

9/09/21 Thursday

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Cristiano Ronaldo Wanted Manchester City Over Manchester United Reunion - Report
By - Nevin Brown

Ahead of Cristiano Ronaldo's second debut for Manchester United, it has been revealed that the Portuguese superstar favored a move to United rival Manchester City.

Cristiano Ronaldo and his agent Jorge Mendes had been trying to [leave Italian side Juventus](#) for two years, and it is reported that they favored Manchester City ahead of Manchester United. According to BBC journalist Guillem Balague, while very little headway was made last summer, the two sides were very close to a deal before this past transfer window closed.

Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola reportedly believed that Ronaldo would score 40 goals on his side with all the chances they created. After seeing their advances for Tottenham striker Harry Kane be continuously rebuffed this summer, City pivoted to Ronaldo.

Juventus were eager to move off of Ronaldo and his nearly £50 million a year salary, and weren't looking for a hefty fee for the 36-year-old. However, City couldn't add Ronaldo without offloading one of their many high-priced attackers.

City's embarrassment of riches in attack end up being as big a headache for them as they are for opposing defenses. Between Phil Foden, Gabriel Jesus, Ferran Torres, Bernardo Silva, Riyadh Marez, Jack Grealish, and Raheem Sterling, one had to go. City looked to offload one of Silva, Jesus, or Marhez, but weren't able to find a suitable partner. As the transfer window was nearing an end, Mendes and Ronaldo reportedly had to act fast if they wanted to leave Juventus.

They quickly turned to Manchester United, where Ronaldo initially became a superstar and offered them his services. United were keen to add Ronaldo, and more crucially, they had the space to add him. United agreed to a €15 million deal with Juventus, plus €8 million in add-ons. Ronaldo agreed to a pay-cut, although he'll still be the highest-paid Premier League player, and it becomes another great what-if in history.

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20 Years Later, 'I Don't Think Anybody Has Been the Same': 9/11 Survivor Recounts the Harrowing Day
By - Nevin Brown

The September 11th terrorist attacks scarred a nation. 20 years later, this is Marc Fiedler's story. A man who "had a perfect view" of the attacks, in his own words, recounts the day that changed him and America forever.

September 11th, 2001 started just like any other day for Marc Fiedler.

The suffering through the inhumanity of train passengers. The grumbling over his office relocating from the area surrounding the World Trade Center to Jersey City. The anguishing move subjected him every time he looked out from his office in Jersey City, across the waters of the Hudson River, and peered into New York. In other words, it was just another Tuesday. Marc and his colleagues at Merrill Lynch went bustling about their mornings. Their view into New York remained an afterthought. Work had to be done and staring out the window was no way to be productive. If one looked up at the wall of television monitors, they would have seen that it was 8:45 in the morning. It was the last minute before everything changed for Marc Fiedler, a city, and a nation.

"We heard a very loud crash." What was just another Tuesday morning was suddenly shattered by the sound of a Boeing 767 [crashing into the North Tower](#) of the World Trade Center. In an instant, Marc Fiedler and his coworkers' attention was drawn to the window, out across the Hudson River, and into Manhattan as they stared at smoke rising from World Trade Center. No one knew what had really happened, or what was about to transpire.

"There were people that were saying, 'Oh, it was some pilot who accidentally crashed his plane into the building, but then we started thinking a pilot would try to land in the Hudson River before he would crash into one the buildings.'"

The smoking North Tower cast a disturbing enchantment over the whole office. Unable to look away, "we saw the second plane coming into the second tower live." In an instant, everything changed. Their curiosity, gone. Their questions, answered. What they witnessed was an attack. All they knew was that it was time to go.

The trains from Jersey City to Hoboken weren't running and cell phones weren't working. All Marc could rely on were his own two feet and the murmur of a radio to guide him. As he made the two-mile trek from his office on Greene Street to the Hoboken train station, he kept an eye back on the World Trade Center.

"It got real cloudy, smokey, really couldn't see much anymore because of the debris. The thought was, those buildings are some of the strongest and biggest in the world. They'll still be there tomorrow, was the thought. And then all of a sudden the guy on the radio started saying how people are jumping out of the building and it was just mayhem."

As the towers crumbled, debris rained down. The impact from the planes had set off a deadly chain reaction. The weight of each floor above the impact zone was slowly accumulating. The World Trade Center hadn't just been attacked, it had been weaponized. It was a structural ticking time bomb.

Most ran as fast and far from the site as they could, but first responders, unknowing of the dangerous trap they had entered, rushed to it. Those above the impact zones had been trapped. There was no escape. There was no rescue. An [estimated 200 people](#) jumped, mixed in with the debris, to their death. As the World Trade Center crumbled and the scene descended into chaos, goodness still shone through.

Even as Marc tried to remain optimistic through all the chaos, everyone seemed to have grasped that things had changed. People were civil at the train station. No one complained about the delays. A somber air permeated the car as Marc rode the train home. There was a collective understanding that everyone was in mourning.

A radio kept him up to date on the events. He was left in disbelief when he heard that the first tower had come crashing down.

"I mean, how could that giant building come down because of one airplane almost near the top," he asked himself. Just as he had done before, he tried to remain optimistic. One tower had fallen, but the other remained. For 30 minutes, the second tower held on, giving Marc and the nation the hope that all was not lost. "Then the second tower fell. And I don't think anybody has been the same since."

Marc had more than just witnessed the most pivotal moment of the 21st century in American history, he had felt it, he had lived it, and it made him think. It made him think about how the people on the trains had been cordial. It made him think about how "the building we left a month before got crushed with the debris." It made him think about his nephew, who worked near Ground Zero, "covered in soot, in a daze, walking across the George Washington Bridge." It made him think about "all the firefighters and police officers who died helping people." It made him think that nothing will ever be the same.

September 11th, 2001 wasn't just any other day. It left a lasting impact on an entire country. However, the people that were there that day in New York and the surrounding areas bore the brunt of the tragedy. They never had the option of turning off the television. They had to live it. Loved ones died on that day. Loved ones suffered, and continue to suffer.

Marc Fiedler didn't suffer any physical wounds from 9-11, but the horrors he witnessed will never fully fade. September 11th, 2001 wasn't 9/10/2021

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SDC Says Not One Terrorist Fighter Has Been Repatriated, States Took Some Kids From Al Hol

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - Not a single terrorist fighter detained by Syrian Democratic Forces has been repatriated to the countries of their origin, while the nations only took back a few children from the Al-Hol refugee camp, Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) Representative in the United States and member of the Presidential Committee, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.

When asked whether any of the captured foreign terrorist fighters have been taken back by their countries, Saker said, "No."

"But some children, yes, some countries took very few children from the Al Hol camp, not from the detainees. From detainees nobody, no one," he added.

Saker said the number of the detainees held by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) has not changed at all in the recent months and stands at about 5,000.

The US State Department acting Director of the Office of the Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State terrorist group (banned in Russia) Patrick Worman said in the end of June that the US-led coalition is working to return some 2,000 terrorist fighters as well as 2,000 Iraqi nationals currently detained by the SDF to face accountability in their countries of origin.

The US diplomat also said that a total of about 10,000 captured IS fighters are currently in SDF makeshift detention facilities while tens of thousands of women and children are still in humanitarian camps and being subject to significant security issues.

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Al-Hol Refugee Camp in Northern Syria Poses 'Big Threat'- Syrian Democratic Council

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - Al-Hol refugee camp in northern Syria represents a great danger, Syrian Democratic Council Representative in the United States and member of the Presidential Committee, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.

"It is not a good situation, and I believe it is a big threat. You know, it is like a bomb," Saker said. "That's why we asked the international community to help us with that, to support us. Even support us financially and with education, with many things, or at least to ask their countries to take them back because many countries refuse to take their citizens back, it is a big issue." Saker has warned that there are a lot of sleeping terrorist cells in Syria, and stressed that this is one of the main matters they are discussing with the United States.

"This is one of our goals or the main issue that we are talking about with the Americans. They promised us. We asked them to stay until we finish this war against this ISIS [Islamic State terrorist group banned in Russia]," Saker said. "There is cooperation with America for fighting the sleeping cells, and to fight this threat."

Saker continued to say that it is also vital to find these sleeping cells to improve the infrastructure, to improve the lifestyle.

"It is one of the main issues, we have to do it and we asked for that," he said. "For example, if our region will be in good situation for living - for foods, for work, for stability - in this case, the sleeping cells and other threats will reduce."

The Al-Hol camp is home to over 60,000 refugees, mostly women and children from the families of militants from the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia).

Moscow and Damascus have consistently warned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation at the camp, located in the US-controlled area around the At Tanf military base.

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Syrian Kurds Regularly Inform Russia, US About Turkish Attacks - SDC

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), the political wing of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, always informs both Russia and the United States about the attacks coming from Turkey, Syrian Democratic Council Representative in the United States and member of the Presidential Committee, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.

"There are repeated attacks from Turkey, and they are shooting, plus, shelling, sometimes they are doing shelling by the artillery. And even they are using drones," Saker said. "We talk about that. You know, we have contacts with the Russians all the time, and with the Americans, and we informed them. And we informed the State Department, and we informed Russia also."

Saker claimed that Turkey targets both the civilian population and the representatives of the so-called Autonomous Administration.

"They target people. They target the activist people more. They target by their drones the Kurdish-led Self-Administration," he noted. "They targeted them lately killing at least 6 people, about 10 days ago, and it is repeatedly. I believe they broke the convention between Russian and Turkey and us, and between America, Turkey and us that they will never shell, they will never go inside and they will never attack, but they broke it. That's why Russia and America should look for that - what's going on, why Turkey broke this."

Turkish troops, in cooperation with Syrian opposition groups loyal to Ankara, have participated in a number of military operations in Syria in recent years, mostly against Kurdish militants, such as the Euphrates Shield (launched in August 2016). Damascus has condemned the Turkish military operations, saying they violate Syrian sovereignty.

Ankara views the Kurdish-led groups operating in northern Syria as affiliates of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which it considers to be a terrorist organization.

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Economic Situation in Northeast Syria Getting Worse Due to US Sanctions - SDC

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The economic situation in northeast Syria has deteriorated and is now worse than ever because of US sanctions imposed on the conflict-torn country, Syrian Democratic Council Representative in the United States and member of the Presidential Committee, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.

"To be honest, it is difficult situation now," Saker said. "The economic situation is worse now than before. Because even us, we are under sanctions, our region is under the Caesar Act sanctions. That's why the people, they still suffer there. I can say that the economic situation is worse than ever. It is complicated. That's why we need the political solution to be reached soon."

Saker said they need waivers from the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) before anything can be done.

"Anything you want to do in the area, you need an OFAC or exemption to do that. It means we are under influence of these sanctions," he added. "We have a problem with sanctions, because we use the Syrian currency and the Syrian currency collapsed."

Saker said he believes when the political process is solved, the sanctions should be removed. He also stressed the importance of UN Security Council Resolution 2254, which calls for an inclusive political solution to end the war.

"It is the main job for America and Russia, and even Turkey, and Iran who [are] involved in Syria - they can do that, the political process and to make the 2254," he said. "If they will do that, I believe everything will be solved. It should be."

Moreover, Saker added, the situation in the region is challenged by the continued attacks from Turkey, remaining sleeping cells of the Islamic State terrorist group (banned in Russia) as well as thousands of foreign fighters remaining in the prisons.

In late 2019, then-US President Donald Trump signed the so-called Caesar Act that took effect the next year, targeting almost all areas of Syria's economy. The law has since sanctioned a number of domestic and foreign companies and individuals who do business with the government of President Bashar Assad, plunging the Middle Eastern country into its worst socioeconomic crisis since the outbreak of the war.

