

6/20/22 Monday

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US Treasury's Yellen Says Inflation Causes 'Global, Not Local,' US Not Destined for Recession

As the value of the US dollar continues to decline alongside unemployment, many economic observers have fretted that a wage-price spiral is all but inevitable, which would strangle economic growth as in-demand workers demand higher wages to compensate for higher prices, driving prices still higher.

Speaking to reporter George Stephanopoulos on [ABC's "The Week" on Sunday](#), US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said inflation "is unacceptably high," but that a recession is not "at all inevitable" as the administration struggles to respond to it.

"I expect the economy to slow," Yellen said. "It's been growing at a very rapid rate, as the economy, as the labor market, has recovered and we have reached full employment. It's natural now that we expect a transition to steady and stable growth, but I don't think a recession is at all inevitable."

The Treasury chief, who is a former chairperson of the US' central bank, the Federal Reserve, said that it was the "top priority" of US President Joe Biden and the Fed's present chairperson, Jerome Powell, to bring down inflation, which has continued to increase past its 40-year high earlier this year. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' May report on consumer prices found an 8.6% average increase over the previous year, or 6%, if energy and food costs are removed, a metric called "core inflation."

Stephanopoulos pressed Yellen on the numbers, asking, "You say that inflation is a global problem, and it certainly is, but how do you explain the fact that Europe's core inflation last month was under 4% and the U.S. was at 6%?"

"So, energy prices spillover is really half of inflation, food and energy and the spillover is because energy is an important input into almost everything into the economy," the Treasury chief replied. "It is true that we've had core inflation over and above that, that is too high and the [Federal Reserve] will take steps to bring it down. President Biden believes there are other things the administration can do to support what the Fed will do."

Last week, the Fed Board of Governors [increased interest rates](#) by 75 base points - their biggest hike in nearly 30 years - on the heels of the BLS report. That followed a 50-base-point increase the month prior, which had little effect. However, [many on Wall Street expect](#) the Fed's actions to not just blunt inflation, but to trigger a recession. Even Powell has referred to the central bank's goal as a "[soft or soft-ish landing](#)," admitting the difficulty of blunting inflation without also blunting economic growth.

"You say it's not inevitable, but I guess the question is: Is it likely?" Stephanopoulos pressed Yellen on Sunday.

She asserted that "consumer spending remains very strong," although acknowledging that in reality, [consumer spending has decreased](#). Yellen also said that "bank balances are high" and "the labor market is very strong, arguably the strongest of the post-war period."

Yellen repeated Biden's [excuse for high inflation](#): oil prices have increased, driven largely by Russia's special operation in Ukraine that began in February 2022 - the so-called "Putin price hike." However, inflation was already a problem [economists were worried about](#) in the fall of 2021, and it isn't so much Russia's operation to neutralize Ukraine as a NATO springboard that's driving up oil prices as it is Biden's total boycott of imports of Russian oil and gas and the European Union's attempts to follow suit. Moscow's fossil fuel sales income [has doubled since February](#) and its oil exports increased by 12% in the first five months of 2022, Russian Deputy Prime Minister [Alexander Novak said on Friday](#).

In addition, US lawmakers have pointed to oil and gas companies gouging prices amid the shortages as a major problem, with the US House of Representatives [passing a bill last month](#) to crack down on the practice. However, that, too, is not a new issue, as [economists last year noted](#) price gouging by retailers was a big part of increasing prices on other goods amid shortages and delays created by a variety of pandemic lockdown-related factors, including Covid outbreaks in China.

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Is China Losing or Gaining Against the US in Competition to Woo Bangkok? Media Can't Decide

Competing narratives have emerged in the English-language media about Thailand's political allegiance amid the rapidly emerging cold war between the United States and China. Whether China is gaining or losing ground, both sides see it as indicative of Beijing's supposedly "transactional" diplomacy.

"China losing, US gaining crucial ground in Thailand: Thai-China relations are in quiet but certain decline while US reaffirms its strategic and economic commitment to the kingdom," a [June 9 article in Asia Times](#) triumphantly declared.

The article, which relies on "multiple Thai officials" cited anonymously, asserts that "as Beijing transitions from less soft and more hard diplomacy under ambassador Han, the Thais are overtly looking back to the US – and its regional ally Japan – for new diplomatic balance and choice."

It casts China as a preying would-be colonial power, tapping into the common Western trope that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure megaproject is nothing more than a tool for Beijing to get new leverage over other nations, and asserts that China has resorted to bullying Bangkok because it won't finish a [rail line connecting the Thai capital](#) with Vientiane, Laos' capital city that sits on the Thai border.

"I think they have that [encirclement] sense, but whether or not they fully appreciate that circumstance and it's widely shared in the entire establishment, [I'm] not sure," an unnamed Bangkok-based senior diplomat told Asia Times. "[But] when you look at it geographically, it looks like an encirclement and Thailand is the odd one out."

The diplomat referred to Thailand as a "democratic oasis," which contrasts sharply with the article's framing of China's friendship with Thailand only blossoming after the 2014 coup that the

article's author described as "a lurch from democracy that sent relations with long-time ally the United States into a tailspin."

Aside from the snail-like pace at which China's much-desired rail line is proceeding, the article's only proof of its claims is that Thailand's exports to the US grew during the COVID-19 pandemic while its exports to China diminished, driving up its [trade deficit with Beijing](#); that Bangkok and Washington [recently signed military deals](#); and Bangkok being a founding member of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), a [rival economic bloc](#) set up by Washington last month that excludes China but includes many of the surrounding nations.

Not mentioned in the article is that Thailand was also one of the first to ratify the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RECP), the world's largest trade bloc incorporating almost all of East Asia and excluding the United States, [which is hostile to the deal](#).

All of that contrasts very sharply with another article published 10 days later in Foreign Policy magazine, a Washington, DC, publication with major gravitas in American foreign policy spheres.

"Washington Worries China Is Winning Over Thailand: One of the United States' oldest security partners in Asia is increasingly marching to Beijing's music," [Foreign Policy opined on June 17](#). According to this article, the US and its allies lost the initiative to Beijing after the military coups in Bangkok in 2006 and especially in 2014. While the Americans supposedly balked at the prospect of military cooperation with a non-democratic government, the unscrupulous Chinese swept in, promising the world to Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha. Now, eight years later, China has sunk its claws into Thailand just like it supposedly did to the Philippines - ignoring of course that [Manila doubled down](#) on its [alliance with Washington](#) well before then-President Rodrigo Duterte left office.

"The recipe is there; all of the ingredients are there," Lyle Morris, a senior policy analyst at the Rand Corporation and a former Pentagon official, told FP. "They've already invested in a lot of the defense industrial base with the subs and more arms being sold from China to Thailand. That's how it starts: It's building the relationships of the defense industrial base and having systems that are more amenable to China than to the US. I don't think Thailand is lost yet, but they definitely need some love."

Chief among FP's concerns is Thailand's [\\$400 million deal to buy submarines](#) from China, which European Union sanctions have ground to a halt after the German engine-maker canceled plans to supply the boats with propulsion. Although, according to an academic at the Heritage Foundation who spoke with the magazine, Beijing doesn't really care about the sub deal since the BRI agreement is the real prize - again because it supposedly gives Beijing leverage over Thai affairs. This contradicts other points also made in the article about how China is using the sub deal and others as leverage.

