

9/29/20 Wires

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Russia Wants Assurances US Not Backing Terrorist Activities in Crimea - Antonov

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov on Tuesday said that it is in the interest of the US administration to deny reports of supporting Ukrainian fighters and terrorist activities on the Crimean Peninsula.

Earlier in September, the NBC News broadcaster reported that the United States had armed some Ukrainian units fighting Russian forces in Crimea, citing current and former US officials. The Russian embassy said the unnamed US officials in fact confirmed that Washington was supporting terrorist activities in third countries, particularly in Russia.

"It is in Washington's interests to publicly disavow these 'revelations' as soon as possible, to make clear assurances of non-involvement in subversive and terrorist activities on the peninsula, that is, in Russia," Antonov told reporters. "We remember attempts to organize terrorist attacks. Detentions of extremist elements in Crimea occur periodically. The State Department stands up for them. In other words, we have grounds for concern."

Antonov continued to say that he is aware of the attempts by the Russian media to get comments from the State Department, the Pentagon, and other official structures on this issue, which were to no avail.

"Can we rule out that the 'hot heads' in Kiev will not try to drag Washington into some next adventure? Not yet," the ambassador said. "It's time to put an end to this episode. The United States must decide which side it is on: peace or war."

Crimea rejoined Russia on March 18, 2014, after 97 percent of those participating in a regional referendum voted for the reunification. Ukraine and the majority of Western countries continue to consider Crimea as Ukrainian territory despite the referendum.

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US Expects to Receive First Israeli Iron Dome Missile Defense System by Year End - General

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The US military expects to receive its first Israeli-made Iron Dome missile defense system at the end of 2020, US Army Space and Missile Defense Command head Daniel Karbler said on Tuesday.

"I am looking forward to how that system performs, how Army soldiers will operate that system. That is currently on schedule right now for delivery here at the end of the year," Karbler said during the 2020 Virtual Fires Conference.

The Iron Dome, a system designed specifically to intercept short-range projectiles, is believed to be the world's most-used missile defense system with more than 2,500 operational intercepts

and a success rate exceeding 90 percent. The system deployed mainly along Israel's southern borders to counter Palestinian attacks from Gaza.

In March, Karbler said the US Army plans to field and test two Iron Dome batteries that may be subsequently used to protect United States' military installations in Iraq, Syria or Afghanistan. Last month, US defense contractor Raytheon and Israeli company Rafael signed an agreement to produce the Iron Dome in the United States to complement initial deliveries from Israel.

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Trump Arrives in Cleveland for First 2020 Presidential Debate - White House

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump has arrived in Cleveland, Ohio for the first presidential debate against his Democratic rival Joe Biden later on Tuesday, according to a White House pool report.

The debate will start at 9:00 p.m. Eastern Time and run for 90 minutes without commercial interruption.

The topics for tonight's debate will be the Trump and Biden records, the Supreme Court, COVID-19, the economy, race and violence in US cities, and the integrity of the election.

The two candidates will face each other again on October 15 in Miami and on October 22 in Nashville.

A recent poll conducted by Monmouth University found that Biden is currently supported by 50 percent of registered voters and Trump by 44 percent. The remaining support is scattered across third-party candidates, including Libertarian Jo Jorgensen and the Green Party's Howie Hawkins, while two percent of voters remain undecided.

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Trump Sends Nomination of Amy Barrett for Supreme Court to Senate - White House

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump sent the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett to the Senate for confirmation, the Office of the White House Press Secretary said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Nomination sent to the Senate: Amy Coney Barrett, of Indiana, to be an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, vice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, deceased," the statement said.

On Saturday, President Donald Trump nominated Barrett to replace the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said earlier this month that the Senate would vote on Trump's pick to replace Ginsburg regardless of criticism by the Democrats. The Republican Party currently holds a 53-47 majority in the Senate.

Confirmation hearings for Barrett will begin on October 12 and will last for up to four days, according to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Earlier this month, US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, 87, died of complications from metastatic pancreatic cancer at her home in Washington. Before her passing, the US Supreme Court was already stacked with a 5-4 conservative majority.

The Democrats have been highly critical of Trump's intention to fill the vacant Supreme Court seat just weeks before the presidential election. Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden has urged the Senate not to approve the nomination before the November 3 presidential election.

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US Court Rules Trump Cannot Halt Order Blocking Census Presidential Memo - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - A US appeals court has ruled that the Trump administration cannot suspend a federal court order that is blocking a presidential memorandum that is seeking to exclude undocumented immigrants from the process that determines congressional representation in each state based on population, a court document revealed on Tuesday.

"In sum, Defendants have not come close to carrying 'the[ir] burden of showing that the circumstances justify an exercise' of our discretion to grant a stay," the court document said. "They fail to show that they are likely to succeed on the merits or that a stay would be in the public interest...Defendants' arguments about irreparable harm and urgency are frivolous. Accordingly, Defendants' motion for a stay is denied."

On September 10, the US District Court for the Southern District of New York ruled that the presidential memorandum violates US law.

Trump is concerned that counting undocumented immigrants in the apportionment process could result in the allocation of two or three more congressional seats in certain US states. Last July, Trump issued an executive order that instructed the Commerce Department to gather data on the number of US citizens, non-citizens and undocumented immigrants in the United States over concerns that illegal immigrants were being counted for the apportionment for congressional representation.

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UPDATE 2 - Biden Releases Tax Returns Ahead of 1st Presidential Debate Against Trump

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden has released his tax returns ahead of the first presidential debate Tuesday in a move that could add pressure on President Donald Trump to do the same.

Biden's tax statement shows him and wife Jill having collectively earned \$517,334 in 2019 and paying \$346,204, while receiving a refund of \$46,858. The New York Times reported on Sunday that Trump contributed just \$750 each for 2016 as well as 2017, his first year in the White House. The report also said Trump paid no income taxes at all in ten of the previous 15 years, largely because he reported losing much more money than he made.

Trump denied the claims in a series of tweets on Monday, labeling the report as yet another instance of corporate-owned media "fake news."

He said he was entitled to depreciation and tax credits like everyone else.

Trump classified costs associated with his homes, planes, golf courses - even \$70,000 in hairstyle expenses - as business expenses for tax purposes, AP reported.

Trump promised in 2016 to release his tax returns, but said he could not do so while being audited by the Internal Revenue Service.

The US president has also resisted providing his returns just as prosecutors in New York, his former state of residence, tried to obtain them on grounds that he may have committed tax fraud.

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Air Travel Industry Needs Global Coronavirus Testing Plan Amid Falling Demand - IATA

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - Internationally-agreed on testing for the novel coronavirus is critical to restoring the air travel industry as significantly low travel demand continued in the month of August, the International Air Transport Association watchdog (IATA) said in a statement on Tuesday.

IATA noted that International passenger demand plummeted 88.3 percent compared to August 2019 and only mildly improved over the 91.8 percent decline recorded in July.

"We need an internationally agreed regime of pre-departure COVID-19 testing to give governments the confidence to reopen borders, and passengers the confidence to travel by air again. Globally tens of millions of jobs depend on aviation," the statement said.

IATA downgraded its traffic forecast for the rest of 2020 to reflect a weaker-than-expected recovery, predicting full-year traffic to be down 66 percent compared to 2019. Its previously estimate noted a decline of 63 percent.

Forward bookings for air travel in the fourth quarter show that the recovery since the April low point will continue to falter, the statement added.

IATA's Director General and CEO Alexandre de Juniac said in the statement. That August's "disastrous traffic performance" puts a cap on the industry's worst-ever summer season.

"International demand recovery is virtually non-existent and domestic markets in Australia and Japan actually regressed in the face of new outbreaks and travel restrictions," he said.

Juniac explained that cash generated during the busy summer season in the northern hemisphere traditionally provided airlines with a cushion during the lean autumn and winter seasons.

"This year, airlines have no such protection. Absent additional government relief measures and a reopening of borders, hundreds of thousands of airline jobs will disappear. But it is not just airlines and airline jobs at risk. If borders don't reopen the livelihoods of these people will be at grave risk," Juniac said.

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US Special Envoy Departs for Doha to Support More Intra-Afghan Peace Talks - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US Special Representative for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad has departed for Doha, Qatar, to support additional intra-Afghan peace talks this week, the Department of State said in a statement on Tuesday.

