

10/14/22 Friday

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CDC Warns Flu Season Beginning Early in US, Outbreaks Tracked in Washington, DC, NYC, Texas

By - Fantine Gardinier

Millions of influenza cases each year cost the country billions of dollars in productivity, according to estimates, and can cause tens of thousands of hospitalizations and deaths. That impact has been somewhat reduced in recent years, since masking to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has also limited other illnesses, like the flu.

"We've noted that flu activity is starting to increase across much of the country," Rochelle Walensky, director of the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC), [told NBC News](#) on Friday.

"Not everybody got flu vaccinated last year, and many people did not get the flu. So that makes us ripe to have potentially a severe flu season," she added.

The "season" for influenza, when the majority of outbreaks happen each year, typically begins in December and peaks in February, the coldest months in the United States.

Between 12,000 and 52,000 Americans die from influenza in a typical year in the United States, [according to CDC data](#), although years with particularly bad outbreaks can be much higher.

During the winter of 2017-2018, for example, [80,000 died in the US](#) from the viral respiratory illness.

According to the CDC's [most recent weekly report](#), released on Friday, the vast majority of cases are Influenza Type A (H3N2), and are concentrated in New York City, Washington, DC, Georgia, and Texas. Type A Influenza includes several strains associated with highly deadly outbreaks, including pandemics in 1918 and the late 2000s.

Health officials have said they are expecting the coming winter to be worse than several recent years because most masking restrictions have been lifted across the US. Masking had a noticeable effect on limiting the spread of influenza and other respiratory illnesses in addition to COVID-19 - so much so that one lineage, the B/Yamagata strain, is [believed to have gone extinct](#) as a result.

Christine Paik, a spokesperson for the Poway Unified School District in San Diego, California, [told CNN on Wednesday](#) that nearly 400 students were absent in a single day "with cold and flu-like symptoms."

"Health officials have told us that the cold/flu season is definitely here and it's hitting schools harder now that COVID restrictions are no longer in place," she said.

The CDC is recommending that as many people as possible get their flu shots, which is an annual vaccination against what officials have judged to be the most likely influenza strains to cause a serious outbreak that year.

"An annual flu vaccine is the best way to protect against flu. Vaccination helps prevent infection and can also prevent serious outcomes in people who get vaccinated but still get sick with flu," according to the report.

“CDC recommends that everyone ages 6 months and older get a flu vaccine, ideally by the end of October,” it continues. “There are also prescription flu antiviral drugs that can be used to treat flu illness; those need to be started as early as possible.”

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Media Debunks GOP ‘Hoax’ Claiming Schools Keep Litter Boxes for ‘Students Who Identify as Cats’

By - Fantine Gardinier

As part of their drive to roll back LGBTQ rights in states across the US, conservative figures have repeatedly claimed that school districts are being forced to keep litter boxes to be used by students who supposedly identify as animals. There’s just one problem: it’s never happened. According to a [Friday article by NBC News](#), at least 20 Republican candidates and elected officials have claimed in 2022 that public school districts in the US are being forced to place litter boxes, normally used by indoor cats or other pets, to instead be used by students who identify as cats in lieu of regular bathroom facilities.

The claim, which has variously appeared as an authoritative statement of fact or as a salacious rumor, is typically invoked during speeches denouncing the right of transgender people to [use gendered public bathrooms](#) belonging to the gender they identify as.

In one example, Heidi Ganahl, the Republican candidate for governor of Colorado, has repeatedly made the claim about Colorado schools.

“Not many people know that we have furrries in Colorado schools ... kids identifying as cats,” [Ganahl said on a local radio](#) show in late September. “It sounds absolutely ridiculous, but it’s happening all over Colorado and schools are tolerating it. It’s insane.”

She later specified that it was happening in Jefferson County. However, when NBC contacted the school district, they found that not only are there no litter boxes in schools, but costumes are banned in schools, including furry outfits, which resemble mascot suits.

In fact, NBC fact-checked every single instance they could find of a politician making the claim: none of them turned out to be true. Not even a [claim Joe Rogan made](#) on his radio show earlier this week, saying his friend’s wife was a teacher who’d been forced to “install a litter box in the girls’ room.”

Rogan’s guest, former US Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, then compared the alleged litter box incident to pedophilia, saying that “when you don’t believe in truth ... there are no boundaries anymore.” Gabbard, once a champion of LGBTQ rights who introduced the Equality Act into Congress, [has since pivoted sharply](#), denouncing transgender rights as a threat to women’s rights. She announced earlier this week she was leaving the Democratic Party, [saying it was](#) “under the complete control of an elitist cabal of warmongers driven by cowardly ‘wokeness.’” [PolitiFact swatted down](#) the litter box rumors as early as April, saying “We did not find any credible news reports that support the claim.”

PolitiFact’s rebuttal was motivated by a series of viral social media posts spreading the claim, and NBC noted in its investigation that social media has continued to serve as the primary

vector for the rumors to spread - aside from the claims being repeated by dozens of politicians during public appearances.

In fact, the news agency contacted representatives from furry groups to ask if even in the most tolerant social spheres, members of the community use litter boxes for going to the bathroom.

None had ever heard of such a thing. Furies are a subculture based around anthropomorphized animals and have nothing to do with sexuality or gender identity.

"I don't go out wearing tail, gloves, ears, or fursuit heads on any normal day," Olivia, 16, from California, told NBC, adding that when she has worn part of her costume to school, "I don't act like an animal, or think that I am one."

American lawmakers have introduced more than 200 bills in 2022 aimed at eliminating the rights of LGBTQ people to participate equally in US society, including limiting access to healthcare, public facilities, playing on sports teams, and the ability to change their name and gender on identification documents. A United Nations expert [has denounced the situation](#) as "deeply discriminatory measures seeking to rebuild stigma," saying the attacks "seek to leverage their lives [of LGBTQ people] as props for political profit."

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German Drone Finds 26-Foot Gash in Nord Stream 1 That Could Only be Caused by Explosion - Report

By - Fantine Gardinier

An underwater drone operated by German federal police took the first photos of the rupture site on the Nord Stream 1 pipeline since the leak was shut off on October 2. The pipeline had gas in it at the time, despite a halt in deliveries since early last month, when Brussels imposed price caps on the purchase of Russian gas.

According to German public broadcaster ARD on Friday, an underwater drone recorded a 26-foot gash in the pipeline that could only have been caused by an explosive charge.

The inspection of the site, the first since the massive gas leak was shut down on October 2, showed that both Nord Stream 1 pipes and one of the Nord Stream 2 pipes were struck in several places, leaving just the second Nord Stream 2 pipeline operational.

A loss in pressure in the pipes was recorded on September 2, and the roiling surface of the sea in Danish and Swedish waters revealed a massive hemorrhage of gas from the pipeline. By the time it was plugged on October 2, the leaks had released an estimated 500,000 tons of methane gas and filled hundreds of kilometers of pipe with seawater. [Gazprom estimates](#) repairs will take at least one year. [Moscow has called](#) the incident an act of terrorism, while Berlin has called it sabotage.

German Report Found No Energy Security Risk

The discovery comes after the release of a newly declassified German government report showing that in the months prior to the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine, Berlin judged the Nord Stream 2 pipeline would pose no risk to European energy security, as Moscow has always been a reliable contract partner.

First obtained by Der Spiegel earlier this week, [the report was given to](#) then-Chancellor Angela Merkel's government by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Change on October 26, 2021. Merkel's government had about six weeks left before it was replaced by Olaf Scholz's SPD-led coalition. At the time, he was Merkel's finance minister and vice-chancellor.

"Overall, the assessment comes to the conclusion that the granting of certification [for Nord Stream 2] does not jeopardize the security of gas supply in Germany and the European Union," the document says.

"For both the German and neighboring markets, the risk of serious impairments to supply security due to the failure of individual import supply infrastructures is very limited."

Indeed, in the end it was Germany that terminated the Nord Stream 2 pipeline after it had already been completed, following the launching of Russia's special operation in Ukraine in February, and it was the European Union's actions that broke the gas contract with Russia, leading to Nord Stream 1's shutoff last month.

Merkel's decision to continue with the Nord Stream 2 project, and the conclusions expressed in the declassified file, were both sharply contrary to the wishes of several German allies, most especially the United States. US President Joe Biden and his predecessor, Donald Trump, both sanctioned Russia and the companies involved in building the pipeline, which runs alongside Nord Stream 1 to carry liquified natural gas (LNG) from Russia to Germany underneath the Baltic Sea.

At the time, [Scholz blasted the sanctions](#) as "a severe intervention in German and European internal affairs."

Washington claimed that Russia intended to use the pipeline as a coercive tool to keep Europe in line by threatening to turn off the gas. Instead, the US has urged European nations to buy American LNG, even though it was more expensive than Russian gas.

Grappling Over Gas

After Russia launched its special operation in Ukraine to eliminate the neo-Nazi threat against Russian-speakers in the region and to neutralize Ukraine as a potential base for a NATO attack against Russia, the US and EU responded with sanctions that included a boycott of Russian energy exports. However, while the US immediately ended purchases of Russian oil and gas, Europe, which gets [nearly half its gas from Russia](#), has dragged its feet on complying with US demands. During much of that time, gas continued to flow through Nord Stream 1, even as Berlin sent military aid to Kiev to be used against Russian forces in what has increasingly become a NATO proxy war.

Those sanctions have helped push up the price of gas around the globe, hurting not just European nations, but much smaller and poorer countries less able to weather the financial blow.

Only last month, when the EU refused to buy gas from Russia at the offered price and imposed a price cap, did Gazprom turn the pipeline off.

"We will curtail Putin's capacity to fund his war from oil exports by banning services, such as insurance and the provision of finance, to vessels carrying Russian oil above an agreed price cap," British Chancellor [Nadhim Zahawi said on September 2](#) following a meeting of G7 finance ministers.

"We are united against this barbaric aggression and will do all we can to support Ukraine as they fight for sovereignty, democracy and freedom," he added.

The point is now somewhat moot, since the explosion has crippled Nord Stream 1 for at least a year. On Wednesday, [Moscow proposed](#) that gas deliveries to Germany could resume via the undamaged Nord Stream 2 pipeline, but Schotz's government declined the offer.

"The ball is in the EU's court. If they want to, then the taps can be turned on and that's it," Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday.

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Sen. Johnson Draws Boos, Laughs for Saying Wisconsin Lt. Gov. Barnes 'Turned Against America'

By - Fantine Gardinier

During the final debate in the US Senate race in Wisconsin on Thursday, incumbent Republican Sen. Ron Johnson elicited an unexpected reaction from the audience in response to one of his answers.

The debate, held at Marquette University in Milwaukee, saw Johnson pitted against his Democratic challenger, Mandela Barnes, the state's lieutenant governor. However, the final question wasn't about what policies they would pursue in the US Congress, but of a more personal nature: each was asked what they found admirable about their opponent.

Charles Benson, a journalist for NBC local affiliate TMJ4 who co-moderated the debate, said the question arose after voters surveyed said they were tired "of divisive politics and attack ads."

Barnes answered the question straight: "the senator has proven to be a family man, and I think that's admirable. You know, that's absolutely to be respected. He speaks about his family. [He's] done a lot to provide for them. I absolutely respect that."

"I mean, likewise," Johnson replied. "I appreciate the fact that Lt. Gov. Barnes had loving parents, a school teacher, father who worked third shift. So he had a good upbringing."

However, his answer then took a turn for the hostile.

"I guess what puzzles me about that is with that upbringing, why has he turned against America?" he asked.

The surprise attack drew boos from the crowd.

It's unclear what specifically prompted Johnson's statement, although he has taken many hard-line conservative stances on issues, most notably siding with former US President Donald [Trump's claims that the November 2020](#) election was fraudulently won by Democrats.

Earlier in the debate, Johnson drew cackles from the audience when he suggested that the FBI had "set me up" for trying to expose what he called "corruption" in the Bureau that had led to it targeting Trump.

A poll [released earlier this week](#) by Marquette University Law School showed Johnson has a slight lead over Barnes, with 52% of responding voters saying they would vote for the incumbent and 46% saying they would vote for Barnes. The election is on November 8.

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Roger Stone Meltdown, Calls Ivanka Trump an 'Abortionist B****'

By - Mary Manley

Roger Stone, a Republican strategist, consultant and lobbyist, began his career as a student volunteer on Richard Nixon's re-election campaign in 1972 before becoming an ally and advisor to former President Donald Trump. A day before the 2020 presidential election, Stone said "f*** the voting, let's get right to the violence," CNN reported.

