized, severe periodontitis and 250 people without gum disease. Periodontitis is a severe gum infection that can eventually lead to tooth loss and other health complications. All of the study participants were healthy and did not have any other health conditions.

The participants had comprehensive periodontal examinations conducted to assess the severity of their gum disease. Blood pressure assessments were also conducted multiple times for each participant while fasting blood samples were also analyzed to look for signs of increased inflammation in the body.

"Additional information analyzed as confounders included family history of cardiovascular disease, age, body mass index, gender, ethnicity, smoking and physical activity levels," reads a [press release](#) on the study.

The researchers concluded that a diagnosis of gum disease was linked to increased likelihood of hypertension, irrespective of common cardiovascular risk factors. In addition, individuals with gum disease were also twice as likely to have higher systolic blood pressures, which refer to the force the heart exerts on the walls of the arteries each time it beats.

"This evidence indicates that periodontal bacteria cause damage to the gums and also triggers inflammatory responses that can impact the development of systemic diseases including hypertension," study author Francesco D'Aiuto stated in the release.

"This would mean that the link between gum disease and elevated blood pressure occurs well before a patient develops high blood pressure. Our study also confirms that a worryingly high number of individuals are unaware of a possible diagnosis of hypertension," he added.

"Oral health strategies such as brushing teeth twice daily are proven to be very effective in managing and preventing the most common oral conditions, and our study's results indicate they can also be a powerful and affordable tool to help prevent hypertension," he continued. The study did not take into account other factors that may also affect blood pressure, such as obesity, salt intake, use of anti-inflammatory medications, stress and hormone treatments.

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'Gross Inequities': World Officials Warn of Unfair COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution  
by [Mary F.](#)

Last month, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres revealed that only 10 countries have distributed 75% of the world's available COVID-19 vaccine supply, while more than 100 countries have yet to receive their first doses.

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Monday warned that there is an increasing gap between the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in wealthy countries versus those in poorer ones.

"The gap between the number of vaccines administered in rich countries, and the number of vaccines administered through COVAX is growing every single day," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned, [The Global Times reported](#).

"The inequitable distribution of vaccines is not just a moral outrage, it's also economically and epidemiologically self-defeating," he added during a virtual conference hosted by the United Arab Emirates on global immunization.

"As long as the virus continues to circulate anywhere, people will continue to die, trade and travel will continue to be disrupted, and the economic recovery will be further delayed," he continued.

Last week, Tedros also [noted](#) that "COVAX is ready to deliver but we can't deliver vaccines we don't have," referring to the abbreviation for the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access Initiative, which aims to provide equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

The initiative is led by several organizations including UNICEF, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the World Health Organization and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations.

"Bilateral deals, export bans, and vaccine nationalism have caused distortions in the market with gross inequities in supply and demand," Tedros said. "Ten million doses are not much and it's not nearly enough."

The latest comments come after United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres last week also expressed concern about unfair vaccine distribution.

According to the digital database Our World in Data, more than 7 billion vaccines have been administered worldwide, with tens of millions of doses going to countries like the United States, Israel, China, the United Kingdom and Brazil.

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From Missiles to Medicine: New US Bill Would Use New ICBM Program Money to Fund COVID-19 Vaccines  
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The US is in the midst of a vast nuclear modernization program estimated to cost \$1.7 trillion over the next 25 years as the Pentagon replaces its nuclear bombers, land, air, and sea-based missiles, and their associated warheads.

A new bill in the US Senate would pull funding for the Pentagon's enormously expensive program to replace its aging intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) arsenal and use the funds to research COVID-19 treatments instead.

"The United States should invest in a vaccine of mass prevention before another new land-based weapon of mass destruction," US Sen. Edward Markey (D-MA) said in a [Friday press release](#) announcing introduction of the Investing in Cures Before Missiles (ICBM) Act. "The ICBM Act makes clear that we can begin to phase out the Cold War nuclear posture that risks accidental nuclear war while still deterring adversaries and assuring allies, and redirect those savings to the clear and present dangers presented by coronaviruses and other emerging and infectious diseases," he added. "The devastation sown by COVID-19 would pale in comparison to that of even a limited nuclear war. The ICBM Act signals that we intend to make the world safe from nuclear weapons and prioritize spending that saves lives, rather than ends them."

According to the release, the bill would prohibit using fiscal year 2022 spending on either the Pentagon's Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) program or the National Nuclear Security Administration's program to update the W87-1 nuclear warhead.

Instead, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) at the National Institutes of Health would get \$1 billion from the GBSD program to work on a new universal vaccine against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Likewise, the W87-1 funds would go towards infectious disease research at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

According to a [report published on Monday](#) by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), a congressional auditing agency, the recently passed American Recovery Plan Act sets aside roughly \$6.7 billion over the next four years for SARS-CoV-2 vaccine research. In addition, Operation Warp Speed, begun in March of 2020 just days after the global pandemic was declared, had spent \$12.4 billion on research for both vaccines and therapeutic treatments, [according to Time](#).

In turn, the bill would commission an independent study by the National Academy of Sciences to figure out how to extend the life of the US' aging [Minuteman III ICBMs](#) until 2050. Presently the sole ICBM in the US arsenal, the Minuteman IIIs have been in service since the 1970s.

Designing and fielding a new global-range ballistic missile is expected to take years, but the Air Force expects to begin activating the first GBSD missiles by 2029. In September 2020, the USAF gave Northrop Grumman [a \\$13.3 billion contract](#) to design the new rockets. However, the program's total cost is rapidly ballooning, with the [latest projections estimating](#) a service life cost of \$264 billion.

However, Adm. Charles Richard, the head of US Strategic Command, [told reporters in January](#) that "you cannot life-extend Minuteman III," they are so old.

"It is getting past the point of [where] it's not cost-effective to life-extend Minuteman III. You're quickly getting to the point [where] you can't do it at all," he said.

The NNSA's W87-1 warhead is an updated version of its existing W87, one of the warheads currently deployed on the Minuteman III. The initiative was announced in 2019 and is expected to be ready by 2030. The GAO [estimated in September](#) that the cost of updating the 450-kiloton warhead will be at least \$14.8 billion.

The bill has 16 co-sponsors, all of whom are Democrats except Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), an independent socialist who caucuses with the Democrats. Many of the co-sponsors have also pressured the Biden administration in other ways recently to [review or cancel](#) existing nuclear weapons programs.

For example, earlier this month, Sens. Chris van Hollen (D-MD) and Joe Courtney (D-CT) [introduced a bill](#) that would block further funding of the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile (N-SLCM) and "its associated nuclear warhead." It's unclear which warhead the bill refers to, but the Trump administration had intended a lower-yield nuclear warhead to be deployed on the N-SLCM, meaning it's [likely the W76-2](#), which entered service aboard US ballistic missile submarines in 2019.

Markey also joined Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA), a co-sponsor of the ICBM Act, in writing a letter to US President Joe Biden [urging him to scrap](#) the W76-2 program and initiate a [comprehensive nuclear posture review](#) akin to that done by former US President Donald Trump in 2018. The low-yield warhead, with just 5-7 kilotons of explosive power, has aroused fears the White House would seek to use nuclear weapons in a non-nuclear conflict to force an adversary's hand - fears amplified in June 2019 after the Joint Chiefs of Staff [accidentally published a strategy](#) paper outlining just such an approach.

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China's Shenyang Aircraft Corporation Announces Forthcoming New Stealth Fighter  
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Only a handful of fifth-generation aircraft are in service with air forces around the globe, and only the US has two such designs: the F-22 and F-35. However, China's FC-31 has long been expected to one day join the ranks alongside the J-20.

China's Shenyang Aircraft Corporation is redoubling its effort to produce a new stealth fighter for the People's Liberation Army, saying recently it would boost research and testing on the aircraft and its related technologies this year.

[According to Global Times](#), Shenyang's WeChat post about its efforts didn't name the aircraft, but pictures accompanying the announcement featured the company's FC-31 Gyr Falcon test aircraft.

Wang Ya'nian, chief editor of Aerospace Knowledge magazine, told the outlet on Monday that an improved version of the FC-31 makes sense, since the two existing aircraft are only intended to be prototypes.

A useful comparison might be between the US' F-22 Raptor stealth fighter and its prototype, the YF-22 that Lockheed Martin built for testing and demonstration purposes. The two jets were

broadly similar, but still featured significant changes in terms of internal layout and the position and design of its cockpit.

A part of Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC), Shenyang has also produced China's only carrier-based fighter, [the J-15 Flying Shark](#), an indigenously designed fighter derived from the same prototype as Russia's Su-33 fighter.

The FC-31, sometimes erroneously called the J-31, has been flying since 2012 and has long been speculated as destined to become China's second fifth-generation fighter and its primary carrier-based fighter, thanks to its smaller profile than the J-20 Weibang already in commission with the air force.

In July 2020, the Chinese Aeronautical Establishment, AVIC's research and design bureau, reported it [intended to begin testing](#) a "new type of aircraft" for naval use in conjunction with Shenyang. Then, two months later, [an FC-31 was spotted](#) with a new paint job, removed airspeed measuring device, and the logo of AVIC painted on its tail, was spotted on maneuvers and the pictures posted on Sina Weibo.

The PLA Navy's Type 003 aircraft carrier, its third carrier but first with a level flight deck and aircraft catapults following the American model, is expected to be launched in the next year or so. [Recent photos](#) of the Shanghai shipyard where it's being built suggest its interior hangars are nearing completion and installation of the flight deck could soon follow. Other aircraft are also under development with the new carrier in mind, such as the [KJ-600 airborne early warning](#) aircraft.

However, Shenyang also noted in its WeChat post that it's beginning work on a "next-generation aircraft," researching technologies such as thermal adaptation and integration of structure and function.

In this context, such an expression likely refers to what would be called a [sixth-generation fighter](#) in the West. The concept is nebulous since no such aircraft is [admitted to exist](#), but it would likely be heavily computer-integrated, including allowing for optionally manned flight, would likely carry directed-energy weapons such as lasers, and would, of course, be even stealthier than present jets.

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Kim Yo Jong Blasts South Korea's 'Gangster-Like Logic' for Criticizing North's Missile Launches by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

While the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has imposed a unilateral moratorium on long-range ballistic missile testing that aroused international condemnation, it has availed itself of the ability to test short-range tactical weapons since talks to trade its nuclear program for the removal of economic sanctions collapsed.

In a Tuesday statement directed at South Korean President Moon Jae In, Kim Yo Jong, vice-director of the Information and Publicity Department of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) Central Committee questioned his motivation for worrying about "self-defense" [missile tests](#) by the North.

On March 26, Moon referred to the then-recent confirmation by Pyongyang that it had tested two new guided missiles as "actions providing difficulty for the mood for dialogue" and called them "undesirable."

"I'm aware the people are greatly concerned by the North's missile test-firings. Now is the time for South and North Korea and the United States to work to continue our dialogue," he added, according to the Seoul-based [Yonhap News Agency](#).

Kim, whose brother is Central Military Commission chair and WPK chair Kim Jong Un, criticized Moon's comments on Tuesday as the "height of effrontery."

"He meant that the step taken by us to bolster the capabilities for national defense, exercise of the legitimate sovereign right pertaining to the DPRK, has aroused apprehension among the south Koreans and caused trouble and obstacle to the efforts to create the atmosphere favorable for dialogue," she said in comments carried by [Korean Central News Agency](#) (KCNA).