"US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad departed for Doha, Qatar and the region on September 29," the statement said. "While in the region, Ambassador Khalilzad will meet with partners to discuss Afghan-owned, Afghan-led peace negotiations and prospects for increased regional connectivity, trade, and development following a peace settlement."

Khalilzad will meet with all the negotiating teams involved in the intra-Afghan peace talks to reaffirm the United States' support for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in the country. The intra-Afghan negotiations began on September 12, with both sides publicly expressing their desire to conclude a secure and long-lasting ceasefire to end Afghanistan's long-running conflict.

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Canadian Economy to Recover to Pre-Pandemic Level by 2022 - Report

TORONTO, September 29 (Sputnik) - The Canadian economy is expected to recover to the pre-coronavirus pandemic levels by early 2022, the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) said in a report on Tuesday.

"We project that growth in real GDP will slow considerably from its recent pace. As the labour market recovers and household and business confidence improve, the economy will recuperate more of the initial loss in output. We project that the level of real GDP will reach its pre-crisis level by early-2022," the report said.

In the Economic and Fiscal Outlook for September, the PBO warned that the "COVID-19 pandemic and oil price shocks will have a permanent impact on the Canadian economy." The Canadian economy will decline by a 3.6 percent in the fourth quarter of 2021 and 1.6 percent by the end of 2024 compared to projections produced in last November's fiscal outlook, the report said.

The Fiscal Outlook also warned that the current projections could be undermined by a second-wave-induced shutdown and increased rates on government borrowing.

The PBO said in the report that Canada's economic recovery will continue to be hampered by the slow recovery of global oil prices.

The PBO said it projects West Texas Intermediate (WTI) and Western Canada Select prices will be lower on average at \$15 and \$8, respectively, compared to the November 2019 Fiscal Outlook.

Economists have pointed to increasing signs of Canada's economic recovery stalling with retail sales significantly slowing in July and following a report that 56,296 businesses closed in June. In June, Fitch Ratings stripped Canada of its AAA debt rating citing a deterioration of the country's public finances and later warned of another downgrade if the federal government does not get its finances in order.

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US Offers \$20M in Rewards for Info Leading to Arrest of 3 Ex-Venezuela Official - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The United States is offering rewards of up to \$20 million in total for information that will lead to an arrest of three former Venezuelan public officials, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced in a statement on Tuesday.

"Today, the US Department of State announces rewards of up to \$10 million for information leading to the arrest and/or conviction of Venezuelan national Pedro Luis Martin-Olivares and up to \$5 million each for information leading to the arrests and/or convictions of Venezuelan nationals Rodolfo McTurk-Mora and Jesus Alfredo Itriago," Pompeo said.

Pompeo explained that Martin-Olivares is a former Chief of Economic Intelligence who was indicted on April of 2015 in Florida for distribution of a controlled substance, knowing that it would be illegally imported into the United States, as well as possession with intent to distribute a controlled substance on board an aircraft registered in the United States and conspiracy to import a controlled substance.

"McTurk-Mora, the former head of Interpol in Venezuela, was charged in the SDFL on December 19, 2013 with: conspiracy to import cocaine, importation of cocaine into the United States, possession with intent to distribute cocaine, and corrupting and impeding an official" in violation of US law, Pompeo said.

Venezuela's anti-drug official Jesus Alfredo Itriago was charged in Florida in January 2013 with conspiracy to distribute a controlled substance knowing that it would be unlawfully imported into the United States.

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Netanyahu Reveals During UNGA Speech Hezbollah's Secret Arms Depot in Beirut

UNITED NATIONS, September 29 (Sputnik) - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu revealed in his address to the UN General Assembly on Tuesday the existence of a secret depot in a residential neighborhood in Beirut where the Hezbollah movement is storing arms. "Now, here is where the next explosion could take place. Right here. This is the Beirut neighborhood of Janah. It's right next to the international airport. And here, Hezbollah is keeping a secret arms depot," Netanyahu said, presenting pictures with the location of the depot. The Israeli Prime Minister said the secret arms depot is adjacent to a gas company. "These are gas canisters. Right here. It's a few meters away from a gas station. It's fifty meters away from the gas company. Here are more gas trucks. And it's embedded in civilian housing here, civilian housing here. For the Janah neighborhood residents this is the actual coordinates," he said. Netanyahu further called on the Lebanese people to "act now" and protest having these depots in their neighborhoods. The Israeli prime minister also called on the international community to insist that Hezbollah stop using Lebanese civilians as "human shields."

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UN Chief Calls on States to Increase Resources Available to IMF Amid COVID-19 Crisis

UNITED NATIONS, September 29 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday called on the international community to increase the resources available to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to help vulnerable countries overcome the economic crisis caused by the restrictive measures amid the novel coronavirus pandemic. "The crisis has snatched lives and livelihoods and taken an unprecedented toll on economies, particularly in the countries and communities least able to cope," Guterres said in a statement. "The international community should also increase the resources available to the International Monetary Fund, including through a new allocation of Special Drawing Rights and a voluntary reallocation of existing Special Drawing Rights." Guterres said that the purpose of the IMF is to assist fragile economies in getting back on their feet at times of global crises; however, the needed "massive" support and solidarity have not been extended yet. "We will not see a global recovery until we have stopped the virus in its tracks," Guterres added.

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Biden Releases Tax Returns Ahead of 1st Presidential Debate Against Trump

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden has released his tax returns ahead of the first presidential debate Tuesday in a move that could add pressure on President Donald Trump to do the same.

Biden's tax statement show him and wife Jill having collectively earned \$517,334 in 2019 and paying \$346,204, while receiving a refund of \$46,858. The New York Times reported on Sunday that Trump contributed just \$750 each for 2016 as well as 2017, his first year in the White House. The report also said Trump paid no income taxes at all in ten of the previous 15 years, largely because he reported losing much more money than he made.

Trump denied the claims in a series of tweets on Monday, labeling the report as yet another instance of corporate-owned media "fake news."

"I paid many millions of dollars in taxes but was entitled, like everyone else, to depreciation and tax credits," Trump said. "Also, if you look at the extraordinary assets owned by me, which the Fake News hasn't, I am extremely under leveraged - I have very little debt compared to the value of assets."

The New York Times report contained information that Trump had indeed paid \$1 million in 2016 and \$4.2 million in 2017. Most of the overpayment was rolled forward, not refunded and the \$750 figure is an additional sum that he paid.

Trump promised in 2016 to release his tax returns, but said he could not do so while being audited by the Internal Revenue Service.

The US president has also resisted providing his returns just as prosecutors in New York, his former state of residence, tried to obtain them on grounds that he may have committed tax fraud.

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Trump Campaign Denies Asking to Avoid Mentioning COVID-19 Death Toll at Debate

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The campaign of US President Donald Trump denies claims by the team of his rival Joe Biden that it asked the moderator of the upcoming presidential debate to avoid mentioning Coronavirus death toll, Trump campaign spokesman Tim Murtaugh said in a statement on Tuesday.

Deputy Campaign Manager and Communications Director for Joe Biden's campaign Kate Bedingfield said earlier on Tuesday that The Trump campaign had asked the moderator of tonight's presidential debate not to mention the novel coronavirus death toll.

"This is a lie and it never happened," Murtaugh said in response. "The Biden campaign is trying to distract from the facts that he won't submit to an inspection for earpieces, won't take a drug test, and needs multiple breaks during the 90-minute debate. This is the height of playing politics with a public health crisis, which Biden has been doing for eight months."

Trump's re-election campaign has requested that the incumbent and his Democratic rival Joe Biden undergo an ear inspection for electronic devices before their first presidential debate. Biden's campaign manager Bedingfield called the Trump campaign's request "absurd" and denied the claim that they asked for multiple breaks during the debate.

US authorities have reported more than 7.165 million novel coronavirus cases in the United States and more than 205,000 virus-related deaths as of Tuesday afternoon, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

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Nearly Three-Fourths of Americans Plan to Watch First US Presidential Debate - Poll

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - Nearly every three-in-four voters in the United States plan to watch the first presidential debate on Tuesday night, but only 3 percent of them believe the debate can influence their choice on Election Day, a new poll by Monmouth University revealed on Tuesday.

"These results underscore the fact that the audience for these debates are voters who already have a rooting interest in one side or the other," Monmouth University Polling Institute Director Patrick Murray said in a statement about the poll.

According to the poll results, 74 percent of voters in the United States will watch the debate between President Donald Trump and his Democratic rival Joe Biden.

