

7/25/22 Monday

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Iran Won't Be Rushed into 'Quick' Deal, But If US Has Same Goodwill, JCPOA Return is Close - Tehran

After negotiations stalled for months on what seemed to be the precipice of a return to the Iran nuclear deal, talks resumed last month in Qatar but made no real progress. Meanwhile, Washington has imposed new sanctions on Iran while sending signals suggesting that the window for a deal is closing rapidly.

Iran won't be rushed into a "quick" deal to revive the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), but if the US has the goodwill Iran does, then a return is close, a government spokesperson said on Monday.

"They demand that Iran makes a quick decision, (insisting that) time is limited and Iran must respond quickly," foreign ministry spokesman [Nasser Kanani told reporters](#) at a press conference. He said the Islamic Republic will "not sacrifice the country's fundamental interests... with a rushed process."

"If the US acts constructively and positively, an agreement is close," Kanani added.

The 2015 deal provided for the removal of US and UN sanctions against Iran in exchange for Iran accepting strict limitations on the purity of uranium-235 it could refine and the volume it could store, as well as giving up any pursuit of nuclear weapons. However, three years later, the Trump administration unilaterally pulled out of the agreement, accusing Iran of secretly violating the deal, and [reimposing harsh sanctions](#) that damaged Iran's economy and frustrated its response to the COVID-19 pandemic that struck in early 2020.

Then-US President Donald Trump's move was part of a "maximum pressure" campaign aimed at toppling the Iranian government and included attacks on Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria allegedly backed by Iran, as well as the positioning of extensive US forces in the Persian Gulf region, the adding of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to the US' list of foreign terrorist groups, and the assassination of the IRGC Quds Force's commander, [Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani](#), during a January 2020 trip to Iraq.

Talks to revive the deal began in 2021, after US President Joe Biden took office, with Biden saying he believes the JCPOA is the best way to stop Iran from getting a nuclear bomb.

Although by early 2022 they had nearly reached a deal, a number of obstacles have remained, including Biden's [refusal to take the IRGC off the list](#) or to provide guarantees to Tehran that a future administration won't back out again, as Trump did.

In addition, Biden's CIA director, William Burns, has twice stated since then that US intelligence [doesn't believe Iran ever restarted](#) its nuclear weapons program after abandoning it in 2004, meaning that all US and Israeli posturing about an [imminent Iranian nuclear weapon](#) were lies. According to [a recent publication](#) in the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a US think tank, Iranian leaders fear that without securing the removal of the IRGC from the US' terrorist

list, they will lack sufficient domestic support for accepting the deal already arrived at in the Vienna talks.

On Monday, [Mohammad Eslami, the head](#) of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, told reporters that the cameras at Iranian nuclear facilities that are owned by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) but which exceed the deal made in March, would remain off until a new JCPOA was signed. Iran [turned those cameras off](#) last month after IAEA chief Rafael [Grossi stopped in Israel](#) to meet with Prime Minister Naftali Bennett ahead of the IAEA meeting. Tehran cried foul, as the cameras at its nuclear facilities were installed after a deal to strengthen the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), and Israel both possesses nuclear weapons and is not party to the NPT, but has faced no similar sanction.

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Video: Protesters Loot UN Base in DR Congo's Conflict-Torn North Kivu Amid Rwanda Standoff

A large protest in the eastern Congolese city of Goma on Monday managed to break through the gates of the United Nations facility there, and protesters ransacked the compound before being driven off.

Hundreds of people descended on the headquarters of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in Goma, a city on the border with Rwanda and the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's North Kivu Province.

Outside the compound, they blocked roads, chanted anti-UN slogans, set a UN car on fire, and skirmished with security forces, who responded with tear gas, [according to footage](#) of the demonstration.

After the protestors broke into the offices, they carried off loot including computers and furniture, [according to AFP](#). Congolese troops reportedly joined them in the looting, with what seems to be at least one soldier being spotted in footage posted online, driving off with solar panels.

"We strongly condemn any form of attack against United Nations personnel and facilities. Those responsible will be prosecuted and severely punished," Patrick Muyaya, a spokesperson for DRC President Felix Tshisekede, [said on social media](#) after the attack.

"The process of withdrawing MONUSCO has already been initiated," he added. "Pending its completion, the Government will respect each of its commitments contained in the agreement which binds us, in particular with regard to the security of its personnel and its installations." MONUSCO's presence is highly unpopular, even among Tshisekede's Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS). Prior to Monday's protests, the party's youth wing in Goma demanded the UN's "withdrawal from Congolese soil without conditions because it has already proved its incapacity to provide us with protection," according to [Rwanda's New Times](#).

In addition, Modeste Bahati, the president of the Congolese Senate, said earlier this month that MONUSCO should "pack its bags."

More than 120 armed groups roam the region, and MONUSCO has attracted no shortage of criticism for its failure to stop their fighting or abuses committed against the local population.

The peacekeeping force has 14,000 international troops and a \$1.4 billion budget, and has been in Kivu since 1999, although it only [acquired a mandate for offensive operations](#) in 2013, amid the first M23 uprising.

When the M23 took up arms once more in late 2021, it helped set in motion the present crisis, in which the DRC government has accused Rwanda of backing and controlling the majority-Tutsi militia. Both Kigali and the M23 have denied the accusations, with the [M23 rejecting a recent "ceasefire"](#) deal between [Kigali and Kinshasa](#), saying "we are Congolese, not Rwandans."

Rwanda, in turn, accuses DRC of backing the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a Hutu Power militia in North Kivu formed by those who perpetrated the 1994 genocide of Tutsis and Twa in Rwanda, which the M23 has fought since reforming last year; Kinshasa denies this accusation, although like the [alleged Rwanda-M23 connection](#), there is some [evidence to support Rwanda's](#) claim.

Tshisekedi's approach to the crisis, which has also included threatening Rwanda with war and severing normal diplomatic and trade relations with its eastern neighbor, has also faced domestic criticism. Last week, Nobel laureate Denis Mukwege, a doctor who has long worked in the region to treat victims of sexual assault and abuses during war, [accused the president](#) of "worsening instability in the region" and warning it would inevitably lead to new abuses against women.

"Each peak of instability corresponds to a peak in the number of women and girls who are victims of sexual violence that we take care of," he said. "We have only one certainty: women and children will be affected again, and will be the first victims of this new cycle of violence." The intermittent fighting since November has displaced some 70,000 people near the city of Goma on Lake Kivu. Across the country, some 5.6 million people are internally displaced - the most of any African country.

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Beijing Seeks to Win Over Seoul as US Pushes Anti-China Computer Chip Alliance

While US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said the US no longer seeks to economically "decouple" from China, the intense competition with Beijing the US has embraced has nonetheless led it to increasingly ban or circumvent Chinese products for US companies. Xing Haiming, China's ambassador to Seoul, told South Korea's Yang Hyang-ja on Monday that the two countries should "exclude external interference" on their cooperation in the semiconductor industry.

"China is willing to work with the ROK [Republic of Korea] to adhere to the principle of a fair and just market, eliminate external interference, strengthen cooperation in semiconductor and other fields, and jointly maintain the stability of the global industrial chain and supply chain," the Chinese envoy told Yang, a former Samsung executive who now serves in the South Korean National Assembly's Semiconductor Industry Special Committee, [according to a WeChat post](#) by the Chinese embassy in Seoul.

South Korea is the world's second-largest maker of semiconductors after the US, producing 18.4% of all semiconductors in 2020, [according to Invest Korea](#). China, on the other hand, is the world's largest buyer of semiconductors, [buying up nearly \\$30 billion](#) of them last year, including 60% of chips produced in South Korea. China used them to [produce 36% of the world's electronics](#) in 2020, including smartphones, computers, cloud servers, and telecom infrastructure.

That's why Washington's recent efforts to establish a Chip 4 alliance with South Korea, Japan, and the autonomous Chinese island of Taiwan, is feared by Beijing as an attempt to edge it out of a key value-chain for its economy. The US-directed partnership would seek to realign computer chip production lines among "friendly" nations.

"The US always claims itself to be a champion of free trade, but has time and again abused its state power to politicize, instrumentalize and weaponize sci-tech and business issues, engaged in 'coercive diplomacy' and sought to forcibly relocate industries and push for decoupling," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson [Zhao Lijian told reporters](#) last week, when asked about the Chip 4 alliance.

"Its actions are undermining international trade rules and splitting the global market. In a highly integrated global economy, what the US has done is against the trend of the times and highly unpopular," Zhao added. "These moves will eventually end in failure."

Taipei and Tokyo quickly embraced the initiative after it was proposed in March, but Seoul has hesitated, even with the conservative President Yoon Suk-yeol taking office in May. Internal debates continue to rage, even as Washington demands Seoul make a decision by the end of the month.

Science Minister [Lee Jong-ho warned recently](#) that while "Fab 4," as it's been nicknamed in Seoul, "is restricted to the semiconductor sector, it can have an impact on other industries. So we have to be cautious."

Yang, who met with the Chinese envoy on Monday, put it even more succinctly last week:

"When looking at the global industrial landscape, the US is the overwhelming first-class semiconductor powerhouse. If the US is the landlord, Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Europe and China are its tenants," [she said in a subcommittee hearing](#). However, she has maintained that South Korea should enter the alliance, so long as it doesn't sever its relationship with China.

Washington's concern isn't just edging out China, though: it's also buttressing its own semiconductor supply [amid a severe shortage](#) created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The US [Senate is poised to vote](#) on a \$52 billion subsidy for domestic semiconductor producers, [the CHIPS Act](#), before the week is out. The House already passed the bill in February.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) was criticized last week after her husband bought [as many as \\$5 million in shares](#) in the California-based chipmaker Nvidia, one of the companies that would receive government money to expand its operations if the CHIPS Act is passed. She [told a reporter on Thursday](#) she had "absolutely not" given him insider information to help him make that decision.

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Watch Moment Whale Breaches and Lands on Fishing Boat Off Massachusetts Coast

A lobster diver claimed last year to have been momentarily "eaten alive" by a whale off Cape Cod, which spit him out after about 30 seconds. While some whales settle for tiny krill and eschew big prey like humans, others like sperm whales dive deep to hunt the mighty giant squid.

A humpback whale had an unexpected encounter with the bow of a small fishing boat on Sunday after it breached the ocean's surface off the coast of the US state of Massachusetts. The incident reportedly happened at about 10 a.m. on Sunday morning as a number of fishing boats congregated offshore near where whales had been spotted feeding. However, the boaters reportedly weren't trying to interfere with the whales' activities, as whale-watchers sometimes do.

Then, suddenly, one whale breached the surface, raising about one-quarter of its body above the water before landing on the bow of a fishing boat. The incident was captured on film and in photographs, and the bow of the 19-foot-long boat can be seen briefly dipping underwater as the massive cetacean slides off it.

According to a [statement by the Town](#) of Plymouth, there were "no injuries and no major damage that affected the seaworthiness of the vessel." However, they decided to call it a day after that, and soon put in at the nearby boat ramp.

Regina Asmutis-Silvia of North American Whale and Dolphin Conservation [told CBS that the whale's](#) actions weren't intentional.

"They're not going to pay attention to what's going on around them. So they're not looking around for kayakers or paddleboarders or even boaters. They're just kind of focusing on food," she said.