A recently released video shows [Stone](#), 70, having a meltdown after he was not granted a pardon following the January 6 riots at the United States Capitol Building. Stone had sought a pardon shortly after the January 6 attacks, when a mob of Trump supporters stormed the Capitol Building in order to disrupt a joint session of Congress from certifying the victory of President-elect Joe Biden.

According to the House committee investigating the January 6 attacks, Stone had texted a lawyer named David I. Schoen, writing: "There will be mass prosecutions. Mark my words." He then asked if Schoen, who was representing Trump at the time, could "plug" a pardon for him during the next meeting that he took with Trump.

That evidence was turned over by a Danish filmmaking crew led by Christoffer Guldbrandsen, who also captured Stone's unhinged behavior on camera during a telephone call in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to an unknown person, during which he referred to Ivanka Trump as an "abortionist b****."

"Jared Kushner has an IQ of 70. He's coming to Miami. We will eject him from Miami very quickly; he will be leaving very quickly. Very quickly," says Stone, who is visibly angry in the video. "He has 100 security guards. I will have 5,000 security guards. You want to fight. Let's fight. F*** you. F*** you and your abortionist daughter."

Stone's phone call shows his anger at learning that he wouldn't be granted a pardon or legal protection in the aftermath of the January 6 riots. Trump first pardoned Stone in December of 2020 in connection to the 2016 election. Stone was supposed to serve a 40-month prison sentence, but Trump commuted that [sentence](#).

The clip was filmed during Inauguration Day on January 20, 2021, as Biden was being sworn in as president. It is from an upcoming documentary called "A Storm Foretold." The House committee decided not to play the clip during their public hearings, but still showed other footage from the documentary. Additional footage shared with the committee, and obtained by [CNN](#), shows Stone saying, "F*** the voting, let's get right to the violence," a day before the 2020 election.

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Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers' Back on Display After Being Vandalized by Soup

By - Mary Manley

The famous painting was a target of a protest by two activists who were seen wearing t-shirts that read "Just Stop Oil." The protestors threw a can of soup at the 1888 Van Gogh painting and then proceeded to glue their hands to the wall. After they were unglued, they were charged with criminal damage and aggravated trespass, London police said.

Two [protestors](#) threw a can of soup at Vincent van Gogh's 1888 "Sunflowers" painting at the National Gallery in London's Trafalgar [Square](#). The protestors then glued their hands to the wall beneath the painting and asked, "What is worth more: art or life?"

The Dutch painter's artwork is back on display about six hours after the soup incident. The "Sunflowers" painting was cleaned and put back on display after some "minor damage" to the frame, according to the museum. The painting itself was left unharmed, as it is protected by glass.

"Are you more concerned about the protection of a painting or the protection of our planet and people?" asked one of the activists. "The cost of living crisis is part of the cost of the oil crisis. Fuel is unaffordable to millions of cold, hungry families. They can't even afford to heat a tin of soup. Meanwhile, crops are failing, millions of people are dying in monsoons, wildfires and severe droughts."

"We cannot afford new oil and gas. It is going to take everything we know and love," concluded the protestors as security arrived on the scene.

The grassroots group, [Just Stop Oil](#), is a "coalition of groups working together to ensure that the government commits to ending all new licenses and consents for the exploration, development, and production of fossil fuels in the [United Kingdom]," according to their website. The group hopes to get the government to "halt all future licensing and consents for the exploration, development and production of fossil fuels in the U.K." and spreads its message by staging protests.

Responses to the staged protests were mixed, with some criticizing the protestors actions despite their intentions.

"I'm struggling to understand why destroying a painting of sunflowers done by Van Gogh, an impoverished man who was marginalized in his local community due to his mental illness, is the right target to make a statement about how awful the oil industry is," said one [Twitter](#) user.

"I get that this feels dumb but van Gogh isn't crying over this cause he's dead and typically the point of demonstrations and protests are to be obtrusive and make people take notice for their cause so. Point accomplished really," wrote another [Twitter](#) user.

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Jurors in Parkland Shooting Case Reported Feeling Threatened and Disrespected During Deliberations

By - Mary Manley

On Thursday, a jury in the Parkland school massacre case ruled that school shooter Nikolas Cruz would not get the death penalty, instead recommending life in prison without parole. Family

members of the 2018 school shooting victims were enraged by the jury's decision. But one juror said she "felt the system failed" Cruz repeatedly.

A Florida jury in the case of the gunman who killed 17 people, including students, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018 decided not to pursue the death sentence for Cruz. However, the jury was so divided in their deliberations that one juror reported feeling [threatened](#) by another panelist. The "threat," according to prosecutor Carolyn McCann, will not affect the jury's decision, but was reported out of safety reasons and may be investigated by the Broward Sheriff's Office.

According to the [SunSentinel](#), none of the jurors looked at Cruz as they reentered the courtroom after deliberating. The jurors told a local TV station that the final vote was nine to three in favor of the death penalty. However, Florida law requires a unanimous vote. One of the jurors who voted for life said she had seen evidence in the trial that Cruz had been "failed" by the mental health system.

"There were negative sarcastic remarks," said Melody Vanoy, a juror in the case. "I heard comments like, 'we're going to let the families down.'"

"I felt disrespected, despite the relationships that we had built," she added. "The energy was so heated that we wanted to get out of that room. They had to take us down for over 30 minutes to just give us fresh air so we can move around and separate. That's how heated it got."

"It got ugly," Vanoy said.

According to Richard Escobar and David Weinstein, who are criminal defense attorneys in Florida, a threat made to a juror cannot overturn the jury's decision because of double jeopardy. Broward Circuit Judge Elizabeth Scherer said she would not direct the sheriff's office to investigate the threat made by one juror to another, but said the office could investigate it if they thought it was appropriate.

"I don't like how it turned out, but... that's how the jury system works," said Benjamin Thomas, the jury foreman.

"There was one with a hard 'no' – she couldn't do it. And there was another two that ended up voting the same way," Thomas said. The woman who voted against "didn't believe, because he was mentally ill, he should get the death penalty," Thomas said.

The prosecution team, led by Mike Satz, had argued that Cruz was aware of his actions and that his ability to "formulate and carry out" the attack should overshadow his mental and developmental issues which the defense argued were left untreated.

"After spending months and months listening, and hearing testimonies, and looking at the murderer – his composure – I believe justice was not done," said Anne Ramsay, the mother of a senior student who was killed by Cruz in the shooting. "The wrong verdict was given out today." Tony [Montalto](#), who lost his daughter Gina in the shooting, and is the president of the advocacy group Stand with Parkland, called the ruling "yet another gut punch for so many of us who devastatingly lost our loved ones on that tragic Valentine's Day at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School."

"Seventeen beautiful lives were cut short, by murder, and the monster that killed them gets to live to see another day," Montalto said in a statement. "While this sentence fails to punish the perpetrator to the fullest extent of the law – it will not stop our mission to effect positive change at a federal, state and local level to prevent school shooting tragedies from shattering other American families."

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Alaska Cancels Snow Crab Season For The First Time Ever After 1 Billion Disappear
By - Mary Manley

The disappearance of 1 billion snow crabs will be investigated by officials, with some biologists believing the causes may be related to disease or climate change. But for now, the cancellation of snow crab season will have a devastating effect on Alaska's economy, which is responsible for 60% of the United States' seafood.

The [Alaska](#) Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) was forced to cancel the state's snow crab harvest season (which usually opens October 15) earlier this week after 1 billion snow crabs disappeared in two years, marking a 90% drop in their population. The decision to cancel the season is the first ever in the history of the state.

"Did they run up north to get that colder water?" asked Gabriel Prout, who owns the Kodiak Island fishing business. "Did they completely cross the border? Did they walk off the continental shelf on the edge there, over the Bering Sea?"

Biologists are saying the warming waters of the Bering Sea may be a possible reason for the decline in the snow crab population. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, as well as Climate Central, reports that Alaska is the fastest warming state in the country and loses billions of tons of ice each year. Ben Daly, a researcher from the ADF&G, says that disease may be another possibility.

"Environmental conditions are changing rapidly," Daly said. "We've seen warm conditions in the Bering Sea the last couple of years, and we're seeing a response in a cold adapted species, so it's pretty obvious this is connected. It is a canary in a coal mine for other species that need cold water."

Miranda Westphal, a biologist with the ADF&G, said the snow crab population declined 90% between 2018 and 2021.

"Snow crabs are an Arctic species," [Westphal](#) said, noting that they need cold water to survive. Between 2018 and 2019, says Westphal, the Bering Sea "was extremely warm and the snow crab population kind of huddled together in the coolest water they could find."

When the water warms, the crabs' metabolism increases, forcing them to use more of their energy. According to Westphal, the crabs most likely starved to death.

The ADF&G's decision to cancel the snow crab season will be a major blow to the state's economy, which was able to harvest 60 vessels worth of snow crab in 2020 and grossed about \$132 million from that season. To make matters worse, the red king crab season was also canceled for the second year in a row. The declining population will also have adverse effects on the Arctic ecosystem.

Officials hope the pause on fishing will allow the crab populations enough time to rebuild, but according to Westphal, that future remains uncertain.

“We’re along for the ride. It’s hard to predict or pretend we could have influences on a stock that is subject to Mother Nature and climate change,” Westphal said. “They need time and space and favorable conditions to rebuild.”

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New England Patriots Owner Robert Kraft Marries Dana Blumberg, 47, in Surprise Wedding
By - Mary Manley

The couple reportedly began dating in 2019 and were engaged by March 2022. The multi-billionaire’s bride, Dana Blumberg, is a New York-based ophthalmology specialist. Robert Kraft, 81, is 34 years Blumberg’s senior. The two were first spotted together in 2017 at an Elton John’s AIDS Foundation event.

Robert [Kraft](#) is now a married man. The New England Patriots owner, who has six Super Bowl rings, has added a wedding band to his collection. The 81-year-old said “I do” on Friday night to Blumberg during a star-studded event at the [Hall des Lumières](#), a permanent digital art center in lower Manhattan. The building has been showing an immersive exhibition titled “Gustav Klimt: Gold In Motion” which the couple bought out for five days.

The wedding was a secret bash in which the newlyweds asked their guests to dress festively but did not disclose the reason for their celebration. After the couple showed a “moving” 10-minute video, according to Page Six, they were then introduced by Sir Elton John who announced the newlyweds as Mr. and Mrs. Kraft for the first time.

The Grammy winner first learned of the couple’s engagement only weeks before the wedding when the trio met backstage at his “Farewell Yellow Brick Road” tour at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Massachusetts. The 75-year-old “Rocketman” singer told the couple he would play at their wedding as a gift, and the couple took John up on his offer.

“Elton just did this as a friend and to honor their friendship. They planned this event in, like, three weeks!” said a guest at the event.

John then made good on his promise and played an hour-long performance which included “Circle of Life,” “Tiny Dancer,” “Philadelphia Freedom,” “Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on Me,” “Can You Feel the Love Tonight,” and other hits. Rapper Meek Mill and the singer/songwriter Ed Sheeran were also present at the event, with Sheeran and John performing a duet of “Candle in the Wind.”

Former New England Patriot star Tom Brady, 45, was also present for the event. Though the football pro was in attendance without his wife, supermodel Gisele Bündchen at his side as the couple is rumored to be in the process of a [divorce](#).

Kraft, who is a multi-billionaire, provided his guests with lavish food for the special affair. A seven-tiered wedding cake was served and food including caviar and knishes. The bride, who sported what is rumored to look like a 10-carat engagement ring, first arrived in an Elie Saab jumpsuit she helped to design and was then seen wearing an ivory Naeem Khan dress during the announcements.

The couple has been spotted at several events since they first made an appearance as a couple in 2019 at the French Open in June, they were then spotted a month later at the Women's World Cup soccer finals in Paris.

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Suspect in Connection to Serial Killer Crimes Arrested in California, Stockton Police Say
By - Mary Manley

California's Central Valley was left unnerved after five people were killed in Stockton, California. The victims were men between the ages of 21 and 54, five of those men were Hispanic and one was white. A 46-year-old Black woman was also shot in Stockton on April 16 but survived the attack. Some of the victims were unhoused.

[Stockton](#) police say they have made an arrest in connection to six murders in California. On Saturday, Stockton police chief Stanley McFadden, city manager Harry Black and Mayor Kevin Lincoln announced in a joint press conference that they had arrested 43-year-old Wesley Brownlee at around 2 a.m. on Saturday morning.