Three percent say that they are "very likely to hear something that will impact their eventual vote choice." Another 10 percent say this is "somewhat likely to happen" and 87 percent say the opposite.

The poll found that Biden is currently supported by 50 percent of registered voters and Trump by 44 percent. The remaining support is scattered across third-party candidates, including Libertarian Jo Jorgensen and the Green Party's Howie Hawkins, while two percent of voters remain undecided.

There will be two more debates between Trump and Biden, on October 15 in Miami and on October 22 in Nashville.

Their running mates, Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Kamala Harris, are scheduled to meet in Salt Lake City in October.

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Trump Campaign Requests Ear Checks Before Presidential Debate - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump's re-election campaign has requested that the incumbent and his Democratic rival Joe Biden undergo an ear inspection for electronic devices before their first presidential debate, FOX News reported on Tuesday.

The report quoted Trump campaign spokesman Tim Murtaugh as saying that Biden's campaign initially agreed to a third-party check, but reversed themselves just hours before the debate.

"Joe Biden's handlers several days ago agreed to a pre-debate inspection for electronic earpieces, but today abruptly reversed themselves and declined. Biden's handlers have asked

for multiple breaks during the debate, which President Trump doesn't need, so we have rejected that request," Murtaugh said.

The report also quoted Kate Bedingfield, Biden's deputy campaign manager, who called the Trump campaign's request "absurd" and denied the claim that they asked for breaks.

Trump publicly questions Biden's cognitive state, claiming that in his public appearances former Vice President relies on teleprompters and sympathetic press. Trump has also suggested drug tests before the presidential debates to prove that he and his opponent are not artificially stimulated when on stage. Biden has rejected the proposal.

Trump and Biden will meet face to face in Cleveland, Ohio, on Tuesday evening. There will be two more debates between them, on October 15 in Miami and October 22 in Nashville, and a single round for their running mates.

Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Kamala Harris, are scheduled to meet on October 7 in Salt Lake City.

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US, Russian Space Agencies Want to Expand Manned Flight Teamwork - NASA Officials

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and Russia's Federal Space Agency Roskosmos have already agreed that they want to have their cosmonauts and astronauts riding on each other's rockets, NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said on Tuesday.

"We are working towards that on our two agencies," Bridenstine told a press conference. "There is broad agreement that it is the end state we need to achieve and, I think, we will get there." NASA Human Exploration and Operations Mission Director Kathy Lueders said top officials at both the US and Russian space agencies strongly favored establishing a set schedule to confirm their continued and extended cooperation on future manned missions to the International Space Station (ISS).

"We are in the process of coordinating an agreement to work towards that: The sooner, the better. It is very important for us that we are both working towards that," Lueders said.

Bridenstine and Lueders were speaking at a press conference discussing the next DragonX manned mission to the ISS, scheduled for October 31.

The mission is planned to confirm the restoration of the United States' ability to send astronauts into space on US-built human-rated boosters for the first time since the end of the Space Shuttle missions in 2011.

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US Offers \$20M In Rewards for Info Leading to Arrest of 3 Ex-Venezuela Official - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The United States is offering rewards of up to \$20 million in total for information that will lead to an arrest of three former Venezuelan public officials, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced in a statement on Tuesday.

"Today, the US Department of State announces rewards of up to \$10 million for information leading to the arrest and/or conviction of Venezuelan national Pedro Luis Martin-Olivares and up to \$5 million each for information leading to the arrests and/or convictions of Venezuelan nationals Rodolfo McTurk-Mora and Jesus Alfredo Itriago," Pompeo said.

The Secretary of State noted that the former Venezuelan public officials are fugitives from justice.

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Baranov Statue Relocated to Sitka History Museum, to Be on Display by End of October

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) – The statue of the first governor of Russian America Alexander Baranov has been relocated from downtown Sitka, Alaska to the local history museum, the museum's executive director Hal Spackman told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"The statue was cleaned and removed from its podium this morning and relocated to our museum," Spackman said. "We hope to have the statue on display for the public by the end of October."

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Trump Campaign Asks Debate Moderator Not to Mention COVID-19 Death Toll - Biden Campaign

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The Trump campaign has asked the moderator of tonight's presidential debate not to mention the novel coronavirus death toll, Deputy Campaign Manager and Communications Director for Joe Biden's campaign Kate Bedingfield said on Tuesday.

"If we're playing that game, then you know, the Trump team asked Chris Wallace not to mention the number of deaths from COVID-19 once during the debate," Bedingfield said. "You can consider that confirmed from the Biden campaign. See how easy that was to try to throw up a distraction?"

The US authorities have reported more than 7.1 million novel coronavirus cases in the United States and more than 204,900 virus-related deaths as of Monday afternoon, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

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US Faces Low Earth Orbit 'Gap' in Manned Presence After ISS Decommissioned - NASA Chief

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The United States faces the likelihood of an extended gap or period when it lacks any continued human presence in low earth orbit (LEO) after the International Space Station (ISS) is decommissioned, NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said on Tuesday.

"The ISS can't last forever," Bridenstine told a press conference. "We have to make the investments today. We haven't been making the investments necessary so that we don't have a gap in LEO. That is critical. We have to get the funding we're working on that there is no gap." Congress has not yet approved any funding to cover the coming gap in manned astronaut presence in low earth orbit - about 200 miles above the surface of the earth - between the eventual end of service of the ISS and the anticipated commercially run space stations to follow it, Bridenstine said.

"We haven't been making the investments we need in low earth orbit. ... The next big thing is commercial habitation (commercial funded space stations) but it never gets funded at the level that is necessary," he said.

Bridenstine was speaking at a press conference discussing the coming four-crewperson DragonX mission to the ISS that has now been scheduled for October 31.

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Biden Releases Tax Returns Ahead of 1st Presidential Debate Against Trump

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - Democratic candidate Joe Biden has released his tax returns ahead of the first presidential debate Tuesday in a move that could add pressure on President Donald Trump, who has not done the same and has been accused by the New York Times of having underpaid or not paid any taxes for many years.

Biden's tax statement show him and wife Jill having collectively earned \$517,334 in 2019 and paying \$346,204, while receiving a refund of \$46,858. The New York Times reported on Sunday that Trump contributed just \$750 each for 2016 as well as 2017, his first year in the White House. It also said he paid no income taxes at all in 10 of the previous 15 years, largely because he reported losing much more money than he made.

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Breonna Taylor's Family Demands Complete, Unedited Grand Jury Transcripts - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - Breonna Taylor's family demands that the Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron release a complete and unedited transcript of his presentation after the grand jury failed to indict any police officer involved in the death of the African American woman, the family's lawyer Benjamin Crump said on Tuesday.

A local court ordered Cameron to make his grand jury presentation public and he promised to comply.

"AG Cameron says he'll comply tomorrow. We urge him to release a COMPLETE and UNEDITED copy of the recording, along with any and all evidence in Bre's case," Crump said via Twitter.

The grand jury returned no indictments of two police officers who participated in executing the search warrant in Taylor's house. Another officer was found guilty of wanton endangerment since he used a firearm in a way that his bullets hit a neighboring apartment.

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Top US Bank JPMorgan Fined \$920Mln For Fraudulent Metals, Treasuries Trade - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - JPMorgan Chase & Co has agreed to pay \$920 million for fraudulent transactions of precious metals and US Treasuries by its traders, the Department of Justice said in a statement on Tuesday.

"JPMorgan entered into a deferred prosecution agreement (DPA) in connection with a criminal information filed today in the District of Connecticut charging the company with two counts of wire fraud," the statement said. "Under the terms of the DPA, JPMorgan will pay over \$920 million in a criminal monetary penalty, criminal disgorgement, and victim compensation."

According to admissions and court documents, between March 2008 and August 2016, numerous traders and sales personnel on JPMorgan's precious metals desk engaged in a scheme to defraud in connection with the purchase and sale of gold, silver, platinum and palladium futures contracts traded on the New York Mercantile Exchange Inc. and Commodity Exchange Inc.

In tens of thousands of instances, traders placed orders to buy and sell precious metals futures contracts with the intent to cancel those orders before execution, including in an attempt to profit by deceiving other market participants through injection of false and misleading information concerning the existence of genuine supply and demand for precious metals futures contracts.

In addition, on certain occasions, traders engaged in trading activity that was intended to deliberately trigger or defend barrier options held by JPMorgan and thereby avoid losses.

One trader, John Edmonds of Brooklyn, New York, pleaded guilty on October 9, 2018, to one count of commodities fraud and one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, commodities fraud, commodities price manipulation and spoofing.

