

05/10/21 Monday

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Probe Launched, Employees Detained After Chinese Safari Park Admits to Concealing Leopards' Escape
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Officials with Hangzhou Safari Park previously dismissed claims that leopards had escaped from their zoo in China's Fuyang District. However, the safari park's story has changed since now-viral videos emerged on social media showing at least one of the leopards roaming around urban, residential areas.

Hangzhou Safari Park took to Weibo on Saturday to issue an apology, and confess that three juvenile leopards did indeed escape the zoo several weeks ago.

The zoo claimed that officials were initially "worried that the announcement of the incident would cause panic." Additionally, the safari park considered the juvenile leopards to be "less aggressive," according to an English language translation.

"Our [zoo] once again apologizes for the impact of the incident," the safari [park wrote](#), adding that it openly accepts criticism from the public.

A second leopard has been recovered since the Saturday announcement, while the first was captured on April 21. Authorities are cooperating with animal experts to track down the last remaining big cat, according to the Fuyang District government.

A total of five employees - including the general manager of the safari park - have been taken into police custody amid an investigation into the matter, the [Associated Press](#) reported on Monday. The leopards' escape is believed to have occurred due to a botched handover by the zookeepers.

The safari park will remain closed until the investigation wraps.

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US Health Regulators Grant Use of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine for Young Teens
by [Evan Craighead](#)

The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine was previously authorized by US regulators to be administered to those as young as 16. Back in March, the two companies claimed their vaccine was 100% effective against SARS-CoV-2 in a clinical trial of over 2,000 adolescents.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced on Monday that it would be expanding the emergency use authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to now include adolescents as young as 12.

"The FDA's expansion of the emergency use authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine to include adolescents 12 through 15 years of age is a significant step in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic," [said](#) Dr. Janet Woodcock, the acting FDA commissioner. "Today's action allows for a younger population to be protected from COVID-19, bringing us closer to returning to a sense of normalcy and to ending the pandemic. Parents and guardians can rest assured that the agency undertook a rigorous and thorough review of all available data, as we have with all of our COVID-19 vaccine emergency use authorizations."

The US health regulator's decision to expand emergency use authorization to include those aged 12 to 15 comes less than two months after Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla declared that he would be sending new data on the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to the FDA.

Said data included details from [a trial](#) involving 2,260 US adolescents between the ages of 12 and 15 years old. According to the companies, their vaccine "demonstrated 100% efficacy and robust antibody responses, exceeding those recorded earlier in vaccinated participants aged 16 to 25 years old, and was well tolerated."

"It is very important to enable them to get back to everyday school life and to meet friends and family while protecting them and their loved ones," remarked Uğur Şahin, CEO and co-founder of BioNTech.

Additional trials with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine have been performed, including those with participants under the age of 11.

"This is a promising development in our fight against the virus. If you are a parent who wants to protect your child, or a teenager who is interested in getting vaccinated, today's decision is a step closer to that goal," US President Joe Biden said in a [Monday statement](#) on the expanded emergency use authorization.

He also highlighted that the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will issue updated recommendations in the coming days.

As of this article's publication, more than 115 million of the [330 million](#) individuals in the US have been fully vaccinated.

According to [data](#) from the CDC, the US has been reporting under 100,000 new COVID-19 cases daily since February 12, and presently has a 7-day moving average of 38,678 new cases a day. As for COVID-19 related deaths, the country has recorded a 7-day moving average of 608 deaths a day.

Experts have suggested that upwards of 80% of the US population must receive COVID-19 vaccines to achieve herd immunity against the contagious disease.

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NASA's OSIRIS-REx Spacecraft Returning to Earth With Asteroid Bennu Sample in Tow
by [Evan Craighead](#)

NASA's Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security, Regolith Explorer (OSIRIS-REx) spacecraft was originally launched from Florida's Cape Canaveral Air Force

Station on September 8, 2016. OSIRIS-REx's main objective is to retrieve a sample from Benu, the near-Earth asteroid the spacecraft landed on in 2018.

The OSIRIS-REx spacecraft on Monday began its two-and-a-half-year trek back to Earth, NASA revealed in a same-day announcement.

According to the [news release](#), the spacecraft fired its main engines for some seven minutes, thrusting it away from asteroid Benu at approximately 600 miles per hour (965 kilometers per hour).

The May 10 event was broadcast via [Sputnik livestream](#).

"OSIRIS-REx's many accomplishments demonstrated the daring and [innovative] way in which exploration unfolds in real time," Thomas Zurbuchen, associate administrator for science at NASA Headquarters, said in a quoted statement.

"The team rose to the challenge, and now we have a primordial piece of our solar system headed back to Earth where many generations of researchers can unlock its secrets," he added, speaking of the Benu sample retrieved from asteroid Benu during a ['Touch-And-Go' mission](#) back in October 2020.

The OSIRIS-REx spacecraft is slated to return to Earth around September 24, 2023.

Once the spacecraft reaches Earth, the capsule containing the sample of Benu will separate from the spacecraft's main body and parachute to the Utah Test and Training Range. Scientists will be awaiting to retrieve the capsule.

In order to ensure the spacecraft's 2.5-year trip back to Earth is a success, the mission's team will now have to track and plan out its future maneuvers.

"Our whole mindset has been, 'Where are we in space relative to Benu?'" said Mike Moreau, OSIRIS-REx deputy project manager at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. "Now our mindset has shifted to 'Where is the spacecraft in relation to Earth?'"

According to experts at NASA, the sun's gravity will have the most influence on the OSIRIS-REx spacecraft's course.

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Tesla Owner Got in Driver's Seat Moments Before Deadly Texas Crash, NTSB Report Declares by [Evan Craighead](#)

Two men were killed earlier this month after a 2019 Tesla Model S reportedly veered off the road, crashed into a tree and burst into flames. Authorities originally said neither man was behind the wheel, while Tesla CEO Elon Musk claimed that data logs recovered from the vehicle "show Autopilot was not enabled" at the time of the crash.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) on Monday issued a preliminary report regarding the fatal April 17 crash unfolded at roughly 9:07 p.m. local time in Spring, Texas.

"NTSB tests of an exemplar car at the crash location showed that Traffic Aware Cruise Control could be engaged, but Autosteer was not available on the part of the road (Hammock Dunes Place) where the crash happened," the NTSB detailed, noting that both Traffic Aware Cruise Control and the Autosteer systems are engaged when Tesla's 'Autopilot' is engaged.

This determination falls in line with claims made by Musk, who [tweeted](#) on April 19 that "data logs recovered so far show Autopilot was not enabled & this car did not purchase FSD." "Moreover, standard Autopilot would require lane lines to turn on, which this street did not have," he added.

At the same time, Constable Mark Herman told reporters that investigators at the scene were "100 percent certain that no one was in the driver seat driving that vehicle at the time of impact" due to the "positioning of the bodies after the impact."

The Board has yet to make a conclusive determination in whether "[Autopilot](#)" was engaged. The preliminary report also cited home surveillance footage taken from the owner's residence. Based on the footage, the NTSB determined that the owner of the Tesla, 59, got into the driver's seat, while the other man, 69, got into the front passenger seat. The Tesla Model S reportedly traveled some 550 feet (about 168 meters) "before departing the road on a curve, driving over the curb, and hitting a drainage culvert, a raised manhole and a tree."

The vehicle's restraint control module - which records data related to vehicle speed, acceleration, etc. - was reportedly damaged during the fiery event. Though the damaged restraint control module has been transported to the NTSB's recorder laboratory for further evaluation, the car's onboard data storage device was completely destroyed.

The vehicle's steering wheel has also been obtained by the NTSB materials laboratory, and will be analyzed for damage.

"The NTSB's investigation of the crash is ongoing, and investigators continue to gather information including data to analyze the crash dynamics, postmortem toxicology test results, seat belt use, occupant egress and the post-crash fire," the Board highlighted.

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WHO Deems COVID-19 Strain Found in India 'Variant of Concern'
by [MariTi Blaise Lovell](#)

The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported 366,161 new COVID-19 cases in India's capital city of New Delhi within the last 24 hours. To date, the health agency has been following 10 COVID-19 variants that have emerged around the world, including the triple-mutant B.1617 strain found in India.

Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's technical lead for COVID-19, reclassified the B.1617 strain as the "variant of concern" during a Monday briefing, acknowledging it as a global health threat. During the briefing, Kerkhove outlined that a team of WHO experts have conducted limited studies of the B.1617 strain that would suggest the variant has increased transmissibility, as well as reduced neutralization.

Previous concerns have been aimed towards identifying different strains of the virus, which are currently circulating [globally](#), in countries including the US, UK, South Africa and Brazil. According to Kerkhove, the emerging strains may also prove to be resistant to current vaccines.

Soumya Swaminathan, who serves as the health agency's chief scientist, argued on Saturday that the lack of social distancing was also to blame for the massive second wave that hit India in March.

The WHO official announced that more information would be provided in the organization's weekly epidemiological update on Tuesday, adding that more research needed to be done to combat the virus.

India's federal government has not yet announced a [nationwide lockdown](#) and has faced [increased criticism](#) over its handling of the pandemic.

Regional neighbor China has recently bolstered its efforts to suppress the spread of COVID-19 from Nepal by increasing strict isolation measures, even as high as [Mount Everest](#).

India's early responses to the start of the pandemic have received both [praise](#) and [criticism](#), as its [Ministry of Home Affairs](#) became one of the first to ease restrictions following the initial COVID-19 lockdown.

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Over 40 US Attorneys General Urge Facebook to Abandon Instagram for Kids Plans
by [MariTi Blaise Lovell](#)

In recent months, social media giants like Facebook have faced backlash over their lack of protection for youths who use their platforms. In March, Instagram released a blog post announcing that it would be updating features aimed at youth protection on its platform. Subsequently, Facebook announced it would launch a version of Instagram for kids.

In a Monday letter addressed to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, a total of 44 US attorneys general urged Facebook to abandon its plans to launch a version of Instagram for children under the age of 13.

"The attorneys general urge Facebook to abandon these plans. Use of social media can be detrimental to the health and well-being of children, who are not equipped to navigate the challenges of having a social media account. Further, Facebook has historically failed to protect the welfare of children on its platforms," [the letter](#) states, citing research into the effects of social media use on mental health in kids.

The attorneys also called out Facebook for previously failing to protect children through its platform and instead using data collection to further exploit its users.

"It appears that Facebook is not responding to a need, but instead creating one, as this platform appeals primarily to children who otherwise do not or would not have an Instagram account," the letter adds.

Current Instagram policies forbid children under the age of 13 from using its platform. However, the policies are not readily enforced, meaning many children under the recommended age are reported as having accounts.

In a report released by [BuzzFeed](#) in March, Instagram executives are cited as wanting to build a version of Instagram for kids as a way of allowing parental figures more transparency and control over their child's social media habits, though plans on how are still in early development.

In 2017, Facebook in another effort to release products aimed at children launched Messenger Kids, which is intended for children between the ages of 6 and 12. Instagram that same year was [reported](#) as being a hotspot for cyberbullying by children and young adults. Facebook has recently sponsored a [Digital Wellness Lab](#) at Boston's Children's Hospital, whose research includes studying the effect of digital technology on kids.

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UN Chief Says COVID Vaccine Nationalism 'Big Mistake,' Production Should Double

UNITED NATIONS, May 10 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he believed vaccine nationalism was a big mistake and the global production of vaccines against the coronavirus disease should be doubled.

"Some countries are vaccinating their population very quickly, but we still have a number of countries that have received not one single dose, and in the developing world, in general, we see a dramatic gap in relation to vaccination," Guterres said in an interview with Russian news agencies. "So, vaccine nationalism is a big mistake. It is clear for me that the world production of vaccines should double to attend all the needs, and for that, we need the cooperation of the different countries that have the capacity to produce vaccines."

Guterres expressed his hope that all large vaccine producers will be able to join efforts to bring about a global vaccination plan that would reach everyone, everywhere.

The secretary-general also recalled the United Nations has been advocating for the COVAX support aimed at equal distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to developing countries.

However, Guterres said, the COVAX facility does not only still lack \$22 billion in funding but is now challenged by supply issues caused by restrictions on exports imposed by different countries.

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UN Chief Says USSR Had Decisive Contribution in Preventing Nazism's Takeover of Europe

UNITED NATIONS, May 10 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the Soviet Union played a decisive role in defeating Nazism and preventing it from a potential takeover of Europe.

"The armed forces of the Soviet Union had the decisive contribution for the defeat of Nazism," Guterres said in an interview with Russian news agencies ahead of his visit to Moscow from May 12-14. "That was very important to defeat the possible Nazism takeover of Europe, with its allies, large chunks of the whole world."

In light of the Victory Day celebrated on May 9, Guterres expressed solidarity with the Russian people.

"The people of the Soviet Union had suffered enormously for Nazism to be defeated, and so this is a moment in which I want to express my admiration for that contribution," the UN chief stated. On May 8, the commanders of Nazi Germany's armed forces signed the instrument of surrender, admitting its defeat in WW2. This day is celebrated in many countries as Victory Day. Due to differences in time zones, it was already May 9 in the Soviet Union, which is why Russia and other former Soviet republics celebrate it a day later.

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P5 Summit Could Contribute Towards Addressing Challenges of Today's World - Guterres

UNITED NATIONS, May 10 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he believed a meeting among the five permanent member states of the UN Security Council - Russia, China, the United States, the United Kingdom and France - can contribute towards addressing the pressing challenges in the world.

"I think that the meeting, if it is simultaneously frank but constructive, can give an important contribution to allow us to be more effective in addressing the challenges of today's world," Guterres said in an interview with Russian news agencies.

"What the COVID has demonstrated is the fragility of the world: in relation to the pandemic, to climate change, to the lawlessness in cyberspace. Even fragility, now, in relation to the risks of nuclear proliferation. And all these show how important it is to understand that international cooperation is vital for human kinds to be able to address these fragilities and to build a resilient, inclusive and sustainable future," he added.

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UN Chief Warns of Vaccine-Resistant COVID-19 Strains if Virus Spreads in Global South

UNITED NATIONS, May 10 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned of the possible emergence of new vaccine-resistant COVID-19 mutations if the virus spreads in developing countries.

"I'm very worried with the present situation," Guterres said in an interview with Russian news agencies. "If the COVID spreads like wildfire in the Global South, it will have more and more variants more and more mutations, and the risk is to have a virus that is able to resist the vaccines that have been developed, which means that nobody is safe until everybody is safe."

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UN Encourages Staff to Receive Sputnik V Vaccine - Guterres

UNITED NATIONS, May 10 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the world body encourages personnel in countries using Sputnik V to receive the Russian vaccine. "We encourage, of course, the staff that is working in countries that are vaccinating with the [Sputnik V], to receive that vaccine," Guterres said in a an interview with Russian media agencies.

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Guterres Says UN Would Like to Use Russian Sputnik V Vaccine, Awaiting Clearance By WHO

UNITED NATIONS, May 10 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the world body would like to use the Russian Sputnik V vaccine against the coronavirus disease and is only awaiting for it to be cleared by the World Health Organization (WHO). "UN personnel has already received the Sputnik vaccine, namely, in the Russian Federation, and we would like to be able to use it by ourselves, only waiting for the validation by the World Health Organization," Guterres said in an interview with Russian news agencies. The WHO said earlier that it expected to give its safety assessment of Russia's coronavirus vaccine in late June or in July.

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UN Chief Says Very Important for Int'l. Community That US, Russia Form Functional Ties

UNITED NATIONS, May 10 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he believed it was essential for the international community to see the United States and Russia establish functional relations. "It is, I believe, very important for the international community, as a whole, that the United States and the Russian Federation, knowing that there are differences in many dimensions, but establish a functional relationship, in which the areas of disagreement can be frankly expressed," Guterres said in an interview with Russian news agencies ahead of his visit to Moscow May 12-14.

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Guterres Says Unlikely Consensus Would Be Reached on UN Peacekeeping Mission in E. Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, May 10 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he did not believe that an agreement can be reached on the potential deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping mission in Eastern Ukraine.

"There are very different positions in relation to the mandate and the role that a peacekeeping force might have in Ukraine," Guterres said in an interview with Russian news agencies. "I would say it is not likely that consensus will be established in the immediate future in relation to that."

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UN Chief Says Will Discuss With Lavrov Situation in Ukraine, Other Security Concerns

UNITED NATIONS, May 10 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he will discuss with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov the situation in Ukraine and other security concerns around the globe during his visit to Moscow May 12-14.