Damascus has repeatedly asked the international community to condemn the unilateral sanctions and take steps to lift them, pointing out that they have led to an increase in the number of Syrians in need and are violating basic human rights.

The official Damascus does not recognize the authority of the so-called Autonomous Administration and its military wing, the SDF, over the country's northeast.

The Syrian Democratic Forces, operating in the north of Syria, have played an active role in fighting IS and have placed thousands of captured militants and members of their families in prisons and camps.

The US-led coalition of more than 60 nations has been carrying out airstrikes and other operations against the Islamic State in Iraq since August 2014 and in Syria since September 2014. However, the coalition has acted in Syria without the approval of the Syrian government or the UN Security Council.

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Syrian Kurdish Leader to Visit US in Coming Weeks to Discuss Washington's Support - SDC

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) Executive Committee President Ilham Ehmed is coming soon to Washington for meetings with US officials to discuss continued support for the region, the SDC Representative in the United States and member of the Presidential Committee, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.

"She is coming soon, in the coming weeks," Saker said. "We are working to prepare the schedule for her. But the meetings will be with the State Department, I believe, maybe Pentagon or maybe something else."

While in Washington, he added, Ehmed will discuss the role of the United State in addressing the Syrian conflict.

"We ask them for support - still supporting us to fight the ISIS [Islamic state terrorist group banned in Russia], to support stabilization in the area, to support us to be part of the political solution and to let them know what's again Turkey doing by targeting us," he said.

Saker said the SDC regularly holds meetings with the European leaders.

"The outcome is that France still supports us, because they are from the international coalition, and they will support stabilization and also keep fighting against ISIS and sleeping cells," he said. "So, really it was very kind of France. For us, it's a good sign from France, and we really appreciate that."

Saker also shared that about a month ago Ehmed met with French President Emmanuel Macron

"The main goal is that they should, first of all, take their detainees, the ISIS detainees back, and also to support us to be part of the political solution in Syria. Because without us, it will never, I believe, it will never be a final solution to political process," he said. "It will be between the opposition and the government. And we are excluded. It is not fair, and how it could be? We will never recognize what they will have, if we are not part of the solution."

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Syrian Kurds Would Be Interested in Cooperation With US Oil Firms if Waiver Granted - SDC

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The Syrian Kurds would be willing to cooperate with the American energy companies on their oil fields if the US Government granted a waiver, Syrian Democratic Council Representative in the United States and member of the Presidential Committee, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.

When asked whether the Syrian Kurds would be interested in cooperation with US companies on oil if they receive a waiver from the US government, Saker said, "Of course, we will be because in our area there is pollution."

"We don't have refinery," he explained. "And because the oilfield is in bad situation."

Ex-US President Donald Trump signed the Caesar Act, which set out Washington's plan to impose sanctions on Syrian government officials as well as foreign companies that work with Damascus to help reconstruction efforts, back in December 2019.

In August of last year, former US President Donald Trump signed a deal for a US company, Delta Crescent Energy, to develop oil fields in Syrian territories in the country's northeast, which are under control of the Kurdish-led and US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces.

US Special Representative for Syria James Jeffrey then said that the United States was not involved in private oil deals made by Kurds in northeast Syria.

Damascus has said the United States is in Syria illegally and is engaged in theft of Syrian oil under the excuse of fighting the Islamic State terrorist group (banned in Russia).

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US Oil Activities in Syria Frozen After Biden Administration Failed to Renew Waiver - SDC

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The US activities in northeast Syria were first challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic, and now have ceased because the American administration has not renewed a waiver needed to work in the oil area, Syrian Democratic Council Representative in the United States and member of the Presidential Committee, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.

"The new administration, they told us straight away that they will never take our oil, and they are not interested in our oil, and they proved it: We had OFAC because of the Caesar act, and now the new administration, they canceled it. It means they did not give a new OFAC waiver for this company [Delta Crescent Energy] and they stopped," he said. "They did not renew the waiver. They said it right at the high level when [US State Department official] Mr. Joey Hood visited the area."

Saker went on to say that the Biden Administration immediately made a point that they were not there because of oil. Unlike the Trump administration which said the US was there to protect the oil.

Saker underscored that they did not need any protection of their oil fields.

"We are protecting that," he stated. "I can say nobody will come to their area where they are, because there are the bases there."

Saker noted that Delta Crescent Energy did not even come to the area because of the pandemic.

"They were only present there as some person, but they did not do nothing inside Syria," he said. "But outside maybe they prepared something ... I believe they lose big money for preparing this. But because of the COVID they did not do that, they couldn't do it. Now it is OFAC. They can do nothing."

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9/11 Terror Attacks United People Regardless of Religious Affiliation - New York Priest

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 resulted in the death of some 3,000 people, but they also caused the people to unite in their faith against evil regardless of religious affiliation, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Vicar General Alex Karloutsos, who witnessed the attacks, told Sputnik.

On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda (banned in Russia) terrorists crashed two hijacked commercial airplanes in the World Trade Center in New York and another in the Pentagon near Washington, DC. A fourth hijacked airplane crashed in the ground in the state of Pennsylvania without reaching its presumed target.

Karloutsos said in the morning of September 11 he was trying to get to work but was unable to reach the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in Manhattan despite being located not very close to the World Trade Center.

"The traffic was stopped, so I returned to my church and called for a prayer service. It was like Pascha, people were experiencing the Holy Friday," he said.

Karloutsos explained the believers were in pain after the terrorist attacks and needed spiritual support. Gathering together, he said, they offered prayers of hope in order to overcome the fear and grief.

"We knew that we had to come up with great love in relationship to God's presence in our lives," Karloutsos said.

As chaplain of the New York Port Authority and the New Jersey police, Karloutsos said he was called in that night to provide spiritual support to those affected by the terrorist attacks.

"I drove down by the World Trade Center. It was like Hell, it was horrible, like a Godzilla movie," he said.

The next morning, September 12, Karloutsos said he picked-up then-Archbishop Demetrios as he could not get into the city without a special permission that the Archbishop had.

"Whenever we walked forward, we had people bowing down before the Archbishop asking for a blessing, no matter what their faith was," he said.

Karloutsos described Manhattan as being chaotic, covered in dust and remains of destroyed buildings as well as remains of human victims as well.

"I continuously vaporized and wiped away the white dust, which was a mix of building structures and flesh. It was very emotional," he said.

The small St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in Manhattan was completely destroyed when one of skyscrapers collapsed after the attacks, Karloutsos said, adding that it was a miracle that nobody died there amid the numerous deaths elsewhere.

Karloutsos also recalled that the church's rector and one other person left the church just minutes before it collapsed.

"I just believe that we were blessed that we did not lose any lives, and we were greatly pained that we lost our church," he said.

The view of the demolished church with a part of an airplane wing on the top of the rubble was terrific, Karloutsos said.

"We looked around - there was nothing," he also said.

Karloutsos noted that the Greek Orthodox community, along with the US authorities and other supporters, has rebuilt the church after 20 years.

"Now we are blessed that we are going to be able to rebuild our church, which will become for all people," he said.

The first memorial service in the new cathedral, which became a National Shrine, will take place on September 10. The following day, the structure will be lit in blue along with other buildings in the area to commemorate the victims of the terrorist attacks, Karloutsos added.

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US Should Warn Kurds Before Pulling Out of Syria - SDC

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The United States should warn the Syrian Kurds if it makes a decision to withdraw from the country, and carry out such a pullout step by step, Syrian Democratic Council Representative in the United States and member of the Presidential Committee, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.

Last week, Iran's Al-Alam news outlet reported, citing a military source, that US forces left three bases inside Syria, including a post near al-Omar oilfield in the Deir Ez-Zor province.

Later, A Defense Department spokesperson told Sputnik that the reports about US troops leaving military posts in Syria are not true, adding that the military's mission in that country has not changed.

"They [the United States] say they will stay until they finish the fight against the ISIS [Islamic State terrorist group (banned in Russia)]," he said. "But we don't know if they will stay or not... If they want to leave, it should be step by step, not immediately, and they should warn us before." Saker added that if the US forces leave it will affect the security situation in Syria as it will create "an empty place," and stressed that he still believes that the Americans will stay until they finish the fight against IS, the Al Hol camp, the matter with thousands of the detainees held by the Syrian Democratic Forces as well as the political solution to the conflict.

"We know that sooner or later they will leave. But we wish that they will stay until we finish this fight against ISIS, until we find final solution for political process in Syria," Saker said. "We wish that. They are only a few soldiers there. We don't want them to be there forever, of course. Only when we finish the political process. They will leave, it is their real choice and their decision, it's not ours."

Saker added that they are aware that the Americans are pushing the countries to take their detainees back.

"They should finish this issue with these detainees," he said. "They should finish with the Al Hol camp. Because, you know, it is like a bomb. They should solve this problem before they leave. It's a very serious problem and it's a threat not only for us, it is a threat for the whole world. That's why the Americans, the Russians should collaborate together and to solve this problem. On sleeping cells. I believe, it takes time to solve this problem but when you do better life, the people will change, they will never follow this ISIS."

Saker praised the current cooperation with the Biden administration, but noted that the lack of Saker stressed that the Syrian Kurds would like Washington to keep the same support for them, both in fighting the IS and stabilization efforts.

The Syrian authorities have repeatedly stated that the US presence in the country violates the country's sovereignty and international law, and is aimed at gaining access to the oil fields.

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Bangladesh Couple Sentenced for Conspiring to Support Islamic State - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - A US federal judge in Philadelphia has sentenced a Bangladesh husband and wife to jail terms for plotting to provide support to the Islamic State terrorist organization, (banned in Russia), the Justice Department said.

United States Attorney Jennifer Arbittier Williams announced that Shahidul Gaffar, 40, and Nabila Khan, 35, both residents of Pennsylvania, were sentenced to 18 months and two years in prison, respectively, by US District Court Judge Joshua Wolson, the Justice Department said in a press release on Thursday.

Gaffar and Khan were convicted of conspiracy to provide material support and resources to the Islamic State, a designated foreign terrorist organization, the release said.

"The defendants encouraged and financially supported the efforts of Nabila Kahn's brothers to join the murderous terrorist group ISIS [Islamic State], which is a direct threat to the United States," the release added.

According to court documents, in 2015, Gaffar and Khan provided financial support to two of Khan's brothers who traveled to Syria to join the Islamic State. The couple discussed the brothers' travel plans in detail with each other as early as September 2014, the release noted.

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Lawyers Call Cape Verde Ruling to Extradite Venezuela Envoy to US 'Constitutional Suicide'

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - A Cape Verde high court's decision to effectively green-light Venezuelan diplomat Alex Saab's extradition to the United States amounts to constitutional suicide, the defense team said in a statement to Sputnik.

On Wednesday, the Constitutional Court of Cape Verde, an island-nation off the West African coast, rejected the defense's appeal asking the court not to abide by the US request to extradite Saab over alleged Iran sanctions violations.

"This ruling is a major moment in the constitutional history of this tiny African state because it symbolizes the sacrificial death of the rule of law so dearly acquired by Cape Verdeans, in the service of purely political interests according to an agenda dictated by Washington," the statement said. "This is constitutional suicide!"

Last July, Cape Verde authorities arrested the Colombian-born businessman during a fuel stop based on a US extradition warrant while Saab was on a humanitarian mission to Iran as special envoy for the Venezuelan government.

Saab's defense insisted that the extradition of diplomat Saab to the United States was in violation of the Vienna Convention.

There is no bilateral extradition treaty between the United States and Cape Verde, Saab's defense team has said.

The defense team went on to say in the statement that the consequence of the ruling is to legitimize "the purely arbitrary arrest of a foreign diplomat, deprived of all rights and guarantees, at the hands of Cape Verdean police officers."