Another trader, Christian Trunz of New York, New York, pleaded guilty on August 20, 2019, to one count of conspiracy to engage in spoofing and one count of spoofing in connection with his precious metals futures contracts trading at JPMorgan and another financial services firm.

The Justice Department also obtained a superseding indictment on November 15, 2019 against three former JPMorgan traders - Gregg Smith, Michael Nowak and Christopher Jordan, and one former salesperson - Jeffrey Ruffo that charged them for their alleged participation in a racketeering conspiracy and other federal crimes in connection with the manipulation of the precious metals futures contracts markets.

JPMorgan is ranked by S&P Global as the largest bank in the United States and seventh largest in the world by total assets, which amount to \$2.7 trillion.

From: Barani Krishnan - barani.krishnan@gmail.com

Subject: Top US Bank JPMorgan Fined \$920M In For Fraudulent Metals, Treasuries Trade - Justice Dept

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TikTok Launches Guide on US Elections to Protect Users From Misinformation - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The Chinese video sharing application TikTok said in a statement on Tuesday that it was launching a guide to the 2020 US elections to provide its users with authoritative information and protect them against misinformation.

"Today, we're launching an in-app guide to the 2020 US elections to provide access to authoritative information as we continue our work to protect against misinformation," TikTok's Vice President Michael Beckerman said in the statement.

TikTok's guide will connect its 100 million users in the United States with trusted information about the elections from the National Association of Secretaries of State, BallotReady, SignVote and more, the statement said.

The guide will offer information about candidates at the federal, state and local level, powered by BallotReady; how to vote in every US state, powered by the National Association of Secretaries of State; and educational videos about misinformation, media literacy, the elections process and more, the statement added.

TikTok has made headlines since August after US President Donald Trump threatened to ban the application in the United States, citing wider concerns about alleged Chinese government spying on data of Americans who use the platform.

Trump's ban of TikTok was originally to take effect on September 20, but was deferred to November 12 after the Trump administration offered the company a way out by selling itself to a US entity. TikTok held talks with Oracle and Microsoft, but also pursued a legal challenge to Trump's ban, winning a reprieve against his order from a federal judge on Sunday.

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US Outraged by Rocket Attack in Iraq, Urges Holding Perpetrators Accountable - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The United States is outraged by the deadly strike on a civilian area in Baghdad and calls on the Iraqi government to bring those responsible for the attack to justice, US Department of State spokesperson Morgan Ortagus said in a statement on Tuesday.

"We are outraged by yesterday's rocket attack in Baghdad that killed civilians, including a mother and her children," Ortagus said. "We express our condolences to the innocent Iraqi people and their families who were victims, once again, of these ruthless acts of violence. The Iraqi people deserve to live in safety and security, so we call on Iraqi officials to take immediate action to hold the perpetrators accountable."

On Monday, the Al Arabiya newspaper reported that a rocket fell in a residential area near the Baghdad International Airport and killed seven people. An Iraqi security sources told Sputnik the perpetrators had targeted the airport.

Ortagus noted that the United States has made the point before the actions of lawless Iran-backed militias remain the single biggest deterrent to stability in Iraq.

"These militias pose an unacceptable danger to everyone in Iraq, from diplomatic officials and facilities to Iraqi activists and families," Ortagus said.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi has ordered an urgent investigation into the deadly strike near the Baghdad airport, the Iraqi Joint Forces Command said in a press release, obtained by Sputnik, on Monday.

According to the release, a criminal network fired two rockets from the Jihad district located to the east of the airport that destroyed a residential house in the Ridvaniyeh district to the south of the airport.

Five people have been killed as a result, including two women and three children, the release said.

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Trump Administration Must Demand Turkey Stay Out of Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict - Biden

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) – The United States must demand Turkey stay out of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Democratic presidential candidate Joseph Biden said on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, the Armenian Defense Ministry said Turkey's F-16 fighter downed an Armenian Su-25 plane. Ankara has refuted Yerevan's claim, according to media reports.

"With casualties rapidly mounting in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, the Trump Administration needs to call the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan immediately to de-escalate the situation. It must also demand others — like Turkey — stay out of this conflict," Biden said via Twitter.

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Canada Imposes Sanctions on Belarus President, Other Officials - Global Affairs

TORONTO, September 29 (Sputnik) - Canada has imposed sanctions on Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, his son Viktor, Interior Minister Yuri Karaev, Election Commission Head Lidia Yermoshina and seven other officials over their alleged participation in election fraud and for violence against protesters, Global Affairs Canada said in a statement on Tuesday.

"In coordination with the United Kingdom and in support of the people of Belarus, Canada is imposing sanctions against Government of Belarus officials, including Alexander Lukashenko. These actions are being taken under the Special Economic Measures Act," the statement said. Deputy Interior Minister Yuri Nazarenko and commander of Belarus' Internal Troops, Khazalbek Atabekov have also been sanctioned, the statement said.

Canada remains concerned by the alleged reports of "human rights violations" in Belarus, the statement added.

The Belarusian government has not indicated that it will respond with its own measures. On August 9, the Belarusian opposition organized protests after disputing the results of the presidential election in which Lukashenko was reelected for a sixth term by winning 80 percent of the vote. The opposition insists that its candidate, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, won the election. Lukashenko has repeatedly accused Western nations of direct interference in the internal affairs of Belarus. Russia has also voiced concerns over foreign interference in the neighboring country.

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UAE Deeply Concerned About Turkey's Interference in Libya - Foreign Minister at UNGA

UNITED NATIONS, September 29 (Sputnik) - The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is deeply concerned about Turkey's military interference in Libya, UAE Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan said in a speech to the UN General Assembly on Tuesday.

"My country expresses its deep concern regarding Turkey's military interference in Libya, which is an alarming part of the regional interference in Arabic affairs that has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, undermined efforts to reach a peaceful solution and destabilized the entire region," Nahyan said.

Libya was engulfed in a conflict after the ouster and assassination of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. At present, the country remains divided between two centers of power - an elected parliament in the country's east, supported by the Libyan National Army (LNA), and the UN-backed Government of National Accord's (GNA) in the country's west.

LNA is supported by Egypt and the UAE, while the GNA is backed by Turkey and Qatar.

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UAE Foreign Minister Announces Bid for Non-Permanent UN Security Council Seat for 2022-23

UNITED NATIONS, September 29 (Sputnik) - The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has announced its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the 2022-2023 term, UAE Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan said in his speech to the UN General Assembly.

"We are pleased to announce our candidature for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the period 2022 to 2023," Nahyan said on Tuesday.

The UN Security Council is the most influential United Nations body whose work aims to maintain international peace and security.

The UN Security Council is comprised of 15 member states: five permanent member states and ten non-permanent ones elected by the UN General Assembly for a two-year term.

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Pence Calls for Respectful Senate Hearing on Barrett's Supreme Court Nomination

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Mike Pence on Tuesday urged the Democratic minority in the Senate to give "a respectful hearing" to Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett despite their opposition to the timing of her nomination.

"We believe the Senate has an opportunity... for a fair and respectful consideration. We urge our Democrat colleagues in the Senate to take the opportunity to meet Judge Barrett as the hearing goes forward, to provide the kind of respectful hearing that the American people expect," Pence said at the beginning of the first meeting between Barrett and senators.

On Saturday, President Donald Trump nominated Barrett to replace the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. After the announcement, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden released a statement urging the Senate not to approve the nomination before the November 3 presidential election.

Pence reiterated that the White House looks forward to a speedy vote.

"We look forward to a vote in the Senate in the near future and to fill the seat of the Supreme Court in the United States, because the American people deserve the justice like judge Amy Vivian Coney Barrett, the American people deserve nine justices in the Supreme Court in the United States," Pence said.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said earlier this month that a vote on Barrett's nomination would take place regardless of criticism by the Democrats. The Republicans hold a 53-47 majority in the Senate.

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Donbas Ceasefire Will Be Used for Intensive Normandy Four Talks in Coming Months - Maas

UNITED NATIONS, September 29 (Sputnik) - The ceasefire in the Donbas will serve as basis for intensive engagement in the Normandy format at a high-ranking political level in the coming months, Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said in his speech at the UN General Assembly on Tuesday.

"The negotiations between Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany have helped to bring about the longest ceasefire since the beginning of the conflict. This is grounds for hope for a genuinely permanent solution to the conflict," Maas said. "We will take this hope as the basis for intensive engagement in the Normandy format in the coming months, including at a high-ranking political level."