In 2017 and 2018, the White House and Pentagon [outlined in key policy documents](#) the US' strategic shift away from the War on Terror and toward what they called "great power competition" with Russia and China, with subsequent documents making clear that China is the main adversary. These nations, the US alleges, are "malign actors" with plans to destroy the "rules-based international order," a fanciful name for the US-led world order that emerged after World War 2 and solidified at the end of the Cold War.

According to Western leaders and media, whenever China or Russia, or other nations like Iran or Venezuela engage in any action around the globe that Washington can't dominate or stop, it's

done surreptitiously and necessarily undermines the US-led order. In China's relations with Southeast Asia and its regional bloc, ASEAN, this characterization is out in full-force, especially with respect to the South China Sea and the longstanding [dispute between six nations](#) over who controls which island chains in the waterway.

For years, the US has fretted that Beijing was trying to bribe its way into getting what it wants from ASEAN nations, particularly by signing BRI development deals and using bluster to get what it can't get in other ways. In response, Washington has [tried to push one arms sale](#) after another [on ASEAN nations](#), including drones, fighter aircraft, and other systems, and more recently with COVID-19 vaccines. However, at the top of China's agenda has been finishing a code of conduct for the South China Sea in cooperation with ASEAN.

After a dispute with Manila last spring, the two nations [pledged to push forward on the draft](#) code of conduct, and American academics have openly worried that if allowed to play out fairly, the code of conduct drafting will produce a document more amenable to Chinese interests than American ones. One paper from the DC think tank Center on Foreign Relations ([CFR](#)) [proposed that Washington foul](#) the China-ASEAN negotiations, draw up a separate code of conduct with ASEAN nations amenable to its interests, and impose it on China.

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Six Injured, Three in Critical Condition After NYC Taxi Jumps Curb, Plows Into Pedestrians
By - Evan Craighead

The incident occurred around 1 p.m. local time in New York's Flatiron District near the Broadway-West 29th St. intersection—approximately four blocks south of the Empire State Building. The high-traffic commercial neighborhood boasts the multi-purpose Madison Square Garden arena, as well as trendy bars, Italian-American eateries, and food trucks.

At least six people have been hospitalized with varying injuries after a New York City taxi cab hopped a curb and struck a group of pedestrians before crashing into a building in Manhattan, according to New York City Police Department (NYPD) officials.

At least three individuals were said to be in critical condition upon transit to the nearby Bellevue Hospital.

The taxi driver is among those injured, and did not attempt to flee the scene, responding authorities noted.

The NYPD's afternoon news briefing detailed that those critically injured included two women who were pinned against a wall of the crash site and a cyclist who was also struck by the taxi driver amid a left-hand turn onto the busy Manhattan street.

"The cab seems to speed up, it strikes two female victims, and presses them against the wall," said NYPD Deputy Chief John Chell. "As this occurs, a remarkable scene took place — about 15 to 20 New Yorkers attempted to pick this cab off these women."

[Eyewitness footage](#) uploaded to Twitter and the Citizen app showed the taxi parked on the sidewalk as emergency personnel and onlookers traverse the area.

"They were on scene quickly and rendered aid, did everything they could," Chell said of the New York City Fire Department (FDNY) emergency personnel who responded to the incident. Members of the public have been told to avoid the area around the Broadway-W 29th St. intersection and 1186 Broadway, the initial address reported for the crash.

Preliminary findings suggest the driver may have lost control of the vehicle after suffering a medical emergency, [an NYPD spokesperson told Fox News Digital](#).

The NYPD, FDNY, and highway investigation personnel were all seen scouting the area for additional clues on the circumstances leading up to the Monday afternoon crash.

Investigating authorities have reportedly recovered video evidence of the incident.

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Japan Court Upholds Same-Sex Marriage Ban, Beleaguering LGBTQ+ Marriage Equality Efforts
By - Evan Craighead

Three same-sex couples each sought 1 million yen (\$7,414) in damages associated with the country's ban on same-sex marriage. The allegations of illegal discrimination raised by the plaintiffs—two male couples and one female—come parallel to several similar lawsuits filed in the cities of Sapporo, Tokyo, Nagoya, and Fukuoka.

The Japanese government's ban on same-sex marriage was upheld on Monday as the Osaka District Court moved to reject three same-sex couples' claims that Tokyo's failure to overturn its "discriminatory" ban on same-sex marriage violated the country's constitution.

The Osaka court argued that, while the disadvantages faced by same-sex couples have eased over time, "there have not been enough discussions among people in Japan" regarding the benefits that would exist under a system that recognized same-sex and opposite-sex unions. At the same time, future social shifts could result in a different court ruling, the Osaka District Court said, noting that "it may be possible to create a new system" that would provide same-sex couples with the same allowances and guarantees as those in traditional marriages.

The plaintiffs and their legal team have pledged to appeal the decision, panning the Monday ruling as unacceptable because "the court stayed away from making a decision."

"We don't have time to feel discouraged," said plaintiff Akiyoshi Tanaka, [as reported by the Associated Press](#).

In a same-day response, Amnesty International demanded Japanese government officials "undertake a thorough review of all laws, policies and practices that discriminate against same-sex couples in all walks of life."

"Japan's repressive ban on same-sex marriage must be consigned to history," [East Asia researcher Boram Jang](#) said in a quoted statement.

Meanwhile, the decision was well-received by government officials.

"The court recognized our claims that provisions in the civil law regarding marriage are not against the Constitution," said a Justice Ministry official, [as reported by Kyodo News](#).

The Monday ruling came as the second instance of a such a case being heard by a District Court in Japan, the only G7 member nation that does not legally recognize same-sex marriage in some form.

The issue of same-sex unions remains a divisive topic in the land of the rising sun, as the Monday ruling in Osaka came in opposition to a Sapporo court decision handed down last year. In March 2021, the Sapporo District Court ruled in favor of two same-sex couples who asserted the government's failure to overturn the country's ban on same-sex marriage amounted to a violation of [Article 14 of the constitution](#), which guarantees the right to equality.

"All of the people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin," according to Article 14.

The Sapporo and Osaka courts both rejected the plaintiffs' requests for 1 million yen (\$7,414) to cover costs associated with psychological damage and discrimination.

[Article 24 of the constitution](#) has remained a point of contention between same-sex marriage activists and the Japanese government, as Tokyo has traditionally interpreted the article as evidence that marriage can only exist between a man and woman, or "husband and wife."

"Marriage must be based solely on the mutual consent of both sexes and must be maintained through cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis," according to Article 24.

However, LGBTQ+ activists have argued that the use of "husband and wife" speaks more to the original authors' attempt at maintaining gender equality and individual self-worth, and less to the assumed parameters for marriage.

Same-sex couples are not just blocked from having a formal status, as individuals in an officially recognized marriage receive a number of government guarantees, including allowances on inheritance—including home ownership—and parental rights over a spouse's child.