"I expect to have the chance to discuss, according to what was agreed, all the, I would say, key security concerns in today's world: be it in Libya, be it in Syria, be it in Yemen, in Ukraine, in Afghanistan, and to exchange views on what is needed in order to address these conflicts and contribute to a peaceful resolution of all the conflicts in the world," Guterres said in an interview with Russian news agencies.

Guterres also said he was concerned about the recent escalation in fighting in Eastern Ukraine that violated the ceasefire agreement.

"We strongly hope that de-escalation takes place and that the ceasefire is fully respected," he added.

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Guterres Says 'Delighted' to Receive Putin During UNGA High-Level Week if COVID-19 Allows
UNITED NATIONS, May 10 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he will be delighted to receive President Vladimir Putin at the UN General Assembly High-Level week in September if the epidemiological situation allows such a meeting to take place.

"I hope that, if the General Assembly works in-person, which is not yet clear, I will be delighted to receive President Putin, coming to New York for the General Assembly," Guterres said in an interview with Russian news agencies ahead of his visit to Moscow.

The United Nations said earlier it did not exclude a possible in-person participation of some world leaders during the upcoming High-Level week as the New York authorities had announced earlier they would lift all coronavirus-related restrictions by July.

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UN Chief Says Will Meet Virtually With Putin During Visit to Moscow May 12-14

UNITED NATIONS, May 10 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he will hold a virtual meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin during his visit to Moscow May 12-14. "In this meeting, there is a virtual contact," Guterres said in an interview with Russian news agencies when asked whether he will meet with Putin.

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Lockheed Martin Pulling Out Contractors From Iraq Over Security Concerns - Official

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin is pulling out F-16 maintenance contractors from Balad air base in Iraq due to instability in the region, company Vice President for Communications Joseph LaMarca said in a statement.

"In coordination with the US government and with employee safety as our top priority, Lockheed Martin is relocating our Iraq-based F-16 team," LaMarca said on Monday.

Lockheed Martin did not disclose the number of contractors that would be withdrawn from Iraq. The New York Times reported, citing an Iraq security official, that Lockheed Martin has 70 employees at Balad air base and 50 would return to the United States while about 20 would be moved to Erbil.

On Saturday, Ain Al-Asad Air Base, which hosts US troops in western Iraq, was attacked by a drone. No coalition forces were injured in the attack.

Earlier last week, the US-led coalition said that two rockets had landed at the air base, with no casualties or material losses reported.

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Canada Urges Vigilance for Travelers to Israel in Updated Travel Advisory Amid Unrest

TORONTO, May 10 (Sputnik) - Canada is urging its citizens in Israel and those planning to travel to the Middle Eastern nation to take additional precautions amid escalating tensions between Israelis and Palestinians, Global Affairs Canada said in an updated travel advisory.

"Clashes resulting in casualties have been increasingly taking place in the Gaza Strip. Hostilities between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and terrorist groups, including Hamas, in the Gaza Strip could resume and the security situation could deteriorate with little or no notice," Canada's foreign ministry said on Monday.

The department is urging Canadians to be aware of their surroundings, avoid large gatherings, monitoring media and staying informed about the ongoing security situation and following the instructions from the IDF.

Earlier in the day, the IDF began airstrikes against the Gaza Strip in response to the dozens of rockets launched at Israel from the self-governing territory amid the escalation of tensions in East Jerusalem, as clashes between the Palestinian protesters and the Israeli security forces continued over the weekend and on Monday.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared on Monday that anyone who attacked the country would pay a "high price."

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US Approves \$1.7Bln Aegis Combat System Contract to Canada - Defense Security Agency

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United States has approved a \$1.7 billion sale of the Aegis Combat System to Canada, the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency said in a press release.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Canada of AEGIS Combat System and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$1.7 billion," the release said on Monday.

The proposed sale will include four Shipsets of the AEGIS Combat System; one AEGIS Combat System Computer Program; four Shipsets of AN/SPY-7 Solid State Radar Components; four Shipsets of Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC); and three Shipsets of the MK 41 Vertical Launch System.

The release said the sale would increase Canadian maritime forces' interoperability with the United States and other allied forces, therefore supporting US national security.

Australia, Japan, Norway, South Korea, and Spain have previously acquired Lockheed Martin's Aegis Combat System.

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US FDA Authorizes Pfizer's Coronavirus Vaccine for Adolescents 12-15 Years of Age

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said in a release that it has expanded the emergency use authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine to administer to adolescents 12-15 years of age.

"Today, the US Food and Drug Administration expanded the emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine for the prevention of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) to include adolescents 12 through 15 years of age," the release said on Monday. "The FDA

amended the EUA originally issued on Dec. 11, 2020 for administration in individuals 16 years of age and older."

The FDA noted that it decided to expand the emergency use authorization because the known and potential benefits of the Pfizer vaccine in individuals 12-15 years old outweigh the known and potential risks of the vaccine administration.

In a clinical study, the vast majority of adolescents 12 through 15 years of age experienced pain at the injection site, fatigue and headache among other side-effects for for a period between one and three days, the release said.

At present, there is no data to determine how long the Pfizer vaccine will provide protection for children in this age bracket, the release added.

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US Eases COVID-19 Travel Advisories for UK and Israel - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The US State Department said it has bumped down Israel and the United Kingdom after updating their travel advisories to match the latest global health notices and information, but added four states to the Level-4 category advising Americans not to travel there.

"This week, the following travel advisories have been assessed and reissued with updates, raised to a Level 4 - Do Not Travel: Fiji; Nepal; Timor-Leste; Trinidad and Tobago," the State Department said on Monday.

The State Department also said it placed the United Kingdom to the Level 3 category, advising Americans to reconsider traveling there. Israel has similarly been placed to the Level 2 category, which signifies a warning to Americans to exercise increased caution if they travel to the country.

The advisory updates are determined using Center for Disease Control and Prevention notices as well as secondary factors such as flight availability, restrictions on US citizen entry and difficulty obtaining coronavirus test results within the proper time frame.

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US Suspects Russia's GRU Behind Directed-Energy Attacks on American Personnel - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Russia's military intelligence service (GRU) may be behind the several cases of alleged directed-energy attacks on US personnel that caused health issues, the newspaper Politico reported on Monday citing unnamed US officials.

The US intelligence community has not reached a consensus whether it was GRU that committed several attacks on the US military and foreign service personnel around the world, the report said.

At the same time, the investigation of the attacks have been intensified and now includes all 18 US intelligence agencies examining GRU's potential involvement.

White House does not know the cause of the alleged attacks or whether they constitute an attack by foreign actors, the report said.

While the CIA director is deepening his involvement in the issue, another official said GRU agents are the only ones who are capable of attacking US public servants on American territory. The directed-energy attacks have resulted in such health disorders as headache, loss of balance and hearing, ringing and pressure in the ears, and sometimes include long-term brain damage, according to the report.

The US intelligence agencies are investigating cases of suspected attacks on government personnel in Washington DC, Alexandria and Miami as part of a much broader probe in the "Havana syndrome" referring to a set of symptoms and health problems which nearly 50 US diplomats experienced during their service in Cuba since late 2016

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US Ship Fires 30 Warning Shots to Repel Iranian IRGC Boats - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - A US Coast Guard cutter on Monday fired dozens of warning shots to fend off multiple Iranian attack boats in the Strait of Hormuz, Defense Department spokesman John Kirby told reporters.

"After following all the appropriate and established procedures ... the US Coast Guard Cutter Maui fired approximately 30 warning shots from a 50-caliber machine gun. After the second round of warning shots, the 13 fast attack craft from the IRGCN [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy] broke contact," Kirby said during a briefing.

Kirby said the boats were armed with machine guns and conducted "unsafe and unprofessional maneuvers" in close proximity to six US Navy vessels, including the cruiser Monterey, which were escorting the guided-missile submarine Georgia through the Strait of Hormuz. The latter is strategic passage between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.

The US Fifth fleet said in a statement that two of the 13 IRGCN vessels broke away from the larger group, transited to the opposite side of the US formation and approached Maui and the patrol coastal ship Squall from behind at a high rate of speed (in excess of 32 knots) with their weapons uncovered and manned.