A week earlier, a paddleboarder off the Plymouth coast had [just such an encounter](#) after a humpback whale breached while hunting about 35 feet away.

A middle-sized whale species, a full-sized humpback whale can be 55 feet long and weigh 66,000 pounds. Despite their massive size [and high intelligence](#), humpbacks use baleen to filter small fish and shrimp out of the water.

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New Data Shows More Than Half of the Elderly in the United States are Living in Poverty
By - Mary Manley

The University of Massachusetts at Boston's Elder Index details the financial strain many older Americans now find themselves under due to America's increased cost of living, which has been further exacerbated by high levels of inflation.

[Americans](#) aged 65 and older are more likely to live in poverty compared to younger adults. Those between the ages of 35 to 54 are least likely to be in poverty, and according to the Department of Health and Human Services, the average poverty guideline for a single person is \$12,880 a year. For a household of four it is \$26,500 a year.

[Data](#) from the University of Massachusetts at Boston's Gerontology Institute's Elder Index records data concerning the cost of health care, food, housing, and transportation. The index shows that currently, 54% of older women who live alone are considered poor by federal poverty standards and are unable to pay for essential living costs, with 45% of single men falling into the same category.

In [2020](#), data from the Elder Index also showed that more than 2 million older couples were considered economically insecure.

"Any small change in circumstance—rising prices, a medical emergency—can throw an older person's budget completely out of whack," said Jan Mutchler, the director of the Gerontology Institute.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in higher rates of unemployment for people over the age of 55 compared to colleagues who were a few years younger—those 55 and up were 17% more likely to become unemployed compared to their younger counterparts, particularly during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was the first time in 50 years that older Americans were experiencing higher rates of unemployment compared to younger workers, according to [AARP](#).

Older Americans were also being rehired at a slower rate compared to younger workers. Those job losses resulted in insecure retirement savings for older Americans.

Inflation has also negatively impacted retired Americans who are living on a fixed income, The Washington [Post](#) reported, with 56 million Americans aged 65 and older having to readjust their budget to satisfy a 9% inflation increase.

"Just surviving day to day has become a big concern of mine — because, how in the world?" said Leslie Morgan, 65, a retired teacher who lives in Asheville, N.C. who quit smoking, cut back on groceries and began limiting her hot showers to save money. "Yes, I can afford what I'm doing right now, but I'm starting to panic. I'm starting to think, 'How am I going to keep paying for everything?'"

Roughly 12% of adults rely wholly on their Social Security, which pays an average of \$1,658 per month, and has only increased by a meager \$93 since 2021.

A single person in good health, according to the Elder Index, needs \$27,096 for basic expenses. That's \$14,100 more than the federal poverty threshold.

"There's a myth that Social Security and Medicare miraculously take care of all of people's needs in older age," said Ramsey [Alwin](#), present and chief executive of the National Council on Aging. "The reality is they don't, and far too many people are one crisis away from economic insecurity."

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Nudist Shoots Flasher for Masturbating in Front of a Woman at French Beach
By - Mary Manley

A suspected exhibitionist was shot at a French nudist beach, located in the Grand Parc Miribel-Jonage near Lyon, known as “La Mama.”

The naturist beach, also known as a nude beach, [La Mama](#) has been an active spot for naturists since 2007.

On Saturday at around 10:30 a.m., a man was shot at La Mama in the urban park of the Grand parc de Miribel-Jonage. The suspected exhibitionist was 46 years old and was apparently harassing beachgoers with insults.

The exhibitionist, which is a person’s desire to display their genitals in a compulsive manner—and differs from a [naturist](#), who takes a nonsexual approach to nature and encourages persons to think of their bodies from a liberal point of view and as a part of their natural environment—began performing a sex act while staring at a woman on the beach, according to French authorities.

A 76-year-old naturist then approached the exhibitionist and the two apparently got into a heated argument. At some point during the argument, the older man took a hunting rifle out of his backpack or bag and shot the male exhibitionist more than once.

According to France3, the 46-year-old came from [Lyon](#) and suffered a fatal wound to his chest. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

The beach closed following the altercation so that French authorities could conduct an investigation into the incident. The 76-year-old did have a permit for his hunting rifle but was not allowed to carry the weapon into public areas.

The hunter did not resist arrest and did not deny responsibility for the shooting.

Officials from the gendarmerie of Trévoux are continuing to investigate the incident as a homicide.

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Hair Loss and Sexual Dysfunction are New Long COVID Symptoms
By - Mary Manley

The list of long COVID symptoms is growing, with researchers adding two new medical conditions. Hair loss and low libido are now being seen among those with long COVID, a medical condition in which some of those infected with the COVID virus continue experiencing health issues “long after” recovery from the virus.

A study conducted by the United Kingdom’s University of Birmingham and published in the journal [Nature Medicine](#) found new symptoms for adults who are suffering from long COVID, despite not being hospitalized.

The most common symptoms of long COVID include loss of sense of smell, shortness of breath, chest pain, and fever. The most common symptom for long COVID patients was fatigue followed by shortness of breath, a cough, and muscle ache.

However, that list is growing and now includes erectile dysfunction, hair loss, amnesia, hallucinations, bowel incontinence, limb swelling and apraxia (the inability to perform familiar

movements and commands). The new list of symptoms was collected between January 2020 and April 2021 and was based on non-hospitalized patients.

"This research validates what patients have been telling clinicians and policy makers throughout the pandemic, that the symptoms of long COVID are extremely broad and cannot be fully accounted for by other factors such as lifestyle risk factors or chronic health conditions," said [Dr. Shamil Haroon](#), an associate clinical professor in public health at the University of Birmingham, and the senior author on Monday's study.

"The symptoms we identified should help clinicians and clinical guideline developers to improve the assessment of patients with long-term effects from COVID-19, and to subsequently consider how this symptom burden can be best managed," Haroon added.

Infected persons were also more likely to report 62 symptoms more frequently 12 weeks after their initial infection compared to those who never had COVID. The researchers grouped symptoms into three separate categories including respiratory symptoms, mental health and cognition, and a broader range of symptoms.

Long [COVID](#) showed up most often in women, people between the ages of 35 and 69 years old, people living in destitute locations, Black persons, and those employed in social care, teaching/education, healthcare, and people with previous health conditions and disabilities such as smokers or overweight individuals.

The United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics reported in [June](#) that at least 2 million people are suffering from long COVID. Of those patients, 1.4 million said they first had COVID (or believed they had COVID) at least 12 weeks before their long COVID symptoms. At least 826,000 said it was a year earlier, and 376,000 said they had COVID two years prior to their long COVID symptoms.

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Google Co-Founder Sells Musk Related Investments After He Finds Out His Wife Slept With Musk

By - Ian DeMartino

Elon Musk and Sergey Brin were once long-time friends, but after an affair between Musk and Brin's wife Nicole Shanahan became public, the two billionaires' friendship ended.

Google co-founder and Alphabet board member Sergey Brin reportedly [told his financial advisors](#) to sell off his investments in Elon Musk-owned companies after finding out that Musk had an affair with Brin's wife, Nicole Shanahan.

It is not known how large his investments in Musk-run companies are or if any sales took place, but the Wall Street Journal is reporting that people familiar with the situation reported that Brin and Shanahan divorced in January after Brin became aware of the affair.

The same source indicated that the longtime friendship between Brin and Musk understandably became strained in the time leading up to Brin's decision to sell off his Musk-related investments. Brin previously invested \$500,000 into Tesla in 2006, according to Crunchbase he has exited that investment.

According to the Journal, the affair between Musk and Shanahan began in December 2021 while Brin and Shanahan were separated, but lived together. Their marriage was on the rocks due to the stresses of raising their three-year-old daughter while dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. They cited “irreconcilable differences” in their divorce filings, which came just weeks after Brin learned of the affair.

Meanwhile, Musk was recently separated from his ex-girlfriend and mother of two of his children, Canadian experimental pop musician Grimes, when he and Shanahan started their relationship. Musk and Grimes’ second child was born via surrogate the same month as Musk and Shanahan’s relationship started.

Musk currently owns Tesla, Neuralink, SpaceX, and The Boring Company. Google, which is owned by Alphabet, was part of a \$1 billion investment into SpaceX in 2016.

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Brooklyn Bishop Robbed At Gunpoint During Live Streamed Service
By - Ian DeMartino

A Brooklyn Bishop known for his designer suits and Rolls Royce was robbed at gunpoint during a sermon that was broadcast live on the Church’s Facebook page on Sunday.

Bishop Lamor Whitehead, a bishop at the Leaders of Tomorrow church in Brooklyn, New York, [was preaching to his flock](#) while wearing a gold-rimmed burgundy suit, a long gold chain, and a large ring on each hand. When he saw the bandits enter the church from behind the camera, he immediately stopped his sermon and began following the gunmen’s orders.

“How many of you have lost your faith because you saw somebody else die with what you were about to go through” Whitehead was saying before stopping and saying “all right, all right” as he put his hands in the air and laid on the floor.

A masked man holding a pistol can then be seen searching Whitehead’s pockets, taking out what appears to be a large wad of cash, before taking the bishop’s jewelry. Police say the robbers made off with \$400,000 worth of jewelry and cash from Whitehead, his wife, and possibly some of the church members.

The video of the robbery was taken off the church’s Facebook* page but has been posted elsewhere online.

Whitehead previously made headlines when he publicly announced he was negotiating the surrender of an accused subway shooter. Whitehead said he was close to the shooter’s family and had convinced him to turn himself in. However, the alleged shooter was picked up by police at a Legal Aid office. While a spokesperson for the Legal Aid office criticized police for ambushing the subject unnecessarily, they also disputed Whitehead’s account, saying that the bishop had no connection to the family.

The flashy man of God has also been connected to New York City Mayor Eric Adams and spoke at [Biz Markie’s homegoing funeral](#). He was previously convicted of auto-loan fraud before reforming himself and becoming an ordained minister.

In 2021, Whitehead ran for borough President of Brooklyn after Eric Adams vacated the seat when he ran for mayor. Whitehead came in 12th place out of a field of 12 candidates, gaining 1.4% of the vote.

In a later Instagram post, Whitehead let his congregation know that he was not hurt in the robbery. No suspects have been named in connection to the crime.

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China Planning Three-Tiered System to Placate American Regulators
By - Ian DeMartino

China's growing influence in the tech and social media markets in the US has resulted in tensions over how those companies store and hold the private data of US citizens and companies.

China plans to create a [three-tiered classification](#) system to group Chinese companies listed on US stock exchanges based on the type of data they hold, Financial Times reported on Saturday. The system will also require companies to allow regulators to audit their files in an attempt to bring them into compliance with US regulations. By doing so, Beijing hopes to stop US regulators from delisting hundreds of Chinese firms.

The companies will be sorted into three categories: Firms with non-sensitive data, firms with sensitive data, and firms with secretive data. Further details about the categories are not yet known.

Washington has long asked for unfettered access to data held by Chinese companies operating and being publicly traded in the US, but China has been hesitant to offer that, citing national security concerns.

In April, Reuters reported that Chinese regulators were working on a framework for an agreement that will allow Chinese companies to remain listed on US stock exchanges. The previous month, Reuters also reported that Beijing warned some companies, including Alibaba, Baidu, and JD.com to prepare for increased audits.