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Israel Reportedly Suspects Iranian Cyberattack Triggered False Siren Alerts on Sunday
By - Evan Craighead

Israeli cybersecurity firm Check Point Research reported last week that Iran-based hackers led a spear-phishing operation to gain identifiable information belonging to high-ranking Israeli officials, including ex-Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, and other targets with ties to Tel Aviv. Tehran has not accepted responsibility for the alleged crimes.

Israeli cybersecurity officials believe an adversary-led cyberattack was responsible for a number of false siren alerts that rang for nearly an hour on Sunday in Eilat and Jerusalem's Talpiot, Katamon, and Beit Hakerem neighborhoods, according to the Israeli Army Radio and local Hebrew-language outlets.

Per the source, Israeli National Cyber Directorate (INCD) personnel are under the suspicion that a coordinated cyberattack was "behind a system malfunction" that allowed cyber criminals to

access and activate the municipality's siren systems—which have a different level of security than the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) Home Front Command alert system.

While the INCD has yet to confirm the suspected perpetrator of the alleged cyberattack, a former Israeli military official is one of several security experts speculating that Tehran may be the coordinator.

“Israel is preparing for Iranian attempts to harm the country through cyber warfare,” former IDF Deputy Chief of Staff Yair Golan told Army Radio.

Radiflow, an Israeli industrial cybersecurity startup, asserted the Sunday incident shined a light on a possible blind spot.

“Whether this siren attack by Iran was a false flag or accidental triggering remains to be seen but the lack of municipal cybersecurity is clear,” Radiflow CEO Ilan Barda said in a Monday statement.

No ransomware or extortion plot was uncovered by Israeli officials, according to officials on Monday.

A diplomatic source appeared to downplay the severity of the alleged cyberattack, [telling the Jerusalem Post](#) that “[t]here is constant cyber activity against Israel.”

“In terms of Israel working on increasing its cyber resilience, it is not in a bad place,” the unnamed diplomatic source told the outlet.

The individual highlighted that Tel Aviv, in cooperation with other nations, is set to build a cyber version of its Iron Dome defense system.

“The headlines exaggerated about the sirens yesterday,” claimed the diplomatic source.

Tehran has not responded to the siren system hacking allegations raised by various entities.

Tensions between Israel and Iran have been further strained in recent weeks following the assassination of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Colonel Hassan Sayyad Khodaei, [whose slaying was linked to Israeli forces by the New York Times](#).

As rhetoric intensifies between the Middle East nations, Tehran has vowed to avenge the late top officer and other Iran-linked security personnel in both Syria and Iran. The IRGC's pledge appears to have prompted Israel to give increased credence to so-called “concrete” threats. Warnings reached a new level on Friday as Israeli officials claimed to be in possession of intelligence that Iran was seeking to carry out a number of attacks over the past weekend, with several targeting some 2,000 Israelis in Istanbul.

“Cells of Iranians and Turkish mercenaries are out searching for Israelis at any cost,” a senior security official told Ynet news. “We can't foil every single attack; I urge Israelis to return home.” Israeli nationals capable of evacuating were instructed to “immediately leave Istanbul,” and others were told to remain in their locked hotel rooms and reduce identifying signs.

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Dave Chappelle Declines Having His Name Attached to Duke Ellington School After 'Closer' Backlash

Chappelle is considered one of the more recognizable graduates of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, and has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the institution. He graduated from the school in 1991.

Comedian Dave Chappelle announced late Monday that he has decided against having his name on a theatre building at his alma mater after facing months of backlash over comments he made during a Netflix special.

The announcement was aired by Chappelle during a dedication ceremony held at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington, DC. The performing arts theatre was intended to be named the "Dave Chappelle Theatre" but will instead be named "Theater of Artistic Freedom & Expression."

Chappelle most recently drew public ire after he made jokes during his latest Netflix special "Closer" that were deemed transphobic, with the topic growing more tense after his November visit to his alma mater saw students blast him for his remarks and accused him of endangering trans lives.

Addressing the backlash, Chappelle told the audience that while the criticism he faced lacked nuance, he ultimately did not want his name on the building to detract from the work being done at the arts school. The decision was officially made on Friday, he told eventgoers.

"No matter what they say about 'The Closer,' it is still [one of the] most watched specials on Netflix," he told the crowd. "The more you say I can't say something, the more urgent it is for me to say it. It has nothing to do with what you are saying I can't say. It has everything to do with my freedom of artistic expression."

He further noted that his decision on the renaming was not an all-out rejection but rather his intent to defer out of the respect for the institution.

At one point during the announcement, Chappelle remarked that the students who called him out last November had "sincerely" hurt him, and that they "didn't understand that they were instruments of artistic oppression."

In the fallout stemming from the Netflix special, the streaming giant saw several hundred of its employees stage walk outs over its poor efforts to handle complaints from the show. Days before the walk-outs, a Netflix employee had been fired for allegedly leaking financial disclosures about the Chappelle special, an accusation the former employee later rejected.

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Police: Shooting in Washington, DC, Leaves One Dead & Three People Injured

Throughout the day the nation's capital had been hosting multiple Juneteenth celebrations to commemorate the day that Union soldiers brought news of emancipation to enslaved African Americans in Texas in 1865.

One minor was killed and three other individuals were injured in Washington, DC, late Sunday after gunshots were fired, the city's police department has revealed.

An [announcement](#) issued by the DC Police Department details the shooting took place in the city's northwest jurisdiction, specifically within the area of 14th and U Street. At the time officials

had only stated that "multiple" were injured, and that one officer was among the injured tally.

The officer is believed to be in stable condition.

The cause of the shooting remains unclear.

Video shared online by local journalists and residents shows several police cruisers in the area, as well as ambulances.'

DC Police Chief Robert Contee told reporters that the event happened at "an unpermitted event by the Moechella group" and not a Juneteenth celebration.

An investigation is ongoing.

The Sunday incident comes one day after a shooting was reported at the nearby Tysons Corner Center mall in Virginia, which sent panicked customers and workers fleeing and taking cover. It was later reported that three had been hurt running from the mall, and that no one had been struck by a bullet. Authorities have since indicated that a bullet had been fired during a brawl.

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US Supreme Court Rules Against State Law Excluding Religious Schools From Tuition Program

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court on Tuesday struck down a tuition assistance program from the state of Maine that excluded religious schools from receiving funding and ruled that the restriction violates the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

"Maine's 'nonsectarian' requirement for its otherwise generally available tuition assistance payments violates the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment. Regardless of how the benefit and restriction are described, the program operates to identify and exclude otherwise eligible schools on the basis of their religious exercise," Chief Justice John Roberts said in the court's written opinion.

The First Amendment clauses on religion forbid the US government from making any law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise of religion.

The case involves a Maine program allowing parents in school districts without secondary schools to decide whether to send their children to public or private schools. Under the program, the school district transferred payments to the chosen school to offset the tuition costs, but only so long as the school qualified as "nonsectarian."

The ruling does not require Maine to fund religious education, Roberts also said in the written opinion. US states are not required to subsidize private education, but once a state decides to do so, it cannot disqualify some private schools solely because they are religious, Roberts said. The dissenting opinion, written by Justice Stephen Breyer, said the majority's decision focuses too much on protecting the free exercise of religion and not enough on avoiding the establishment of religion by the state. States have a degree of legislative leeway to act as Maine did under the program, Breyer said.