On July 27, new measures to maintain the ceasefire, which include a blanket ban on deploying military equipment or using drones in reconnaissance, sabotage or offensive missions in sensitive locations, entered into force. The sides also agreed for a system of holding ceasefire violators accountable.

The Normandy format summit on the Ukraine conflict took place in Paris on December 9. The summit further established the Minsk agreements as the basis to resolve the crisis, set up the aim of disengaging forces and military equipment by the end of March 2020 on three additional disengagement areas in Donbas, and ordered the implementation of a ceasefire by the end of 2019.

The four leaders of the Normandy format member states - Russia, France, Ukraine and Germany - had also scheduled a meeting in Berlin four months later. However, the summit was canceled due to the novel coronavirus pandemic and some tasks of the Paris summit remain unfulfilled.

The crisis in Ukraine began in 2014, when Kiev declared war on the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. The two republics announced their independence following a coup that forced a change in government in Ukraine in February of 2014.

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US Trade Deficit in Goods Up 3.5% in August to Reach \$83Bln - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The US trade deficit in goods increased by 3.5 percent in August and reached nearly \$83 billion, data from the Commerce Department's Census Bureau revealed on Tuesday.

Imports of foreign goods such as automobiles and consumer products grew by 3.1 percent in August, reaching slightly more than \$201 billion, but exports expanded by only 2.8 percent to around \$118, crating the deficit, the data showed.

The US economy shrank at its fastest pace in history in the second quarter of 2020, contracting by 32.9 percent amid widespread lockdowns and other restrictive measures due to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

The US economic recovery has mostly settled into a trend of gradual improvement with retail and housing activity having rebounded to pre-pandemic levels and consumer confidence continuing to improve. The labor market has marked some gains, but economists have said it still has a long way to go.

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Canada Imposes Sanctions on Belarus President, Other Officials - Global Affairs

TORONTO, September 29 (Sputnik) - Canada has imposed sanctions on Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko, his son Viktor, Interior Minister Yuri Karaev, Election Commission Head Lidia Yermoshina and seven other officials over the alleged election fraud and violence against protesters, Global Affairs Canada said in a statement on Tuesday.

"In coordination with the United Kingdom and in support of the people of Belarus, Canada is imposing sanctions against Government of Belarus officials, including Aleksandr Lukashenko. These actions are being taken under the Special Economic Measures Act," the statement said.

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G20 Debt Initiative Does Not Address Magnitude of COVID-19 Crisis – Guterres

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) – The debt relief initiative adopted by the G20 group of nations in response to the coronavirus pandemic fails to adequately address the impact of the crisis on the world's poorest countries, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Tuesday.

"I welcome the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), which has created fiscal space in the world's poorest countries, but this response does not address the magnitude of the crisis," Guterres said in a speech at the UN High-level meeting on financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the era of COVID-19 and beyond.

G20 leaders in April agreed to suspend debt payments due by the world's poorest developing economies from May 1 to December 31, 2020 in order to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The UN chief called on international community to take urgent matters to prevent further economic and other losses. "Unless we take action now, we face a global recession that could wipe out decades of development and put the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development completely out of reach," he said.

On Friday, the G20 International Financial Architecture Working Group (IFA WG) had the last of its September meetings, where it discussed a range of financial issue, including updates on the implementation the DSSI. Until now, 46 countries have applied for DSSI.

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German Foreign Minister at UNGA: EU Reserves Right to Use Sanctions in Case With Navalny

UNITED NATIONS, September 29 (Sputnik) - Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas in his speech to the UN General Assembly on Tuesday said the incident with Russian opposition figure Alexey Navalny must have consequences and the European Union reserves the right to impose sanctions.

"This isn't the first time that we have been confronted by a violation of an existential principle of international cooperation, namely the banning of chemical weapons. A violation of this, as we have been able to prove together with our partners in the poisoning of Alexey Navalny, is a problem for the entire international community," Maas said. "I call on Russia to do more to investigate this case, a case such as this must have consequences. The EU, therefore, reserves the right to impose sanctions."

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Officers Assaulted, 24 People Arrested at Unlawful Protest in Portland – Police

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) – Several officers were assaulted and two dozen people were arrested during unlawful protests overnight in the US city of Portland, Oregon, local police said in a statement on Tuesday.

"A sergeant was punched in the face and was transported to the hospital for treatment. Five other officers were sprayed with some kind of chemical," the statement said.

Over the course of the protest in the Kenton neighborhood in north Portland, police arrested 24 people, it added.

Protesters began gathering for the protest outside the Portland Police Association building late Monday evening. Police asked the group to move a nearby park, as they had not obtained a permit to march on the streets.

"While [officers] were performing their lawful duties, some in the crowd interfered and were arrested," the statement said, adding that the detentions continued until the the crowd dispersed at around 1:30 a.m.

Some of the protesters who were arrested were wearing heavy body armor and were armed with knives and pepper spray, the statement said. One protester who escaped arrest threw a baseball bat at pursuing officers, it added.

Fresh protests erupted across the US last Wednesday after a grand jury brought no charges against police officers for the March killing of African American woman Breonna Taylor during a drug raid of her Louisville home. The state attorney general said the deadly use of force by the officers involved was justified after Taylor's boyfriend opened fire on them. One of the officers was still charged with wanton endangerment.

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FEATURE - COVID Victim's Daughter Calls on Americans to Take Pandemic Seriously, Trust Science

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik), Barrington M. Salmon - New York-area resident Sabila Khan, who lost her father due to COVID-19, decided to devote her time supporting survivors and educating people so they take the pandemic seriously and stop questioning science. Khan is left with the memories of her father, Shafqat - married for 50 years, a father of 3 and grandfather of 7 - who died on April 14 after coming down with COVID-19. He was a larger-than-life figure, the beating heart and energy center of her family and his community. Khan remembers a man who never allowed any challenge to defeat him, who worked hard, made numerous sacrifices to provide for his family, and whose passion for politics, involvement in community activism and love of people made him a revered patriarch in Jersey City's Pakistani community.

"I personally have never gone through losing an immediate family member. This is my first brush with death," Khan said softly. "But I feel like there's nothing normal about this grief - it's overwhelming, it's complicated, it's traumatic."

TORTUROUS DEVELOPMENTS

For the past 10 years, her father had been suffering from Parkinson's. While in a rehab facility, his health took a turn for the worst, Khan told Sputnik.

"My mom, my brother and I visited him every day until the facility closed its doors on March 11. We couldn't see him after that," said Khan, who has worked in publishing for almost 20 years. "I spoke to him and he reassured me that he was okay, that he would be okay. In late March, he stopped calling and he wouldn't talk when we tried to talk to him, but the nurses told us he was fine. He got sick in late March but we didn't find out about COVID-19 until April 1."

Khan said her family found out that a patient at the facility had COVID-19 in what she describes as "a very roundabout way."

"My brother was speaking to the director who mentioned it. Then one day we were told he had a fever," she said.

Khan said the facility closed down in late March as COVID-19 spread across New York and the tri-state area.

"COVID sounded very serious. I was very worried because it was in the height of COVID-19 in the New York-New Jersey area," she explained. "On Monday, April 6, it was 10 days that we hadn't heard his voice. The nurse said he was very congested. And I said we had no idea he was even sick."

Khan said the family was notified that facility staff had sent him to the emergency room of a hospital blocks from the family's home.

"I was beside myself after I heard the news. He spent three days in what I imagine was a war zone of an ER before they found a bed for him. My father was a big, tough guy but he hated hospitals. I can't imagine the fear... the hospital is three blocks from us and we couldn't see

him. It was special type of torture," she said. "He was doing pretty well. He never made it onto ventilators. We have doctors in the family, including one in infectious disease, who said it was looking pretty good but on April 14th, they said he went into cardiac arrest. We urged them to keep trying and they tried for 15 minutes but he died."

Sabila said her father was diagnosed with Parkinson's 10 years ago and she was under no illusions that he would live forever.

"But never, in my wildest dreams did I think he'd die like this, without his family by his side. I wish we could have talked to him. We couldn't see him at all. That was the hardest part. I understand they were trying to prevent the spread but it was torture," she said.

Khan said her parents traveled to Libya in 1973 where Khan worked as secretary at a pharmaceutical company.

"There wasn't much opportunity in Tripoli so he applied for a computer certification course at New York University and he and my mom sold everything they had to make the trip to the States," she recalled. "The plan was that he would find a job that would sponsor him." Unfortunately, she said that job never materialized.