"Such illogical and brazen-faced behavior of south Korea is exactly the same as the gangster-like logic of the US faulting the right of the DPRK to self-defense as a violation of the UN 'resolutions' and 'threats' to the international community," Kim said, adding that Moon "can not feel sorry for being 'praised' as a parrot raised by America. This could be what is described as self-contradictory and being caught in one's own trap."

Her use of the term "gangster-like logic" follows WPK secretary Ri Pyong Chol's use of the same words to describe US President Joe Biden's response to the March 25 weapons test.

"It is a gangster-like logic that the United States can ship the nuclear assets any time to the Korean peninsula and launch inter-continental ballistic missile, but the DPRK, one of the warring sides, is not allowed to test [a] tactical weapon," Ri said, according to [Voice of Korea](#).

While Biden admitted the test wasn't a provocation and was "business as usual," [he also said](#) "there will be responses" if US allies in the region - South Korea and Japan - "choose to escalate. We will respond accordingly."

The DPRK has technically been at war with South Korea since 1949 and the US since 1950, when an international force intervened in a war between the two recently-formed Korean states just as the North was closing in on the southern stronghold of Busan. After the American-led force pushed them back and conquered most of the North, an all-volunteer force of Chinese soldiers joined the fight under North Korean command and pushed the allied forces back almost to where the war had started. A ceasefire in 1953 created the demilitarized zone that separates North and South Korea, but did not formally end the war with a permanent peace treaty.

In 2019, an unprecedented rapprochement between Kim and Moon saw them sign an end-of-war declaration and begin to establish closer social and economic ties, although Seoul backed off amid US objections and an eventual collapse of the US-DPRK dialogue running parallel to their negotiations. Biden has sharply criticized former US President Donald Trump's willingness to negotiate with Kim, and the [White House reiterated](#) on Monday that Biden "would not be sitting with President Kim Jong Un."

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Iran May Reportedly Cease 20% Enrichment of Uranium Supplies if US Lifts 'All the Sanctions'

Earlier, a new report surfaced detailing that the Biden administration would be putting forth a new proposal to reinstate talks with Iran before the Middle Eastern nation's looming election put off talks for several months.

An unnamed senior Iranian official recently revealed that Iran will stop its 20% uranium enrichment "only if the US lifts all the sanctions" that were imposed under the Trump administration and have been kept in place by the Biden White House.

The Iranian official [informed](#) Press TV that "20% uranium enrichment is in line with Paragraph 36 of the [2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action], and will be stopped only if the US lifts all the sanctions."

"The Biden administration is losing time, and if it fails to lift the sanctions soon, Iran will take the next steps, which will be further reduction" of its commitments to the nuclear deal, the senior official said.

In January, the Iranian parliament boasted that its scientist had produced 17kg of enriched uranium in less than a month at its [Fordow nuclear facility](#). This exceeds their purported production timeline which listed Iran's goal at a rate of 120kg of 20% enrichment uranium per year.

The unidentified individual's remarks came as a response to the [Monday report](#) from Politico that the US was seeking to issue a new proposal that requires Iran to ease its nuclear practices in exchange for relief from US sanctions.

The proposal, which has not been confirmed by the Biden camp, is expected to request that Iran ceases its use of advanced centrifuges and the pullback on enrichment of uranium supplies to 20% purity, among other efforts.

Shahrokh Nazemi, the head of press at Iran's mission to the United Nations, responded to the Politico revelation by indicating that "the [deal] needs no specific proposal," and that the US needs to follow commitments to the 2015 agreement.

Sanctions placed on Iran have put the country in challenging situations over the years.

Mahmoud Jarafi, the deputy head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, [told](#) the Isna news agency that "because of [US] sanctions, we have problems with bank transfers, and if no solution is found, we will even be forced to stop work at the first unit of Bushehr." Bushehr is a plant that operates as part of a joint nuclear program between Iran and Russia.

Moscow has argued for the use of nuclear energy for civilian purposes in Iran, but US sanctions have plunged the country into an [economic crisis](#). Iran has long maintained that its nuclear program was meant for peaceful purposes and not for making bombs.

The Biden administration's alleged proposal is slated to be set forth this week, setting the stage for future talks between the US and Iran. However, the lack of diplomatic ties are sure to be one of the greatest hurdles in reaching nuclear negotiations.

Iran has remained head strong in their use of nuclear energy, and has recently solidified an [investment deal](#) with China that is sure to cause reaction from the United States.

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US Judge Drops Terrorism Charges Against Three Suspects Linked to Whitmer Kidnapping Plot  
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

In October 2020, authorities with the US' Federal Bureau of Investigation revealed that members of the Wolverine Watchmen militia group planned to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in an effort to initiate an uprising. A total of 13 individuals were hit with a variety of charges, including terrorism and conspiracy offenses.

A judge in Michigan on Monday moved to dismiss terrorism charges against three of the men who were apprehended as a result of the [Whitmer kidnapping plot](#), explaining there was a lack of evidence to support the charge.

Jackson County Michael Klaeren ruled in a preliminary examination of the offense that there is not enough probable cause when it comes to terrorism charges against Pete Musico, Joseph Morrison and Paul Bellar.

Klaeren ruled that the trio's use of an encrypted communication network to discuss details surrounding the plot was "in many respects no different than thinking the thought to yourself." "One does not even need to know all the co-conspirators," Klaeren concluded in his ruling, underscoring that "there has to be some form of intent here to incite mayhem."

However, when it came to the additional charges that the group faces, the judge determined that there was sufficient evidence to support prosecution on offenses which include providing material in support for terrorist acts, gang membership and using a firearm during a felony.

"The intent is so clear that these individuals were going to do more than spout off threats to each other," Klaeren said. "They started a very big snowball that wasn't going to stop."

He further noted that the three men were "erratic" and "joined at the hip."

Aside from the weapons charge, which amounts up to two years in prison, the terrorist acts and gang membership charges are punishable by up to 20 years in prison if they're convicted.

It's unclear when the trial will begin for Musico, Morrison and Bellar.

After announcing the criminal plot, the FBI revealed that the agency had become aware of the [group's efforts](#) last year by utilising undercover agents and informants.

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Biden White House Eyes New Proposal to Break Nuclear Stalemate With Iran - Report

Over the last few months, US President Joe Biden's administration has faced pressure from both sides of the US Senate on how to approach the ongoing tension with Iran. However, a new initiative by the White House suggests officials may offer a new proposal to get talks with Iran moving as soon as this week.

As US-Iran tensions remain high, new reports have recently suggested the Biden administration is eyeing the possibility of working up a new diplomatic proposal to “jump-start” talks between the two nations.

Two individuals familiar with the situation [told Politico](#) for a Monday story that the alleged proposal asks Iran to halt some of its nuclear activities in exchange for some relief from US economic sanctions.

The details of the proposal are said to still be a work in progress but face situational deadlines, as upcoming presidential elections in Iran foreshadow a time limit for negotiation talks.

One of the unidentified individuals informed the outlet that the proposal is “more than anything about trying to get the conversation started” between the two countries, which have been at odds for decades and saw tensions hit a new boiling point under the Trump administration.

A looming expiration to an agreement between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is also serving as a push to establish renewed talks. The deal between the pair allows the UN watchdog to continue inspections of its nuclear facilities, but is due to [expire in June](#) and take with it the agency’s access to Iranian facilities.

Shahrokh Nazemi, the head of press at Iran’s mission to the United Nations, responded to the Politico revelation by indicating that “the [deal] needs no specific proposal,” and that the US just needs to follow implementation of the 2015 agreement.

The Biden camp did not offer details of the ongoing diplomatic talks.

In 2018, the Trump administration walked away from the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which in turn re-imposed sanctions on Iran, and initiated even stricter financial hurdles as Trump sought a “[maximum pressure](#)” campaign against Iran. As a result, Tehran has taken several steps against denuclearization and argues that since the US abandoned the deal first, they should take the [first step](#) in renegotiating and ultimately removing sanctions.

Biden stated on the campaign trail that he wanted to reverse his predecessor’s actions against Iran. However, he has been working under the assumption that he will either remake or at least update the 2015 deal. Most recently, the Biden White House has stated that sanctions will not be lifted unless Iran returns to compliance with the original deal. Reports have indicated that the US is willing to make the first move in returning to negotiations.

Biden is facing increased tension in competition as Iran continues its attempt at nuclear growth including signing a \$400 billion deal with China, which includes investment into the renewable energy and nuclear energy infrastructure.

European officials have also attempted to salvage the agreement, setting up talks between Iran and the US, an effort subsequently rejected by both parties.

Europe faces its own challenge of encountering US sanctions of their own if they attempt to do business with Iran.

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Ever Given Fiasco Raises Questions Over Fragility of Global Trade Methods in Aftermath

Shipping traffic through the Suez Canal, one of the world's busiest trade routes, has resumed as of Monday after a sky-scraper-sized container found itself lodged along its banks. The vessel was fully refloated, with officials announcing that traffic would resume at 6 p.m local time.

After a week of being trapped aground on the banks of the Suez Canal, rescuers managed to free the container ship Ever Given. While it will take at least another week to clear the current queue of ships traveling through the canal, the larger perspective calls into question the future of the global economy, especially one dependent on the just-in-time shipping method.

While the ship was wedged, it was estimated that each day [billions of dollars](#) in trade had been lost, with actual numbers being difficult to calculate but approximated to about [\\$9.6 billion](#) a day. A prolonged shut down of the canal would have had a long-lasting effect particularly on European markets, which relies greatly on transfers through the canal, and would have posed a possible [trickle-down](#) effect to the United States. Shippers had options to get around the shutdown, but very few that wouldn't be costly or time consuming.

"It just shows you how vulnerable our supply-chain lines are," Guy Platten, secretary general for the UK-based International Chamber of Shipping, [told](#) The Washington Post.

As a result, [some companies](#) have started to suggest alternatives to water-way supply hubs.

"[We] recommend that you reach out to your local sales representative for dialogues and quotations on alternative solutions, such as air and rail," a [statement](#) from Maersk, the world's largest container line, said.

So far the weeklong shut down has only negligently affected consumers, but this is in addition to the fragility of the current [global economy](#) under the coronavirus pandemic, which sets the ground for cries of exploitation.

The current method of global trading relies on the just-in-time [shipping method](#), in which companies order supplies on an as-needed basis.

Working around this method would require more research into consumer data, which is already questionable under the current [data collection](#) tactics implemented by tech giants such as Google.

As the pride of Egypt, the Suez Canal has called to the forefront many questions surrounding the future of the global economy and requires preparation to deal with [more potential](#) challenges.

Osama Rabie, the head of the Suez Canal authority, has stated that this incident will be used as a [learning step](#) to prevent similar issues in the future.

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**US Judge Orders New York to Provide COVID-19 Vaccines to Prisoners**

Over a year ago, New York became the global epicenter for the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic, suffering from the highest rates of infection, which resulted in a destabilizing economic and health crisis.

Justice Alison Y. Tuitt of the State Supreme Court in the Bronx has ruled that New York must immediately begin to offer COVID-19 vaccines to all incarcerated people in the state's prisons and jails.

This comes after a report revealed that New York jails are now [more crowded](#) than they were at the beginning of the pandemic despite efforts to release hundreds of people to prevent overcrowding.

