

3/22/22 Tuesday

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Hong Kong's Carrie Lam Could See No-Confidence Vote After SAR Caves to Corporate Anti-Lockdown Lobby

An opposition lawmaker in Hong Kong's Legislative Council has threatened to bring a motion of no confidence against Chief Executive Carrie Lam for the government's backing off of COVID-19 restrictions amid a massive new outbreak of the deadly disease.

Junius Ho Kwan-yiu, an unaffiliated but pro-mainland lawmaker representing the Election Committee constituency in the Legislative Council, on Tuesday suggested that Lam's government had failed to respond to the new COVID-19 outbreak raging across the city.

"We trust the [Hong Kong] government because we wholeheartedly trust the central government. But now you've told us things won't be carried out according to what you had said ... Tell us then, should we listen to you or not?" Ho said, according to the [South China Morning Post](#).

Lam's government has repeatedly said it would implement stricter COVID-19 protections, including lockdowns, over the past several months, only to consistently reverse course on those plans. The back-and-forth has created uncertainty, causing runs on supermarkets and other stores, and sending the wealthy residents abroad to escape quarantines.

No other lawmakers have spoken out in favor of Ho's proposed move, however, according to the SCMP.

On Friday, the city's Department of Health said it had [recorded over 1 million](#) COVID-19 cases in Hong Kong since the pandemic began, but almost all have come in the most recent fifth wave. [A separate estimate](#) by University of Hong Kong researchers found that as many as 3.6 million Hong Kong residents may have contracted the virus - half the city's population.

The Health Department reported 14,152 new cases on Tuesday, lower than its peak number but still roughly 100 times the average daily cases seen in previous Covid outbreaks.

A day prior, [Lam's government laid out](#) a tiered plan for easing Covid restrictions beginning on April 1, although she noted it was a framework and not a firm plan.

"I would advise that you need not draw any conclusion of what we are heading towards in the announcement that we have made today," she remarked.

Lam has faced heavy opposition to firmer lockdowns from the city's corporate sector, including the Hong Kong Monetary Authority bank regulator, which earlier this month said it was lobbying the city to halve quarantine times for travelers, [according to Bloomberg](#). Weeks earlier, the government, under corporate pressure, [made another reduction](#) in quarantine times.

The situation contrasts sharply with that on the Chinese mainland, where the socialist government has a firm grip on corporate power and has directed a wide-ranging "Zero Covid" program. In Shenzhen, a tech hub of 17.5 million that abuts the Hong Kong SAR in Guangdong Province, a handful of cases [caused a weeklong shutdown](#) and a massive testing program for every resident.

According to a recent [report in Fortune](#), Shenzhen residents aren't amused at what they describe as the "privileged" attitude of their Hong Kong neighbors.

"Why is Hong Kong experiencing such privilege? No lockdowns, no citywide tests?" said one user on China's Sina Weibo social media site. "Why is our taxpayer money going to these bastards? Hong Kong is part of China, but the people are not necessarily our compatriots." Mainland China [has only reported](#) 174,505 Covid cases since the beginning of the pandemic, including the Wuhan outbreak in December 2019 that began the spread of the virus among humans. It recorded 3,890 new cases on Monday, part of the worst outbreak since the initial one, which has been centered in two cities in the northeastern Jilin Province. In Jilin's Changchun and in Shenzhen, several dozen [officials have been fired](#) in recent days after being found responsible for the most recent outbreaks due to negligent behavior.

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Videos: Abbot Declares Disaster in Texas After Tornadoes Tear Across US South

A band of powerful storms is cutting its way across the American South, bringing torrential rain, powerful wind and numerous tornadoes from central Texas eastward.

At least one person has died and nine others injured after at least nine tornadoes spawned across central and eastern Texas on Monday. The storms have now passed eastward into Louisiana and Mississippi, where schools were closed early on Tuesday ahead of their arrival. The National Weather Service has confirmed nine tornadoes hit Texas on Monday, ranging from a powerful EF3 storm that hit Jacksboro to numerous weaker twisters scattered across 16 counties.

Some folks captured videos of the carnage.

In one video, as a tornado crosses the highway in front of a driver, a pickup truck going the other way is seen being knocked over and spun around by the twister, which then mysteriously sets the truck upright again as it passes away. The driver is then seen speeding away.

In another video filmed from the front doors of a Walmart store in Round Rock, near the state capital of Austin, a twister roars into the massive parking lot as the filmer screams over the roaring wind to running shoppers to seek shelter inside the store. As might be expected, the curses fly as freely in the video as the debris, so viewer caution is advised.

A mounted camera at Round Rock's Kalahari Resorts that was placed by local ABC affiliate KVUE got an even more incredible view: the tornado spun its way right over the camera, giving viewers a unique taste of an experience they will hopefully never get in person.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed a disaster declaration on Tuesday for the 16 affected counties, according to [The Dallas Morning News](#). He made the declaration from a Jacksboro hospital, where an elementary school serving as a storm shelter was struck by a tornado. He called it a "miracle" no one was killed.

Cyclones aren't the only agents of chaos in these storms, as Jacksboro police chief Scott Haynes reportedly had to wade through inches of standing water to get to sheltering students

inside the struck school, and several water rescues have been reported across the state as drivers attempted to ford high water on the road.

One death from the storm has been confirmed: a 73-year-old woman from Grayson County, but officials did not say how she died, according to [the Associated Press](#).

Over 90,000 homes and businesses are without power as of Tuesday in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi as the storms passed eastward.

As the storms passed through Louisiana, they entered territory still reeling from [the catastrophic landing](#) of Hurricane Ida in late August 2021. In Houma, the seat of the southern Terrebonne Parish, [shelters opened early](#) on Tuesday as there are over 8,000 households still living in temporary homes due to Ida and two other hurricanes that hit in 2020: Laura and Delta.

On Tuesday, the [Biden administration announced](#) it would allocate over \$1.7 billion in recovery funds to victims of the storms in the Bayou State.

Further east, in West Point, Mississippi, meteorologists [issued a tornado warning](#) on Tuesday night as the storms continued eastward.

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Magnitude 6.7 Earthquake Strikes Off Taiwan's East Coast - EMSC

A powerful magnitude 6.7 earthquake was detected off the southeastern coast of Taiwan early on Wednesday morning, followed closely by a second quake of magnitude 6.1. A third earthquake measuring at a magnitude 5.7 struck less than an hour after the second quake. According to the Euro-Mediterranean Seismological Center (EMSC), [the 6.7 magnitude quake](#) occurred at a depth of 30.6 kilometers and its epicenter was roughly 122 kilometers east of Taichung, in the Philippine Sea.

According to local reports, the shaking was felt in Taipei at the Chinese island's northern end. It struck at about 1:41 am local time. Video posted online showed hanging chandeliers shaking. There were no reports of damage or of a tsunami risk.

A second quake was [reported moments later](#) about 12 kilometers to the west, but at a depth of just 19 kilometers, and with a magnitude of 6.1 on the Richter scale.

Located along several fault lines collectively known as the Pacific Ring of Fire, Taiwan is prone to earthquakes. One quake in 2016 killed 117 people and injured 550 after several buildings collapsed, and another one in 1935 was responsible for the deaths of more than 3,000 people.

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BuzzFeed Investors Pressured CEO to Shutter Entire News Operation, Reports Say

Amid a sharp decline in revenue following its December 2021 initial public offering, investors in BuzzFeed have pressured the company to shut down its news outlet branch, BuzzFeed News.

According to a [Tuesday report by CNBC](#), top investors in the multimedia company have pressured BuzzFeed CEO Jonah Peretti to shut down BuzzFeed News "amid what people familiar with the matter describe as broader investor concern that the division is weighing down the company," as CNBC put it.

Among their reported expectations is that doing so would immediately add \$300 million of market capitalization to BuzzFeed's stock, which has suffered since it went public in December. Earlier on Tuesday, Mark Schoofs, BuzzFeed News' editor-in-chief, [announced he was stepping down](#), as were Tom Namako, the deputy editor in chief, and Ariel Kaminer, the executive editor of investigations, ahead of anticipated layoffs connected to budget cuts.

Peretti told BuzzFeed News employees in a Tuesday email obtained by the New York Times that the outlet would need to "prioritize the areas of coverage our audience connects with the most" and slash budgets for the BuzzFeed video, business and administrative teams.

The company went public in December by merging with a special purpose acquisition company (SPAC) used to raise funds for the IPO, which was valued at about \$1.5 billion. However, the deal collapsed after investors pulled almost all of their money out of the SPAC ahead of the merger, leaving BuzzFeed with just \$16 million. Its [stock collapsed](#) and has never recovered, remaining on Tuesday at about \$5, or half its value before the IPO. It was the first significant modern digital media company to go public.

Last week, 77 BuzzFeed [employees brought complaints](#) against the company with the American Arbitration Association, which settles disputes outside of court. They claimed the company illegally shortchanged them in the merger by a collective \$8.7 million.

BuzzFeed News was launched in 2011 and has won numerous awards, including a Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting. The outlet has undergone considerable ebb and flow in its size, including [laying off 15% of its workforce](#) in 2019 and canceling separate operations in Australia in an attempt to make the outlet profitable.

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South Dakota Euthanizes 85,000 Birds as US State Faces First Avian Flu Outbreaks Since 2015

By - Evan Craighead

Since January, the US Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has confirmed at least 385 domestic cases of wild birds infected with the highly-pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus. Although HPAI-strain viruses are rarely passed on to humans, the disease can rapidly devastate poultry populations.

Veterinary officials in South Dakota have confirmed that at least 85,000 birds at two facilities have been euthanized as part of the state's attempt to combat its first avian flu outbreaks since 2015, when over 50 million domesticated birds were collectively culled due to outbreaks in 21 states.

The identified outbreaks occurred in the southeastern county of Charles Mix—the same area linked to South Dakota's first identified bird flu case on March 6. Turkeys, along with other fowls, were said to be among those culled.

"I think the response is going well and the industry has done a great job of stepping up and trying to prevent it," said Dr. Mendel Miller, South Dakota's assistant state veterinarian.

The state official detailed that USDA-approved guidelines were adhered to during the euthanasia process, which reportedly included high heat, and suffocating foam methods. Although the county was noted, the facilities which house the deadly outbreaks were not explicitly named by the South Dakota Veterinary Medical Exam Board.

"They're doing everything they can, but you know, there's just some things that are out of their control, and we just have to deal with it when it happens," he added.

Two additional sites remain under investigation, Miller confirmed. The facilities' respective counties will be identified if tests return positive results.

State officials are concerned about the impact of such outbreaks, as the USDA has logged an alarming number of reports on wild birds infected with the HPAI virus in 2022.

Miller pointed out that the outbreaks in 2015 impacted tens of millions of birds in the US and triggered a spike in egg prices. The 2022 cases have been identified in a number of waterfowl, like Canadian geese and snow geese, and cases have been detected in the Atlantic, Central and Mississippi Flyaways.

"We hope it doesn't get as large, but if it is [a] migratory waterfowl, they're still around and that risk is still here," Miller highlighted.

The USDA offers compensation to those forced to slaughter animals due to avian flu concerns. At the same time, Romania has also reported a recent rise in HPAI-infected birds, including a new outbreak of the H5N1 strain in the country's southern region.

Quoting Romanian health authorities, the World Organization for Animal Health announced on Monday that some 6,770 birds were killed due to an outbreak in Oinacu, and nearly 34,000 other animals were slaughtered to prevent the outbreak from spreading.