"We had no money to go back to Pakistan or Libya so we were undocumented for over a decade," said Khan. "My father worked six days a week, 12 hours a day working at a friend's store. We didn't have health insurance, we lived on the edge for many years but my parents shielded us from these realities. We had a safe, loving childhood."

Khan said her father was very interested in American politics.

"Some of my earliest memories are of watching the news, debates, and primaries with my father, and his encouraging me to discuss, unpack, and examine the most serious political issues of the day," she added.

"Many years later, it struck me as odd that he was so interested in politics - he didn't actually vote in a presidential election until 2000. He told me that the politics of a nation impacted everyone in that nation - documented or not."

Khan said the family received their green cards and became legal in 1992, and freshly-minted citizens in 1998.

"He was an extraordinary man, a legend in the Pakistani community in Jersey City," Khan said. Khan said her father created a community organization in 2000 called Pakistanis for America to increase voter registration.

"Then after 9/11 he pivoted and held panels where diverse communities came together to talk beyond their differences," she said.

FEAR, GRIEF AND ANGER

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, eight of 10 of the COVID deaths in America have been adults 65 and older. The fear that Khan has always felt about the dangers this global pandemic poses to people in the US and around the world, is now leavened by a deep reservoir of grief and pain.

She said in her family's religion, her dad had to be buried as soon as possible. The family was informed that only one cemetery was open and staff were overwhelmed with bodies. But a cousin stepped in to facilitate the process and a friend was able to pick him up a few hours later. "He was buried the next day and, in one of the most surreal experiences of our lives, the funeral was livestreamed. My mom was with me," Khan said. "Every religion and culture has rites and

ceremonies marking death - in the absence of this, grief is prolonged, grief is complicated, and grief becomes trauma. The whole COVID-bereaved community is dealing with trauma."

Khan said four days after her father's passing, as she looked for ways to deal with her grief, she realized there was no group that offered a place for families of COVID victims to gather, support each other and grieve. So she created a Facebook group and named it COVID-19 Loss Support for Family and Friends.

"In those early days, we spread word of the group in other local Facebook groups I was a part of," she said. "Even today, most of the people in the group are from the NY-NJ area. It's grown since the early days and become a safe space for people to mourn. Recently someone posted at 3:00 a.m., saying her mother had just died and she didn't know what to do. There were 20 comments in response to her overnight. It was such a beautiful moment."

The group, she added, has given her "a sense of purpose."

"I feel like there's a through-line from my father's community service to what I'm doing for this community now. Everything is triggering for us – TV, social media, family, friends, everything. I'm so glad that I'm able to do this," she said.

Sabila said her Facebook circle is liberal and Democratic "so no one is questioning COVID."

"One time, I went down the rabbit hole to debate this issue and felt emotionally broken. COVID is touching and tearing people up. This group has really given me life. I don't know what I would do without it," she said.

DEADLY POLITICS

Khan said she despairs as she sees the devastation COVID has wrought across the country.

Sabila has felt extremely angry because the more than 204,000 deaths and millions of COVID-19 cases were avoidable.

"Yes, politics is the reason why he's dead," Khan said somberly. "While I'm very angry about how my father died, I've made a very conscious choice to not live in that anger. I just can't live in that space and be healthy," she said.

Journalist Bob Woodward's tapes, released in early September, of Trump admitting he downplayed COVID-19 "was a triggerfest for our community," she said.

"Our loved ones didn't have to die. I just want politicians and Americans to stop questioning science. It blows my mind that people still do in the 21st century. I wish people would trust science," she added.

Khan said she is struck by the reality that after 9/11 the country came together against a common enemy, but this pandemic has caused divisions and "vitriol, anger, suspicion."

"It's not important that my father's face and name be in a memorial. Some of those in my group want and need this," she explained. "But I don't want COVID to be the defining event of my father's life. He had a long, rich, vibrant life, especially contributing to his community. In starting this group I'm doing this for him. Keeping him alive."

And in order that those taken by coronavirus and their families are not forgotten, organizers have pulled together a National COVID Remembrance on October 4 in Washington, DC.

"This is a reminder to officials, those who run the country, in highest office, that we have experienced unbelievable loss and we need to be part of the conversation. We will not be ignored," Khan said. "I'm so thankful that this is happening. It's really, really important. There's this idea that 9/11 was traumatic, and the fact that the pandemic has killed exponentially more people is the reason why this must be done."

The bereaved community is going through trauma, she added, so it is very important that loved ones are not forgotten or relegated to statistics.

"We need them memorialized now. We need our trauma to be acknowledged now. It is minimizing to us when people don't take COVID seriously. This pandemic feels endless," Sabila said.

Dionne Warwick, Grammy award-winning singer and former US Ambassador for Health, will host the first National COVID-19 Remembrance. She will be joined virtually and in person by faith leaders, health care professionals, frontline workers, and Americans who have lost someone they love to COVID-19.

Organizers say six months into this pandemic, America has not yet had a collective moment to grieve and remember the parents, spouses, and children the US lost. This program, which will be streamed virtually to ensure audience and performer safety, will be the first time the nation will mourn together and honor the frontline workers who are risking so much, and receiving so little. Participants in the first National COVID-19 Remembrance will honor that sacrifice by calling for a national plan for recovery.

Twenty-thousand empty chairs will be placed on the National Mall to represent a fraction of the more than 200,000 lives lost due to COVID-19. With no end in sight, organizers are calling for action.

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RPT: Thousands Visit Russian Wooden Boat During Trip in US - Crew Captain

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - Thousands of Americans took a unique opportunity to learn Russian culture by visiting a replica of an 18th century wooden boat which continues its journey around the world despite the COVID-19 outbreak, crew captain Sergei Sinelnik told Sputnik.

This year, the boat, named Pilgrim, has covered a distance of more than 1,800 sea miles from the US state of Maryland to the city of Duluth in Minnesota.

"We have passed Chesapeake Bay, Delaware and Hudson Rivers. Passed over 100 miles along the Atlantic Coast, Erie Canal and Great Lakes," Sinelnik said. "Several thousands of people visited us during our stops... people were coming on board, asking about our country. We were unable to be under the radar."

Leaving the city of Albany, the crew had to remove masts in order to pass the Erie Canal, but even then the unusual wooden boat attracted the attention of people on the shore.

"As it happened, we only highlighted the gracefulness of Pilgrim's body by removing masts. People came out of homes, stopped their cars to greet us and take some pictures," Sinelnik said.

The crew captain expressed gratitude to all who helped the Russian voyager in finding stops during the trip. In Albany, where the Pilgrim spent over two weeks, more than 1,000 people visited the museum on board the boat, while local authorities had a special (Lodya Day) in honor of its arrival.

"We were inspired by the hospitality of the residents of Duluth, who even organized a firework [show] in honor of us," Sinelnik noted. "We said in response, that we are celebrating great people of Duluth."

Obviously, the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on Pilgrim's voyage this year, from delaying the start from Maryland, but the crew was able to realize most of its goals, the captain said.

"Many harbors are empty, no people in Erie Canal, but despite all this situation and related difficulties, we have made a fair amount of our plans," he added.

Visiting the Great Lakes was a childhood dream, which finally became a reality, Sinelnik said.

"All lakes are different not only by size, but by soul as well. Probably I will understand it better some later, because all great things are seen better after some time," he said.

Sinelnik hopes to re-start his trip next year.

"We hope to transport the boat from Duluth to Snake River at West Coast and reach Pacific Ocean through Columbia River, or from Seattle, to Alaska," he said.

The final point of the trip should be the city of Petrozavodsk in Russia, where Pilgrim started its journey over three years ago.

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RPT: PREVIEW - Trump, Biden Set to Square Off in First Presidential Debate

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump and Democratic presidential challenger Joe Biden come face to face on Tuesday for the first round of televised debates to showcase their strengths and expose opponent weaknesses with just over a month left until the election.

This first of three presidential debates is being held in Cleveland, Ohio, hosted by Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Clinic. The contest will begin at 9:00 p.m. EST (1:00 a.m. GMT) and last about 90 minutes without commercial interruptions.

Tuesday night's debate could break the audience record set in 2016, which saw 84 million viewers tune in, according to the Los Angeles Times.

The moderator, Fox News Sunday television anchor Chris Wallace, has chosen six topics for discussion with 15 minutes allocated to each.