"Our surveillance team followed this person while he was driving. We watched his patterns and determined early this morning he was on a mission to kill. He was out hunting," McFadden said. Beginning in April of last year, victims were attacked either late at night or early in the morning in dimly-lit areas while they were alone. A year after the first fatal shooting in Oakland, five more killings occurred in Stockton between July 8 and September 27. The killings occurred in a radius of just a few square miles, police said.

[Serial killers](#) are identified as such by the Federal Bureau of Investigation if they fall under one of two categories: they either kill based on their victims' common characteristic(s), or---such is the case of the killer in Stockton---they stalk a specific location.

"What we seem to have in common is probably complexion -- it has been folks that are different races, but they have a similar complexion," McFadden said. "The location, the environments have been consistent: It's very dark locations, it's locations where there's not very many witnesses around."

"This is a person that lurks in the shadows," the chief added. "Our victims are being caught by surprise." Earlier this month, authorities said they believed the California serial killer was "on a mission."

McFadden said Brownlee was wearing dark clothing, had a mask around his neck, and was armed with a firearm at the time of his arrest. The only survivor of the serial killer suspect said her attempted murderer had on black clothes and a black face mask and said nothing when he shot her multiple times.

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Protestors Who Threw Cans of Soup at Van Gogh Painting Appear in Court By - Mary Manley

The Just Stop Oil protestors threw cans of soup at an 1888 Vincent van Gogh painting at the National Gallery in London, but the “Sunflowers” painting was left undamaged while its frame sustained only minor damage. The environmental protestors were hoping to garner attention in order to end the use of fossil fuels in the U.K.

Two young protestors appeared in court on Saturday after throwing two tin cans of tomato soup at a painting by Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh. The two protestors were wearing “Just Stop Oil” t-shirts and then glued their hands to the wall beneath the soup-stained artwork. The young women were unglued from the wall and arrested by police.

Anna [Holland](#), 20, of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Phoebe Plummer, 21, of Clapham, south London were made to appear in front of the Westminster magistrates court on Saturday for charges of criminal damages. No damage occurred to the \$80.99 million iconic work of art, however, the frame reportedly sustained damage during the staged protest. The protestors pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The protest on Friday was the 14th day of the grassroots group’s “continuous disruption” which is expected to last for more than a month. [Just Stop Oil](#), according to their website, is a “coalition of groups working together to ensure that the government commits to ending all new licenses and consents for the exploration, development, and production of fossil fuels in the [United Kingdom].” The protests are in response to the United Kingdom’s decision to reverse a 2019 fracking ban.

Lora Johnson, 38, of Reydon, Suffolk, also appeared in court on Saturday after being charged with criminal damage to the [New Scotland Yard](#) sign which she, and others, covered in yellow paint.

At least 28 arrests have been made in connection to the Just Stop Oil demonstrations on Friday, according to the Metropolitan police. Police arrested another 26 protestors on Saturday who had blocked a major road in east London with some protestors holding banners and others actually gluing themselves to the road. Police arrested 26 of these persons on suspicion of willfully obstructing a highway.

The disruptions have angered some, with one angry motorist actually throwing a can of [soda](#) at one demonstrator, and another motorist appearing to threaten the blockade with running them over.

The latest demonstrations by Just Stop Oil, which first launched in February of 2022 and held a month of protests in April, have been spurred on by the new Prime Minister Liz [Truss](#) and her Conservative government’s decisions to do away with a 2019 ban on fracking in England. The government has instead plowed ahead with the decision to allow oil and gas operations in the North Sea through the first drilling licenses seen by the country in almost three years.

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Raleigh Mass Shooter is a 15-Year-Old But Will Be Charged as an Adult, Police Say

By - Mary Manley

A mass shooting in Raleigh, North Carolina on Thursday afternoon left five people dead and two others injured. The shooting happened in the Hedingham neighborhood, a typically quiet suburban neighborhood, The Washington Post reported. The victims ranged in age between 16 and 52 years old.

People in a suburban neighborhood in [Raleigh](#) were performing everyday tasks and chores: walking their dog, going out for a run, or just stepping out of their house to go to work, when a 15-year-old boy dressed in camouflage and carrying a shotgun went on a killing spree and murdered five people.

Little has been revealed about the 15-year-old [gunman](#), except that he is a young white juvenile, he was dressed in camouflage during the attack, carried a camouflage backpack and was arrested after a manhunt which spanned four hours. The 15-year-old was apprehended following a standoff with police leaving him in critical condition. Wake County District Attorney Lorrin Freeman said her office is monitoring the gunman's medical condition.

Prosecutors expressed that the 15-year-old would be charged as an adult.

Further details about the shooting have yet to be released. But Hedingham has been reported to be a typically calm and friendly suburban area which features the Neuse River Greenway Trail. But on Saturday, the neighborhood came together to mourn those who were murdered in their quiet neighborhood—one victim having actually been gunned down on their porch—including Mary Marshall, 35, James Roger Thompson, 16, Nicole Connors, 52, Susan Karnatz, 49, and Officer Gabriel Torres, 29, who was off-duty at the time.

North Carolina does not have a minimum age for possession of rifles or shotguns, according to data from the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. In the United States between 1966 and 1975—a nine year timespan—there were 12 mass shootings. Between 2011 and 2021 there were 160 mass shootings. More than 95% of those mass shooting perpetrators were male, 74% used a gun, and 54% were white, according to the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government of [SUNY](#).

“Enough,” said President Joe Biden in a statement on [Friday](#). “We’ve grieved and prayed with too many families who have had to bear the terrible burden of these mass shootings. We must pass an assault weapons ban. The American people support this commonsense action to get weapons of war off our streets.”

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Kanye West Goes On Another Bizarre Tirade in Podcast Interview

By - Mary Manley

The American rapper Kanye West made antisemitic remarks over social media which included a screenshot of a text conversation with rapper Puff Diddy where he accused Diddy of being under the control of Jewish people. The rapper also said in a separate Tweet that he was going “Death Con 3 on Jewish People”.

The posts in question have been taken down for breaking social media rules. However, the 45-year-old rapper has doubled-down on his disturbing statements about the Jewish community. West appeared on [Revolt](#) TV's podcast "Drink Champs" and dug his heels in on the subject. "We made the 'White Lives Matter' tees," says [West](#) of his relationship with Dov Charney, the founder of the bankrupt clothing manufacturer American Apparel, who had been accused of sexual harassment, discrimination and assault.

"And then when I put up the defcon Tweet, now he ain't releasing the tee, cause he's Jewish. And I'm like, 'See this is my exact point that I'm making. Like Jewish people have owned the Black voice. Whether it's through us wearing a Ralph Lauren shirt or it's all of us being signed to a record label, or having a Jewish manager, or being signed to a Jewish basketball team, or doing a movie on a Jewish platform like Disney,'" the rapper ranted.

"And I respect what the Jewish people have done and how they brought their people together," said the rapper before comparing the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to the nonprofit healthcare organization Planned Parenthood.

"You just get used to getting screwed by the Jewish media," said West, promoting the antisemitic [stereotype](#) that Jewish people are greedy, after accusing his former trainer Harley Pasternak of selling him out for telling Newsweek he was mentally ill.

"I think [Kanye](#) has a history of mental health issues, and it appears that he's probably going through an episode right now. If people continue to give him a platform to discuss hateful, antisemitic rhetoric, they're complicit, so I applaud Facebook and Twitter," Pasternak told [Newsweek](#) last week.

In the nearly 45-minute interview with "Drink Champs," West used the interview to promote antisemitic stereotypes. The troubled star also said in the interview that George Floyd's death in 2020 was caused by fentanyl and not police brutality.

On Wednesday Maverick Carter decided to pull an episode of his show, which he co-produces with professional basketball player LeBron James, after West reportedly used the interview to "reiterate more hate speech and extremely dangerous stereotypes", according to Carter. This week the bank JP Morgan [Chase](#) also ended their relationship with West, giving him until November 21 to remove his funds from their company.

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Over 1,000 'Paddington' Teddy Bears Will be Donated to a Children's Charity as Tribute to Late Queen

By - Mary Manley

Paddington teddy bears were left outside of the royal residences across Windsor and London in memory of Queen Elizabeth II who died on September 8 at the age of 96. Paddington Bear, a fictional children's book character created by Michael Bond, became associated with the late Queen following her Platinum Jubilee concert.

Paddington Bear was filmed opposite the Queen in a [sketch](#) for her Platinum Jubilee celebrations in which the Queen and Paddington Bear share tea and marmalade sandwiches in

an endearing and wholesome exchange. Paddington Bear became an unlikely [mascot](#) for the Queen after she died, with so many Paddington teddy bears and marmalade sandwiches being laid out in tribute that the Royal Parks had to request mourners to not leave out any more. Those teddy bears will now be donated to a children's charity, according to an announcement from Buckingham Palace. The teddy bears will be professionally [cleaned](#) before they are donated to the British children's charity [Barnardo's](#) which helps to support children and young adults who have been abused. The charity also works to prevent further cases of abuse. More than 1,000 teddy bears will be donated to Barnardo's which the Queen patroned from 1983 until 2016 when she passed the responsibility onto Queen Consort Camilla, 75. The teddy bears were collected by the Royal Parks Charity which was made up of almost 200 volunteers who cleaned the tribute gardens in late September.

"Those involved in the project hope the teddy bears will be much loved for many years to come by children supported by Barnardo's, whilst understanding the story behind the bears and how they came to be donated," said the palace in a statement.

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Official From Sweden Democrats Suspended for Insulting Anne Frank
By - Mary Manley

The 26-year-old head of television programming for the Sweden Democrats made a comment that spurred the condemnation of Jewish groups and the Israeli ambassador to Sweden Ziv Nevo Kulman. The social media post made by Fallenkvist has prompted her suspension by the far-right party as well as an investigation by the party.

Rebecka Fallenkvist, a Sweden Democrat official, was suspended after she made a social media post labeling Anne Frank, a Jewish diarist and major historical figure, as "immoral." Frank wrote a diary which was then published as "Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl" while hiding from Nazis in a secret annex of her father Otto Frank's business building in Amsterdam during World War II.

The social media post shows a photo of Frank's book, along with a caption that reads: "Even if you are not ready for the day, it cannot always be night" which is written in English. In Swedish Fallenkvist writes of the book: "50 pages in and so far Anne Frank has only struck me as morally hindered. The stubbornness itself."

In addition to her criticism of the 15-year-old girl who died in Nazi Germany's Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945, Fallenkvist also linked her post to a song by American rapper [Kanye West](#) who has come under criticism in recent days for sharing antisemitic views and opinions across social media and in interviews.

"I strongly condemn this despicable insult, disrespectful of the memory of Anne Frank. It comes in sharp contrast to Sweden's efforts to preserve the memory of the Holocaust. Unfortunately, there are many more bad weeds that must be uprooted," wrote Kulman, the Israeli ambassador to Sweden, who shared an image of the disturbing social media post to Twitter.

Oskar Cavalli-Bjorkman, the media director of the Sweden Democrats, told a Swedish news agency that their party would be launching an internal investigation into Fallenkvist's "insensitive and inappropriate" social media post.

"The book is a moving depiction of human good and evil," Fallenkvist wrote to Dagens Nyheter, a Swedish newspaper, in an effort to defend herself. "The good Anne, who in the first chapters is like any other young girl living her life in peace and finding an interest in boys (which I highlighted), is contrasted with the evil of Nazism. My story was aimed at the good and human in Anne while not playing down the evil to which she was subjected."

Sweden Democrats is a nationalist, right-wing political party that was first formed in the 1980s by political extremists, including neo-Nazis. It is Sweden's second-largest party and is led by Swedish politician and author Jimmi Akesson, who is 43.

The party has moved towards mainstream politics, [AP News](#) reports, but holds a hard stance on immigration policies, advocating for stronger restrictions. On Friday, three center-right parties in Sweden agreed to form a three-party minority government with the help of the Sweden Democrats.

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China To Enact Policies To Boost Birth Rates

By - Mary Manley

China's one-child policy was first enacted in 1980 and ended in 2016. The policy allowed one child per family in an effort to address what the government saw as a rapidly growing population. China's patriarchal beliefs led to female infanticide and abandonment. In 2021 China had a population made up of 723 million men and 689 million women.

Chinese President Xi Jinping said on [Sunday](#) that he plans to enact policies that will help boost the declining birthrate in his country.

"We will establish a policy system to boost birth rates and pursue a proactive national strategy in response to population ageing," Xi told some 2,300 delegates in a speech at the Communist Party Congress in Beijing.