Chinese companies holding private data and accessing corporate secrets have been an ongoing issue in the US. Earlier this month, Senators asked the Federal Trade Commission to investigate TikTok's alleged descriptive data privacy practices. Last week it was reported that ByteDance, the parent company of TikTok, had significantly increased its [lobbying spending](#) in Washington.

The Canadian government also joined the other members of the [five-eyes group](#) in [banning Huawei and ZTE](#) from being used to develop the nation's development of 5G networks.

Reuters was not able to reach the Chinese Securities Regulatory Commission for comment.

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House Committee May Subpoena Ginni Thomas, Wife of SCOTUS Justice Clarence Thomas
By - Ian DeMartino

In March it was revealed that Ginni Thomas texted former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, urging him to continue to fight to change the 2020 election results.

The Vice Chair of the January 6 commission says that the committee [may subpoena Ginni Thomas](#), the wife of Supreme Court Justice, Clarence Thomas.

Liz Cheney, a Republican representative for Wyoming and the Vice Chairwoman for the House Select committee Investigating the January 6 riots, said that the committee is currently speaking with Thomas' legal counsel in hopes that it will convince the conservative activist to speak to them voluntarily.

"We certainly hope that she will agree to come in voluntarily, but the committee is fully prepared to contemplate a subpoena if she does not. I hope it doesn't get to that. I hope she will come in voluntarily," Cheney told CNN's Jake Tapper on "State of the Union" on Sunday.

The committee is in possession of email correspondence between Thomas and Donald Trump's election attorney John Eastman as well as text messages Thomas sent Trump's chief of staff Mark Meadows. In those texts, Thomas urges Meadows to fight to overturn the 2020 election results.

Last month, a lawyer for Thomas wrote to the committee, saying that he does not believe there is ample reason for Thomas to speak to the committee. He [also said](#) that his client was "willing to appear" and "eager to clear" her name but without knowing why the committee wants to speak with Thomas, he fears the intention of the talk will be "to continue the baseless harassment she has been subjected to since January 6."

Later in the interview, Cheney indicated that the committee is still considering charges against Former President Donald Trump, but that no decision has been made.

"I think that Donald Trump, the violation of his oath of office, the violation of the Constitution that he engaged in, is the most serious misconduct of any president in the history of our nation. I think that, as I said, the committee has not decided yet whether or not we'll make criminal referrals. That's something we take very seriously."

Cheney's appointment as Vice Chair and her actions in the role have been extremely unpopular with voters in her party, who by and large still support Trump. She is facing a challenger in the GOP's Wyoming primary election next month and is currently [more than 20 points behind](#) her pro-Trump opponent. If she loses the seat, she believes serving on the committee is worth it.

"If I have to choose between maintaining a seat in the House of Representatives, or protecting the constitutional republic and ensuring the American people know the truth about Donald Trump, I'm going to choose the Constitution and the truth every single day," Cheney said.

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Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan: Democrats and Trump 'Colluded' To Help 'QAnon Whack Job' Cox Win Primary

Dan Cox defeated the Larry Hogan-backed Kelly Schulz in Maryland's GOP Gubernatorial primary election last week, gaining 53.8% of the vote.

Republican Maryland Governor Larry Hogan is crying foul after the Democratic Governors' Association (DGA) supported a Trump-backed candidate in the Republican Gubernatorial primary election last week.

"It was kind of unprecedented collusion between the Democratic Governors Association and Donald Trump," Hogan [said on ABC's "This Week."](#)

Dan Cox, who enjoyed an endorsement from former President Donald Trump, easily defeated Hogan's preferred candidate Kelly Schulz in the GOP's primary election last week. Hogan, who has a reputation for being a moderate Republican in the blue state of Maryland, cannot run again due to term limits.

Hogan warned that Cox would be unelectable in November and called him "a QAnon whack job." Cox has backed former President Trump's false claims that the 2020 election was stolen and [chartered buses](#) to the January 6, 2021 "Stop the steal" rally that turned into a riot and siege on the Capitol building.

Cox initially declined to condemn the riots, stating without evidence that the violence that day was caused by "Antifa infiltrators." He also tweeted that day that former Vice President Mike Pence was a "traitor." Pence faced criticism from the right wing of his party for not going along with Trump's plan to overturn the election results.

Cox, who is currently a state delegate, would [eventually backtrack](#), lightly denouncing the violence after fellow delegate members called for his expulsion from the Maryland General Assembly.

Hogan does not think a candidate with Cox's history has any chance of winning the governor's seat in November.

"So, it was a win for the Democrats. It's a big loss for the Republican Party and we have no chance of saving that governor seat. We actually had a chance if they hadn't gotten together and done that," Hogan also claimed that the DGA spent over \$3 million on ads for Cox, while the candidate only spent \$100,000 himself.

The strategy of promoting an opponent that seems easy to defeat was infamously employed by the Hillary Clinton campaign during the 2016 election cycle. An email from her campaign staff, revealed by Wikileaks, showed that her campaign intended to promote GOP candidates, [including Trump](#), who were seen as the most extreme in an effort to push the other candidates right and paint the Republican party as an extremist party. The strategy worked until November of that year when Trump defeated Clinton in the general election.

However, there are reasons to believe the strategy may have a better result for Democrats this November. For starters, Cox's opponent Wes Moore is very popular in Maryland, unlike Clinton who was one of the [least popular candidates](#) to ever receive a major party's nomination.

Maryland is also an extremely blue state, with Biden winning 65% of the vote there in 2020.

On the flip side, traditional political headwinds are pointing in the Republicans' favor. Inflation and economic concerns are sure to be a major motivating factor for voters in November.

Additionally, Biden is [one of the least popular](#) Presidents in modern history. It remains to be seen if those factors will be enough to make Maryland voters overlook Cox's extremist views.

FiveThirtyEight has given Cox a [5% chance](#) of winning the election.

Democrats are employing the strategy elsewhere. They [also backed](#) GOP candidates in gubernatorial primaries in Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Illinois.

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US Deputy Treasury Secretary Discusses Ukraine, Russian Oil Price Cap During France Visit

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo discussed the Ukraine crisis and a price cap on Russian oil as he met with French officials and the International Energy Agency chief during his visit to Paris, the Treasury said on Tuesday. Adeyemo met with Secretary-General of the Elysee presidential palace Alexis Kohler and Director General of the Treasury Emmanuel Moulin on Monday.

"They discussed their commitment to the people of Ukraine as they defend their country against Russia's unprovoked and unjustifiable war, the need to continue to speed budgetary support and suspend debt service for Ukraine, and opportunities to build on the historic sanctions imposed on Russia," a statement released by the Treasury said.

A price cap on Russian oil was also on the agenda.

"In these meetings and in a meeting with Executive Director of the International Energy Agency (IEA) Dr. Fatih Birol, the Deputy Secretary also discussed the merits of a price cap on Russian oil to ensure that Russian oil keeps flowing at lower prices - restricting revenue to fund Russia's military while putting downward pressure on global energy prices," the release read.

In addition, the deputy secretary held talks with financial services executives, economists and scholars.

"They reviewed ways to alleviate those impacts, particularly a price cap on Russian oil to stabilize global energy markets and supporting Ukraine's efforts to export grain. The Deputy Secretary reiterated that the United States and our partners have issued authorizations to ensure sanctions do not stand in the way of agricultural exports from Russia," the statement concluded.

After Paris, Adeyemo visits Brussels from July 26-27.

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NASA Says No Official Word From Russia on News of Quitting ISS

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - NASA has not received any official word from Russia on the news of the country quitting the International Space Station after 2024, director of the ISS for the agency Robyn Gatens said on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, the new director general of Russian state space corporation Roscosmos, Yuri Borisov, confirmed that Russia will fulfill all its obligations to international partners on the ISS and then leave the station after 2024.

"Russia is like us, they are planning what is ahead of them, as we are planning for the transition after 2030 for a commercially operated space station in lower orbit, they have the similar plan, we have not received any official word from the partner," Gatens said.

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IMF Warns Risks to Economic Outlook 'Overwhelmingly' Tilted to Downside

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said the risks to the bank's updated economic outlook are heavily leaning downward especially amid prospects of a prolonged conflict in Ukraine, inability to rein in inflation, and geopolitical fragmentation.

The IMF in its updated World Economic Outlook (WEO) released on Tuesday projected that global growth will slow to 3.2 percent in 2022, 0.4% lower than April's outlook. In 2023, the IMF projects global growth to be 2.9%, 0.7 percentage points lower than its previous forecast.

"The risks to the outlook are overwhelmingly tilted to the downside," the IMF said in the report.

"A plausible alternative scenario in which risks materialize, inflation rises further, and global growth declines to about 2.6 percent and 2.0 percent in 2022 and 2023, respectively, would put growth in the bottom 10 percent of outcomes since 1970."

Runaway inflation, the Ukraine conflict and debt distress are tops among those risks, the report said.

"The war in Ukraine could lead to a sudden stop of European gas imports from Russia," the report said. "Inflation could be harder to bring down than anticipated either if labor markets are tighter than expected or inflation expectations unanchor."

Tighter global financial conditions could induce debt distress in emerging market and developing economies, the report added.

The IMF said it is also concerned that renewed COVID-19 outbreaks and lockdowns and escalation of the property crisis might further suppress Chinese growth. In addition, the report

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IMF Revises Down Euro Area Growth Forecast by 0.2% in 2022 - World Economic Outlook

*WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The International Fund (IMF) on Tuesday said that it has revised down its forecast for growth in the euro area by 0.2% in 2022 and by 1.1% next year.

"Growth in the euro area is also revised down: by 0.2 percentage point in 2022, when improved prospects for tourism and industrial activity in Italy are more than offset by significant downgrades in France, Germany and Spain; and by 1.1 percentage point in 2023," the IMF said in its updated World Economic Outlook.

The IMF said in the report that it projects the euro area GDP to decline by 2.6% in 2022 and by 1.2% next year, with Spain emerging as a leader in the group with 4% growth in 2022 and 2% growth next year.

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IMF Expects Global Inflation to Reach 6.6% in Advanced Economies, 9.5% in Emerging Markets

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The International Fund (IMF) said on Tuesday that it has revised up its forecast for global inflation to 6.6% in the world's advanced economies and 9.5% in the emerging markets in 2022.

"Global inflation has been revised up due to food and energy prices as well as lingering supply-demand imbalances, and it is anticipated to reach 6.6% in advanced economies and 9.5% in emerging markets and developing economies this year - upward revisions of 0.9 and 0.8 percentage points, respectively," the IMF said in its updated World Economic Outlook. The IMF said in the report that it expects disinflationary monetary policy to "bite" next year, with global output growing by a modest 2.9 percent. Inflation is projected to be 3.3% in the advanced economies and 7.3% in the developing ones in 2023, the report said.

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IMF Revises China's Growth by 1.1%, Sees Major Global Spillovers - World Economic Outlook

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The International Fund (IMF) said on Tuesday that it has revised down its forecast for China's economic growth by 1.1% in 2022 and by 1.3% next year that will be complemented with significant global spillovers.

"In China, further lockdowns and the deepening real estate crisis have led growth to be revised down by 1.1 percentage points, with major global spillovers," the IMF said in its updated World Economic Outlook report.