Before opening fire, US crews issued multiple warning to Iranian vessels, including bridge-to-bridge verbal messages, acoustic device signals and five short blasts of the ship's horn, the internationally recognized danger signal.

Monday's incident is the second instance in recent weeks of US Navy resorting to warning shots to defuse altercations with the IRGC boats in the Persian Gulf.

The Fifth fleet urged Iran's forces to operate with due regard for the safety of all vessels and vowed to continue to fly and sail "anywhere international law allows.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) -

UNREST IN JERUSALEM

* The United States is seriously concerned about violent confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli police in Jerusalem and is closely monitoring the situation, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

* The number of Palestinians injured in clashes with the Israeli police outside of Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem increased to 331, with seven being in critical condition, the Red Crescent said.

* UN Security General Antonio Guterres is urging all parties to respect the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reporters.

COLONIAL PIPELINE CYBERATTACK

* US President Joe Biden said on Monday that he is being regularly briefed on the ransomware cyber attack carried out against the Colonial pipeline operator and his administration closely follows the situation.

* Biden said there is no evidence that Russia is involved in last week's ransomware attack on the Colonial Pipeline and he will not change his plans to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

* Biden said agencies across the US government acted quickly to mitigate any adverse impacts on the United States' fuel supply caused by the cyber attack on the Colonial pipeline operators and pledged to work with the US private sector in beefing up cybersecurity.

* The FBI confirmed on Monday that DarkSide ransomware is responsible for the breach of one of the United States' largest pipeline operators, Colonial Pipeline.

MISSILE STRIKES AGAINST ISRAEL

* More than 150 rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip toward Israel on Monday evening, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said.

* The al-Qassam brigades, Hamas's military wing, took responsibility for the recent missile attacks on Israel, the groups' spokesperson Abu Obeida said.

* The death toll from Israel's airstrikes in the Gaza Strip has increased to 20 people, including nine children and one woman, the enclave's Health Ministry spokesperson Ashraf al-Qidra told Sputnik.

* The Israeli army began firing at Hamas targets on Monday in response to launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip, Israel Defense Forces spokesman Jonathan Conricus said.

AFGHANISTAN DEVELOPMENTS

* The United States is urging the Taliban to extend its short-term ceasefire currently in place in Afghanistan, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

* The Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) may be behind the recent bombing of a girls' school in the Afghan capital Kabul, Price said.

* The United States welcomes the three-day ceasefire in Afghanistan during the Islamic holiday Eid that was announced by the Taliban, Price said.

PUTIN'S TALKS WITH KYRGYZ, AZERI PRESIDENTS

* Russian President Vladimir Putin has held a phone conversation with Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov and invited him to pay a working visit to Russia, the Kremlin said on Monday.

* Putin and his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev confirmed a mutual disposition to building up cooperation between the countries and agreed on contacts at different levels in a phone conversation, the Kremlin said.

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US Federal Deficit Reaches \$1.9 Trillion in First 7 Months of Fiscal Year - CBO

WASHINGTON, May 10 - The US federal government deficit has soared to \$1.9 trillion in the first seven months of current Fiscal Year 2021, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) announced on Monday.

"The federal budget deficit was \$1.9 trillion in the first seven months of fiscal year 2021, CBO estimates - \$449 billion more than the deficit recorded during the same period last year," the CBO said in its regular monthly budget review for April this year.

Unemployment insurance receipts increased by \$6 billion, or 30 percent, because states were replenishing the balances in their unemployment insurance trust funds, at least in part by collecting more in unemployment, the CBO said.

Outlays for unemployment compensation rose by \$181 billion this year compared with the first seven months of 2020 because of an increase in the number of people receiving regular unemployment benefits, the CBO added.

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US Suspects Russia's GRU Behind Directed-Energy Attacks on American Personnel – Reports

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Russia's military intelligence service (GRU) may be behind the several cases of alleged directed-energy attacks on US personnel that caused health issues, the newspaper Politico reported on Monday citing unnamed US officials.

The US intelligence community has not reached a consensus whether it was GRU that committed several attacks on the American military and foreign service personnel around the world, the magazine noted.

At the same time, the investigation of the attacks have been intensified and now includes all 18 US intelligence agencies that focus on GRU's potential involvement.

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Biden Approves Disaster Aid for Virginia Winter Storm Recovery Efforts - White House

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has approved a disaster declaration for the state of Virginia that will help recovery efforts for residents affected by a severe winter storm earlier this year, the White House announced on Monday.

"Today, President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. declared that a major disaster exists in the Commonwealth of Virginia and ordered Federal assistance to supplement commonwealth, tribal, and local recovery efforts in the areas affected by severe winter storms from February 11 to February 13, 2021," the White House said.

Last winter, a severe storm blocked many of the Virginia's roadways and left hundreds of thousands of residents without power. The declaration enables local governments and private nonprofit organizations to receive federal funding in their efforts to repair and replace infrastructure damaged by the storm.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which directs many of the federal disaster relief programs, placed Kevin Snyder in charge of the federal recovery operations in Virginia.

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New York Boosting Police Presence in Times Square Following Weekend Shooting - Mayor

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The New York City Police Department (NYPD) will be stationing additional security officers at Times Square following a shooting last weekend that left three injured, Mayor Bill de Blasio said on Monday.

"It will be use of our CRC [Critical Response Command] officers in Time Square. You'll see additional presence. I think there may be some other areas as well where you'll see that. And it's important to show people that presence, I think it is reassuring and helpful," the mayor told reporters.

He also said it is important to maintain safety as the city begins to reopen after a long pandemic-related shutdown.

The shooting that prompted these additional security measures occurred on Saturday in Times Squares, and left three people injured, although they are all expected to make a full recovery. The suspected shooter, Farrakhan Muhammad, is not yet in police custody.

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US World War II Veteran Upset America Hardly Celebrates Victory Day

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United States unfortunately hardly celebrates Victory Day over Nazi Germany, US World War II veteran Frank Cohn told Sputnik on Monday.

"There sure is a difference how you celebrate this holiday in Russia, while here [in the United States], it is hardly mentioned," said Cohn, who participated in historical meeting between Soviet and American troops at the Elbe River in Germany in April 1945.

Thousands of people annually participate in May 9 parades in cities across Russia to commemorate the anniversary of the victory over the Nazi Germany and its allies in 1945. This

year, the biggest parade took place traditionally at the Red Square in Moscow in the presence of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Cohn, who has been a special guest at several Victory Day parades in Moscow in the past, expressed regret that major US media do not pay attention to this important day.

"The Friends of the World War II Memorial posted a short video about the war and its ending and there was a virus dictated small wreath-laying ceremony at the WW II Memorial, but hardly a mention in the newspaper," he said.

The United States will probably give an eye to the celebration while commemorating the 80th anniversary of the victory in 2025, Cohn added.

On May 8, 1945, the commanders of Nazi Germany's armed forces signed the instrument of surrender, admitting defeat in World War II. This day is celebrated in many countries and referred to as Victory Day. Due to the difference in time zones, Russia and several other former Soviet republics, celebrate it a day later.

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Biden Says in Coming Months US Economy to See Fastest Growth in 40 Years

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The US economy will likely see its fastest growth in four decades in the months to come, though the rate of expansion might not be smooth throughout, President Joe Biden said on Monday.

"Forecasts have projected that we will see the fastest economic growth in nearly 40 years to come in coming months, and we're moving in the right direction," Biden told a news conference. But he cautioned that there might be bumpy patches in the growth, evidenced by the sharp slowdown in jobs growth in April versus March.

"Let's be clear our economic plan is working. I never said, nor seriously ever suggested, that climbing out of the deep deep hole our economy is in would be simple," he said.

The US economy expanded at an annual rate of 6.4 percent in the first quarter of the year after shrinking 3.5 percent in 2020 due to COVID-19 lockdowns which left 21 million people unemployed between March and April.

More than a year into the pandemic, restoring jobs growth has been one of the biggest headaches of policymakers. The April jobs report, for instance, showed just 266,000 positions being created versus forecasts for 1.0 million new jobs.

The Federal Reserve has forecast an economic growth of 6.5 percent for all of 2021 although it said it does not expect "full employment" - defined by a monthly unemployment rate of 4.0 percent or lower - before 2023. Unemployment stood at 6.1 percent in April.

Biden said his administration would also enforce more tightly labor rules denying financial assistance for those who turned down work offered to them.

