

9/08/21 Wednesday

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New York AG Subpoenas Ethics Agency for Records on Ex-Gov. Cuomo's \$5.1 Million Book Deal

By - Evan Craighead

Since mid-April, the office of New York State Attorney General Letitia James (D) has been investigating whether ex-New York Governor Andrew Cuomo (D) violated ethics laws by seeking out state employees to assist with drafting and editing his COVID-19 pandemic leadership book. Cuomo's office has claimed state officials simply volunteered their time.

The New York State Office of the Attorney General has subpoenaed the Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE) for all records related to Cuomo's \$5.1 million book deal, according to a [Wednesday report from the Albany Times Union](#).

The issuance comes as part of the AG's criminal probe into whether Cuomo misused government resources for his own personal gain while writing "American Crisis: Leadership Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic."

Staffers with JCOPE, a New York watchdog panel overseeing lobbying and ethics standards, granted Cuomo conditional permission to write the book, and collect outside income from the lucrative deal. The July 2020 decision stipulated that the memoir must be written on "his own time and not on state time" and "no state property personnel or other resources" could be used during the process.

Cuomo has maintained that state officials who assisted him with the project "volunteered" their time and wanted to personally review the memoir to ensure its accuracy.

However, Judith Mogul, then-special counsel for Cuomo, explicitly told JCOPE in July 2020 that "he will write the book entirely on his own time, without the use of state resources or personnel." [Reports have since revealed that Cuomo](#) may not have abided by his special counsel's pledge, as a number of state employees, including top aide Melissa DeRosa, assisted with drafting and editing the memoir.

Jim Malatras, who is now chancellor of the State University of New York, reportedly helped Cuomo edit and fact-check the book while working as an aide. Appearing before the Assembly Judiciary Committee late last month, Malatras testified that he did work on Cuomo's memoir during regular work hours, [according to the New York Post](#).

"I didn't work on the book during business hours," he clarified. "I took time off. I testified as such."

The Assembly Judiciary Committee's probe into the matter is separate from the New York Attorney General's investigation.

Cuomo's \$5.1 million book deal included \$2 million payments issued in both 2021 and 2022, according to a financial disclosure form made public in May. However, JCOPE executive director

Judge Sanford Berland has noted that the disgraced ex-governor may be forced to return all proceeds if it is determined he violated state law.

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FBI Releases New Footage of Suspect Accused of Planting Pipe Bombs in DC Ahead of Jan. 6 Riot

By - Evan Craighead

The Washington Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is offering a cash reward of up to \$100,000 for information leading to the location, arrest and conviction of the individual - or group - seen planting viable pipe bombs near both the Democratic and Republican National Committee Headquarters in Washington DC on January 5.

New surveillance footage from the night of January 5 was released by the FBI's Washington Field Office on Wednesday in hopes of identifying the shrouded suspect, and obtaining new information on the plot.

The suspect, donning a gray hooded sweatshirt, black gloves and a face mask, is seen sitting on a public bench near 430 South Capitol Street SE - the location of the DNC Headquarters. The area shown was the approximate location of one of two viable explosives planted between 7:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m., local time, that night. Authorities highlighted that the suspect's full front view can be observed as they pick up their backpack and leave.

"Based upon the suspect's route of travel to the DNC and from the DNC to the RNC, and the manner in which the suspect carries the backpack after placing the pipe bomb at the DNC, the FBI believes the suspect had a location in the vicinity of Folger Park from which the person was operating," [noted the FBI's Washington Field Office](#).

Following a [review of the suspect's behavior in the clips](#), as well as interviews with Capitol Hill residents, the FBI also believes the suspect is not from the DC Metropolitan area.

A virtual map was also included in the FBI release, providing a visual breakdown of the suspect's presumed path, as well as accompanying security footage.

Authorities have not ruled out the possibility that multiple suspects carried out the attempted explosive attack.

Steven D'Antuono, assistant director-in-charge for the FBI Washington Field Office, expressed appreciation for those who have assisted in the ongoing case, and urged the public to continue reporting any information relevant to the attempted bombing.

Since the incident, FBI agents have conducted over 800 interviews, accrued more than 23,000 surveillance and video files, and assessed more than 300 related tips, according to an FBI official's statement.

Although the pipe bombs were [discovered by authorities during the deadly US Capitol riot](#) on January 6, authorities have not directly linked the pipe bomb suspect with the [mob protesting](#) former US President Donald Trump's Electoral College defeat.

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Apologies From Abu Dhabi - Cartoon

Former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled Kabul, Afghanistan, on August 15 as Taliban militants took over the war-torn country's capital. Zahir Aghbar, Afghanistan's ambassador to Tajikistan, alleged some days later that Ghani "stole \$169 million from the state coffers" amid his exit.

Ghani, who is presently in the United Arab Emirates capital of Abu Dhabi, [took to social media on September 8](#) to issue an explanation and apology for "leaving Kabul abruptly" when Taliban militants stormed the city last month.

"Leaving Kabul was the most difficult decision of my life, but I believed it was the only way to keep the guns silent and save Kabul," he said, arguing that he never intended to abandon Kabul's "6 million citizens."

The former Afghan president also took time to address the "categorically false" accusation that he made off with nearly \$170 million that belonged to the Afghan people.

"I welcome an official audit or financial investigation under UN auspices or any other appropriate independent body to prove the veracity of my statements here," he declared.

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United Airlines to Place Unvaccinated Employees With Religious Exemptions on Unpaid Leave
By - Evan Craighead

United Airlines revealed last month that it will require nearly all of its 67,000 US employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19 by October 25, or risk termination. At the time, the airline said that certain religious and health exemptions would be made on a case-by-case basis.

United Airlines employees who have been granted religious exemptions for the company's [recently-announced COVID-19 vaccine mandate](#) will be forced to take a temporary, unpaid leave of absence beginning October 2, according to a memo issued to airline staffers this week. Citing recent spikes in COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and related deaths, [the company stressed](#) that it "can no longer allow unvaccinated people back into the workplace until we better understand how they might interact with our customers and their vaccinated coworkers."

United Airlines did not specify a target date to lift the mandatory unpaid leave.

"Once the pandemic meaningfully recedes, you will be welcomed back to the team on active status, which may include other, safety-related workplace measures that do not exist today," the memo stated.

Employees who were denied approval for such accommodation are required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 within five weeks of the denial notice.

Unvaccinated employees who do not have an exemption and refuse to get their first shot by September 27 "will be separated from the company."

United Airlines will not institute temporary, unpaid leave for those with medical exemptions for the COVID-19 vaccine mandate.

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Hacker Claims to Have Stolen the Personal Data of 75% of Israel's Population

By - Nevin Brown

The hacker uses the name Sangkancil and maintains that they stole the data from CITY4U, a website used by local officials to process property taxes, fines, and utility bills. 'Sang Kancil' is a traditional fable popular in Indonesia and Malaysia about a small and cunning mouse-deer.

A hacker, using the name Sangkancil, claims to have stolen the personal information of some seven million Israelis.

If the claims are true, it would be one of the largest privacy breaches in Israeli history and would mean the personal information of approximately 75% of the nation's 9.3 million population has been compromised, The Times of Israel [reported](#).

In one message the hacker, in reference to Rosh Hashanah, wrote, "This is my first surprise for the Jewish new year. Enjoy!"

The hacker has offered the data for sale and has hinted that they will drop more information in the coming days.

The hacker first claimed to have made the attack on Sunday through the use of a Telegram messaging application account. On Monday, they released images of documents, such as Israeli identity cards, driver's licenses and tax bills, as a means of proving their claim.

According to The Times of Israel, the state's National Cyber Directorate offered a statement claiming that the leaked information was out of date.

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'Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings' Crushes Box Office, and Day-to-Date Steaming Releases

By - Nevin Brown

"Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" set box office records over the Labor Day weekend. The newest entry in the Marvel Cinematic Universe was the first major Disney release this summer to not have a day-to-date streaming release. Could its success be a death blow to the day-to-date blockbuster?

The coronavirus pandemic has had a crippling effect on the film industry. Productions were shut down. Release dates were pushed back. Movies once headed for theaters went straight to on-demand. The industry was in flux.

As a result, Hollywood decided to try something new. If people were scared to see movies in theaters, why not bring the films directly to them? The idea was not new, but the idea that a blockbuster could be available to watch, on your couch, the same day that it graced theaters was. The idea was bold, it was novel, and, if this summer is any indication, it is dead.

Over the four-day Labor Day weekend, “Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings” opened to \$90 million. It's three-day opening, how non-holiday box office weekends are reported, came in at \$75.5 million.

The record for a four-day Labor Day weekend was \$30.6 million. “Shang-Chi” more than doubled that in its first three days of release. It also was exclusively available in theaters, like the good old days.

“Shang-Chi” is a massive success. It's opening all but guarantees it'll be one of the highest grossing films of the year, and it also may represent a death blow for day-to-date streaming releases. Using weekend box office projections from [boxofficereport.com](https://www.boxofficereport.com), an all too telling trend emerges. Movies that had day-to-date streaming releases underperformed and those that didn't defied expectations.

From May 28th, 2021 to September 6th, 2021, nineteen high-profile releases went to American cinemas. Eight had day-to-date steaming releases and eleven did not. Of the eight available for streaming right away they were, on average, projected to gross \$32.6 million in their opening weekend. In reality, these films grossed, on average, \$30.7 million.

While a drop-off of \$1.9 million doesn't sound like much, the projections baked in that people were able to watch it without going to theaters. Factor in that films with day-to-date streaming releases also experienced [more significant declines in subsequent weeks](#), and suddenly studios are seeing their box office returns dwindle.

The other side of the coin are the eleven films that didn't have day-to-date streaming releases. As a group they, on average, were projected to earn \$27.4 million in their opening weekends but brought in an average of \$30.6 million.

On the whole, the difference between the two groups is a small \$100,000 difference on opening weekends. However, expectations are everything in the film industry, and the films without day-to-date releases were more likely to go above and beyond their pre-release expectations.

“Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings” had a record setting debut. It caps off a summer of disappointing box office returns with a ray of hope. While it has all but guaranteed a long running franchise, its longest lasting legacy may be that it was the film that officially killed the day-to-date streaming blockbuster.

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Cristiano Ronaldo Spotted on Manchester United Training Pitch Ahead of Much Anticipated Second Debut

By - Nevin Brown

Cristiano Ronaldo got a headstart on his second act for Manchester United. The forward was released from international duty early and made his debut at United's training ground. The 36-year-old met with United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer before being introduced to his new teammates.

Cristiano Ronaldo is making headlines once again. The five-time Ballon d'Or winner was [spotted on Manchester United's training pitch](#) ahead of their weekend showdown with Newcastle United. The 36-year-old forward was [released early from international duty](#) with Portugal to return to Manchester after a 12-year absence.

Many of United's key contributors are still absent on international duty, but Ronaldo was filmed jogging with former Spanish International player Juan Mata. The pair battled against each other for two seasons in La Liga, with Mata's Valencia finishing third and Ronaldo and Real Madrid finishing second in both seasons.

Before training, Ronaldo met with United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer before being [introduced to his new teammates](#). Solskjaer and Ronaldo were teammates at Old Trafford for four years. At that point, Solskjaer's career was winding down, while Ronaldo was quickly becoming one of the best players in the world.

The manager is hoping that Ronaldo can reinvigorate the club for a second time after finishing second in the league last season. If Ronaldo's training goes well, he figures to make his second debut for United either this weekend or at mid-week in the Champions League at Swiss side BSC Young Boys.

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Texas Governor Greg Abbott Claims 'Texas Will Eliminate All Rapists' in Defense of Heartbeat Bill

By - Nevin Brown

Texas Governor Greg Abbott proclaims 'Texas will eliminate all rapists' in defense of his state's heartbeat bill's controversial provision that bans abortions after a fetal heartbeat is detected even in the event of rape or incest.

[Texas Senate Bill 8](#), known more commonly as the heartbeat bill, was passed on May 19th, 2021, but went into effect September 1st. The bill bans abortions when a fetal heartbeat is detected, which [the bill defines as](#), "cardiac activity or the steady and repetitive rhythmic contraction of the fetal heart within the gestational sac."