The Venezuelan government demanded that Cape Verde release Saab, stating that he was Caracas' special envoy to the African Union. According to Colombian media, Saab allegedly has information about secret agreements of the Venezuelan government with Turkey, Iran and Russia, which, according to the United States, affect US interests in the region.

The Russian Foreign Ministry called the situation around Saab "outrageous." The ministry said that Washington, apparently, decided to "reach a new level", creating the precedent of a diplomat's extradition.

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Biden Imposes Compulsory COVID-19 Vaccination for All US Federal Govt. Employees - Order
WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The US government is imposing compulsory vaccination against COVID-19 for all employees of the US federal government, President Joe Biden said in an Executive Order.

"I have determined that to promote the health and safety of the federal workforce and the efficiency of the civil service, it is necessary to require COVID-19 vaccination for all federal employees, subject to such exceptions as required by law," Biden said.

Each agency of the federal government shall implement a program to require COVID-19 vaccination for all of its employees, with exceptions only as required by law, Biden also said.

"It is essential that federal employees take all available steps to protect themselves and avoid spreading COVID-19 to their co-workers and members of the public. The CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] has found that the best way to do so is to be vaccinated," Biden added.

Delta, the predominant coronavirus variant in the United States, is more contagious than other variants and therefore the nationwide public health emergency that was first introduced on January 31, 2020, remains in effect, Biden added.

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Iran Ready to Host Next Talks Between Afghan Government, Taliban - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - Tehran stands ready to host the next round of talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban (banned in Russia), Iran's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Majid Takht Ravanchi said during a UN Security Council meeting.

"Iran has always made every effort to help all Afghan parties to settle their differences peacefully. Last July, they organized the high-level peace talks between the delegations of the Afghan government and the Taliban. They agree to continue their talks at a later meeting. Iran is ready to host the next round of such talks," Ravanchi said on Thursday.

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Dozens of Canadians Flown Out of Afghanistan on Qatar Charter Flight - Foreign Minister

TORONTO, September 9 (Sputnik) - More than 40 Canadian citizens were evacuated out of Afghanistan on a Qatar charter flight, Foreign Minister Marc Garneau said.

"We can confirm that today 43 Canadian citizens were on board a special flight organized by the Government of Qatar, which departed from Kabul, Afghanistan, for Doha. They will be repatriated to Canada in the coming days," Garneau said in a statement on Thursday.

Garneau said Ottawa continues to work to evacuate Canadian citizens, permanent residents and Afghan nationals approved for relocation to Canada and thanked Qatar for its support of the evacuation mission.

The Taliban (banned in Russia) entered the Afghan capital of Kabul on August 15, ending a weeks-long offensive and resulting in the collapse of the US-backed government. The seizure of power has forced thousands of Afghans to seek refuge abroad for fears of reprisals from the militants.

According to Ottawa, the government has evacuated some 3,700 people via military flights, however, an estimated 1,250 Canadian nationals remain stranded in Afghanistan and Canada

remains well short of its goal to resettle 20,000 Afghan nationals who are most at risk of Taliban reprisals.

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Pakistan Willing to Create Land Corridor to Deliver Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan- Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - Pakistan is willing to create a land corridor that will help the international community deliver humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, the country's Ambassador to the United Nations Munir Akram said during a UN Security Council meeting. "We will also dispatch supplies to Afghanistan through land routes as well," Akram said on Thursday. "We are willing to establish a land corridor to provide humanitarian help to Afghanistan."

Pakistan in coordination with the United Nations has created a humanitarian air bridge for delivery of supplies to Afghanistan. Three flights have been scheduled to deliver food and medicine to Afghanistan, the first arrived in Kabul on Wednesday.

Akram urged the international community to provide adequate financial support for refugees in Afghanistan.

On Tuesday, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that it needs \$606 million to continue to provide assistance to people in Afghanistan through 2021.

UN Development Program (UNDP) Asia-Pacific Director Kanni Wignaraja said in earlier remarks that Afghanistan is expected to face universal poverty by the middle of 2022 as both humanitarian and development disasters unfold in the country.

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Fines to Double for Federal Mask Mandate Violations on Public Transportation - White House

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - Fines for violating federal mask mandates aboard certain forms of public transport will be doubled under the Biden administration's new COVID-19 response plan, the White House said.

"TSA (Transportation Security Administration) has extended its implementing orders for air and ground travel through January 18th, 2022, and the President's plan will double fines for those who are not in compliance," the White House said in an outline of the plan on Thursday.

A release from TSA earlier on Thursday said that the penalties, which are set to take effect on September 10, will be \$500-\$1000 for first offenders and \$1000-\$3000 for second offenders.

The federal mask mandate aboard certain forms of public transportation was first implemented in February and applies at airports, commercial aircraft and in various modes of surface transportation, including passenger railroads and intercity bus services.

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Biden Says Will Announce Plan Next Month to Help Rest of World With COVID-19 Pandemic

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said during remarks about his new COVID-19 response plan that he will also be announcing additional steps next month to help the international community as well.

"I'll be announcing additional steps to help the rest of the world later this month," Biden said on Thursday.

The US president said the United States will be donating another 500 million Pfizer vaccine doses to lower income countries in need of them.

Biden reiterated that the United States has already donated more vaccines to other states than all other countries combined.

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Kazakhstan Ready to Set Up Hub in Almaty to Store, Send Aid to Afghanistan - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - Kazakhstan is ready to establish an alternative humanitarian hub in the city of Almaty to store and distribute aid to Afghanistan, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations, Magzhan Ilyassov, said in a Security Council meeting.

"We consider that it is necessary to establish an alternative regional hub for storing and distributing international humanitarian aid to Afghanistan," Ilyassov said on Thursday. "In that respect, given that... it takes less than two hours to fly from Almaty to Afghanistan, given the infrastructure and logistical possibilities, we're ready to engage with the UN on establishing an alternative humanitarian hub in Almaty to efficiently deliver this aid."

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Wall Street Falls as Pandemic-Era Low in US Jobless Claims Triggers Fed's Taper Fears

NEW YORK, September 9 (Sputnik) - US stocks fell broadly for a fourth day in a row on Thursday after another Federal Reserve official advocated this week for a prompt taper of the central bank's long-running economic stimulus.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest equity barometer on the New York Stock Exchange that lists mostly industrial stocks, settled at 34,879, down 152 points or 0.4 percent

on the day. The Dow has lost a cumulative 563 points, or 1.6 percent, over the past four sessions.

The S&P 500, which groups the top 500 US stocks, closed at 4,493, down 21 points, or 0.5 percent. The blue-chip indicator slid by 44 points or almost 1 percent over four trading days.

The Nasdaq Composite Index, which includes stocks of technology giants such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, settled at 15,248, down 38 points, or 0.3 percent. The tech-heavy index slid 126 points, or 0.8 percent, over the past two sessions.

Stocks fell after Labor Department data showed US jobless claims rose by 310,000 last week but remained below the key 400,000 for a sixth straight week to mark a new COVID-19 pandemic-era low.

Wall Street has been under pressure since Wednesday after Federal Reserve Bank of New York President John Williams said 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 stays on track.

Federal Reserve Governor Michelle Bowman was the second senior official of the central bank to think so on Thursday, saying US inflationary pressures were in line with the robust demand and constrained supplies in the economy, making a stimulus taper before the end of the year likely appropriate.

Bowman said the United States has achieved "significant progress" on price stability and is "quite close" to achieving its aim of full employment and it was "critical not to draw too many conclusions from a single month's shaky job market data." Ensuring maximum employment and manageable inflation are the Federal Reserve's two mandates.

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.

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

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Afghan Envoy to UN Says Has Eyewitness Accounts of Taliban Atrocities, Human Rights Abuses

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - Afghanistan Ambassador to the United Nations Ghulam Isaczai said there are eyewitness accounts of the Taliban (designated as a terrorist group and banned in Russia) committing atrocities and human rights violations in Afghanistan.

"We have eyewitness accounts of Taliban's widespread atrocities perpetuated with support of foreign terrorist fighters and foreign intelligence and military assets," Isaczai said during a UN Security Council meeting on Thursday. "They have performed targeted executions, cutoff communication lines, and imposed a humanitarian blockade."

Isaczai called on the United Nations to urgently send a fact-finding mission to Afghanistan to assess the Taliban's alleged human rights violations.

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Afghan Envoy Calls on UN Security Council to Withhold Taliban Government Recognition

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - Afghanistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ghulam Isaczai called on the UN Security Council not to recognize any government in Kabul unless it is genuinely inclusive.

"I... ask you to withhold any recognition of any government in Afghanistan, unless it's truly inclusive and formed on the basis of the free will of the people," Isaczai said during UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Afghanistan on Thursday.

Isaczai said the UN Security Council should also reevaluate its approach to granting travel ban exemption to Taliban leaders who are sanctioned after they failed to resolve the conflict through peaceful means.

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US Lawmakers Call on Belarus to Release Opposition Activists Kalesnikova, Znak - Letter
WASHINGTON, September 10 (Sputnik) - A bipartisan group of US Congressmen issued an open letter condemning the sentencing in Belarus of opposition activists Marya Kalesnikava and Maksym Znak and demanding the government release them.

"As bipartisan members of the United States Congress, we comprehensively condemn the unjust and illegitimate sentencing of Marya Kalesnikava and Maksim Znak," the letter said on Thursday. "We write this letter with one voice and demand the Lukashenko regime release Ms. Kalesnikava and Mr. Znak along with the over 650 other political prisoners facing the same fate for their activism."

The lawmakers said they are committed to ensure the release of the opposition activists regardless of whether through international organizations, Congressional initiatives or new sanctions packages.

The letter was signed by Congressmen Jim Costa, Brian Fitzpatrick, Gerald Connolly, Claudia Tenney, Dina Titus, Joaquin Castro - and by four co-chairs of the Friends of Belarus Caucus - William Keating, Christopher Smith, Marcy Kaptur and Joe Wilson.

On Monday, a court in Minsk found Kolesnikova and Znak guilty of crimes, including threatening national security, conspiracy to commit subversion and extremism, and sentenced them to eleven and ten years in prison, respectively.

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US Raises COVID-19 Business Loan Limit to \$2Mln, Defers Payments 2 Years – Administrator

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) – The US Small Business Administration (SBA) raised the cap COVID-19 disaster loans from \$500,000 to \$2 million, with a two-year grace period to begin repayments, SBA Administrator Isabella Guzman said.

"The SBA's COVID Economic Injury Disaster Loan [EIDL] program offers a lifeline to millions of small businesses who are still being impacted by the pandemic, Guzman said in a press release on Thursday. "We've retooled this critical program – increasing the borrowing limit to \$2 million, offering 24 months of deferment, and expanding flexibility."

The two-year grace period will allow business owners to get through the pandemic without having to worry about making ends meet, the release said.

The SBA also expanded allowed uses of the funds, with recipients now able to prepay commercial debt and make payments on federal business debt, the release added.

The agency will immediately begin accepting applications for loans of \$500,000 or less for the next 30 days, after which larger loans will become available. More than \$150 billion is available for the EIDL program, according to the release.

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US Outraged at Reports of Taliban Engaging in Reprisals Against UN Staff - Mission to UN

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - The United States is outraged at reports suggesting that the Taliban (banned in Russia) has engaged in reprisals against the United Nations' personnel working in the country, Acting Alternate Representative for Special Political Affairs at the US Mission to the United Nations Jeffrey DeLaurentis said during a UN Security Council meeting.

"We are outraged at reports that members of the Taliban have engaged in reprisals against UN staff throughout the country. This is simply unacceptable," DeLaurentis said on Thursday. "All UN staff members must be able to conduct their work without undue burden and without discrimination as to who they are. We call the Taliban to permit humanitarian organizations to continue their vital work in Afghanistan."