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Massive Wall of Ice Forced First Humans to Arrive in the Americas Via Boats, Study Claims
By - Mary Manley

Until now, scientists had assumed that the first people to arrive in the Americas traveled over a broad bridge of land that connected present day Siberia to Alaska. Scientists are now rethinking that theory, but what's stumping them? A giant wall of ice.

How exactly did the first Americans enter this New World during the height of the Ice Age? For the longest time scientists believed they traveled over a bridge made of land often referred to as Beringia, as it now exists beneath the Bering Sea.

There existed a giant wall of ice that spread over what is now known as Canada, almost 300 stories high - that's over 3,200 feet. But scientists believed there existed a passage in this

behemoth block of ice, a seam between east and west sheets of ice that researchers thought “unzipped” towards the end of the Ice [Age](#).

Until recently, scientists had believed the first Americans, known as the Clovis people, traveled through this “ice-free corridor” but a study led by Jorie Clark, a geologist and archaeologist at Oregon State University, has made the discovery that the ice-free corridor did not open until just 13,800 years ago.

The group of researchers were able to learn the age of the ice-free corridor (IFC) by dating boulders carried by glaciers from their original location. By learning the age of the boulders through the measurement of beryllium-10, they estimated the IFC was covered in ice sheets anywhere from 1,500 to 3,000 feet high.

This new information has prompted researchers to assume that the earliest Americans traveled by boat along the Pacific coast to reach their new home.

In addition, archaeologists discovered stone artifacts in central Mexico that were at least 26,500 years old, well before the Clovis people, who were the first to migrate from Asia to the Americas, settled on the continent 13,400 years ago.

“We now have robust evidence that the ice-free corridor was not open and available for the first peopling of the Americas,” Clark [said](#), adding that “there is still a lot to learn about whether they actually did come down the coastal route, and if so, how did they travel? We need to find archaeological sites from the area.”

Archeologists have yet to find traces of boats used by these people, although another theory suggests that people may have arrived in the Americas before the glaciers closed off the route.

“That’s one of the main outstanding questions in the field,” [says](#) anthropological geneticist Jennifer Raff, who was not part of the study. “Whether or not people were in the Americas before the height of the glacial maximum.”

The study was published in Proceedings of the National [Academy](#) of Sciences.

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Los Angeles Tops US Average Gas Costs After City Prices Surpass \$6 Per Gallon

By - Mary Manley

While only 16 states in the nation have recorded gas prices under \$4 per gallon, (those include Kansas \$3.76, Missouri \$3.77, Oklahoma \$3.77, and Maryland \$3.81) the average price of gas in the United States reached \$4.33 per gallon on March 11, but since then has dropped some 9 cents. However, prices refuse to come down for those in California.

On Tuesday, the average cost of gas per gallon reached \$6.01 in Los Angeles, the highest number in the nation. Surrounding counties in the Golden State include costs of \$5.97 in Orange County, \$5.95 in Ventura County, and \$5.90 in Bernardino County. The average for the rest of the state comes to \$5.86 per gallon.

Industry watchers suggest that the drastic spike is due to flaring at PBF Energy refineries located in Torrance, Martinez, and Valero outside of San Francisco. [Flaring](#) is a safety device used by refineries to prevent “overpressure” of equipment. Planned flaring is scheduled, but

unplanned flaring is used for emergencies caused by equipment failure or other unexpected events.

According to Patrick De Haan, head analyst at GasBuddy, the California refineries could be experiencing computer or valve issues which have caused them to use flaring as a safety solution, but that is reportedly just a guess, as refineries do not willingly release that kind of information.

Even if refineries in California get their safety issues under control, De Haan says it's not certain that will bring the costs of gas down, considering other global issues such as the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic.

California is also known to have higher gas costs on average, considering their strict environmental laws and taxes on motor fuels as a means of curbing CO2 emissions and protecting the environment as humanity continues to avoid addressing its climate [crisis](#). A decrease in California's gas supply would likely affect other states on the West Coast, such as Oregon and Washington, as the two Pacific Northwest states may soon see the same price gouging by the fossil fuel industry in Los Angeles.

"I moved to San Diego from the Los Angeles area a little over eight years ago, and I thought I would do this for a couple of months," [says](#) Richard Martin, 60, who has been driving for Uber for eight years. "I left the other day, and I couldn't believe that I had over 12,500 rides." But Martin says he might leave the Uber business due to high gas prices.

An increasing number of Californians may be turning away from gasoline as an option.

"Demand destruction" is when prices are so high that consumers choose to do away with their purchase of that product.

"Above \$4 per gallon, you do see the American public change their driving habits. And we do actively see demand destruction," [says](#) Regina Mayor, global head of energy at KPMG.

"I think that's one of the things that helps the overall tightness of supply, is when we see demand start to dip back down," she added.

Californians have been turning toward electric vehicles to avoid price spikes at the pump. And while some EVs are more expensive, such as Teslas or BMWs, other brands, including Volkswagen, are more affordable due to monthly rebates that the state offers consumers, like the California Clean Fuel Reward, as well as federal rebates.

Michael Macias, who became California's millionth EV owner in [December 2021](#), said the cost of gas played a major role in his decision to purchase an EV. Macias used \$9,500 in state rebates, \$750 from the California Clean Fuel Reward, \$7,500 in federal rebates, and, because he is a resident of San Joaquin Valley in Central California, he gets \$3,000 rebates from the Air Pollution Control District to purchase his electric Volkswagen.

Macias says that after he factored in the cost of gas compared to the monthly car payments for his new EV, for him, the choice was clear. "So those are the two things that I was thinking about, along with the fact that I am committed to being a good steward of the land," Macias said. "This is part of me living into those principles and values."

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Trump Remains MIA on Truth Social as App Struggles to Maintain Appeal, User Activity
By - Evan Craighead

Truth Social, a so-called 'alternative' social media application backed by former US President Donald Trump, sparked backlash earlier this month when prospective users wishing to explore the app found themselves registering for a glorified waitlist. Now running, the app's public performance appears to be significantly below expectations.

As netizens wait their turn to exit the Truth Social membership queue, former US President Donald Trump's continued non-activity on the platform has become a buzzkill to conservative supporters wishing to jump ship from the likes of Twitter and Facebook, where Trump is banned. The app notably turned a month old on Monday.

"Get Ready! Your favorite President will see you soon!" reads Trump's sole message, as of this article's publication.

Trump's failure to promote the platform by his presence falls in line with a Daily Beast report claiming that Trump was confused and upset about the steep decline in downloads after its misnamed soft launch.

The platform drastically fell from #1 in its first 24 hours to below 72nd in Apple's App Store.

"What the f**k is going on' with Truth Social?" Trump was reported to have been overheard shouting in recent weeks.

Devin Nunes, a conservative Republican lawmaker who resigned from a congressional seat to lead the Trump-backed venture, earlier this month declared that developers working on the app had made some advancements to make the platform functional as the amount of registered users slowly rises.

"Our team is working literally around the clock 24/7," Nunes told conservative outlet One America News earlier this month. "And as we grow and as we add people, we squash bugs, we're making changes right. Matter of fact, we should have in the next day or two another Apple update."

Nunes was a senior House member in the Republican party at the time of his December 2021 departure for Truth Social.

A number of vocal GOP lawmakers—including Reps. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), Matt Gaetz (R-FL) and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA)—are said to have accounts on Truth Social.

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Videos: Large Tornadoes Leave 1 Dead & Multiple Injured Across New Orleans' 9th Ward, Mississippi

By - Evan Craighead

A tornado warning was issued for both the St. Bernard Parish and Orleans Parish around 7:30 p.m., local time, when officials with the US National Weather Service (NWS) confirmed a "large

and extremely dangerous” tornado moving at approximately 45 miles per hour (72.4 kilometers per hour) formed over Arabi.

The New Orleans branch of the NWS urged Lower 9th Ward-area residents to remain off roads and streets as meteorologists confirmed the presence of at least one dangerous twister in Lacombe, and another tornado in nearby Picayune, Mississippi.

"Take shelter now!" tweeted the NWS' branch servicing the areas of New Orleans-Baton Rouge and Louisiana

Footage obtained by local NBC affiliate WDSU briefly showed a number of transformers blowing in the lower sector of New Orleans' 9th Ward—the easternmost downriver portion of the city. The river-bounded region has the largest geographical area of the city's 17 Wards.

Another angle of the Lower 9th Ward's "multi-vortex tornado crossing" was captured by Fox 8's Zack Fradella.

David Bernard, chief meteorologist for Fox 8 NOLA, republished a number of videos showing the immediate aftermath and tornado damage in the 9th Ward.

The NWS New Orleans announced at 7:50 p.m., local time, that the impacted area was now in the clear, as the tornado and its associated storm traveled east. Flipped cars, household debris and downed power lines were seen in images and video footage uploaded to social media.

Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards (D) encouraged residents to remain in place and listen to directions from local officials.

"State agencies are assisting local officials as needed as they assess the damage and impacts of these tornadoes," tweeted Edwards. "My prayers are with you in Southeast Louisiana tonight. Please be safe."

The tornadoes and accompanying storms observed in Louisiana on Tuesday came as part of a severe and dynamic weather system traveling from parts of Oklahoma and many affected areas in Texas.

"I saw over 30 downed houses, six businesses flattened, a church flattened," Reggie Ford, a resident of St. Bernard Parish's Arabi area detailed to the Daily Beast. "It looked crazy. Like a disaster zone."

The predictability of the storm allowed individuals like Ford to locate proper shelter ahead of its touch-down. At the same time, emergency responders have determined that a number of in-home entrapments and injuries are believed to be associated with the weather event.

US Army Reserve teams in the New Orleans and Baton Rouge areas have been dispatched to assist with search-and-rescue operations in affected areas.

Some 17,000 families experienced power outages as the impacted downtown area endured dangerous and high winds.

The St. Bernard Parish president, Guy McInnis, told reporters on Tuesday night that at least five homes were destroyed in the storm. Additionally, area firefighters requested a "major" presence from emergency services in Arabi, as well as the Lower 9th Ward.

Veranda Rodger, 73, of Sherwood Shores, Texas, died during the storms, her surviving family members confirmed to Dallas-Fort Worth outlet WFAA.

"Her family says she didn't deserve to die this way," [tweeted WFAA news reporter Matt Howerton](#).

"Told us she was a rock for the family and someone who always checked up on everyone." Another 30 injuries were reported from Monday's incident.

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Stormy Daniels: 'I Will Go To Jail Before I Pay' Trump \$300k in Fees Over Failed Defamation Suit

By - Evan Craighead

On Monday, former US President Donald Trump hailed a ruling handed down by the 9th Circuit Court upholding a lower court decision in which Stormy Daniels, real name Stephanie Clifford, must pay nearly \$300,000 to cover Trump's legal fees in connection to a defamation suit filed in 2018 by Clifford and disgraced lawyer Michael Avenatti.

Following the 9th Circuit Court decision, Stephanie Clifford took to Twitter to proclaim that former US President Donald Trump may be delayed in receiving his funds, as she would not be voluntarily paying the former US president's near-\$300,000 attorney bill.

"I will go to jail before I pay a penny," [the former adult film star told another social media user](#), although the federal appeals court backed a previous order to cover Trump's legal fees during the failed defamation trial.