The IMF downgraded China's growth to 3.3% in 2022, the lowest level in more than 40 years, and to 4.6 percent in 2023, a half-percent lower than it was in the previous outlook in April, the report said.

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IMF Revises Downward US Growth Forecast by 1.4% in 2022 - World Economic Outlook

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The International Fund (IMF) said on Tuesday that it has revised downward its forecast for the growth of the US economy by 1.4% in 2022 and by 1.3% next year.

“Baseline growth in the United States is revised down by 1.4 percentage points and 1.3 percentage points in 2022 and 2023, respectively, reflecting weaker-than-expected growth in the first two quarters of 2022, with significantly less momentum in private consumption, in part reflecting the erosion of household purchasing power and the expected impact of a steeper tightening in monetary policy,” the IMF said in its updated World Economic Outlook. The current IMF projection for the US economy stands at 2.3% for 2022 and 1% for 2023, the report noted.

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IMF Revises Russia's 2022 Growth Forecast Upward by 2.5% to -6% - World Economic Outlook

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Tuesday revised upward its forecast for Russia's GDP by 2.5 percent to -6% in 2022 due to stronger-than-expected export growth.

In 2023, Russia's GDP is expected to reach -3.5%, which is 1.2 percent less than the IMF projected in April, according to the IMF's updated World Economic Outlook.

The IMF projected in the April that the Russian economy would decline by 8.5 percent this year. “Russia's economy is estimated to have contracted during the second quarter by less than previously projected, with crude oil and non-energy exports holding up better than expected,” the report said.

In addition, domestic demand is also showing some resilience thanks to containing the effect of sanctions on Russia's domestic financial sector and a lower-than-anticipated weakening of the labor market, the report added.

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IMF Revises Down 2022 Global Growth Forecast by 0.4% to 3.2% - World Economic Outlook

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - Global growth will decrease to 3.2 percent this year and further to 2.9 percent in 2023, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in its updated World Economic Outlook on Tuesday.

“The baseline forecast is for growth to slow from 6.1 percent last year to 3.2 percent in 2022, 0.4 percentage points lower than in the April 2022 World Economic Outlook,” the report said.

In 2023, the IMF projects global growth to be 2.9%, 0.7 percentage points lower than it projected in April's World Economic Outlook, the report added.

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Effects of Ukraine Conflict on European Economies More Negative Than Expected – IMF

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) – European economies are facing more negative effects from the Ukraine conflict than was expected, the International Monetary Fund said on Tuesday. "The war's effects on major European economies have been more negative than expected, owing to higher energy prices as well as weaker consumer confidence and slower momentum in manufacturing resulting from persistent supply chain disruptions and rising input costs," the IMF said in its updated World Economic Outlook.

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US Reports Highest Number of Monkeypox Cases Globally – CDC

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The United States has reported the highest number of monkeypox cases around the world this year, according to CDC data. As of Monday evening, the US had reported 3,846 cases. The CDC has recorded 18,095 cases across 75 countries so far this year. Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France also have recorded upwards of 1,500 cases. On Saturday, the WHO announced that monkeypox had become a global health emergency. The Biden administration is reportedly planning to decide whether to make an emergency health declaration this week, in addition to appointing a White House coordinator to oversee the US response to the monkeypox outbreak.

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US Special Envoy Says No Alternatives to Non-Proliferation Treaty

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) has no alternatives, US Special Representative of the President for Nuclear Nonproliferation Adam Scheinman said on Tuesday, ahead of the NPT review conference next month. "I am optimistic about the prospects of the NPT itself, there are no alternatives, no in-between or other treaty," he said. In August, the countries that are part of the treaty are due to meet in New York. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will address the conference on the first day and express backing for the treaty, Scheinman said. Scheinman added the US is still concerned about North Korea, which exited the treaty in 2003. The country is the only member which left the deal.

"The North Korean nuclear program constitutes a threat to global peace and non-proliferation regime. We hope that North Korea returns to the compliance with the NPT," he said. The NPT is an international treaty concluded to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and promote cooperation for peaceful use of nuclear energy by furthering the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament.

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Establishing Pakistani CDC Key Topic at Washington-Islamabad Health Summit - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - Top officials from Washington and Islamabad at a new health dialogue discussed setting up a Pakistani version of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in addition to issues like vaccination funding and donations, the State Department said after the summit.

"The discussions centered on establishing a Pakistani CDC, global health security, childhood immunizations, COVID-19, maternal and child health, and non-communicable diseases," the release said on Monday after the dialogue in Washington. "Both sides identified areas of mutual engagement and established an action plan to reach shared goals."

Washington also announced new pandemic funding and vaccine donations amid the official launch of the US-Pakistani Health Dialogue.

"During the dialogue, the United States also announced it was donating 16 million doses of pediatric vaccines for COVID-19 to Pakistan in partnership with COVAX, on top of the 61.5 million adult vaccines doses already donated," the release said. "An additional \$20 million in USAID funding is also planned to support vaccination efforts."

In addition, the dialogue highlighted the donation of four mobile testing labs that will strengthen Pakistan's ability to diagnose COVID-19 and other communicable diseases, especially in remote and underserved areas, according to the release.

The US side was co-led by USAID Assistant Administrator for Global Health Atul Gawande and Health Department Assistant Secretary for Global Affairs Loyce Pace, while the Pakistani delegation was led by Federal Minister of National Health Services and Regulations Abdul Qadir Patel.

Also among the US delegation were representatives from the CDC, Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and State Department, the release said.

The State Department said the Health Dialogue highlights the depth and breadth of the US-Pakistani bilateral relationship, which celebrates its 75th anniversary this year.

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US Tribes Ask Pope to Help Obtain All Records Related to Indian Boarding Schools - Letter

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The National Congress of American Indians President Fawn Sharp sent a letter to Pope Francis inviting the Catholic Church to partner with Native American tribes to obtain all records about federal Indian boarding schools in the United States.

"I invite His Holiness and the Catholic Church to work with the National Congress of American Indians to open all records related to Federal Indian boarding schools so that someday soon American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian peoples may host an apostolic - and maybe even apologetic - journey to our tribal lands here in the United States," Sharp said in the letter on Monday.

Sharp pointed out he is encouraged by the Pope's visit to Canada to issue an apology on behalf of the Catholic Church for its role in the cultural genocide caused by Canada's residential school system. This marks the beginning of a new chapter for truth and reconciliation, he said.

Sharp emphasized that the Catholic Church is withholding records about federal US Indian boarding schools that can help reveal truths.

The opportunity to hold abusers accountable or to reconcile with the Catholic Church is only possible through cooperation, he said.

In May, the US Department of the Interior revealed findings from an investigation that found that the United States had 408 federal Indian boarding schools and that more than 500 Native American children died in 19 of those institutions. The Interior Department expects the number of deaths to increase as the probe continues.

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Colorado Gas Company to Pay \$3.2Mln Over Emission Leaks - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The Colorado-based DCP Operating Company agreed to pay more than \$3 million in fines and take corrective action in a settlement over natural gas leaks that occurred in Denver's metro area, the Justice Department said in a press release.

"DCP [allegedly] violated leak detection and repair requirements in federal and state clean air laws, resulting in excess emissions of volatile organic compounds (VOC) and other pollutants to the atmosphere," the release said on Monday. "As part of the settlement, DCP will take corrective actions and pay a \$3.25 million civil penalty for the alleged violations."

DCP has agreed to strengthen its leak detection and repair practices at eight natural gas processing plants in Weld County, Colorado, located within the Denver Metro/North Front Range Ozone Nonattainment Area, the release added.

The company also agreed to install equipment that leaks less pollution and committed to employing optical gas imaging technology to improve the visual detection of leaks. DCP will install a dry seal recompression system on two turbines at the Kersey/Mewbourne plant, which is expected to reduce VOC emissions by 26 tons per year and methane emissions by 375 tons per year, according to the release.

The Justice Department announced the settlement jointly with the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Colorado state government, the release added.

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US Government Plans to Plant 1Bln Trees During Next Decade - Agriculture Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The US government plans to plant more than one billion trees over the next decade as part of efforts to address a reforestation backlog, the Department of Agriculture said in a statement.

"Today, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced a strategy for how the Biden-Harris administration, through the US Department of Agriculture, will address a reforestation backlog of four million acres on national forests and plant more than one billion trees over the next decade," the statement said on Monday.

The US Forest Service will use over the next ten years resources made available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to eliminate the backlog and develop infrastructure, such as tree nurseries, to keep up with increasing needs, the statement said.

The Forest Service has used money from the legislation to more than triple its annual reforestation budget to over \$100 million this year, the statement added.

The effort is part of the Biden administration's directive to bolster climate-smart reforestation, as well as the Forest Service's ten-year strategy to reduce wildfire risk and improve forest health, according to the statement.

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US Turns Top LNG Exporter as Europe Leans on US Supply Amid Ukraine Crisis - EIA

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The United States became the world's largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporter as of June as Europe leaned heavily on US LNG supplies after sanctioning Russia over the Ukraine conflict, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in a statement.

"The United States became the world's largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporter during the first half of 2022," the statement said, citing the France-based database on gas markets CEDIGAZ on Monday. "Since the end of last year, countries in Europe have increasingly imported more LNG to compensate for lower pipeline imports from Russia and to fill historically low natural gas storage inventories."

Since the end of last year, countries in Europe have increasingly imported more LNG to compensate for lower pipeline imports from Russia and to fill historically low natural gas storage inventories. LNG imports in the European Union and United Kingdom increased by 63% during the first half of 2022 to average 14.8 billion cubic feet per day (bcf/d).

In June, the United States exported 11% less LNG than the 11.4 bcf/d average exports during the first five months of 2022, mainly as a result of an unplanned outage at the Freeport LNG

export facility. Freeport LNG is expected to resume partial liquefaction operations in early October 2022.

Utilization of the peak capacity at the seven US LNG export facilities averaged 87% during the first half of 2022, mainly before the Freeport LNG outage, which is similar to the utilization on average during 2021.

Earlier on Monday, Russia announced that it will reduce flows on the Nord Stream 1 pipeline to as little as 20% of capacity, further complicating the European Union's goals to fill European gas storage tanks ahead of winter.

Most US LNG exports went to the European Union and the United Kingdom during the first five months of this year, accounting for 71%, or 8.2 billion cubic feet per day (bcf/d) of the total US LNG exports, the EIA said.

"Similar to 2021, the United States sent the most LNG to the EU and UK during the first half of the year, providing 47% of the 14.8 bcf/d of Europe's total LNG imports, followed by Qatar at 15%, Russia at 14%, and four African countries combined at 17%," the EIA said.

Compared with the second half of 2021, US LNG exports increased by 12% in the first half of this year, averaging 11.2 bcf/d, the EIA said.

"US LNG exports continued to grow for three reasons - increased LNG export capacity, increased international natural gas and LNG prices, and increased global demand, particularly in Europe," it said.

The EIA pointed out estimates showed that installed US LNG export capacity had expanded by 1.9 bcf/d nominal (2.1 bcf/d peak) since November 2021.

The capacity additions in the United States included a sixth train at the Sabine Pass LNG, 18 new mid-scale liquefaction trains at the Calcasieu Pass LNG and increased LNG production capacity at Sabine Pass and Corpus Christi LNG facilities, the EIA said.