Many pro-choice and abortion rights advocates point out that fetal heartbeats can be determined usually around six weeks after conception, a period of time when many women are not even aware that they are pregnant. While the bill doesn't ban abortion outright, it creates a very small window of time for a woman to determine that they're pregnant and have an abortion performed.

Perhaps even more controversial is that the bill makes no exceptions for women that have become pregnant through sexual assault, rape, or incest. The governor was asked, "why force a rape or incest victim to carry a pregnancy to term?"

He responded by saying, "It doesn't require that at all, because obviously it provides at least six weeks for a person to be able to get an abortion... let's make something very clear. Rape is a crime, and Texas will work tirelessly to make sure that we eliminate all rapists from the streets of Texas by aggressively going out and arresting them and prosecuting them.... goal number one in the state of Texas is to eliminate rape."

Abbott's statement that Texas will work to eliminate all rapists in defense of the controversial law has drawn the ire of many of its opponents. Experts point to the reality that [most rapes go unreported to the police](#), and that Abbott has not come out with any concrete plans to eliminate all rapists from Texas.

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The Oil Leak Enigma off the Coast of Louisiana
By - Nevin Brown

In the wake of Hurricane Ida, an oil leak off the coast of Louisiana is the region's newest whodunit. The owner of the leaking pipeline has yet to be determined, and it raises fresh concerns over the lax regulatory guidelines for decommissioning a pipeline.

The damage that Hurricane Ida caused continues to grow. Reports came in on Saturday of an [oil spill approximately two miles from Port Fourchon, Louisiana](#). Over the weekend, divers, with the assistance of Talos Energy, who had previously leased the area for a pipeline and were initially believed to be at fault, began investigating the scene. The source of the leak was discovered on Sunday.

On Monday, Talos secured a containment dome to recover and transfer the leaking oil. While the spill is currently contained, it was determined that the spill was not caused by Talos. It has yet to be determined who is at fault.

The Louisiana Gulf Coast is littered with [active and defunct oil and gas pipelines](#). Oil has been extracted from the Gulf of Mexico since the 1920s, and as demand and production ramped up post-World War II, pipelines began their web-like sprawl through the gulf. Regulations in the region have been and remain relaxed in regards to how to deconstruct defunct pipelines. The oil spill reported on Saturday likely originates from a poorly decommissioned pipeline.

Oil production in the Gulf of Mexico [accounts for 15% of the US's crude oil production](#) and underwater pipelines are their highways to the shore. Intense hurricanes, like Ida, are more likely to damage current and defunct pipelines. Officials in Louisiana may be looking for the one-time owner of the leaking pipe, but the blame is not squarely on them. Loose regulatory guidelines have left the Gulf of Mexico littered with aging and potentially oil-filled pipelines, and solving the mystery of this oil spill won't solve that problem.

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Gavin Newsom Looks Poised to Survive California's Recall Election

By - Nevin Brown

The recall election has been a wild ride for the incumbent Democrat. What looked like a dead heat as early as a month ago, has quickly become a double-digit lead for Newsom in the polls. With the recall election official, the political future for California Governor Gavin Newsom looked to be on rocky ground.

The recall election in the Golden State is broken into two sections. The first is a vote to either keep or to remove Newsom, and the second is who should replace him, in the event that 50% or more of voters decide to remove Newsom, with the winning candidate assuming the governorship. While the first choice is a simple yes or no question, the second is far more [difficult, with 46 challengers](#) for voters to choose from.

According to [FiveThirtyEight's meta-poll](#), early polling saw Newsom maintain a healthy double-digit lead in mid-July. However, as the month wore on Newsom's favorability began to slip with an astonishing turn of events in early August, suggesting that Newsom was in a dead heat to remain California's governor. From August 4th to 24th, Newsom maintained a slim 0.2 to 1.2 edge in the polls in favor of keeping him in office.

The narrowing of the gap was fueled by one [SurveyUSA poll that gave an +11 point edge](#) to removing Newsom from office. As more polls began to roll in the following weeks, especially around the end of the month, Newsom's lead in the polls began to grow again. He hit double-digits again on September 4th, and, as of September 8th, holds a 12.3 point edge in his favor.

The SurveyUSA poll that spelled doom for Newsom ended up being a false positive. Of the 28 polls used in FiveThirtyEight's meta-poll, three had Newsom being removed, one had Newsom tied, and the rest saw Newsom as safe.

The two other polls that had more support for Newsom's removal were by small margins. In a [subsequent SurveyUSA poll](#), conducted from August 26th to 28th, the results came back with a +8 point lead for Newsom to remain in office. In the official results, SurveyUSA pointed to changes in methodology, as well as changed language that they believed led to the outlier poll at the beginning of the month.

California's recall election of Governor Gavin Newsom is set for September 14th and marks a [fifteen-month effort by state Republicans to oust the Democrat](#).

Back in June of 2020, the petition to oust Newsom was approved, but still needed nearly 1.5 million signatures to trigger the recall election. The petition was given until November 17th, 2020 to collect the necessary signatures but was granted a four-month extension due to the difficulties the COVID-19 pandemic presented. The extension ended up being a significant development for their efforts.

On November 6th, 2020, Gavin Newsom [was photographed dining at an upscale French restaurant](#). The photos revealed that Newsom was inside, maskless, and in clear defiance of his own administration's covid protocols. The moment catalyzed Republicans who had grown weary

of the state's covid restrictions and propelled the petition to the necessary signatures over the final months of 2020.

With less than a week until California's recall election, it appears that Gavin Newsom is once again safe. In fact, it's likely that he was safe the entire time. If it wasn't for one outlier poll, the idea that Newsom was fighting for his political future never would have materialized. Newsom might not have been politically vulnerable, but no one is impervious to the forces of poor polling. International

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England Stunned by Late Equalizer Against Poland in World Cup Qualifier
By - Nevin Brown

England's perfect start to World Cup qualifying has come to an end. An extra-time equalizer from Poland nullified a wonder strike from Harry Kane. While England's perfect start is gone, their chances of sealing Group I remain strong.

Halfway through England's World Cup qualifiers, the European Championship runner-ups remained perfect. Five matches, five victories, 15 points, and sitting pretty atop Group I. Another victory over Poland, to make it six victories in six matches, would give the three lions a stranglehold on the group and all but book their ticket to the Qatar World Cup.

After 90 minutes of action, clinging to a 1-0 lead and with four minutes of extra-time on the ledger, it looked like England had accomplished their mission in the Polish capital of Warsaw. All it took was one minute of extra time for Poland to equalize and snatch two points from the three lions.

The match was defined in the early goings by England's dominance of possession and the Polish side's willingness to play physically. Poland conceded possession in an effort to maintain their defensive shape and opted to create chances in transition. For the first 45 minutes, neither side was able to break through. However, the match would come alive in the second half. Caught in a deadlock for 72 minutes, England opened the scoring with an absolute stunner from Harry Kane. England overloaded the left side of the field and with Poland in retreat, Harry Maguire drifted into an advanced position where he switched the play to Kyle Walker. Walker, who had tucked in centrally, wasted no time moving the ball and carefully volleyed the ball to an unmarked Kane leaving the Polish defense flat-footed. Kane, nearly 40 yards from goal but with Poland's defense camped out on the 18-yard box and their midfield disoriented or unaware of Harry Kane's rocket launcher of a right foot, had more than enough time and space. A turn and touch were all Kane needed to unleash a stunning 32-yard shot on Poland's goal. The ball, blasted right at Polish defender Jan Bednarek, narrowly missed decapitating the Southampton defender before dipping and darting with outside foot movement. The shot, first hidden behind Bednarek and then darting away like a driver asleep at the wheel, left Polish goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny rooted to his spot for too long. The goal harkened back to days when players, unknowing of expected goals, would unleash long-range efforts with

abandon. Harry Kane had delivered England the goal they needed to make it six out of six. All they needed was to hold on for 20 more minutes.

Hold on they did. England reached extra-time with a 1-0 lead over Poland and four minutes of extra-time away from 18 points in Group I. Spurred on by their home crowd Poland launched a late attack in an effort to claim a point and move ever closer to second place in the Group. It was at the end of the 91st minute when Poland drew, even taking two points from England and one for themselves.

The play started with Jakub Moder beating Kyle Walker down the right side and playing a low cross into the box. Mason Mount was on scene for England, but a poor clearance saw the ball fall to Polish midfielder Karol Linetty, who blasted a shot from the edge of the 18-yard box. Calvin Phillips made the block but unfortunately for him, and all of England, the ball careened to Polish number nine, Robert Lewandowski. Lewandowski took a second to assess the situation and lofted a ball to the back post where a streaking Damian Szymanski rose up, obliterating Luke Shaw in the process, and thumped home the header that brought the game even. England will feel disappointed that they weren't able to secure three points tonight. They had the lion's share of possession and outshot Poland on the night 14 to 12. However, a draw was a fair result. According to [Footystats](#), England barely edged Poland in expected goals 1.62 to 1.32 and for all their possession they struggled to consistently create big chances.

Drawing on the road against your group's toughest opponent while you maintain a lead of four points is hardly a disaster. England has already played Poland twice, taking four points, and their remaining four games are all incredibly favorable. They face Hungary and Albania at home, and their two remaining road contests are against Andorra and San Marino.

The way England drew against Poland stings, but they remain in an incredibly enviable position. England should have no problems taking the group and, assuming England beat Andorra and San Marino, can afford to drop points against both Hungary and Albania. Albania, currently in second, is sitting on 12 points. Even if they win out, they'll finish with 24 points and England already has 16 points in the bag.

All England needs to do to punch their ticket to the World Cup is take care of business against the minnows and draw Albania. Although, a clean sweep of the remaining competition is likely what England has their sights set on.

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FIFA Suspends Brazilian Premier League Players at Request of Brazilian FA
By - Nevin Brown

The Premier League is at odds with the Brazilian Football Association and FIFA. In retribution for the Premier League not releasing players to play in red-listed countries, FIFA and the Brazilian FA are seeking to suspend players for five days for following their club's requests to skip international duty.

[FIFA is set to invoke the five-day ruling](#), at the request of the Brazilian Football Association, that will prevent the Premier League players who were blocked from playing for Brazil over this past week's international break, from participating in any club games for five days.

If no resolution can be agreed to, the teams could risk forfeiting any games where the banned players feature. The players the Brazilian FA has asked FIFA to ban are the Liverpool trio of Alisson, Fabinho, and Roberto Firmino, the Manchester City duo of Ederson and Gabriel Jesus, Leeds's Raphinha, Chelsea's Thiago Silva, and Manchester United's Fred.

The ban applies not just to Premier League games, but Champions League games as well, with the group stage set to start this mid-week.

The move is a response to [Premier League clubs unanimously deciding](#) "not to release players for international matches played in red-list countries next month," as their re-entry into England would require a 10-day hotel quarantine period, which would cause them to miss games and training. The Brazilian FA appears to have employed FIFA and the five-day ruling largely out of spite.

As they did not ask FIFA to impose the five-day ruling on Everton's Richarlison due to the friendly nature between the club and the FA for allowing Richarlison to play in both the Copa America and the Olympics this summer.

The Premier League clubs are working to resolve the issue, and believe there is a chance that their star Brazilians will be able to feature this weekend. Premier League clubs believe FIFA has no real basis in enforcement due to the extraordinary circumstances that a global pandemic creates. Furthering the clubs' anger towards FIFA, is that FIFA had introduced temporary release exceptions for players who faced quarantine restrictions, but failed to continue that policy earlier this year.

At the moment, the Premier League is at odds with not only FIFA and the Brazilian FA, but the FA's of Chile, Mexico, and Paraguay have also asked FIFA to invoke the five-day ruling. If no resolution between the parties can be made, star players missing time through quarantine or suspension could be the norm this season.

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US Weekly Jobless Claims at 310,000 in New Pandemic Low - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US jobless claims rose by 310,000 last week, remaining below the key 400,000 for a sixth straight week for a new pandemic low, the Labor Department data said on Thursday.

"In the week ending September 4, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 310,000, a decrease of 35,000 from the previous week's revised level," the department said in a statement. "This is the lowest level for initial claims since March 14, 2020 when it was 256,000."