The case was brought about after Trump denounced Clifford on social media and refuted allegations that her life was threatened after their sexual liaison while he was married to former first lady Melania Trump. Trump, now 75, and Clifford, 43, reportedly had a sexual tryst in 2006, while his new wife, Melania Trump, was pregnant with their son, Barron.

Clifford has maintained that Michael Cohen, Trump's longtime lawyer - now disbarred and a convicted felon - paid her \$130,000 to remain silent about the hookup, as Trump was eyeing the launch of his 2016 presidential campaign at the time.

In addition to Clifford producing a copy of the hush money payment, the former adult film star has been forthcoming about the adulterous act, revealing in 2018 that the businessman requested to be spanked with a copy of TRUMP Magazine—some have reported that Forbes was the publication, which would complicate the alleged timeline of events.

Trump has denied that the rendezvous took place, even after Clifford compared his anatomy to the fictional Toad, [a little Mario universe character who boasts a mushroom cap-like head](#).

The former US president continued his denials on Monday.

"As I have stated many times throughout the years, I never had an affair with Stormy Daniels, nor would I ever have wanted to," Trump said shortly after the court decision.

It was also alleged by Clifford that a man approached her while she was alone with her infant daughter in Las Vegas, Nevada, in 2011. The man reportedly instructed Clifford to "leave Trump alone," or face ominous consequences.

"That's a beautiful little girl," the unidentified man is reported to have said, according to Clifford.

"It'd be a shame if something happened to her mom."

Trump has asserted that the man described by Clifford and seen in a later sketch is "nonexistent."

Both Michael Avenatti and Michael Cohen have been disbarred, and were each sentenced to over two years in federal prison for their respective criminal actions.

Avenatti, convicted of extortion, wire fraud, and transmission of interstate communications with intent to extort, remains incarcerated. Cohen was released from prison early due to COVID-19-related health concerns, which allowed the disgraced Trump fixer to finish his three-year bid for fraud and perjury from the comfort of his home in November 2021.

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WikiLeaks Founder Julian Assange Marrying Wednesday While in Belmarsh Prison
By - Mary Manley

Assange is the co-founder of WikiLeaks, the nonprofit group known for publishing classified information offered by anonymous sources. One of the website's most significant leaks includes the Collateral Murder footage in which American soldiers gunned down two journalists in Iraq after mistaking their cameras for weapons.

The founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, has been given permission to marry his fiancée despite being in Her Majesty's Prison Belmarsh, a Category-A men's prison in southeast London. His partner, Stella Moris, has two sons with the Australian publisher and fugitive activist.

Julian Assange was arrested in April of 2019 at the Ecuadorian embassy in London after failing to surrender to court. His capture means the possibility of facing up to five years in a United States prison for federal conspiracy charges after teaming up with former US intelligence analyst Chelsea [Manning](#) who was arrested in 2010 for disclosing more than 700,000 confidential documents to WikiLeaks.

Despite the arrest, Assange has been given permission to marry his partner, the mother of their two sons, Gabriel and Max. Moris spoke of her joy at being able to finally marry Assange, despite restrictions which have been placed around their wedding, including the guest list. "Obviously we are very excited, even though the circumstances are very restrictive," said Moris. "All the guests and witnesses must leave as soon as the ceremony is over, even though that will be before normal visiting time ends."

Will Assange and his bride be expecting friends, family and loved ones? Not exactly. Only four guests are allowed to attend their wedding, in addition, two security guards will be present. "Julian is looking forward to the wedding because it is finally happening, many months after we first made the request," adds [Moris](#), who had to change her name in 2012 for safety reasons, a year after meeting Assange.

[Moris](#) met Assange in 2011 when she was 28, and Assange was 40 at the time. Moris was working as a lawyer when she fell in love with the man she believed was responsible for exposing war crimes.

"If Collateral Murder hadn't been published, those innocent people who were mown down in a war crime would have for ever remained in terms of the official story 'enemy combatants' engaged in a war battle and legitimately killed," Moris said last year. "And that was only one of the stories."

Assange's supporters plan to hold a gathering outside the prison on Wednesday during the couple's ceremony. Assange and Moris, who are being dressed by Dame Vivienne Westwood, have asked their supporters to dress as if they were attending any other "normal" wedding. The couple has asked supporters to donate funds to a Crowdfunder campaign to free the groom from captivity, as opposed to being given wedding gifts.

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Pusha T Creates New Diss Track for Arby's in Retaliation for Not Getting Paid Enough by McDonald's
By - Mary Manley

Pusha T released a track for another fast food franchise, but this time it's not all fun and games. The rapper, 44, is retaliating against McDonald's after not getting paid enough for their iconic "I'm Lovin' It" jingle which he and his brother created in 2003.

"I'm the reason the whole world love it, now I gotta crush it," Pusha T raps in the new Arby's ad, "You should be disgusted. How dare you sell a square fish asking us to trust it. A half slice of cheese, Mickey D's on a budget?"

The "Arby's Spicy Fish Diss Track" for [Arby's](#) has already racked up 5 million views on Pusha T's Twitter page, which slams McDonald's Filet-O-Fish sandwich while advertising Arby's Spicy Fish Sandwich as the better alternative, with lyrics that hype the \$4.49 sandwich.

The backstory to Pusha T's diss track is more complicated than simply "hatin' on a sandwich". The rapper was in his 20s when he and his brother, No Malice, created the Golden Arches' signature "ba da ba ba ba, I'm lovin' it!" jingle.

Pusha T told Rolling Stone on Monday that he and his brother were paid \$1 million for the iconic tune that has since become a trademark for the \$130 billion [dollar](#) fast food chain. The rapper referred to that sum of cash as "peanuts for as long as that's been running."

"I am solely responsible for the 'I'm Lovin' It' swag and the jingle of that company," said the rapper.

Like many young artists, Pusha T says he didn't ask for ownership of the jingle because he wasn't, at the time, experienced enough in the music business. The mistake of not investing in that jingle is something that has been bothering him for years.

"I did it at a very young age at a very young time in my career where I wasn't asking for as much money and ownership. It's something that's always dug at me later in life like, 'Dammit, I was a part of this and I should have more stake,'" the rapper recounted.

He told Rolling Stone the advertisement was the best way for him to blow off steam built up from his long-standing grudge with the fast food restaurant. "I had to get that energy off me, and this [ad] was the perfect way," he said. "You know what? I'm over it."

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US, UK, Canadian Export Credit Agencies Axe New Export Finance Support for Russia, Belarus

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The export credit agencies of the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada said on Wednesday they have withdrawn any new export finance support for Russia and Belarus.

"In a show of united action against the Russian Federation's assault as well as Belarus' support for this illegal invasion, U.K. Export Finance (UKEF), the Export-Import Bank of the United States (US EXIM), and Export Development Canada (EDC) have together withdrawn any new export finance support for the Russian Federation and Belarus, while retaining support for Ukraine," their joint statement said.

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Biden Says 'Real Threat' That Russia Might Use Chemical Weapons in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday there is a "real threat" that Russia might use chemical weapons in Ukraine.

"I think it's a real threat," Biden said before departing for Europe, when asked whether he is concerned with the threat of chemical warfare at the moment.

A senior Pentagon official told reporters on Tuesday that the United States sees no indication that there is an imminent risk of Russia using chemical or biological weapons in Ukraine.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov at the same day criticized Washington's claims that Russia might use chemical and biological weapons. The diplomat noted that the US has not yet destroyed its own stockpiles of chemical weapons, and accused the latter of artificially delaying the process.

Russia's entire arsenal of chemical weapons was completely destroyed under the strictest international control back in 2017, he recalled.

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Russia Grants US Embassy Consular Access to Detained Basketball Star Griner – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) – Russia has granted the US embassy in Moscow consular access to detained American basketball star Brittney Griner, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday.

"Within the past couple hours, an official from our [US] Embassy [in Moscow] has been granted consular access to Brittney Griner. We were able to check on her condition. We will continue to work very closely with her legal team, with her broader network to see to it that she is treated fairly," Price told CNN in an interview.

The two-time Olympic gold medalist was detained at a Moscow airport on February 18 after a police dog alerted officers to vape cartridges containing cannabis oil in her luggage. During a court hearing last week, Griner did not deny a charge of drug trafficking. The 31-year-old has been playing for the Russian basketball club UMMC Yekaterinburg during the off-season at the Women's National Basketball Association in the United States.

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Biden on EU Trip May Announce Deal on LNG Supply to Europe - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States and the European Union are working on a deal to supply Europe with American LNG and hydrogen to lessen the bloc's reliance on Russian gas, Bloomberg reported on Wednesday, citing sources.

President Joe Biden and European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen could announce the agreement this week, while the former is on a trip to Brussels and Warsaw this week. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday that, while on the trip, Biden will announce joint action on enhancing European energy security and reducing Europe's dependence on Russian gas.

The report comes as the European Commission adopted a draft regulation on Wednesday requiring EU member states to have underground gas storage facilities filled to 80% by November 1.

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Nestle Says Suspending KitKat, Nesquik Brands in Russia

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) – Swiss company Nestle said on Wednesday it is suspending its brands KitKat and Nesquik in Russia.

"We are suspending renowned Nestlé brands such as KitKat and Nesquik, among others. We have already halted non-essential imports and exports into and out of Russia, stopped all advertising, and suspended all capital investment in the country. Of course, we are fully complying with all international sanctions on Russia," the statement read.

The company promised to continue providing Russia with essential food, such as infant food and medical/hospital nutrition. It also said that any profit will be donated to humanitarian relief organizations.

Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine on February 24 in response to calls from the Donbas republics for help in countering intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only.

In response, the US and its allies have rolled out comprehensive sanctions, including restrictions on the Russian central bank, export control measures, SWIFT cutoff for select

banks, and closure of airspace to all Russian flights. Many of their companies have suspended their Russian operations.

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RPT - US Ban on Russian Seafood May Lead to King and Snow Crab Shortages - Industry Sources

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The US ban on Russian seafood imports could lead to a shortage of king and snow crab in the United States, industry representatives told Sputnik.

President Joe Biden earlier in March announced a ban on US imports of seafood, alcohol, and diamonds from Russia over Moscow's special military operation in Ukraine.

"There will be supply chain disruptions due to the ban beginning with king crab and snow crab," Les Hodges, the former director of business development for Keyport LLC and former CEO of Vantage Seafood and the Talon Group, told Sputnik.

Russia represented over 90% of US king crab imports in 2021, with the United States bringing in 31 million pounds, according to Hodges. The US also imported 42 million pounds of snow crab from Russia, representing 31% of the product category total, he added.

"The US has relied on Russian king and snow crab for many years," Hodges said.

Hodges pointed out that this year Alaskan king crab production was curtailed with the cancellation of the red king crab season, which limited output to 4 million pounds, and a harvest of only around 6 million pounds of golden king crab. Meanwhile, the snow crab quota in 2022 was 5.6 million pounds and is about to be completed.

"Once the current inventory of Russian king crab is sold, it will basically be unavailable in the market place," Hodges said. "There is a little Norwegian red king crab but not enough to have an effect."

Canada is a major producer of snow crab that is expected to provide product to the United States and the world, but with limited competition prices could rise for consumers, Hodges said, adding that their season will begin around the end of March.

"The importers who handle king and snow crab will definitely be affected as will those further down the supply chain," Hodges said. "I expect that some will go out of business as crab is the primary income source."