The Chinese government first began regulating how many children their citizens could have in 1970. In 1980 they enacted the one-child policy which led to forced-abortions, families having to hide their pregnancies, and the abandonment and murder of [female](#) infants. China ended their one-child policy in 2016 and opened a two-child policy for families.

"When you create a system where you would shrink the size of a family and people would have to choose, then people would... choose sons," said Mei [Fong](#), a journalist and China correspondent for The Wall Street Journal. "Now China has 30 million more men than women, 30 million bachelors who cannot find brides. They call them *guang guan*, 'broken branches,' that's the name in Chinese. They are the biological dead ends of their family."

In 2021 China changed their two-child policy to allow families three children. The fertility rate for that year was 1.16 (births per woman), which is well below the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) stable population standard of 2.1.

In [1966](#) China's birth rate was 6.4. This year the country's birth rates dropped 11.5% since 2020 with 10 million babies being born in a nation of 1.4 billion people.

While the country may have one of the lowest fertility rates in the world, women in China have little interest in having children. Chinese women have been reported to have the lowest desire to have children in the world, according to a February survey by YuWa Population Research.

The government's introduction of tax deductions, longer maternity leave, increased medical insurance, housing subsidies and tackling the high costs of private tutoring may encourage some young women to change their stance on parenthood. Still, the country must first address education costs, low wages and labor rights as well as COVID-19 policies, says [demographers](#).

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Student Loan Forgiveness Site Launches in 'Beta'

By - Ian DeMartino

In August, the Biden administration announced a program allowing student loans to be forgiven up to \$10,000 or \$20,000 for Pell Grant recipients. The means-tested program is available for borrowers who make less than \$125,000 a year.

The Department of Education has opened up the application process for student loan forgiveness, launching the website in a beta period on Friday evening. Borrowers can submit their applications, but they will not be processed until the website launches officially later this month.

"Tonight, the Department of Education will begin beta testing the student debt relief website. During the beta testing period, borrowers will be able to submit applications for the Biden-Harris Administration's student debt relief program," a spokesperson for the Department of Education [told CNN](#).

While borrowers will not have their applications processed, they will receive a confirmation email.

To qualify, borrowers must have had their loans through the federal government. Those who had their loans guaranteed by the government but held by a private company are no longer eligible after President Biden limited the program in hopes of ensuring that it survives legal challenges. Those who applied to have their consolidated into federal loans before that announcement, September 29, will still be eligible to have them forgiven.

The program is facing several lawsuits from conservatives and Republicans. On Wednesday, a preliminary injunction was filed, asking a judge to halt the loan forgiveness program. If the judge rules in favor of the injunction, it may delay the program until a judge issues a final judgment in the case.

The Department of Education hopes to have applications processed by January when the student loan payment pause is set to expire. If they fail to do that either because of the lawsuits or unforeseen problems, then the Biden administration may have to pause payments again.

The website is launching in beta to allow the Department of Education to monitor its performance and use before it launches in full. When Healthcare.gov launched in 2013 as part

of the Affordable Care Act, it infamously ran [into a myriad of issues](#), frustrating users and becoming a headache for the Obama administration.

In October when the lawsuits were filed, higher education and legal expert Mark Kantrowitz [told CNBC](#) that borrowers should apply as soon as possible. Even if Republican attempts to block the program are successful, either temporarily or permanently, borrowers may still have their loans forgiven if they are approved before a court intervenes.

The website is expected to launch in full later this month. It is available at <https://studentaid.gov/debt-relief/application>.

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Founder of Nikola Found Guilty of Three Fraud Charges
By - Ian DeMartino

Nikola presents itself as “a leading manufacturer of heavy-duty commercial battery-electric vehicles.” The founder and former executive chairman of electric truck company Nikola, Trevor Milton, was found guilty of three counts of fraud on Friday.

Milton was [accused of defrauding investors](#) and the public about how far along the company was with its electric semi-truck, the Nikola One, among other claims. He was found guilty of two counts of wire fraud and one count of securities fraud. He was acquitted of one additional securities fraud charge. Sentencing is scheduled for January 27, the top charge carries a maximum sentence of 25 years.

The Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) began investigating Nikola after short sellers Hindenburg Research accused the company of an [“elaborate ruse”](#) and spinning an “ocean of lies” to deceive the public and investors.

The highest profile case was a video released by Nikola of the Nikola One traveling on the road at a high rate of speed supposedly on its own power when the video actually showed the semi-truck rolling down a hill after being towed to the top. Nikola paid \$125 million to the SEC in 2021 to settle civil charges related to that video.

Through YouTube and Twitter, Milton also made false claims about the company producing green hydrogen and the cost that would be involved in producing it. Nikola had not produced any hydrogen at the time and didn’t have a hydrogen plant as Milton claimed. Prosecutors also said that Milton lied about “binding contracts with trucking companies” when the companies had instead signed cancelable reservations for trucks.

“Trevor Milton lied to Nikola’s investors — over and over and over again. That’s fraud, plain and simple, and this Office has no patience for it. Never has, never will,” US Attorney Damian Williams said of the conviction through the South District of NY Department of Justice Twitter account. “Let this case serve as a warning, anyone who plays fast and loose with the truth to get investors to part with their money. It won’t end well.”

Nikola, whose shares closed at \$3 on Friday after falling from an all-time high of \$65, noted that the charges were against Milton himself and not the company.

“The company has cooperated with the government throughout the course of its inquiry. We remain committed to our previously announced milestones and timelines and are focused on delivering Nikola Tre battery-electric trucks later this year from the company’s manufacturing facilities,” Nikola’s statement read.

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Highlights from the Walker, Warnock Georgia Senate Debate
By - Ian DeMartino

The Georgia Senate Debate took place on Friday, giving both candidates a chance to make their case for the first and likely only time before the November 4 election.

Democratic Senator Raphael Warnock and his opponent Republican and National Football League Hall-of-Famer Herschel Walker took a few shots at each other, but the debate did not provide the fireworks many were expecting.

The most unusual exchange came during a discussion about crime. After each made comments on the issue, Warnock took a pointed shot at Walker, saying that “I’ve never pretended to be a police officer and I’ve never threatened a shootout with the police,” referring to two embarrassing incidents in Walker’s past.

The shootout comment was in reference to a February Associated Press report that in 2001, Walker threatened to shoot a police officer while being involved in a domestic disturbance call. The police officer impersonation comment referred to a 2019 speech where Walker claimed to have spent time training in Quantico with the FBI and said that he has “been in law enforcement.” He also later claimed to have been made an honorary deputy of the Cobb County Sheriff’s Office. There is no record of Walker being in law enforcement and Cobb County would not say if he was made an “honorary deputy.”

Even if Walker has been given an “honorary deputy” badge, that hardly makes him a member of law enforcement. “Honorary deputy” is similar to the “Jr. Officer” badges that are sometimes given to children at law enforcement events and provide no power to the wearer.

Walker then broke the rules of the debate by pulling out a prop, something that resembled a police badge. The moderator admonished him for breaking the rules “you are very well aware of the rules tonight, and you have a prop, that is not allowed.” Walker, seemingly confused about the word prop, claimed that the badge wasn’t a “prop” and was real. Its authenticity was not the issue, because props in this context meant any object used to make a point.

Other major events include Warnock refusing to answer the question of if he plans to support President Biden in a potential 2024 campaign. The moderator asked for a simple yes or no on the question but Warnock would not commit either way. “I have not spent a minute thinking of what politicians should run for what in 2024.” When pressed, Warnock still refused to give a straight answer. “The people of Georgia get to decide who is going to be their senator in three days,” (Senator Warnock likely meant three weeks, the election was 21 days away at the time of the debate).

Biden was a large focus of the debate, with Walker attempting to paint Warnock as someone who works for Biden instead of the people of Georgia. He repeatedly pointed to Warnock's voting record, saying that he voted with the President 96% of the time. That is true, though it puts Warnock in the bottom third of Democrats voting in lock-step with the President. Warnock pointed to times he pushed back against the President to get more for Georgians, specifically, he took credit for convincing the president to increase student loan forgiveness for Pell Grant recipients from \$10,000 to \$20,000.

Biden is not popular with Georgian voters. According to a recent Civiqs poll, only 34% [of Georgia voters](#) approved of the President's job performance.

Warnock came off as cool and collected, but his strategy of avoiding questions invited attacks by Walker to paint him as a DC politician. Warnock not only refused the Biden question but also if he would add justices to the Supreme Court in an attempt to restore abortion rights, and also refused to answer questions about lawsuits from his ex-wife and [former tenants](#) at an apartment complex owned by Ebenezer Baptist Church where Warnock is the senior pastor.

Other Highlights:

Walker scandals: The debate mostly avoided candidate Walker's various scandals. The only time it was referenced was early in the debate, with Walker again denying [reports](#) that he paid for an abortion.

Healthcare: Warnock advocated for Georgia to accept funds from the Affordable Care Act to expand Medicaid in the state. Walker said he would speak to hospital administrators about how to reduce costs. The moderators pointed out that 1.5 million Georgians do not have healthcare and hospitals are closing around the state.

Inflation: Walker tied inflation to Government spending, and blamed Warnock for going along with Biden's policies. Warnock said the Inflation Reduction Act would lower drug prices, helping seniors and diabetics. Walker countered saying the bill failed to stop inflation and said "eating right" is the first step to treating diabetics and inflation was stopping that. Warnock replied that Walker was blaming diabetics.

Ukraine: Both candidates expressed support for the continued funding of the Zelensky regime.

Student Debt: As mentioned, Warnock took credit for the Pell Grant provision in Biden's student forgiveness plan. He also said that we should lower the costs of schools to avoid this situation in ten years. Walker said that federal funding should be cut from universities that raise their prices. That proposal got some applause from the crowd.

Minimum Wage: Neither candidate expressed support for raising the federal minimum wage. The minimum wage was last raised in 2009.

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US, Emirati Officials Discuss Price Cap on Russian Oil – Treasury

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) – US Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo met with Emirati Minister of State for Financial Affairs Mohamed bin Hadi Al Hussaini and senior

officials from the nation's central bank to discuss the price cap on Russian oil and other issues, the Treasury said on Monday.

The talks took place on the sidelines of the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

"They discussed global macroeconomic trends, financial support for African countries, and the price cap on Russian oil exports," the Treasury said in a press release.

Adeyemo also expressed concerns about "Russian attempts to evade international sanctions" and stressed the importance of ongoing cooperation on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism issues, the release added.

Last week, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that the Group of Seven countries, the European Union and Australia are still trying to determine a suitable price cap to place on Russian oil. She suggested that a price cap in the \$60-a-barrel range would likely be sufficient to reduce Russia's energy revenues while allowing oil to continue to flow into the global market. Russian President Vladimir Putin has said Moscow will not supply oil to countries that choose to impose the price cap.

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Republicans Gain Advantage With Voters Ahead of US Midterm Elections - Poll

WASHINGTON, October 17 (Sputnik) – Republicans have gained a narrow advantage in the weeks before the US midterm elections, according to a New York Times/Siena College poll released Monday.

The poll found that 49% of prospective voters intended to choose a Republican congressional representative, representing four percentage points more than those who intended to vote for Democrats and a narrower gap than the one point seen in September.

Adding to Republican momentum, amid a steady decline in the stock market and an increase in inflation, the percentage of prospective voters citing economic concerns as most important increased from 36% in July to 44%. Those most concerned about the economy planned to vote Republican by more than a two-to-one margin.

The poll also found that Republicans have a 10-percentage-point lead among independent voters, a notable shift from the Democrats' three-point lead in September.

All this underscores that the Democratic Party is in a precarious position, which currently holds a slim House majority and half of the Senate. The poll also found that 45% of prospective voters strongly disapprove of US President Joe Biden's performance, with 90% of this group planning to vote Republican.

The poll of 792 likely voters was conducted across the country from October 9 to 12.

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Cuban Missile Crisis 60 Years On: Nuke Risk Higher Today Amid Diplomatic Deficits

WASHINGTON, October 16 (Sputnik) - Sunday marks sixty years since the outbreak of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, a thirteen-day nuclear standoff between the United States and Soviet Union that was ultimately resolved through skillful diplomacy, the type of which some fear may be lacking to defuse current superpower tensions.

On October 16, 1962, US President John Kennedy was shown surveillance photos of what he called "unmistakable evidence" the Soviets were building installations for medium-range nuclear-tipped missiles in Cuba, 90 miles off Florida's coast. In consultations with senior officials, Kennedy was presented with two alternatives: a military invasion or a naval blockade. The missile buildup came after Cuban President Fidel Castro asked Moscow for deterrence assistance in the wake of the US failed Bay of Pigs invasion in April of 1961.