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US Taps Libya Ambassador to Serve as Special Envoy to Revolve Civil Conflict - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - US Ambassador to Libya Richard Norland has been tapped to simultaneously serve as special envoy for the war-torn country and will lead the United States' efforts to end the civil conflict through diplomatic means, the State Department said on Monday.

"US Ambassador to Libya Richard Norland will now also serve in the capacity of US Special Envoy for Libya in addition to Chief of Mission for Libya. In his role as US Special Envoy, Ambassador Norland will lead US diplomatic efforts to promote international support for a Libyan-led, inclusive, and negotiated political solution to the conflict, facilitated through the United Nations," the State Department said in a statement.

Norland, a career diplomat, who has also served as ambassador to Georgia and Uzbekistan, will now be part of an interagency effort to find a diplomatic solution to the decade-long civil conflict that began after the assassination of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, the State Department said.

Norland will also serve as a liaison with the United States Congress, the statement said. Norland will have an "elevated profile" in his new role that will see him engage with other countries on behalf of the United States and work with a variety of partners, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said speaking to reporters on Monday.

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US Welcomes Taliban's Announcement of 3-Day Ceasefire During Eid Holiday - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United States welcomes the three-day ceasefire in Afghanistan during the Islamic holiday Eid that was announced by the Taliban, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"We welcome [the Taliban's] announcement of a three-day ceasefire over the upcoming Eid holiday," Price told reporters.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani reciprocated on Monday, ordering government forces to halt armed hostilities for the three days of Eid, while calling for a permanent ceasefire, Afghanistan's Tolo News reported.

Eid in Islam marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, which is scheduled to end on May 12 this year. A three-day mutual ceasefire by the Taliban and Kabul has been annual since 2018. Despite the ongoing peace talks, the Afghan government and the Taliban continue fighting each other on the ground. The confrontation unfolds on the backdrop of the withdrawal of US-led foreign troops, which is expected to complete on September 11.

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US Offers Help to Resolve Conflict Between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan - Diplomat

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The US State Department offered its assistance to resolve the dispute between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan via embassy contacts in both countries, Deputy Assistant Secretary of South and Central Asian Affairs Jonathan Henick said on Monday.

"We have offered in any way we can to support a peaceful resolution to that conflict and, more importantly, we have really urged the leadership here to take responsibility and to look forward at creating the conditions so that this type of thing doesn't happen again," Henick said during a webinar at the Atlantic Council.

He added that communications go through US embassies in Bishkek and Dushanbe that are in direct touch with the leadership of both countries.

"We have been in touch with their embassies here in Washington," Henick said.

A local conflict between residents of the border regions of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on April 29 escalated into an armed confrontation between the military of the two countries. Clashes between Kyrgyz and Tajik border guards lasted more than six hours. As a result, 36 Kyrgyz citizens were killed, about 200 were injured. Tajikistan reported 19 dead and 87 injured. More than 300 buildings were destroyed.

On the same day, the sides agreed to cease fire and withdraw forces from the border, but the next day the shots were fired again. The countries reached another truce in the late afternoon of April 30. All the military was pulled back from the conflict zone.

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Blinken Expresses Concern Over Rocket Attacks on Israel, Urges All Sides to De-Escalate

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed deep concern on Monday over Hamas' latest rocket attacks on Israel and called on all sides to avoid further escalation.

"We are deeply concerned about the rocket attacks that we have seen now, that need to stop immediately," Blinken told reporters ahead of his meeting at the State Department with Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi.

He urged all sides to cease the violence, de-escalate and reduce tensions.

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US State Dept. Says Islamic State May Be Responsible for Bombing of Afghan Girls School

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The Islamic State (banned in Russia) terror group may be behind the recent bombing of a girls' school in the Afghan capital Kabul, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"The circumstances of the bombing over the weekend, they are not yet crystal clear... there are some indications this may have been attributable to ISIS and not the Taliban," Price told reporters.

Price noted that the bombing bears similarity to other Islamic State attacks against Shia targets in Kabul.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Sunday called a bombing of a girls' school in the country's capital Kabul an act of terrorism and a crime against humanity and called on the Taliban to stop killing innocent Afghans.

The Taliban has denied responsibility for the attack, Price said.

On Saturday, a car bomb went off outside the Sayed-ul-Shuhada school in a Shia-majority neighborhood in western Kabul followed by two more blasts. The attack claimed at least 63 lives and left over 150 wounded.

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NASA Should Stay Outside Space Force to Retain Diplomatic Clout - Ex-Chief Bridenstine

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) should remain separate from the recently-constituted US Space Force in order to retain its significant global diplomatic influence and leverage, former agency administrator Jim Bridenstine said on Monday.

"NASA really needs not to become part of the [US] military capability because that is what gives us the leverage on the diplomatic side," Bridenstine told a podcast hosted by the Heritage Foundation.

NASA had concluded hundreds of diplomatic agreements with other countries around the world in order to share scientific data and cooperate on major space programs, Bridenstine said.

"NASA has 700 diplomatic agreements with other countries," he said.

NASA's relationship with Russia through Roscosmos, the Federal Space Agency, had always been a strong one and Russians and Americans had been living and working on the International Space Station (ISS) together for more than 20 years, Bridenstine said.

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US Condemns Rocket Attacks on Israel as 'Unacceptable Escalation' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - US State Department spokesperson Ned Price on Monday said the United States condemns the rocket attacks on Israel as unacceptable as unrest grows in the region between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

"The United States condemns in the strongest terms the barrage of rocket attacks fired into Israel in recent hours. This is an unacceptable escalation," Price said in a press briefing.

Hamas' military wing, al-Qassam Brigades, took responsibility for the missile attacks and warned that Israel had until 6.00 p.m. (15:00 GMT) to withdraw soldiers from the areas of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem, where clashes have continued since the weekend.

Price said the United States recognizes Israel's right to defend itself, however, when asked if the United States believes Palestinians have a right to defend themselves, the spokesperson said the United States supports de-escalation by both sides.

Price also mentioned the United States is concerned about the potential eviction of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem.

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US Urges Taliban to Extend Ceasefire in Afghanistan - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United States urges the Taliban to extend its short-term ceasefire currently in place in Afghanistan, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"We urge the Taliban to extend the ceasefire and order a significant reduction in violence," Price said in a press briefing.

The Taliban declared a three-day Eid ceasefire earlier in the day, but reserved the right to fire back for self-defense.

The United States welcomes the three-day ceasefire, Price said.

Moreover, Price said the Saturday bombing, which killed 63 people and wounded more than 150 others at an Afghan girls school has indications that the Islamic State terrorist group (banned in Russia) may be responsible for the attack.

Despite the ongoing peace talks, the Afghan government and the Taliban continue fighting each other on the ground. The confrontation unfolds on the backdrop of the withdrawal of US-led foreign troops, which is expected to complete on September 11.

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Biden Says US Has No Evidence Russia Involved in Pipeline Attack, Ready to Meet Putin

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Monday said there is no evidence that Russia is involved in last week's ransomware attack on the Colonial Pipeline and he will not change his plans to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"I'm gonna be meeting with [Russian] President [Vladimir] Putin, and so far there is no evidence based on, from our intelligence people that Russia is involved. Although there is evidence that the actor's ransomware is in Russia. They have some responsibility to deal with this," Biden said.

Biden said in earlier remarks that he is confident a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin will be possible in June, but the date and location have yet to be determined.

The White House said on Friday there is no predetermined component to a potential Biden-Putin summit this summer and not all bilateral issues need to be resolved in advance of the meeting.

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US State Department Hints at Islamic State Involvement in Afghan Girls School Bombing

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"The circumstances of the bombing over the weekend, they are not yet crystal clear ... there are some indications this may have been attributable to ISIS and not the Taliban," Price told reporters.

Price noted that the bombing bears similarity to other Islamic State attacks against Shia targets in Kabul.

The Taliban has denied responsibility for the attack, Price noted.

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"After following all the appropriate and established procedures ... the US Coast Guard Cutter Malley fired approximately 30 warning shots from a 50-caliber machine gun. After the second round of warning shots, the 13 fast attack craft from the IRGCN [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy] broke contact," Kirby said during a briefing.

He added that the boats conducted "unsafe and unprofessional maneuvers" in close proximity to six US Navy vessels which were escorting a guided missile submarine.