Hodges predicts that prices on products that compete with Russian seafood may increase due to the lack of market competition.

Mark DeCristoforo, executive director of the Massachusetts Seafood Collaborative, which is a broad-based coalition of harvesters, processors, and wholesalers in the region, told Sputnik there is not a great deal of Russian seafood product that moves through the US system, however, it has definitely been helpful for filling certain voids in the US market, such as snow crabs, haddock and pollock fish.

"For the most part, the places that those products from Russia go, the pollack or the king crab, they typically are frozen abroad, shipped over here... they usually fill our big box stores Costco or Walmart or something like that," DeCristoforo said.

DeCristoforo said he does not expect anyone to lose their jobs in the restaurant industry or processing industry in the US state of Massachusetts due to the ban.

DeCristoforo said the European Union and the United Kingdom could face a tougher time meeting demand if they impose similar actions against Russian seafood.

So far, the European Union and United Kingdom have not imposed bans on Russian seafood.

"I can't speak for the Nordic countries, but I'm not sure that they're going to be able to necessarily make up for what they're going to lack," DeCristoforo said.

Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine on February 24 after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only.

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RPT - Activist Says Hopes to Inspire Canadians to Resist Escalation in Confronting Top Diplomat

TORONTO, March 22 (Sputnik) - An anti-war activist says he hopes his confrontation with Foreign Minister Melanie Joly inspires fellow Canadians to resist escalation by Ottawa and NATO in the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine.

On Monday, Canadian anti-war activist Yves Engler interrupted Joly's appearance at the Montreal Council of Foreign Affairs to challenge Ottawa's and NATO's involvement in the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

Canada has been among the most active supporters of Kiev throughout Russia's special operation in Ukraine, providing the government of Volodymyr Zelenskyy with millions of dollars' worth of lethal aid and has also imposed hundreds of sanctions against Russian individuals and entities.

"Stop escalating the war, stop sending arms. Why didn't you push Kiev to sign the Minsk accords? Why [not] no to NATO? You're going to push us to World War III! Shame on you," Engler told Joly on Monday before being escorted out by security.

Engler, in an interview with Sputnik on Tuesday, said he had a "moral duty" to push against what he sees as an escalation of the conflict by third parties, including Canada, and hopes his protest resonates with Canadians and inspires them to confront an increasingly hazardous situation.

"The message is aimed at overwhelmingly Canadians," Engler told Sputnik. "The objective is really to kind of galvanize a sense of resistance to a very dangerous, escalating situation."

While Engler believes the world is already embroiled in a conflict of global scale, he believes it has the potential to spiral out of control and ordinary people across Canada, the United States and allied countries must play a role in de-escalation.

"It's absolutely essential for Canadians, Americans, others to start restraining our government's path towards ever more belligerent and militaristic policies," Engler said.

The Montreal-based activist and author also took issue with the one-sided media coverage of the conflict, saying that the aggressive tone set by the press is silencing dissenting voices, including politicians, that may be in favor of peaceful solutions.

"There's a history of politicians, even the progressive end of official politics, of completely cowering in the face of warfare, in the face of media war drums... it's very troubling," Engler said.

Engler notes that while Western media makes a regular show of Russian anti-war demonstrators and dissidents, local protests, including his, barely get noticed by the same outlets. Engler's impassioned appeal only received passing mention from only one major Canadian broadcaster, CTV News, despite several mainstream media journalists attending the event in Montreal.

Despite Ottawa increasingly flexing its muscles against protesters in recent memory, including during last month's Freedom Convoy demonstrations - anti-government protesters had their financial assets frozen and some still face the prospect of jail time - Engler doesn't believe he faces additional law enforcement intervention.

"No, I don't expect any kind of follow up for this," Engler said, but noted that the possibility exists.

On February 24, Russia said it began a military operation in Ukraine in response to calls from the Donbas republics for help in countering intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only. It accused Ukrainian forces of using terrorist-like methods, such as hiding behind civilians and in civilian quarters.

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UPDATE 2 - Biden to Designate 300 Members of Russian State Duma as Early as Thursday - Reports

(Adds background in para 7, clarifies UN casualty figures in para 8)

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is expected to announce this week new US sanctions against more than 300 members of the Russian State Duma over Moscow's special military operation in Ukraine, The Wall Street Journal reported citing American officials. The report said on Tuesday that the Biden administration could announce the sanctions as soon as Thursday when Biden will meet with NATO leaders to discuss the situation in Ukraine. Earlier in the day, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said Biden will announce new sanctions against Russia while he is in Brussels meeting with NATO and European partners.

The report, citing US officials, confirmed that the sanctions will be announced in coordination with the European Union and members of the G7.

A US official said the planned sanctions packaged are often postponed and changed during the interagency review process prior to being finalized.

Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine on February 24 with the goals of demilitarizing the country, neutralizing nationalist battalions, ensuring Ukraine remains a neutral country and that Crimea is recognized as a part of Russia that cannot be taken away. Russia also seeks to ensure Ukraine also recognizes the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics as independent states.

According to the Castellum.AI sanctions tracker, Russia has become the most sanctioned country in the world with more than 7,100 restrictive measures imposed against the country since 2014 - a majority of which came after Russia launched its military operation in Ukraine in February.

On March 20, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said it had recorded 2,361 civilian casualties since the start of the operation in Ukraine, including 902 deaths and 1,459 injuries. 992 of the total casualties occurred in Donetsk and Luhansk and 1,369 in other regions of Ukraine, according to the OHCHR.

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US Charges Russian National With Operating Cyber-Criminal Marketplace - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - A 23-year-old Russian man has been charged in the US state of Texas for allegedly operating a cyber-criminal marketplace, the US Department of Justice said.

"Igor Dekhtyarchuk, a resident and national of the Russian Federation (Russia), was named in an indictment returned by a federal grand jury on March 16, 2022, charging him with offenses related to operating a cyber-criminal marketplace that sold thousands of stolen login credentials, personal identifiable information, and authentication tools," the Justice Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

If convicted, Dekhtyarchuk faces up to 20 years in federal prison, the release said.

He is currently on the FBI's most wanted cyber criminal list. He was last known to reside in Kamensk-Uralsky, Sverdlovsk Oblast, Russia, the FBI said.

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Biden to Designate 300 Members of Russian State Duma as Early as Thursday - Reports (Updates with details, background in paras 4-7)

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Disney LGBTQ Employees Stage Walkout in Protest of Florida Education Bill - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - A group of employees of the Walt Disney Company in Florida staged a walkout in protest of what they perceive to be the company's meek response to the Parental Rights in Education bill that they consider to be harmful to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) community.

The bill, which passed in the Florida legislature, bans classroom instruction on gender identity and sexual orientation until children reach the third grade. The bill also prohibits such instruction in a manner that is not age or developmentally appropriate for students, which critics say could be interpreted to extend to all grade levels.

"The Walt Disney Company's (TWDC) LGBTQIA+ community and their allies are determined to take a stand against TWDC's apathy in the face of the bigoted 'Don't Say Gay' bill put forth by the [Florida] state legislature," the employees said on the protest website on Tuesday. "The recent statements by The Walt Disney Company leadership regarding the Florida legislature's recent 'Don't Say Gay or Trans' bill have utterly failed to match the magnitude of the threat to LGBTQIA+ safety represented by this legislation."

The walkout organizers said statements from Disney officials indicated the company's leadership does not understand the impact the legislation may have the LGBTQIA+ community members in the company and beyond.

The protesters said they demand that Disney immediately and indefinitely cease all campaign donations to politicians tied to the bill and commit to an actionable plan that will shield employees from this and other similar legislation. In addition, they demand that Disney direct money and resources to invest in LGBTQIA+ representation and donate to human rights advocacy groups.

By contrast, proponents of the bill say the measure is not discriminatory but allows parents to have control over their children's education and pose an age limit on certain discussions they deem are inappropriate.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who has not signed the bill into law yet, said he believes it is entirely inappropriate for teachers to talk to their youngest students about gender identity.

DeSantis said the teachers should actually teach and especially focus their efforts on science, history as well as civics and the US constitution.

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US, UK Reach Agreement to Remove Tariffs on British Steel, Aluminum Products

(Updates with additional details, background in paras 4-6)

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The US and UK governments have reached an agreement to remove tariffs imposed under Section 232 on British steel and aluminum products entering the United States, including a special provision regarding the Chinese-owned enterprises in the United Kingdom, the Commerce Department said in a statement.

"Today, United States Secretary of Commerce Gina M. Raimondo and United States Trade Representative Katherine C. Tai announced a new 232 tariff agreement with the United Kingdom to allow historically-based sustainable volumes of UK steel and aluminum products to

enter the US market without the application of Section 232 tariffs," the statement said on Tuesday.

The agreement requires that all UK steel companies owned by a Chinese entity must go through a financial audit to determine the level of alleged influence of the Chinese government and the results must be shared with the United States, the statement said.

The new deal will also lift retaliatory tariffs on over \$500 million worth of US exports to the UK, which includes distilled spirits, agriculture products and consumer goods, the statement said. In January, the two countries began talks on addressing the current excess capacity in the global steel and aluminum markets, including the United States' application of tariffs on imports from the United Kingdom under Section 232 and the United Kingdom's retaliatory tariffs on certain US exports.

In the last year, the United States and the United Kingdom have agreed on a large civil aircraft dispute, removed 25% tariffs on Scotch whiskey and made it possible to export Scottish beef and Welsh lamb to the United States.

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US Senator Graham Walks Out of Supreme Court Nomination Hearing After Clash Over Gitmo

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - A clearly exasperated US Senator Lindsay Graham walked out of Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson's Supreme Court confirmation hearing after a heated exchange between himself and Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin about the release of detainees held in Guantanamo Bay, a video of the exchange showed.

"I'm suggesting the system has failed miserably and advocates to change the system, like she [Jackson] was advocating, would destroy our ability to protect this country. We're at war, we're not fighting a crime," Graham said on Tuesday. "As long as they're dangerous, I hope they all die in jail if they're going to go back and kill Americans... it won't bother me one bit if 39 of them die in prison. That's a better outcome than letting them go.

Graham also said if it costs \$500 million "to keep them in jail, keep them in jail."

Graham's sharp questioning came when he lobbed questions about briefs she filed as a private lawyer representing accused terrorists confined at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. He argued that a position Jackson made would force the US to release terrorists. As a result of her argument, Graham said, Jackson is "putting America in an untenable position."

During the Durbin-Graham exchange, Graham asked Durbin that if the US government closes "Gitmo" and moves them to Colorado, does he support indefinite detention under the law of war for these detainees. Durbin said he was just giving the facts, which angered Graham.

Graham countered that the answer is no as Durbin explained that going back to 2005, 31 percent of the detainees who were released re-offended.

Then he turned off his microphone, grabbed his bottle of water and walked out, later telling reporters it is fair to say that he currently sees red flags when it comes to Jackson's nomination, hinting that he will vote against the nomination. However, when Jackson came before the Senate Judiciary Committee eight months ago, Graham voted for Jackson's ascension to the federal bench.

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Wall Street Rallies as Investors Ignore Talk on US Interest Rate Hike

NEW YORK, March 22 (Sputnik) - US stocks rallied as much as 2% on Tuesday as investors ignored talk of higher interest rate hikes in the coming months and the possibility of a recession stemming from the effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict to focus on the resilience of the US economy since the start of the year.