October 22, the seventh day of the crisis, Kennedy announced the imposition of a naval "quarantine," choosing to avoid the word "blockade" which could be considered an act of war. Blockades prevent all trade and travel whereas the quarantine only prohibited offensive military equipment.

This came after hours of difficult meetings between Kennedy and US security officials, many of whom pressed for more aggressive options.

Nevertheless, in the ensuing days, Castro mobilized Cuba's army, the Soviet missiles were placed on ready to launch, and their ships were soon at the so-called quarantine line.

Meanwhile, American military forces were put on defense readiness condition 2, the highest in US history - just one away from DEFCON 1 - which signaled the outbreak of nuclear warfare.

LACK OF LEADERSHIP, CRITICAL THINKING

It was not until day eleven that back-channel talks began between presidential adviser Robert Kennedy and Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, which culminated in a deal that publicly called for the US to vow not to invade Cuba in exchange for Moscow dismantling the nuclear sites. However, the negotiators also struck a private agreement that the US would remove missiles from Turkey.

The crisis ended on October 28, when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev announced the dismantling of Soviet missile installations, while keeping the deal on Turkish missiles a secret. The solution allowed both sides to "save face," and exhibited sophisticated diplomatic acumen on the part of both Kennedy and Khrushchev, the type of which experts fear is sorely lacking today in the face of rising nuclear tensions between the US and Russia.

Not to mention, the size and nature of present day arsenals are much different than they were sixty years ago, when the US had 3,500 nuclear warheads and the Soviets about 500.

According to the Federation of American Scientists, the US currently has 5,428 nuclear warheads and Russia 5,977.

During a recent interview with CNN, President Joe Biden warned that miscalculations over the Ukraine conflict "could end in Armageddon," just a week after suggesting the world was facing another Cuban Missile Crisis and wondered aloud about finding an "off ramp," for Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Historian Dan Lazare described the stark difference between the current approach with 1962. "The maturity of people like Kennedy and Khrushchev can't help but contrast with the recklessness, arrogance, and sheer stupidity of people like Biden," Lazare told Sputnik. "Thanks

to NATO's drang nach osten, we are closer to nuclear war than we probably were in 1962. Yet negotiations are nowhere in sight. How the world has regressed in a mere 60 years."

Unlike Biden's declaration to find an "off-ramp," for Putin, Lazare noted that Khrushchev and Kennedy were savvy enough to make the "behind-the-scenes" deal to remove missiles from Turkey in exchange for the Soviets doing the same in Cuba.

Historian and political commentator Anton Chaitkin feels the existence of human civilization is now endangered due to Western power structures and intellectual deficits that have made a shift away from war escalation very difficult. A situation miles away from Kennedy's quality of "truth-seeking" that he believes "saved humanity."

"There is no thinking at the top," Chaitkin said. "Any critical thought, like Kennedy's process, could have wonderful consequences."

Former UK ambassador Peter Ford fears the Cuban missile crisis will be seen as a reason not to panic, which is dangerous because the "hubristic" West does not have the same type of leadership, not to mention it is much easier to launch a nuclear war in the 21st century.

"Biden is no Kennedy," Ford told Sputnik. "And in the 1960s tactical nukes did not exist. The potential threshold for going nuclear today is much lower."

American University in Moscow President Professor Edward Lozansky said the current situation is much worse than in 1962 partly because Washington wrongly believes the worst-case scenario is that Russia would only use tactical nuclear weapons and only against Ukraine and other targets in Europe.

"This is a gross miscalculation since, according to Russian military doctrine, in case of the existential threat to [the] homeland Moscow will use the strategic nuclear weapons that will reach the US," Lozansky warned. "It looks like Washington is totally ignoring this scenario and therefore does not even want to think about compromise with Putin, looking only for his total defeat."

NO DESIRES TO TALK OR DE-ESCALATE

University of Louvain Professor of Philosophy Jean Bricmont is also worried about signs Washington does not even want a settlement.

"During the Cuban missile crisis, there was a desire on both sides to de-escalate. I see no such sign now, at least on the American side," Bricmont told Sputnik. "They have been provoking Russia since the 1990's by extending NATO eastwards and profiting from Yeltsin's weakness to 'loot' Russia."

Hence, he added, the situation seems totally blocked or rather drifting towards the apocalypse.

"Is there anybody to stop that madness?" Bricmont said. "We will see or die."

University of Illinois Professor of Law Francis Boyle, who also observed the lack of Kennedy-style diplomatic skill in the White House, is concerned that so far the Biden administration has publicly ruled out direct negotiations with Moscow over Ukraine.

"Though there could be back-channel negotiations going on right now that I am not aware of," Boyle added. "Let's hope there are."

Stephen Schlesinger, one of the premier historians of the UN, said a major difference in today's crisis has been the failure of either side to leverage third parties, like the US and Soviets did with then-UN Secretary-General U Thant.

"In the Cuban missile crisis, the leaders of the USA and USSR were sober enough to use intermediaries - including U Thant - to communicate a desire for a settlement - while in today's hostilities, Biden and Putin are simply not talking," he said.

Meanwhile, the lack of opposition to the US support for Ukraine has been conspicuous other than disgruntlement expressed in a few polls, while antiwar progressives in Congress have even backed billions in military aid to Kiev.

"There are a few brave folks warning of the looming disaster but their voices are drowning in the ocean of ignorance," Lozansky said.

Boyle said the situation is unlikely to get resolved unless the antiwar movement mobilizes.

"It is really up to the American peace movement to pressure the Biden administration to open direct negotiations over the Ukraine war with the Russian government before the war degenerates out of control as almost happened during the original Cuban Missile Crisis," Boyle concluded.

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RPT: ANALYSIS - US Inflation Could Reaccelerate After Slight Pause if Fed Fails to Continue Boosting Rates

WASHINGTON, October 15 (Sputnik) - US inflation could reaccelerate after the recent minuscule slowdown if the Federal Reserve fails to continue raising interest rates, economic analysts told Sputnik.

The US Consumer Price Index (CPI), the primary gauge for inflation, contracted modestly during the 12 months to September, growing by 8.2% from 8.3% during the year to August, Labor Department data revealed on Thursday.

However, economists polled by US media had forecast the CPI to grow by just 0.2% last month versus the August rate of 0.1%.

The Fed has struggled to contain inflation for more than a year, with the annual CPI remaining not too far from a 40-year peak of 9.1% in June.

"The Fed's [prime rate is] only at 3%-3.25%," former merchant banker, economic historian and financial analyst Martin Hutchinson told Sputnik. "My guess is the Fed will wimp out well before it gets to the 7-8% that would actually restrain inflation. If it does, inflation will re-accelerate."

IMPACT AND ROOT CAUSES

Retired Brown University Assistant Professor of Economics Barry Friedman warned that it will take more time than anyone wants to bring inflation down to the Fed's 2-percent target.

There are some underlying forces that will also take time to resolve as so many producers and consumers revise their plans, regardless of monetary tightening, Friedman observed.

"That affects housing, business growth that depends on borrowing, international sales affected by strong dollar and wealth effects due to downward revaluation of stocks and pre-existing bonds," Friedman told Sputnik.

As the Fed continued to raise interest rates, stock market values would weaken as more investors found it prudent to switch to more cautious government bonds, and similar holdings, Friedman explained.

"With 'safe' short-term bonds and CDs over 4% and heading higher, there is an alternative to stocks that we haven't seen in more than a decade," Friedman told Sputnik.

International trade analyst Alan Tonelson said the inflation report underscores a stunning change on the cost-of-living front and how miserably Fed and Biden administration policies have failed.

Not long ago, Americans were debating how quickly raging inflation would end, Tonelson recalled.

"The new Consumer Price Index results, however, revealed not only monthly acceleration in the headline figure and a core reading that removes food and energy prices, but a speed up of annual core inflation to its fastest pace in nearly forty years. As a result, now the big inflation question before the nation is how deeply it's become embedded in the economy," Tonelson said.

Independent Institute Center for Peace & Liberty Director Ivan Eland said the crisis can be traced back to the Biden administrations' failure to respond more vigorously to pandemic-induced economic disruptions.

"Inflation is too much money chasing too few goods. It has been caused by the pandemic disrupting supplies of goods and too much money by consumers for spending - caused by Trump and Biden's excessive spending on COVID relief and other items," Eland said.

The Fed thought inflation would be transitory so initially did nothing about it, he added, and now the market was reacting to the central bank's demonstrated determination to raise rates steadily until it goes down, Eland added.

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Russia, Belarus Take NATO Expansion Into Account When Discussing Countermeasures
-Official

UNITED NATIONS, October 15 (Sputnik) - Russia and Belarus have been taking into account NATO's expansion when discussing countermeasures, Russian Deputy Representative on Disarmament in the United Nations First Committee Kosntantin Vorontsov said.

"What we are hearing is more and more calls for the development of NATO's infrastructure and its deployment further and further to the east. In Poland, for many years, they have been talking about full involvement in joint nuclear missions," Vorontsov told the members of the First Committee on Friday.

NATO expansions has been taken into consideration by Russia and Belarus when discussing countermeasures, Vorontsov added.

Earlier on Friday, Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei said Minsk is considering tough retaliatory measures in response to the potential deployment of nuclear arsenals on the territory of Poland and other neighboring countries.

Polish President Andrzej Duda recently said the absence of nuclear weapons in his country was a "problem" and the issue of deploying US nuclear weapons there was open. At the same time, Duda said he believes Poland could take part in the Nuclear Sharing program under which European NATO member states host and store US nuclear weapons.

On October 6, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said that Poland had long ago agreed with the United States on the deployment of nuclear weapons arsenals on its territory.

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New \$725Mln Ukraine Aid Package Includes More Artillery, HIMARS Munitions - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 15 (Sputnik) - The newly announced \$725 million military assistance package for Ukraine includes more ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and additional 155mm artillery rounds, the US Defense Department said.

"This new security assistance package includes: Additional ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS); 23,000 155mm artillery rounds; 500 precision-guided 155mm artillery rounds," the Defense Department said in a press release on Friday.

The package also includes 5,000 anti-tank weapons, additional High-Speed Anti-Radiation Missiles (HARMs), more than 200 High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles, and more than two million rounds of small arms ammunition, the release said.

The Defense Department noted that Spain announced it will provide four HAWK launchers to strengthen Ukraine's air defense and Germany recently delivered the first of four IRIS-T air-defense systems committed to Ukraine and intends to deliver more MARS rocket systems and howitzers, the release added.

The United States has provided Ukraine with about \$17.6 billion in military assistance since the start of Russia's special military operation on February 24, according to the release.

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Russia Has No Plans to Create Facilities to Store Nuclear Weapons in Belarus - Official

UNITED NATIONS, October 15 (Sputnik) - Russia does not plan to create facilities for stockpiling nuclear weapons in Belarus, Russia's Deputy Representative on Disarmament in the United Nations First Committee Konstantin Vorontsov said.

"We do not plan to transfer these to Belarus' territory. The establishment of a facility for stockpiling nuclear weapons is not in the cards either," Vorontsov told the members of the First Committee on Friday.

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Russia Has no Plans to Transfer Technology to Belarus to Carry Nuclear Weapons - Official

UNITED NATIONS, October 15 (Sputnik) - Russia has no plans to transfer technology to Belarus on converting existing systems into carriers of nuclear weapons, Russian Deputy Representative on Disarmament First Committee Konstantin Vorontsov said.

"However, technologies that would allow weapons to be equipped, carry nuclear weapons, that's not in the cards," Vorontsov told the members of the United Nations First Committee on Friday.

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ANALYSIS - US Inflation Could Reaccelerate After Slight Pause if Fed Fails to Continue Boosting Rates

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IMF Steering Committee Unable to Reach Unanimity on Communique Due to Russia Stance -Chair

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) steering committee - known by the acronym IMFC - was unable to reach unanimity on a communique after discussing all core issues during the annual meetings because Russia blocked reaching a consensus, IMFC Chair Nadia Calvino said.

The committee advises the IMF Board of Governors on the supervision and management of the international financial and monetary system.

"Our teams have managed to agree on the full document that addresses all the issues that have been discussed on the IMFC, all the core issues that are discussed in these annual meetings. I regret very much that due to Russia's blocking any chance of a consensus, we do not have unanimity on a communique," Calvino told reporters on Friday.

In the absence of a communique, Calvino said she had to issue a Chair's statement that was agreed on by all participating countries.