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Biden Says in Coming Months US Economy to See Fastest Growth in 40 Years

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"Forecasts have projected that we will see the fastest economic growth in nearly 40 years to come in coming months, and we're moving in the right direction," Biden told a news conference. "Let's be clear our economic plan is working. I never said, nor seriously ever suggested, that climbing out of the deep deep hole our economy is in would be simple."

But he cautioned that there might be bumpy patches in the growth, evidenced by the sharp slowdown in jobs growth in April versus March.

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Ransomware Attack on US Pipeline Has No Impact on Pentagon Operations - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The ransomware cyber attack carried out against the Colonial pipeline operator has had no immediate affect on the operations of the Defense Department, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said on Monday.

"The Defense Logistics Agency is monitoring inventory levels and we are awaiting updates from Colonial Pipeline ... There is sufficient inventory on hand for downstream customers. So, there is no immediate mission impact," Kirby when asked whether the shutdown of the Colonial Pipeline had affected Pentagon fuel supplies. "Obviously, we are coordinating with our interagency partners."

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Biden Says US Has 'No Evidence' Russia Involved in Ransomware Attack on Pipeline

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"I'm gonna be meeting with [Russian] President [Vladimir] Putin, and so far there is no evidence based on, from our intelligence people that Russia is involved. Although there is evidence that the actor's ransomware is in Russia. They have some responsibility to deal with this," Biden said.

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UN Chief Calls for Restraint, Respecting Status Quo of Holy Sites in Jerusalem - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - UN Security General Antonio Guterres expresses serious concerns over the violence in East Jerusalem and urges all parties to respect the status quo of the holy sites, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reporters on Monday.

"The Secretary General expressed his deep concern over the continuing violence in occupied East Jerusalem, as well as the possible addiction of the Palestinian families from their homes," Dujarric said during regular press briefing.

Clashes between Palestinians and Israeli forces at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Sheikh Jarrah areas of East Jerusalem have been reported as Israel celebrates Jerusalem Day.

Duharric said the UN chief has called on the Israel authorities to abide by international commitments, cease demolitions and addictions, while exercising maximum restraint and respecting a freedom of peaceful assembly.

"The Secretary General urges that the status quo of the holy sites be upheld and respected," he said.

The Palestinian news agency Wafa said that the Israeli police surrounded Al-Aqsa on Monday morning, stationed snipers and used tear gas to force Palestinian worshipers out of the mosque. Several people were detained while trying to leave the area.

The Israel authorities reported nine people were injured during the unrest, including one person hospitalized. The situation on the Temple Mount is currently stabilized, though the entry to the place is barred for Jewish visitors to avoid further escalation of the situation.

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First All-Private Sector Manned US Space Mission Scheduled For January - Axiom Chief

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and Axiom Space have signed an agreement to launch the first entirely private sector astronaut mission to the International Space Station (ISS) no earlier than January 2022, top officials of both organizations said on Monday.

"This is a remarkable journey: It will result in a launch no earlier than in January 2022," Axiom Space President and CEO Michael Suffredini told a podcast press conference.

NASA said the spaceflight, designated as Axiom Mission 1, will launch from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida and the crew is scheduled to spend eight days aboard the orbiting laboratory.

"We are excited to see more people have access to spaceflight through this first private astronaut mission to the space station," Kathy Lueders, associate administrator for human exploration and operations at NASA Headquarters, said.

Axiom will purchase services for the mission from NASA, such as crew supplies, cargo delivery to space, storage, and other in-orbit resources for daily use. NASA will purchase from Axiom the capability to return scientific samples that must be kept cold in transit back to Earth," the space agency said.

"The first private crew to visit the International Space Station is a watershed moment in humanity's expansion off the planet ... A thriving commercial marketplace in low-Earth orbit begins with expanding access to serious, nontraditional users and that is exactly the aim of our private astronaut missions," Suffredini said.

NASA said it has opened up the space station for commercial activities, including private astronaut missions, as part of its plan to develop a competitive economy in low-Earth orbit.

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US Condemns Rocket Attacks on Israel as 'Unacceptable Escalation' - State Department

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US to Pursue Private Sector Cybersecurity Initiatives After Pipeline 'Ransomware' - Biden

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden pledged on Monday to work with the US private sector in beefing up cybersecurity in oil and gas and other industries after a so-called ransomware attack by hackers who downed the country's main fuel pipeline in an attempt to extort money from its operator.

"We will work with the private sector on cybersecurity projects in the oil, gas, and other industries," Biden told a news conference after the attack on the Colonial Pipeline by a cybercrime group calling itself the Dark Side, which the Federal Bureau of Investigation said it was probing.

Biden said the United States planned to work with other countries as well eventually "on a global level to combat ransomware assaults"

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Biden Says US Agencies Acted Quickly to Mitigate Pipeline Attack's Impact on Fuel Supply

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Agencies across the US government acted quickly to mitigate any adverse impacts on the country's fuel supply caused by the ransomware cyber attack on the Colonial pipeline operators, President Joe Biden said during a speech on Monday. "The Department of Energy is working directly with Colonial to get the pipelines back online and operating at full capacity as quickly and safely as possible. The FBI also has engaged to assess and address this attack. The agencies across the government have acted quickly to mitigate any impact on our fuel supply," Biden said.

The DarkSide hacking group is reportedly responsible for the ransomware attack that took down one of the country's largest pipeline operators.

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Biden Says US Government Closely Tracking Colonial Pipeline Ransomware Cyber Attack

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Monday that he is being regularly briefed on the the ransomware cyber attack that has been carried out against the Colonial pipeline operator and his administration closely follows the situation.

"This is something that my administration, our administration, has been tracking extremely carefully, and I have been personally briefed every day," Biden said.

Biden said the US Department of Energy is working with Colonial to bring the pipeline back into operation. The cyber attack was reportedly carried about by the DarkSide group.

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Biden, NATO Allies Discuss Boosting Cooperation in Baltic, Black Sea Regions - White House

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden in a virtual meeting with NATO allies on Monday conveyed his desire to work more closely with allies in the Baltic and Black Sea regions to address a range of issues, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said.

"The president spoke today with NATO's eastern flank allies in a virtual summit," Psaki said in a press briefing. "He conveyed his desire for closer cooperation with our nine allies in Central Europe and the Baltic and Black Sea regions on a full range of issues including global health security, climate change, energy security, and global economic recovery and he also expressed his support for enhancing NATO's deterrence and defense posture as well as the importance of allies increasing their resilience against harmful economic and political actions by our strategic competitors."

Biden also underscored the US commitment to strengthening Transatlantic partnerships, Psaki said.

Biden during the virtual meeting with the NATO allies, including Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, discussed the alliance's efforts to meet future threats, which will be a topic of discussion at the June 14 NATO summit.

The virtual meeting was attended by the leaders of the Bucharest Nine that includes Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary.

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US Taps Libya Ambassador to Serve as Special Envoy to Revolve Civil Conflict - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - US Ambassador to Libya Richard Norland has been tapped as to simultaneously serve as special envoy for the war-torn country and will lead the United States' efforts to end the civil conflict through diplomatic means, the State Department said on Monday.

"US Ambassador to Libya Richard Norland will now also serve in the capacity of US Special Envoy for Libya in addition to Chief of Mission for Libya. In his role as US Special Envoy,

Ambassador Norland will lead US diplomatic efforts to promote international support for a Libyan-led, inclusive, and negotiated political solution to the conflict, facilitated through the United Nations," the State Department said in a statement.

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US Colonial Pipeline Expects to Substantially Restore Service by Week's End - Statement

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - One of the United States' largest pipeline operators, Colonial Pipeline, hit by a DarkSide ransomware breach expects to substantially restore service by the end of the week, the company said on Monday.

Colonial Pipeline said on Friday that it halted all pipeline operations and took some systems offline to contain the threat from a cyberattack.

"While this situation remains fluid and continues to evolve, the Colonial operations team is executing a plan that involves an incremental process that will facilitate a return to service in a phased approach. This plan is based on a number of factors with safety and compliance driving our operational decisions, and the goal of substantially restoring operational service by the end of the week," the statement said.

Portions of the pipeline system are currently being brought back online, the company said, adding that it is working in close coordination with the Department of Energy, which is leading the federal response.

During a White House presser on Monday, US Deputy National Security Adviser Elizabeth Sherwood said Colonial Pipeline has not suffered damage and its operations can resume quickly.