While Trump is never shy of public appearances, including massive rallies and almost daily sparrings with skeptical press, the focus will likely be more on Biden, who after relying on less challenging canvassing throughout his entire campaign, has to prove his intellectual prowess and dispel concerns over his age.

"For Biden to win, he's got to exceed this low bar of expectations that he can't stand there for 90 minutes and string two sentences together," debate expert Mitchell McKinney told MarketWatch.

"But he also has to demonstrate for anxious, nervous Democrats, and also for an anxious, nervous perhaps even wider swath of the citizenry, that he can aggressively meet Donald Trump and push back."

The candidates will be requested to address their "records," which implies grilling on Ukraine dealings for Biden and issues like tax returns for Trump in addition to his decision to fast-track a Supreme Court nomination prior to the November 3 election. The COVID-19 outbreak, the economy, ant-racism protests and recent violence that has erupted in several US cities are also likely to be discussed.

The final topic - the integrity of the election - is likely to cover Trump's concerns over widespread mail-in voting and growing fears that the incumbent may refuse to peacefully cede power in case of a defeat.

The moderator, Wallace, works for a pro-Trump TV network, but is known to be a registered Democrat and has a reputation of one of America's toughest interviewers.

Wallace is expected to address his first question to Trump in the debate that will kick off without opening statements. Both candidates will not be wearing face masks on stage, but will refrain from handshakes.

Another coronavirus-related limitation is a small number of ticketed guests at Case Western Reserve University. The venue is already heavily guarded by local and federal law enforcement agencies, including a National Guard task force, to minimize all possible "distractions," as Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson put it.

Trump, who is trailing in the polls, has repeatedly demanded that Biden take a drug test to ensure that he is not artificially stimulated when on stage, while Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi advised Biden to skip the debates, which she denounced as "an exercise in skullduggery."

All the hype notwithstanding, Americans do not see debates as a major choice-making factor, a recent poll by the Wall Street Journal and NBC showed. When asked how important the event will be in helping them make a decision, 44 percent answered "Not at all." Another 27 percent opted for a "somewhat" important, only 18 and 11 percent see it as "extremely" and "quite" important respectively, according to the pollsters.

There will be two more debates between Trump and Biden, on October 15 in Miami and October 22 in Nashville, and a single round for their running mates. Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Kamala Harris, are scheduled to meet on October 7 in Salt Lake City.

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Ex-OPCW Member Says Syria 2018 Chemical Attacks Report May Not Reflect Actual Events

UNITED NATIONS, September 29 (Sputnik) - A former lead investigator from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ian Henderson, said the final report of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) into the alleged use of toxic chemicals in an attack in Douma, Syria, in 2018, may not reflect what happened on the ground.

Henderson was speaking at an informal meeting of the UN Security Council, organized by the Russian Mission, to openly discuss the treatment of the Syrian chemical dossier, in contrast to traditionally closed gatherings of the council on the issue.

"I speak for myself, but I know there are other Douma FFM inspectors who hold the similar concerns that I do about the manner in which the investigation was controlled, locked-down... [as well as] the findings reflected in the final FMM report," Henderson said. "We believe that there is more than sufficient information out there today that has demonstrated our points that the findings of the FFM report on Duma may not reflect the actual situation."

Henderson said the launching of a transparent technical inquiry aimed at clarifying the actual course of events in Douma in 2018 is justified, given the scope of the available information and facts on the alleged incident.

"And this needs to be done in a way that demonstrates scientific rigor and integrity because that currently has not been done," he said. "Perhaps, more importantly, we continue to hope that there's someone who's willing and able, someone who has the courage to do something about this."

The OPCW concluded that chlorine was most likely used in the suspected April 2018 attack on the city, which lies on the northeastern outskirts of the Syrian capital. This led the United States, France and the United Kingdom to launch missile strikes on Syrian targets.

The OPCW relied in its probe on data provided by the White Helmets, a rebel-linked group that bills itself as a volunteer rescue force.

However, the group has faced severe criticism from the Syrian and Russian governments who accuse the organization of supporting terrorists and staging provocations involving chemical weapons aimed at justifying potential foreign interventions.

In December 2019, whistleblowing website WikiLeaks made public documents from the OPCW on the accuracy of the investigation in Douma.

One is an internal email exchange between a senior OPCW official, Chief of Cabinet Sebastian Braha, and his colleagues regarding a technical assessment by Henderson into allegations that the Syrian government had dropped two gas cylinders in a civilian area of Duma from an aircraft.

Henderson, who was assisting the FFM with information collection in Douma, in particular, found that all evidence from the ground suggest that cylinders were placed there manually and, given that the area was not controlled by Damascus at the time, most likely by no one else but the anti-government rebels.

The final report of the OPCW has no mention of these findings. Henderson faced pressure from the OPCW leadership and was eventually fired.

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Pompeo, Saudi Counterpart Discuss Efforts to Stabilize Middle East - State Department

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan al Saud in a recent telephone call discussed efforts to stabilize the Middle East, including providing humanitarian aid in Yemen and the Abraham Accords, State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortagus said in a press release.

"Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo spoke yesterday with Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud," Ortagus said in the release on Monday. "The Secretary and the Foreign Minister discussed important work to advance humanitarian assistance and peace in Yemen, the need to overcome divisions between Gulf countries, and the historic Abraham Accords signing." The two statesmen also discussed expectations for a productive bilateral meeting on strategic security scheduled in October.

On September 10, President Donald Trump said his administration had already started dialogue with Saudi Arabia regarding a commitment to normalize relations with Israel.

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County in US State of Maryland Reaches \$20Mln Settlement Over Police Killing

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - Prince George's County in the US state of Maryland has agreed to pay \$20 million to a family of an African American man who was shot dead by a police officer, County Executive Angela Alsobrooks announced.

"While criminal charges are still pending, I am here to announce that Prince George's County has reached a settlement agreement with a Green family for \$20 million," Alsobrooks said on Monday.

William Green was allegedly shot six times in police custody by African American officer Michael Owen Jr. who claimed that the handcuffed suspect was reaching for a gun. Owen has been arrested on charges of a second-degree murder and is awaiting trial.

The settlement deal is believed to be one of the largest payments in police-related killings in US history.

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UK, Canada Call for Immediate End of Hostilities in Nagorno Krabakh - Joint Statement

TORONTO, September 29 (Sputnik) - Canada and the United Kingdom in a joint statement called for the immediate cessation of hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

"Canada and the United Kingdom are deeply concerned by reports of large scale military action along the Line of Contact in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone. Reports of shelling settlements and civilian casualties are deeply concerning. We call for the immediate end of hostilities, respect for the ceasefire agreement, and the protection of civilians," the statement said on Monday.

Canadian Foreign Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne and UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab urged both sides to pursue negotiations through the OSCE's Minsk process. The Minsk

group - co-chaired by Russia, the United States and France - strives to achieve a peaceful solution to the decades-old dispute in the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Since 1991, Armenia and Azerbaijan have been engaged in a conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian-majority region that proclaimed independence from what was the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan.

On Sunday morning, clashes occurred in Nagorno Karabakh with both sides accusing the other of carrying out provocations. Armenia declared martial law and general mobilization, while Azerbaijan declared partial martial law and partial mobilization. Azerbaijan has closed its airports to all international air traffic except from Turkey, which has pledged support to Baku. Multiple countries and international organizations have called on the warring parties to accept a ceasefire and engage in an OSCE-facilitated dialogue without preconditions, including Russia, France, Germany, the United States, Moldova, the European Union, NATO, and the United Nations as well as Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and Pope Francis.

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UNSC Meeting to Discuss Fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh Requested Tuesday - Diplomatic Source

UNITED NATIONS, September 29 (Sputnik) - Germany and several other European countries at the UN Security Council had sent an official request for a meeting to be convened on Tuesday to discuss the ongoing clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, a diplomatic source told Sputnik.

"An official request has been sent out, but the meeting has not been scheduled yet," the source said on Monday.

Since 1991, Armenia and Azerbaijan have been waging an ongoing conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian-majority autonomous region that proclaimed independence from the then-Soviet Azerbaijan Republic.

Tensions intensified in the breakaway region on Sunday morning, with both sides accusing each other of carrying out provocations. Armenia and the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh republic declared martial law and general mobilization, while Azerbaijan declared partial martial law and partial mobilization. Azerbaijan has closed its airports to all international air traffic except for Turkey, which has pledged its support to Baku.