However, Roberts said a state's anti-establishment interest does not justify exclusion of community members from otherwise generally available public benefit due to their religious exercise. A neutral benefit program in which public funds flow to religious organizations through

the independent choice of private benefit recipients does not violate the First Amendment, he added.

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US State Dept. Says Ukraine Does Not Use Anti-Personnel Landmines

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) – Ukraine does not use anti-personnel landmines, and the United States has never supplied Kiev with any landmines that are not compliant with the Ottawa Convention, US Bureau of Political-Military Affairs Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Stanley Brown said on Tuesday.

"Ukraine is actually a party to the Ottawa Convention and cannot use landmines that do not comply with convention themselves. So, in itself, Ukraine is not using landmines and we have not provided landmines to Ukraine that aren't compliant with the Ottawa Convention," Brown told a press briefing, when asked whether Ukraine uses anti-personnel landmines.

Earlier in the day, the Biden administration announced that the United States will not develop, produce, or acquire anti-personnel landmines. It will not export or transfer APL, "except when necessary for activities related to mine detection or removal, and for the purpose of destruction," the White House said.

Since the beginning of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine in February, the United States has been the main provider of military assistance and equipment to Ukraine, committing about \$6.3 billion in total. The equipment sent to the country includes 1,400 Stinger anti-aircraft systems, 6,500 Javelin anti-armor systems, 700 Switchblade drones, 126 155mm howitzers among others.

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US Begins Enforcement of Ban on Imports From China's Xinjiang - Blinken

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) – The United States has started implementing the regulations that ban imports of goods from China's Xinjiang, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"Starting today, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) will begin to implement the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act's provisions to prohibit imports made by forced labor into the United States of products made in Xinjiang," Blinken said.

The bill, signed by President Joe Biden in December 2021, underscores Washington's commitment to combating forced labor globally, including in Xinjiang, he added.

Blinken accused authorities in Xinjiang of genocide and crimes against humanity.

"We have taken concrete measures to promote accountability in Xinjiang, including visa restrictions, financial sanctions under Global Magnitsky, export controls, Withhold Release Orders and import restrictions, as well as the release of a multi-agency business advisory on

Xinjiang to help U.S. companies avoid commerce that facilitates or benefits from human rights abuses, including forced labor," Blinken said.

He reaffirmed that combating forced labor and human rights abuses in China and around the world is a US priority, he added.

The United States has repeatedly accused Beijing of arbitrarily imprisoning members of Muslim minority groups in a system of extrajudicial mass internment camps, where people are reportedly forced to produce textiles, electronics, food products, shoes, tea, and handicrafts. Beijing, in turn, has consistently denied the existence of "re-education camps," insisting that the country fully complies with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

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US Successfully Tests Diamond Shield Management System in Guam War Games - Lockheed Martin

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The US Indo-Pacific Command successfully operated a new Diamond Shield battle management system linked to Aegis missile and air defense virtualized operations in the Valiant Shield military exercises on and around Guam, Lockheed Martin said in a press release on Tuesday.

"Lockheed Martin paired its Diamond Shield battle management system with four Virtualized Aegis Weapon System (VAWS) nodes deployed across hundreds of miles to successfully demonstrate multi-domain operations during a recent US military exercise," the release said. During the 12-day event in Guam and other sites in the Pacific, Lockheed Martin cooperated with the Indo-Pacific Command in operating artificial intelligence to accelerate the rate of decision-making to seconds or minutes instead of hours, the release also said.

"The exercise, called Valiant Shield 2022, is a biennial training activity involving thousands of US. military personnel and more than 200 ships, aircraft and ground vehicles," the release added.

The Diamond Shield-VAWS linkup operated at strategic, operational and tactical levels of missions across air, land, sea and space during the exercise, according to the release.

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State Dept. Confirms Second US Citizen Died in Ukraine - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - A US State Department spokesperson on Tuesday confirmed to Sputnik the death of a second US citizen Stephen Zabielski in Ukraine amid Russia's special military operation there.

"We can confirm the death of US citizen Stephen Zabielski in Ukraine. We have been in touch with the family and have provided all possible consular assistance," the spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik.

According to Zabielski's obituary, he was killed on May 15 while engaging in combat operations in Ukraine. The obituary was published on June 1 but was not reported on until Monday by US corporate media.

US Marine Corps veteran Willy Joseph Cancel, who died in April, was the first confirmed mercenary from the United States to be killed fighting in Ukraine.

On Friday, media reported that a third US citizen has gone missing in Ukraine and it is believed that he is former Marine Corps service member Grady Kurpasi.

US citizens Alexander Druke, 39, and Andy Huynh, 27, were captured by Russian forces near Kharkiv last week. The two had been identified as being a US Army veteran and a US Marine Corps veteran, respectively.

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Biden to Nominate First Native American as US Treasurer - White House

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) – President Joe Biden will nominate Marilynn Malerba as US Treasurer, making her the first Native American to hold the position, the White House said on Tuesday.

"Malerba is the Chief of the Mohegan Tribe, a lifetime appointment made by the Tribe's Council of Elders. Prior to becoming chief, she served as chairwoman of the Mohegan Tribal Council, and served in Tribal Government as Executive Director of Health and Human Services," the White House said in a statement. "Preceding her work for the Mohegan Tribe, Chief Malerba had a lengthy career as a registered nurse, ultimately serving as the Director of Cardiology and Pulmonary Services at Lawrence & Memorial Hospital."

Malerba is a member of the Treasury Tribal Advisory Committee, a seven-member committee which advises the Secretary of the Treasury on issues related to taxing Native Americans, training field agents of the Internal Revenue Service, and developing training and technical assistance to Native American financial officers.

The Treasurer of the United States is responsible for the smooth running of the US Mint, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, Fort Knox, and is a key liaison with the Federal Reserve. Malerba will also act as senior advisor to the Secretary of the Treasury focused on community development and public engagement.

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US Designates New Mobile Radar to Track Hypersonic Missiles, Drones - Northrop Grumman

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The US government has designated a new rapidly mobile and movable radar capable of closely tracking hypersonic weapons, unmanned aerial vehicles, fifth generation combat aircraft and other threats, Northrop Grumman announced in a press release on Tuesday.

"Northrop Grumman's long-range radar, an advanced digital radar available in the market today, has been officially recognized by the US government as the AN/TPY-5(V)1 making it the newest multi-mission air-surveillance radar available to the US military and its international partners," the release said.

"The AN/TPY-5(V)1 provides enhanced surveillance and a robust multifunction capability," Northrop Grumman Vice President Mike Meaney said. "This S-band system features advanced electronic protection combined with a high degree of mobility that will help ensure survivability in today's complex battlespace."

The new system is capable of facing the challenges of fifth-generation fighters, hypersonic weapons, unmanned systems and ballistic missiles, the release said.

"AN/TPY-5(V)1's size and form factor have been optimized for expeditionary operation on a modern, global battlefield, making its intrinsic capability to self-deploy, emplace and displace in minutes - a key discriminator compared to other systems," the release added.

The radar's advanced digital AESA architecture and command and control integration have been combined to enable protection and situational understanding for warfighters, according to the release.