At the same briefing, Deputy US National Security Adviser for Cybersecurity Anne Neuberger said the US believes the hacking group behind the attack is a criminal actor, but is investigating whether it has ties to Russia.

Colonial runs the largest refined products pipeline system, transporting more than 100 million gallons of fuel daily from Houston in Texas to the New York Harbor.

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US Has Serious Concerns About Violence in Israel, Monitoring Situation - White House

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is seriously concerned about violent confrontations in Jerusalem and is closely monitoring the situation, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"We are continuing to closely monitor the violence in Israel, we have serious concerns about the situation, including violent confrontations that we've seen over the last few days," Psaki said during a press briefing.

Unrest in the Jerusalem grows as Israel celebrates Jerusalem Day, with clashes continuing between the Palestinian population and the Israeli forces in the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Sheikh Jarrah areas of East Jerusalem.

Palestinian news agency Wafa said that the Israeli police surrounded Al-Aqsa on Monday morning, stationed snipers and used tear gas to force Palestinian worshipers out of the mosque. Several people were detained while trying to leave the area. Mosque director Sheikh Omar al-Kiswani called the actions of the police "an unprecedented barbaric attack."

The Israeli side reported nine injured, including one person hospitalized. The situation on the Temple Mount is currently stabilized, though the entry to the place is barred for Jewish visitors to avoid further escalation.

Red Crescent office in Jerusalem said on Monday that the number of Palestinians injured in clashes with the Israeli police outside of Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem rose to 331, with seven of them in critical condition.

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Colonial Pipeline Has Suffered No Damage During Hack, Can Reopen Quickly - White House

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Colonial Pipeline has not suffered damage in the recent pipeline hack by DarkSide ransomware and its operations can resume quickly, US Deputy National Security Adviser Elizabeth Sherwood said on Monday.

"Colonial has told us that it has not suffered damage and can be brought back online relatively quickly but that safety is a priority given that it has never before taken the entire pipeline down," Sherwood told reporters in a press briefing.

Sherwood said at the moment there is no oil and gas shortage due to the disruption, however, the US administration has reviewed and prepared plans if a shortage does occur.

Colonial Pipeline said in a statement later in the day that it expects to restore service by the end of the week.

Deputy US National Security Adviser for Cyber Technologies Anne Neuberger said the ransomware used in the attack against the pipeline network has been known to US law enforcement since last October.

Neuberger refused to answer when asked whether the company paid a ransom to the hackers and mentioned that there is no further information about the intent of the perpetrators. She added that the US administration believes that a hacking group behind the Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack is a criminal actor, but is investigating whether it has ties to Russia.

Colonial Pipeline said on Friday that it halted all pipeline operations and took some systems offline to contain the threat from a cyberattack. Colonial runs the largest refined products pipeline system, transporting more than 100 million gallons of fuel daily from Houston in Texas to the New York Harbor.

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Biden also underscored the US commitment to strengthening transatlantic partnerships, Psaki said.

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Unrest in the Jerusalem grows as Israel celebrates Jerusalem Day, with clashes continuing between the Palestinian population and the Israeli forces in the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Sheikh Jarrah areas of East Jerusalem. Earlier in the day, the police barred entry to the Temple Mount to Jewish visitors to avoid further escalation.

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US Familiar with Ransomware Used against Colonial Pipeline since October - White House

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - A piece of ransomware used in an attack on Colonial Pipeline infrastructure has been known to US law enforcement since last year, Deputy US National Security Adviser Anne Neuberger told reporters on Monday.

"In this case, the ransomware that was used is a known variant. The FBI has investigated many cases of this in the past ... beginning in October," Neuberger said during a White House briefing. She refused to answer when asked whether the company paid a ransom to the hackers.

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US Intelligence Looking Into Possible Colonial Pipeline Hackers' Ties to Russia - Official

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that a hacking group behind a Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack is a criminal actor, but is investigating whether it has ties to Russia, Deputy US National Security Adviser for Cybersecurity Anne Neuberger said on Monday.

"At this time, we assess that DarkSide is a criminal actor, but that is certainly something that our intelligence community is looking into," Neuberger said in response to a reporter's question on the group's possible ties with Russia.

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US Capital to Lift Most COVID-19 Restrictions on May 21 - Mayor

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Washington, DC will lift most COVID-19-related restrictions on May 21 and the remainder will be lifted on June 11, Mayor Muriel Bowser announced on Monday.

"On Friday, May 21 we will be turning on substantially more activity in the district [of Columbia]. And we anticipate, three weeks following that on June 11, we will be able to turn up activity in the district all the way. So, restrictions on public and commercial activity, including capacity limits, types of activities and time restrictions, will be lifted, except for bars, nightclubs and large sport and entertainment venues where we will have a capacity limit until June 11," Bowser said during a briefing.

Starting on June 7, up to 50 percent of the Washington, DC government and management service employees will return to in-office work and starting on July 12, all government employees are supposed to be back in their offices, Bowser said.

On May 3, up to 25 percent of Washington, DC government employees were set to resume working in person, according to the operating timeline implemented by the mayor.

Since December, more than 226,000 Washington, DC residents have been vaccinated, Bowser said.

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Sherwood said at the moment there is no oil and gas shortage due to the disruption, however, the US administration has reviewed and prepared plans if a shortage does occur.

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Biden to Reenforce Rules Denying Government Assistance for Turning Down Jobs - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden will announce on Monday ways to make it easier for employers to hire new workers and reinforce rules denying government assistance for those who turn down work opportunities, the New York Times reported.

Biden is scheduled to discuss the economy at a White House media briefing in early afternoon and is expected to bring up the rules of unemployment insurance benefits as well as reiterate

that workers who turn down job offers will be ineligible to receive state and federal unemployment aid.

The unemployment insurance in the era of the coronavirus pandemic has been a political minefield for Biden, as it had been for his predecessor, Donald Trump. Typically, the jobless benefits are meant to provide weekly financial support to families until the head of household gets re-employed.

But the coronavirus pandemic and the higher compensation doled out weekly now compared with two years back, has made people less energetic to look for employment even when there were ample job opportunities in various sectors, according to reports.

The April jobs report from the Labor Department partly highlighted the problem, with just 266,000 jobs created for last month, despite multiple data suggesting roaring economic recovery from the pandemic. Economists polled by US media had expected about 1.0 million new jobs in April, to follow through with the 770,000 officially recorded for March.

Earlier on Monday, US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell accused the Biden administration of placing "handcuffs" on the economy by extending the jobless benefits.

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

Subject: Biden to Help Match US Workers With Jobs, Reinforce Rules For Turning Down Jobs - NYT

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FBI Confirms DarkSide Ransomware Responsible for Compromise of Colonial Pipeline Networks

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The FBI confirmed on Monday that DarkSide ransomware is responsible for the breach of one of the United States' largest pipeline operators, Colonial Pipeline.

Colonial Pipeline said Friday that it halted all pipeline operations and took some systems offline to contain the threat from a cyberattack.

"The FBI confirms that the Darkside ransomware is responsible for the compromise of the Colonial Pipeline networks. We continue to work with the company and our government partners on the investigation," the FBI said in a statement.

According to media reports, the DarkSide hackers are a group of Russian cyber criminals.

Colonial Pipeline said on Sunday that it was developing a system restart plan.

Colonial runs the largest refined products pipeline system, transporting more than 100 million gallons of fuel daily from Houston in Texas to the New York Harbor.

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Police Takes Suspect in Custody After Shooting at Orlando Immigration Services Building

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - One suspect has been placed in custody after a shooting at a US Citizenship and Immigration Services office in Orlando, Florida, the Orlando Police Department (OPD) said in a statement on Monday.

"OPD is working a shooting at the 5400 block of S Semoran Blvd (USCIS Building)," the statement said via Twitter.

OPD spokesperson Autumn Jones stated that one person was killed in the incident.

The police also said more details would be provided as they becomes available.

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US Supports Iran-Saudi Arabia Talks, Has No Role in Them - Official

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United States supports talks between the Middle East rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia though Washington's stance has nothing to do with the diplomatic process reportedly taking place in Iraq, Acting US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Joey Hood said on Monday.

"We support these talks. We don't have anything to do with them," Hood said during a Brookings Institution webinar.