Wall Street's S&P 500 index, which groups the top 500 US stocks, closed up just 53 points, or 1.2%, at 4,514.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average index, which lists travel, aviation and cross-industry value stocks, rose 255 points, or 0.7%, to settle at 34,807.

The Nasdaq Composite, which includes the biggest technology names of the world, including Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, finished up 270 points, or 2%, at 14,109.

"Despite recession talk rearing its ugly head as people question whether the economy can withstand such a rapid tightening, it's clear that investors are not being deterred," Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said. "You start to wonder what exactly will put investors off at this stage. It's not like the situation in Ukraine is improving, even if negotiations are continuing with Russia."

On March 16, the Federal Reserve approved a 25-basis point interest rate increase for its first hike since the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis in March 2020.

Since then, many of the central bank officials, including Chairman Jerome Powell, have also said that 50 basis point hikes might be needed in the future to contain inflation growing at its fastest in 40 years.

The Fed's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee has six more meetings this year and there could be as many rate hikes, officials have said.

The US economy grew 5.7% last year, growing at its fastest since 1984. But inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index, grew at an even faster rate, expanding by 7% in 2021, its most since 1981. The Fed has forecast a 2.8% economic growth for 2022.

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Oil Rally Stalls After 3-Day Run-up as EU Wavers on Russia Ban

NEW YORK, March 22 (Sputnik) - Global crude prices fell , snapping a three-day rally, as European Union nations wavered on implementing a US-style ban on Russian oil and gas imports.

The EU and their allies have already imposed hefty sanctions against Russia over its military operation in Ukraine, including freezing the assets of Moscow's central bank. But targeting Russian energy exports, as the United States and Britain have done, is a tough choice for the 27-nation EU, which relies on Russia for 25% of its oil and 40% of its gas.

"It's going to be tough for the EU to agree on a ban that isn't phased in over time as they're simply too reliant on Russian oil," said Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA. "In years gone by, maybe. But supplies are too tight and it will take time to source alternative producers."

London-traded Brent, the global benchmark for oil, settled down 14 cents, or 0.1%, at \$115.48 a barrel on Tuesday, off the session low of \$112.66. Brent had gained 17% between the settlement of Wednesday and Monday.

US crude's West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, benchmark settled down 36 cents, or 0.3%, at \$111.76 a barrel. WTI hit a session low of \$107.12 earlier. Like Brent, it had gained about 17% in three previous sessions.

Tuesday's losses in oil, however, were limited by a caution by Moscow's energy ministry that Russian and Kazakhstan oil exports via the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, or CPC, may fall by up to 1 million barrels daily due to storm-damaged berths. Pavel Sorokin, Russia's deputy energy minister, said repair works could take up to two months.

The CPC is a joint-venture to transport Caspian oil from the Tengiz field to the Novorossiysk-2 Marine Terminal on Russia's Black Sea coast. It is also a major export route for oil from the Kashagan and Karachaganak fields. The pipeline ships around 1.2 million barrels daily, or 1.2% of the global demand for oil.

With sanctions and other curbs on Russia already depriving global oil markets of an estimated 3 million barrels per day in supply, the drop in the CPC flows weighed further on the nerves of oil traders, analysts said.

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CORRECTION - Biden Approval Rating Declines to 40% - Poll

(Fixes figure in headline to 40%)

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden 's approval rating has tumbled to only 40% this week, a poll conducted by Reuters/IPsos revealed, noting that Biden's rating is the same as his predecessor, Donald Trump, at the same time period.

Some 54% of American voters disapprove of Biden's performance, according to the survey.

At least 77% of the Democratic voters approve the actions of their leaders, only 10% of Republicans and 27% of independents voted in favor of Biden.

The rating of Biden mirrors the one of Trump at the similar period of the presidency, the poll revealed.

The poll was conducted between March 21 and March 22 and involved 1005 registered voters, including 432 Democratic supporters, with a margin of error of 4 percentage points.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) -

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

- * The UN Security Council will discuss an ammonia leak incident in the town of Sumy in Ukraine on Tuesday, Russia's mission to the United Nations told Sputnik.
- * The Russian forces have hit Ukrainian military targets in the Donbas with high-precision weapons, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said.
- * UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said he sees elements of diplomatic progress on key issues in the Ukraine conflict and believes there is "enough on the table" to cease hostilities.
- * Over 68,000 people have been evacuated from Ukraine's Mariupol, where the humanitarian situation is "catastrophic," without participation of authorities in Kiev, the head of the Russian National Defense Control Center, Mikhail Mizintsev, said.
- * US President Joe Biden will coordinate on the next phase of military assistance to Ukraine during his upcoming trip to Europe, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.

IMF POSITION ON RUSSIA, UKRAINE

- * The energy trade will never look the same after the conflict in Ukraine and the world is already seeing changes to global trade, International Monetary Fund (IMF) First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath said on Tuesday.
- * The Ukraine conflict will have a "quite limited" effect on the global economy, Gopinath said.
- * The government of Russia has enough dollars in its possession and is current on its debt payments. Gopinath said.

* The Ukrainian economy will likely shrink by one third of what it was before the current conflict escalation, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said.

US-RUSSIA CONTACTS

* The United States tests daily the deconfliction line established with Russia to prevent a conflict with NATO over Moscow's special operation in Ukraine, and is always met with a Russian response, a senior Defense Department official said on Tuesday.

* The US Defense Department maintains many ways to communicate US concerns directly to the Russian leadership separate from the new deconfliction line established to prevent a conflict with NATO over Moscow's special operation in Ukraine, a senior Defense Department official said.

* Russia, unlike Western countries, including the United States, is not engaged in banditry, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, commenting on the US remarks about possible cyberattacks from Moscow.

SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* Italy has frozen more than 800 million euros (\$880 million) worth assets of Russian oligarchs currently under EU sanctions, Prime Minister Mario Draghi said on Tuesday.

* The European Union is expecting that Serbia — as a candidate to join the bloc — will fully align with its sanctions against Russia over the operation in Ukraine, European External Action Service spokesperson Peter Stano said.

* Foreign manufacturers have refused to supply components for the MS-21 aircraft to Russia, even on prepaid orders, Russian Minister of Industry and Trade Denis Manturov said.

* US President Joe Biden will join partners and allies in imposing additional sanctions on Russia and will announce a new joint action to reduce European dependence on Russian natural gas, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.

NAVALNY CASE

* A Moscow district court has sentenced jailed opposition figure Alexey Navalny to nine years in a strict-regime penal colony in a criminal case of fraud and contempt of court, judge Margarita Kotova said on Tuesday.

* The defense team of Navalny plans to appeal a Moscow court decision which sentenced him to nine years in jail in a case related to fraud and contempt of court, lawyer Olga Mikhailova told reporters.

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Biden Approval Rating Declines to 41% - Poll

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden 's approval rating has tumbled to only 40% this week, a poll conducted by Reuters/IPsos revealed, noting that Biden's rating is the same as his predecessor, Donald Trump, at the same time period.

Some 54% of American voters disapprove of Biden's performance, according to the survey. At least 77% of the Democratic voters approve the actions of their leaders, only 10% of Republicans and 27% of independents voted in favor of Biden.

The rating of Biden mirrors the one of Trump at the similar period of the presidency, the poll revealed.

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Russian Operation in Ukraine Will Affect Content of New US Defense Strategy - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The Russian special operation in Ukraine will affect the content of the new US defense strategy, Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"I don't want to preview it, I would only say that, as I said before, certainly the strategy... it is being informed by what's going on in Ukraine," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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Nothing in Russia's Nuclear Posture Makes US Change Strategic Deterrence - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has not seen anything in Russia's nuclear posture that would lead to a change in Washington's strategic deterrent posture, US Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"We monitor this [Russia's nuclear posture] the best we can every day and we haven't seen anything that would lead us to conclude that we need to change our strategic deterrent posture. The Secretary [of Defense Lloyd Austin] is still comfortable and confident that our strategic deterrent posture is well configured to defend not only the homeland, but our allies and our partners," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Kirby also said that the Defense Department considers Russia's recent nuclear rhetoric as "dangerous."

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US Strongly Condemns Terrorist Attack in Israel, Ready to Help Investigation - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States strongly condemns the deadly terrorist attack in southern Israel and is prepared to help the investigation into the incident, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"The United States strongly condemns the abhorrent attack terrorist attack today in Beersheba, Israel, which killed four people and injured others," Price said during a press briefing.

The United States is prepared to provide support to the Israeli government to investigate this attack, Price said.

Earlier on Tuesday, Israeli police said that an unknown man wielding a knife had attacked people in Beersheba and was neutralized.

According to Israel's emergency medical service, the first incident occurred at a gas station near a shopping center, while the second attack took place at the mall itself.

US media reported that the assailant had been imprisoned in 2015 for supporting the Islamic State terrorist group (outlawed in Russia).

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US, UK Lesson Learned From Ukraine Conflict to 'Build More Resilient Global Economy' - Tai

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States and the United Kingdom are taking lessons from the conflict in Ukraine that a more resilient global economy must be built by ensuring more options and a capability of weathering possible shocks, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said on Tuesday.

"We take lessons from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the responses there to how we take that into our consideration in working together to build out a more resilient global economy, to give ourselves more options, to give our economies more options in terms of being able to weather disruptions and shocks," Tai said during a joint press briefing with her UK counterpart Anne-Marie Trevelyan.

Tai said the Russia-Ukraine conflict has once again reinforced the need for the United States and the United Kingdom to trade "smarter" by promoting resilience and optionality.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. In response to Russia's special operation, the United States and its allies imposed a comprehensive sanctions regime against Russian entities and individuals. Russia has drawn a list of states that it deems are taking unfriendly actions and said will respond with its own measures.

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US Inflation 'Too High,' Unlikely to be at 2% Target by Year End - San Francisco Fed Chief

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - US inflation expanding at nearly 8% a year is "too high" and the Federal Reserve's existing pace of rate hikes is unlikely to get it down to the targeted 2% by end-2022, San Francisco Fed President Mary Daly said Tuesday.

"I don't think we'll be at 2% by end of year," Daly said at a live-streamed discussion on the US economy.

It was her first such comment since the Fed approved on March 16 an increase of 25 basis points for its first pandemic-era rate hike.

Many of the central bank officials, including Chairman Jerome Powell, have also said in recent days that 50 basis point hikes might be needed in the future to contain inflation growing at its fastest in 40 years.

The US economy rose by 5.7% last year, growing at its fastest since 1984. But inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index, grew at an even faster rate, expanding by 7% in 2021, its most since 1981.

Daly said she expected the Fed's "policy changes and other variables to reduce inflation" but probably not to desired levels by year-end. "We have a lot of inflation; that's a hard thing for sentiment," she added.

The Federal Reserve is expected to raise interest rates by 50 basis points back-to-back in May and June after Powell's remarks that the central bank should move "expeditiously" and possibly "more aggressively" to tackle inflation, Wall Street firm Goldman Sachs said Tuesday.

The Fed's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) has six more meetings through 2022 and the central bank has said there could be as many rate hikes before the end of the year. The FOMC's next two meetings are scheduled for May 3-4 and June 14-15.

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US Ban on Russian Seafood May Lead to King and Snow Crab Shortages - Industry Sources

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The US ban on Russian seafood imports could lead to a shortage of king and snow crab in the United States, industry representatives told Sputnik.