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Moscow Believes Chilly Relations With US Do Not Mean Anti-Terrorism Effort Futile

MOSCOW, September 8 (Sputnik) - The cooling of relations between Moscow and Washington does not mean that the countries have been cooperating on counterterrorism in vain for the past 20 years, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Oleg Syromolotov said in an interview with Sputnik. "Over the 20 years that have passed since the 9/11 events, the counterterrorism cooperation between the Russian Federation and the United States has been developing with varying degrees of intensity, and the current cooling of our relations does not mean that these two decades have passed in vain and to no avail," Syromolotov said.

Moscow has repeatedly emphasized that the 2018-2019 dialogue between Russian and US foreign affairs agencies was "quite productive," the diplomat recalled.

"This dialogue had every chance to become an 'all-weather' one, not depending on any external irritants, but it was terminated unilaterally at Washington's initiative under far-fetched pretexts, which hardly served anyone well," Syromolotov stated.

Syromolotov also expressed the hope that common sense and capacity for constructive engagement on counterterrorism are not foreign to Washington.

Contacts between the special services of Russia and the United States have never been interrupted, the work on this line should not depend on politics, Syromolotov said.

On September 11, 2001, members of Al-Qaeda, a terrorist group banned in Russia and a number of other countries, attacked the World Trade Center and other facilities in the United States. As a result of the terrorist attacks, apart from 19 terrorists, 2,977 people died, another 24 were missing, making it the largest terrorist attack in history in terms of the number of victims. After the tragedy, Russia was the first state to offer Washington assistance in the fight against terrorism.

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Turkey Detains 13 ISIS Terror Suspects in Ankara- Reports

MOSCOW, September 8 (Sputnik) - Turkish security forces have detained 13 foreign people with suspected links to Islamic State terrorist group (IS, banned in Russia) in the country's capital, Ankara, in simultaneous anti-terror operations, the Anadolu news agency reported on Thursday.

The operations which were targeted at arresting 15 suspects linked with the terrorist group saw 13 arrested while efforts are underway to capture the remaining suspects, the state-run agency reported citing a source.

Turkey designated IS a terrorist organization in 2013 and holds the group accountable for attacks across the country that have claimed over 300 lives and left hundreds more injured.

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US Defense Secretary Postpones Saudi Arabia Visit Due to Scheduling Issues - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin postponed his trip to Saudi Arabia this week due to scheduling issues, a Pentagon spokesperson told Sputnik. "Yes, that is correct," the spokesperson said on Wednesday when asked to confirm Austin canceled his trip to Saudi Arabia. "The Secretary's trip to Saudi Arabia has been postponed due to scheduling issues. He looks forward to rescheduling at the soonest opportunity." Austin is on a tour of the Persian Gulf this week to thank allies for supporting the United States last month in its mission to evacuate 123,000 people from Afghanistan. Austin already visited Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain, and planned to end his tour with a stop in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia did not play an active role in supporting the United States' airlift mission in Afghanistan and Washington is aware of Riyadh's military agreement with Russia.

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Biden Expected to Propose Global Summit to Plan Collective Response to Pandemic - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is expected to recommend the international community convene in a global summit to strategize a collective response to the coronavirus pandemic, Politico reported citing two sources familiar with the matter. The report said on Wednesday that Biden aims to schedule the summit close to the high-level week at the United Nations General Assembly, which begins on September 20. Biden could make the call for the global summit during his speech on Thursday afternoon when he will layout the next steps to combat the Delta variant wave in the United States, the report said. The Biden administration wants to use the summit to discuss ways to improve vaccine manufacturing and distributions, including international cooperation on COVID-19 research and development, the report said. The report said Biden has not sent formal invitations to countries for the summit, but some have been notified about his plans.

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US State of Louisiana Delays Fall Elections Because of Hurricane Ida - Secretary of State

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The US state of Louisiana has decided to push back its fall elections after suffering significant damage as a result of Hurricane Ida, the Office of the Louisiana Secretary of State said in a statement.

"Today, Louisiana Secretary of State Kyle Ardoin announced that Governor John Bel Edwards has agreed with his recommendation to reschedule the fall 2021 elections in light of the devastation brought on by Hurricane Ida," the statement said on Wednesday.

The elections were originally scheduled for October 9 but are now set to take place on November 13, while the elections that were scheduled for November 13 are now set to take place on December 11 - in order to give election staff and local partners more time to properly prepare, the statement said.

Ardoin said that he is thankful to be given more time to ensure the integrity of the election process and that voters' traditional voting habits are undisturbed.

A total of 26 people have been killed across Louisiana as a result of Hurricane Ida as of

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US Indicts Ex-Ericsson Employee for Role in Foreign Bribery Conspiracy - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - A dual citizen of Ethiopia and Sweden, Afework Bereket has been charged for his alleged role in bribing Djibouti government officials with \$2.1 million while working for the Swedish telecommunications company Ericsson, the US Justice Department said in a press release.

"A federal indictment was unsealed today in the Southern District of New York charging a former employee of the Swedish multinational telecommunications company Telefonaktiebolaget LM Ericsson ("Ericsson" or "the Company") for his alleged role in a scheme to pay approximately \$2.1 million in bribes to high-level government officials in the Republic of Djibouti and conspiring to launder funds to promote the scheme," the release said on Wednesday.

The defendant was involved in the scheme in the period between 2010 and January 2014 when he was the account manager for the Horn of Africa. During this time, Bereket was allegedly a part of a scheme to bribe two high-ranking Djibouti officials to obtain a contract with the state-owned telecommunications company, the release said.

Bereket is charged with one count of conspiracy to breach the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) as well as one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering and faces a maximum sentence of 25 years in prison, the release added.

Ericsson entered into a deferred prosecution agreement with the US Department of Justice in December 2019 in connection with violation of the anti-bribery provisions of FCPA. Its subsidiary, Ericsson Egypt Ltd., pleaded guilty to the same violation and paid a total penalty of over \$520 million, according to the release.

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Biden Asks Trump-Era Military Academy Advisory Board Appointees to Resign - White House

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has asked several individuals appointed to military academy advisory boards during the Trump administration to resign from their positions, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said.

"Yes, we have [asked appointees to resign] and the President's objective is what any president's objective is, was to ensure that you have nominees and people serving on these boards who are qualified to serve on them and who are aligned with your values," Psaki said on Wednesday. "I will let others evaluate whether they think Kellyanne Conway and Sean Spicer and others were qualified."

Trump associates including former Senior Counselor Kellyanne Conway, former White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer and former National Security Advisor Herbert McMaster were appointed to advisory board positions for the US military academies at West Point and Colorado Springs.

Psaki added that Biden's requirements for the positions are not of a party affiliation, but whether one is qualified and aligned with the administration's values.

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Biden Expected to Propose Global Summit to Plan Collective Response to Pandemic - Reports

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The report said on Wednesday that Biden aims to schedule the summit close to the high-level week at the United Nations General Assembly, which begins on September 20.

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Michigan Seeks \$22,000 in Fees From Ex-Trump Attorneys in Voter Fraud Case - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The Michigan Attorney General's office is asking former Trump attorneys who promoted false voter fraud allegations in the 2020 election to pay a fee of nearly \$22,000, a court filing revealed.

"The State Defendants propose that they be awarded \$21,964.75 in attorneys' fees based on the affidavits submitted by Assistant Attorney General Heather S. Meingast and Assistant Attorney General Erik A. Grill," the court filing said on Wednesday.

Former Trump attorney Sidney Powell and her team sued Michigan's Governor Gretchen Whitmer and Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson over voter fraud allegations in the state's vote for the 2020 presidential election.

Last month, a US judge had ordered attorneys Sidney Powell, Lin Wood and others to pay the legal fees of the Michigan state officials.

The US judge also sanctioned the Trump attorneys for abusing the legal system to push false voter fraud claims.

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New York Governor Mandates All Cars, Trucks to Comply With Zero-Emissions Standard By 2035

NEW YORK, September 8 (Sputnik) - New York Governor Kathy Hochul has signed a new legislation that outlines an ambitious goal to make all cars and light trucks sold in the state zero-emissions no later than by 2035, the governor's office said in a release.

"Governor Kathy Hochul today announced new actions to reduce climate-altering greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution from the transportation sector. The Governor signed legislation (A.4302/S.2758), setting a goal for all new passenger cars and trucks sold in New York State to be zero-emissions by 2035," the release said on Wednesday.

The measure also requires all new medium-duty and heavy-duty vehicles to become zero-emissions by 2045 and orders the development of a new green transportation strategy by 2023, the release said.

"New York is implementing the nation's most aggressive plan to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions affecting our climate and to reach our ambitious goals, we must reduce emissions from the transportation sector, currently the largest source of the state's climate pollution," Hochul said in the release.

The devastating consequences of Hurricane Ida in the northeast of United States made President Joe Biden and the governors of the affected states name climate change as the main cause of the detrimental rains and floods that claimed dozens of lives.

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CORRECTION - Hurricane Ida Death Toll Rises to 26 Killed Across Louisiana - Health Department

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The number of individuals killed in Louisiana as a consequence of Hurricane Ida has risen to 26, the state of Louisiana's Department of Health said on Wednesday.

"Following a full review of cases since Hurricane Ida's landfall and the conclusion of several investigations, the Orleans Parish Coroner's Office has confirmed 11 additional storm-related

deaths. This brings the death toll from Hurricane Ida to 26," the Louisiana Health Department said.

Hurricane Ida, which made landfall approximately 10 days ago, caused extensive damage across areas of the Gulf Coast, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. US President Joe Biden has recently visited several of the damaged communities.

Causes of death related to the extreme weather and damage of Hurricane Ida include drowning, falling trees, excessive heat, and carbon monoxide poisoning. The Louisiana Health Department called on the community to be aware of the signs of heat stroke and safely use generators in hopes of avoiding further deaths from overheating and carbon monoxide poisoning.

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REVIEW - Canada's Political Leaders Look to Strike Right Chords at Pivotal National Debates

TORONTO, September 8 (Sputnik) - Canada's political leaders are looking to fine-tune their messaging as the national election campaign heads into the home stretch with the General Election Leaders' Debates giving start to an entirely different phase of the race.

With less than two weeks to go before Canadians go to the polls, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Liberal Party find themselves trailing the Conservative Party in most major nationwide polls, although the Tories have found themselves navigating choppy waters during a week that saw wedge issues come to the forefront.

The political jockeying in the first 24 days of the campaign now gives way to the national leaders' debates, which begin on Wednesday with the French-language debate, and will likely prove pivotal to the fortunes of Canada's political elite.

"It's the most important moment of the campaign," Clinton Desveaux, a political strategist and columnist told Sputnik.

Desveaux explained that elections in Canada are broken into two phases: the introductory phase before the debates and the home stretch of the race following the debates, when the campaign kicks into "overdrive."

"This is where the election starts," Desveaux said.

The two two-hour debates - the English-language debate is scheduled for Thursday - will cover topics, including affordability, climate change, the pandemic and indigenous relations among other issues.

Desveaux believes Conservative Party leader Erin O'Toole, who has been on the defensive during the past week struggling to clarify his stance on several wedge issues including gun control and vaccination, has the most at stake the debates.

"Erin O'Toole needs a 'Hail Mary' pass to show Canadians he is ready for primetime," Desveaux said. "If [O'Toole] can't come out as the definitive victor, then... it's most likely over for [O'Toole]."

O'Toole has the unenviable task of "dominating" Trudeau, fending off attacks from New Democrat Party (NDP) leader Jagmeet Singh and appealing to People's Party of Canada (PPC) voters in order to come out the clear victor, Desveaux said.

Desveaux noted that Trudeau will be looking to build on the momentum following a good performance at the first French-language debates, while Singh will be looking to build momentum.

The political strategist noted that Trudeau and Bloc Quebecois leader Yves-Francois Blanchet, who Desveaux said is in "survival" mode following a subpar performance in the first French-language debate, will have the most to gain during Wednesday's sparring match, while Trudeau and O'Toole will share the limelight on Thursday.

Similarly, Dr. Nelson Wiseman, a political science professor at the University of Toronto, told Sputnik that "a lot" will depend on debate performances but noted that the debates usually "reinforce" voters' preexisting notions rather than necessarily change opinions.