Earlier on Monday, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh was quoted as confirming for the first time that Tehran is in deescalation talks with Saudi Arabia.

US media had reported in April that Iraq mediated and hosted "the first major political conversation" between the two states since they cut diplomatic ties in 2016.

Hood said that the United States supports the Iraqi government's "outreach and reintegration to all different parts of the region and playing that role as a convener rather than a battleground."

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Dow Jones Hits 35,000 First Time Ever Continuing Record High Streak on Wall Street

NEW YORK, May 10 (Sputnik) - The Dow Jones Industrial Average, Wall Street's broadest equity barometer, crossed the 35,000 point mark on Monday for the first time ever, continuing its record high streak from last month powered by the rebound in industrial and leisure stocks battered by the coronavirus pandemic.

By 11:32 a.m. (15:32 GMT), some two hours after trading opened for the new week, the Dow was at 35,076, setting an all-time high of 35,092 earlier.

The Dow had its best week in three months last week, rising 2.7 percent, after a rash of US data pointing to faster-than-expected recovery from the COVID-19 despite a sharp growth in US jobs growth for April. For May thus far, the Dow is up 3.5 percent, while year-to-date it has risen 14.6 percent, outperforming the broader market.

The S&P 500 index, which groups the top 500 stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, also hit record highs, was flat at 4,232.

The tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite plunged 1.5 percent to 13,544, bucking the trend in the Dow as investors sold high-flying growth stocks such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Netflix and Google to buy those of value in the leisure and industrial sector.

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Top UN Investigator Tells Security Council Crimes Against Yazidis Constitute Genocide

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, head of the UN investigative team to promote accountability for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) in Iraq, said on Monday that the crimes against the Yazidis constitute genocide.

"The team has established a detailed account of the atrocities committed against the Yazidis," Khan said. "Thousands of statements have been taken by the team or obtained from the Iraqi authorities or from the KRG or from NGOs. I am able to announce that based upon independent and impartial investigations, complying with international standards and UN best practice, there is clear and convincing evidence that the crimes against the Yazidi people clearly constitute genocide."

Khan said the investigative team combined the findings with analyses of computers and phone records, facial recognition and forensic analysis to reach its conclusion.

Khan pointed out that the investigative team identified specific perpetrators who clearly are responsible for the crimes of genocide against the Yazidi community.

"The intent ISIL [Islamic State] to destroy the Yazidis physically and biologically was manifested in the ultimatum that was repeated in so many different villages in Iraq - to convert or to die," he said. "Thousands of men and women and children were killed pursuing to this ultimatum."

Thousands of Yazidis remain missing and there is evidence some may still be detained by the terror group in the region, Khan added

The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2379 in September 2017 to establish an independent investigative team to support domestic efforts to hold Islamic State in Iraq accountable for its actions in Iraq. UNITAD collects, preserves, and stores evidence of acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide committed by the terrorist group in Iraq.

In December 2017, the Iraqi leadership declared victory over the Islamic State after fighting the group for more than three years. Nevertheless, the international coalition against the terrorist group, which was established in 2014, remained in the country to assist the government in creating a sustainable Iraqi security force that could secure the nation's borders and ensure a lasting victory over the terrorist group.

Despite these efforts, terrorists continue to conduct raids and attacks across the country.

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New York Joins 43 US States Seeking Facebook Drop 'Instagram for Kids' - Attorney General

NEW YORK, May 10 (Sputnik) - New York Attorney General Letitia James has joined the attorney-generals in 43 other US states that seek Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg to drop plans to launch Instagram for children aged below 13 years, a statement from the state Attorney General's Office said on Monday.

James sent Zuckerberg a letter saying the coalition of 44 attorney generals were of the opinion that social media can be detrimental to children for a variety of reasons and Facebook has historically failed to protect the welfare of children on its platforms.

"Without a doubt, this is a dangerous idea that risks the safety of our children and puts them directly in harm's way," the statement said. "There are too many concerns to let Facebook move forward with this ill-conceived idea, which is why we are calling on the company to abandon its launch of Instagram Kids."

James said data and research have shown a strong link between young people's use of social media and an increase in mental distress, self-injurious behavior and suicide.

"Instagram has been frequently flagged for increasing suicidal ideation, depression, and body image concerns in children," the statement said.

The coalition of 44 attorneys general also have concerns about Facebook's ability to comply with relevant privacy laws, such as the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, the statement said.

James said the attorneys general were of the opinion that young children were not equipped to handle the many challenges that came with having an Instagram account, including the lack of an ability to understand privacy, the statement added.

At a hearing in the US Congress in March, Zuckerberg dismissed the idea that social media was harmful to children.

In December, a coalition of 48 attorney generals and the US Federal Trade Commission sued Facebook for anti-competitive practices, demanding it divest its interests in Instagram and popular social communications platform WhatsApp.

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Canada to Begin Issuing US Dollar-Denominated Bonds - Finance Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government will soon begin issuing US dollar-denominated bonds, the country's Department of Finance said in a statement on Monday. "Today, the government of Canada announced its plan to issue a US dollar-denominated global bond later this week, subject to market conditions," the statement said.

The Finance Department explained the move is an effort to diversify the country's assets and encourage long-term economic growth amid a pandemic-era downturn.

The funds will be held in their Exchange Fund Account (EFA), the Finance Department said.

US-dollar-denominated bonds are offered by foreign governments due to the relative stability of the currency for outside investors, especially from the United States. The US dollar is currently valued slightly higher than the Canadian dollar, although officials from the Federal Reserve have recently expressed concern over the potential for higher inflation.

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US Special Envoy for Northern Triangle to Visit El Salvador May 10-12 - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle Ricardo Zuniga will visit El Salvador May 10-12 to discuss with government and private sector representatives a range of issues, including economic solutions to the causes of migration, the US State Department said on Monday.

"Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle Ricardo Zuniga will travel to El Salvador from May 10-12, 2021. Special Envoy Zuniga will meet with Salvadoran government officials, as well as representatives from the private sector, to discuss areas of mutual interest, including strengthening democratic governance and respect for human rights, countering corruption, and addressing economic opportunities as solutions to the root causes of migration," the Department said in a release.

On Friday, US Vice President Kamala Harris said the United States seeks international effort to eradicate root causes of mass migration from the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

The United States is experiencing the highest surge in the number of migrants attempting to cross through its border with Mexico in more than two decades and apprehensions have soared by more than 70 percent in March to 172,331 migrant encounters.

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US Special Envoy for Northern Triangle to Visit El Slavador May 10-12 - State Department
Sputnik

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US Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton Pays Port Visit to Ukraine - Navy

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) – The US Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton conducted a port visit to the city of Odessa in Ukraine following engagements at sea with Ukrainian naval forces, the Navy's Sixth Fleet said on Monday.

"USCGC Hamilton (WMSL 753) conducted a port visit in Odesa, Ukraine, May 10, 2021, following at sea engagements with Ukrainian navy. This port visit marks the fourth stop while conducting operations in US Sixth Fleet, following Spain, Italy and Georgia," the fleet said in a statement.

While visiting Odessa, the US crew will engage with Ukrainian navy and state border guard and other military services, it added.

"Hamilton's gracious welcome to [Odessa] reflects the strong and valued partnership between the US Coast Guard and Ukrainian navy," Capt. Timothy Cronin, commanding officer of the Hamilton. "We look forward to having more opportunities to work together and enhance maritime safety and security, particularly with our allies and partners here in the Black Sea."

While in the Black Sea, the Hamilton crew conducted maritime law enforcement training with the Maritime Border Guard and exchanged damage control and firefighting expertise with the Ukrainian navy, the statement read. The cutter also served as the training platform for Ukrainian troops, it added.

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US Airports Screen Record 1.7Mln Passengers in Single Day - Transportation Agency

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) – US airports set a new record for passenger flow over the weekend, screening more than 1.7 million people or the highest number of travelers since the start of the pandemic, Transportation Security Administration (TSA) spokesperson Lisa Farbstein said on Monday.

"A very busy Mother's Day in the sky yesterday as 1,707,805 people were screened at TSA security checkpoints," Farbstein said via Twitter.

The tally marks the busiest day for TSA since the start of the pandemic, she added.

Friday was the first day since the start of the coronavirus pandemic that US airport passenger traffic topped 1.7 million, with TSA screening 1,703,267 million individuals, Farbstein said on Saturday.