"As of July 2022, we estimate that US LNG liquefaction capacity averaged 11.4 bcf/d, with a shorter-term peak capacity of 13.9 bcf/d," it added.

International natural gas and LNG prices hit record highs in the last quarter of 2021 and first half of 2022. Prices at the Title Transfer Facility (TTF) in the Netherlands have been trading at record highs since October 2021. TTF averaged \$30.94 per million British thermal units (mmBtu) during the first half of 2022. LNG spot prices in Asia have also been high, averaging \$29.50/mmBtu during the same period.

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White House to Host Summit on Future of COVID-19 Vaccines - Coronavirus Coordinator

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The White House will host a summit on the future of COVID-19 vaccines on Tuesday, Coronavirus Response Coordinator Ashish Jha said during a press briefing.

"We will be hosting the White House Summit on the future of COVID-19 vaccines. There's a lot of work happening inside the US government and in private industry on the true next generation

of COVID-19 vaccines and the summit will feature some of the cutting-edge work being done by US government scientist," Jha said on Monday.

The announcement came as fully vaccinated and boosted US President Joe Biden is in isolation after he was tested positive for the novel coronavirus last week.

Earlier in the day, Biden's physician Kevin O'Connor said that his COVID-19 symptoms are "almost completely resolved."

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UNSC Condemns Attack in Northern Iraq, Calls for Support of Government Probe - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, July 26 (Sputnik) - UN Security Council (UNSC) members in a statement condemned last week's deadly attack in Iraq's Dohuk province and urged all member states to cooperate with the government's investigation.

The deadly attack on the resort town of Zakho in northern Iraq last Wednesday came amid an ongoing Turkish operation against Kurdish militia. Iraq's foreign ministry vowed to give a "maximum diplomatic response" to Turkey and said it would appeal to the UN Security Council. "The members of the Security Council condemned in the strongest terms the attack in Dohuk province of Iraq on 20 July, 2022. The attack resulted in at least nine civilian deaths, including children," the statement said on Monday. "The members of the Security Council expressed their deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government of Iraq and the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, wished a speedy and full recovery to those who were injured, and expressed their support for the Iraqi authorities in their investigations."

The UNSC also urged all member states to engage with the Iraqi government to support the investigations, according to the statement.

Last Wednesday, the Iraqi people gathered in front of the Turkish embassy in Baghdad, condemning the attack. After the attack, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Turkey did not target any Iraqi positions.

Earlier on Monday, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan told state broadcaster TRT that the attack was carried out by "terrorists" hoping to harm Turkish-Iraqi ties.

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UN 'Strongly Condemns' Executions of Democracy Activists in Myanmar - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, July 26 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres "strongly condemns" the executions of three democracy activists and an opposition leader by the Myanmar military, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

"The Secretary-General strongly condemns the executions carried out this weekend by the Myanmar military against four political activists in Myanmar - Phyo Zeya Thaw, Kyaw Min Yu (Ko

Jimmy), Hla Myo Aung and Aung Thura Zaw, and offers his condolences to their families," Dujarric said in a statement.

The UN Secretary-General is against the imposition of the death penalty under all circumstances, Dujarric noted.

The executions by the military authorities show the further deterioration of the already bad human rights situation in Myanmar, Dujarric said.

The last time the Myanmar authorities utilized the death penalty was in 1988, according to reports.

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UPDATE - Texas Airport Secure After Officer-Involved Shooting, Ground Stop Lifted

(Updates with more details in paras 5, 6)

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The Dallas Love Field airport in the state of Texas is secure following an officer-involved shooting, Dallas Police Department (DPD) Chief Eddie Garcia said. "No other individuals were injured in this event, other than the suspect... We wanted to ensure that our community knows that this is not an active situation," Garcia said during a press conference on Monday. "We want to make sure our community knows that there are no other passengers, family members, or people in the airport that are victims."

Garcia said a 37-year-old woman was dropped off at the airport near the ticket counters at around 11:00 a.m. local time (4:00 p.m. GMT). The suspect walked into a nearby restroom and changed her clothing, then she exited the restroom and started firing a handgun into the air, Garcia said.

A police officer in the area, he added, shot the suspect, who was then taken into custody and transported to a local hospital.

A Dallas Love Field airport spokesperson told Sputnik that the ground stop at the airport is lifted. "The FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] implemented a Ground Stop which has been lifted, but there are residual delays," the spokesperson said. "We recommend contacting the airlines directly for flight status information."

The spokesperson told Sputnik earlier in a separate statement that at approximately 11:23 a.m. local time DPD reported and immediately responded to a potential active shooter. Operations at the airport would be suspended until police concluded its investigation, the spokesperson added.

A Federal Aviation Authority spokesperson told Sputnik that Southwest Airlines flights bound for Dallas Love Field were being held at their departure airports.

Southwest airlines in a travel advisory said due to an ongoing investigation regarding a security event, the airline's operations at the airport may be disrupted for the remainder of today and flights may be delayed and/or canceled.

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Russia Blames West for Mercantilism Over Political Settlement in Libya - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, July 26 (Sputnik) - Russia blames the Western countries for putting on the back burner the urgent task of Libyan political settlement in favor of their mercantile interests, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said during a UN Security Council debate on Libya.

"We can't ignore the eagerness with which our Western colleagues, first and foremost the American colleagues, calling for the rapid resumption of the work of the largest Libyan oil fields. Given the overall tensions on global energy markets and the volatility in oil prices, this could be interpreted them as them essentially approving attempts to put the urgent task of Libyan political settlement on the back burner in favor of their own mercantile mercantile interests," Polyanskiy said on Monday.

The Russian diplomat added that the behavior by the Western countries in line with their actions in other parts of the world.

Polyanskiy's comments came after Libya's El Feel oil field resumed production last Tuesday. Production on the oil field was shut down for about three months. Libya is trying to increase oil production at a time when OPEC+ are maintaining output targets and the Western countries are asking for more supplies.

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US Defense Head Talks Syria Stability, Ukraine Support With Turkish Counterpart - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin spoke by telephone with Turkish National Defense Minister Hulusi Akar and discussed maintaining stability in Syria and efforts to support Ukraine, acting Defense Department spokesperson Todd Breasseale said in a readout of the call.

"Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III spoke with Turkish Minister of National Defense Hulusi Akar by telephone today to discuss the importance of maintaining stability in Syria," Breasseale said on Monday. "The leaders also discussed their continued support for Ukraine and Secretary Austin thanked Minister Akar for Turkey's humanitarian efforts related to Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine."

The conversation took place after an agreement was concluded last week between Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the United Nations to facilitate the resumption of food and other agricultural exports from Russian and Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea.

Russia, Turkey and another country that is yet to be determined will provide escort for merchant ships carrying food supplies across the Black Sea, according to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Earlier on Monday, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said the agreement needs to endure despite challenges posed by a Russian strike on targets in the port city of Odessa over the weekend.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) -

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

- * The UN Security Council (UNSC) will convene a meeting on Ukraine on Friday, a UNSC source told Sputnik.
- * Kiev has plotted a provocation at an oil- and fat-processing plant in Slovyansk, involving the explosion of containers with more than 120 tonnes of toxic hexane, Russian National Defense Control Center head Col. Gen. Mikhail Mizintsev said.

ENERGY MARKETS

- * Gas futures in Europe closed up 12% at \$1,890 per thousand cubic meters, according to data from the London-based ICE exchange.
- * Russian gas giant Gazprom said on Monday it would stop operation of another Siemens gas turbine engine at the Portovaya compressor station early on Wednesday, limiting daily deliveries to 33 million cubic meters, or 20% of the pipeline's total capacity.
- * Gazprom said that it had received the documents on the turbine for the Nord Stream 1 pipeline from the Canadian authorities from Siemens, but they do not address the previously identified risks.

GRAIN EXPORTS TALKS

- * All parties to the Black Sea grain initiative will start having a presence in the Joint Coordinator Center (JCC) in Istanbul by Tuesday, with ships planning to move within the next few days, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said.
- * All parties to the recent UN-brokered grain deal have reaffirmed their commitment to the initiative, Haq said.
- * There are no obstacles to the export of grain from the Odesa port, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.
- * Deputy Infrastructure Minister of Ukraine Yuriy Vaskov said that the country expects to start exporting grain within a week, adding that the Chornomorsk port will resume its work first.

RUSSIA-CONGO RELATIONS

- * Russia and the Republic of the Congo are interested in increasing the military cooperation between the countries, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Monday.
- * Congo's President Denis Sassou Nguesso has shared his plans to organize a conference on the Libyan conflict resolution, and Moscow welcomes this initiative, Lavrov said.

SHOOTINGS IN CANADA

* The Royal Canadian Mounted Police has issued an emergency alert to cellphones of Langley B.C. citizens as multiple shootings are being reported around the city, the country's public alerting system Alert Ready said on Monday.

* The suspect behind early morning multiple shootings that left several victims in British Columbia is in custody and no longer a threat, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police said.

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US Congress Seeking to Bolster Pentagon Cyber Force Readiness - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The US Congress seeks in the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to bolster the Defense Department cyber forces' readiness amid concerns about recruitment and retention, FedScoop reported on Monday.

The US Senate Armed Services Committee's version of the NDAA calls for a plan to address readiness challenges faced by US Cyber Command, the report said.

Readiness issues include problems attracting and keeping talent, which has been a long-term challenge in the government cybersecurity realm, the report said.

The Armed Services Committee heard about the challenges from cyber organizations across the joint force during a classified hearing, the report said.

The panel's version of the NDAA addresses cyber force concerns by mandating a Defense Department readiness plan and increasing funding for Cyber Command's acquisition priorities programs, as well as "hunt forward" operations that deploy US cyber personnel to foreign nations to boost their defenses, the report also said.

The panel is also monitoring the cyber mission force's progress on readiness as it plans to add 14 more teams over the next several years, the report added.

The US House of Representatives earlier in July passed their initial version of the 2023 NDAA, which authorized approximately \$850 billion in defense spending for the fiscal year. The Senate still must pass their version of the legislation and reconcile it with the House version before it can be signed into law by President Joe Biden.

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Canada Condemns Execution of Pro-Democracy Leaders in Myanmar - Foreign Minister

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government condemns Myanmar's military regime for the execution of three pro-democracy activists and an opposition leader, Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly said on Monday.

The opposition news portal Irrawaddy reported earlier on Monday that the Myanmar authorities had executed former National League for Democracy lawmaker Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw, democracy activist Ko Jimmy as well as two other activists.

"Canada condemns the Myanmar military regime's reprehensible acts of violence, including executions, against pro-democracy and opposition leaders. We will continue to support the people of Myanmar and honor the lives of those who were unjustly executed," Joly said via Twitter.

Joly's statement comes after US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken issues a strong condemnation of the execution of the four individuals, reaffirming the United States' commitment to returning democracy in Myanmar.

In January, the military authorities sentenced Thaw and Jimmy to death on charges of masterminding and participating in armed subversion and related activities under Myanmar's Counterterrorism Law.

Jimmy was arrested for posting messages on social media and calling on the people in Myanmar to resist the military authorities while Thaw was arrested for organizing illegal armed anti-government groups.

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Oil Up 2% as Traders Bets on Tight Supply Amid US Interest Rate Hike, Recession Worries

NEW YORK, July 25 (Sputnik) - Oil prices rose about 2% in choppy trading on Monday as investors placed bets on tight supply against concerns of weaker demand from an imminent Federal Reserve interest rate hike and fears of a US recession.