Both prisoners and guards have filed claims that the conditions inside are [unsanitary and dangerous](#). A class action lawsuit was filed on behalf of [all prisoners](#) in New York City jails in February that highlighted how inmates were kept from receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. Social distancing is nearly impossible in some jail units and PPE is scarce or unavailable. Data offered by the Empire State's Correctional Health Services has shown that in January and February infections and exposures in the jails had reached their [highest levels](#) since last spring. New York recently announced new vaccine [eligibility guidelines](#) but failed to mention the nearly 50,000 people currently incarcerated in the state's prisons and jails, a development that has caused severe backlash from law officials.

Tuitt's [late Monday ruling](#) states that leaving the US' inmate populations outside of the ongoing public vaccination campaign is "unfair and unjust" and an "abuse of discretion."

The judge wrote in her ruling on the matter that state officials "irrationally distinguished between incarcerated people and people living in every other type of adult congregate facility, at great risk to incarcerated people's lives during this pandemic."

"There is no acceptable excuse for this deliberate exclusion," she underscored.

It was announced on Monday that all [adult residents](#) of New York would be eligible to receive a vaccine by April 6 but the measure left many unsure of how the effort would apply to the incarcerated population. However, Tuitt's ruling now guarantees that prisoners will be addressed as part of that population.

Efforts to put incarcerated people ahead of the general population for vaccine dosage has drawn pushback from some lawmakers, including officials from the Kansas State Senate where [Republicans](#) demanded a revision of resolution [No. 1707](#).

In a similar suit filed last month, a federal court judge from Oregon ordered the state prison system to offer doses to [all incarcerated people](#), making it the first successful legal battle of its kind and encouraging states nationwide to follow suit.

Representatives from the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision in New York and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo have not yet commented on the judge's ruling, and it is unclear whether the state will appeal. Cuomo is currently under fire for his own handling of the state's response to the pandemic and his concealment of the number of nursing home deaths.

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Georgia NAACP Files Lawsuit Against State's Republican-Backed Voting Bill, Alleges Rights Violations

On March 25, Georgia Governor Brian Kemp signed into law Bill SB 202, a new voting law with restrictions that even US President Joe Biden has referred to as "Un-American." Georgia's NAACP chapter, along with other state-based organizations, took action against the bill this week in the form of a lawsuit.

The Georgia NAACP [filed a lawsuit](#) on Monday that claims the state's new voting restrictions included in the Election Integrity Act are a violation of the First, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, as well as Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.

The suit was filed in the US District Court for the Northern District of Georgia, with backing from the Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda, League of Women Voters of Georgia, GALEO, Common Cause, and the Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe.

The lawsuit, which was brought against Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger and members of the State Election Board, challenges implementation of the signing of the SB 202 bill, believing that it was intended to and will disproportionately affect the rights of Black voters and other voters of color.

Race is stated to be the motivating factor behind the enactment of SB 202 as many critics, [including Biden](#), have referred to it as a new form of [Jim Crow](#), a set of state and local laws that enforced racial segregation within the US.

A [statement](#) issued by the civil rights organization explains that the bill directly targets groups similar to the Georgia NAACP and other plaintiffs listed in the suit by prohibiting them from sending out unsolicited absentee ballot applications to voters through the use of fines and criminalizing "line-warming," which provides relief in the form of food or water for voters forced to wait in long lines.

"We promised to use every legal option available to us to fight back against SB 202 and our lawsuit does just that." Rev. Woodall, state president of the Georgia NAACP branch, said in a release announcing the development.

"The thinly-veiled attempt to roll back the progress we have made to empower Georgians - to use their voices in the democratic process - creates an arbitrary law that does not improve voter confidence, secure election integrity nor increase access to the ballot box."

Others, such as [Kemp](#), have argued that the law is needed to restore voters' confidence after the events of the 2020 election, which saw US President Donald Trump and several of his backers alleging mass voter fraud. Republicans also believe that it expands on [voting access](#), with state Sen. Randy Robertson stating that the lawsuit is "all for publicity."

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Suez Canal Authority Officially Announces Resumption of Navigation From 6pm Monday by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Egypt's Suez Canal was unexpectedly blocked early last week after the Panamanian-flagged cargo ship Ever Given ran aground after strong high winds and a sandstorm dramatically reduced visibility for the crew. Repeated attempts to release the 200,000-tonne ship were previously unsuccessful.

The Suez Canal Authority announced Monday that the temporarily shuttered waterway resumed operations once again at 6 p.m. local time, restarting a trade route that has prompted massive shipping and trading delays.

Osama Rabie, the head of the Suez Canal Authority, noted that the agency will be working "around the clock" to ensure the end of the traffic jam at the passage, noting that approximately 113 vessels are expected to cross the channel between 6 p.m. on Monday and 8 a.m. on Tuesday.

Rabie went on to state that officials will be using the incident as a learning step to prevent similar issues from arising. Additionally, in the wake of the trading setback, officials are weighing the possibility of providing benefits to clients.

However, as traffic resumes in the busy trade waterway, officials are anticipating that seaports across Western Europe may face a sharp spike.

Representatives for Belgium's Antwerp, the second-busiest European port, informed Sputnik News that it is making preparations in case of peak traffic caused by the unblocking of the Suez Canal. First ships are expected to begin arriving this week or by early next week.

"There will be an impact on our port, but it is still too early to judge how small or large this impact will be," the spokesperson remarked. "Some shipping companies can decide to change their schedule or decide whether or not to call extra at certain ports."

Rabie has indicated that should the transit pace at the Suez Canal remain, the current backlog could be cleared in about 3.5 days.

The mammoth Ever Given cargo ship was [finally freed](#) earlier Monday after a massive effort from various tugboats and dredging operations. It proved to be the first global operation in which a ship was successfully refloated without having to unload its container ships, an option that officials had been considering.

The vessel, which [briefly blocked](#) the Suez for a second time after being freed, is currently located at the Small Bitter Lake, a saltwater body of water in Egypt that is connected to both the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea.

The cost of the traffic accident remains unclear as insurers, the shipping industry and a slew of businesses depending on container goods are still calculating figures. It was previously reported that the Shoen Kisen Kaisha, the owner of the Ever Given, holds an insurance policy of \$3 billion.

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Say What? My Pillow CEO Tells Steve Bannon 'Trump Will Be Back in Office in August'  
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Mike Lindell, CEO of My Pillow, Inc., is currently entangled in a \$1.3 billion defamation lawsuit filed late last month by Dominion Voting Systems, Inc. The company claims Lindell, a staunch supporter of former US President Donald Trump, knowingly disseminated false information purporting that Dominion rigged the 2020 US presidential election.

During a recent appearance on "Steve Bannon's War Room," Lindell ended up getting into a bit of a shouting match with Bannon - a former White House chief strategist who notably received [a pardon](#) from 45 earlier this year.

The conversation began with the businessman asserting, once again, that he is in possession of evidence that "is going to go before the Supreme Court."

He went on to baselessly argue that voter fraud was present in the 2020 presidential election. "It was an attack by other countries, communism coming in," the My Pillow CEO added. "I don't know what they're going to do with that after they pull it down."

According to the US National Intelligence Council, [there were](#) "no indications that any foreign actor attempted to alter any technical aspect of the voting process in the 2020 US elections, including voter registration, casting ballots, vote tabulation, or reporting results."

As Bannon tried to butt in, Lindell talked over the host to make one last assertion: "Donald Trump will be back in office in August!"

While Lindell has been [permanently suspended](#) from Twitter, the businessman's comments managed to become a trending topic on the social media platform.

"The problem is not that Mike Lindell says crazy, stupid stuff. The problem is that there are violent pro Trump supporters who believe this, egged on by GOP leaders who lie about the election being stolen," Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA) [tweeted](#). "That's why National Guard troops in body armor are still at our Capitol."

[Sputnik reported](#) last month that Lindell was named as a defendant in a \$1.3 billion lawsuit from Dominion Voting Systems.

The suit, which names both Lindell and his company, alleged the businessman sought to use Trump's campaign as "another chance to boost sales." It also claimed Lindell's allegations of election rigging "have exposed Dominion to the most extreme hatred and contempt."

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'I'm Scared': CDC Director Warns of 'Impending Doom' As US Passes 30 Million COVID-19 Cases

by [Evan Craighead](#)

On Monday, Rochelle P. Walensky, director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, signed a three-month extension to the nation's eviction moratorium, which now expires June 30, 2021. As of this article's publication, nearly 30.3 million cases of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus have been logged in the US.

After announcing the US surpassed 30 million cases of the novel coronavirus on Monday, Walensky took a moment to warn Americans of the "impending doom" related to recent surges in positive novel coronavirus diagnoses.

"I'm going to lose the script, and I'm going to reflect on the recurring feeling I have of impending doom. We have so much to look forward to so much promise and potential of where we are, and so much reason for hope," the CDC director said during the White House COVID-19 Response Team press briefing.

"But right now I'm scared," she added, noting the US does "not have the luxury of inaction" when it comes to COVID-19.

"We are just almost there, but not quite yet," she said.

The CDC [also announced](#) on Monday that Walensky authorized "an extension to the eviction moratorium further preventing the eviction of tenants who are unable to make rental payments." US President Joe Biden later warned that "[i]f we let our guard down now, we can see the virus getting worse, not better. People are letting up on precautions, which is a very bad thing."

The US [has logged](#) 546,704 deaths related to the novel coronavirus, according to the CDC.

Additionally, some 146 million vaccines have been administered.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the White House's chief medical adviser, appeared on CBS' Face the Nation on Sunday to highlight the US should be wary of a possible spike in infections following the current "plateau" in new COVID-19 cases.

"And that's exactly what's happened in Europe in several of the countries in the European Union where they plateaued and then started to come back," [he said](#). "And that's why we say it really is almost a race between getting people vaccinated and having this peak that we may want to see. And we don't want to see that."

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Shortage of US Working Military Dogs May Pose Security Risk, Pioneer Report Warns

Dario Cortese

by [Evan Craighead](#)

The recent study comes as the US government's first "comprehensive research on working dog procurement conducted in the last 15 years." Alongside lacking in new canines for combat, several services, including the US Air Force, have expressed the need for volunteers to adopt dogs that are out of service due to age or failed training.

A recent study conducted by the US federal government found that the US military "has faced a chronic shortage of domestically bred working dogs qualified for use by both the Department of Defense and other federal agencies."

[Said research](#), conducted by the Acquisition Research Program of the Naval Postgraduate School's Graduate School of Defense Management, comes as the US military's most "comprehensive research on working dog procurement conducted in the last 15 years."

"Unlike current technology, canines possess the ability to continuously adapt and provide a consistent detection capability," researchers argued.

The report also suggested that, due to "adversaries" becoming more "adept in circumventing detection systems, the need for working dogs has steadily increased to address security vulnerabilities."

Within the document, researchers highlighted that the lack of a "robust domestic supply" of military dogs "may threaten the ability of departments and agencies that utilize working dogs to maintain readiness if the supply from foreign markets is contested or interrupted for an extended period."

Expenditure data shows that, over the course of six fiscal years, the US government has spent a total of \$38.9 million on some 533 contracts related to the procurement of military dogs.