TRUDEAU LOOKS TO MOVE ON FROM SHAKY ELECTION START

More than three weeks into the campaign, Trudeau looks to continue the offensive that finally saw him shake questions about the necessity of a federal election and defend Ottawa's troubled evacuation from Afghanistan.

"[Trudeau] never gave the public a real reason why we're having an election," Wiseman said. Wiseman believes that the ambiguity from Trudeau on this question might impact the results on election day. The political science professor purported that lack of clarity might temper voter turnout amongst Liberals and the increasing impact of the fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic - projections suggest the latest wave might peak around September 20 - would raise further questions about the necessity of an election.

Most opposition leaders have criticized the prime minister, who is running largely on his record of handling of the pandemic, for calling an election while cases and hospitalizations mount across the country. Most analysts say Trudeau called the election to reclaim the majority mandate lost in the 2019 federal campaign.

Cory Morgan, political analyst and columnist with the Western Standard, also told Sputnik that Trudeau had a "tough time articulating the need for an election."

Jacqueline Biollo, a Principal Consultant with Aurora Strategy Group, disagrees.

"Prime Minister Trudeau called the election to allow Canadians a say in what the priorities, post-pandemic should be, and who will lead the country in this regard," Biollo told Sputnik. Biollo emphasized that Trudeau's Liberal government often had to sacrifice the party's priorities to strike deals with opposition parties on emergency COVID-related legislation.

VACCINATION, GUNS BECOME WEDGE ISSUES IN HEATED ELECTION

While questions about the timing of the elections and foreign affairs issues dominated discussion during the first few weeks of the campaign, vaccination against the coronavirus disease and gun control are increasingly becoming wedge issues in campaign that is one of the most heated in recent memory.

Trudeau has dug in on his stance on vaccination throughout the campaign, invoking the issue often during his stops, with O'Toole, who has endorsed a moderate stance on stringent vaccination requirements and vaccine passports, usually on the receiving end of his tongue-lashings.

The Trudeau government has vowed to make vaccination mandatory for all federal government employees and inter-provincial passengers and entice provinces, who have jurisdiction over health-related matters, to introduce vaccine passports. O'Toole, on the other hand, has spoken

out against sweeping vaccination mandates, touting increased COVID-19 testing as an option for the vaccine hesitant.

Wiseman says vaccination talk was all part of the Liberals' plan.

"The whole strategy was built around vaccination," Wiseman said, explaining that mandatory vaccination is a winner with most Canadians.

However, as vaccination against COVID-19 becomes increasingly politicized, heated discussion is leading to ugly scenes at Trudeau's campaign stops and other settings around the country.

On Monday, Trudeau was pelted with gravel during a campaign stop in London, Ontario, an incident which came just weeks after the Prime Minister was forced to cancel an event in Bolton, Ontario to avoid a sizable crowd of protesters hurling obscenities directed at him and the governing Liberals.

Additionally, in recent weeks, protesters have descended upon hospitals in protest of the existing and proposed public health measures and reportedly accosting healthcare workers.

Mark Slapinski, a political commentator, believes the campaign is getting "ugly" and could provide a lifeline to the sitting prime minister by painting all conservatives with the same brushstroke.

"What started with words is now turning into violence. The people responsible for throwing rocks are linked to a far-right, nationalist movement. I believe the police failed to act swiftly and make an arrest. There's a good chance this will get worse," Slapinski said. "Trudeau will use this as a way to slam the far-right and put all Conservatives into the same category."

Wiseman and Biollo believe such demonstrations will continue to plague the campaign, however, do not believe they will swing the vote.

Slapinski, meanwhile, believes that vaccination should've never been politicized to begin with, warning of after-shocks following the conclusion of the campaign.

"Vaccines should never have been politicized... I believe the people opposed to vaccines will likely continue protesting against the system," Slapinski said, warning that after the election Canada could see similar unrest that occurred United States earlier in the year, but on a smaller scale.

The issue of gun control is also getting increasing attention.

Weeks after a mass shooting in the province of Nova Scotia left 22 dead, the Trudeau government introduced a ban on 1,500 models and variants of military-grade assault weapons. However, more than 16 months later, the regulatory ban is being revisited.

O'Toole had vowed to reverse ban, however, was forced backtrack on his promise after incurring stinging criticism from other candidates, particularly Trudeau, and considerable backlash on social media.

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Hurricane Ida Death Toll Across US Rises to 26 - Louisiana Health Dept.

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Hurricane Ida, which made landfall ten days ago, caused extensive damage across areas of the Gulf Coast as well as the states of Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey. US President Joe Biden visited several of the damaged communities in the northeast of the country on Tuesday. Causes of death related to the extreme weather and damage of Hurricane Ida include drowning, falling trees, excessive heat and carbon monoxide poisoning.

The Louisiana Health Department called on the community to be aware of the signs of heat stroke and safely use generators in the hope of avoiding further deaths from overheating and carbon monoxide poisoning.

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Ex-Special Envoy for Guantanamo to Lead US Legal Efforts on Afghan Evacuees - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Former US special envoy for Guantanamo Lee Wolosky will lead the Biden administration's legal efforts on resettling Afghan evacuees in the United States, Axios reported.

Wolosky, who worked on Guantanamo under President Barack Obama, will serve as a special counsel to Joe Biden and will leave his current position in Jenner & Block LLP, the report said, citing a person familiar with the matter.

By adding an experienced attorney, President Joe Biden is trying to ensure that his resettlement program continues working on a solid legal base, the report added.

Wolosky served as Director of Transnational Threats on the National Security Council under Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

On Friday, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said the United States has so far admitted more than 40,000 Afghan evacuees.

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US Capitol Police Warn of Potential for Violence During September 18 Rally - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - A rally in support of individuals arrested in connection with the unrest at the Capitol on January 6 has the potential to lead to violence, CNN reported on Wednesday, citing an internal US Capitol Police memorandum.

The "Justice for J6" rally, organized by the pro-Trump group Look Ahead America, is intended to bring public attention and support to those arrested, kept in detention and charged with crimes in relation to the January 6 events at the Capitol.

The memorandum said there has been an increase in rhetoric calling for violence during the event and it is not unreasonable to plan for violent altercations.

The US House Administration Committee, which oversees the security of the Capitol, began receiving briefings on Wednesday in preparation for the event. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said they intend to keep the integrity of the Capitol intact during the rally.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) -

PUTIN-MICHEL TALKS

* Russian President Vladimir Putin and European Council President Charles Michel held a telephone conversation on Afghanistan, emphasizing the need to maintain stability and prevent violence in the country, and expressed readiness to cooperate against the spreading of terrorism, the Kremlin said on Wednesday.

* Putin and Michel touched upon the Donbas conflict, pointing to the need to intensify negotiations between the warring parties, the Kremlin said.

* Putin briefed Michel on the steps to implement the trilateral agreements on Nagorno-Karabakh, the Kremlin said.

* Putin pointed out to Michel the European Union's persisting discriminatory policy against Crimea residents, the Kremlin said.

IRAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT

* European Council President Charles Michel said on Wednesday that he held a conversation with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi about the importance to urgently resume negotiations on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also praising Iran's important role in hosting Afghan refugees.

* The United States is approaching the point when Iran's return to compliance with the 2015 nuclear agreement, formally known as the JCPOA, will no longer achieve the same benefits that it did when it was initially signed, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

AFGHANISTAN

* The inauguration ceremony for the new Afghan cabinet is scheduled for September 11, a source in the Taliban movement (banned in Russia) told Sputnik.

* Acting Afghan Prime Minister Mohammad Hassan Akhund said that the Taliban has called on former officials to return to Afghanistan and that it will guarantee their safety.

* China made a decision to urgently provide food, winter clothes, vaccines and medicines worth 200 million yuan (\$30.9 million) to Afghanistan, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said.

* US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that the Taliban are not allowing charter flights to leave Afghanistan because some passengers do not have the appropriate credentials.

RUSSIA-INDIA RELATIONS

* Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev and Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar met on Wednesday to discuss a wide range of issues, including developments in Afghanistan, the Russian Security Council said on Wednesday.

* Patrushev held a meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi to discuss bilateral cooperation and ways to further boost political dialogue, the Russian Security Council said.

GUINEA

* RPG Arc-en-ciel, the Guinean political party that holds majority of seats in the parliament, said on Wednesday that it accepts changes in the country and called for the release of President Alpha Conde.

* Conde is feeling fine and stays in a presidential suite of the Noor hotel, the Mosaique Guinee news agency reported.

COVID-19

* World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Wednesday called for a global moratorium on booster doses of the coronavirus vaccines until the end of the year so every country can have opportunities to vaccinate "at least" 40 percent of population.

* Approximately 7,000 cases of adverse reactions to coronavirus vaccines have been registered in Russia, Alla Samoylova, the head of the Russian Federal Service for Surveillance in Healthcare, Roszdravnadzor, said.

RUSSIAN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS MINISTER DIES

* Russian Minister of Emergency Situations Yevgeny Zinichev died at the age of 55 in the line of duty as he was saving a person's life, the ministry said on Wednesday.

* Zinichev died in Norilsk during military drills when he tried to save the live film director Alexander Melnik (who directed famous action movies Terra Nova and Territory), the ministry told Sputnik.

* A cameraman that Zinichev tried to save also died, Sputnik and RT Editor-in-Chief Margarita Simonyan said.

PUTIN-LUKASHENKO TALKS

* Presidents Vladimir Putin and Alexander Lukashenko will exchange views on Afghanistan at their meeting in Moscow on Thursday but will chiefly focus on the bilateral relations between Russia and Belarus, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

* Putin will not raise the topic of Crimea's recognition at meetings with Lukashenko since this is a sovereign affair of any nation, Peskov told reporters ahead of the top-level negotiations.

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Blinken Urges Allies to Unite to Mitigate Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) – The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has called upon American allies and partners to unite in an effort to mitigate the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and to hold the Taliban (banned in Russia) accountable on counterterrorism, spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday.

“Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas co-hosted a ministerial on Afghanistan with allies and partners,” Price said in a press release. “Secretary Blinken urged unity in mitigating a potential humanitarian crisis and on holding the Taliban accountable on counterterrorism, on allowing safe passage for foreign citizens and Afghans who want to leave, and on forming an inclusive government that respects basic rights.”

The US will continue to support the human rights of the Afghan people, including women and girls, and to ensure that the country does not become a safe haven for terrorism, the release said.

Representatives of Germany, Australia, Bahrain, Canada, France, India, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Uzbekistan, the European Union, NATO, and the United Nations attended the meeting.

Conflict coupled with drought and COVID-19 has caused immense displacement, poverty, and food insecurity in Afghanistan. As a result, about 18 million people in Afghanistan are in need of humanitarian assistance, according to the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations' Directorate for Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific.

The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization fears that the upcoming winter season will threaten hundreds of thousands of Afghans whose livelihoods depend on agriculture if urgent humanitarian assistance fails to come on time.

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US Stocks Slide on Wednesday Due to Worries of Delta Variant, Federal Reserve Taper Talk

NEW YORK, September 8 (Sputnik) - US stocks fell on Wednesday as worries about the Delta variant of the coronavirus returned to haunt investors, while a senior Federal Reserve banker advocated a quick tapering for the central bank's long-running stimulus.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest US equity barometer on the New York Stock Exchange that lists mostly industrial stocks, settled at 35,032, down points or 0.2 percent on the day.

The S&P 500, which groups the top 500 stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, closed at 4,514, down 6 points, or 0.1 percent.

The Nasdaq Composite Index, which includes stocks of technology giants such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, settled at 15,287, down 88 points or 0.6 percent.

Stocks fell as data showed the United States might face a COVID-19 surge from the more contagious Delta variant before the start of the fall season.

"The low volume grind higher in US stocks is taking a break," said Ed Moya, analyst at New York-based online trading platform OANDA. "The Delta wave may be peaking, but the Fed is clearly in wait-and-see mode over the next couple of months to see how the economy holds up." Federal Reserve Bank of New York President John Williams said on Wednesday it might be appropriate to start tapering this year the central bank's stimulus for the US economy if inflation remains unbridled and the recovery from the pandemic remains on track. The Federal Reserve has been buying \$120 billion in bonds and other assets since the COVID-19 outbreak of March 2020 to support the economy. The central bank has also been keeping interest rates at virtually zero levels for the past 18 months.