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) -

PUTIN-LUKASHENKO TALKS

- * The talks with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko were intense and constructive, Russian President Vladimir Putin said during a press conference following the discussions on Thursday.
- * Russia and Belarus have agreed on the 28 roadmaps of the Union State, Putin said.
- * The two governments will finalize work on Union State programs in the near future, perhaps even on Friday, Putin told Lukashenko during the meeting.
- * Russia and Belarus will soon conduct joint military exercises dubbed West 2021 and they are not directed against anyone, Putin said.

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

- * The US position on the need to include non-strategic nuclear weapons in future agreements with Russia on strategic stability in the form in which Washington is now promoting it, is unacceptable for Moscow, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said on Thursday.
- * Russia offered the United States specific measures to "reset" the situation with diplomats, but Washington prefers to dissemble and complain, creating the appearance of discrimination, Ryabkov said.
- * Russia did not interrupt the dialogue with the United States on the subject of verifiable mutual moratoriums on the deployment of the intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles in Europe, hoping that a solution will still be found, Ryabkov said.
- * The two countries will hold a new meeting on cybersecurity, the dialogue has gained momentum even despite previous US attempts to narrow the agenda, and not only ransomware is being discussed, Ryabkov said.
- * Moscow and Washington are discussing the resumption of inspections within the framework of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), Russia expects that the United States will soon specify its approach, Ryabkov said.
- * US Special Envoy Robert Malley said that he had a "good and constructive" meeting with Ryabkov on the goal of returning to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iranian nuclear deal.

COVID-19

- * The White House on Thursday unveiled the Biden administration's new plan to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States that includes mandating vaccines for federal government employees and contractors and calls on state governors to mandate vaccines for teachers as well as expand testing accessibility.
- * The Biden administration's plan also includes mandating vaccination or testing of employees in private companies with 100 or more people, the White House said in an outline of the plan posted to their website on Thursday.
- * The Kremlin has not received any precise information from the United States about the summit on coronavirus fight that could be held at the upcoming session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

* The European Medicines Agency (EMA) requires more data on Sputnik V and Sinovac COVID-19 vaccines and cannot say when their approval can be expected, Dr. Marco Cavaleri, Head of Biological Health Threats and Vaccines Strategy at the EMA, said.

AFGHANISTAN DEVELOPMENTS

* Russia has offered the United States specific measures to "reset" the situation concerning diplomats, but Washington prefers to dissemble and complain, creating the appearance of discrimination, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said.

* The Taliban (banned in Russia) has been cooperative in helping the United States facilitate charter flights with evacuees out of the Kabul airport, the White House said.

* A US charter flight carrying American citizens and legal permanent residents out of Kabul, Afghanistan, has landed in Qatar, the White House said.

* Russia will take part in a meeting on Afghanistan on September 13 in Geneva at the level of a permanent representative, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

RUSSIAN, IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTERS TALKS

* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov discussed Afghanistan by phone with his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amirabdollahian, the parties expressed interest in establishing stability in this country, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

* Lavrov discussed the Iran nuclear deal by phone with Amirabdollahian, the parties expressed the opinion that restoring the deal in its original configuration was the only correct way, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

BRICS SUMMIT

* Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) call for prioritizing preventing Afghanistan from being used as terrorist sanctions, according to a declaration adopted following the BRICS summit on Thursday.

* The BRICS countries call for preventing an arms race in outer space, the declaration said.

* BRICS countries believe that urgent reform of the World Trade Organization is necessary, the declaration said.

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Russia Extends Condolences to US on Anniversary of 9/11 Attacks - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia on Thursday expressed condolences to the United States ahead of the 20th anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

"On September 11, it will be exactly 20 years since the tragic events in New York, when almost 3,000 innocent lives were lost," Nebenzia said in a UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Afghanistan. "We extend our condolences to the government of the USA and also to the families of those who, as a result of these acts of terrorism, lost their loved ones."

Nebenzia said terrorism is a "basic evil," which can only be eliminated through joint international efforts.

Earlier on Thursday, the members of the UN Security Council visited the 9/11 Memorial and Museum in New York City, located at the former site of the Twin Towers, destroyed in the 2001 attacks.

A total of 2,977 people died in the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington and in the hijacked airplane that crashed in Pennsylvania without reaching its presumed target.

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Russia Trusts All Afghan Frozen Assets Will Be Made Available - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - Moscow hopes that access to all Afghanistan's frozen assets will be made available, Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia told the UN Security Council on Thursday.

"We trust that access to all frozen Afghan assets will be made available. This is in the interest of the Afghan people," Nebenzia said.

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Biden Announces New National Strategy to Combat COVID-19 Pandemic - White House

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The White House on Thursday unveiled the Biden administration's new plan to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States that includes mandating vaccines for federal government employees and contractors and calls on state governors to mandate vaccines for teachers as well as expand testing accessibility.

"Building on the President's announcement in July to strengthen safety requirements for unvaccinated federal workers, the President has signed an Executive Order to take those actions a step further and require all federal executive branch workers to be vaccinated. The President also signed an Executive Order directing that this standard be extended to employees of contractors that do business with the federal government," the White House said in an outline of the plan.

Federal employees were previously only required to either get vaccinated or face restrictions such as suspended work travel, testing and social distancing while at the office.

The plan also includes a new rule from the Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) that requires all companies with 100 or more workers to demand the workers to either get vaccinated or be subjected to weekly testing.

The White House said that Biden's plan also calls on state governors to mandate vaccination among their teachers and other school staff. It also directs the Education Department to investigate whether state rules that prohibit school mask mandates discriminate against students with disabilities who are at heightened risk for severe illness from COVID-19 by preventing them from safely accessing in-person education.

The plan also focuses on expanding testing availability, including measures to accelerate the production of rapid COVID-19 tests using authorities of the Defense Production Act and through the procurement of nearly \$2 billion in rapid point-of-care and over-the-counter at-home tests. The White House added that top retailers that sell at-home, rapid COVID-19 tests such as Walmart, Amazon and Kroger, will sell those tests at-cost for the next three months.

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Biden to Make Companies With 100 Workers or More Require Vaccines or Tests - White House

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's new plan to combat COVID-19 includes federally mandating vaccination or testing of employees who work for companies with 100 or more people, the White House said on Thursday.

"The Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is developing a rule that will require all employers with 100 or more employees to ensure their workforce is fully vaccinated or require any workers who remain unvaccinated to produce a negative test result on at least a weekly basis before coming to work," the White House said in an outline of the plan posted to their website.

The new mandate will impact over 80 million workers across the US, the White House noted. The new plan also includes new mandates for federal government employees and contractors to be vaccinated, lest they risk termination.

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Taliban Sheltering Al-Qaeda, IS-K Could Gain Strength in Afghanistan - UN Special Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - The Taliban (banned in Russia) de-facto authorities are visibly sheltering members of Al-Qaeda (banned in Russia) in Afghanistan, while the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (banned in Russia) is active in the country and has the potential to gain strength, UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan Deborah Lyons told the UN Security Council on Thursday.

"Al-Qaeda members remain in Afghanistan, visibly welcomed and sheltered by the de-facto Taliban authorities," Lyons said. "Islamic State-Khorasan Province remains active and could gain strength."

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US Summer Hottest on Record, Tops Previous High During 1936 Dust Bowl - Weather Service

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The average temperature for the contiguous 48 US states for June, July and August set a new record of 74 degrees Fahrenheit, 2.6 degrees above average, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said on Thursday. "This technically exceeds the record heat of the 1936 Dust Bowl Summer, but the difference is extremely small (less than 0.01 of a degree F)," NOAA said in a press release. California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon and Utah each reported their warmest summer on record, as 16 other states had a top-five warmest summer on record, the release said. The summer also featured multiple deadly weather and climate disasters, including Hurricane Ida, numerous wildfires in the western United States and devastating floods in the east. The Dust Bowl refers to severe dust storms and drought that devastated the prairie regions of the United States and Canada in the 1930s. Scientists attributed multiple heat records of the period to sunlight absorption by the dry ground.

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US Homeland Security Chief Says Not Seeing Organized Domestic Terrorism Threats

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said on Thursday the agency is not seeing any organized domestic terrorism threats within the United States. "We're not seeing the organized structures with a hierarchical architecture, that's not what we're seeing in the current threat stream of domestic terrorism," Mayorkas said during a National Press Club event when asked if there are sleeper cells in the United States. However, Mayorkas pointed out that the agency receives information from the public concerning people showing signs of radicalization and threat of violence. The Department of Homeland Security is working to expand domestic terrorism awareness to local US communities besides airports, train stations and bus stations, Mayorkas said. Moreover, Mayorkas said the agency has seen no information to suggest Islamic State terrorists (outlawed in Russia) came into the United States through the Afghan population that was evacuated out of Kabul.

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Pentagon to Double Number of Teams Supporting Hospitals With COVID-19 Surges - White House

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Defense will double the number of teams deployed to support hospitals battling surges of coronavirus cases in the United States as part of President Joe Biden's new COVID-19 response plan, the White House said on Thursday.

"The President's plan will provide additional support for hospitals facing capacity issues. The Department of Defense is announcing a commitment to double the number of DOD teams of clinicians deployed to support hospitals battling a surge in COVID-19 cases. These clinicians will be available for mission assignment through FEMA's response across surge states," the White House said.

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UN Security Council Discussing 6-Months Extension of Afghanistan Mission - Source

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council is discussing a possible extension of the UN Assistance Mission's in Afghanistan (UNAMA) mandate for another six months, a diplomatic source at the UN Security Council told Sputnik on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, Norway and Estonia presented a draft resolution that seeks to renew UNAMA's mandate ahead of its expiration on September 17.

"The council is discussing a six-month renewal. However, it is still an ongoing negotiation," the source said.

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UN Calls to Create Means for Allowing Money into Afghanistan to Prevent Economic Breakdown

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - A provisional agreement must be reached to allow money to flow into Afghanistan and prevent the total collapse of the country's economy, UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan Deborah Lyons told the UN Security Council on Thursday.

Lyons said that since the international community has frozen billions of assets and donor funds to deny these funds to the de-facto Taliban (banned in Russia) administration, Afghanistan is facing the prospect of a severe economic crisis threatening to throw millions more into poverty. "A modus vivendi must be found, and quickly that allows money to flow to Afghanistan to prevent a total breakdown of the economy and social order," Lyons said. "The economy must be

allowed to breathe for a few more months, giving the Taliban a chance to demonstrate flexibility and a genuine will to do things differently this time."

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Biden Seeks 20% Decrease in US Aviation Emissions By 2030 - White House

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration announced on Thursday that it has targeted a 20 percent drop in aviation emissions by 2030 and was prodding aircraft makers, airlines, fuel producers, airports and non-governmental organizations to embrace cleaner and more sustainable fuels, the White House announced on Thursday.

"These steps will help make progress toward our climate goals for 2030 and are essential to unlocking the potential for a fully zero-carbon aviation sector by 2050," the White House said in a statement. "Today's executive actions ... will result in the production and use of billions of gallons of sustainable fuel that will enable aviation emissions to drop 20percent by 2030 when compared to business as usual."

To help achieve its target, the Biden administration said it has rolled out a "Sustainable Aviation Fuel" tax credit, where successful applicants need to demonstrate a 50 percent reduction at least in lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions.

The administration has also proposed a "Sustainable Aviation Fuel Grand Challenge" to inspire the production of at least 3 billion gallons per year by 2030; new and ongoing funding opportunities to support sustainable aviation fuel projects and fuel producers totaling up to \$4.3 billion; and an increase in research and development to demonstrate new technologies that can bring about a 30 percent improvement at least in aircraft fuel efficiency.