In the statement, Calvino called on governments to implement domestic policies and intensify multilateral cooperation to safeguard macroeconomic and global financial stability as well as overcome the current food crisis.

"We will calibrate and coordinate our domestic policies, managing tradeoffs and bolstering the effectiveness of the policy response, tailored to country-specific circumstances," Calvino said.

Fighting inflation, protecting the most vulnerable, safeguarding debt sustainability as well as achieving growth and macro-financial stability are the major priorities of the international community in the current situation, she added.

In addition, Calvino called for taking urgent multilateral action to address shared challenges such as the existing food crisis.

"We will further step up efforts to overcome the food crisis in coordination with international organizations and development partners and, in this context, will focus on supporting affected countries in protecting vulnerable populations from the impact of food price shocks and on lifting of export restrictions on food and fertilizers. We will continue to support vulnerable countries as they address their pressing financing needs and debt vulnerabilities," she said.

Calvino described the IMFC meeting as being quite intensive and productive and added the the members sent a strong message to Russia to stop the conflict in Ukraine.

"The war is the single most important element slowing down growth and generating inflation, volatility, energy and food insecurity, and uncertainty," Calvino said.

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US Justice Dept Asks Appeals Court to Reject Special Master in Trump Records Case - Filing

WASHINGTON, October 15 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department is asking a federal appeals court to reject former President Donald Trump's request for a third party to review classified records seized from his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida, a court filing revealed.

"This Court has instructed that a district court must consider four factors before exercising jurisdiction to entertain a preindictment motion for return of property," the court document said on Friday. "These factors are: (1) whether the government has 'displayed' a callous disregard for the constitutional rights" of the plaintiff... Plaintiff's uncontested failure to satisfy the first factor... is reason enough to conclude that the district court erred by exercising jurisdiction in this case." A lower district court previously granted Trump's request for a third party to review the classified records seized from Trump's residence in Florida.

Moreover, the special master in this case, federal judge Raymond Dearie, initiated the review process in August but he would be required to pause his work if the Justice Department's appeal is successful.

The 11th Circuit Court of Appeals is not expected to make a decision until about late November.

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SpaceX Dragon With Crew 4 Mission From ISS Splashes Down Successfully in Atlantic

WASHINGTON, October 15 (Sputnik) - The Dragon Freedom spacecraft carrying Crew 4 from the International Space Station (ISS) back to earth successfully splashed down to safety, SpaceX said in a social media post accompanied by a video clip.

"Splashdown of Dragon confirmed – welcome back to Earth," SpaceX said on Friday.

The company also shared a video of the spacecraft returning to the planet's surface.

SpaceX, a creation of billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, returned four astronauts from the ISS back to Earth after a six-month scientific mission.

Dragon Freedom undocked from the ISS earlier on Friday, one day later than planned, due to high weather concerns in the splashdown areas off the coast of Florida.

NASA in a blog post said US astronauts Bob Hines, Kjell Lindgren and Jessica Watkins as well as European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut Samantha Cristoforetti splashed down safely off the coast of Jacksonville, Florida, at 4:55 p.m. EDT (2050 GMT).

Last week, the Dragon Freedom spacecraft carried the Crew-5 mission participants to the ISS, including Russian cosmonaut Anna Kikina.

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Biden Authorizes Another \$725Mln in Ukraine Security Aid - Memorandum

WASHINGTON, October 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden issued a memorandum authorizing an additional \$725 million in military assistance for Ukraine.

"I hereby delegate to the Secretary of State the authority under section 506(a)(1) of the FAA to direct the drawdown of up to \$725 million in defense articles and services of the Department of Defense, and military education and training, to provide assistance to Ukraine and to make the determinations required under such section to direct such a drawdown," Biden said in the memorandum on Friday.

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US Judge Drops One Count in Russian National Danchenko's Case of Lying to FBI - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 15 (Sputnik) - A US federal judge has dropped one out of five counts against Russian national Igor Danchenko, who is accused of lying to the FBI during its probe into the origins of the Trump-Russia collusion investigation, Fox News reported.

District Judge Anthony Trenga acquitted Danchenko on the first count, which alleged that the defendant lied to FBI agent Kevin Helson when stating that he had not "talked" to Charles Dolan, a US Democratic party PR executive, about any information contained in the so-called "Steele dossier."

Trenga ruled to drop the count because, in his opinion, the prosecution, led by Special Counsel John Durham, had not provided sufficient evidence to support its claims that Danchenko understood the word "talk" to mean something more than the spoken word.

"He [FBI agent Helson] didn't ask for written communications or e-mail," the report cited Trenga as saying during the trial.

Danchenko's trial began on Tuesday with the prosecution wrapping up its presentation of evidence earlier on Friday.

Closing arguments in the trial are scheduled to begin Monday before the jurors retire to contemplate the verdict.

In November, Danchenko pleaded not guilty to all five counts of making false statements to the FBI about the alleged collusion between former US President Donald Trump and the Kremlin during the 2016 US presidential election.

The prosecution insists that Danchenko lied to the FBI about the sources of information given to British spy Christopher Steele concerning alleged contacts between the Trump campaign and Russian officials, including information that the Kremlin may have facilitated Trump's election.

The indictment states that Danchenko did not receive such information from anyone and fabricated facts.

Danchenko provided data to former British spy Steele, who used the information to prepare the dossier, which served as a guide for US authorities investigating alleged ties between the Trump campaign and Russia. A subsequent Special Counsel investigation proved that there was no collusion between Trump and Russia.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 15 (Sputnik) -

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

* Gas can be delivered to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iraq and other countries as part of the swap supplies from Russia to Iran, Iranian Deputy Oil Minister Ahmad Asadzadeh told Sputnik.

* Russia and Saudi Arabia are discussing joining petrochemical projects in both countries, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said.

* Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday that he, as well as Russian President Vladimir Putin, has ordered to promptly start work on the gas hub idea.

NORD STREAM PIPELINES SABOTAGE PROBE

* Sweden, Denmark and Germany refused to jointly investigate the sabotage at Nord Stream pipelines, each of these countries will conduct its own probe, the ARD broadcaster reported on Friday, citing sources in government circles.

* The German law enforcement officers have completed investigative measures at the site of sabotage at the Nord Stream network, and their results are being studied, the Interior Ministry's spokesperson said.

UK CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHQUER

- * UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Kwasi Kwarteng announced his resignation on Friday.
- * Former UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Jeremy Hunt has been appointed as the next UK chancellor of the exchequer, the Downing Street said.
- * Kwarteng has been sacked three weeks after his appointment over a controversial tax cuts plan for big corporations, Sky News reported.

RUSSIA-CENTRAL ASIA SUMMIT

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday called on Central Asian countries to join Russian projects on import substitution.
- * Russia is ready to assist in the restoration of the unified energy system in Central Asia, Putin said.
- * Russia is in favor of having the necessary level of communication with the Taliban (under UN sanctions for terrorism), Putin said.

SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

- * The US Treasury Department issued a new notice warning that the Biden administration will impose sanctions on non-US persons that provide Russia with ammunition or support its military-industrial complex amid the ongoing conflict with Ukraine.
- * The United States is "willing and able" to impose sanctions on those people, companies and countries that provide ammunition to Russia or support its military-industrial complex amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo said.
- * Switzerland considers the introduction of sanctions against Russia in the scientific field to be absurd, Swiss President Ignazio Cassis said.
- * US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that the Group of Seven (G7) countries, the European Union and Australia have not yet finalized their plan to impose a price cap on Russian oil.

WESTERN SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

- * The United States is planning to send a new \$725 million package of military assistance to Ukraine that will include additional munitions and the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HUMVEE) amid Russia's ongoing special military operation in the country, Reuters reported on Friday, citing two US administration officials.
- * The US Defense Department is "in communication" with SpaceX regarding the Starlink satellite services for Ukraine after Elon Musk said the company cannot continue funding them amid Russia's ongoing special military operation, Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said.
- * The United States can partner with other satellite communications (SATCOM) entities besides SpaceX in order to provide Ukraine with critical services, Singh said.

MOBILIZATION IN RUSSIA

- * Russia has already mobilized 220,000 people and the partial mobilization will be completed within the next two weeks, President Vladimir Putin said on Friday.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

* Germany has decided to prioritize its relations with NATO and actively participate in the Ukraine conflict, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday.

* The Ukrainian military command and energy system facilities in Kiev and Kharkiv regions have been targeted by high-precision weapons, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

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China Not Engaging US to Solidify Plans for Biden-Xi Meeting at G20 Summit - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - China is not engaging the United States to firm up plans for a prospective meeting between US President Joe Biden and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping during the Group of Twenty (G20) summit in Bali next month, Politico reported on Friday. Chinese officials are not working with the Biden administration to draft an agenda for the meeting, which could prevent the face-to-face encounter from happening at all, the report said, citing a person familiar with the planning.

Last month, Biden said he would surely see Xi at the G20 summit in November. However, the White House could not confirm any official plans between the two leaders to meet at the time. Biden and Xi spoke in late July prior to heightened tensions between the two nations, stemming from a contentious trip to Taiwan by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in August and the unveiling of a new national security strategy this month that cemented China as a leading threat in the US's view.

Chinese diplomats are reluctant to plan a bilateral meeting amid frequent slights against China by the Biden administration, the report said. China is questioning whether to hold the meeting if they cannot expect a positive outcome or working environment, according to the report.

The White House denied any problems negotiating a meeting between Biden and Xi, the report said. However, a meeting still has not been confirmed between Biden and Xi in Bali, a Washington-based diplomat also reportedly said.

China's hesitation to formalize aspects of the meeting may also show their intent to delay major decisions until after the Chinese Communist Party's congress, which is set to begin on Sunday, according to the report. Xi is expected to be given a five-year extension as head of the party at the congress, the report said.

Both leaders are likely to have a chance to engage in-person during the G20 summit regardless of whether a bilateral meeting is officialized, the report also said.

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Oil Markets Down for 5th Week in 7 as Stubborn US Inflation Raises Fears of Recession

NEW YORK, October 14 (Sputnik) - Oil markets fell for a fifth week in seven as stubbornly high US inflation raised the odds of a recession amid the Federal Reserve's attempts to rein in the worst price pressures in 40 years.

Prices of New York- and London-traded crude oil were down 7% on the week, giving back about half of the past two weeks' gains, after latest readings for US retail sales and consumer prices showed the central bank was barely winning in its year-long battle against inflation.

"The global growth outlook remains a major downside risk, also," Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said, pointing to new lockdowns in China, the world's largest crude oil importer, which has been fighting COVID flare-ups after a week-long holiday. Erlam added that with labor markets remaining tight and inflation stubborn, "further downgrades could be on the cards" for the global economy.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate crude (WTI) settled Friday's trade down \$3.50, or 3.9%, at \$85.61 per barrel. For the week, WTI settled down just over 7%. The US crude benchmark rose 17% over two prior weeks, in a powerful start to October, after a 12.5% drop in September and 24% loss for the third quarter.

London-traded Brent oil settled down \$2.94, or 3.1%, at \$91.63 per barrel. Brent had risen 13% over two prior weeks. The global crude benchmark was down 11% in September and dropped 22% in the third-quarter.

Friday's declines in oil came as data showed US retail sales were flat in September and below expectations as inflation at near 40-year highs took a toll on consumer appetite - the most dynamic sector of the economy.

The zero percent growth in retail sales for last month was below a minimum 0.2% expected by economists and compared with the 0.4% reported by the Commerce Department for August. For the year to September, retail sales were at 8.4% versus the 9.4% registered in the 12 months to August.

Retail sales are a major indicator of consumer spending, which accounts for 70% of US gross domestic product.

The September numbers for retail sales came on the heels of Thursday's reading of the US Consumer Price Index (CPI) which showed a 0.4% growth for last month - double economists' estimates and four times higher than the expansion in August. The annual CPI growth of 8.2% for September was also not too far from the 9.1% expansion seen during the year to June, which marked a four-decade high.

Taken together, the retail sales and CPI numbers suggested the Fed was still far behind in its fight against inflation.

The central bank has raised interest rates by 300 basis points since March to curb runaway price pressures and is likely to add another 125 basis points before the year-end. Economists expect further hikes in 2023, making any talk of "peak-inflation" irrelevant for now.

"Given the acceleration of core CPI prices, the Fed will remain resolved to increase rates by at least 125 bps before year end," Oxford Economics' Matthew Martin said. "Slowing global trade flows, higher rates, and waning domestic demand will continue to support lower import prices, barring any further unexpected shocks to supply chains."