"This research draws on data from across the federal government and utilizes a mixed methods approach that applies both quantitative and qualitative techniques to obtain insight into the domestic working dog market," researchers wrote.

At the same time, the Texas-based [341st](#) Training Squadron of the US Air Force - which is tasked with training the military working dogs of the Department of Defense - has detailed within the past year that it needs folks to adopt dogs that have either aged-out, or failed their training.

"There is also a selection of older dogs available that have served in the field or were utilized in the training of new military dog handlers. Some of the available dogs may have hip, back, or other medical issues that prevent them from working," the program's website notes.

"Additionally, dogs with medical issues may require prescription medications for the remainder of their lives."

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RPT: ANALYSIS - US Unlikely to Ever Achieve Racial Equality Without Paying Reparations

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - Reparations payments similar to the legislation passed in Evanston, Illinois recently represent the most effective way for the United States to settle the debt owed to Black Americans for years of discrimination, experts told Sputnik.

On March 22, Evanston became the first city in the United States to pass reparations legislation. The city council voted 8-1 to disburse some \$400,000 for Black homeowners victimized by housing discrimination.

NO OTHER WAY

US Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee is pushing legislation that calls for establishing a federal commission to assess and develop remedies to offset the negative impact slavery and discrimination have had on Black Americans since 1619. Although the bill has been introduced every year for more than three decades, it has lately gained more traction - including the endorsement of a major US bank.

"It's absolutely necessary," University of the District of Columbia Assistant Political Science Professor, Monique Gamble, told Sputnik when asked about reparations legislation. "There is no other way to make this right, no other way to reach parity."

The wealth generated by slavery in the South, Gamble said, funded the banks and colleges in the North upon which White Americans built their power structure.

"Jim Crow and other vestiges of slavery built in a whole other set of disadvantages such as redlining, the wealth gap and Black veterans blocked from taking advantage of the G.I. Bill. In the modern era, it's all connected," Gamble said.

The professor said she doubted this type of legislation at the federal level would ever pass.

"But changes are necessary. The degree of anti-Blackness and the fear of Black people is real. I expect that there would be consternation and questions of 'what about me?'" she said.

She called for a "national reckoning" about race that is honest and truthful.

Gamble, however, said she objects to one aspect of the Evanston model.

"I don't like that money is coming from a marijuana tax because so many Black men are hemmed up on marijuana charges," Gamble said. "A bunch of white people will turn around and make money selling marijuana. A tax on vice, and luxury goods used to fund reparations? It's the same type of things used to perpetuate the disadvantages Black people face, like slavery. We should make other people pay. It should come from a government."

#### DEBT TO BE PAID

Supporters of reparations argue that the United States has never atoned for centuries of slavery, lynchings, segregation and discrimination Black Americans have faced in every aspect of life. Dr. Sharon Dennard, a clinical psychologist who specializes in treating minority mental health issues, said reparations is a no-brainer.

"You know, the first acknowledgment that has to be made by America - however ill-defined - is that the reason this country is so wealthy is because of more than 300 years of slave labor, free labor, back-breaking work by African Americans," Dennard told Sputnik.

From a spiritual point of view, Dennard added, Africans and indigenous people believe in karma and the United States has never settled up.

"You [America] have an outstanding debt you never made good on. You will never stand as tall as you might have stood because... you have the resources but refuse to settle," Dennard said. "The way karma works is, if you don't do the right thing - you pay."

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#### Canada's Anti-Russian Lies-Based Sanctions 'Absolutely Futile' - Embassy

TORONTO, March 29 (Sputnik) - Ottawa's latest round of anti-Russian sanctions are based on lies, distortion of history and are "absolutely futile," the Russian Embassy in Canada said in a statement.

Earlier in the day, Global Affairs Canada announced that Foreign Affairs Minister Marc Garneau imposed sanctions on two Russian executives and four entities in response to the decision of the Crimean people to rejoin Russia.

"The latest anti-Russian sanctions on Crimea – based on lies, historical revisionism and disregard for reality – are absolutely futile and contradict not only international law, but also humanitarian principles," the Russian Embassy said

The diplomatic mission added that the Crimean rail infrastructure targeted by Canadian sanctions will continue to serve the country and the people in spite of efforts by “Western patrons” of the regime in Kiev.

The Embassy emphasized that despite a brief 23-year stint within Ukraine's borders, Crimea is a Russian territory and has been an integral part of the country for centuries. The diplomatic mission noted that visitors to the peninsula have witnessed its development and defense of human rights.

The latest round of anti-Russian sanctions come less than a week after Ottawa imposed sanctions on nine senior Russian officials in line with similar measures taken earlier by the United States and the European Union over the case of opposition blogger Alexey Navalny. In the aftermath of the sanctions announced on March 24, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova blamed Canada's ruling elite for reducing bilateral relations with Russia to historic lows and vowed that the Russian response will be tough and shortly forthcoming.

Impacted by Monday's sanctions are Aleksandr Ganov, the head of the Crimean Railway, which was also included in the latest sanctions package, and Leonid Ryzhenkin, General Director of the Mostotrest, which built the Crimean Bridge.

The latest round of anti-Russian sanctions also targets First Crimean Insurance Company, JSC Lenpromtransproyekt and JSC "The Berkakit-Tommot-Yakutsk Railway Line's Construction Directorate."

Crimea rejoined Russia on March 16, 2014, after over 95 percent of voters backed the move in a referendum, which followed a violent power change in Ukraine. Two days later, an agreement on Crimea's accession to the Russian Federation was signed.

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Georgia Governor Quarantines After Exposure to Coronavirus Positive Person - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - Georgia's Governor Brian Kemp has decided to self-quarantine after an interaction with a person who tested positive for the novel coronavirus, his communications director Cody Hall said in a statement .

"Following exposure to a COVID-19 positive individual... the Governor is following CDC/DPH protocol and quarantining," Hall said via Twitter on Monday evening.

Kemp met with the person while touring Newnan on Saturday to inspect the damage from a recent storm, but his office was not notified of the person's diagnosis until Monday.

Kemp tested negative for the novel coronavirus, which has an incubation period of two weeks, and was referred to a doctor.

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US, France Discuss Solution at OECD to Issue of Taxing Companies - Treasury Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen spoke with French Minister of Finance, Economy and Recovery Bruno Le Maire about their countries' joint efforts to enable a global economic recovery and solve the issue of international taxation among OECD countries, the Treasury Department said in a statement.

"Earlier today, Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen spoke with French Minister of Finance, the Economy, and the Recovery Bruno Le Maire," the statement said on Monday. "They discussed the importance of working together toward a solution in the ongoing OECD discussions on international taxation."

Yellen also expressed the United States' readiness to promote a global economic recovery via multilateral mechanisms and support low-income countries, the statement said.

In July 2019, France passed a law on taxing major US corporations, including tech giants Google, Apple and Facebook. However, in January of 2020, France decided to postpone levying the tax so that the negotiations at the OECD on the issue of taxation would be concluded. By the end of January, 137 countries had expressed their commitment to reach an OECD-led deal on taxation of multinational tech companies by the end of 2020.

France's tax has been a source of tensions between Paris and Washington as the latter believes it unfairly targets US companies.

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US, Spain Agree to Resolve Civil Aircraft Disputes Lodged at WTO - Trade Representative

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - US Trade Representative Katherine Tai spoke today with Spanish Minister of Industry, Commerce and Tourism Maria Reyes Maroto about joint efforts on a number of issues, including the resolution of the US-EU civil aircraft dispute at the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Office of the US Trade Representative said in a statement.

"Ambassador Tai and Minister Reyes Maroto discussed the importance of developing a more positive and productive trade and investment relationship between the United States and Spain," the statement said on Monday. "They agreed to work to strengthen US-Spanish collaboration on mutual interests, including resolving the WTO large civil aircraft disputes." The officials also discussed Spain's digital service tax as well as the challenges presented by global excess steel and aluminum capacity, the statement added.

In 2006, the United States filed a case with the WTO accusing European aircraft manufacturer Airbus of receiving \$22 billion in illegal subsidies. After the EU filed a counterclaim, the WTO ruled both sides illegally subsidized their respective aircraft companies.

Earlier this month, the European Union and the United States agreed to suspend all duties related to the civil aircraft disputes lodged at the the WTO for an initial period of four months.

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US Tells Ukraine Official Biden Seeks to Revitalize Ties to Support Zelensky - White House

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and the head of the Ukrainian Presidential Office on Monday discussed the steps the Biden administration aims to undertake to revitalize the bilateral strategic partnership in support of President Volodymyr Zelensky's policies, White House spokesperson Emily Horne said in a statement. "He [Sullivan] relayed the Biden administration's commitment to revitalize our strategic partnership in support of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's plan to tackle corruption and implement a reform agenda that delivers justice, security and prosperity to the people of Ukraine," the statement said on Monday.

Sullivan also told Yermak that the United States will continue supporting Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, the statement said.

Last week, President Zelensky approved a new military security strategy for Ukraine that sets a goal for the country to become a member of NATO as well as to end the temporary "occupation" of a part of the Ukrainian territory by Russia.

Moscow has rejected accusation that it occupies any territory and has repeatedly said the residents of Crimea decided to rejoin Russia via a referendum organized in accordance to international law and standards.

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Blinken, UN Chief Discuss Libya, Syria - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issues concerning Syria, Libya and Afghanistan as United

States' priorities at the United Nations, Department of State spokesperson Ned Price said in a readout of the conversation.

"Secretary Blinken welcomed close coordination with the UN regarding the political settlement and the permanent and comprehensive ceasefire in Afghanistan as well as the need to renew and expand cross-border aid delivery in Syria," Price said on Monday.

Blinken welcomed the new interim Government of National Unity in Libya, the readout also said. The US Secretary of State "underscored the importance of national elections in December of this year and the need for foreign forces to depart, and pledged full support for UN Special Envoy Jan Kubis and the UN Support Mission in Libya," the readout added.

Blinken and Guterres also discussed efforts in Ethiopia to secure greater humanitarian access across the country, the need for Eritrean forces to withdraw from the Tigray region and the need for independent, international investigations into human rights abuses, according to the readout.

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Canada Advisory Committee Recommends Pausing AstraZeneca Vaccine Shots – Statement

TORONTO, March 29 (Sputnik) - Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunizations (NACI) is recommending a pause in inoculating Canadians under the age of 55 with the Oxford-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine citing safety concerns.

"NACI recommends that AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine should not be used in adults under 55 years of age at this time while the safety signal of Vaccine-Induced Prothrombotic Immune Thrombocytopenia (VIPIT) following vaccination with AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine is investigated further," NACI said in a statement on Monday.

The updated guidance comes as European researchers have purported that an autoimmune response to AstraZeneca's vaccine is behind the blood clots that have forced the suspension of inoculation with the vaccine in several European Union countries.

Despite the advisory committee's warning, Canadian federal health regulators indicated to reporters that they don't plan on changing the current federal guidance that says the AstraZeneca vaccine is safe and effective for adults over the age of 18.

"There hasn't been enough data to show that we should make a change to the way that the vaccine is used or changes to the labeling," Health Canada Chief Medical Advisor Supriya Sharma.

Deputy Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Howard Njoo said that those who have been vaccinated with the AstraZeneca vaccine should seek immediate medical attention if they develop symptoms including, chest pain, leg swelling and shortness of breath, between four and 16 days after being inoculated. Njoo said those who have been vaccinated more than 20 days ago have no cause for concern.