President Joe Biden announced in April that his target was to halve all emissions in the United States by 2030.

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UPDATE: US Justice Department Sues Texas After State Restricts Abortions - Court Filing

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Justice has filed a lawsuit against the State of Texas to stop the enforcement of its recent decision to ban abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, according to court filings published on Thursday.

"It is settled constitutional law that 'a State may not prohibit any woman from making the ultimate decision to terminate her pregnancy before viability.' But Texas has done just that," the Justice Department said. "The United States therefore seeks a declaratory judgment that [the abortion restriction] is invalid under the Supremacy Clause and the Fourteenth Amendment, is preempted by federal law, and violates the doctrine of intergovernmental immunity. The United States also seeks an order preliminarily and permanently enjoining the State of Texas, including

its officers, employees, and agents, including private parties who would bring suit under the law, from implementing or enforcing.”

Later in the day, during remarks on the filed lawsuit, US Attorney General Merrick Garland noted that if the Texas anti-abortion law prevails it can become a model for future legislative actions by other states with respect to other constitutional rights.

Garland also said that the disputed law is in conflict with federal law by prohibiting federal agencies from exercising their authority and responsibilities related to abortion services.

The new Texas law prohibits abortions if a fetal heartbeat has been detected or after six weeks of pregnancy, except for cases when the conception was the result of rape or incest. The only case when a woman can have an abortion without violating the law is medical emergencies.

Last week, the US Supreme Court has declined to block the law with five out of nine judges voting against blocking it.

Under federal legislation, abortions have been legalized since 1973 by the Supreme Court's landmark *Roe v. Wade* ruling. The right to abortions has long been politicized in the US, with politicians often raising the issue during election campaigns.

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US Remains Prepared to Engage North Korea in Diplomatic Negotiations - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration remains prepared to hold diplomatic meetings with North Korea even though Pyongyang has yet to respond to the offer, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Thursday.

"We have made clear to [North Korea] that we are prepared to meet, to engage in principled negotiations, anytime, anywhere, any place. I don't have an update for you when it comes to any North Korean response to those offers, but the offer certainly stands," Price said during a press briefing.

Price also confirmed the State Department is aware of reports that North Korea resumed operations at its primary nuclear reactor facility in Yongbyon in July. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) published a report on August 30 that North Korea resumed its plutonium production at Yongbyon.

Price said that the US government is working with partners on addressing this development and the IAEA report underscores the urgent need for dialogue and diplomacy between the United States and North Korea in order to achieve the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

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Biden Renews 20-Year-Long Bush National Terrorism Emergency Declaration – Notice

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) – The US government has renewed the declaration of National Emergency that President George W. Bush proclaimed 20 years ago after the attacks September 11 terrorist attacks, President Joe Biden announced on Thursday.

“I am continuing for one year the national emergency previously declared on September 14, 2001, in Proclamation 7463, with respect to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the continuing and immediate threat of further attacks on the United States,” Biden said in a presidential notice.

Because the terrorist threat continues, the national emergency was declared on September 14, 2001, and the powers and authorities adopted to deal with that emergency must continue in effect beyond September 14, 2021, Biden explained.

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 went 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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US Video Firm Pays \$189,483 to Settle Charges of Iran Sanctions Violations – Treasury

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) – NewTek, a company that supplies 3D animation systems, agreed to pay \$189,483 to settle liability for violating US sanctions against Iran, the Treasury Department said on Thursday.

“The apparent violations occurred when NewTek exported goods, technology, and services from the United States to third-country distributors that it knew or had reason to know were specifically intended for companies and individuals in Iran,” Treasury said in a press release. The violations center on three sales to state-owned Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), which is subject to US sanctions. The company earned a profit of \$61,070 of \$583,024 from the sales, the release said.

OFAC reduced the applicable base monetary penalty of \$291,512 to \$189,843, due in part to the company's cooperation during the investigation, as well as subsequent steps by the firm to improve compliance with US sanctions, the release added.

The measures include establishing export controls and sanctions compliance policies, hiring a director of compliance and providing sanctions training to employees, according to the release.

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Norway, Estonia Present Draft to Extend UN Mission in Afghanistan - Estonian Ambassador

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - Estonia and Norway drafted a UN Security Council resolution seeking to extend the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan set to expire next week, Estonian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Sven Jurgenson said in a statement on Thursday.

"Norway and Estonia have presented a draft resolution to extend the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan which expires on September 17," Jurgenson said. The diplomat did not specify the term of the mission's potential extension. Previously, the mandate of the mission was reviewed annually since its establishment in 2002.

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US Justice Department Sues Texas After State Restricts Abortions - Court Filing

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Justice has filed a lawsuit against the State of Texas to stop the enforcement of its recent decision to ban abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, according to court filings published on Thursday.

"It is settled constitutional law that 'a State may not prohibit any woman from making the ultimate decision to terminate her pregnancy before viability.' But Texas has done just that," the Justice Department said. "The United States therefore seeks a declaratory judgment that [the abortion restriction] is invalid under the Supremacy Clause and the Fourteenth Amendment, is preempted by federal law, and violates the doctrine of intergovernmental immunity. The United States also seeks an order preliminarily and permanently enjoining the State of Texas, including its officers, employees, and agents, including private parties who would bring suit under the law, from implementing or enforcing."

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Energy Firm Agrees to Slash Sulfur Air Pollution at Michigan Site – Justice Department

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) – An energy-producing utility company has reached an agreement with the US government and the state of Michigan to drastically reduce and possibly eliminate sulfur dioxide air pollution at a landfill facility, the Department of Justice said on Thursday.

"Arbor Hills Energy (AHE) has agreed to significantly reduce, if not virtually eliminate, AHE's sulfur dioxide (SO₂) emissions at its landfill gas-to-energy facility (Facility) in Northville, Michigan, to resolve alleged Clean Air Act and State law violations," the department said in a press release.

The US government and the State of Michigan in a filed complaint alleged several Clean Air Act and State law violations that included breaking the facility's permitted SO₂ emissions limits.

"This settlement benefits public health and the environment by delivering deep cuts in SO₂ emissions from the AHE Facility," Assistant Attorney General Todd Kim said on behalf of the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division.

Sulfur dioxide causes harm to human health and the environment once emitted into the air, including premature death, heart attacks, respiratory problems and adverse environmental effects, the Justice Department said.

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El Salvador's Adoption of Bitcoin as Legal Tender Undercuts US Monetary Policy - Expert

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik), Ekaterina Chukaeva - By adopting bitcoin as legal tender, El Salvador is effectively replacing the monetary policy of the US and this could sput worldwide adoptions and attract foreign investment into the country, Bobby Ong, co-founder and COO of Coingecko told Sputnik.

Earlier this week, the Latin American nation made headlines after becoming the world's first to accept cryptocurrency as legal currency. By the move, the authorities hope to save millions a year on fees charged for sending money from abroad, predominantly from Washington.

"El Salvador is an interesting testbed for Bitcoin to be adopted as a national currency because the country does not use its own national currency but is a dollarized economy. From that standpoint, replacing USD [US dollar] with Bitcoin is an interesting angle because the country basically replaces the monetary policy of the US government with that of Bitcoin's fixed programmed monetary policy," Ong said.

He added that there was an argument to be made that the risk for the country may be even lower compared to a country that already has a well-functioning national currency.

Other nations with dollarized economies will be following this economic experiment closely to decide whether they can also follow in their footsteps, Ong noted.

"The pioneers in this space will attract the attention of the global crypto community and this could be a catalyst to attract foreign direct investment into the country," he said.

Meanwhile, the El Salvador government decision was not welcomed by hundreds of the country's residents who took part in a rally against the adoption of bitcoin the day it became legal tender. Those protesting, including social and civil organizations and peasants, said they viewed the move as solely a money-laundering attempt. The opposition, which accuses Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele of pursuing this policy for personal enrichment, claims that bitcoin is legalized in light of a possible dollar deficit.

Ong said it was still early to speculate on just how widespread the adoption of the cryptocurrency will be in the country, especially given that the rollout was shortly followed by a nationwide outage of the payment service and remains dogged with technical difficulties.

"Whether the residents actually use Bitcoin in their day-to-day economic activity remains to be seen. The rollout of the government wallet has seen some hiccups. Additionally, Bitcoin value is not stable and is very volatile. It remains to be seen how the residents who accept Bitcoin for trade of goods and services convert their Bitcoin to a stable currency," he said.

Meanwhile, hours after the announcement, the price of bitcoin decreased by 9.11% to \$47,010 on the Binance exchange, the largest cryptocurrency exchange in terms of the trading volume. "The correction that happened on the day El Salvador officially adopting Bitcoin was also a classic example of 'buy the rumor, sell the news,'" Ong concluded. On Wednesday, Bitcoin continued to lose ground, closing at \$46,000, which was down by 1.7 percent.

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US Concerned About Leadership Crisis in Ukraine's Naftogaz - State Department

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned about the leadership crisis in Ukrainian state energy company Naftogaz, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Thursday.

"We are deeply concerned about the ongoing leadership crisis in Naftogaz, including the September 8th resignations of the Naftogaz independent board members," Price said at a daily briefing.

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Fed Governor Bowman Says Supports Year-End Taper for US Stimulus

NEW YORK, September 9 (Sputnik) - US inflationary pressures are in line with the robust demand and constrained supplies in the economy and the Federal Reserve should consider tapering its long-running stimulus by end of this year, the central bank's governor Michelle Bowman said Thursday.

"It's likely appropriate to begin tapering this year if the data come in as expected," Bowman said in a live-streamed speech. "Inflation may take longer to subside (but) inflationary pressures are unsurprising given robust demand and constrained supply."

Bowman is the second Fed official in as many days to advocate for a reduction in the central bank's stimulus program which began in March 2020.

New York Fed President John Williams said on Wednesday it might be right for the central bank to start tapering its stimulus program by this year if inflation remains unbridled and economic recovery remains on track.

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

The question of when the Fed 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 economists' target. Aside from keeping a check, the Fed's more important mandate is growing employment.

Bowman said the United States has achieved "significant progress" on price stability and is "quite close" to achieving its aim of full employment and it was "critical not to draw too many conclusions from a single month's shaky job market data".

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UN Confirms Cyberattackers Breached Infrastructure in April - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric confirmed on Thursday the organization's computer networks had been breached by hackers in April this year.

"We can confirm that unknown attackers were able to breach parts of the United Nations infrastructure in April of 2021," Dujarric said in a statement.

The spokesman explained the attack had been detected before the United Nations was notified about it by a cybersecurity firm Resecurity and actions to mitigate the impact were being implemented.

Further attacks linked to this breach have been detected and are being responded to, Dujarric added.

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US Cybersecurity Company Says Russia Does Not Control Cybercriminals But Tolerates Them

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The Russian authorities do not control cybercriminals who operate in the country, but are tolerant toward their activities, the US cybersecurity company Insikt Group said in a report on Thursday.

"Recorded Future identified 3 types of links between the Russian intelligence services and the Russian criminal underground based on historical activity and associations, as well as recent

ransomware attacks: direct links, indirect affiliations, and tacit agreement," the report dubbed Dark Covenant: Connections Between the Russian State and Criminal Actors said. A lack of meaningful punitive actions from the Russian government to prevent cybercrime shows its tolerance for cybercriminals, the report also said.

"This assessment takes into account that the Russian government possesses a robust surveillance apparatus and interfaces with cybercriminal elements and therefore has visibility into, if not control over, many of the resources used by these threat actors and can shut them down if they so desire," the report added.

Insikt Group explained that it considers "highly likely" that Russian intelligence and law enforcement have very good understanding of what the cybercriminals are doing.

"In some cases, it is almost certain that the intelligence services maintain an established and systematic relationship with criminal threat actors, either through association or recruitment," the report said.