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Coalition of 18 States Urges Supreme Court to Extend Federal Benefits to Puerto Rico

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) – A coalition of attorneys general from 18 US states filed a brief urged the Supreme Court to modify a law that excluded residents of Puerto Rico from receiving federal aid for disabled adults and children, New York State Attorney General Letitia James said on Wednesday.

"In a brief filed in *United States v. Vaello-Madero*, a case concerning whether it is constitutional to deny Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits to residents of Puerto Rico, the attorneys general urge the Supreme Court to carefully scrutinize Congress's reasoning for discriminating against the territories," James said in a press release.

The coalition argues that Congress must have more than a good reason to discriminate, and that a similar standard should apply to treatment of the territories that applies to the 50 US states, the release said.

The brief also highlights the racist roots of discrimination against residents of US territories and points out that by excluding territories from certain nationwide aid programs like SSI, Congress withholds assistance from areas in which it is arguably most needed, the release added.

The SSI program provides monthly payments to adults and children with blindness or other disabilities who have income and resources below set financial limits. Congress excluded Puerto Rico from the program.

The case stems from a lawsuit by the Social Security Administration attempting to recover \$28,000 paid to former resident of New York State who moved to Puerto Rico. Lower courts have ruled that the defendant can keep the money.

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Canada Arbitrator Reserves Decision on Ex-Nazi Oberlander's Bid to Adjourn Proceedings

TORONTO, September 8 (Sputnik) - A Canadian immigration arbitrator on Wednesday reserved her decision on former Nazi Helmut Oberlander's bid to adjourn proceedings in the deportation hearings against him.

Oberlander's legal team argued a stay of proceedings is warranted, alleging that the former death squad member is the victim of an abuse of process and that the Canadian government withheld sensitive documents for years that impaired his ability to mount an effective defense. Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) member Karen Greenwood reserved her decision until a later date, saying that the arguments deserve a deeper dive. The adjudicator noted her intention to render the decision within a "reasonable timeframe."

Crown attorney Angela Marinos rejected the defense's position, saying that the abuse of process allegation fails to meet the Babos test, according to which a stay of proceedings is warranted if the right to a fair trial has been violated and no additional redress exists. Marinos emphasized that Oberlander has been given "every bit of the doubt" unlike the victims of the crimes his Sonderkommando SS-10A death squad perpetrated.

During the hearing, Oberlander's counsel Barb Jackman claimed that it is "wrong" to brand the 97-year-old a Nazi, calling him a "kid" caught up in a war against his will and stressing that the Waterloo, Ontario resident's reputation has been shattered by the accusation. Oberlander, a Ukrainian-born ethnic German, was conscripted into the Schutzstaffel (SS) at the age of 17. The defense also repeatedly sought to introduce Oberlander's physical state into the proceedings, calling the deportation process against him "punitive." According to a report drafted by Oberlander's physician, he is not expected to survive "much beyond the summer" and has lost most cognitive function.

However, Marinos countered the defense's arguments, saying that admissibility hearings not about full disclosure or fitness to stand trial, and rejecting allegations that Oberlander's rights have been violated.

Oberlander has been embroiled in a legal battle with the Canadian government since 1995, when the latter began trying to strip him of his citizenship, citing his failure to disclose his links to death squads. After a lengthy legal battle, Oberlander was stripped of his citizenship for the fourth and final time in 2017 and Canada's Supreme Court issued a ruling last December that blocked any possibility for Oberlander to appeal this decision.

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Wage, Commodity Inflation Outpacing US Economic Growth - Fed Beige Book

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Wage and commodity-based inflation are outpacing US economic growth, with businesses reporting higher costs for attracting and maintaining workers and elevated pricing of metals and metals-based products, the Federal Reserve said in its monthly Beige Book report on Wednesday.

"With persistent and extensive labor shortages, a number of districts reported an acceleration in wages, and most characterized wage growth as strong," the Fed said in the report, which surveyed 12 key US districts from early July through August. "Several districts noted particularly

brisk wage gains among lower-wage workers. Employers were reported to be using more frequent raises, bonuses, training, and flexible work arrangements to attract and retain workers.” The central bank also said commodity inflation was at an elevated pace, with half of the districts characterizing the pace of price increases as strong.

“With pervasive resource shortages, input price pressures continued to be widespread,” the Fed’s Beige Book report said. “Most districts noted substantial escalation in the cost of metals and metal-based products, freight and transportation services, and construction materials, with the notable exception of lumber whose cost has retreated from exceptionally high levels.” Even at greatly increased prices, the central bank said many businesses reported having trouble sourcing key commodities and other inputs.

“Some districts reported that businesses are finding it easier to pass along more cost increases through higher prices,” the Fed said. “Several districts indicated that businesses anticipate significant hikes in their selling prices in the months ahead.”

The Fed has been buying \$120 billion in bonds and other assets since the COVID-19 outbreak of March 2020 to support the economy. The central bank has also been keeping interest rates at virtually zero levels for the past 18 months.

The Fed’s stimulus program is being blamed for aggravating price pressures in the United States, where economic growth for the second quarter of 2021 was estimated at 6.6 percent on Thursday - above the 3.5 percent decline noted for all of 2020. The central bank itself has projected economic growth at 6.5 percent for all of 2021.

The Fed’s preferred gauge for inflation - the core Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) Index, which excludes volatile food and energy prices - rose 3.6 percent in the year through July, its most since 1991. The PCE Index including energy and food rose 4.2 percent year on year.

The Fed’s own target for inflation is 2 percent per annum.

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New York Fed Chief Says Appropriate for US Central Bank to Start Stimulus Taper in 2021

NEW YORK, September 8 (Sputnik) - The appropriate time for the US central bank to start tapering the stimulus for the US economy may be later in 2021 if the economic recovery remains on track as anticipated, Federal Reserve Bank of New York President John Williams said Wednesday.

“Assuming the economy continues to improve as I anticipate, it could be appropriate to start reducing the pace of asset purchases this year,” Williams said. “I will be carefully assessing the incoming data on the labor market and what it means for the economic outlook, as well as assessing risks such as the effects of the Delta variant.”

The Federal Reserve has been buying \$120 billion in bonds and other assets since the COVID-19 outbreak in March of 2020 to support the US economy. The central bank has also been keeping interest rates at near zero for the past 18 months.

Critics have blamed the stimulus program for aggravating price pressures in the United States, where economic growth for the second quarter of 2021 was estimated to be at 6.6 percent on Thursday - above the 3.5 percent decline noted for all of 2020. The Federal Reserve has projected economic growth to be 6.5 percent for all of 2021.

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The Federal Reserve's own target for inflation is 2 percent per year.

The question of when the Federal Reserve ought to taper its stimulus and raise interest rates has been hotly debated in recent months as economic recovery conflicts with a resurgence of the coronavirus' Delta variant. The argument for a taper was, however, weakened considerably after US jobs growth for August came in at 70 percent below the economists' target.

Williams suggested in his speech on Wednesday that the central bank should pay as much attention to price pressures as to the labor market.

"Inflation has reached 2 percent and is on track to moderately exceed 2 percent for some time," he said. "There is still a long way to go before reaching maximum employment, and over time it should become clearer whether we have reached 2 percent inflation on a sustainable basis."

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Bill Gates' Investment Company Agrees to Buy Controlling Share of Four Seasons Hotels

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Cascade Investment, an investment and holding company controlled by Microsoft founder and philanthropist Bill Gates, has agreed to purchase a controlling stake in the Four Seasons hotels chain, according to a statement released by the hotel company on Wednesday.

"Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts ("Four Seasons" or "the Company"), the world's leading luxury hospitality company, today announced that its longstanding shareholder, an affiliate of Cascade Investment, L.L.C. (collectively, "Cascade"), has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire a controlling interest in the Company," Four Seasons said.

Cascade is set to expand its current stake from 47.5 percent to 71.25 percent by buying half of the stakes owned by an affiliate of Kingdom Holding Company, a long-term investment partner of Cascade, at a price of \$2.21 billion.

Four Seasons CEO John Davison said in the statement that the support and partnership of shareholders like Cascade continue to be critical to growth, and that the company looks forward with confidence to the future of the luxury hospitality industry.

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US Agriculture Department to Expand Livestock Farmer Assistance Amid Drought - Secretary

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) is changing the rules of its Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) to include aid that offsets livestock feed transportation costs, Agriculture Secretary Thomas Vilsack said during remarks at the White House on Wednesday.

"Right now, we're deeply concerned about the impacts and effects of drought on these beef prices and pork prices and poultry prices... for that reason, we've looked at a number of different steps to try and provide help and assistance to deal with the drought, and today we identified yet another way in which we can provide help and assistance... we're now changing [ELAP] to include also assistance and help for transportation expenses for feed," Vilsack said. Prior to this change, the program explicitly covered losses due to drought or wildfire ineligible for assistance. An April 2021 fact sheet for the program said that "ELAP provides assistance for livestock feed and grazing losses that are not due to drought or wildfires on federally managed lands [or] losses resulting from the cost of transporting water to livestock due to an eligible drought."

Although ELAP benefits do not have any payment limitations, persons and entities with an average adjusted gross income of more than \$900,000 are ineligible to receive them, according to the USDA program fact sheet.

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US Has Not Conveyed Message It Will Recognize Taliban Government - White House

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration has not conveyed any plans to recognize the newly formed Taliban (banned in Russia) government, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said on Wednesday.

"No one in this administration, nor the [US] President [Joe Biden], nor anyone on the national security team would suggest that the Taliban [banned in Russia] are respected and valued members of the global community," Psaki said at a press briefing. "This is a caretaker cabinet that does include four former imprisoned Taliban fighters. We have not conveyed we are going to recognize it."

At the same time, Psaki noted that the US government continues to work with the Taliban to evacuate the remaining American citizens, permanent residents, and Special Immigrant Visa applicants out of Afghanistan since the group oversees and controls the country.

After seizing the last vestiges of resistance in the province of Panjshir, the Taliban announced the end of the war and unveiled the new interim, all-male Afghan government, led by Mullah Hasan Akhund, who has been under UN sanctions since 2001.

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US Forms Advisory Panel on Artificial Intelligence, Recruits Members - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) – The US established a senior-level committee to advise the White House and other federal departments on the development of artificial intelligence (AI), the Commerce Department said on Wednesday.

"AI presents an enormous opportunity to tackle the biggest issues of our time, strengthen our technological competitiveness, and be an engine for growth in nearly every sector of the economy," Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said in a press release announcing the committee.

The release emphasized a need for AI to advance equity and racial justice – a likely reference to reports that the technology performs poorly in facial recognition, especially when used by law enforcement to identify African-Americans.

"We must be sure that these advances are matched by similar progress in ensuring that AI is trustworthy, and that it ensures fairness and protections for civil rights," White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) Director Eric Lander said in the release.

Named National Artificial Intelligence Advisory Committee (NAIAC), it will consist of expert leaders from a broad and interdisciplinary range of AI-relevant disciplines from across academia, industry, non-profits and civil society, and federal laboratories, the release said. A formal notice describing the NAIAC with a call for nominations for the committee and its Subcommittee on Artificial Intelligence and Law Enforcement appeared in the Federal Register on Wednesday.

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US Workforce Subject to Employer Vaccine Mandates Doubles in Past Month - Poll

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The percentage of workers in the United States who say their employer requires coronavirus vaccinations for all employees more than doubled in the past month, a new Gallup poll revealed on Thursday.

"Nineteen percent of US employees now say their employer has such a policy in order for them to return to the workplace, compared with 9 percent in the prior survey from July, and 6 percent or less before that," a press release explaining the poll said.

Fifty-five percent of employees, down from 62 percent in July, say their employer is encouraging but not requiring vaccinations, while 26 percent say their employer has not done either, the release added.

The latest results are from the August 16-22 COVID-19 tracking survey, based on web interviews with more than 1,800 US workers who are members of Gallup's nationally representative panel, according to the release.