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US Plan Seeks to Isolate Iran From Global Financial System - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - The US administration is considering sanctioning Iran's entire financial system to cut it off from the outside world, Bloomberg news agency reported.

The sanctions will specifically target around 14 Iranian banks that have so far escaped US restrictions, the report said on Monday, citing three people familiar with the matter. The initiative, if approved, will designate the financial sector, including money-changers and informal payment transfer processors, on par with mining, construction and other sanctioned industries, according to the report.

The move, which would effectively leave Iran isolated from the global financial system, has not yet been submitted to President Donald Trump as of yet, the report added.

Under the current administration, the United States has pursued a maximum pressure campaign against Iran by abandoning the nuclear deal and reinstating sanctions. Washington is now seeking to put in place international restrictions, despite other major powers' opposition.

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Thousands Visit Russian Wooden Boat During Trip in US - Crew Captain

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - Thousands of Americans took a unique opportunity to learn Russian culture by visiting a replica of an 18th century wooden boat which continues its journey around the world despite the COVID-19 outbreak, crew captain Sergei Sinelnik told Sputnik.

This year, the boat, named Pilgrim, has covered a distance of more than 1,800 sea miles from the US state of Maryland to the city of Duluth in Minnesota.

"We have passed Chesapeake Bay, Delaware and Hudson Rivers. Passed over 100 miles along the Atlantic Coast, Erie Canal and Great Lakes," Sinelnik said. "Several thousands of people visited us during our stops... people were coming on board, asking about our country. We were unable to be under the radar."

Leaving the city of Albany, the crew had to remove masts in order to pass the Erie Canal, but even then the unusual wooden boat attracted the attention of people on the shore.

"As it happened, we only highlighted the gracefulness of Pilgrim's body by removing masts. People came out of homes, stopped their cars to greet us and take some pictures," Sinelnik said.

The crew captain expressed gratitude to all who helped the Russian voyager in finding stops during the trip. In Albany, where the Pilgrim spent over two weeks, more than 1,000 people visited the museum on board the boat, while local authorities had a special (Lodya Day) in honor of its arrival.

"We were inspired by the hospitality of the residents of Duluth, who even organized a firework [show] in honor of us," Sinelnik noted. "We said in response, that we are celebrating great people of Duluth."

Obviously, the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on Pilgrim's voyage this year, from delaying the start from Maryland, but the crew was able to realize most of its goals, the captain said.

"Many harbors are empty, no people in Erie Canal, but despite all this situation and related difficulties, we have made a fair amount of our plans," he added.

Visiting the Great Lakes was a childhood dream, which finally became a reality, Sinelnik said.

"All lakes are different not only by size, but by soul as well. Probably I will understand it better some later, because all great things are seen better after some time," he said.

Sinelnik hopes to re-start his trip next year.

"We hope to transport the boat from Duluth to Snake River at West Coast and reach Pacific Ocean through Columbia River, or from Seattle, to Alaska," he said.

The final point of the trip should be the city of Petrozavodsk in Russia, where Pilgrim started its journey over three years ago.

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Woman Accused of Sending Ricin to Trump to Remain in Custody, Face Trial in Washington

TORONTO, September 29 (Sputnik) - The Canadian woman suspected of sending a ricin-laced letter to US President Donald Trump will remain in custody until she is transferred to the District of Columbia to stand trial, a US Magistrate Judge said in a ruling.

The defendant, Pascale Cecile Veronique Ferrier, entered on a not guilty plea during the hearing in Buffalo, New York on Monday.

The Canadian National Microbiology Laboratory confirmed ricin found during a search in Ferrier's apartment, according to Timothy Lynch of the US Attorney's Office in Buffalo.

The 53-year-old dual national was deemed to be an ongoing threat to Trump and the general public, US Magistrate Judge Kenneth Schroeder, Jr. said in his decision. The judge also agreed with Lynch's assessment that Ferrier is a flight risk citing her possession of a French passport, at least two fraudulent Texas drivers' licenses, as well as the complications an extradition process could entail should Ferrier choose to flee.

The defense argued that Ferrier's education, work history and ties to her community in the Montreal suburb of Laval preclude the threat of further crimes and flight.

Making threats against the US president carries a fine and potential prison term of up to five years.

Lynch said there are likely going to be additional charges from the state of Texas, where Ferrier mailed six analogous letters to employees of penitentiaries and detention centers and New York, where she was initially arrested.

Ferrier was detained at the Peace Bridge Border Crossing in Buffalo, New York, earlier this month. According to the US attorney, the Quebec resident was found to be in possession of a loaded firearm, a knife, 294 rounds of ammunition and a bulletproof vest at the time of arrest. Ferrier waived her right to an identity hearing.

The dual French-Canadian national will now await transfer to the District of Columbia. The next court date has not been set. The defense asked that the transfer be made within ten days. Schroeder, however, said that timelines are fluid due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. In her letters, Ferrier called Trump an "ugly clown tyrant" and said that she does not want her US extended family members to see Trump win a second four-year term in the upcoming presidential election. All of the letters included the signature "FREE REBEL SPIRIT," alluded to the notes as a "special gift for you" and vowed to "find a better recipe" if the letters did not have their desired effect.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was also able to trace Facebook and Twitter postings, which included the hashtag "#killTrump," back to an email address bearing Ferrier's name. On September 19, the FBI said that an investigation was underway over a suspicious letter addressed to Trump. The package was reportedly intercepted earlier in the week and two tests were conducted, confirming the presence of the deadly poison ricin.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) -
US SANCTIONS AGAINST CUBA

* The United States has added American International Services (AIS) to the Cuba Restricted List, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement on Monday.

* Moscow strongly condemns Washington's decision to strengthen embargo against Cuba and is ready to keep supporting Havana, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

* Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan convened an emergency meeting of the republic's Security Council on Monday to discuss the situation on the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh.

* Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said during a video conference with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres that the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh should be settled on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions.

* Turkey considers it unnecessary to deploy either its military or opposition fighters from Syria to the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region, which is currently the site of a reignited conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Yasin Aktay, an aide to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, told Sputnik.

* Russia maintains contact with Turkey on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, where tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan have recently escalated, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

CONFLICT IN SYRIA

* Terrorists plan to organize provocations with poisonous substances in settlements in the Syrian provinces of Idlib and Aleppo, Rear Adm. Alexander Grinkevich, deputy head of the Russian Center for Reconciliation of Warring Parties in Syria, said at a briefing.

CANADIAN WOMAN WHO ATTACKED TRUMP PLEADS NOT GUILTY

* The Canadian woman suspected of sending a ricin-laced letter to US President Donald Trump entered on Monday a not guilty plea in a Buffalo, New York courtroom to making threats against him.

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PREVIEW - Trump, Biden Set to Square Off in First Presidential Debate

WASHINGTON, September 29 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump and Democratic presidential challenger Joe Biden come face to face on Tuesday for the first round of televised debates to showcase their strengths and expose opponent weaknesses with just over a month left until the election.

This first of three presidential debates is being held in Cleveland, Ohio, hosted by Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Clinic. The contest will begin at 9:00 p.m. EST (1:00 a.m. GMT) and last about 90 minutes without commercial interruptions.

Tuesday night's debate could break the audience record set in 2016, which saw 84 million viewers tune in, according to the Los Angeles Times.

The moderator, Fox News Sunday television anchor Chris Wallace, has chosen six topics for discussion with 15 minutes allocated to each.

While Trump is never shy of public appearances, including massive rallies and almost daily sparrings with skeptical press, the focus will likely be more on Biden, who after relying on less challenging canvassing throughout his entire campaign, has to prove his intellectual prowess and dispel concerns over his age.

"For Biden to win, he's got to exceed this low bar of expectations that he can't stand there for 90 minutes and string two sentences together," debate expert Mitchell McKinney told MarketWatch. "But he also has to demonstrate for anxious, nervous Democrats, and also for an anxious, nervous perhaps even wider swath of the citizenry, that he can aggressively meet Donald Trump and push back."

The candidates will be requested to address their "records," which implies grilling on Ukraine dealings for Biden and issues like tax returns for Trump in addition to his decision to fast-track a Supreme Court nomination prior to the November 3 election. The COVID-19 outbreak, the economy, ant-racism protests and recent violence that has erupted in several US cities are also likely to be discussed.

The final topic - the integrity of the election - is likely to cover Trump's concerns over widespread mail-in voting and growing fears that the incumbent may refuse to peacefully cede power in case of a defeat.

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