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US Attorney General Making Unannounced Visit to Ukraine - Reports

(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - US Attorney General Merrick Garland is making an unannounced visit to Ukraine, ABC News reported on Tuesday, citing a Justice Department official.

Garland is due to meet with Ukrainian Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova to discuss efforts to help identify and prosecute individuals involved in war crimes in Ukraine, the report cited the official as saying.

Garland is visiting Ukraine to re-iterate Washington's support for Kiev in what it claims to be "an unprovoked and unjust Russian invasion," the report said.

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. Russia has said the goal of the special military operation is to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine.

Last week, US President Joe Biden told reporters that it is not likely for him to visit Ukraine during his upcoming trip to Europe.

Biden will visit Germany and Spain from June 25-28 for the Group of Seven (G7) and NATO summits. The NATO summit will take place in Madrid, Spain, on June 28.

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Musk Confirms Tesla to Fire 10% of Workers in Next 3 Months

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - Tesla CEO Elon Musk confirmed on Tuesday that his electric vehicle company will fire 10% of the workforce over the next three months.

"Tesla is reducing roughly 10% of its salaried staff in the next three months," Musk said at the Qatar Economic Forum.

The statement confirmed reports that have been circulating in the media for two weeks now.

"We grew very fast on the salaried side. A year from now, I think our headcount will be higher," the world's richest man said, adding that Tesla has already cut 3.5% of its jobs.

The announcement comes days after Tesla shareholder Solomon Chau filed a lawsuit against the billionaire entrepreneur, Tesla Inc. and its board of directors over their alleged encouragement of discriminatory practices in the workplace. The document cites multiple cases of verbal abuse, racial and sexual discrimination and harassment against Tesla's employees.

The plaintiff believes that Tesla's "toxic workplace culture" caused "financial harm" and "irreparable" reputational damage to the detriment of the firm's stockholders.

Last week, Bloomberg reported that Musk and his companies Tesla and SpaceX were being jointly sued for \$258 billion over claims that they had engineered a racketeering scheme involving the cryptocurrency Dogecoin.

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Biden Administration to Limit Use of Land Mines - White House

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) – The United States will limit the use of anti-personnel mines, the White House's National Security Council spokesperson said on Tuesday.

"Today, the Biden-Harris Administration is announcing an important step to limit the United States' use of anti-personnel landmines," Adrienne Watson said.

The United States will align its policy concerning use of these weapons outside of the Korean Peninsula with key provisions of the Ottawa Convention, the international treaty prohibiting the use, stockpiling, production, and transfer of anti-personnel landmines, she added.

"Additionally, the President will prohibit the development, production, and acquisition of anti-personnel landmines prohibited under the Ottawa Convention, and will direct the Department of Defense to undertake diligent efforts to pursue alternatives to anti-personnel landmines that would be compliant with and ultimately allow the United States to accede to the Ottawa Convention, while ensuring our continued ability to respond to global contingencies," the statement read.

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US Attorney General Making Unannounced Visit to Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - US Attorney General Merrick Garland is making an unannounced visit to Ukraine, ABC News reported on Tuesday, citing a Justice Department official said.

Garland is due to meet with Ukrainian Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova to discuss efforts to help identify and prosecute those involved in "war crimes" in Ukraine, according to the official.

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US Air Travel Chaos Eases After 21,000 Flights Canceled, Delayed Over Busy Weekend

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Spirit) - US air travel returned to normal after a hectic weekend that saw more than 21,000 flights delayed or canceled.

At least 7,224 flights were delayed or canceled on Sunday and 4,075 on Saturday, according to the FlightAware tracking service's dashboard. This came after 10,410 were canceled or delayed on Friday, USA Today reported citing FlightAware. The three-day total amounts to 21,709, including 3,167 cancels and 18,542 delays.

The figure dropped to 3,824 by end of day Monday, the dashboard showed, including 3,445 delays and 379 cancels.

Much of the heavy traffic was due to Juneteenth, a new federal holiday observed on Monday, and Father's Day on Sunday, experts told CNN.

The Transportation Safety Administration screened 2.4 million travelers US airports on Friday, increasing 17 percent from the Friday before Father's Day last year, the agency said.

When demand for flights tumbled during the first year of the pandemic, major American airlines slashed employees using early retirement packages and buyouts to cull staff. But in the aftermath of the global pandemic, airlines have had great difficulty building employees numbers to pre-pandemic levels.

Unfortunately, staffing and scheduling issues continue to plague the airlines and bad weather also adds to the difficulty of scheduling flights.

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Second American Volunteer Died Fighting in Ukraine - Obituary

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - A second American volunteer, Stephen Zabielski, from the state of Florida, died while fighting in Ukraine last month, according to his obituary published in the local newspaper The Recorder.

"Zabielski, of Hernando, FL, formerly of Cranesville, NY, died on Sunday, May 15, 2022, while fighting the war in Village of Dorozhniak, Ukraine," the obituary said.

The obituary was published on June 1 but not reported on until Monday by Rolling Stone and The Washington Post.

The Washington Post reported, citing a US official, that the State Department has provided Zabielski's family with all the possible consular assistance it can.

The Rolling Stone reported that Zabielski, a US Army veteran, was killed by a land mine.

The State Department did not immediately respond to Sputnik's inquiry to confirm Zabielski's death.

US Marine Corps veteran Willy Joseph Cancel, 22, who died in April, was the first confirmed American volunteer to be killed while fighting in Ukraine.

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Iranian Military Vessels Come Into Close Contact With US Ships in Persian Gulf - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - Three military vessels belonging to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) came within close proximity of two US Navy ships operating in the Persian Gulf, The Washington Post reported.

Three high-speed IRGC boats came directly towards the USS Sirocco and USNS Choctaw County, getting as close as 50 yards, the report said on Monday, citing a US military official. Audible warning signals and a warning flare were deployed by the US ships, the report added. The encounter, which lasted approximately one hour, concluded with the IRGC boats leaving the area, according to the report.

The Iranian vessels acted in a way that "did not meet the international standards of professional or safe maritime behavior," US Central Command spokesman Col. Joseph Buccino was quoted as saying in the report.

US forces will continue operations at air and at sea anywhere international law allows in order to promote regional stability, Buccino also said.

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Peskov Says Ukraine Conflict Will Be Long Crisis, Russian Will Not Trust West Anymore

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said in an interview that the Ukraine crisis will be a long conflict and Russia will no longer trust the West.

"Yes, it will be a long lasting crisis, but we'll never trust [the] West any more," Peskov said in an NBC interview that aired on Monday when asked if the Ukraine conflict will be long-lasting.

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Double Standards Applied in Settlement of Situation in Syria - Russian Deputy Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, June 21 (Sputnik) - The Western countries are applying double standards in the attempts to settle the conflict in Syria, Russia's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyansky said.

"It's hard not to conclude that there are double standards regarding the settlement of the situation in Syria," Polyansky said during a meeting of the UN Security Council on Monday. The Russian diplomat said the members of the Security Council should focus more on the cross-line deliveries to the Syrian province of Idlib.

"We regret the fact that we don't see a similar caucus regarding other serious issues, including early recovery work and cross-line deliveries of humanitarian assistance," Polyanskiy said. Russia is disappointed that the cross-line deliveries are not used enough and they can and should replace cross-border crossing, he added.