Economists have warned that the Fed could push the United States into a deep recession with the sharpest interest rate hikes in four decades, pointing to the high-flying housing sector and one-time ebullient stock market as the central bank's potential victims.

Wall Street's top 500 stocks indicator, the S&P 500, is down almost 25% on the year while tech stocks barometer, Nasdaq, has plunged 33%.

US mortgage rates, meanwhile, climbed to 6.7% two weeks ago, their highest levels in 15 years as Fed rate hikes caused borrowing costs for home loans to swell.

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CIA's Inspector General Criticizes How Agency Handled 'Havana Syndrome' Cases - Reports WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The Inspector General of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) this week sent a report to Congress that criticizes the way the agency handled early reports of the so-called "Havana syndrome," The New York Times reported on Friday. US diplomats were first diagnosed with Havana Syndrome in Cuba in 2016 and then in China in 2018. The diplomats said they experienced piercing sounds that have caused longer-term health effects. American diplomats in Russia, Tajikistan, Austria, and in several African countries have also reported experiencing Havana Syndrome symptoms, including nausea and dizziness. On January 20, the US Central Intelligence Agency said it does not consider Havana syndrome to be the result of a deliberate global campaign by any hostile country.

The report for Congress was critical of how the agency's top physicians dealt with the unexplained incidents during the Trump administration, resulting in many people with strange symptoms being unable to get. Prompt medical care, the report said.

CIA officials, cited in the report, acknowledged that the 2016-2020 internal review discovered weaknesses in the agency's response.

"The review found the challenge of simultaneously understanding and effectively responding to the myriad of challenges associated with anomalous health incidents complicated the agency's response during this time period," the report cited CIA spokeswoman Susan Miller as saying.

The news comes after the first victims of the alleged attacks reportedly began receiving compensation between \$100,000 and \$200,000 which was announced by US President Joe Biden in June.

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OPEC+ Nations Privately Told US They Disagreed With Production Cut Decision - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - Some member states of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries Plus (OPEC+) privately told the United States that they disagreed with a Saudi-backed decision to cut the group's oil production starting in November, State Department Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Friday.

Last week, OPEC+ unanimously agreed to decrease oil production by two million barrels per day starting in November in response to uncertainty in global energy markets. The Biden

administration condemned the supply cut as short-sighted amid rising energy prices in the US and Europe.

"Other OPEC nations communicated to us privately that they disagreed with the decision that was taken," Patel said when asked why Saudi Arabia is being criticized more than OPEC+ member states.

On Thursday, the Saudi Foreign Ministry denied that the OPEC+ decision was politically motivated. The US disagrees with Saudi claims that the move was economically necessary and provided alternative analysis to the contrary, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby also said on Thursday.

The uncertainty in global energy markets is partially caused by sanctions imposed by the collective West on Russian fuel sources. The Biden administration is attempting to establish a global price cap coalition on Russian oil to stabilize supply while reducing Russia's profits - a move that is undermined by OPEC+'s production cut, according to Kirby.

The Kremlin said it will not provide energy to countries that choose to join the price cap coalition.

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US Commerce Dept. Says Russia Semiconductors Imports Have Decreased by 70%

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - Russia's imports of semiconductors have fallen by nearly 70% on a year-to-year basis since the imposition of controls by the United States, the US Commerce Department said on Friday.

"Since the imposition of our controls, Russia's semiconductor imports, the lifeblood of Russia's weaponry, have dropped by nearly 70% compared to the same time period last year," the Commerce Department said in a statement.

As a result of the controls targeting Russia's imports of semiconductors, the country's production of hypersonic ballistic missiles has been significantly hindered, the statement said. In addition, the Commerce Department said Russia's car production has decreased by three-quarters and is a sign that microchips are being redirected to military production, the statement said.

"Russia's industry is on life-support," the statement said, noting that Russia is turning to chips meant for refrigerators and dishwashing machines to keep up military production.

The United States is committed to enhancing its methods of control over the supply of semiconductors to Russia to limit its ability to carry offensive operations and will keep supporting Ukraine, that statement added.

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UN Chief Appeals to Russia to Allow Red Cross to Access All War Prisoners - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, October 14 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres is reiterating his appeal to Russia to grant full access to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to all prisoners of war, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Friday.

"The Secretary-General reiterates his appeal to the Russian Federation that the International Committee of the Red Cross be granted full access to all Prisoners of War, in accordance with international humanitarian law, including the Third Geneva Convention," Haq said during a press briefing.

Recently, Guterres said the referenda in four regions in Ukraine seeking to join the Russian Federation lack any legal value.

The Russian mission to the United Nations has put out a statement criticizing Guterres for his lack of impartiality and bias on the side of the countries of the so-called collective West.

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US, Saudi Arabia Have Multiplicity of Interests Relating to Bilateral Ties - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 13 (Sputnik) - The United States still believes that Riyadh and Washington have multiplicity of mutual interests, US State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Friday.

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministry said on Thursday that The Kingdom affirms that it views its relationship with the United States of America as a strategic one that serves common interests of both countries.

When asked whether he believes that the relationship with Saudi Arabia is of mutual interest and Riyadh is a partner when it comes to countering terrorism or ending the war in Yemen or confronting Iran, Patel said, "Absolutely."

"We continue to have a multiplicity of interests as it relates to our bilateral relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," Patel said. "And of course, a big piece of that is a security relationship, one that is important towards regional stability, but also, approximately or more than 70,000 American citizens live in that Kingdom. And so we continue to keep in mind, their safety but also the broader national security interests of the United States in the region and ensuring that the steps that we take do not infringe on those interests either."

The OPEC+ alliance agreed last week to cut oil production by 2 million barrels per day from November and will take production levels agreed for August as a reference point. The move was made in response to uncertainty in global oil market outlooks, in part caused by Western sanctions on Russian energy deliveries and the G7 plans to introduce a price cap on Russian crude. The decision was met with a backlash from the United States, which demanded an increase in production to combat rising domestic prices.

On Thursday, the Saudi foreign ministry denied that the OPEC+ decision to cut oil production was politically motivated against some states.

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US, G7 Partners Urge China to Provide Debt Relief to Low Income Countries - Yellen

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The United States and its Group of Seven (G7) partners are urging China to provide debt relief to low-income countries, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Friday.

"All major official bilateral creditors, including China, should also deliver on our G20 commitments to provide debt relief to low income countries," Yellen said during a press conference.

Yellen said that debt issues are growing more acute for African countries and China is the main creditor country standing in the way of efforts to resolve excessive debt.

The United States and its G7 partners have had many discussions about what they can do to persuade China to cooperate on debt relief efforts.

World Bank President David Malpass said earlier this week that the bank is supporting the idea of comprehensive debt reduction, but he expressed concerns that the international community simply does not have the mechanism which would allow it to solve the debt issue.

Malpass stressed that the composition of debt has changed significantly over the years towards China and private sector creditors.

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UN Says Russia Has Not Shared Suspicions on Who is Behind Crimea Bridge Attack

UNITED NATIONS, October 14 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has not received any official complaints about Russia's suspicions about who is behind the explosives which attacked the Crimea bridge, UN Spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Friday.

"No, we have not received any official information along the lines of what your colleague has indicated," Haq told a briefing, pointing at one of the journalists, who indicated that according to news reports, Ukraine could be behind the attack on the Crimean bridge.

The United Nations wants to wait and see what the actual facts of the incident are, he added.

On Wednesday, the Russian Federal Security Service said that behind the explosives under the bridge was the Ukrainian intelligence service and that the explosives were delivered via Odessa from Bulgaria.

The United Nations usually stays away from any assessment or analysis of who is behind certain attacks - waiting for an official request from governments to establish official missions.

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US Has Seen Artillery Attacks on ZNPP But Nothing of 'Great Concern' - Military Official

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The United States has seen artillery shells landing "in and around" the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP), but it does not consider the incidents to be ones of "great concern," a senior US military official said on Friday.

"We continue to watch the operation with added care. Given the nuclear power plant, we have seen artillery that's landed in and around the Zaporizhzhia area, but nothing that's caused us great concern," the official said during a press briefing.

Last week, the Ukrainian troops damaged the last high-voltage power line that connected the ZNPP to the Ukrainian grid. Diesel generators now power the ZNPP to cool down the stalled units and run other operations.

Earlier in October, Russian President Vladimir Putin instructed the government to transfer the ZNPP under the control of Russian institutions and signed a decree to that effect. All plant employees would soon be transferred to the new operating organization with the preservation of wages and social guarantees.

Located on the left bank of the Dnieper River, the ZNPP is the largest nuclear power plant in Europe in terms of the number of units and output. During Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the nuclear plant and surrounding areas went under the control of Russian forces and have since been targeted by Ukrainian troops multiple times.

On September 11, the last operating power unit of the ZNPP was shut down.

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US Treasury Secretary Says No Decision Made Yet on Russian Oil Price Cap

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Friday that the Group of Seven (G7) countries, the European Union and Australia have not yet finalized their plan to impose a price cap on Russian oil.

"No decisions have been made," Yellen said during a press conference.

Yellen added that the United States and its partners are still trying to determine a suitable price cap to place on Russian oil that would lower Moscow's energy revenues but allow oil to continue to flow into the global market.

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UN Determining What Positive Role to Play in Ukraine Moving Forward - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, October 14 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is in touch with the parties to the conflict in Ukraine as it seeks ways to play a positive role moving forward, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Friday.

"The United Nations continues to be in touch with the parties to see what positive role we can play to move forward," Haq said during a press briefing.

However, the parties to the conflict in Ukraine do not seem to be ready to bridge their differences at present, Haq added.

The United Nations has so far reached out to the governments of Ukraine and Russia as well as has worked hard on reaching the grain exports agreement, which establishes a safe route for exporting grain - and fertilizer - via the Black Sea.

Recently, Russia has accused UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres of taking the side of the collective West and expressed deep dissatisfaction with Guterres' role that effectively undermines his supposed position of impartiality.

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Biden Says US Federal Government Aiding in Probe of N. Carolina Shooting That Killed 5

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US federal authorities are assisting law enforcement agencies in the state of North Carolina that are investigating the shooting that left five people dead in the city of Raleigh, President Joe Biden said on Friday.

"My administration is working closely with Governor Cooper to assist local authorities in this investigation to the fullest extent needed," Biden said in a press release.

Biden urged the US Senate to pass an assault weapons ban so he can immediately sign the legislation into law.

On Thursday, a 15-year-old suspect killed five people, including an off-duty police officer, and injured two others during a shooting in a neighborhood in Raleigh, media reported.

One witness told media that the suspect was dressed in camouflage and was armed with a long-barrel shotgun.

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US Senators Call for Repealing of 2002 Authorization to Use Military Force for Iraq War

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US Senators Tim Kaine and Todd Young on Friday introduced a bill to repeal the 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) that was passed for the purposes of the war in Iraq.

"By failing to repeal outdated and unnecessary AUMFs, Congress is abdicating its responsibility to provide oversight over military action and leaving these war authorizations subject to abuse," Kaine and Young said in a statement.

The 2002 AUMF was signed into law on October 16, 2002, and authorized the use of military force against the Iraq government led by Saddam Hussein.

Kaine and Young called on the Senate to vote on the bill during consideration of the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, arguing that it was long past time to repeal the 2002 AUMF and formally end the war in Iraq.

Kaine and Young, members of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, have been leading voices in Congress to raise concerns over the use of military force without congressional authorization.

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US Will Monitor Russian 'Grom' Strategic Nuclear Exercise - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The United States will monitor Russia's annual "Grom" strategic nuclear exercise as NATO holds its own "Steadfast Noon" strategic nuclear drills as well, Defense Department Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Friday.

"I don't have the exact location of where those take place, and I don't have any more further details on it. It's something that we're going to monitor," Singh said during a press briefing when asked for details about the Russian strategic nuclear exercise.

On Thursday, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the Western military alliance will likewise monitor the Grom exercise, which tests Russia's nuclear-capable systems.

While the Grom exercise's location is currently unknown, it be conducted concurrently with the Steadfast Noon exercise, which is set to take place some 600 miles away from Russia, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby also said on Thursday.

Steadfast Noon, also an exercise held annually, is not linked to tensions with Russia or other real-world events, Kirby said.

However, Russia probably believes its Grom exercise, named after the Russian word for "Thunder," will help project power in light of recent events, Kirby added.

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Pentagon Says N. Korean Warplane Flights Near S. Korea Undermine Regional Stability

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - Flights by North Korean warplanes near South Korean airspace are provocative actions that undermine regional stability, US Defense Department Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Friday.