President Joe Biden earlier in March announced a ban on US imports of seafood, alcohol, and diamonds from Russia over Moscow's special military operation in Ukraine.

"There will be supply chain disruptions due to the ban beginning with king crab and snow crab," Les Hodges, the former director of business development for Keyport LLC and former CEO of Vantage Seafood and the Talon Group, told Sputnik.

Russia represented over 90% of US king crab imports in 2021, with the United States bringing in 31 million pounds, according to Hodges. The US also imported 42 million pounds of snow crab from Russia, representing 31% of the product category total, he added.

"The US has relied on Russian king and snow crab for many years," Hodges said.

Hodges pointed out that this year Alaskan king crab production was curtailed with the cancellation of the red king crab season, which limited output to 4 million pounds, and a harvest of only around 6 million pounds of golden king crab. Meanwhile, the snow crab quota in 2022 was 5.6 million pounds and is about to be completed.

"Once the current inventory of Russian king crab is sold, it will basically be unavailable in the market place," Hodges said. "There is a little Norwegian red king crab but not enough to have an effect."

Canada is a major producer of snow crab that is expected to provide product to the United States and the world, but with limited competition prices could rise for consumers, Hodges said, adding that their season will begin around the end of March.

"The importers who handle king and snow crab will definitely be affected as will those further down the supply chain," Hodges said. "I expect that some will go out of business as crab is the primary income source."

Hodges predicts that prices on products that compete with Russian seafood may increase due to the lack of market competition.

Mark DeCristoforo, executive director of the Massachusetts Seafood Collaborative, which is a broad-based coalition of harvesters, processors, and wholesalers in the region, told Sputnik there is not a great deal of Russian seafood product that moves through the US system, however, it has definitely been helpful for filling certain voids in the US market, such as snow crabs, haddock and pollock fish.

"For the most part, the places that those products from Russia go, the pollack or the king crab, they typically are frozen abroad, shipped over here... they usually fill our big box stores Costco or Walmart or something like that," DeCristoforo said.

DeCristoforo said he does not expect anyone to lose their jobs in the restaurant industry or processing industry in the US state of Massachusetts due to the ban.

DeCristoforo said the European Union and the United Kingdom could face a tougher time meeting demand if they impose similar actions against Russian seafood.

So far, the European Union and United Kingdom have not imposed bans on Russian seafood.

"I can't speak for the Nordic countries, but I'm not sure that they're going to be able to necessarily make up for what they're going to lack," DeCristoforo said.

Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine on February 24 after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only.

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Blinken, Stoltenberg Discuss Fortifying NATO's Eastern Flank Ahead of Summit - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 22(Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg discussed the fortification of the alliance's eastern flank ahead of the March 24 summit, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg about ongoing efforts to fortify NATO's Eastern Flank and preparations for the March 24 Extraordinary NATO Summit," Price said in a readout of the leaders' call.

The two also discussed the humanitarian and security assistance being provided to Ukraine bilaterally by NATO members, as well as efforts to strengthen the alliance's deterrence and defense, the readout said.

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US, UK to Take Trade Relationship to Next Level - Trade Secretary

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States and the United Kingdom are willing to take their trade relationship to the next level by utilizing the untapped trade potential, UK International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said on Tuesday.

"We want to take our trade relationship between the UK and the US to the next level, unleashing more of our untapped trading potential. Our two countries have successfully resolved a number of key bilateral trade barriers in the last year, clearing the way for us to have this crucial strategic discussion," Trevelyan said during a press briefing.

In the last year, the United States and the United Kingdom have agreed on a large civil aircraft dispute, removed 25% tariffs on Scotch whiskey and made it possible to export Scottish beef and Welsh lamb to the United States.

Trevelyan also expressed optimism about the progress made in the talks on existing tariffs on UK steel and aluminum.

In January, the two countries began talks on addressing the current excess capacity in the global steel and aluminum markets, including the United States' application of tariffs on imports from the United Kingdom under Section 232 and the United Kingdom's retaliatory tariffs on certain US exports.

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US Condemns Russia's Conviction of Navalny for Fraud, Contempt of Court - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States condemns a Russian court's conviction of opposition figure Alexey Navalny to nine years in a strict-regime penal colony for fraud and contempt of court, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"We strongly condemn the Russian Federation's orchestration of a sham trial to convict Alexey Navalny on further spurious charges and sentencing him to nine more years in a high-security prison," Price said during a press briefing.

Navalny on Tuesday was found guilty and sentenced by a Moscow district court. Navalny was also ordered to pay 1.2 million rubles (\$11,200) in fines.

Defense team lawyer Olga Mikhailova told reporters that they plan to appeal the court's decision.

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Peskov Says Russian Military Does Not Strike Civilian Targets, Goal Not to Occupy Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday that the Russian military is not striking civilian targets in Ukraine and has no plans to occupy the country.

"The Russian military is not hitting civilian targets," Peskov said during an interview with CNN. Some of the goals of the Russian special military operation in Ukraine include demilitarizing the country and eliminating extremist battalions,

Russia also aims to ensure Ukraine becomes a neutral country and acknowledge the fact that Crimea is part of Russia and that the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics (DNR and LNR) are independent states.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after DNR and LNR requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only. Several days into the operation, the Defense Ministry said the Ukrainian troops are using terrorist methods, such as shielding behind civilians and positioning weapons systems in civilian areas.

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New Mexico Elected Official Found Guilty of Illegally Entering Capitol on January 6

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) – A New Mexico elected official who participated in non-violent activities but still broke the law while at the US Capitol during the January 6 riot, was found guilty of trespassing in the area after a two-day bench trial, the Department of Justice said Tuesday.

"[Cory] Griffin was among thousands who illegally entered the U.S. Capitol grounds on Jan. 6 ... he climbed over a stone wall and entered the lawn on the West Front of the Capitol, within the restricted area. He turned to another individual, an associate, and stated, 'This is our house ... we should all be armed,'" the department said in a press release. "Griffin climbed over a metal barricade surrounding the West Front and entered the area below the inauguration platform. He then climbed the hidden stairway to the inauguration stage, which was under construction on the Lower West Terrace."

Justice Department officials said Griffin told a video audience, "It's a great day for America. The people are showing that they have had enough. People are ready for fair and legal elections, or this is what you're gonna get and you're gonna get more of it." The founder of Cowboys for Trump sat on a front railing of the inaugural stage for more than an hour filmed by an associate.

Griffin, 48, was found guilty of trespassing on the US Capital grounds while former Vice President Mike Pence was there. The former Disneyland rodeo cowboy was acquitted of disorderly and disruptive conduct. He contends that he was on the grounds to lead others in prayer that day. He is the second January 6 defendant to go on trial following prosecution from the US Department of Justice and the second to be convicted. In the first, with Guy Reffitt, a Texas Militia recruiter, a jury found him guilty of five felonies, including witness tampering, obstruction of an official proceeding and interfering with police in a riot.

Griffin refused a plea deal for a lesser charge and probation and waived a jury trial. With his conviction before US District Judge Trevor N. McFadden, he could face jail time. Sentencing is set for June 17. The charge carries a statutory maximum of a year in jail and potential financial penalties.

In the 14 months since January 6, more than 775 people from nearly all 50 states have been arrested for their involvement in the riot, which saw Trump supporters protest a joint session of Congress where lawmakers were meeting to ascertain and count electoral votes to determine who won the 2020 presidential election. That includes more than 245 people who have been charged with assaulting or impeding law enforcement. The investigation continues.

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US May Face Increasing Number of COVID-19 Infections Soon - Fauci

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States may see an increase in the number of novel coronavirus infections in the near future, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Antony Fauci said on Tuesday.

"I would not be surprised to see an uptick in infections," Fauci said during a virtual conversation with the Washington Post.

Fauci said the same conditions exist in the United States as in other countries like United Kingdom that are experiencing an uptick in cases. The conditions include increasing dominance of the BA.2 coronavirus variant, relaxed restrictions and reduced immunity.

"All of these three things, which are comparable in the UK to here, makes me feel that we will see an increased uptick," he said.

Fauci also said the United States is following the United Kingdom with a "few weeks lag."

Investing in biomedical research will allow the country to confront future pandemics, he added.

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Russia Would Only Use Nuclear Weapons If Its Existence Threatened - Peskov

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - Russia would only use nuclear weapons if it determined the existence of the nation was threatened, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told CNN.

"We have a concept of domestic security, it's public, you can read all the reasons for [Russia's] nuclear arms to be used," Peskov said during an interview. "If it is an existential threat for our country, then it can be used in accordance with our concept."

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US Does Not Have Troops in Ukraine Nor Trains Ukrainians - White House

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States does not have any troops on the territory of Ukraine and does not currently conduct any military training of Ukrainians amid the conflict with Russia, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.

"We do not have US troops currently training Ukrainians. We do not have US troops on the territory of Ukraine. We do, of course, have US troops defending NATO territory, providing reassurance to our allies deterring Russian aggression," Sullivan said during a press briefing. Earlier on Tuesday, a Defense Department official said Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is not ruling out the possibility of deploying more US forces on NATO's eastern flank to counter Russia.

On February 24, Russia undertook a special military operation in Ukraine, responding to requests for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure. However, the Defense Ministry later also said that the Ukrainian troops are employing terrorist tactics, including using civilians as human shields and positioning weapon systems in civilian areas.

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Biden to Raise Question of China's Role in Ukraine Conflict While in Europe - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will raise the question of China's involvement in the Ukraine conflict during his upcoming trip to Europe, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.

"President Biden to raise the question of China's participation in conflict while he is in Brussels," he said.

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Trudeau Assures Zelenskyy Canada Will Continue to Support Ukraine Sovereignty

TORONTO, March 22 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Tuesday spoke by phone with Volodymyr Zelenskyy and assured him that Canada would continue to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

"Ahead of my meetings with other leaders this week, I spoke with the President again this morning. I let him know that Canada will continue to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity - and advocate for the Ukrainian people on the world stage," Trudeau said in a statement via Twitter.

Canada has been among the most active supporters of Ukraine and has provided the country with millions of dollars worth of weapons and has also imposed hundreds of sanctions against Russian individuals and entities.

On February 24, Russia undertook a special military operation in Ukraine in response to requests for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to help defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only. The Defense Ministry later accused Ukraine's forces of using terrorist methods, including hiding behind civilians and placing weapons systems in civilian areas.

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Biden to Join Partners in Imposing New Sanctions on Russia While in Europe – White House

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden will join partners and allies in imposing additional sanctions on Russia and will announce a new joint action to reduce European dependence on Russian natural gas, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.

"He [Biden] will join our partners in imposing further sanctions on Russia and tightening the existing sanctions to crack down on evasion and to ensure robust enforcement," Sullivan said during a press briefing. "He will announce joint action on enhancing European energy security and reducing Europe's dependence on Russian gas."

With regard to Russia's membership in international organizations, the United States believes there cannot be "business as usual" with Russia in international institutions and the international community, however it is up to these organizations to decide, Sullivan added.

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Psaki Says Tested Positive for COVID-19, Will Not Accompany Biden to Europe

(Updates with background in paras 4-6)

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said in a statement on Tuesday that she has tested positive for the novel coronavirus and will not accompany US President Joe Biden on his upcoming trip to Europe.

"Today, in preparation for travel to Europe, I took a PCR test this morning. That test came back positive, which means I will be adhering to CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] guidance and no longer be traveling on the President's trip to Europe," the statement said.