The company pointed out that it calls on the US government to make decisive actions in persuading the Kremlin to control such criminal activities.

"If the Biden administration can persuade the Kremlin that bringing cybercriminal activity under some form of control is in their best interest - by granting sanctions relief, increased collaboration, or economic agreements - these immediate reforms may be substantive and long-lasting," the report said.

Russia has repeatedly denied involvement in cybercrimes and cyber attacks on vital US infrastructure.

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Taliban Yet to Reach Out to UN About Their Ambassador to Organization - UN Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - The Taliban (banned in Russia) has not yet contacted the United Nations regarding their ambassador to the world's body, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Thursday.

"Not that I am aware of it," Dujarric said when asked whether the new interim government contacted the United Nations on the matter. "There has been no contact... here at UN Headquarters."

The United Nations website and Afghanistan's Permanent Mission to the organization still list Ghulam Isaczkai, appointed by former President Ashraf Ghani as the country's Permanent Representative.

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Pennsylvania Senate Starts 2020 Election Audit, Says No Challenge to Outcome – Hearing

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) – The Republican-run senate in the US state of Pennsylvania has started hearings into the workings of the 2020 presidential election process but will make no attempt to challenge the victory of President Joe Biden, hearing chairman State Senator Cris Dush said on Thursday.

"This investigation is not about overturning the results of the election, that horse is out of the barn," Dush said, launching the hearing.

He said, however, that holding the review was well within the rights of the State Senate Intergovernmental Operations Committee according to the constitution of Pennsylvania.

At the same time, the ranking Democrat on the committee, State Senator Anthony Williams, challenged the propriety of the hearing.

"This committee is operating out of its purview this sets a dangerous precedent. ...[It is] still giving oxygen to the Big Lie. The goal is simply to sow distrust and division across this country," Williams said.

The 2020 national presidential election was the first to be held in Pennsylvania under changes in the state election code introduced in Act 77 in 2019, including the implementation of mail-in ballots.

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Biden Says to Keep Fighting Gun Violence Despite Withdrawing Support for ATF Head Nominee

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden announced on Thursday that he has withdrawn support for David Chapman, his nominee for the position director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), due to strong opposition by Republican lawmakers, but will continue to fight gun violence in the United States.

"David Chipman spent 25 years in distinguished service to our country as an ATF agent... He would have been an exemplary Director of the ATF and would have redoubled its efforts to crack down on illegal firearms traffickers and help keep our communities safe from gun violence." Biden said.

The US president went on to say that in spite of the setback, he has spent his entire career working to combat the scourge of gun violence and remains deeply committed to that cause.

Chipman, a long-time gun control advocate, faced criticism from Republicans for his stances on the federal government as a primary gun regulation authority.

Biden said the Republicans' decision to block Chipman's nomination is a result of them using gun crime as a political talking point instead of a serious issue to be addressed, and accused them of siding with gun manufacturers over the will of the majority of Americans.

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Taliban Cooperative in Facilitating US Evacuation Charter Flights From Kabul - White House

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The Taliban (designated as a terrorist group and banned in Russia) has been cooperative in helping the United States facilitate charter flights with evacuees out of the Kabul airport, the White House said on Thursday.

"The Taliban have been cooperative in facilitating the departure of American citizens and lawful permanent residents on charter flights from HKIA [Hamid Karzai International Airport]," the White House said in a press release. "They have shown flexibility, and they have been businesslike and professional in our dealings with them in this effort. This is a positive first step."

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US Aircraft Carrying Evacuees From Afghanistan Lands in Qatar - White House

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - A US charter flight carrying American citizens and legal permanent residents out of Kabul, Afghanistan, has landed in Qatar, the White House said on Thursday.

"Today, the United States government facilitated the departure of US citizens and lawful permanent residents on a chartered Qatar Airways flight from Hamid Karzai International Airport," the White House said in a press release. "We can confirm that flight has safely landed in Qatar."

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UN General Assembly Will See 83 World Leaders Coming to New York In-Person - President

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - A total of 83 world leaders will come to New York later in September to attend the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, the body's President Volkan Bozkir said in a press briefing on Thursday.

The High-Level Week of the UN General Assembly will begin on September 21.

"There will be 83 heads of state in-person who has applied," Bozkir said when asked how many officials indicated they intend to attend the annual gathering.

So far, 26 heads of states informed they will submit pre-recorded statements, Bozkir said.

Among those who chose to participate personally are one vice president, 43 heads of government, three deputy prime ministers and 23 foreign ministers, Bozkir added.

This year, the United Nations has decided to allow world leaders to come to the UN General Assembly in-person or deliver pre-recorded video messages if COVID-19-related restrictions prevent the officials from traveling.

In 2020, the 75th session of the UN General Assembly was held online and no world leader came to the United Nations headquarters in-person.

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United Airlines Targets 100% Use of Sustainable Jet Fuel With Plan to Buy 1.5Bln Gallons

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - United Airlines hopes to fly its planes without using a single drop of petroleum-based fuel, with an agreement to buy 1.5 billion gallons of fuel made from biomass, the company said on Thursday.

Adler Fuels, a clean technology company, will make the fuel using technology developed by the firm Honeywell Invest. The process promises to increase production of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) to levels needed for the industry, United Airlines said in a press release.

"When used together across the fuel lifecycle, the Alder technologies, coupled with Honeywell's Ecofining process, could have the ability to produce a carbon-negative fuel at spec with today's jet fuel. The goal of the technologies is to produce fuel that is a 100 percent drop-in replacement for petroleum jet fuel," the release said.

Drop-in replacement is an industry term for a substitute fuel that can be used without any modifications to equipment.

A joint United-Honeywell agreement will purchase 1.5 billion of gallons of biofuel from Adler over the next 20 years. The process creates oil identical to petroleum from the ground, which can be readily converted to jet fuel, the release said.

At one and a half times the size of known biofuel purchase commitments of all global airlines combined, United Airline's order is easily the largest publicly announced SAF agreement in aviation history, according to the release.

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Afghanistan Faces Prospect of Universal Poverty By Middle of 2022 - UNDP

UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - Afghanistan is expected to face universal poverty by the middle of 2022 as both humanitarian and development disasters are unfolding in the country, UN Development Program (UNDP) Asia-Pacific Director Kanni Wignaraja said on Thursday.

"Afghanistan pretty much faces universal poverty by middle of next year," Wignaraja said during a press conference. "Together with political instability, you've now got a freeze on on foreign reserves, you've got a collapsed public finance system, you've got a crush on local banking... and you've got COVID-19. So if you look at this, it's both a humanitarian and development disaster."

The poverty rate in Afghanistan is projected to reach 97 percent by the middle of 2022, Wignaraja added.

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United Airlines to Place Unvaccinated Employees on Temporary, Unpaid Leave Beginning Oct 2

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - All United Airlines workers who are not vaccinated against COVID-19, including those with religious exemptions, will be furloughed beginning in October, the company said on Thursday.

"All employees who get an exemption, regardless of their role in the company, will be on temporary, unpaid personal leave until specific safety measures for unvaccinated employees are instituted by the airline," United Airlines said in a press release.

The release explained United Airlines "can no longer allow unvaccinated people back into the workplace until it better understands how they might interact with the customers and their vaccinated co-workers."

The furloughs begin on October 2, with the airline planning to announce by the middle of the month when employees with approved vaccine exemptions can return. The timing will be based on new safety protocols now being developed, the release said.

United became the first major US airline to impose vaccine mandate for its 67,000 employees or risk being fired, the release added.

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Filipino President's Daughter Drops Presidential Bid as Her Father Seeks VP Post in 2022

MOSCOW, September 9 (Sputnik) - The Philippine president's daughter, who is also the mayor of Davao city and head of the regional party, HNP, Inday Sara Duterte-Carpio, says she will not run for president in the upcoming 2022 election after her father agreed to be the vice-presidential bet of his ruling PDP-Laban faction.

Before announcing the decision on Thursday, Sara Duterte-Carpio had been leading opinion polls and was quoted by the media saying she was open to running and contemplating several running mate offers.

"Yes, I am not running for a national position as we both agreed only one of us will run for a national position in 2022," Sara Duterte-Carpio said in a television interview, as quoted by The Philippine News Agency.

On Wednesday, President Rodrigo Duterte accepted his nomination as the vice-presidential candidate of the PDP-Laban faction led by Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi.

President Duterte, who has run the country since 2016, serves as the chairman of the ruling party, the PDP-Laban, while his daughter Sara Duterte-Carpio, a mayor of Davao, is the chairman of the regional party, the HNP. The ruling PDP-Laban, however, has split into two factions: the one led by Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi, which offered Duterte to run for

vice-president, and the one led by Senator Manny Pacquiao, which elected a new party chairman in August, ousting Rodrigo Duterte.

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Ford to Stop Manufacturing Cars in India After Losses Reach \$2Bln - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The Ford Motor Company said on Thursday that it has decided to restructure its business in India and to cease manufacturing cars there after its operating losses increased to \$2 billion over the past decade.

"Ford in India today announced it will restructure its operations with plans to significantly expand its Chennai-based Ford Business Solutions team and bring to market some of Ford's iconic global vehicles and electrified SUVs while ceasing vehicle manufacturing in India," the company said in a statement.

Ford said in the statement that it plans to gradually end its vehicle assembly in Sanand by the end of the year as well as the vehicle and engine manufacturing in Chennai by the second quarter of 2022.

However, the company also said it will continue to provide customers with parts, service and warranty support.

To create a more profitable business in India, Ford is going to focus instead on increasing its Ford Business Solutions capabilities in order to create a platform for the company's global transformation, the statement said.

Earlier this year, Ford, the world's fifth-largest automobile manufacturer, announced that it will make all its new European passenger vehicles electric by 2030.

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US Crude Oil Draw at 4-Week Low on Fallout from Hurricane Ida - EIA Data

NEW YORK, September 9 (Sputnik) - US crude oil inventory draws hit four-week lows last week and were less than a third of expected levels, data from the Energy Information Administration showed on Wednesday, as refinery closures from Hurricane Ida tripped up analysts' projections. Crude inventories fell by 1.5 million barrels in the week to September 3 to 423.9 million barrels, the EIA said in its Weekly Petroleum Status Report.

It was the smallest drawdown in US crude stocks since the week ended August 6, EIA historical data showed.

Analysts polled by US media had expected a drawdown of 4.75 million barrels instead.

On the gasoline front, stocks fell by 7.2 million barrels in the week to 220 million barrels, the EIA said, compared with analysts' expectations for a 3.3 million-barrel drop. This was another

storm-related anomaly as refiners' inability to operate at optimum levels since the August 29 hurricane led to less replenishment of motor fuel stockpiles.

Refineries operated at below 82 percent of their capacity last week, the EIA said. Operating levels are typically around 95 percent at this time of year.

Analysts were more accurate with their reading on inventories of distillates, which include diesel and heating oil. These fell by 3.1 million barrels to 133.6 million barrels, not far from the anticipated drawdown of 3.5 million barrels, the EIA data showed.

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 damage caused by the storm, analysts said.

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Russia to Continue Facilitating Direct Israel-Palestine Talks - Lavrov

MOSCOW, September 9 (Sputnik) - Moscow will continue its efforts to facilitate direct Israel-Palestine negotiations, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Thursday after a meeting with his Israeli counterpart Yair Lapid.

"We reiterate the willingness of Russia to facilitate a direct dialogue between the Israelis and the Palestinians through bilateral channels and as a member of the quartet of international mediators," Lavrov said.

Russia appreciates the normalization of relations between Israel and some Arab countries, supports the continuation of this process and expects it to contribute to the advance of a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East, the minister added.

Last September, Israel, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates signed agreements — known as the Abraham Accords — on normalizing relations.