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Tigray Rebels Deny Accusations of Killing Over 100 Civilians in Ethiopia

MOSCOW, September 8 (Sputnik) - The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) dismissed on Wednesday allegations that it killed over 100 civilians in Ethiopia's northeastern Amhara region. Earlier this day, Ethiopian media reported that the Tigray rebels assassinated over 100 civilians in Ethiopians without specifying when the massacre happened.

"We categorically reject claims of our forces' involvement in the killing of civilians. We reiterate our call for an independent investigation into all atrocities, and our willingness to facilitate media access to areas under our control for independent verification of any allegations," the statement, published by TPLF representative Getachew Reda on Twitter, said.

The Ethiopian government and TPLF have been engaged in conflict since last November. In July, the rebels captured the city of Mekele, the administrative center of the Tigray region bordering Amhara. Although the government declared a ceasefire, TPLF launched an offensive and took control over most of the region's southern half.

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Tajikistan to Back Only Inclusive Afghan Government With Tajik Representation

DUSHANBE, September 8 (Sputnik) - Tajik Foreign Minister Sirojiddin Muhriddin that Dushanbe will only support an inclusive government in Afghanistan, where seats for Tajik civil servants will be reserved, the country's foreign ministry said on Wednesday.

The remarks were made at a virtual meeting devoted to Afghanistan with over 20 foreign ministers, the UN, the EU, and NATO involved.

"The Foreign Minister stressed that Tajikistan will support only an inclusive government with the participation of all ethnic groups, in which the Tajiks of Afghanistan will take their deserve seats," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

The foreign minister also expressed concern over the violence against ethnic Tajiks in the Panjshir valley and called on the international community to pressure the Taliban (banned in Russia) to reach a political settlement with resistance groups, the statement added.

On Tuesday, the Taliban announced they formed an interim government, with Taliban co-founder Mullah Hasan Akhund as its head.

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US Natural Gas Seen Under \$3.50 by 2022 as Output Quickens - EIA

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US natural gas prices are expected to fall from 7-½ year highs above \$5 per million metric British thermal units to below \$3.50 by next year amid a production hike and a drop in exports of liquefied natural gas, the Energy Information Administration said on Wednesday.

"We expect the Henry Hub spot price will average \$4.00/MMBtu in 4Q21, as the factors that drove prices higher during August lessen," the EIA said in its Short-Term Energy Outlook Report for September.

It said the Henry Hub, where futures of gas were traded, was expected to experience another price hike to \$4.25/mmBtu in January at the peak of winter demand for heating.

But from there, it was expected to "generally decline through 2022, averaging \$3.47/MMBtu for the year amid rising US natural gas production and slowing growth in LNG exports."

Natural gas prices are up 93 percent on the year, trading near \$5 per million metric British thermal units, after rallying with few stops since January due to weather extremities and underwhelming production.

Since last week, the rally has intensified as Hurricane Ida shut down more than 90 percent of gas production facilities on the US Gulf of Mexico prior to making its landfall. In the aftermath of the storm, some production remained shut and could take time to resume due to flooding and other carnage caused by the storm.

The EIA said that even before Ida made landfall at the end of last month, Henry Hub prices had gained as much as \$1.77/mmBtu for August compared to a year ago.

"We expect that natural gas production in the GOM will gradually come back online during the first half of September," the agency added.

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Blinken Will Participate in High-Level US-Mexico Trade Talks on Thursday - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will take part in high-level trade talks between the United States and Mexico that are scheduled to take place in Washington this week, the State Department said on Wednesday.

"On September 9, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken will participate in the US-Mexico High-Level Economic Dialogue (HLED) as a part of a delegation from the United States," the release said.

The meeting's agenda includes promoting economic and social development in southern Mexico and Central America.

Blinken will join Department of Commerce Secretary Raimondo, United States Trade Representative Tai, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas, among others. Mexico's delegation will be lead by Foreign Secretary Marcelo Ebrard, Secretary of Economy Tatiana Clouthier, and Undersecretary for Finance and Public Credit Gabriel Yorio.

This bilateral dialogue is the first meeting to take place since 2016.

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Terrorist Assets Blocked by US Exceed \$200Mln, Excluding Blocked Property – Treasury

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) – US sanctions against terrorist groups and states that sponsor terrorism resulted in the seizure of more than \$200 million, including an unspecified amount of property, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said on Wednesday.

"Approximately \$140.76 million in assets relating to the three designated state sponsors of terrorism (Iran, Syria, North Korea) in 2020 have been identified by OFAC as blocked pursuant to economic sanctions imposed by the United States," Treasury's annual OFAC report on terrorist financing said.

An additional \$63.4 million is blocked by sanctions programs that target international terrorist organizations, the report said.

The dollar tally excludes real estate and other tangible property, for which OFAC does not conduct appraisals, the report added.

However, the report noted that Syria owns four blocked properties in New York and Washington, DC, and Iran owns 11 blocked properties in California, Illinois, Maryland, New York, Texas, and Washington, DC.

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Ex-Nazi Oberlander's Defense Pushes Canada's IRB for Stay of Proceedings

TORONTO, September 8 (Sputnik) - Former Nazi Helmut Oberlander's attorney opened the second day of deportation hearings by Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) with a request to halt proceedings, alleging that the defense was hamstrung by the Canadian government.

Oberlander's legal counsel, Ronald Poulton, argued that the Canadian government withheld sensitive documents for years, which impaired the former death squad member's ability to mount an effective defense, in seeking a temporary stay.

A confidential portion of the Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals in Canada report – better known as the Deschenes Commission – revealed that there was no evidence his client participated in any executions or shot anyone during the war, Oberlander's lawyer claimed.

Poulton emphasized that the search for the sensitive documents began as soon as Oberlander became aware of their existence.

Crown attorneys, meanwhile, assert that Oberlander was aware of the contents of the Deschenes report since the late 1980s when it was completed.

On Tuesday, in the first of the four-day hearing, the defense introduced a motion to conduct the admissibility hearing against the former death squad member in private, barring members of the media and public from observing the proceedings. However, IRB Immigration Division member Karen Greenwood dismissed the motion put forth by Oberlander, the immigration board's spokesperson said in a statement to reporters.

Oberlander's legal team has also introduced supplementary arguments to the bid to have the former death squad member's deportation hearings halted, claiming his debilitated physical state renders him unable to mount a defense against the allegations he is accused of.

According to a report drafted by Oberlander's physician, the 97-year-old is not expected to "survive much beyond the summer" and has lost most cognitive function.

The 96-year-old Oberlander has been embroiled in a legal battle with the Canadian government since 1995, when the latter began trying to strip Ukrainian-born ex-SS member of his citizenship, citing his failure to disclose his links to death squads. After a lengthy legal battle, Oberlander was stripped of his citizenship for the fourth time and final time in 2017 and Canada's Supreme Court issued a ruling last December that blocked any possibility for Oberlander to appeal this decision.

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UN Not Asked Yet to Probe if Ghani Left Afghanistan With Millions of Dollars - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, September 8 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has not been contacted to conduct an official investigation to ascertain whether former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani left the country with millions of dollars in cash, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, Ghani promised to soon lay out in detail the circumstances of his departure from Afghanistan. He also said he would welcome an official audit under the United Nations or any other independent organization to prove claims that he had fled Kabul with the country's resources are "baseless."

"We have not been contacted in any way, shape, or form on this issue," Dujarric said during a press briefing. "It is very important that the resources of the Afghan people go to the Afghan people."

In August, the Taliban terror group (banned in Russia) completed their takeover of Afghanistan by entering Kabul. Ghani left the country to prevent what he described would be a bloodshed that would occur if militants had to fight for the city.

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UN Not Yet in Position to Bring in Humanitarian Flights to Kabul - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, September 8 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has not yet been able to resume humanitarian flights to the Kabul airport but is hopeful airplanes carrying aid will soon be able to land there, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

"There is a lot of discussions going on. We do know that some countries are operating flights, that there have been some upgrades to the airport," Dujarric said during a press briefing. "We're not yet in a position to bring in flights, but we do hope that will happen very soon."

On Tuesday, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths said he had met earlier with the new Afghan Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghani Baradar and addressed the importance of getting humanitarian access to the Kabul airport.

Before the Taliban (banned in Russia) takeover of Afghanistan on August 15, some 18 million vulnerable Afghans have already been facing pressing humanitarian needs.

On Tuesday, the United Nations made an emergency appeal for \$606 million to help some 11 million people in Afghanistan for the rest of 2021.

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Poland Extradites Ukrainian to Face US Charges of Selling Hacked Passwords - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - A Ukrainian cyber-criminal arrested in Poland and extradited to the United States faces up to 17 years in prison for decrypting computer login credentials to sell on the dark web, the US Justice Department said on Wednesday.

"According to the indictment, [Glib] Ivanov-Tolpintsev controlled a 'botnet,' which is a network of computers infected with malware and controlled as a group without the owners' knowledge. He used the botnet to conduct brute-force attacks designed to decrypt numerous computer login credentials simultaneously," the Justice Department said in a press release.

Ivanov-Tolpintsev then sold the login credentials on a dark web website that specialized in access to compromised computers – credentials used by fellow hackers for tax fraud, ransomware attacks and other crimes, the release said.

The hacker once said that his botnet was capable of decrypting the login credentials of at least 2,000 computers every week, the release said.

Ivanov-Tolpintsev was arrested in Poland on October 3, 2020, and extradited to the US, where he appeared in court earlier this week and ordered held without bail, the release added.

Ivanov-Tolpintsev faces multiple charges of conspiracy, trafficking in unauthorized access devices, and trafficking in computer passwords. If convicted on all counts, he faces a maximum penalty of 17 years in federal prison, according to the release.

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Saudi Arabia Welcomes Full Declassification of US 9/11 Documents - Embassy

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Saudi Arabia supports the declassification of documents related to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the kingdom's embassy in the United States said on Wednesday.

"The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United States welcomes the release of classified documents relating to the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001," the embassy said in a statement. "Any allegation that Saudi Arabia is complicit in the September 11 attacks is categorically false."

In the statement, the Saudi embassy underscored that over the course of the twenty years since the tragedy, no evidence has emerged to indicate that the kingdom's government had any information about the planned attack or was somehow involved in its execution.

The kingdom hopes that the full declassification of documents will put an end to any persisting allegations against Saudi Arabia as to its role in the attacks, the release said.

On Friday, Biden issued an executive order initiating an interagency review to possibly declassify certain documents related to the September 11 terrorist attacks. The executive order requires the Attorney General to release the declassified documents publicly over the next six months.

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Brent to Lose \$5 Per Barrel in 2022 as Global Output Expected to Outpace Demand - EIA

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Global oil production is expected to outpace demand, resulting in benchmark Brent crude prices falling by an average of \$5 per barrel by next year, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in its Short-Term Energy Outlook Report for September on Wednesday.

"We expect Brent prices will remain near current levels for the remainder of 2021, averaging \$71 per barrel during the fourth quarter of 2021," the report said. "In 2022, we expect that growth in production from OPEC+, US tight oil, and other non-OPEC countries will outpace slowing growth in global oil consumption and contribute to Brent prices declining to an annual average of \$66/b."

OPEC+, a 23-nation coalition comprising the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and ten other allies steered by Russia, has controlled output tightly since May 2020 in the aftermath of the demand destruction caused by the novel coronavirus pandemic measures.

The EIA noted that Brent averaged \$71 in August, down \$4 from July but up \$26 from August 2020.

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US Gasoline Prices Expected to Fall Under \$3 Per Gallon By Fourth Quarter - Energy Agency

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US gasoline prices, retailing at seven-year highs above \$3.15 per gallon due to peak seasonal demand and outages from Hurricane Ida, are expected to fall to under \$3 by the fourth quarter of this year, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) said on Wednesday.

"US regular gasoline retail prices averaged \$3.16 per gallon in August, the highest monthly average price since October 2014," the EIA said in its Short-Term Energy Outlook Report for September. "We forecast that retail gasoline prices will average \$3.14/gal in September before falling to \$2.91/gallon, on average, in 4Q21."

The EIA said the drop will be in line with expectations that the profit margin for processing gasoline will decline from currently elevated levels and refinery runs will normalize after the fallout from Hurricane Ida.

"Estimated gasoline margins surpassed 70 cents/gal in late August. We expect margins will remain elevated in the coming weeks as refining operations in the US Gulf Coast remain disrupted," the EIA added.