Psaki said she has so far experienced only mild symptoms and will work from home until the conclusion of a five-day isolation period, the statement said.

Psaki also tested positive last November prior to Biden's trip to Rome for the G20 summit and the UN climate summit.

Biden also was subjected to a PCR test on Tuesday and the result was negative, the statement added.

Biden is scheduled to travel to Brussels on Thursday to attend the NATO summit there. He will then travel to Poland the following day to meet with President Andrzej Duda and other government officials to discuss the US and Polish responses to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.

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Biden During Europe Trip to Coordinate on Next Phase of Military Aid to Kiev - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will coordinate on the next phase of military assistance to Ukraine during his upcoming trip to Europe, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.

"President Biden to coordinate on the next phase of military assistance to Ukraine," he told a briefing.

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Psaki Says Tested Positive for COVID-19, Will Not Accompany Biden to Europe

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Canada to Extradite Fashion Mogul Peter Nygard to US - Justice Minister

TORONTO, March 22 (Sputnik) - Canadian fashion mogul Peter Nygard has been ordered extradited to the United States after the legal processes against him in Canada concluded, Justice Minister and Attorney General David Lametti said on Tuesday.

The US Justice Department has indicted Nygard on charges of numerous sexual assaults, racketeering and other crimes that he allegedly committed over at least the past two decades.

"Earlier today, I ordered that Peter Nygard to be surrendered for extradition to the United States to face charges there, but only after the current criminal charges in Canada have been addressed," Lametti said in a statement via Twitter.

The US Justice Department alleges Nygard had been using the resources, funds and influence of his clothing company Nygard International to cover sex trafficking and other abusive activities for more than 25 years.

In Canada, Nygard faces multiple counts of sexual assault and forcible confinement.

Nygard's criminal conduct spread across such locations as the United States, Canada and the Bahamas, but also in other places as well, according to the Justice Department.

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US Will Not Support Russia's Humanitarian Resolution on Ukraine - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States will not support Russia's humanitarian resolution on Ukraine, US Envoy to UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Tuesday.

"The is no [US] support for that resolution," she said.

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Russia Never Shelled Ukrainian Facilities Where Toxic Materials Stored - Polyanskiy

UNITED NATIONS, March 22 (Sputnik) – Russian armed forces have never carried out strikes against Ukrainian facilities where toxic substances stored or produced, Deputy Envoy to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Tuesday.

"[T]he Armed Forces of the Russian Federation have never planned or carried out strikes against any Ukrainian facilities where toxic substances are stored or produced. The Russian

army ensures security of such objects on the territories liberated from radical groups and we are deeply concerned by the recent developments in Sumi," Polyanskiy said during a press briefing. According to the Russian diplomat, on the evening of March 21, Ukrainian nationalists carried out an attack on a chemical plant in the city of Sumi resulting in an ammonia leak. Polyanskiy called the statement by the officials in Kiev that the plant was shelled by the Russian armed forces as fake and deliberate disinformation.

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S. Africa Submits Draft Humanitarian Resolution on Ukraine for Vote in UN General Assembly

UNITED NATIONS, March 22 (Sputnik) - South Africa has submitted a draft resolution on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine for a vote in the UN General Assembly, the Office of the General Assembly said on Tuesday.

"As of late this morning there has been a ... resolution submitted to the Secretariat and is being processed. It is entitled 'Humanitarian Situation in Ukraine' and is initiated by South Africa," the Office of the General Assembly said in a statement.

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Sherman Agrees With UK, German Counterparts to Continue Isolating Russia - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman conducted talks with her UK, French, German and Italian counterparts and they agreed to continue working to isolate Russia, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

Joining Sherman in the meeting were French Foreign Secretary-General Francois Delattre, German Foreign Ministry Political Director Tjorven Bellmann, Italian Foreign Ministry Secretary General Ettore Sequi and UK Minister of State for Europe and North America James Cleverly. "They... discussed additional economic measures to hold the Russian Federation and Belarus accountable. All participants agreed to continue to work to isolate the Russian Federation on the international stage given its flagrant violation of international law and principles," Price said. Sherman condemned what she called were "brutal tactics" employed by Russian President Vladimir Putin that "continue to kill civilians in this unjustified and unprovoked war of choice," Price said.

Moreover, the participants in the talks discussed the importance of providing further military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, Price added.

On February 24, Russia launched a special operation to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine responding to requests for help by the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only, but later accused the Ukrainian forces of using terrorist methods, such as hiding behind civilians and positioning weapons systems in civilian areas.

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US Energy Secretary Says Will Discuss Immediate Energy Actions at IEA Paris Ministerial
WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - Members of the International Energy Agency (IEA) will discuss immediate steps countries can take to advance clean energy and other organizational goals during the upcoming ministerial meeting in Paris, US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said on Tuesday.

"Our conversations are going to center on immediate, actionable steps that IEA's members can take, both individually and collectively, to raise our ambitions, to advance our goals and to create millions of good paying jobs in the process," Granholm said during a press briefing. Members will discuss opportunities to deepen clean energy research, coordinate efforts to secure critical mineral supply chains, and develop policies to use the power of clean energy markets to lift up communities in transition, Granholm also said.

The IEA 2022 Ministerial Meeting will take place in Paris on March 23 and 24. The meeting will be chaired by Granholm and include energy ministers from IEA's 31 member countries, as well as partner countries.

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IMF Senior Official Says Energy Trade Will Never Look Same After Conflict in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The energy trade will never look the same after the conflict in Ukraine and the world is already seeing changes to global trade, International Monetary Fund (IMF) First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath said on Tuesday.

"We are certainly seeing changes to global trade. For a fact, we know that energy trade will never look the same again after this war [in Ukraine]," Gopinath said.

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US Sees No Indications Russia Brought in Reinforcements to Ukraine - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has seen no indications that Russia brought in reinforcements as well as foreign fighters to Ukraine, a senior US Defense Department official said on Tuesday.

"No indications of reinforcement being brought in, no indication of foreign forces being moved from Syria or elsewhere," the official said.

However, the United States has noticed the activity of the private military contractor Wagner Group in the Donbas region, the official also said.

The official pointed out that if Russia were to bring in reinforcements to Ukraine, they would likely be forces from abroad.

Earlier in March, the US Defense Department said Russia was recruiting Syrian fighters and other foreigners for its special operation in Ukraine.

On February 24, Russia launched the special operation to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine, responding to requests help by the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend against intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only, but later accused the Ukrainian forces of using terrorist methods such as hiding behind civilians and positioning weapons systems in civilian areas.

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Pentagon Says No Indication of Russia's 'Imminent' Use of Chemical Weapons in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States sees no indication that there is an imminent risk of Russia using chemical or biological weapons in Ukraine, a senior Pentagon official said on Tuesday.

"No indication that there's something imminent in that regard right now," the official said in response to a question on the subject.

Earlier on Tuesday, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov criticized Washington's claims that Russia might use chemical and biological weapons. The diplomat noted that the US has not yet destroyed its own stockpiles of chemical weapons, and accused the latter of artificially delaying the process.

Russia's entire arsenal of chemical weapons was completely destroyed under the strictest international control back in 2017, he recalled.

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IMF Says Does Not See Imminent Demise of US Dollar as World Reserve Currency

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - There are no indications of the US dollar's imminent demise as a world reserve currency but some countries are reconsidering their currency reserves distribution amid the increasing fragmentation of payment systems around the world, International Monetary Fund (IMF) First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath said on Tuesday.

"If you asked me today, does it [recent global events] imply the imminent demise of the dollar, I will say flat out 'no,' that is not the case. But what we are seeing around the world is increasing fragmentation of payment systems that probably will further increase following this war [in Ukraine]," Gopinath said. "[W]e are likely to see countries some countries reconsidering how much they hold off certain currencies in their reserves."

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UNSC to Discuss Ukraine Ammonia Leak Incident on Tuesday - Russia's Mission

(Corrects date in para 3, adds background in para 4)

UNITED NATIONS, March 22 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will discuss an ammonia leak incident in Ukraine's Sumy on Tuesday, Russia's mission to the United Nations told Sputnik.

"Today, during consultations ... the Security Council will discuss the situation with chemical incidents in Ukraine," the mission said.

On Monday, Dmitry Zhivitsky, the head of the Sumy regional administration, said that an ammonia leak had been detected at a local chemical facility. The Russian Defense Ministry said that the leak was the result of a provocation by Ukrainian nationalists.

On February 24, Russia launched a special operation to demilitarize and "denazify" Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics in countering the aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only, but later accused Ukrainian forces of using typical terrorist methods, such as hiding behind civilians and positioning weapons systems in civilian areas.

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Fed Expected to Hike US Rates by 50 Basis Points in Both May, June - Goldman Sachs

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve is expected to raise interest rates by 50 basis points back-to-back in May and June after Chairman Jerome Powell said the US central bank should move "expeditiously" and possibly "more aggressively" to tackle inflation, the investment banking and management firm Goldman Sachs said on Tuesday.

"Our best guess is that the shift in wording from 'steadily' in January to 'expeditiously' today is a signal that a 50bp rate hike is coming," Goldman Sachs's analysts wrote in a report issued for public dissemination on Tuesday after being circulated first among the firm's clients a day earlier.

On Monday, Powell signaled the Fed will double down on its pace of rate hikes if needed, after several officials within the central bank said its first pandemic-era rate hike of 25 basis points, or a quarter-percentage point, on March 16 was inadequate to fight the worst US inflation in 40 years.

The Fed's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) has six more meetings through 2022 and the central bank has said there could be as many rate hikes before the end of the year. The FOMC's next two meetings are scheduled on May 3-4 and June 14-15.

"There is an obvious need to move expeditiously to return the stance of monetary policy to a more neutral level, and then to move to more restrictive levels if that is what is required to restore price stability," Powell said in a speech to the US National Association for Business Economics on Monday. "If we conclude that it is appropriate to move more aggressively by raising the federal funds rate by more than 25 basis points at a meeting or meetings, we will do so. And if we determine that we need to tighten beyond common measures of neutral and into a more restrictive stance, we will do that as well."

Neutral refers to bringing inflation toward the Fed's target of 2% per year that is the central bank's mandated tolerance for price growth. Aside from that mandate, the Fed is also obligated to ensure maximum employment by keeping the jobless rate at 4% or below.

The Fed has achieved success with its second target by bringing unemployment down to 3.8% in February from a pandemic- and record-high of 14.8% in April 2020. But it has done woefully so far in tackling inflation.

The US economy grew 5.7% last year, growing at its fastest since 1984. But inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index, grew at an even faster rate, expanding by 7% in 2021, its most since 1981.

The FOMC's more hawkish policy-makers - including Christopher Waller, one of the central bank's seven governors, and St. Louis Fed President James Bullard - have called for 50-basis point hikes for more than a month now.

After slashing interest rates to near zero following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the Fed provided stimulus of more than \$2 trillion over the past two years to ensure enough money to sustain credit markets. On top of that, the US federal government spent trillions of dollars more on pandemic relief measures, while employers paid out higher wages to working Americans. All that money, along with supply chain bottlenecks arising from the pandemic, have led to soaring inflation.

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Pentagon Has Many Ways of Communicating US Concerns to Russian Leaders - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department maintains many ways to communicate US concerns directly to the Russian leadership separate from the new deconfliction line established to prevent a conflict with NATO over Moscow's special operation in Ukraine, a senior Defense Department official said on Tuesday.