The group of four international mediators in the Middle East settlement, comprising Russia, the US, the EU and the UN, was established in Madrid in 2002.

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Harris Reaffirms US-Mexico Partnership to Modernize Hemisphere, Develop Central America

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris during remarks on Thursday reaffirmed the US's commitment to working with Mexico to advance goals including the modernizing of infrastructure across the Western hemisphere and the creation of jobs in Central America

"This high-level economic dialogue is an opportunity to deepen our ties and advance our collective goals. Together we will strengthen supply chain resilience. Together we will modernize our hemisphere's infrastructure through the plan the President has outlined, in partnership and

cooperation with our friends, Build Back Better World... We will create jobs for the people of Southern Mexico and Central America," Harris said.

She added that she is confident that the two nations and their companies will continue to work together towards greater prosperity, and that the US and Mexico will continue working together to set an example of what is possible in the Western hemisphere.

Representatives of the US and Mexico met in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building near the White House to engage in the first US-Mexico High-Level Economic Dialogue since 2016.

Other members of the US delegation to the dialogue included US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai, US Agency for International Development Administrator Samantha Power, and US Ambassador to Mexico Ken Salazar.

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US Federal Reserve Fines BNP Paribas Bank Data Manager \$100,000 Over Kickback Scheme

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - A former data manager with the BNP Paribas Bank faces a lifetime ban from working with banks and other financial firms and a \$100,000 penalty for receiving kickbacks from technology firms he hired as contractors, the Federal Reserve said on Thursday.

"The Board of Governors hereby imposes a civil money penalty on Bhushan Bhangale in the amount of \$100,000 which shall be paid within thirty (30) days," a six page order from the Federal Reserve Board of Governors said.

In addition, the order bans Bhangale from working at banks or other financial institutions.

Bhangale accepted the penalties without an admission or denial of guilt, the order said.

From at least 2013 to 2018, Bhangale hired workers from IT companies including "Individual A," who paid Bhangale a percentage of the fees received by the IT firms from the bank for workers' services. During the period, kickbacks received by Bhangale totaled \$100,000, the order said.

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Yellen Holds Virtual G7 Meet, Supports Global Tax Revamp Efforts - US Treasury

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen expressed support for continued efforts of international fiscal authorities to revamp and make the global tax system more equitable during a virtual meeting with G7 finance ministers on Thursday, the Treasury Department said in a statement.

"Secretary Yellen today expressed support for ongoing efforts to improve the international tax system and the importance of swift implementation of the new system," the statement read.

"The new international tax system would meet the needs of the 21st century global economy by

providing governments with resources to invest in their workers and economies, as well as improving the standing of U.S. businesses by leveling the playing field in which they compete." Yellen also told the meeting that the Biden administration was pleased with the progress the US Congress was making to strengthen tax rules, with efforts underway for reconciliation legislation to push for the international tax agenda.

"The Secretary noted the generational importance for Congress to seize this historic opportunity to end the race to the bottom by enacting a US minimum tax rate on foreign earnings of at least 21 percent on a per-country basis," the statement said.

The meeting comes after the historic June 7 agreement by the G7 to impose a global minimum tax on corporate foreign earnings, a move that was later supported by 134 countries representing more than 90 percent of the world's gross domestic product, the Treasury statement noted.

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US-Led Coalition Remains Committed to Defeating Islamic State Globally - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - The Coalition to defeat the Islamic State (banned in Russia) has reiterated its commitment to defeating the terror group globally, including in Afghanistan, the US State Department said after a virtual meeting of the Coalition members on Thursday.

"The Coalition remains united and resolved in its determination to achieve the enduring defeat of Daesh/ISIS [Islamic State] wherever it operates and to bringing its members to justice," the State Department said in a press release.

The Coalition partners remain focused on efforts to prevent the resurgence of the Islamic State in the liberated areas of Iraq and Syria and have already pledged more than \$600 million of their stated goal of \$670 million for 2021, the release said.

The United States will continue its support of the Iraqi Security Forces even after the US combat role in the country will be over, the release said citing US Special Envoy John Godfrey.

During the meeting, Godfrey emphasized the US concern about thousands of Islamic State fighters who are detained in northeast Syria and urged their accelerated repatriation to prevent the terror group from reconstituting in that country as well as in Iraq, the release added.

In June, the State Department said the US-led coalition was working to return some 2,000 terrorist fighters as well as 2,000 Iraqi nationals detained by the Syrian Democratic Forces to their countries of origin.

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US Charges 3 in Global Financial Firm With \$155Mln Investment Fraud - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - Three operators of a defunct financial firm with clients in the US, South America and Europe face prison sentences of up to 70 years for their roles in an investment fraud scheme that resulted in losses of \$155 million for clients, the Justice Department said on Thursday.

A three-count criminal indictment unsealed on Wednesday charges Roberto Ripalda, Fernando Bergson and Ernesto Pazmino "with conspiring to defraud investors and financial institutions as part of an international fraud scheme stretching through the United States, South America, and Europe," the department said in a press release.

"The defendants are each charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud, conspiracy to commit bank fraud, and conspiracy to commit money laundering," the release said.

Federal agents arrested Weisson in Miami, while Cortes and Haberer were arrested yesterday in Spain and Argentina, respectively, the release added.

The defendants and their co-conspirators sold fake proprietary investment products to clients of the firm they founded, Biscayne Capital, and used the money to pay off other clients, the release said.

The scheme collapsed in September 2018, and Biscayne Capital went into liquidation, causing more than \$155 million in losses to the firm's clients, the release said.

Each defendant faces a maximum penalty of 70 years in prison, according to the release.

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Kiev Needs Normandy Four Meeting to Ask Berlin, Paris to Put Pressure on Moscow – Lavrov

MOSCOW, September 9 (Sputnik) - Ukraine desires to hold a Normandy group meeting only for asking Germany and France to exert pressure on Russia to change the Minsk Agreements, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Thursday.

Earlier this day, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said that Kiev was ready to hold the meeting of the Normandy Four foreign ministers at any time, with efforts intensifying to organize one this fall.

"The only goal of such initiative [for Ukraine] is to beg Berlin and Paris to put pressure on Russia to start modifying, as they say, the Minsk Agreements," Lavrov said following a meeting with his Israeli counterpart, Yair Lapid.

Although Kiev repeatedly expressed its willingness to hold various conferences, Russia along with Germany and France cannot understand Ukraine's stance at these meetings, the Russian foreign minister added.

Lavrov said that if the Normandy group continues its work, this means providing conditions necessary for the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

The Ukrainian foreign minister calls on all parties of the Normandy group to hold a meeting as soon as possible, while other members of the Kiev administration claim that they refuse to implement the agreements, something Lavrov called "foreign policy schizophrenia."

The conflict in Donbas between the Ukrainian government and the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk republics has been going on since 2014. The Minsk Agreements, designed to find a

political settlement to the conflict, were negotiated by the leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine — comprising the Normandy group — in February 2015.

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Trump Endorses Republican Challenger to 'Disloyal' Liz Cheney – Statement
WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump on Thursday endorsed a challenger to Representative Liz Cheney, the daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, in her previously safe seat in the US state of Wyoming.

"I strongly endorse Republican House of Representatives Candidate Harriet Hageman from Wyoming who is running against warmonger and disloyal Republican, Liz Cheney," Trump said in a statement. "Harriet has my complete and total endorsement in replacing the Democrats' number one provider of sound bites Liz Cheney."

Cheney was one of 10 House Republicans who voted to impeach Trump following the January 6 Capitol riot by supporters of the then-outgoing president. She also vowed that she would do everything she could to ensure that Trump never again got anywhere near the Oval Office.

Earlier this year, House Republicans ousted Cheney from the Number Three spot in their leadership as chairman of the conference of party representatives. Trump then accused her of being a "bitter, horrible human being" and a "warmonger whose family stupidly pushed us into the never ending Middle East disaster."

Cheney was then replaced as Republican conference chair by Congresswoman Elise Stefani.

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EU Commission Allocates First \$185.5Mln From Post-Pandemic Recovery Fund to Cyprus

MOSCOW, September 9 (Sputnik) - The European Commission paid out the first 157 million euros (\$185.5 million) to Cyprus on Thursday from the EU-wide fund allocated to support member states during the coronavirus crisis.

"The European Commission has today disbursed €157 million to Cyprus in pre-financing, equivalent to 13% of the grant and loan component of the country's financial allocation. The pre-financing payment under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) will help to kick-start the implementation of the crucial investment and reform measures outlined in Cyprus' recovery and resilience plan," the Commission said in a statement.

According to the report, further disbursements will be authorized by the Commission if the investments and changes outlined in Cyprus' recovery and resilience plan are implemented. The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) was established to provide up to 723.8 billion euros to support reforms and projects in EU member states post-pandemic. Before allocating the funds, the Commission reviews recovery plans presented by member states based on

country-specific recommendations and assesses whether they dedicate at least 37% of expenditure to climate objectives and 20% to the digital transition.

The disbursed monies, or 13% of the total 1.2 billion euros allocated to Cyprus, is expected to help the country enhance its renewable energy measures, promote sustainable and green mobility, digitalize its public sector and increase the quality of education and training via reformation of the teaching profession.

"Today's disbursement follows the recent successful implementation of the first borrowing operations under NextGenerationEU. By the end of the year, the Commission intends to raise up to a total of €80 billion in long-term funding, to be complemented by short-term EU-Bills, to fund the first planned disbursements to Member States under NextGenerationEU," the statement reads.

European leaders agreed on the RRF in July 2020 as part of NextGenerationEU, a temporary recovery instrument designed to mobilize investments and jump-start Europe's economy battered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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US Congressman Urges Facebook, Amazon to Detail Measures Against Vaccine Disinformation

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - US House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff on Thursday sent letters to the heads of Facebook and Amazon asking them to provide detailed explanation of what they do to mitigate the spread of disinformation about coronavirus vaccines.

"As a Member of Congress who is deeply concerned by the prevalence of vaccine hesitancy during this time of crisis, I request additional, more detailed information on Facebook's policies regarding false or misleading health information in order to identify potential needs for federal regulation," the letter to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said.

Schiff called on Zuckerberg to provide information regarding the criteria the social platform exploits to determine whether misinformation or conspiracy theories are dangerous enough to be removed.

The congressman from California also asked Zuckerberg to provide the actual size of the team that is responsible for moderating content on Facebook and whether the number is sufficient to prevent anti-vaccine content from being published.

With respect to Amazon, Schiff said the company's recommendation systems promote dangerous misinformation on vaccines that may result in over-recommendation of disinformation and conspiracy theories regarding medical items sold online.

Schiff asked Amazon to detail the steps it is taking to ensure that filters and recommendations, including "Amazon's Choice" labels, are not used to promote false health-related information.

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Moderna Combines Seasonal Flu Vaccine With COVID-19 Booster in Single Shot

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) – A new vaccine candidate combining a yearly inoculation against the flu with a COVID-19 booster in a single jab was announced by the US pharmaceutical firm Moderna on Tuesday.

"Today we are announcing the first step in our novel respiratory vaccine program with the development of a single dose vaccine that combines a booster against COVID-19 and a booster against flu," Moderna CEO Stephane Bancel said in a press release.

Moderna also provided updated results of the latest phase 3 trial of its existing two-jab coronavirus vaccine, showing 93 percent efficacy with effectiveness remaining durable through six months following the second shot.

"In this analysis, the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine showed 98.2% efficacy against severe COVID-19 disease and 100% efficacy against death caused by COVID-19," the release said. Unlike rival Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine, Moderna's jabs have yet to receive full approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) but continue to be used with an FDA emergency use authorization.