Polyanskiy's comments come amid a heated debate as the Western states seek to keep the current United Nations resolution that allows for humanitarian cross-border deliveries. By contrast, Russia advocates increasing the share of cross-line deliveries that Moscow says are easier to control.

In July 2021, resolution 2585 authorizing one crossing point and stressing the need to improve cross-line deliveries and early recovery projects were adopted as a result of a compromise between Russian and US negotiators. If not renewed, the resolution will expire on July 10.

As of now, Russia has not indicated whether it would veto renewing the resolution.

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Texas Republican Party Approves Resolution Rejecting 2020 Presidential Election Results

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The Texas Republican Party passed a resolution that declares US President Joe Biden did not legitimately win the 2020 presidential election.

"We reject the certified results of the 2020 Presidential election, and we hold that acting President Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. was not legitimately elected by the people of the United States," the Texas Republican Party said in a press release. "We strongly urge all Republicans to work to ensure election integrity and to show up to vote in November of 2022, bring your friends and family, volunteer for your local Republicans, and overwhelm any possible fraud." Texas' Republican Party adopted a new so-called platform that calls for a measure recognizing the state's right to secede from the United States because the federal government has impaired the right of local self-government.

"Texas retains the right to secede from the United States and the Texas Legislature should be called upon to pass a referendum consistent thereto," the release added.

Moreover, the Texas Republican Party believes that all gun control measures are a violation of the US law that grants Americans the right to bear arms. The party also calls for repealing the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which is a landmark US law that prohibits racial discrimination in voting.

In addition, the release said the Texas Republican Party backs the idea of the United States withdrawing from UN.

Texas Republican Chairman Matt Rinaldi told the Texas Newsroom media outlet that Democrats have an incompatible vision for the future of the United States, so the conservative party must be ready to go on the offense and win the fight for the country.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) -

UKRAINE DEVELOPMNETS

* Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in an interview with MSNBC on Monday that the two Americans captured in Ukraine have committed crimes and are not subject to the Geneva Conventions.

* EU Foreign Ministers expressed their intention to continue comprehensive support for Ukraine, including military, as well as continue to put pressure on Russia, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said following the EU Council meeting in Luxembourg.

* European Council President Charles Michel said that he would call on the European leaders to grant Ukraine and Moldova a candidate status at the upcoming EU summit in Brussels on June 23-24.

KALININGRAD

* Moscow has lodged a protest to the Lithuanian charge d'affaires in Russia in connection with the decision of Vilnius to ban rail cargo transit to the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, the Russian foreign ministry said on Monday.

* Lithuanian Railways has sent an additional request to the European Commission to clarify transit restrictions to Kaliningrad, Kaliningrad Region Governor Anton Alikhanov said.

* Lithuania's decision to ban rail cargo transit to the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad is unprecedented, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, calling it a "violation of everything."

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN ISRAEL

* Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid will support a bill to dissolve the Knesset, a government spokesman said in a statement.

* Elections to the Israeli parliament may be scheduled after the Jewish holidays at the end of October, the Gaalei IDF broadcaster reported.

ATTACK ON CRIMEA OIL PLATFORM

* The Ukrainian military attacked the drilling platforms of the oil company Chernomoneftgaz on Monday, Crimean Head Sergey Aksenov said, adding that several workers are missing following the incident.

* Aksyonov said that 94 people had been evacuated from drilling platforms after an attack by Ukrainian troops.

ENERGY MARKETS

* Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday that Russia has enough gas and is ready to deliver it but Europe has refused to return turbines that are under repair, adding that the current crisis is "man-made."

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US, Allies Working on Russia Oil Price Cap to Allow More Crude to Hit Market - Yellen
(Updates with details, background in paras 4-6)

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - The United States and its allies are working hard on a collective plan to place a price cap on Russian oil that will allow more crude to reach the market while reducing Russia's revenue, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Monday.

"We are talking about price caps, or a price exception, that would enhance and strengthen recent and proposed energy restrictions by Europe, the United States, the United Kingdom and others that would push down the price of Russian oil," Yellen said during a press conference.

When asked how soon the United States and its allies could implement such a plan, Yellen said they are working hard on it and the public should stay tuned.

Yellen explained that the price cap could serve as an exception to the partial ban that the European Union has placed on Russian oil.

Moreover, Yellen said a price cap could also serve as an important way to prevent spillover effects to low-income and developing countries that are struggling with high costs of food and energy.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Western sanctions against Russia would have no effect on the country's oil exports and predicted a surge in profits from energy shipments this year.

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UN Security Council Appeals to All Member States to Renew Syria Cross-Border Resolution

UNITED NATIONS, June 20 (Sputnik) - The members of the UN Security Council should renew resolution 2585 on cross-border operations in Syria for additional 12 months, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Monday.

"I strongly appeal to the members of the Council to maintain consensus on allowing cross-border operations by renewing resolution 2585 for an additional twelve months," Guterres said. "When it comes to delivering life-saving aid to people in need across Syria, all channels should be made and kept available."

Guterres said that cross-line assistance, which some members believe should replace the cross-border deliveries, is not sufficient to satisfy the number of people in need in Syria.

"While increasing cross-line assistance was an important achievement, in the present circumstances, it is not at the scale needed to replace the massive cross-border response," Guterres said.

According to the United Nations, 4.1 million people are in need of humanitarian aid in Northwest Syria and women and children constitute 80% of them.

Earlier in the day, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said the world body needs the cross-border entry point to address all the people in need.

The appeal comes ahead of the UN Security Council's vote in early July on whether the cross-border aid from Turkey into Northeast Syria will continue to function. Russia and China vetoed two border crossings in July 2020. Since, one border crossing has been allowed but its mandate will expire on July 10.

In July 2021, Resolution 2585 authorizing one crossing point and stressing the need to improve cross-line deliveries and early recovery projects were adopted as a result of a compromise between Russian and US negotiators. The resolution will expire on July 10 but there are concerns that the current challenging geopolitical situation overshadows new efforts to agree and extend it.

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US Ex-Vice President Pence Says Biden Has 'No Idea' How to Lower Energy Prices

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has "no idea" how to deal with the record high energy prices with gas prices similarly rising due to his war on the energy sector and not because of the Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, former Vice President Mike Pence said on Monday.

"The President [Joe Biden] has clearly no idea how to bring energy prices down. He released oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve on several occasions, which failed to make a dent in the prices at the pump," Pence said in remarks at the University Club of Chicago. "Gasoline prices are skyrocketing not because of the war in Ukraine, gas prices are rising because of Joe Biden's war on energy."

Pence said high gas prices in the United States should not come as a surprise to Americans given that Biden had promised to "end fossil fuels" during the 2020 presidential campaign. Earlier on Monday, Biden said that a White House team will meet with the CEOs of major US oil companies this week to discuss their profits amid significant increases in consumer prices at the pump.

The average price of a gallon of gas in the United States has increased to more than \$5 per gallon in June, with diesel also at record-high prices above \$6 a gallon.

The Biden administration has said the impact of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine and alleged price gouging by energy firms are responsible for higher fuel prices. Biden on Monday also partially blamed companies not refining enough oil for impacting supply.