"It's not meant to be an all-purpose complaint line, where we can just pick up the phone and register concerns about what Russia is doing in Ukraine... We have many ways of communicating directly with Russian leaders as we need to," the official said.

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UNSC to Discuss Ukraine Ammonia Leak Incident on Tuesday - Russia's Mission
UNITED NATIONS, March 22 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will discuss an ammonia leak incident in Ukraine's Sumy on Tuesday, Russia's mission to the United Nations told Sputnik. "Today, during consultations ... the Security Council will discuss the situation with chemical incidents in Ukraine," the mission said. Earlier in the day, Dmitry Zhivitsky, the head of the Sumy regional administration, said that an ammonia leak had been detected at a local chemical facility. The Russian Defense Ministry said that the leak was the result of a provocation by Ukrainian nationalists.

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Recent Events to Accelerate Consideration of Central Bank Digital Currencies Globally- IMF

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The recent international developments will accelerate the consideration of central bank digital currencies more widely around the world, International Monetary Fund (IMF) First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath said on Tuesday. "I think it's fair to say that the recent events will accelerate consideration of central bank digital currencies more widely around the world. And we need to be particularly careful of the regulation that's needed to ensure that the new forms of digital money don't lead to evasion of capital risk flow restrictions, especially for emerging and developing economies," Gopinath said.

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US Tests Deconfliction Line With Russia Daily - Defense Official

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States tests daily the deconfliction line established with Russia to prevent a conflict with NATO over Moscow's special operation in Ukraine, and is always met with a Russian response, a senior Defense Department official said on Tuesday. "We test it every day and the Russians are picking up. So, that's a good thing. There hasn't been any content delivery over the deconfliction line because there hasn't been any need to have that conversation with the Russians. There hasn't been any potential conflicts in NATO airspace or ground space," the official said.

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Russia Current on Debt Payments, Has Enough Dollars - Senior IMF Official

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The government of Russia has enough dollars in its possession and is current on its debt payments. International Monetary Fund (IMF) First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath said on Tuesday.

"Russia has been current so far on its debt payments. It does have the dollars that are needed. It's owning those to be able to make those payments," Gopinath said.

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Austin Not Ruling Out Deploying More US Forces on NATO's Eastern Flank - Defense Official

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is not ruling out the possibility of placing more US forces on NATO's eastern flank to counter Russia, a senior Defense Department official said on Tuesday.

"I have nothing to speak to with respect to additional troops rotating... [Austin] is not taking that off the table, the possibility that we could possibly deploy additional US forces to the eastern flank," the official said.

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Ukraine Crisis to Have 'Quite Limited' Effect on World Economy – IMF's Gopinath

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) – The Ukraine conflict will have a "quite limited" effect on the global economy, International Monetary Fund First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath said on Tuesday.

"I think effect on the rest of the world would be quite limited," Gopinath said during a virtual conversation.

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Ukrainian Economy Likely to Shrink by One Third Due to Conflict Escalation - IMF

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) – The Ukrainian economy will likely shrink by one third of what it was before the current conflict escalation, International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Tuesday.

"The devastation of Ukraine's economy breaks my heart. We are likely to see shrinkage that could be a third of what it was before the war," Georgieva said during a virtual conversation.

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Canada's Trudeau Announces Deal With Opposition to Remain in Power Through 2025

(Updates with more details in paras 3-9)

TORONTO, March 22 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Tuesday announced a deal with the left-wing New Democratic Party to keep him and his minority Liberal government in power through 2025.

"Today, I am announcing that the Liberal Party has reached an agreement with the New Democratic Party to deliver results for Canadians now. This supply and confidence agreement starts today and will be in place until the end of this parliament in 2025," Trudeau told a news conference in Ottawa.

The deal will see the New Democrats the Liberals next four budgets and work toward implementing NDP priorities such as new dental and national pharmacare programs. Critics have warned against massive new spending, with Canada's deficit standing at a record \$282.67 billion and the national debt approaching \$1 trillion.

The Prime Minister defended his decision, saying that the deal "strengthens democracy" and that democracy is not about toxicity and hyper partisanship.

Official opposition Conservative Interim Leader Candice Bergen called the deal a "Trudeau power grab."

"Eighty-two percent of voters did not vote for a Liberal-NDP government... these Canadian woke up this morning to the fact that they have been hoodwinked and deceived by their Prime Minister. This is nothing more than a Justin Trudeau power grab," Bergen said.

Bergen vowed to seek out Liberal parliamentarians, who, according to her, would oppose the new spending the Liberal-NDP coalition would seek.

In a social media post, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh said that the deal would "deliver the biggest expansion of health care in a generation."

By 2025, Trudeau will be Canada's prime minister for a period of a decade, having assumed power in 2015. Asked about his future plans, Trudeau said he intends to serve Canadians through and beyond the next elections.

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US, NATO Believe Belarus Can 'Soon' Join Russia's Military Operation in Ukraine – Reports

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) – The United States and NATO believe that Belarus could "soon" join Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, CNN reported on Tuesday, citing officials.

A NATO official told the channel there is an increasing likelihood of Belarus entering the conflict in Ukraine to support Russian forces. Another intelligence official from the alliance stated the Belarusian government is preparing the environment to justify a "Belarusian offensive against Ukraine."

A source in the Belarusian opposition claims that thousands of the country's combat units are getting ready to head to Ukraine in the next few days, the report said.

On Monday, Pentagon said that it has not seen any indications of Belarusian troops preparing to join the conflict.

On February 24, Russia began its special military operation in Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only. The West has rolled out a comprehensive sanctions campaign against Russia and Belarus, accusing the latter of assisting Moscow.

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Russian Orthodox Mission in Mexico Helps Ukrainians, Says Nationality Makes No Difference

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The Russian Christian Orthodox mission in Mexico supports Ukrainians in need and they can see that the church is providing help to all, without distinction on the basis of nationality, head of the mission Archimandrite Nektariy (Hajji-Petropoulos) told Sputnik.

"We keep serving those Ukrainians living in Mexico who are in need and they become witnesses that the Russian monastery is there to help. We make no difference with respect to ethnicity or nationality. We serve Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Georgians and others in need," Archimandrite Nektariy said.

Some Ukrainian parishioners in Mexico stopped visiting the church after Russia began its special military operation in Ukraine, Nektariy said. However, others continue to attend services, he added.

"I had to tell them: Please listen, we do not serve any state, we do not serve any country. We serve the Lord and we are open to all Orthodox people, not only to Russians. We are praying for both Russians and Ukrainians," Nektariy said.

Many Ukrainians residing in Mexico know about the Russian Orthodox mission there and have received help when they were in need, Nektariy said.

"These people know that mission members do not make a difference on nationality and do not serve interests of any particular country," he continued.

In a sign of treating people equally regardless of nationality, Nektariy put the Russian and the Ukrainian flags near the iconostasis, in addition to other flags that were placed there before.

"I want people to see that there are no differences among us. Yes, we are the Russian church but we are not just serving Russians," he said, adding that parishioners have been asked not to discuss politics.

The mission in Mexico will participate in several fundraising events organized by the Western American diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), the ROCOR Fund for Assistance and several local organizations in the country to help Ukrainian refugees, Nektariy said.

"Certainly we will send our part," he added.

On February 24, Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine responding to calls for help from the Donbas republics in defending themselves against the aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only, but later accused Ukrainian forces of using typical terrorist methods, such as hiding behind civilians and positioning weapons systems in civilian areas.

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US Lawmakers Call on Intelligence Agencies to Help Save Ukrainian Civilians - Letter

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - Members of the US House of Representatives Intelligence Committee on Tuesday sent a letter to Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines urging the intelligence community (IC) to maximize information sharing and leverage its capabilities to help save Ukrainian civilians' lives.

"As Russia intensifies its indiscriminate killing of Ukrainians, we believe it is vital the IC continues maximizing intelligence sharing with our Ukrainian and international partners... and we hope that, in coordination with our diplomats, you consider all the ways in which you can leverage IC capabilities to help save lives of Ukrainian civilians," the letter said.

The intelligence community could assist in identifying safer evacuation corridors and call out any violations of humanitarian ceasefires, the letter said.

The lawmakers also called on the intelligence community to declassify any information that may reveal potential war crimes committed in Ukraine amid Russia's special operation there.

The letter was signed by Congressmen Adam Schiff, Michael Turner, Eric Swalwell and Mike Gallagher, among others.

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Donald Trump Jr., Former Trump Staffers Start News Aggregation App - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - Donald Trump Jr. alongside other previous staffers of former President Donald Trump is launching a free news aggregation application to combat alleged bias against conservatives in the media space, Axios reported on Tuesday.

The app, known as MxM (minute by minute) News, will curate news stories from an array of publishers and will be available for download on both Apple's iOS and Google's Android devices, the report said.

"We created the MxM News app to help people cut through that clutter and get trustworthy news and information about topics that matter and impact their lives ... We view it as an important public service and also believe it will be a great business," Trump Jr. said in the report.

The founders hope that the app will compete with similar products such as Apple News, Google News and Drudge Report, the report added.

The tech project comes following several other efforts by former Trump associates to break into online and media spaces often touted as left-of-center by the previous administration, including Trump's own Truth Social platform and former aide Jason Miller's social app Gettr.

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Blinken Discusses With French Counterpart Aid to Ukraine, NATO Summit - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed with his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian aid provided to Ukraine and the upcoming extraordinary meeting of the NATO member state leaders, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke yesterday with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian about ongoing efforts by NATO allies and EU partners to provide vital security assistance and humanitarian aid to Ukraine," the State Department said in a statement. Blinken condemned Russia's actions in Ukraine amid Moscow's special operation there, the release said.

The two officials also discussed further economic and diplomatic measures to hold Russian and Belarus accountable, the release added.

Moreover, they discussed the extraordinary meeting of the NATO member states leaders scheduled for Thursday and the strengthening of the alliance's defenses on the eastern flank, the statement added.

The leaders will discuss the Russian special operation in Ukraine and the ways of boost the alliance in response to the new security challenges, including the energy and economic aspects of the crisis.

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UN Chief Calls for Giving Peace Chance in Ukraine to End Suffering, Destruction

UNITED NATIONS, March 22 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday called for an end to the fighting in Ukraine and giving a peace a chance in order to end the suffering of civilians amid Russia's ongoing special operation there.

"The only outcome to all this [fighting] is more suffering, more destruction and more horror as far as the eye can see," Guterres said at a UN Security Council stakeout. "By any measure - by even the shrewdest calculation - it is time to stop the fighting and give peace a chance. It is time to end this ghastly absurd war."

Guterres added that he, nevertheless, sees positive signs of diplomatic progress about the situation regarding Ukraine.

On February 24, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation was targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only.

The United States and its allies have responded by imposing comprehensive sanctions against Russia. Moscow has drawn a list of states that it considers unfriendly to Russia and said will respond in kind,

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Guterres Sees 'Elements of Diplomatic Progress' in Ukraine Conflict

UNITED NATIONS, March 22 (Sputnik) – UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Tuesday he sees elements of diplomatic progress on key issues in the Ukraine conflict and believes there is "enough on the table" to cease hostilities.

"From my outreach with various actors, elements of diplomatic progress are coming into view on several key issues. There is enough on the table to cease hostilities – now and seriously negotiate – now," Guterres said at a UN Security Council stakeout.