The release also updated Moderna's efforts to develop and test vaccines against other diseases including respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), which infects lungs and airways mainly in infants but can occur in people of all ages.

In addition, the release contained updates on an experimental cancer vaccine and an inoculation against the Epstein-Barr virus, a cause of chronic fatigue syndrome.

Overall, Moderna has 34 vaccine candidates under development, including 22 in ongoing clinical trials, according to the release.

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Biden Nominates Willie Phillips for Energy Regulatory Commission Head - White House

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden plans to pick attorney Willie Phillips as a new head of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the White House said in a statement on Thursday.

"Today, President Joe Biden announced his intent to nominate Willie L. Phillips, Jr. as a Commissioner of the FERC," the statement said.

The FERC will maintain an important role in regulating the transmission of carbon-free energy across the country, the statement said.

The White House noted in the statement that Phillips has an extensive experience in utility regulation and led the relevant commission in Washington, DC.

"Willie was a thoughtful and innovative leader in modernizing the energy grid, implementing the District's aggressive clean energy and climate goals, and in protecting the District's customers," the statement said.

Phillips also served as Assistant General Counsel for the North American Electric Reliability Corporation and held other positions in different organizations, the statement added.

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RECAST - Kyrgyz President Dismisses Ambassador to Afghanistan

BISHKEK, September 9 (Sputnik) - Kyrgyz President Sadyr Zhaparov has dismissed ambassador to Afghanistan Miroslav Niyazov, the presidential press office said on Thursday.

"The President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Sadyr Zhaparov, has signed a decree, according to which Niyazov Miroslav Dzhumabekovich has been dismissed from his post of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kyrgyz Republic to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in accordance with a submitted application," the statement read.

The press office did not specify the reasons for the decision.

The Kyrgyz embassy in Afghanistan continued its work even after the Taliban's (a terrorist group, banned in Russia) takeover and actively evacuated Kyrgyz citizens from the country. Diplomats had contacts with the movement, which, in its turn, provided security for the embassy and did not prevent the departure of Kyrgyz nationals from Kabul.

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Biden Proclaims September 10-12 National Days of Prayer, Remembrance for 9/11 Attacks

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - September 10-12 have been designated as National Days of Prayer and Remembrance for the 20th anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States, President Joe Biden announced in a proclamation on Thursday.

"Now, therefore, I, Joseph R. Biden Jr., President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim September 10, 2021, through September 12, 2021, as National Days of Prayer and Remembrance," Biden said.

A total of 2,977 people died in the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, as well as in the hijacked airplane that crashed in Pennsylvania without reaching its presumed target.

Biden said during the days of prayer and remembrance, Americans will solemnly reflect on the freedom and tolerance of the "American character" as they preserve the memories of the fallen.

Biden also called on Americans to honor and remember the victims of the terrorist attacks through contemplation, memorial services, bell ringing and evening candlelight vigils, among other activities.

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UNSC Marks 20th Anniversary of 9/11 Attacks Pledging to Counter Terrorism - Statement UNITED NATIONS, September 9 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council ahead of the 20th anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States on Thursday reaffirmed their commitment to continue countering terrorism in all its forms.

Earlier on Thursday, the members of the council visited the September 11 Memorial and Museum in New York City located at the former location of the Twin Towers that were destroyed in the 2001 attacks.

"The members of the Security Council are as united today as they were 20 years ago in their commitment to prevent and counter terrorism, in all its forms and wherever it occurs, consistent with international law," the statement said.

The members of the council also offered their condolences to the families and friends of the people from more than 90 countries killed in the attacks.

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 went 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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US Special Envoy Malley Says Had 'Constructive' Meeting With Ryabkov on Iran Nuclear Deal

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy Robert Malley said on Thursday that he had a "good and constructive" meeting with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov on the goal of returning to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iranian nuclear deal.

"Good & constructive meetings in Moscow with @mfa_russia DFM Ryabkov where we discussed our shared goal of a return to negotiations and quick mutual resumption of compliance with the JCPOA," Malley tweeted.

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Austria's Kurz Supports Laschet in Election Race for German Chancellor's Office

VIENNA, September 9 (Sputnik) - Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz expressed his support for Armin Laschet, the conservative CDU/CSU alliance's candidate for German chancellor in the upcoming elections.

"I know him [Laschet] and value him. He has so far managed and led the largest German federal state. He is a convinced European, with whom we have always cooperated well. I am sure that he should lead Germany in the nearest future," Kurz told German outlet Die Welt in an interview published on Thursday.

The chancellor added that people should not rely on the results of pre-election surveys, as only a vote eventually will decide which party will win. He also warned about the formation of the "red-green-red" coalition in Germany made up of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, The Greens and The Left.

Germany will hold the federal elections on September 26, after which the winning party will appoint the federal chancellor to head the government and replace incumbent Angela Merkel.

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Biden to Beef Up COVID-19 Vaccine Regulations for Federal Workers - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden is expected to announce stricter COVID-19 vaccine regulations for federal workers later on Thursday, CNN said citing a source familiar with the matter.

US leader is going to announce a broad plan which includes an executive order requiring all federal employees to be vaccinated without possibility of being regularly tested to avoid immunization, the report said. He also will impose the same rule for government contractors, it added.

Biden is expected to announce a major expansion to free testing and will talk about the confusion over booster shots, the report noted.

As of Thursday morning, the United States counts almost 40.5 million COVID-19 confirmed cases and more than 650,000 related deaths, according the Johns Hopkins University database.

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US Workers' Job-Loss Worries Ease But Remain Above Pre-Pandemic Levels - Poll

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) – Job-related anxiety among US workers eased in the second year of the coronavirus pandemic, with a nine point drop in company employees who say the fear being laid off, a new Gallup poll revealed on Thursday.

"[Eighteen] 18 percent are worried about being laid off, down from 27 percent in 2020," a press release explaining the poll said.

The annual Gallup poll dating back 1997 also looks at anxiety over other "job-setbacks." Twenty percent of workers say they fear work hours could be cut, down from 27 percent in 2020, the release said.

Workers who fear their pay will be cut fell from 28 percent in 2020 to 23 percent in the latest poll while worries of cuts in job benefits fell from 30 percent to 27 percent, the release added.

The decline in worker anxiety coincides with conditions in the US job market that favor employees over employers, with companies struggling to fill vacancies and the number of unfilled jobs greater than the number of unemployed workers, according to the release.

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Typhoon Jolina Leaves 11 Dead in Philippines - Reports

MOSCOW, September 9 (Sputnik) - Typhoon Jolina, also known internationally as Conson, killed at least 11 people in the Philippines, media reported on Thursday citing police.

Seven dead bodies were found in coastal waters near Santo Nino, in the central Samar province, where the rescuers managed to save about 50 fishermen in the stormy sea. Four more people were found dead in different parts of Samar Island as of Thursday, the police report says, as cited by the Philippine News Agency.

On Wednesday, over 8,500 individuals were evacuated to safe places amid heavy rain and flooding, one of which occurred in the capital of Manila, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council's report.

The authorities have yet to assess the damage from typhoon Jolina, which made landfall on the Philippine archipelago on Tuesday with gusts of up to 150 kilometers per hour (93.2 mph), but has already passed the Philippines and, weakened, is moving towards the coast of Vietnam. Another typhoon Kiko, also known as Chanthu, is approaching the north of the Philippines, however, with wind speed in gusts reaching 240 kilometers per hour.

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Top US Commanders to Testify in Senate on Afghanistan Withdrawal - Committee

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - Several senior US commanders, including former Commander of US Forces-Afghanistan Austin Scott Miller, Commander of Central Command General Kenneth McKenzie and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, will testify in Senate on the

withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan, the US Senate Committee on Armed Services said on Thursday.

US troops completed the withdrawal operation by August 31, ending its 20-year military presence in the country.

"The Senate Armed Services Committee today announced its initial slate of hearings to examine the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan and lessons learned from the twenty year conflict," the statement said.

The first hearing — which is to be closed — is to take place on Wednesday, September 16 and will touch upon the recent developments in Afghanistan. General Austin Scott Miller, former Commander of US Forces-Afghanistan, will join it as a witness.

A hearing on September 28 will feature the testimony on US withdrawal from Afghanistan and will take place in open and closed formats. Defense Secretary Austin, General McKenzie and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley will attend the hearing as witnesses.

The hearing on September 30 will include the review of US military operations in Afghanistan.

The Taliban (terrorist group, banned in Russia) seized the Afghan capital of Kabul on August 15, leading to a collapse of the US-backed authorities. The movement declared that foreign evacuation operations and the exit of foreign troops from Afghanistan were to be completed by August 31, after which the Kabul Airport, which has served as a point of departure for evacuation flights, came under the control of the Taliban.

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Hackers Broke Into United Nations Earlier This Year, Stole Sensitive Data – Reports

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) – Earlier this year, the United Nations' (UN) networks were allegedly breached by unknown hackers who used stolen credentials of a UN employee to steal some sensitive data, Bloomberg reported on Thursday.

The breach was discovered by a cybersecurity company Resecurity, according to which the initial intrusion to the UN networks took place as early as April 5 and the hackers were still present in the system as of August 7, the report said.

"The actor conducted the intrusion with the goal of compromising large numbers of users within the UN network for further long-term intelligence gathering," Resecurity Chief Executive Officer Gene Yoo said as cited by the report.

UN officials informed Resecurity that the hackers' aim was reconnaissance and stopped communicating with the cyber security firm after it provided proof that the attack also resulted in stolen data, the report said.

During the latest breach, the hackers tried to collect information about the architecture of the UN computer networks and to compromise 53 UN accounts, according to Resecurity.

The purported hacking took place amid an increased number of ransomware attacks against US-based companies, including Colonial Pipeline, Kaseya and others.

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Biden to Withdraw His ATF Head Nominee Due to Congressional Opposition – Reports

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration plans to withdraw its nominee to head of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) David Chipman because of strong opposition against him from both parties in the Congress, the Washington Post said on Thursday citing two sources familiar with the matter.

The report did not provide additional details on the possible decision but noted that the White House declined to comment.

US President Joe Biden nominated Chipman, famous as a long-time gun control advocate, to lead the ATF in April as a part of his larger program to combat gun violence. Commenting then on his pick, Biden called gun violence in the US an epidemic.

Chipman does not have enough votes in Congress to be confirmed given staunch opposition from largely pro-gun Republicans, CNN said in a separate report quoting a senior administration official.

Debates about gun control were reignited at the beginning of the year amid a surge in mass shootings across the country. Biden has been promising harsh action to curb gun violence in the country since his inauguration. Gun sales, which jumped sharply during the early 2020 pandemic, meanwhile continue to increase. Some 39% of US households are in possession of guns now, an increase from 32% in 2016.

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

WASHINGTON, September 9 (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." Economists polled by US media forecast 335,000 unemployment claims for the latest week on file, putting what the department reported at just above target.

"The data continues to move in the positive direction," economist Adam Button said in a post on ForexLive.

Continuing claims for the week that ended on August 28 — reported with a one-week lag — were at 2.78 million, barely changed from the 2.81 million reading for the week to August 21. That left the weekly unemployment rate unchanged at 2.0 percent.

More than a year into the COVID-19 crisis, restoring job growth remains one of the main concerns of US policymakers.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus. More than 7 million of those jobs have yet to return, officials say.

The US economy itself shrank 3.5 percent in 2020. This year though, growth has been quite dynamic, with a 6.5 percent rebound for the second quarter though that was still below the 8.5 percent expected by economists.

The Federal Reserve thinks growth will average at 6.5 percent for all of 2021. But Chairman Jerome Powell also says it may take a while for “full employment” — defined by a monthly unemployment rate of 4.0 percent or lower — to occur. The monthly unemployment rate stood at 5.2 percent in August.