"Oil traders have their sights set on many of the same events this week, as they try to better grasp the economic threat facing the US and other countries around the world," Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said. "A recession is the primary downside risk for crude prices and it's all that's keeping them below \$100 in the short term."

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled up \$2, or 2.1%, at \$96.70 per barrel. The US crude benchmark fell almost 3% last week, extending to nearly 13% its loss over the past three weeks. In the prior week, WTI sank to \$90.58, its lowest since February 25. London-traded Brent crude settled up \$1.81, or 1.8%, at \$100.19 per barrel, extending last week's 2.2% gain. The global crude benchmark was down five weeks in a row, conceding about 17%. Brent hit a near five-month low, at \$95.42, during that stretch.

Volatility could be a main feature in oil and other risk assets this week as the Federal Reserve prepares to announce on Wednesday its fourth rate hike of the year. Traders will also attempt to interpret the latest turns in the economy from a news conference by Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, right after the rates decision.

Forecasters consensus so far is that there will be another 75-basis point interest rate hike for July, just like in June. If so, that will bring rates to a range of 2.25-2.50% by the end of this month, from the 0-0.25% range they stood at in February before the increases.

With three more rate decisions left for this year, Federal Reserve officials have suggested that rates could be at a high-end of 3.5% or even 4% by the year-end.

But money market traders are also pricing in rate cuts by 2023 if economic fallout from the interest rate increases turns out to be greater than thought. That the market is even

contemplating rate cuts by next year tells some economists that the risk of a Fed-induced recession is reasonably high.

The US economy has already contracted 1.6% in the first quarter and a second quarter in the red is all that's needed to technically call a recession. The first reading for second quarter GDP data will be on Thursday, a day after the Federal Reserve interest rate decision.

ONADA's Erlam said oil bulls will likely swarm with the market with dip-buying if WTI goes below \$90 a barrel on recession fears

"The tightness of the oil market cannot be ignored even as recession odds rise. A sustainable break below \$90 still looks like a big ask and if it does materialize, it will be a bit of a double-edged sword," he added.

Despite WTI coming off from this year's peaks of above \$130 and Brent sliding from highs of almost \$140, both crude benchmarks are still up 28% for 2022 on concerns over tight supply.

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Biden Says He Does Not Expect to See Recession in US

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden told reporters on Monday that in his view the United States will not experience a recession.

"We are not going to be in a recession, in my view," Biden said when asked how worried should Americans be ahead of announcement on the nation's GDP on Thursday. "I don't think we are going to see a recession."

7/25/2022 4:17:10 PM -04:00

Biden Says Expects to Speak With China Counterpart Xi This Week

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden told reporters on Monday that he anticipates having a conversation with Chinese President Xi Jinping this week

When asked whether he will speak with Xi this week, Biden said, "That's my expectation."

Biden added that he will let the media know about the conversation once it is set up.

Last week, Xi sent a message of sympathy to Biden, wishing him a prompt recovery after acquiring the novel coronavirus, media reported. White House National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby confirmed that Xi sent the message to Biden. On Thursday, Biden tested positive for novel coronavirus and is experiencing mild symptoms.

The US president is currently working from his residence and will continue to do so for at least five days or until he receives a negative test, the White House said.

7/25/2022 4:11:38 PM -04:00

North Korea 'Highly Likely' to Carry Out 7th Nuclear Test Soon - US Congressman

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - North Korea is "highly likely" to carry out its seventh underground nuclear test in the near future, and the United States, South Korea and Japan should coordinate their response to it, Democratic US Congressman Ami Bera said on Monday. "It is highly likely there will be a seventh nuclear test coming out of North Korea," Bera told a podcast from the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "All indications are there will be a seventh nuclear test. We have to decide what our responses will be on that."

The US government had to close ranks with its two most important Northeast Asian allies, South Korea and Japan, to plan in advance a coordinated response to the expected test, Bera, a leading expert in Congress on US-Korean relations, said.

"We are really going to have to start speaking with one voice on the nuclear issue. If there is that seventh nuclear test, that just elevates the importance of a strong trilateral relationship speaking with one voice on the geopolitical issues in the region," Bera said.

North Korea has completed all preparations for a nuclear test but is waiting for the right moment to maximize its effect, while closely watching the situation in the international and domestic arena, South Korean Minister of Unification Kwon Young-se said on June 27.

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US to Discuss Economic Issues, Supply Chains in Talks With Japan This Week - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The United States will discuss economic issues including supply chain challenges during upcoming talks in Washington later this week, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Monday.

"We do look forward to welcoming our Japanese allies to the [State Department] building later in the week. We'll do so in tandem with our partners from the Department of Commerce to have a wide-ranging discussion on our economic relationship and our economic priorities. I can assure you that supply chains will feature into that conversation," Price said during a press briefing.

The meeting comes amid reports that the US is attempting to form a new alliance of semiconductor manufacturing nations, including Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. The chip market has faced challenges starting with production pauses and logistical disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The US on Monday also approved a potential \$293 million sale of advanced medium-range, air-to-air missiles to Japan, the Defense Department said. The US is in close contact with Japan and South Korea about increased North Korean weapons tests, and is prepared to make military posture adjustments as appropriate, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said last month.

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Biden Administration Considers Declaring Monkeypox Health Emergency in US - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is considering whether to declare the monkeypox outbreak in the United States a health emergency, the Washington Post reported on Monday.

Administration officials plan to make a decision whether to declare an emergency health declaration later this week, the report said.

The Biden administration is also planning to appoint a White House coordinator to oversee its response to the monkeypox outbreak in the United States, the report also said.

Officials are hesitant to declare a health emergency since the virus has not cause a single death, the report said.

US health authorities have reported some 2,900 monkeypox cases in the United States. In other parts of the world, the authorities have reported a total 17,000 cases, according to the report.

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US Cyber Agency Says Cyber Activity 'Key Part' of Russia's Ukraine Military Operation
WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) – Cyber activities have been a key part of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, Executive Director of the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Brandon Wales said on Monday.

"Cyber has been a key part of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. What we have not seen, luckily, is targeting of the United States," Wales said during a virtual talk organized by the Rural Broadband Association.

Wales believes that in spite of the fact that Russian state actors have not targeted the United States, such attacks are still possible in the future, especially following alleged malicious cyber activities emanating from within Russia over the past few years.

The United States continues to see ransomware attacks from Russia, but, according to Wales, there has not been significant disruption to critical infrastructure.

Earlier in July, US Cyber Command (USCYBERCOM) released information regarding malicious activity against Ukrainian networks provided by the Security Service of Ukraine. Even though the US Cyber National Mission Force did not identify a suspect behind the hacks, a number of US officials have frequently accused Russia of engaging in cyber activities against Ukraine as part of its special military operation.

Moscow has denied the claims. Top Kremlin cyber official Andrei Krutskikh in June accused the United States and its allies of waging illegal cyberattacks against Russia.

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US State Dept. Says UN-Brokered Deal to Export Ukraine Grain 'Needs to Endure'

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The United Nations-brokered deal to allow exports of grain out of Ukraine "needs to endure," US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"This agreement needs to endure," Price said during a press briefing.

Price said the United States is hopeful food and fertilizer will begin to ship out in the coming days.

Last week, the defense ministers of Russia and Turkey and the infrastructure minister of Ukraine met in Istanbul to ink a UN-brokered deal on grain and fertilizer exports. However, there was a strike on Ukraine military targets at the Odessa port over the weekend and the United Nations expressed concern about the development.

Earlier on Monday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said the strike at the Odessa port targeted exclusively military infrastructure and cannot - and should not - affect grain shipments.

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US Urges International Partners to Pressure Myanmar Into Democratic Reforms - State Dept. WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The United States is urging and working with international partners to increase pressure on the government of Myanmar to accept democratic reforms following the execution of political activists by military authorities, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"The United States urges all partners and allies to join us in condemning the regime's actions and stepping up pressure on the regime and its supporters," Price said during a press briefing.

"We are discussing additional response options that we could implement ourselves, that we could implement in coordination with our partners - our partners in ASEAN, our other like-minded partners - with whom we've worked since February of last year to seek to put Burma back on the path to democracy."

The Myanmar government executed former National League for Democracy lawmaker Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw, democracy activist Ko Jimmy and two others under the country's counterterrorism laws, opposition news outlet Irrawaddy reported on Monday.

Jimmy was arrested for posting messages on social media and calling on the people in Myanmar to resist the military authorities while Thaw was arrested for organizing illegal armed anti-government groups.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken condemned the executions and affirmed the US's commitment to restoring democracy in Myanmar, according to a statement.

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Blinken Offers Assistance to Armenia, Azerbaijan for Regional Linkages - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke by telephone with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and offered US assistance for opening regional transport and communications linkages, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to discuss Armenia and Azerbaijan's historic opportunity to achieve peace in the

region. The Secretary offered the United States' assistance in facilitating regional transportation and communication linkages," Price said in a press release.

Blinken offered the same kind of assistance to Azerbaijan leader Ilham Aliyev in a separate phone call, Price also said.

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US Approves Possible \$293Mln Sale of Advanced Air-to-Air Missiles to Japan - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The United States has approved a potential \$293 million sale of advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles to Japan, the Defense Department said in a press release on Monday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Japan of AIM-120C-7/8 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAMs) and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$293 million," the release said. "The Government of Japan has requested to buy one hundred fifty (150) AIM-120C-7/C-8 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles."

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Cyber Threat Coming From China 'Substantial,' Top Concern for US - CISA

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The United States sees a substantial cyber threat coming from China and considers the country a top concern for US security, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Executive Director Brandon Wales said on Monday.

"We face threats from a variety of nation states. Russia has been obviously one that's been very acute, but long term the threat posed by malicious activity coming out of China is substantial," Wales said during a virtual talk organized by the Rural Broadband Association. "They are obviously a top concern for us."

Wales said the United States sees large scale Chinese activity to compromise networks for espionage and to allegedly exploit them for future attacks.

According to Wales, the United States saw cyber-attacks from China last year when thousands of Microsoft Exchange servers were hit or compromised in the United States and around the world.

In June, the United States warned that China-backed cybercriminal groups were targeting major telecommunications companies since 2020.

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Texas Airport Secure After Officer-Involved Shooting, Ground Stop Still in Effect

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The Dallas Love Field airport in the state of Texas is secure following an officer-involved shooting, Dallas Police Department (DPD) Chief Eddie Garcia said on Monday.

"No other individuals were injured in this event, other than the suspect... We wanted to ensure that our community knows that this is not an active situation," Garcia said during a press conference. "We want to make sure our community knows that there are no other passengers, family members, or people in the airport that are victims."

Garcia said a 37-year-old woman was dropped off at the airport near the ticket counters at around 11:00 a.m. local time (4:00 p.m. GMT). The suspect walked into a nearby restroom and changed her clothing, then she exited the restroom and started firing a handgun into the air, Garcia said.

A police officer in the area, he added, shot the suspect, who was then taken into custody and transported to a local hospital.

A Federal Aviation Authority spokesperson told Sputnik Southwest Airlines flights bound for Dallas Love Field are being held at their departure airports. The stop began at 11:11 a.m. and remains in effect, the spokesperson added.