Shadow Minister of Health, Michelle Rempel Garner, during a press briefing called for greater transparency from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and to explicitly say if Health Canada will accept the advisory committee's recommendation.

However, a number of provinces, including Alberta, Manitoba and Newfoundland and Labrador, have announced that they are temporarily halting vaccination with the AstraZeneca shots effective immediately.

In its statement, NACI said a decision on the second vaccine dose for those already vaccinated with the AstraZeneca shot should be made based on the "latest evidence and research." Canadian health regulators last week issued a disclaimer regarding blood clots that may potentially form in individuals who vaccinate with the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY  
WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) -

#### SITUATION IN SUEZ CANAL

- \* The container ship Ever Given that was blocking the Suez Canal is towed in the direction of the Bitter Lakes and the crisis is over, a source in the administration of the Suez Canal told Sputnik on Monday.
- \* Navigation has begun on the Suez Canal, which was previously blocked by a container ship; ships are being towed, Adm. Mohab Mamish, the Egyptian president's aide on the development of seaports and the Suez Canal, told Sputnik.
- \* Up to four days are required before the Suez Canal, which was blocked for nearly a week by a huge container ship, can be fully unloaded, Mamish told Sputnik.

#### PUTIN-MERKEL-MACRON TALKS

- \* A video conference between Russian President Vladimir Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron did not take place on Monday, German cabinet spokesman Steffen Seibert said, without providing further details.
- \* A videoconference of Putin, Merkel and Macron is being coordinated, it will focus on the situation in Donbas, among other issues, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

#### MYANMAR

- \* The United States is concerned about the escalation of violence in Myanmar and stressed that the country's military will pay a price for it, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said in a press briefing on Monday.
- \* The United States is suspending all trade engagement with Myanmar after the recent military coup in that country and subsequent violence against civilians there, the office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) said.
- \* The Kremlin is concerned about the growing number of civilian casualties in Myanmar, where mass protests are taking place, spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday, adding that the situation is being closely monitored.

\* The United Kingdom has requested consultations on Myanmar at the United Nations Security Council and they are expected to take place on Wednesday, a source at the UN Security Council told Ria Novosti.

#### CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

\* Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunizations (NACI) is recommending a pause on immunizing Canadians under the age of 55 with the Oxford-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine citing safety concerns, state broadcaster CBC reported on Monday.

\* US airports on Sunday screened the highest number of passengers on a single day since the start of the pandemic more than a year ago, Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Spokesperson Lisa Farbstein said.

\* President Joe Biden will announce later on Monday that 90 percent of adults in the United States will become eligible to receive coronavirus vaccines by April 19, White House said in a release.

#### ATTACK IN MOZAMBIQUE

\* At least 57 people, among them seven foreigners, were killed in a militant attack on the town of Palma in Mozambique, Julia Wachave, a representative of a local civil rights group Women's and Girls Association, told Sputnik on Monday.

\* Approximately 2,000 foreign workers fled Mozambique's Palma town after a militant attack, Julia Wachave, a representative of a local civil rights group Women's and Girls Association, told Sputnik.

#### US-UKRAINE RELATIONS

\* US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and the head of the Ukrainian Presidential Office on Monday discussed the steps the Biden administration aims to undertake to revitalize the bilateral strategic partnership in support of President Volodymyr Zelensky's policies, White House spokesperson Emily Horne said in a statement on Monday.

#### PUTIN'S PARTICIPATION IN CLIMATE SUMMIT

\* Moscow has received US President Joe Biden's invitation for Russian President Vladimir Putin to participate in the upcoming online climate summit, a source told Sputnik on Monday.

\* Putin attaches great importance to the climate issue, but it will take some time to make a decision on his participation in the US-initiated online summit, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

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US Citizen Successfully Evacuated From Mozambique's Palma After Militant Attack - Diplomat

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The State Department is aware of one US citizen present in Mozambique's town of Palma during an attack by militants and the person was successfully

evacuated, Acting Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State John Godfrey told reporters on Monday.

"We were aware of one American citizen who was on the ground in Palma and that individual as we understand it has successfully been evacuated," Godfrey said during a phone briefing. Last week, militants attacked Palma, a town in northern Mozambique that is home to international gas projects. The Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

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Biden to Watch Closely Officer Chauvin's Trial in Case of George Floyd Death - White House

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will follow closely the trial of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin in the case of the death of George Floyd, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters on Monday.

"He certainly will be watching closely as Americans across the country will be watching," Psaki said during a press briefing.

The trial started in Minneapolis, Minnesota, earlier on Monday.

Psaki declined to say whether Biden plans to talk with the Floyd family but noted that he did so last spring.

Biden conveyed his condolences then and was impressed by the Floyd family's courage, Psaki said.

Biden supports the George Floyd legislation introduced in Congress and hopes to receive it on his desk to sign, Psaki added.

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US Looks at Additional Actions in UN to Deter North Korea - Ambassador

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The United States is looking along with its allies Japan and South Korea to take additional actions in the United Nations to deter North Korea, United States Ambassador to the world body Linda Thomas-Greenfield told reporters on Monday.

"We are looking at the additional actions that we might take in New York," Thomas-Greenfield said during a virtual press briefing for foreign journalists.

The United States remains in close contact with Japan and South Korea regarding this matter, she also said.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during the briefing that he discussed the issue of North Korea with senior officials during his recent visit to the region as well as with his Chinese counterpart during their meeting in Alaska.

"We are in the midst of reviewing our policy and approach to North Korea and the conversations that we had with our allies and partners were very important," he said.

North Korea's provocations by conducting missile tests will not undermine the United States' alliance with South Korea and Japan, Blinken added.

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US Tells Ukraine Official Biden Seeks to Revitalize Ties to Support Zelensky - White House

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and the head of the Ukrainian Presidential Office on Monday discussed the steps the Biden administration aims to undertake to revitalize the bilateral strategic partnership in support of President Volodymyr Zelensky's policies, White House spokesperson Emily Horne said in a statement on Monday.

"He [Sullivan] relayed the Biden administration's commitment to revitalize our strategic partnership in support of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's plan to tackle corruption and implement a reform agenda that delivers justice, security and prosperity to the people of Ukraine," the statement said.

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Biden Says 90% of Adults in US Will Be Eligible for COVID-19 Vaccines By April 19

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Monday that 90 percent of the adults in the United States will be eligible for coronavirus vaccines by April 19.

"At least 90 percent of all adults in this country will be eligible to be vaccinated by April 19, just three weeks from now, because we have the vaccines," Biden said during a press briefing. "The final 10 percent will be eligible no later than May 1."

Moreover, those eligible will find themselves within 5 miles of the nearest vaccination location, he said.

Biden called on all US states and territories to reinstate the face mask mandate and added that businesses should also require people to wear masks.

During the past the three days, 10 million vaccine doses have been administered and more than 33 million vaccines will be administered later this week, Biden said.

Nearly 50 million Americans are fully vaccinated against the coronavirus, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

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## US Trade Chief, EC VP to Boost Cooperation on Non-Market Economies Like China - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - US Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai and European Commission Executive Vice President Margrethe Vestager in a virtual meeting on Monday agreed to strengthen cooperation on China and other non-market economies, the USTR's office said in a statement.

"They committed to strengthening US-EU cooperation on shared objectives related to large non-market economies, such as China," the release said.

Both sides agreed to cooperate on key priorities, including the digital economy and trade policy support for climate change objectives, as well as confirmed commitment to strong bilateral partnership, the release added.

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## Biden Tells US States to Pause Their Rush to Reopen From COVID

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden told US states on Monday to pause in their rush to reopen from COVID-19 lockdowns, warning that progress achieved from masking and vaccinations may come to naught if infections spike beyond control again.

"We are in a death race with a virus that is spreading quickly. With new variants spreading, sadly some of the reckless behavior we've seen on television over the past few weeks means that more new cases are to come in the weeks ahead," Biden told a media briefing, before replying "yes" to a question on whether some states should pause their reopening.

Rochelle Walensky, director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told a separate media briefing on Monday that she was "really worried" about the rollbacks of restrictions in some states.

Walensky cautioned that the plateauing case levels of COVID-19 "must be taken extremely seriously" or "we stand to completely lose the hard-earned ground we have gained". She added: "I know people are tired; they want to get back to life, to normal. But we're not there yet."

Biden said nearly 75 percent of Americans over the age of 65 will have received at least one shot of a two-shot vaccine by the end of this week.

"Yet, now is not the time to celebrate. Our duty (is) take care of one another. Don't let up now," he said, reiterating his call to every state governor, mayor and local leader to maintain and reinstate the masked mandate. "Please this is not politics," he added.

The resistance against masking and rush to open are mostly taking place in Republican-run states that are rival to Biden's Democratic party.

The United States is the country worst hit by the COVID-19 since its global outbreak last year, with over 30 million confirmed cases of the virus and nearly 550,000 deaths resulting from them.

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#### Minneapolis 911 Dispatcher Testifies to Calling Police While Witnessing Floyd's Arrest

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - Minneapolis 911 dispatcher Jena Scurry, the first witness to testify in the trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin, told a US court on Monday she got so alarmed by the livefeed of George Floyd's arrest she called a sergeant to share her concerns.

Scurry said on May 25, 2020 she decided to report to the police on the police for the first time in her career when she saw officers sitting on the suspect who appeared to be motionless.

"I first asked if the screens had frozen because it hadn't changed... I became concerned that something might be wrong," Scurry said. "I was concerned because of the length of the time the incident did not change."

She described it as "a gut instinct of... something is not going right."

Scurry admitted that she could not hear officers interactions and was not familiar with police rules for the use of force.

The record of her call was played at the court.

"I don't know if they have used force or not. They got something out of the squad [car] and all of them sat on this man," Scurry was heard saying.

Chauvin, the officer who put his knee on Floyd's neck during the arrest of the Minneapolis African-American man, is charged with second- and third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. He faces up to 40 years in prison if found guilty.

Chauvin's defense asked the jury to fully acquit him as it seeks to prove that his actions did not exceed permissible limits and did not result in Floyd's death.

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#### New Yorkers Aged 16+ to Be Vaccinated From April 6 - Governor

NEW YORK, March 29 (Sputnik) - New York state will start vaccinating from next week all residents aged 16 and above for the COVID-19, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced on Monday.

"Starting Tuesday, April 6 at 8am, all New Yorkers age 16+ will be eligible to schedule and receive the COVID-19 vaccines," Cuomo said in a tweet.

Over the next 24 hours, vaccination appointments will be opened to those aged 30 and above, he said.

New York state has some 19.5 million people, according to a 2019 census. According to the state's official website, more than 15 percent of its people have received full vaccination - meaning the two-shot Pfizer or Moderna or the one-shot Johnson & Johnson - for COVID-19.

A total of 239,288 doses were administered in the last 24 hours alone, making for a record high, the website said, adding that more than 1.0 million vaccines were given out over the past seven days.

President Joe Biden, who took office on January 20, has set a target of vaccinating 200 million Americans within the first 100 days of his administration, after exceeding in less than 60 days his earlier goal of administering 100 million vaccinations.

New York was the biggest COVID-19 hotspot at the height of the pandemic last year. At the peak of the outbreak in April, the state had about 18,000 people in hospital and there were roughly 800 people dying a day from complications caused by the virus.