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UN Deeply Disappointed at New Male-Only Government in Afghanistan - Official

UNITED NATIONS, September 8 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is deeply disappointed at the composition of the new Afghan government formed by the Taliban (banned in Russia) that includes no women, UN Women Deputy Country Representative in Afghanistan Alison Davidian said on Wednesday.

On Tuesday night, the Taliban announced the composition of a new interim government, exclusively represented by male members of the movement and headed by Hasan Akhund, who

served as foreign minister during the first Taliban rule, and who has been under international sanctions since 2001.

"This briefing is happening the day after the announcement of the Taliban's transitional administration that has failed to include any women and appears to have abolished the Ministry of Women's Affairs," Davidian said during a press briefing. "UN Women joins many around the world in expressing deep disappointment at this development."

Davidian said the Taliban has missed an opportunity to show the world its commitment to building an inclusive society in Afghanistan.

The United Nations is also deeply concerned by the reports of a crackdown on women who took to the streets across the provinces to protest for equal rights in Afghanistan, Davidian said.

The United Nations has already been receiving numerous reports of women being prohibited from leaving their houses to go to work or to complete daily tasks, she noted.

"It's critical going forward that the Taliban adherences to human rights standards and ensures equal rights and equal participation," Davidian said.

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WhatsApp Refutes Report It Undermines User Privacy Protections - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The instant messaging platform WhatsApp rejects any notion that its feature to review content flagged by users undermines privacy protections, a company spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik on Wednesday.

"We strongly disagree with the notion that accepting reports a user chooses to send us is incompatible with end-to-end encryption," the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson also said WhatsApp permitting users to report spam or abuse is important to preventing such acts on the internet.

Watchdog ProPublica reported this week that WhatsApp falsely claims it can see no users' messages on its global messaging service. However, the company has more than 1,000 contract workers who review millions users' content that has been flagged, the report said. WhatsApp also regularly shares users' personal information with the authorities, the report added.

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Fifty People Missing After 2 Ferries Collide in River in Northeastern India – Police

NEW DELHI, September 8 (Sputnik) - At least 50 people are missing after a collision of two ferries carrying about 120 passengers and the rollover of one of them in the Brahmaputra River in the Assam state of northeastern India, the police said.

"We have found an upturned boat in about 350 meters [0.2 miles] from the river's coast. About 20 people on board have been rescued from different places downriver, but around 50 are missing," Ankur Jain, the police's representative, told national broadcaster India TV. The representative also confirmed the death of one person in the accident. The incident occurred when the first ferry headed to the island of Maluji from the Nimati Ghat pier, while the second one was going in the opposite direction, according to India TV. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his condolences over the accident.

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Oil, Natural Gas Markets Expected to Boom Through 2022, Potentially Beyond - Baker Hughes

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The market for oil and gas is expected to boom through 2022 and potentially beyond despite emerging strains of the novel coronavirus and the anticipated timeline for peak production of hydrocarbons being continuously pushed forth, the drilling services firm Baker Hughes said on Wednesday.

"Looking at the near to intermediate term, we see continued signs of a global economic recovery that should drive further demand growth for the traditional markets of oil and natural gas through 2022 and potentially beyond," Baker Hughes CEO Lorenzo Simonelli told an industry conference.

Simonelli said Baker Hughes remained "constructive" on the oil price environment, as demand recovered, and they maintained spending discipline.

"Although we recognize the growing risks presented by the variant strains of the COVID-19 virus, we expect oil demand to eventually return to pre-COVID levels in the coming years," he said.

Simonelli said the timeline for "peak oil" - defined by a petroleum extraction rate greater than at any time in history, after which it will continue to decline - was being continuously deferred due to environmental issues and progress in electric vehicles, or EV.

"Looking further out into the second half of this decade and beyond, questions remain around the exact timing of peak oil demand," he said. "With policy momentum building for carbon pricing, an acceleration in EV adoption, and the likely growth in other sources of energy consumption, the timeline for peak oil seems to be consistently getting pulled forward."

Simonelli also said a combination of outages and strong demand in Asia, Latin America and Europe have driven third quarter LNG prices to levels not seen since 2015.

"Importantly, higher natural gas and LNG prices are beginning to support an increased level of long-term contracting activity as buyers once again seek out long-term supply agreements," he said.

Natural gas prices are up 93 percent on the year, trading near \$5 per million metric British thermal units, after rallying with few stops since January due to weather extremities and underwhelming production. Crude oil prices are up around 40 percent, responding to output

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US Army Readiness Not Impacted in Afghan Evacuation, Budget Being Reworked - Secretary

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The Afghan evacuation and housing efforts under Operation Allies Welcome have had no impact on US Army readiness and the unforeseen budgetary issues are being worked out, Army Secretary Christine Wormuth said during an interview with DefenseNews on Wednesday.

"We've been very careful to make sure that we manage our ability to maintain our readiness even as we provide all of the support to the safe havens as part of Operation Allies Welcome. So I'm happy to report that we're not going to see a negative impact on readiness," Wormuth said.

Eight US military facilities across the country are being used as temporary housing facilities for Afghans evacuated from the country as they await more permanent relocation.

Wormuth added that although the US Army did not envision having to undertake a mission like Operation Allies Welcome when they submitted their budget projections, they have already been working closely with OSD and Congress to make sure that costs are covered.

She said that they have already secured \$400 million in reprogramming and that the Office of the Secretary of Defense is in conversation with congressional staff about securing another \$1 billion in reprogramming.

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UK Home Minister Says Social Media Should Be Accountable for Content Hurting Children

LONDON, September 8 (Sputnik) -The UK Home Secretary Priti Patel said on Wednesday that G7 countries should hold social networks and companies accountable for content harmful to children and not allow end-to-end encryption to increase sexual abuse rate among minors.

"End-to-end encrypted messaging presents a big challenge to public safety, and this is not just a matter for governments and law enforcement. Social media companies need to understand they share responsibility for keeping people safe... The UK is a global leader in tackling online child sexual abuse... I am raising this issue at the G7 summit of interior ministers this week," Patel stated ahead of the G7 ministers meeting, scheduled to take place from September 8-9 in London.

Sexual abuses of children are incited and organized via the internet on a vast scale, with most incidents occurring on everyday apps and platforms and not the darkest corners of the web as generally believed, the minister added.

"The introduction of end-to-end encryption must not open the door to even greater levels of child sexual abuse – but that is the reality if plans such as those put forward by Facebook go ahead unchanged," Patel continued.

The UK Home Minister announced that enforcing cooperation on children's online security was on the agenda of the upcoming G7 meetings and urged UK partners to back its approach of holding technology companies to account and asking social media companies to "put public safety before profits."

In mid-August, Facebook, the owner of Instagram and WhatsApp, announced plans to start encrypting voice messages and video calls, a measure that some governments and law enforcement agencies believe may hinder investigations into pedophiles.

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US Getting Closer to Point Where Return to JCPOA Does Not Achieve Same Benefits - Blinken

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is approaching the point when Iran's return to compliance with the 2015 nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), will no longer achieve the same benefits that it did when it was initially signed, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.

"I'm not going to put a date on it, but we are getting closer to the point at which a strict return to compliance with the JCPOA does not reproduce the benefits that that agreement achieved," Blinken said in response to a question during a news conference at the Ramstein Air Base in Germany.

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House Committee Receives Security Briefings for Sept. 18 Rally by Trump Supporters- Pelosi

WASHINGTON, August 8 (Sputnik) - The US House Administration Committee, with responsibilities that include protecting the Capitol from outside threats, has begun receiving briefings in preparation for a September 18 rally by supporters of former President Donald Trump, Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Wednesday.

"There are some briefings going on at the appropriate level to the committee of jurisdiction in our house which is house administration and then we will be briefed after that," Pelosi said during a weekly news briefing.

Pelosi declined to provide other details, but she added: "We intend to have the integrity of the Capitol be intact."

The pro-Trump group Look Ahead America announced a rally at the Capitol on December 18 to support hundreds of Trump supporters arrested following the January 6 riot.

On that day, Trump supporters entered the US Capitol in a bid to protest lawmakers' certification of 2020 election results in several states - results that Trump said were fraudulent.

The authorities subsequently arrested more than 500 participants in the riot.

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Ukraine Interested in North Macedonian Experience of Cooperation With NATO - Zelenskyy

KIEV, September 8 (Sputnik) - Ukraine is interested in North Macedonia's experience of strengthening cooperation with NATO, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Wednesday. Earlier in the day, Zelenskyy spoke on the phone with his North Macedonian counterpart, Stevo Pendarovski, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of his country's independence.

"I congratulated [Stevo Pendarovski] on 30th Independence Anniversary of North Macedonia by phone. I thanked for support of Ukraine sovereignty. We discussed deepening of economic interaction. I am interested in sharing experiences between [Ukraine] and [North Macedonia] on deepening cooperation with [NATO]," Zelenskyy tweeted.

Ukraine's ambition to achieve EU and NATO membership has been a national priority dictating the country's foreign and domestic policies.

The Ukrainian parliament adopted constitutional amendments that committed the country to seek EU and NATO membership in 2019. In June 2020, the North Atlantic Council recognized Ukraine as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner.

Meanwhile, North Macedonia officially joined the alliance in March 2020.

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Blinken Says Does Not Know Whether Ghani Fled Afghanistan With Millions of Dollars in Cash

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that he did not know whether former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled Afghanistan with millions of dollars in cash.

"That I don't know. What I do know, is that he left the country and again in very short period of time the security forces and its institutions collapsed and so did the government," Blinken told TOLONews when a journalist said Ghani took millions of dollars in cash with him while fleeing Afghanistan and asked Blinken to comment.

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Blinken Says US Assessing Taliban Announcement of New Government

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that the Washington was assessing the announcement of the new Afghan government by the Taliban (terrorist group, banned in Russia).

"Yesterday the Taliban named the new interim government. We are assessing the announcement," Blinken said at a press conference with German Foreign Minister Heiko Mass after Ramstein Air Base visit.

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Blinken Says Taliban Not Allowing Charter Flights to Leave Afghanistan
WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that the Taliban (designated as a terror group and banned in Russia) are not allowing charter flights to leave Afghanistan because some passengers do not have the appropriate credentials.

"As of now, the Taliban are not permitting the charter flights to depart," Blinken said during remarks at Ramstein air base. "They claim some of the passengers do not have the required documentation."

Blinken added that the State Department is doing everything it can to support the charter flights and has made clear to the Taliban they need to allow the airplanes to depart.

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Ghani Pledges to Tell Details of His Departure From Afghanistan Soon

MOSCOW, September 8 (Sputnik) - Former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said in a statement on Wednesday that he will soon lay out in detail the circumstances of his departure from Afghanistan.

"Now is not the moment for a long assessment of the events leading up to my departure – I will address them in detail in the near future," Ghani said in a statement published on Twitter.

In August, the Taliban (a terrorist group, banned in Russia) completed their takeover of Afghanistan by entering Kabul. Ghani resigned and left the country to prevent what he described as bloodshed that would occur if militants had to fight for the city.

On Tuesday, the Taliban announced an all-male interim government headed by Mullah Hasan Akhund, a close ally of the Islamist militant group's founder.

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Blinken Says Did Not Know in Advance of Ghani's Plans to Flee Afghanistan

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US State Secretary Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that he did not know in advance that then-Afghan President Ashraf Ghani planned to flee Afghanistan and the United States did not help him in the escape.

"He [Ghani] told me in the conversation the night before he fled is that he was prepared to fight to the death and in less than 24 hours, he left Afghanistan. So no, I certainly didn't know about it. And we certainly we did nothing to facilitate it," Blinken told TOLONews in an interview.

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Virginia Removes Statue of Confederate General Lee from State Capital

RICHMOND (Virginia), September 8 (Sputnik) – Several hundred people gathered in Virginia state capital Richmond to witness the dismantling of the statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee from the State Capitol territory.

The statue, installed in 1890, was removed after almost two hours of preparation when technical workers secured it with construction wires. A special crane lifted it from the pedestal and put it on the ground nearby.

People met the historical moment with applause and songs. "Hey, hey, goodbye," they chanted when the statue left its historical place.