A Dallas Love Field airport spokesperson told Sputnik that at approximately 11:23 a.m. local time DPD reported and immediately responded to a potential active shooter.

"An evacuation and shelter in place commenced as DPD investigated, confirmed, and neutralized the... shooter threat," the airport spokesperson said. "Operations are currently suspended... [and] will resume once DPD has concluded its investigation."

Southwest airlines in a travel advisory said due to an ongoing investigation regarding a security event, the airline's operations at the airport may be disrupted for the remainder of today and flights may be delayed and/or canceled.

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Pope Apologizes for Church 'Systematically Marginalizing' Indigenous Peoples of Canada

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) – Pope Francis during his visit to Canada on Monday delivered an official apology to indigenous communities for the "devastating experiences" the Catholic Church subjected them to in the system of residential schools.

"I am here because the first step of my penitential pilgrimage among you is that of again asking forgiveness, I'm telling you once more that I am deeply sorry," Pope Francis said as he visited the site of a former residential school in the province of Alberta.

The pontiff said the Church and First Nations must work together to heal the wounds of the past and work on reconciliation between the two.

"I think back about the stories you told me, how the policies of assimilation ended up systematically marginalizing indigenous peoples; how also through the system of residential

schools, your languages and cultures were denigrated and suppressed," he continued, addressing Canada's indigenous communities.

Canada has a checkered history with its indigenous nations as it forcefully assimilated them over the centuries with the complicity of the Catholic Church which was tasked with carrying out the "mission."

During the forced assimilation in the period between the 1880s and the late 20th century, the Catholic clergy physically, psychologically and emotionally abused students of residential schools, mainly children that were taken from their families.

Over the past years, numerous mass graves with remains of indigenous children have been found at the sites of former Catholic Church boarding schools, leading to a formal request, by the First Nations, to the Pope, to apologize in the name of the Holy See for its past crimes.

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UPDATE - US Condemns Execution of Pro-Democracy Leaders in Myanmar - Blinken
(Updates with more information in para 3; modifies headline, lede)

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The United States condemns the Myanmar military authorities for carrying the execution of four pro-democracy activists, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said on Monday.

The opposition news portal Irrawaddy reported earlier on Monday that the Myanmar government had executed former National League for Democracy lawmaker Ko Phyto Zeya Thaw, democracy activist Ko Jimmy as well as two other activists.

"We strongly condemn the Burma [Myanmar] military regime's executions of pro-democracy activists and elected leaders. Such reprehensible acts of violence and repression cannot be tolerated. We remain committed to the people of Burma and their efforts to restore Burma's path to democracy," Blinken said via Twitter.

The US embassy in Burma also issued a statement earlier in the day in which it condemned the execution of the four individuals.

In January, the military authorities sentenced Thaw and Jimmy to death on charges of masterminding and participating in armed subversion and related activities under Myanmar's Counterterrorism Law.

Jimmy was arrested for posting messages on social media and calling on the people in Myanmar to resist the military authorities while Thaw was arrested for organizing illegal armed anti-government groups.

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Nord Stream 1 Turbine Ready to Be Delivered as Siemens Now Has All Necessary Documents

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The Nord Stream 1 pipeline turbine, which was stuck in transit in Germany, is ready to be delivered to Russia given that all the necessary export documents have been obtained from the German government, Siemens told Sputnik on Monday.

"The transportation of the turbine could start immediately. The German authorities provided Siemens Energy with all the necessary documents for the export of the turbine to Russia at the beginning of last week," Siemens said.

The Russian energy giant Gazprom has been informed about the latest developments and the emission of custom documents from Russia is expected next but has not yet happened yet, Siemens added.

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US Energy Dept. to Loan GM Joint Lithium-Ion Battery Venture \$2.5Bln - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The US Energy Department said on Monday it plans to loan \$2.5 billion to a General Motors joint venture with LG Energy Solutions to build new lithium-ion battery cell manufacturing plants that will be vital for electric vehicles produced in the United States.

"The Department of Energy's Loan Programs Office (LPO) announced a conditional commitment to Ultium Cells LLC for a \$2.5 billion loan to help finance the construction of new lithium-ion (Li-ion) battery cell manufacturing facilities in Ohio, Tennessee, and Michigan," the Energy Department said in a press release.

Construction of the three facilities will support General Motors' plans to have capacity to build one million electric vehicles in North America by the end of 2025, the release said.

The battery cells manufactured by Ultium Cells LLC are pouch-type cells that use nickel-cobalt-manganese-aluminum chemistry, the release said.

The bipartisan infrastructure law provides \$7.5 billion for electric vehicle charging infrastructure and more than \$7 billion for the critical minerals supply chains needed for batteries and other materials important to the electric vehicle industry.

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US Condemns Execution of Pro-Democracy Leaders in Myanmar - Embassy

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The United States condemns the execution of four pro-democracy leaders by the military authorities in Myanmar, the US Embassy said on Monday. The opposition news portal Irrawaddy reported earlier on Monday the execution of former National League for Democracy lawmaker Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw, democracy activist Ko Jimmy as well as two other activists.

"We condemn the military regime's execution of pro-democracy leaders and elected officials for exercising their fundamental freedoms. We join the people of Myanmar in mourning the loss of, Ko Jimmy, Phyo Zeya Thaw, Hla Myo Aung and Aung Thura Zaw," the US Embassy said via Twitter.

In January, the military authorities sentenced Thaw and Jimmy to death on charges of masterminding and participating in armed subversion and related activities under the Myanmar's Counterterrorism Law.

Jimmy was arrested for posting messages on social media and calling on the people in Myanmar to resist the military authorities while Thaw was arrested for organizing illegal armed anti-government groups.

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UN Says Odessa Port Attack 'Not Helpful' for Grain Deal

UNITED NATIONS, July 25 (Sputnik) - The United nations views the attack on the port of Odesa as being "not helpful" for the recently concluded Black Sea Initiative on grain and fertilizer exports, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Monday.

"It was not a helpful thing," Haq said during a press briefing. "We want all sides, as the Secretary-General [Antonio Guterres] made clear on Saturday, to fully implement what they've agreed to."

Haq emphasized that under the agreed provisions of the Black Sea Initiative, all parties should act in a manner that is helpful for the safe transport of commercial foodstuffs and fertilizers by ship.

Earlier on Monday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said the Odessa attack targeted exclusively military infrastructure and cannot - and should not - affect the beginning of the grain shipments.

The United Nations brokered the deal on grain exports from Ukraine and Russia last Friday and the attack took place on Saturday.

Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy denounced the strike, but UN-brokered deal is still holding.

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US Surgeons to Expand Charity Projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East - Team Leader

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - Pediatric cardiology specialists from the Bill Novick Cardiac Alliance are planning to expand their charity programs in the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, team leader Bill Novick told Sputnik.

"We are going to start a new program in Rwanda, in the capital city of Kigali. The program will start in the first quarter of next year," Novick said.

Novick said Rwanda does not have pediatric surgeons and "really needs help," along with other countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

"There is an Ethiopian-Australian trained pediatric heart surgeon, whom we have known for years, and he is going to take up a position there in Kigali. He has asked us to help develop this program in pediatric heart surgery. We don't know how many surgeries we will perform there," Novick said.

The Cardiac Alliance team has scheduled one trip to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and two trips to Angola later this year with plans to operate on approximately 50-55 children in total, Novick said.

Next year, the team plans to visit Angola eight times and the DRC twice, he said.

Novick pointed out that he and his colleagues had just returned from Iraq, where they operated on 26 children in the city of Basra.

"All the children were discharged from the hospital so everybody was happy. We are scheduled to go back to Basra in August and then in October," he said.

In 2023, the team plans to expand the project and visit Basra eight times, he said.

In addition, the Cardiac Alliance plans to visit Lebanon in late July to operate on children there, the vast majority of them being Syrian refugees.

"That program typically involves anywhere from 12 and 17 kids per trip and 95% of these children are Syrian refugees," Novick said.

He said that those Syrians who had to flee to Lebanon are not part of the local healthcare system and typically have to pay \$15,000 to \$40,000 that private centers charge people for children's heart surgery.

"There is no public hospital in Lebanon, except the one where we work, that provides pediatric heart surgery. If you got a kid who needs heart surgery, you are going to go to a private hospital, you are going to pay, you are going to find a sponsor," Novick said. "I would say, if we do 16 kids, 14 or 15 will be Syrian refugees, and one or two would be from Lebanese poor families who cannot afford private healthcare."

The Cardiac Alliance is comprised of medical specialists from different countries who usually work in "hot spots" around the world.

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US Cardiologists Hope to Resume Program in Russia While Awaiting Response From Kemerovo

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - A group of pediatric cardiologists from the Bill Novick Cardiac Alliance is hoping to resume its partnership with Russia this year, but is still awaiting a response from their colleagues in the city of Kemerovo, team leader Bill Novick told Sputnik. "Even if we make a trip to Angola until December 17, it is entirely possible to send a smaller team of two or three people to Kemerovo at the same time," Novick, a prominent pediatric heart surgeon, said.

The team had scheduled a trip to Kemerovo last spring, but the doctors from the city hospital asked them to cancel it because of financial issues. However, the Kemerovo doctors also expressed hope cooperation will resume later this year, probably in December.

"I don't know what is going on there. I have not heard from them, not even a whisper out of Kemerovo since March or April, when they said that the next trip is going to be postponed," Novick said.

Novick said he suspects the current economic situation in Russia as related to the conflict in Ukraine might somehow affect the ability of the hospital administration in Kemerovo to plan. "I am just keeping my eye on what is going on in Ukraine and if we will see things going to an end, I will contact them," he said.

The Cardiac Alliance maintains contacts at the doctors' level, however. One of the Kemerovo surgeons has called Novick's colleagues on several occasions to discuss specific cases.

"We are still in touch at a doctor-to-doctor level, but there is nothing from the hospital administration. We still have a window, but if by the start of November I do not hear anything from Kemerovo, I will say the window for this year is closed," Novick added.

The Cardiac Alliance has conducted some 500 surgeries in Russia since 2008. The group is comprised of medical specialists from different countries who usually work in "hot spots" around the world. Previously, the Cardiac Alliance performed surgeries in several Russian cities, including Voronezh and Nizhny Novgorod.

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US-Based Cardiologists to Operate on Children in Ukraine in September - Team Leader

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - A group of pediatric cardiologists from the Bill Novick Cardiac Alliance plans to conduct up to 20 surgeries of different levels of complexity during its next trip to the Ukrainian city of Lviv, team leader Bill Novick told Sputnik.

"I would imagine, we are probably looking at somewhere around 12 to 15 already operated-on children in need of another surgery and probably another three to six interventional catheterization procedures," Novick said about the upcoming trip in September.

In addition, the team may conduct another trip to Lviv in the first part of December, Novick noted.

The Cardiac Alliance team has visited Lviv three times this year, including one unexpected trip just several days after the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine. At that time, Ukrainian doctors asked the team to come urgently in order to operate on several newborns with serious heart issues.

"In March and June, we made short seven-eight day trips. This time, we hope to have a 14-day trip in September," Novick said.

The Cardiac Alliance established a pediatric heart surgery project in Lviv last year given that there were no such programs in the western part of Ukraine at that time and children had to travel to Kiev and other cities to receive relevant treatment.