"I think those types of activities, those types of movements, certainly are provocative. They seek to undermine stability within the region," Singh said during a press briefing when asked about the flights by North Korean warplanes.

On Thursday, approximately a dozen North Korean warplanes approached South Korean airspace, crossing a special reconnaissance line and prompting South Korea to scramble its own jets in response, according to South Korean media reports.

The incident came a week after a mid-air standoff between North and South Korean planes in response to an alleged military exercise by North Korea involving 12 planes.

Tensions on the Korean peninsula have risen in recent months due to an increase in weapons tests by North Korea. Pyongyang has conducted over 20 missile test launches since the beginning of the year.

North Korea claims the tests are in response to the refusal of US and South Korean forces to cease joint military exercises, which Pyongyang considered a threat to regional stability.

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SpaceX Dragon Undocks From International Space Station for Return to Earth - NASA

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The SpaceX Dragon Freedom spacecraft carrying its Crew 4 undocked successfully from the International Space Station (ISS) at 12:05 p.m. EDT as it orbited above the Atlantic Ocean on Friday, NASA engineers announced.

'Everything is proceeding as expected,' a NASA official said as the undocking was broadcast.

The spacecraft is carrying NASA astronauts Bob Hines, Kjell Lindgren and Jessica Watkins and European Space Agency astronaut Samantha Cristoforetti back to earth after completing their nearly six month science mission on the ISS.

The departure was originally scheduled for Thursday but was delayed because of high winds over the two potential splashdown areas off the east and west coasts of the US state of Florida, NASA said.

Splashdown is now scheduled to be in one of those two areas just before 5:00 p.m. EDT on Friday afternoon, NASA added.

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US Retail Sales Flat in September as Inflation Weighs on Consumer Spending

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US retail sales were flat in September and below expectations as inflation at near 40-year highs took a toll on the consumers' appetite, the dynamic sector of the economy, adding to the Federal Reserve's headache in curbing price growth.

The zero percent growth in retail sales for last month was below a minimum 2% expected by economists and compared with the 0.3% reported by the US Commerce Department for August. For the year to September, sales were at 8.4% versus the 9.2% registered in the 12 months to August.

Retail sales are a major indicator of consumer spending, which accounts for 70% of US gross domestic product.

The September numbers for retail sales came on the heels of Thursday's reading of the US Consumer Price Index (CPI), which showed a 0.4% growth for last month - double economists' estimates and four times higher than the expansion in August. The annual CPI growth of 8.2% for September was also not too far from the 9.1% expansion seen during the year to June, which marked a four-decade high.

Taken together, the retail sales and CPI numbers suggested the Fed was still far behind in its fight against inflation.

The US central bank has raised interest rates by 300 basis points since March to curb runaway price pressures and is likely to add another 125 basis points before the year-end. Economists expect further hikes in 2023, making any talk of "peak-inflation" irrelevant for now.

"Given the acceleration of core CPI prices, the Fed will remain resolved to increase rates by at least 125bps before year end," Oxford Economics' Matthew Martin said. "Slowing global trade flows, higher rates, and waning domestic demand will continue to support lower import prices, barring any further unexpected shocks to supply chains."

Economists have warned that the Fed could push the United States into a deep recession with the sharpest rate hikes in four decades, pointing to the high-flying housing sector and one-time ebullient stock market as the central bank's potential victims.

Wall Street's top 500 stocks indicator, the S&P 500, is down almost 25% on the year while tech stocks barometer Nasdaq has plunged 33%.

US mortgage rates, meanwhile, climbed to 6.7% two weeks ago, their highest levels in 15 years as Fed interest rate hikes borrowing costs for home loans to swell.

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Pentagon Says US Can Partner With Other SATCOM Entities Besides SpaceX to Help Ukraine

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The United States can partner with other satellite communications (SATCOM) entities besides SpaceX in order to provide Ukraine with critical services, Defense Department Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Friday.

SpaceX notified the Defense Department last month that it would not be able to donate its services to Ukraine indefinitely and requested the US government to step in and fund them, media reported.

"There are certainly other SATCOM capabilities that exist out there," Singh said during a press briefing. "There are other, there's not just SpaceX, other entities that we can certainly partner with when it comes to providing Ukraine with what they need on the battlefield."

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Pentagon, SpaceX in Touch After Elon Musk Says Cannot Fund Starlink for Ukraine - Official

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department is "in communication" with SpaceX regarding the Starlink satellite services for Ukraine after Elon Musk said the company cannot continue funding them amid Russia's ongoing special military operation, Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Singh said on Friday.

"I can confirm that the department has been in communication with SpaceX regarding Starlink [in Ukraine]," Singh said during a press briefing.

The Defense Department is currently assessing options to keep Starlink satellite communication services for the Ukrainian forces, Singh added.

Earlier on Friday, a US defense official said that the United States is working with its allies to support the communications needs for Ukrainians.

SpaceX notified the Defense Department in September that it can no longer donate its Starlink services to Ukraine and requested that the US government fund it instead, US media reported on Friday.

The report said that SpaceX will end up spending more than \$120 million donating its Starlink services to Ukraine this year and expects the cost to reach about \$400 million if it continues providing those services next year.

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EU Provides Over \$97Mln to IMF Poverty Reduction Trust - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The European Union has contributed more than \$97 million to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust, the IMF said in a statement on Friday.

"Today, the EU signed a €100 million grant agreement (US\$97.2 million) for the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT). These funds will allow the IMF to make about €630 million worth of zero interest loans for PRGT-eligible countries, including African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP), facing balance of payments difficulties," the statement said.

The IMF considers the funds to be a critical tool in helping countries to address the economic and food crisis, which worsened because of the conflict in Ukraine, the statement said.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva thanked the European Union for the contribution. "Its grant contribution today of €100 million will help to subsidize PRGT loans and support our provision of zero-interest lending to our most vulnerable members," Georgieva said.

Georgieva also urged others to make contributions to the PRGT so the IMF could support its members during difficult times.

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IMF Says Russia Entering 'Deep Recession'

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects growth in Russia to be negative this year and the next as the country has entered a "deep recession," IMF European Department Director Alfred Kammer said on Friday.

"When you are looking at the growth developments, what you are seeing is that growth in Russia this year and next year is going to be negative, and combined over those two years GDP levels will be lower by 10 percentage points than pre-war. So, this is deep recession Russia has entered," Kammer told reporters.

The economies of Europe are also experiencing a lower growth, however, are not seeing such a deep recession as Russia, Kammer added.

Earlier on Friday, Kammer said the IMF expects the GDP growth in advanced European economies to fall from 3.2% this year to 0.6% in 2023.

Emerging European economies may also face a sharp economic decline from a growth of 4.3% this year to 1.7% in 2023, Kammer added.

The IMF said earlier this week that it projects Russia's GDP growth to be -3.4% this year and -2.3% in 2023.

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Trump Sends 14-Page Letter to US Select Committee Probing January 6 Events

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump on Friday sent a 14-page long letter to the US House Select Committee probing the January 6, 2021 Capitol riot after he was subpoenaed by the panel on the previous day.

Trump starts his letter by repeating his past contention that the 2020 presidential election was "rigged and stolen" and vividly describes accusations of his collusion with Russia that according to him turned to be untrue.

"A large percentage of American Citizens, including almost the entire Republican Party, feel that the Election was Rigged and Stolen," the letter said. "I received many millions more votes in 2020 than I did in 2016, unheard of in our political History."

In his letter, the former US President names Washington, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser, the Capitol Police, and US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi as responsible for the breach of the Capitol building on January 6 after they allegedly refused to send troops to protect the grounds around the building.

According to Trump, days before the January 6 events, he personally "recommended and authorized thousands of troops to be deployed to ensure that there was peace, safety, and security at the Capitol and throughout Washington, DC."

On Thursday, the US House committee unanimously agreed to a resolution to subpoena Trump, who they claim bears significant responsibility for the riot.

On January 6, 2021, demonstrators breached the US Capitol complex and delayed the certification of the 2020 US presidential election results in favor of Joe Biden. Hundreds of individuals have since been charged with crimes related to the incident.

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US Warns It Will Sanction Non-US Persons Providing Ammunition to Russia - Treasury

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury Department on Friday issued a new notice warning that the Biden administration will impose sanctions on non-US persons that provide Russia with ammunition or support its military-industrial complex amid the ongoing conflict with Ukraine.

“As flagged in recent guidance, OFAC [US Office for Foreign Assets Control] is also prepared to use its broad targeting authorities against non-US persons that provide ammunition or other support to the Russian Federation’s military-industrial complex, as well as private military companies (PMCs) or paramilitary groups participating in or otherwise supporting the Russian Federation’s unlawful and unjustified attack on Ukraine,” the notice said.

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Blinken Says Iran's Government Does Not Understand Its Own Citizens - State Dept

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has warned that the Iranian government will try to paint his meeting on Friday with Iranian activists as evidence that the mass protests in Iran are organized by external forces, arguing that this distortion would show that the Iranian government does not understand its own citizens.

“I know that the Iranian regime will try to paint this and other expressions of solidarity with those standing up for their freedoms as evidence that these protests are somehow made outside of Iran and the work of others,” Blinken told reporters upon meeting with activists at the Department of State. “If they genuinely believe that, they fundamentally, fundamentally do not understand their own people because this is about Iran’s struggle, the struggle of the people of Iran for the fundamental freedoms that have long been denied them.”

Blinken reiterated that the US had also sought to support protesters through imposing sanctions on Iranian officials and departments like the Morality Police and expanding licenses for technology companies to help Iranians access the internet amid a communications crackdown. The death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini while she was in custody of the Morality Police for an alleged hijab violation on September 16 has since sparked mass nationwide anti-government protests.

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US to Send \$725Mln Military Aid Package to Ukraine, Including Humvees, Munitions – Reports

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik/Prime) – The United States is planning to send a new \$725 million package of military assistance to Ukraine that will include additional munitions and the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HUMVEE) amid Russia's ongoing special military operation in the country, Reuters reported on Friday, citing two US administration officials.

The new package is not expected to include either significant new capabilities or counter-air defense systems, the report said.

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IMF Expects GDP Growth in Advanced Europe to Fall From 3.2% in 2022 to 0.6% in 2023

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund expects that GDP growth in advanced European economies will fall from 3.2 percent this year to 0.6 percent in 2023, the IMF's European Department director Alfred Kammer said on Friday.

"GDP growth in advanced Europe is forecast to fall from 3.2 percent in 2022 to 0.6 percent in 2023—implying a downward revision for 2023 of 0.7 percentage point from our July World Economic Outlook Update projections," Kammer told reporters.

Emerging European economies may also face a sharp economic decline from 4.3 percent growth in 2022 to 1.7 percent in 2023, he added.

"In the conflict countries, output losses will be very large; Ukraine will see its GDP contract by over a third in 2022, while in Russia GDP is projected to be about 10 percent lower by 2023 than pre-war forecasts," Kammer added.

The IMF sees downside risks to economic growth and upside challenges to inflation in the region.

"A complete shutoff of remaining Russian gas flows to Europe, combined with a cold winter, could result in gas shortages and rationing, giving rise to GDP losses of up to 3 percent in some Central and Eastern European economies, and yet another bout of inflation across the continent," Kammer said.

The IMF said earlier this week in its World Economic Outlook that the projected growth to the eurozone is 3.1 percent in 2022 and 0.5 percent in 2023.

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US Justice Department Says Awarding Over \$370Mln to Support Police, Reduce Violent Crime

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department is awarding more than \$370 million in grants to law enforcement agencies to support their operations and address violent crimes, the department said on Friday.

“The Department of Justice announced today more than \$370 million in grant awards to fund state, local and Tribal crime and violence reduction efforts and evidence-based strategies that support law enforcement operations, improve officer safety and build trust with communities,” the Justice Department said in a statement.

The grants, made by the Office of Justice Programs and National Institute of Justice, will support activities designed to address serious crimes such as sexual assault and gun offenses, the statement said.

The awards will also support the Justice Department’s work to build officer resilience, improve recruitment and increase diversity in the law enforcement profession, the statement said.

The grant award announcements were made as part of the Justice Department’s end-of-fiscal year cycle, the statement added.

Additionally, the Justice Department announced six new cities joining the National Public Safety Partnership – a program designed to address local crime challenges through nationwide collaboration, according to the statement.

Albuquerque, Greensboro, Rochester, Sacramento, Tucson and Washington joined the program, which promotes collaboration among local entities while utilizing support from federal agencies such as the FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration and US Marshals, the statement said.