Virginia Governor Ralph Northam initiated the removal in June 2020, at the height of the protests against racism that erupted after the police murder of George Floyd in the state of Minnesota. However, getting legal approvals took several months.

"This is the step in the right direction," Northam told reporters after the removal was complete. "I want to thank the people of Richmond and all across the Commonwealth for doing the right thing."

He also noted that now Virginia will be a welcoming state to everyone.

The statue's torso was detached from the horse for further transportation to a secure storage, where the statue will stay until a further decision over its destiny, state's authorities said.

During the Civil War in the United States, Lee led the forces of the Confederacy - a group of southern states that fought for the preservation of the institution of slavery. Calls for the removal of monuments honoring Confederate figures became widespread after last years' protest movements against systemic racism following Floyd's death.

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US Test Demonstrates Long-Range, Jam-Resistant Data Link for Aircraft - Northrop Grumman

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - A successful test of a long-range data link between aircraft and the internet-based cloud demonstrates a technology that can revolutionize command and control in contested airspace, Northrop Grumman said on Wednesday.

"The flight demonstration linked the Scaled Composites Proteus, a High-Altitude, Long-Endurance research aircraft, with a Firebird, an unmanned air vehicle with the capability to be flown manned, through an advanced line-of-sight data link with low probability of intercept/low probability of detection characteristics that includes anti-jam properties," Northrup Grumman said in a press release.

The demonstration was the first integration of a new military transceiver and multi-level security data switches to protect the decision-making chain. The in-flight connectivity "can revolutionize Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) in contested airspace," the release added. During the test, the aircraft established a link, performed a simulated intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) mission, and connected back to a cloud-based 5G network test-bed through a novel prototype multi-level security switch, according to the release.

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US Job Openings Hit Record High of Almost 11Mln in July - Labor Dept

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US job openings hit a record high of nearly 11 million in July, the Labor Department reported on Wednesday in data that showed the mismatch between demand for workers and declining number of positions filled each month.

"The number of job openings increased to a series high of 10.9 million on the last business day of July," the department said in a statement.

The US non-farm payrolls report, which account for jobs filled each month, came in at 235,000 in August, almost 70% below the 733,000 targeted by economists.

Labor market analysts say employers have offered multiple incentives to attract employees — higher wages and hiring bonuses among them — but the pool of available workers remains small and constrained by the resurgence of the coronavirus pandemic via its Delta variant.

The 10.9 million available positions in July came from an upwardly revised 10.2 million in June, the Labor Department's Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey showed Wednesday.

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NASA Sets December 18 Launch Date for James Webb Space Telescope

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The United States plans to launch the James Webb Space Telescope on December 18 from French Guiana on an Ariane rocket supplied by the European Space Agency, NASA said on Wednesday.

"The agency set the new target launch date in coordination with Arianespace after Webb recently and successfully completed its rigorous testing regimen - a major turning point for the mission," NASA said in a press release.

The new date also follows Arianespace successfully launching an Ariane 5 rocket from Europe's Spaceport on the northeastern coast of South America in July - the first for an Ariane 5 since August 2020, the release said.

NASA is currently packing the telescope in California for shipment to the Ariane launch site, the release added.

Unlike its predecessor, the Earth-orbiting Hubble telescope, the Webb observatory will orbit the sun about a million miles from Earth. From that position, the telescope will be able to explore every phase of cosmic history - from within our solar system to the most distant galaxies in the early universe, according to NASA.

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US Supreme Court to Return to In-Person Arguments in October, Sessions Closed to Public

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) – US Supreme Court will resume in-person arguments in October after a long pause caused due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but all sessions will be closed to the public, the court said in a press release on Wednesday.

"The Court will hear all oral arguments scheduled for the October, November, and December sessions in the Courtroom... Out of concern for the health and safety of the public and Supreme Court employees, the Courtroom sessions will not be open to the public," the release read. Courtroom access will be limited to the Justices, essential Court personnel, counsel in the scheduled cases, while journalists with full-time press credentials also allowed in, it added. It is anticipated that the court will provide a live audio feed of oral arguments in October, November and December, the release said.

The Supreme Court remains closed to the general public due to the pandemic until further notice since early 2020.

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Yellen Reiterates Warning US Government Could Run Out of Money to Service Debt By October

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The US government could run out of money as early as next month to service its debt, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Wednesday, reiterating her warning that emergency measures put in place to raise cash could be exhausted soon.

Yellen warned in July that the United States faced a default risk on its debt by October as the deadline for the two-year suspension of its debt limit neared. In her latest update, she wrote to US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that there was "considerable uncertainty" on how long the Biden administration could continue stretching its debt obligations at the current rate.

"Given this uncertainty, the Treasury Department is not able to provide a specific estimate of how long the extraordinary measures will last," Yellen said in a copy of her letter to Pelosi, released by the department. "However, based on our best and most recent information, the most likely outcome is that cash and extraordinary measures will be exhausted during the month of October."

Yellen announced in August that the Treasury Department was suspending fully or partly investments in the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund, the Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits Fund and a section of the Federal Employees Retirement to free up funds to service the national debt. These were flexible investments that could be made in due course, and other US treasury secretaries have also suspended them as well in times of emergency, she said.

"Our estimates of the period of time that extraordinary measures will last have been refined in recent weeks, although they continue to be subject to considerable uncertainty due to the normal challenges of forecasting the payments and receipts of the US government, including the uncertainty in the level of corporate and individual taxes due September 15, heightened by the additional uncertainty due to the pandemic and related economic relief, and other factors," Yellen said. "Once all available measures and cash on hand are fully exhausted, the United States of America would be unable to meet its obligations for the first time in our history."

Negotiations on the debt ceiling between Democrat lawmakers led by President Joe Biden and their Republican rivals have dragged on for months, with no immediate solution in sight. Democrats and Republicans have squared off over the debt ceiling several times over the past decade and briefly allowed the United States to surpass it during the Trump administration.

"We have learned from past debt limit impasses that waiting until the last minute to suspend or increase the debt limit can cause serious harm to business and consumer confidence, raise short-term borrowing costs for taxpayers, and negatively impact the credit rating of the United States," Yellen said.

She urged Congress to protect "the full faith and credit" of the United States by acting as soon as possible.

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Finland to Issue COVID-19 Vaccination Certificates For Inoculated Abroad – Health Ministry

HELSINKI, September 8 (Sputnik) - Finland will issue EU COVID-19 vaccination certificates for its residents inoculated in non-EU countries with vaccines approved by the European Medicines Agency, the health ministry said on Wednesday.

"The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare and the Social Insurance Institution of Finland will start preparing the technical implementation and operating model which will allow Finland to issue the EU COVID-19 vaccination certificate to people who have received a COVID-19 vaccine approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) in a non-EU country," the statement read.

Finnish residents vaccinated in non-EU countries will be able to receive their certificates not earlier than late October. Helsinki is also considering whether to issue certificates for those inoculated with vaccines listed for emergency use by the World Health Organization, the ministry specified.

The EU COVID-19 certificate became available in Finland in June, having replaced the national one. The country currently also issues the document for those who received their first dose in another EU state and the second one in Finland.

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Chinese Actors Used Fake Social Media Accounts to Get Asian-Americans to Protest - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Fake social media accounts suspected of being linked to the Chinese government have been used in an attempt to get Asian-Americans to attend political protests, the Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday, citing cyber intelligence researchers at Mandiant and Google.

The research published on Wednesday said that thousands of fake accounts across social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter were used to urge Asian-Americans to participate in protests against racial injustice.

The fake accounts network appears to have been largely unsuccessful in their efforts, according to the researchers. However, the researchers also said the network mimics alleged attempts by Russia to sow discord during the 2016 US election using fake social media bots.

While the researchers from Mandiant and Google did not directly assign responsibility to the Chinese government, they said that it is almost certainly government-sponsored work that aligns with China's strategic interests.

The network was also said to have pushed narratives about the COVID-19 virus originating in the United States and positive accounts of China's efforts to handle the pandemic as well as vaccine disinformation.

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Italian Court Orders Health Evaluation for Berlusconi Amid Trial Delays

ROME, September 8 (Sputnik) - A judge at a Milan court ordered a medical evaluation for former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi after his corruption trial was repeatedly delayed due to ill health, media reported on Wednesday.

Judge Marco Tremolada postponed the trial until September 15 to appoint an expert panel, according to the Corriere della Sera daily. Berlusconi is accused of bribing witnesses in a previous case, which saw him acquitted of paying a minor for sex.

The 84-year-old leader of the right-wing Forza Italia party has been in and out of hospital after contracting COVID-19 last September. He was hospitalized twice in the past few weeks.

Berlusconi's defense team says he needs absolute rest due to heart problems, but Milan prosecutor Tiziana Siciliano was quoted as saying by the paper that Berlusconi had been meeting politicians and agreed to appear on a TV show.

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Ukraine Seeks to Impose New Sanctions Over Crimean Bridge's Construction

KIEV, September 8 (Sputnik) - The Ukrainian government suggested the country's National Security and Defense Council impose sanctions against six individuals and 24 legal entities involved in the construction of the Crimean Bridge, the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories said on Wednesday.

"Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers has approved and submits the package of sanctions against 24 legal entities and 6 individuals involved in the illegal construction and exploitation of the so-called bridge across the Kerch Strait... for the consideration of the National Security and Defense Council," the statement read.

The sanctions against the legal entities will affect their property, ban export and import operations and block the withdrawal of capital from Ukraine. As for the individuals, they will be forbidden from entering the country and deprived of the opportunity to manage their property in Ukraine, the statement added.

The ministry did not provide a list of the entities or individuals facing sanctions.

The Crimean Bridge is a complex of Russian-constructed parallel road and railway bridges connecting the Crimean peninsula and the Taman Peninsula of Russia's Krasnodar Krai.

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US Will Assist Latin America to Scale Up Green Energy Capacity to 70% By 2030 - Kerry

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is planning to increase its assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean in a bid to provide for at least 70 percent green energy capacity in that region by 2030, US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry said on Wednesday.

"Today, I am able to announce that we have plans to scale up our assistance for the renewable energy for Latin America and Caribbean regional effort led by President [Ivan] Duque of Colombia, in order to increase renewable energy capacity to at least 70 percent across the region by 2030," Kerry said at a virtual climate change dialogue hosted by Argentina.

The US Special Envoy also said the new regional climate effort will focus restoring forest ecosystems by way of lowering emissions, accelerating forest finance for which public finance will be mobilized.

The measure and additional engagement in dialogue with regional partners is intended to build momentum in anticipation of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow from October 31 to November 12 to include panel discussions on enhancing climate ambition, accelerating climate action through regional cooperation and strengthening climate resilience.

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Ukraine's Zelenskyy to Visit New York to Attend UN General Assembly Session - Office

KIEV, September 8 (Sputnik) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will pay a visit to New York later in September to participate in the session of the UN General Assembly, presidential spokesman Serhiy Nykyforov told the RBC Ukraine news agency on Wednesday.

"We are preparing the president's visit to New York," Nykyforov said, adding that the leader will fly to the US to attend the session of the UN General Assembly.

The 76th session of the UN body will run from September 14-30, with the most important foreign policy event of the year — the week of the assembly's high-level session — scheduled for September 21-27.

The Russian delegation will be headed by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the so-called high-level week, with the minister's speech expected to be delivered on September 25.

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Canada Deportation Hearing for Ex-Nazi Oberlander Resumes

TORONTO, September 8 (Sputnik) - Deportation hearings against former Nazi Helmut Oberlander by Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) resumed on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, on the first day of the four-day hearing, the defense introduced a motion to conduct the admissibility hearing against the former death squad member in private, barring members of the media and public from observing the proceedings. However, IRB Immigration Division member Karen Greenwood dismissed the motion put forth by Oberlander, the immigration board's spokesperson said in a statement to reporters.

The 96-year-old Oberlander has been embroiled in a legal battle with the Canadian government since 1995, when the latter began trying to strip Ukrainian-born ex-SS member of his citizenship, citing his failure to disclose his links to death squads. After a lengthy legal battle, Oberlander was stripped of his citizenship for the fourth time and final time in 2017 and Canada's Supreme Court issued a ruling last December that blocked any possibility for Oberlander to appeal this decision.