On Sunday, COVID-19 hospitalizations in New York were at 8,926, with 164 fatalities.

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#### US Launches 30GW Offshore Wind Project - White House

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The United States hopes to create some 77,000 jobs over the next decade with its \$12 billion 30-Gigawatt (30,000 megawatts) offshore wind energy project that will meet demand of some 10 million homes, the White House announced Monday. "The Departments of Interior, Energy, and Commerce are announcing a shared goal to deploy 30 gigawatts of offshore wind in the United States by 2030, while protecting biodiversity and promoting ocean co-use," the White House said in a mission statement. "Meeting this target will trigger more than \$12 billion per year in capital investment in projects on both US coasts, create tens of thousands of good-paying, union jobs, with more than 44,000 workers employed in offshore wind by 2030 and nearly 33,000 additional jobs in communities supported by offshore wind activity."

The project will generate enough power to meet the demand of more than 10 million American homes for a year, and avoid 78 million metric tons of carbon-dioxide (CO2) emissions, the statement added.

Renewable energies are at the core of President Joe Biden's "Build Back Better" plan to steer America out of the coronavirus pandemic into new areas of growth that will create jobs by the thousands while drastically slashing the CO2 footprint in the world's largest economy. His administration is reducing its reliance on fossil fuels oil and gas to halve the US rate of emissions by 2030 under the US target for the Paris climate agreement.

"Nowhere is the scale of that opportunity clearer than for offshore wind," White House National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy said in the statement issued Monday. "This commitment to a new, untapped industry will create pathways to the middle class for people from all backgrounds and communities."

Meeting the 2030 target on wind energy will involve new port upgrade investments totaling more than \$500 million, the White House said.

It detailed the construction of one to two new US factories for each major windfarm component including wind turbine nacelles, blades, towers, foundations, and subsea cables; and additional

cumulative demand of more than 7 million tons of steel — equivalent to 4 years of output for a typical US steel mill.

The plan also involves the building of four to six specialized turbine installation vessels in US shipyards, each representing an investment between \$250 and \$500 million, the White House said.

The emission reforms have, however, drawn Biden into a political and legal battle with the attorney generals of 14 US states that have filed a lawsuit against his moratorium on lease renewals on oil and gas drilling on public lands and waters.

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#### NORAD Tracks 2 Russian TU-142 Patrol Aircraft Near Alaska - Alaskan Command

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - NORAD closely tracked two Russian TU-142 Patrol Aircraft as they flew in international airspace near Alaska, its Alaskan command said on Monday.

“At 4:50 a.m. (AKST), the Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense Region, in support of NORAD, positively identified and tracked two Tu-142 Russian maritime patrol aircraft entering the Alaskan Air Defense Identification Zone,” the Alaskan command said in a statement. NORAD pointed out that the Russian aircraft did not enter either US or Canadian sovereign airspace.

“As always, NORAD remains vigilant and ready to protect the sovereign airspace of Canada and the United States to deter, deny and defeat potential threats to our air and maritime approaches,” it added.

Two Russian aircraft Tu-142 flew over the water area of the North Sea and in the North-East Atlantic, the Northern Fleet said on Monday.

The flight was conducted over the neutral waters of the Barents, Norwegian and North Seas. In the initial phase of the flight over the Barents Sea, the aircraft were escorted by Su-33 fighters. The flight lasted about 11 hours.

During the flight over the water area of the Norwegian Sea, a pair of F-16 fighters of the Royal Norwegian Air Force were scrambled twice to escort them. In addition, two Typhoon fighters of the Royal Air Force escorted Tu-142 aircraft in the airspace over the North Sea, the Northern Fleet said.

The flight of the Russian aircraft was carried out in strict accordance with international rules for the use of airspace, it added.

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#### UN Chief in Meeting With Blinken Calls for Boosting Cooperation on COVID-19, Climate

UNITED NATIONS, March 29 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres proposed during a meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and the United States on coronavirus vaccinations, climate action and promotion of peace processes across the globe.

On Tuesday, Blinken undertook his first virtual visit to the United Nations, during which he chaired the UN Security Council meeting on the humanitarian situation in Syria and met with UN General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir.

"Cooperation between the United Nations and the United States is indeed critical for our common work," Guterres said. "The commitment and contribution of the United States are essential to resolve the many serious global challenges we face - starting with the COVID-19 pandemic."

Guterres said the United States can play a crucial role in the global vaccination plan that seeks help to end the coronavirus pandemic everywhere.

"I have proposed that the G20 should establish an emergency task force to develop and coordinate such a plan but there is no way that this can work without an effective American leadership," Guterres said.

Guterres also took note of the United States' return to the Paris Climate Agreement and expressed hope the US leadership could dramatically advance adaptation strategies in climate action.

The UN Secretary-General further said the United Nations and the United States will work to achieve lasting peace agreements in conflict settings, including in Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria, and restart the Middle East peace process.

"We need a new movement for peace, from war zones to people's homes," Guterres said.

Blinken responded by saying there is a wide range of issues on the shared agenda, including the situations in Ethiopia, Myanmar, the advancement of human rights as well as the COVID-19 response.

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**Biden Extends State of Emergency With Respect to South Sudan - White House**

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has extended an existing national emergency declaration with respect to South Sudan because activities there continue to pose a threat to the United States, the White House announced in a release on Monday.

"The situation in and in relation to South Sudan continues to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States. For this reason, the national emergency declared on April 3, 2014, must continue in effect beyond April 3, 2021," the release said. "Therefore... I am continuing for one year the national emergency declared in Executive Order 13664."

The situation in South Sudan is characterized with widespread violence and atrocities, human rights abuses, recruitment and use of child soldiers, attacks on peacekeepers and humanitarian workers and obstruction of humanitarian operations, the release also said.

In July, South Sudan will mark ten years of independence from Sudan. The country has been engulfed in a civil war between the government of President Salva Kiir and the opposition since 2013. Some 400,000 people have been killed during the conflict while more than four million have been displaced, according to the United Nations.

In September 2018, Kiir signed a peace agreement with rebel leader Riek Machar, after which the Transitional Government of National Unity was formed in February last year.

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US, India Conduct Naval Drills in Indo-Pacific Amid Vows to Boost Alliance Against China

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - An American carrier group integrated with the Indian Navy and Air Force as part of a joint exercise in the Indian Ocean, the USS Theodore Roosevelt Public Affairs office said in a release on Monday.

During a visit to New Delhi earlier this month, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the United States must work with partners like India to check Chinese aggression and ensure freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific.

"The Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group (TRCSG) conducted simultaneous joint multi-domain operations with the Indian Navy and Air Force in the Indian Ocean March 28-29, 2021," the release said. "It demonstrated the capacity of the two nations to operate together to advance a common vision of Indo-Pacific, ensuring peace and stability."

The joint exercise focused on such operations as anti-submarine warfare, joint air operations, and command and control integration, the release added.

The TRCSG is on a scheduled deployment to the US 7th Fleet operating between 50-70 ships and submarines and 140 aircraft with approximately 20,000 Sailors, according to the release. Earlier this year, strike groups of the USS Theodore Roosevelt carrier also participated in joint operations in the South China Sea.

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White House Says Biden Does Not Intend to Meet With North Korea's Kim

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden does not plan to meet with North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said in a briefing on Monday.

Biden said on Thursday that he is willing to do "some form of diplomacy" with North Korea, but conditioned any talks by reaching an end result of the country becoming denuclearized.

When asked whether this includes meeting with Kim, Psaki said, "I think his approach would be quite different, and that is not his intention."

On Friday, the White House said the United States is in the final stages of its policy review on North Korea.

Also on Friday, South Korean President Moon Jae-in announced the importance of further attempts to continue a dialogue with the United States and North Korea while noting that Seoul can protect itself from any provocations. The statement came as North Korea conducted two missile tests last week.

The dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang has stalled since the failed February 2019 summit in Hanoi, during which the United States demanded more decisive steps from North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons while Pyongyang accused Washington of not responding to the already taken steps. The October 2019 talks in Sweden failed to break the deadlock.

The inter-Korean dialogue is also at a low point following North Korea's decision to cut all lines of communication with Seoul last June.

From: Liudmila Chernova - liudmila.chernova84@gmail.com

Subject:

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Prosecution, Defense Present Cases for Ex-Officer's Conviction, Acquittal in Floyd Trial

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The prosecution and defense asked the jury to convict and acquit respectively former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin of murdering George Floyd as they cited in their opening statements on Monday conflicting medical reports and focused on different episodes of the incident.

Attorney Jerry Blackwell in an hour-long presentation showed a well-known video of Floyd dying after under Chauvin's knee and vowed to prove an excessive use of force and an assault that contributed to taking his life. Defense attorney Eric Nelson in his 25-minute speech argued that the evidence is "far greater than 9 minutes and 29 seconds" and offered a glimpse into preceding events to shed a more favorable light on the policeman's behavior.

"We are going to ask at the end of this case that you find Mr. Chauvin guilty for his excessive use of force against George Floyd that was an assault that contributed to taking his life and for engaging in imminently dangerous behavior - put the knee on the neck, the knee on the back for 9 minutes and 29 seconds without regard for Mr. Floyd's life. We are going to ask that you find him guilty of murder in the second degree, murder in the third degree and second degree of manslaughter," Blackwell said.

Blackwell vowed to provide proof that Floyd died of oxygen deprivation caused at least partially by Chauvin's actions and not because of a fatal heart attack or a drug overdose.

"We are going to show you that putting... a knee on his back for 9 minutes and 29 seconds was an imminently dangerous activity and he did it without regard to what impact it had on Mr. Floyd's life. We are going to show you also that putting him on the ground, we call it the prone position, on your stomach, face down, putting him in the prone position handcuffed like this in the first place was uncalled for, it was an excessive use of force, let alone for 9 minutes and 29 seconds," Blackwell said.

Chauvin has been charged with murder in the second degree, murder in the third degree and manslaughter for using excessive force against Floyd.

"In terms of the charges that we are bringing we are going to prove to you that Mr. Chauvin's conduct was a substantial cause of Mr. Floyd's death... We will show you that this was an assault that contributed to taking his life," Blackwell said.

Nelson claimed that medics found "none of the telltale signs of asphyxiation."

"There were no bruises to Mr. Floyd's neck either on his skin or after peeling his skin back to the muscles beneath... There was no evidence that Mr. Floyd's air flow was restricted," he said adding that blood samples identified the presence of drugs in Floyd's body as well as exceptionally high levels of carbon dioxide.

"The evidence will show that Mr. Floyd died of cardiac arrhythmia that occurred as a result of hypertension, his coronary disease, the ingestion of methamphetamine and fentanyl and the adrenaline flowing through his body, all of which acted to further comprise an already compromised part," Nelson added.

Blackwell argued that the harsh treatment of Floyd by the police was unwarranted.

"What you are going to learn that it was about a counterfeit \$20 bill used at the convenience store. That's all. You will not hear any evidence that Mr. Floyd knew it was fake or did this on purpose. You will learn from witnesses we will call that the police officers could have written him a ticket and let a court sort that out. You will learn that even if he did it on purpose it was a minor offense, a misdemeanor," he said.