However, Russia has denied the accusations, saying the sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies, as well as Ukraine mining the Black Sea, have dislocated the market and contributed to higher energy, food and fertilizer prices.

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Freeland Says Hopes Canada Soon Passes Budget Bill Allowing Sanctioned Asset Freezes

TORONTO, June 20 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government is hopeful that they will pass budget legislation soon allowing for the freezing or confiscation of sanctioned assets, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said on Monday.

"We hope that in the coming days my budget legislation will be passed, and that does include, for the first time in Canada, measures that would allow us to confiscate, as well as to freeze, sanctions assets," Freeland said during a press conference alongside US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen.

Freeland also said that she discussed the measures with Yellen and other international partners. Canada believes it is important to extend legal authorities to find money to help rebuild Ukraine, including through allowing the confiscation of sanctioned Russian assets, Freeland added.

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Police Offers \$25,000 Award for Information on Gunman in Washington Shooting Sunday

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - The suspect behind the fatal shooting in Washington, DC on Sunday is still on the run and a \$25,000 award is being offered to anyone with information that leads to an arrest, the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) said on Monday.

"Last night's shooting tragically took the life of a 15-year-old boy and left three others, including an MPD officer, injured," MPD said in a press release. "The person who took Chase's life and brought this violence to our community must be held accountable."

Anyone with information that leads to the suspect's arrest and conviction will be eligible for a reward of up to \$25,000, the release said.

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Oil Up 1% on Supply Tightness, Clawing a Little Ground After Last Week's 9% Plunge

NEW YORK, June 20 (Sputnik) - Crude prices rose by as much as nearly 1% on Monday as concerns over supply tightness helped oil markets claw back some ground from last week's 9% plunge triggered by worries of a US recession and demand destruction for energy.

"The market remains extremely tight but the threat of recession is one of the few negative forces for crude prices," Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said.

Oil production in Libya, one of key states in the 13-member Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, had reportedly returned to 700,000 barrels per day from recent lows of 100,000-150,000, further limiting the potential for gains in the near term.

"Whether that will be enough to create anything more than two-way price action is another thing," Erlam said. "The price had been powering higher over the previous month and the bullish case remains far more convincing."

London-traded Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, settled up \$1.01, or 0.9%, at \$114.13.

Brent tumbled more than 7% last week for its first weekly drop in eight and the sharpest in two months.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate, the benchmark for US crude, rose 78 cents, or 0.7%, to stand at \$110.17 in subdued trade on the Juneteenth US holiday. WTI plunged 9% last week for its first and worst weekly decline since April.

Prior to last week's tumble, analysts had warned for weeks that WTI and Brent were severely overbought as both crude benchmarks tacked on about \$20 each in gains over the past two months. The oil trade took serious note of the warning on Friday, after US factory output fell for a fifth straight month as firms struggled with supply-chain bottlenecks and high costs despite industrial production itself rising.

The Federal Reserve's divisional chief for Minneapolis, Neel Kashkari, also warned that US interest rates might have to go higher if inflation doesn't retreat from current four-decade highs. That was a sign that the central bank's three-quarter percentage point increase in June — the largest in 28 years — could be followed up with more major hikes. This was despite its chairman Jerome Powell assuring that there will be no more super-sized rate hikes this year. On the contrary, Powell said rate cuts could actually come as early as 2024.

US inflation, as indicated by the Consumer Price Index, grew at an annualized rate of 8.6% in May — more than four times the 2% target of the central bank, which has vowed to do what it takes to bring price pressures down.

Economists, however, fear the US economy will slip into a recession with the way rate hikes are increasing.

The economy has already shown a negative growth of 1.4% for the first quarter. If it does not return to the positive by the second quarter, the United States will technically be in a recession, given that it takes just two straight quarters of negative growth to make a recession.

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Global Corporate Tax Would Increase Benefits to Multinational Home Countries - Yellen

OTTAWA, June 20 (Sputnik) - A global corporate minimum tax rate agreement would be beneficial to all participating countries as it would oblige multinationals operating in a signatory member territory to pay their taxes at home or face financial losses, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said at a press conference in Toronto on Monday.

"The way it works is that if a country has adopted the tax that country may then proceed to impose taxes on the multinationals in other countries that do not have the tax. So, if we impose the tax in the United States, and we have multinationals based in another country, operating in the United States, we are free to impose taxes on those companies now, on their profits from their operations in the United States," Yellen said alongside Canadian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland.

At least 136 countries agreed to a global minimum tax rate in a deal that was announced last year. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a minimum tax rate of 15% will apply to companies with revenues over 750 million euros (\$787 million).

The OECD said the objective is to re-allocate profit of the largest multinational enterprises to countries worldwide. The OECD envisages implementation of the new rules by 2023.

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Core Stage Hydrogen Leak Halts Fourth Full Rehearsal for Artemis Moon Rocket - NASA

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - Artemis Moon Project engineers halted their fourth attempt at a full dress rehearsal test of the Space Launch System (SLS) mega-rocket and its Orion 1 spacecraft after a hydrogen leak was detected in the core stage of the booster, NASA Ground Systems said on Monday.

"Liquid oxygen upper stage is now in stop flow," NASA Ground Systems said in a Twitter message. "The team has discovered a hydrogen leak at a quick disconnect for the core stage and are currently working to understand the situation."

NASA later said the upper stage liquid hydrogen is now full.

"The team is still troubleshooting the leak at the core stage quick disconnect. Team is working to manually adjust the LOX pressure in upper stage to get back into tanking. Plan for small fire at pad is to allow it to burn out," the agency said in another tweet.

Artemis engineers were making their fourth attempt this year at a full wet dress rehearsal or check and count down of the Artemis system to within 10 seconds of launch and had fueled liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen into the core stage through Monday morning, an official NASA blog noted earlier.

If the rehearsal check out had gone well, Artemis 1 could have finally been launched on its prototype unmanned test mission in the second half of August, Exploration Systems Development Mission Directorate Associate Administrator Jim Free told reporters last Wednesday.

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US Could Return to 'Inflation Decade of 1970s' - Federal Reserve Banker Bullard

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - The United States could return to the unanchored-inflation style of the 1970s that could take years for the Federal Reserve to fix, the central bank's regional chief for the state of Missouri said in a speech on Monday.

"In the 1970s, inflation expectations became unmoored, and it took years for the Fed to bring inflation back to lower levels," St. Louis Fed President James Bullard said in a speech prepared for delivery at an economic conference in Barcelona.

The 1970s was generally known as the decade of inflation in the United States. While the average inflation rate for the decade was 6.8%, it was double the long-run historical average and nearly triple the rate of the previous two decades.

"The real economy was also volatile during this process," Bullard said, referring to that era. Similarly, current price pressures are above target and at levels last seen in the 1970s and early 1980s, he said.

"US inflation expectations could become unmoored without credible Fed action, possibly leading to a new regime of high inflation and volatile real economic performance," Bullard said. "The Fed has reacted by taking important first steps to return inflation to the 2% target. Market interest rates have increased substantially, partially in response to promised Fed action." The mooring or anchoring of inflation expectations is a necessary condition for central banks to maintain price stability, as it prevents temporary shocks to inflation from feeding into the

mechanisms of wage and price formation. De-anchoring produces the opposite effect, creating instability.