The Cardiac Alliance is comprised of medical specialists from different countries who usually work in "hot spots" around the world. The team has been working in different Ukrainian cities for than 10 years.

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US Cancels 'Essential' Navy Drills in Black Sea Over Conflict in Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) – The US Navy canceled "essential" Sea Breeze 2022 exercise in the Black Sea over Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, Newsweek reported on Monday, citing unnamed US officials.

The major navy exercise was "canceled due to Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine," according to a Biden administration official quoted in the report.

Last year, the exercise was dubbed "essential" to deterring Russia's alleged aggression, the report said.

In 2021, Sea Breeze involved 32 warships from NATO and partners, the report said.

Instead of the canceled drills, NATO is conducting a smaller exercise, Breeze 2022, off the coast of Bulgaria, near the Black Sea port cities of Varna and Burgas, the report noted.

Breeze 2022 involves a total of 24 vessels, five planes and two helicopters from 10 nations and is the first NATO-led exercise since the beginning of Russia's special military operation, according to the report. At the same time, no US ships are taking part in the exercise.

Soon after Russia launched its operation, Turkey warned both Black Sea and non-Black Sea countries not to send warships through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, citing the Montreux Convention of 1936 that grants the country the right to restrict the passage of military ships through the straits in emergency situations.

On February 24, Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk appealed for help in defending themselves against Ukrainian forces. In response, the West rolled out a comprehensive sanctions campaign against Russia and boosted military assistance for Ukraine, including lethal weapons.

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Parties to Grain Deal to Have Presence in Joint Center in Istanbul by Tuesday - UN

UNITED NATIONS, July 25 (Sputnik) - All parties to the Black Sea grain initiative will start having a presence in the Joint Coordinator Center (JCC) in Istanbul by Tuesday, with ships planning to move within the next few days, UN spokesman Farhan Haq said at a press briefing. "By tomorrow, we expect that all parties and the UN will have a... physical presence in the Joint Coordination Center," Haq said on Monday. "And to reiterate, we do expect that the first ships could move within a few days."

Last week, the defense ministers of Russia and Turkey and the infrastructure minister of Ukraine met in Istanbul to ink a UN-brokered deal on grain exports.

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Ex-US Congressman, 8 Others Arrested in Multimillion Insider Trading Case - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - A former US congressman, an FBI agent and seven other individuals have been charged with insider trading that generated millions of dollars in profits, US Attorney for the Southern District of New York Damian Williams said on Monday.

"I'm here today to announce the unsealing of four separate indictments, charging a total of nine defendants with insider trading schemes that collectively generated millions of dollars in profits. The defendants arrested today include a former United States congressman, an FBI agent in training, multiple Silicon Valley executives, and an investment banker who worked at one of Wall Street's leading financial institutions," Williams said during a press conference.

One of the defendants is former US congressman Stephen Buyer, who is charged with allegedly using his job as a business consultant to obtain information about corporate mergers involving his clients, Williams said.

Buyer then used the obtained information to trade and to profit in his own account and in other people's accounts, Williams added.

The criminal action against Buyer has been taken in parallel with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

The SEC said in a press release that it filed a complaint alleging Buyer used inside information to buy \$1.5 million in stocks, including from the telecommunication company Sprint ahead of its merger with T-Mobile.

In March 2018, Buyer purchased a total of \$568,000 of Sprint stocks and made a profit of more than \$107,000 after news of the merger leaked in April 2018, the release also said.

The SEC alleges that that Buyer earned more than \$227,000 after he purchased and then sold more than \$1 million of Navigant Consulting, Inc. securities, the release added.

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US Sen. Joe Manchin Tests Positive for COVID-19, Experiencing Mild Symptoms - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - US Sen. Joe Manchin said on Monday he has tested positive for COVID-19 and is experiencing mild symptoms while continuing to work remotely.

"This morning I tested positive for COVID-19. I am fully vaccinated and boosted and am experiencing mild symptoms. I will isolate and follow CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] guidelines as I continue to serve West Virginians," Manchin said via social media.

Manchin's COVID-19 infection comes alongside US President Joe Biden's, who tested positive on Thursday. Biden's symptoms are almost entirely resolved as of Monday morning, according to presidential physician Kevin O'Connor.

A group of 165 staffers from federal agencies and congressional offices on Sunday sent Biden and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer a letter urging them to guarantee the support of Manchin on climate change legislation that he has been reluctant to back amid inflation concerns.

The staffers in the letter also suggested Schumer strip Manchin of his chairmanship of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Manchin and Biden's cases are two of over 90.4 million COVID-19 infections confirmed in the United States since the beginning of the pandemic, according to Johns Hopkins University of Medicine data. Over 570.3 million cases have been confirmed globally as of Monday, the data said.

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All Parties Reaffirm Commitment to Black Sea Grain Initiative - UN Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, July 25 (Sputnik) - All parties to the recent UN-brokered grain deal have reaffirmed their commitment to the initiative, UN spokesman Farhan Haq said Friday.

"We can tell you that since the signing of the agreement, the parties to the initiative and the UN have been in frequent contact including yesterday. All parties have reconfirmed their commitment to the initiative," Haq said.

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Suspect in Multiple Shootings in British Columbia's Langley 'No Longer a Threat' - Police

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) – The suspect behind early morning multiple shootings that left several victims in British Columbia is in custody and no longer a threat, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) said on Monday.

"In the early morning hours of July 25, the Langley RCMP responded to multiple reports shots fired with several victims and several different scenes throughout the City of Langley and one scene in the Township of Langley. Out of an abundance of caution, an Emergency Alert was issued until investigators can confirm that the suspect was acting alone," Langley RCMP said in a statement.

The city's RCMP worked with local law enforcement and one male individual was taken into custody. He is believed to have acted alone, the security service added.

"Suspect police interacted with is no longer a threat. Efforts still being made to confirm only one suspect is involved," Canada's public alerting system said.

The number of victims is yet to be communicated by Langley RCMP.

In the early hours of the morning, an emergency alert was sent to the cellphones of Langley B.C. citizens as multiple shootings were being reported around the city.

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US Democrats Ask Hulu to Reconsider Decision Not to Air Election Ads - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - Democratic Party leaders, political action committees (PACs) and candidates running for office in the November midterm elections in the United States have said they are infuriated by the decision of the streaming service Hulu to refuse to run their political advertisements and some have asked the company to reconsider its decision, the Washington Post reported on Monday.

Hulu has rejected to run the Democrats' advertisements that deal with abortion, guns control and the January 6 events at the US Capitol, citing its policy of not airing issues that it considers controversial.

New York Democratic Congressional candidate Suraj Patel wrote a letter to Hulu President Joe Earley - and to parent company Disney CEO Bob Chapek - to complain about its policy and to urge them to reconsider their decision.

Patel pointed out that blocking advertisements means not addressing the most important issues currently facing the United States, the report said.

Democracy only functions if there is open debate, shared facts and an informed electorate and the United States is at an absolutely critical time in its history, the report quoted Patel as saying. How are voters supposed to make informed choices if their candidates cannot talk about the most important issues of the day - here including abortion, guns, climate change and democracy, the report also quoted Patel as saying.

The leaders of three Democratic PACs weighed in by characterizing Hulu's decision "censorship of the truth" and noting that the company is doing a disservice to the American public in what they said was another step down a dangerous path for the United States, the report said.

Democrats also complained about the fact that Hulu's advertisements guidelines are not public and are also confusing and seemingly arbitrary, the report added.

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Biden's COVID-19 Symptoms Nearly Resolved – Doctor

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) – US President Biden's COVID-19 symptoms are "almost completely resolved," his physician Kevin O'Connor said on Monday.

"His symptoms have now almost completely resolved. When questioned, at this point he only notes some residual nasal congestion and minimal hoarseness," O'Connor wrote in his daily

memo to Assistant to the President and White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre. Biden's pulse, blood pressure, respiratory rate, and temperature remain normal, he added. O'Connor said the president was responding to therapy as expected, noting that Biden had completed his fourth full day of Paxlovid on Sunday. Biden will continue taking the medication, as well as low dose aspirin as an alternative type of blood thinner. The doctor said that as the BA5 variant was "particularly transmissible," Biden would continue to isolate according to CDC recommendations.

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Russia Strongly Protests US Refusal to Provide Kremlin Official Visa for UN Event - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, July 25 (Sputnik) - Russia strongly protests the decision of the United States to refuse a visa needed to attend a UN working group on information security to top Kremlin cyber official Andrei Krutskikh, Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Monday.

"We have made known to US authorities our strong protest [to the decision]," Polyanskiy said.

"We call on the UN Secretariat to take concrete measures toward the resolution of this unacceptable situation. We expect the organization's leadership to address the situation."

The US refused to grant Krutskikh a visa as a matter of principle, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said earlier.

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US Justice Dept. Says Filing Lawsuit Against Poultry Plants for Anticompetitive Behavior

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department is filing an antitrust lawsuit against three poultry processors and a data consulting firm to stop an alleged conspiracy between the businesses to exchange grower compensation information in violation of federal competition laws, the Justice Department said on Monday.

The lawsuit alleges that data consulting firm Webber, Meng, Sahl and Company (WMS) worked alongside poultry companies Cargill Inc., Sanderson Farms Inc. and Wayne Farms LLC to pit chicken growers against each other to determine their compensation through a so-called "tournament system."

Tournament pay systems are used in the poultry industry to set growers' compensation based on their flock's ranking relative to the average quality of the whole group of growers for a given time period. The US Department of Agriculture over many years has received numerous complaints from growers calling for restrictions on such pay systems.

"Through a brazen scheme to exchange wage and benefit information, these poultry processors stifled competition and harmed a generation of plant workers who face demanding and

sometimes dangerous conditions to earn a living," Justice Department Antitrust Division Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Doha Mekki said in the statement.

The Justice Department also filed consent decrees that, if approved by the court, would prohibit WMS from providing competitively sensitive information and ban the poultry processors from sharing such information about plant workers' compensation, according to the statement.

The consent decree with the poultry processors would also impose a compliance monitor for 10 years and require the companies to pay workers harmed by the alleged anticompetitiveness conspiracy \$84.8 million in restitution, the statement added.

The lawsuit is part of a larger probe into anticompetitive labor market abuses in the poultry processing industry, the statement said. Today's actions put companies on notice that the Justice Department Antitrust Division will use all available legal authorities to address anticompetitive conduct, Mekki also said in the statement.

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Police in Canada's British Columbia Issues Alert for Multiple Shootings in City of Langley

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Sputnik) – The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) has issued an emergency alert to cellphones of Langley B.C. citizens as multiple shootings are being reported around the city, the country's public alerting system Alert Ready said on Monday.

"Civil Emergency alert has been issued by BC RCMP for Langley Downtown Core, BC. Please remain alert and out of the area," the entity wrote on social media.

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UNSC to Hold Meeting on Ukraine on Friday - Source

UNITED NATIONS, July 25 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council under Brazil's presidency will convene a meeting on Ukraine on Friday, a UNSC source told Sputnik.

The United States and Albania requested the meeting, and it will be the first UNSC meeting on Ukraine this month. According to the Security Council Report, an independent organization providing analysis on Security Council matters, the discussion will focus on "civilians and civilian infrastructure."