However, Nelson said the grocery store staff called the police only after they twice went out to ask Floyd to either pay for cigarettes or return the pack. The call described him as "drunk" and unable "to control himself," the lawyer alleged. Nelson also said that Floyd fall asleep in his car and his friends could not wake him up.

When police officers finally arrived at the scene, he allegedly failed to respond to their orders and "put drugs in his mouth in an attempt to conceal them." He struggled with policemen as they attempted to put him on their car and the three of them "couldn't overcome the strength of Mr. Floyd," Nelson said.

He promised to show a video of the car "rocking back and forth during the struggle" and that the struggle continued in the street prompting the police to resort to "a maximum restraint technique."

Nelson also took aim at a bystanders crowd which grew increasingly hostile to the policemen allegedly causing them to divert attention from Floyd already pinned to the ground. The lawyer described is as "a high stress use of force situation" and in complete contrast to the prosecution arguments defended Chauvin's behavior as fully consistent with "what he was trained for."

"When you review the actual evidence and hear the law and apply reason and common sense there will be only just verdict and that is to find Mr. Chauvin not guilty," the lawyer concluded his statement.

Both Blackwell and Nelson warned against the politicization of the case underscoring that it is against Chauvin alone and not the institution of police in general. The verdict will be decided by 14 jurors who were sworn by judge Peter Cahil before opening statements.

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Biden to Announce 90% of Americans to Be Eligible for Vaccines by April 19 - White House

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden will announce later on Monday that 90 percent of adults in the United States will become eligible to receive coronavirus vaccines by April 19, White House said in a release.

"President Biden will unveil new actions to get more people vaccinated quickly and announce that by April 19, 90 percent of adults in the US will be eligible for vaccination and 90 percent will have a vaccination site within 5 miles of where they live," the release said.

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Canada Sanctions 2 Individuals, 4 Entities Over Crimea Rejoining Russia - Global Affairs

TORONTO, March 29 (Sputnik) - Canada has imposed sanctions on two Russian executives and four entities in response to the decision of the people of Crimea to rejoin Russia, Global Affairs Canada said on Monday.

"Marc Garneau, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today announced new sanctions against 2 individuals and 4 entities, under the Special Economic Measures (Russia) Regulations and the Special Economic Measures (Ukraine) Regulations, in response to Russia's illegal occupation and annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea," Global Affairs said in a statement. Impacted by the sanctions are Aleksandr Ganov, the head of the Crimean Railway, which was also included in the latest sanctions package, and Leonid Ryzhenkin, General Director of the Mostotrest, which built the Crimean Bridge.

The latest round of anti-Russian sanctions also targets First Crimean Insurance Company, JSC Lenpromtransproyekt and JSC "The Berkakit-Tommot-Yakutsk Railway Line's Construction Directorate."

Crimea rejoined Russia on March 16, 2014, after over 95 percent of voters backed the move in a referendum, which followed a violent power change in Ukraine. Two days later, an agreement on Crimea's accession to the Russian Federation was signed.

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US Made Clear Escalation of Violence in Myanmar Will Cost Military Regime - White House

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned about the escalation of violence in Myanmar and has made clear that the country's military will pay a price for it, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said in a press briefing on Monday.

"We are deeply concerned by the recent escalation of violence against peaceful protesters in Burma [Myanmar]. Burmese security forces are responsible for hundreds of deaths since they perpetrated a coup on February 1," Psaki said. "The Burmese junta continues to use lethal force against its own people. Last week's killing of children is just the most recent example of the horrific nature of the violence perpetrated by the military regime. We continue to make clear that we will impose costs on the military regime for the deadly violence against peaceful protesters and the suppression of human rights."

Earlier on Monday, the office of the US Trade Representative said the United States is suspending all trade engagements with Myanmar after the recent military coup and subsequent violence against civilians there.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) in Myanmar, more than 90 people were killed during protests against the military rule on Saturday and more than 420 people have been killed since the military seized took over the government early last month. On February 1, Myanmar's military seized power and announced a one-year state of emergency and vowing to take action against alleged voter fraud during the November 8 general election. The military said it was committed to the democratic system and vowed to hold new and fair elections after the state of emergency ends.

The United States and the United Kingdom have imposed sanctions against multiple individuals and entities affiliated with Myanmar's military, as well as some of Myanmar's conglomerates.

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**Ex-Pentagon Chief Hagel Says US Must Leave Afghanistan, But Responsibly**

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The United States should fully withdraw from Afghanistan but it must do so responsibly, former Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said on Monday.

Last week, President Joe Biden said due to "tactical reasons" the US was unlikely to meet the May 1 deadline to exit Afghanistan stipulated in the agreement the Trump administration struck with the insurgents.

"I think it's time we have to leave [Afghanistan] but it has to be done responsibly," Hagel told a conference organized by The Hill political newspaper.

However, Hagel also said May 1 is not a deadline that could ever have been achieved.

Hagel criticized previous President Donald Trump's agreement at Doha with the Taliban to withdraw all US military forces from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021. Trump's decision to ignore the Afghan government and make a deal with the Taliban behind Kabul's back echoed President Richard Nixon's pullout talks on Vietnam 50 years ago.

According to media reports last week, American intelligence warned the White House that Afghanistan could be taken over by the Taliban militants if American troops leave before a power-sharing agreement is in place.

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US Encouraged by Announcement Eritrean Troops to Exit Tigray - White House

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The United States is encouraged by the announcement that Eritrean troops will leave the Tigray region, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters on Monday.

On Friday, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali said that Eritrea has agreed to pull its forces from Ethiopia's restive border region of Tigray.

"We are encouraged by the [Ethiopian] Prime Minister's announcement that the state of Eritrea has agreed to withdraw its forces from Ethiopia," Psaki said during press briefing. "The immediate and complete withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Tigray will be an important step in de-escalating the conflict and restoring regional peace and stability."

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White House Says Biden Does Not Intend to Meet With North Korea's Kim

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden does not plan to meet with North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said in a briefing on Monday.

Biden said on Thursday that he is willing to do "some form of diplomacy" with North Korea, but conditioned any talks by reaching an end result of the country becoming denuclearized.

When asked whether this includes meeting with Kim, Psaki said, "I think his approach would be quite different, and that is not his intention."

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US Must Invest in Repairing Decaying Alliances - Director of National Intelligence

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The United States must work to repair and strengthen the alliances with its main allies to mend damage done to them during the Trump administration, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said on Monday.

"We do have to rebuild some trust with allies," Haines told a conference organized by The Hill. "It is increasingly important for us to invest in those partnerships."

The United States needed to be able to use the leverage that its alliances and intelligence relationships with other nations such as Australia provided to it in order to face an increasingly complex array of threats arraigned against it, Haines explained.

"We all want to leverage what the others are doing: What the Australians are finding [for example]" Haines said. "We are watching an increasing pace of threats that have interdisciplinary elements to them."

The US government and intelligence services had to do a better job of integrating the intelligence it was receiving across a wide array of disciplines and fields, Haines added.

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CDC Head Says Has Feeling of 'Impending Doom' as Coronavirus Cases, Deaths Increase in US

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky said she feels scared about the possibility of an "impending doom" in the United States after a new increase in the number of novel coronavirus cases and related deaths over the past week.

"I'm gonna lose the script and I'm gonna reflect on the recurring feeling I have of impending doom," Walensky said. "Deaths which typically lying behind cases and hospitalizations, have now started to rise, increasing nearly 3 percent to a seven-day average of approximately 1000 deaths per day."

Walensky said the number of cases in the United States surpassed 30 million while the daily average number of cases increased from 54,030 to 59,773. Hospital admissions are also on the rise, from 4,621 to 4,816 admissions per day, she added.

The trajectory of the pandemic in the United States is similar to countries in Europe, including Germany, Italy, and France, which have also experienced recently a spike in the number of coronavirus cases.

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US Made Clear Escalation of Violence in Myanmar Will Cost Military Regime - White House

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned about the escalation of violence in Myanmar and stressed that the country's military will pay a price for it, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said in a press briefing on Monday.

"We are deeply concerned by the recent escalation of violence against peaceful protesters in Burma [Myanmar]. Burmese security forces are responsible for hundreds of deaths since they perpetrated a coup on February 1," Psaki said. "The Burmese junta continues to use lethal force against its own people. Last week's killing of children is just the most recent example of the horrific nature of the violence perpetrated by the military regime. We continue to make clear that

we will impose costs on the military regime for the deadly violence against peaceful protesters and the suppression of human rights."

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UN Concerned by Situation in Mozambique's Palma, Deplores Deadly Attacks - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, March 29 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is deeply concerned about the evolving situation in the town of Palma in Mozambique and condemns in strong terms last week's deadly attacks claimed by the Islamic State (IS, banned in Russia) terror group, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a statement on Monday.

"We are deeply concerned by the still evolving situation in Palma where armed attacks began on March 24, reportedly killing dozens of people, including some trying to flee a hotel where they had taken shelter," Dujarric said. "We strongly condemn the attacks and extend our deep condolences to the families of the victims and the government of Mozambique."

Earlier in the day, a representative of a local civil rights group, Women's and Girls Association, told Sputnik that at least 57 people, among them seven foreigners, were killed in last week's militant attack.

Nearly 2,000 locals fled to nearby forests, while field workers, among them foreigners, and officials took refuge in the Amarula Hotel. The military has announced an operation to retake the destroyed town.

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Canada Advisory Committee to Recommend Pausing AstraZeneca Vaccine Inoculations - CBC

TORONTO, March 29 (Sputnik) - Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunizations (NACI) is recommending a pause on immunizing Canadians under the age of 55 with the Oxford-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine citing safety concerns, state broadcaster CBC reported on Monday.

The new guidance is expected to be released later in the afternoon, the report said.

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white house says biden does not intend to meet north korea's kim

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US Offers Up to \$10M In Reward for Information on Senior Hezbollah Operative - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The United States has offered a reward of up to \$10 million for information that would result in determining the location or identification of senior Hezbollah operative Salim Jamil Ayyash, a US State Department said in a release on Monday. "The US Department of State's Rewards for Justice program is offering a reward of up to \$10 million for information leading to the location or identification of Salim Jamil Ayyash, a senior operative in the assassination unit of the terrorist organization Lebanese Hizballah, or information leading to preventing him from engaging in an act of international terrorism against a US person or US property," the release said.

The State Department explained that Ayyash is a senior operative in Hezbollah's Unit 121, its assassinations squad, which gets orders directly from the group's leader Hasan Nasrallah. "Ayyash is known to have been involved in efforts to harm US military personnel," the release said. "On December 11, 2020, an international tribunal sentenced Ayyash in absentia to five concurrent sentences of life imprisonment on terrorism-related charges pertaining to the February 2005 suicide truck bombing in Beirut that killed Lebanon's former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri."

The State Department noted that 21 people were killed in the attack and 226 others were wounded.

"The tribunal found that Ayyash led the 'assassination team' that carried out the attack on Hariri and was actively involved in the assassination on the day of the attack," the release said.

Hezbollah has been designated as a terrorist organization by more than 20 countries, including the United States, Israel, Canada and the United Kingdom. The European Union has designated Hezbollah's military wing a terrorist organization.

Russia does not consider Hezbollah to be a terror group.

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Russia Receives Reports of US Carrying Oil From Syria to Iraq 'Every Day' - Vershinin

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - Russia continues to receive reports about US convoys transferring daily oil and grain from Syria to Iraq, Russian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Vershinin said during a UN Security Council meeting on Monday.