The International Monetary Fund's First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath said earlier this month that US inflation could exceed the Fed's targets longer than thought and become "de-anchored" to expectations.

The Fed announced last week its stiffest US rate hike in 28 years to fight inflation, adding a three-quarter point that brought key lending rates to as high as 1.75% from May's peak of 1%. US inflation, as indicated by the Consumer Price Index, grew at an annualized rate of 8.6% in May — more than four times the Fed's target. The Fed's preferred rate of inflation is a mere 2% a year and it has vowed to raise rates as high and long as necessary to bring price growth back to its annual target.

Economists, however, fear that the Fed will push the US economy into a recession with the way it's going with rate hikes.

The US economy has already shown a negative growth of 1.4% for the first quarter. If it does not return to the positive by the second quarter, the United States will technically be in a recession, given that it takes just two straight quarters of negative growth to make a recession. Fed Chair Jerome Powell denied assertions last week that the central bank was pushing the country toward recession, even as he expressed doubts about whether the central bank could achieve a so-called soft landing for the US economy.

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UN Continues to Engage With Taliban, Must Continue in Future - High Commissioner

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - The United Nations continues to be in contact with the Taliban (under UN sanctions for terrorism) and believes the engagement must continue in the future, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said on Monday.

"I think one positive thing that happened last August was the decision, in particular by the United Nations and its organizations, to continue to engage with the Taliban. This is not recognition, this is engagement on humanitarian grounds," Grandi said in an interview with The Washington Post.

Grandi explained the efforts at engagement have allowed the United Nations to have the Taliban as an interlocutor.

The United Nations has seen over the past several months some progress in terms of security but also some stagnation and some bad decisions such as the one made recently not to allow girls attend high school, Grandi said.

"But by and large there is dialogue, there is engagement and this must continue," Grandi added. The Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in the fall of 2021 following the United States pullout from the country and established an interim government. The new government has not yet been internationally recognized even though the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan - the country's name as used by the Taliban - was restored in December.

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Peskov Says Detained US Citizen Brittney Griner Not Hostage, Violated Russian Law

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in an interview with MSNBC on Monday that US basketball player Brittney Griner, who was detained in Russia, is not a hostage because she violated Russian law and as a consequence is being prosecuted. "I would strongly disagree with that, we cannot call her a hostage," Peskov said regarding claims Griner is a hostage. "She violated Russian law, and now she is being prosecuted. It's not about being a hostage."

On February 18, Griner, a two-time Olympic gold medalist, was detained at a Moscow airport after a police dog alerted officers to a vape cartridges containing cannabis oil in her luggage.

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Peskov Says 2 Americans Captured in Ukraine 'Committed Crimes'

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in an interview with MSNBC on Monday that the two Americans captured in Ukraine have committed crimes and are not subject to the Geneva Conventions.

When asked whether the two captured Americans are the prisoners of war," Peskov said. "I wouldn't start explaining the juridical side of their capture. So, they have committed crimes. They are not a Ukrainian army. They are not a subject to the Geneva conventions."

Peskov emphasized that the actions of the captured Americans will be investigated, but also pointed out that they are "soldiers of fortune" and have been involved in illegal activities such as firing and shelling Russia's military personnel and endangering their life.

"They should be held responsible for those crimes that they have committed and those crimes have to be investigated. They are being held in due place to ensure that the investigation of their crimes is being completed," he said.

When asked whether the two captured Americans are being held by the authorities of the Donetsk People's Republic or Russia's authorities, Peskov said, "By [the] due authorities."

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UN Calls on Parties to Conflict in Ukraine to Spare, Protect Civilians - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, June 18 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is calling on the parties to the conflict in Ukraine to spare civilians and to allow them to receive assistance, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"We call on them [the parties] to make sure that civilians in Ukraine who have already gone through immense suffering are not only spared but have the opportunity to receive assistance," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

Dujarric pointed out that based on reports from United Nations partners on the ground in the Donbas, the Ukrainian troops have continued shelling civilian settlements in the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics.

"Intense hostilities were reported over the weekend across government and non-government controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblast. In Donetsk, hostilities and shelling were particularly intense since Friday," Dujarric said.

Dozens of residences, schools and other civilian structures have been demolished in Donetsk over the weekend and civilian casualties have been reported as a result of the shelling, according to media reports.

Dujarric said the conditions have been similar in Luhansk, where fighting has continued to make life "extremely difficult for people in Severodonetsk, Lysychansk and other places in both government and non-government controlled areas."

The United Nations, along with its partners on the ground, stands ready to expand its presence on the ground, Dujarric added.

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Number of Adults in US Using Smartphones 'Too Much' Increases by Fifth - Poll

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - The number of adults in the United States who acknowledge they are using their smartphones "too much" has increased in the past seven years by almost a fifth and the sentiment is shared by all other age groups, a new Gallup poll revealed on Monday.

"The percentage of US adults saying they use their smartphone 'too much' has increased markedly in recent years, rising from 39% when Gallup last asked this in 2015 to 58% today," a release about the poll said. "This sentiment was strongly age-contingent in 2015 and remains so now; however, all age groups have become more likely to express this concern."

The poll results show that smartphone users in the 30-49-year-old age bracket are just as likely as younger users to say they use their smart phones too much.

"Even as Americans believe they use their smartphone too much, nearly two-thirds think their smartphone has made their life better - 21% say it has made their life 'a lot' better and 44% 'a little' better. This has declined slightly from the 72% perceiving a net benefit in 2015," the release said.

Meanwhile, 12 percent of users say smartphones have made their life worse to any degree, double the number in 2015, the release said.

Using smartphones for online purchases, instead of using computers, increased from 11% in 2015 to 42% at present, the release also said.

In addition, there has been a 23-25 point increase in the Americans' reliance on smartphones for browsing the internet, comparing prices or browsing products online and managing their finances, the release added.

The percentage of those relying on smartphones to access social media has risen 17 points, as has managing investments that has seen a 14-point increase, according to the release.

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Biden Says White House Team to Meet With Major Oil Company Chiefs This Week

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - A White House team will meet with the CEOs of major oil companies this week to discuss their profits amid significant increases in consumer prices at the gas pump, US President Joe Biden said on Monday.

"My team is going to be sitting down with the CEOs of major oil companies this week, so I can get an explanation of how they justify making \$35 billion in the first quarter," Biden said during remarks from a beach in Delaware.

Biden also said that he will not personally participate in the meeting.

The discussion will occur amid rising energy prices around the world, including in the United States. The average price of a gallon of gas in the US rose to over \$5 a gallon in June, with diesel also at record-high prices above \$6 a gallon.

The Biden administration has said the impact of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine and alleged price gouging by energy firms are responsible for higher fuel prices. Biden on Monday also partially blamed companies not refining enough oil for impacting supply.

However, Russia has denied the accusations, saying the sanctions imposed by the US and its allies, as well as Ukraine's mining the Black Sea, have upended the market and contributed to higher energy, food and fertilizer prices.

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Biden Says Ukraine Very Likely to Become EU Member

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Monday he believes Ukraine is very likely to join the European Union.

"I think that's very likely to happen," Biden told reporters, when asked whether he is confident that Ukraine will become a member of the European Union.