"We are still receiving information that American convoys carry oil and grain out of Syria in to Iraq every day," Vershinin said.

Vershinin pointed out that 300 oil trucks crossed the Syria-Iraq border on March 23 alone as ascertained from the information in the received reports.

"It's clear while Syrians are suffering from a severe lack of goods including bread and oil, this tide of contraband Syrian natural resources leaving the US-controlled area on the Euphrates are in parallel there's a economic suffocation of the country as a result of unilateral sanctions which is a form of collective punishment," Vershinin said.

Syria has been engulfed in an armed conflict since 2011 as opposition and terrorist groups have fought to topple the government of President Bashar Assad. While victory over the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) in Syria and Iraq was announced at the end of 2017,

government forces continue security operations in some parts of Syria. However, priority is given to reaching a political settlement, returning of refugees and restoring Syria. According to data published by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 6 million people are displaced within Syria and as many as 6.6 million have fled the country as refugees since 2011.

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UPDATE: US Calls for Reopening 3 Border Crossings Into Syria to Humanitarian Aid - Blinken

UNITED NATIONS, March 29 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged the UN Security Council on Monday to reauthorize the opening of three border crossings to deliver aid to the people in need in northwest Syria.

"Let's reauthorize both border crossings that have been closed and reauthorize the one border crossing that remains open," Blinken said.

In January 2020, the number of accessible border points was reduced to two: the Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa crossings from Turkey. Six months later, the UN Security Council extended the mandate for aid deliveries through only one crossing - Bab al-Hawa for 12 months.

According to Blinken, there was no reason for the Security Council's decision not to reauthorize the two crossings from Turkey back in July. He explained that the reduction of crossings meant that UN convoys were forced to move through multiple lines of control, negotiating access and traveling longer distances, all of which made the work of aid workers more dangerous.

"The crossings provided a path for delivering aid that was more economical, safer, more efficient," Blinken stated. "In their absence, delivering aid is costlier, more perilous, less efficient."

Authorized by a UN Security Council in 2014, the mechanism initially allowed the United Nations and humanitarian partners to bring aid into Syria from the four border-crossings in Turkey, Iraq and Jordan.

Russia had been seeking to limit the number of cross-border aid deliveries into Syria to just one checkpoint, Bab al-Hawa, which is used for about 90 percent of UN deliveries to northwestern Syria.

The Russian position is that the cross-border aid delivery mechanism was a temporary and urgent measure initiated in 2014 and that the current situation in Syria, where government forces have regained control over most of the territories, no longer requires the work of so many cross-border checkpoints, which threaten Syrian sovereignty.

Syria and Russia have stated that humanitarian aid should now be managed via cross-line operations from Damascus.

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### Johnson & Johnson Reaches Deal to Supply Up to 400Mln Coronavirus Vaccines to Africa

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - Johnson & Johnson has reached a deal with the African Vaccine Acquisition Trust to provide at least 220 million coronavirus vaccines to the African Union and a total of up to 400 million doses if states on that continent need more, the company said in a statement said on Monday.

Under the deal, Johnson & Johnson unit Janssen Pharmaceutica will commence the supply of the vaccines from the third quarter of 2021 and the African Union has "the potential to order an additional 180 million doses, for a combined total of up to 400 million doses through 2022," the statement said.

Johnson & Johnson pointed out it was committed to ensuring equitable global access to its single-shot COVID-19 vaccine candidate under not-for-profit emergency pandemic use, citing its agreements with the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (Gavi) and the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX).

The company also said it expects to enter into an advance purchase agreement with Gavi to provide up to 500 million doses of its coronavirus vaccine to the COVAX program through 2022.

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### US Deploys Robot Dogs on Active Service to Guard Florida Base - Air Force

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has started to deploy robot artificial dogs on guard duty at a major military installation in Florida, the US Air Force announced in an official report on Monday.

"The first official semi-autonomous robot dogs were delivered to Tyndall Air Force Base March 22 for integration into the 325th Security Forces Squadron," the Air Force News Service (AFNS) said in the report.

The purpose of the Quad-legged Unmanned Ground Vehicles, or Q-UGVs, is to add an extra level of protection to the base, the report explained.

"The robot dogs, designed by Ghost Robotics and Immersive Wisdom, are the first of their kind to be integrated onto a military installation and one of many innovation-based initiatives to begin at Tyndall AFB, coined the 'Installation of the Future,'" the report said.

Features applied to the robot dogs allow for easy navigation on difficult terrains as they can operate in minus 40-degree to 131-degree Fahrenheit conditions and have 14 sensors to create 360-degree awareness, the report said. The robot dogs are also equipped with a crouch mode that lowers their center-of-gravity, it added.

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US Extends Freeze on Tenant Evictions Until June - Health Agency

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The United States has extended until June its freeze on eviction of tenants unable to pay rent to help stop the spread of the novel coronavirus, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced on Monday.

"The moratorium that was scheduled to expire on March 31, 2021 is now extended through June 30, 2021," CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said in a statement. "Keeping people in their homes and out of crowded or congregate settings - like homeless shelters - by preventing evictions is a key step in helping to stop the spread of COVID-19."

The White House said in a separate statement that the Biden administration was continuing its multi-agency effort to support both tenants and landlords, especially through assistance of rent and utility payments.

The departments of Treasury, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and the Federal Trade Commission are coordinating these efforts in addition to the CDC, the White House said.

The freeze on evictions as well as government assistance for rent has been in place since the pandemic broke out last March last year.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April at the height of lockdowns and other restrictive measures forced by the government. About 10 million of those jobs may have not returned, data shows. The economy itself shrank 3.5 percent in 2020, after a 2.2 percent growth in 2019.

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US Jury Sworn In Ahead of Trial of Police Officer Charged With Killing George Floyd

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - US judge Peter Cahil swore in on Monday the jury in the trial of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin over the death of George Floyd. A brief swearing-in ceremony followed immediately by an explanation of the rules of procedure preceded opening statements by the defense and prosecution. Over the last three weeks, 15 jurors were selected. Twelve of them will deliberate with two serving as alternates. One was to be dismissed provided that all the others showed up on Monday.

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Membership in Religious Organizations in US Falls to Record Low in 80 Years - Poll

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The United States remains a religious nation but it is experiencing the lowest level of religious membership in eight decades as fewer than 47 percent of its residents regularly attend an institution of worship, a new Gallup poll revealed on Monday. The survey showed 47 percent Americans belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque in 2020 - a record decline from 50 percent in 2018 and 70 percent in 1999. The highest level of US church membership, 73 percent, was noted by Gallup in 1937. Membership remained near 70 percent for the next 60 years before it started to fall at the turn of the 21st century, a release explaining the poll said. The decline in church membership is consistent with larger societal trends in declining church attendance and an increasing proportion of Americans with no religious preference, the release said. The latter has increased from 8 percent in 1998-2000 to 21 percent in the past three years. The poll results show the decline is bigger among Catholics, from 76 to 58 percent, than among Protestants, from 73 to 64 percent. The decline among Conservatives, Republicans, married adults and college graduates is also lower than among Democrats. The survey results are based on a three-year aggregate from 2018-2020 consisting of data from over 6,000 adults.

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Facebook, Google Plan New Pacific Cable Links to Indonesia, Singapore - Statements

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - Facebook and Google plan to build two new communications cables under the Pacific Ocean between North America and Southeast Asia to boost their information carrying capacity by 70 percent, Facebook announced in a statement on Monday.

"We are announcing two vital new subsea cables to connect Singapore, Indonesia, and North America," the statement from Facebook Engineering said. "These will be the first transpacific

cables through a new diverse route crossing the Java Sea and will increase overall transpacific capacity by 70 percent."

The goal of the cables was to produce faster service on the Internet, the statement explained. "We are committed to bringing more people online to a faster internet. As part of this effort, we're proud to announce that we have partnered with leading regional and global partners to build two new subsea cables - Echo and Bifrost - that will provide vital new connections between the Asia-Pacific region and North America," the statement added.

The two projects are still subject to regulatory approval but they are projected to meet rapidly increasing demand for 4G, 5G, and broadband access, according to the statement.

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Chauvin Trial Serves as Referendum on US Racial Equality - Floyd Family Lawyer

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin will serve as a referendum on how far the United States has come in its effort to ensure racial equality, Attorney for George Floyd's family Ben Crump said on Monday.

"Today starts a landmark trial that will be a referendum on how far America has come in its quest for equality and justice for all," Crump told reporters ahead of opening arguments in Chauvin's trial later on Monday.

Crump noted that many observers were predicting Chauvin's trial would be hard case for the prosecution because of Floyd's known drug use. Chauvin's defense attorneys would seek to argue that Floyd died of a drug overdose, Crump said.

"This murder case is not hard," Crump said. "George Floyd was living and breathing just fine until the police put a knee on his neck."

Crump said that instead of focusing on Floyd's character, the trial should hone in on Chauvin's past actions, including 19 civilian complaints against him for using excessive force as an officer. Also speaking at the press conference, civil rights activist Rev Al Sharpton echoed Crump's argument that the trial would serve as a test of where the United States stands on racial equality.

"Chauvin is in the court room but America is on trial," Sharpton said.

Floyd died in police custody last May after Chauvin kneeled on his neck for eight minutes, despite Floyd's pleas that he could not breathe. His death sparked a nationwide wave of protests against racially motivated police brutality.

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US Suspends Trade Engagement With Myanmar - Trade Representative

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - The United States is suspending all trade engagement with Myanmar after the recent military coup in that country and subsequent violence against civilians there, the office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) said in a statement on Monday.

"United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai today announced the suspension of all US engagement with Burma under the 2013 Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), effective immediately," the statement said. "This suspension will remain in effect until the return of a democratically elected government."

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SolarWinds Hackers Got Emails of Top Officials at US Homeland Security Dept. – Reports

WASHINGTON, March 18 (Sputnik) - The hackers responsible for the SolarWinds attack were able to obtain the emails of top officials in the US Department of Homeland Security including its acting secretary at the time, the Associated Press reported on Monday, citing its own sources.

The intrusion compromised the accounts of then-acting Homeland Security Secretary Chald Wolf, as well as the emails of the department's cybersecurity officials who are tasked with identifying and tracking down threats from foreign countries, the report said.

DHS did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment on the Associated Press report.

According to the report, the hackers were also able to obtain the private schedules of senior officials at the Energy Department, including then-Secretary Dan Brouillette.

Another official confirmed that the Federal Aviation Administration was among agencies compromised by the attack, the report said.

US officials have alleged that Russian hackers were likely behind the massive cyberattack that targeted at least nine US federal agencies and 18,000 private companies.

Russia has denied the allegations, saying they are groundless.

The suspects embedded malware in updates and patches issued by SolarWinds, which supports government data, to penetrate networks in search for sensitive information.

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US Airports See Highest Number of Passengers Since Pandemic - Transportation Agency

WASHINGTON, March 29 (Sputnik) - US airports on Sunday screened the highest number of passengers on a single day since the start of the pandemic more than a year ago, Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Spokesperson Lisa Farbstein said on Monday.

"TSA screened 1,574,228 people yesterday, Sunday, March 28th," Farbstein said via Twitter. "It was the busiest day in a little more than a year when 1,714,372 people were screened on March 12, 2020."