

5/11/23 Thursday

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Khan's Opponents Block Elections and Order His Arrest Fearing Ex-PM Can't be Voted Out

On Tuesday, former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, ousted by parliament last year, was arrested on terrorism charges and others stemming from a March clash between police and his supporters. However, on Thursday, the nation's high court declared the arrest illegal and ordered his release.

The arrest of the highly popular politician touched off days of protests and riots, resulting in the [arrest of hundreds of his supporters](#), including several high-ranking leaders of Tehreek-e-Insaf, Khan's political party.

"I think the confrontation between the present government and Imran Khan has been going on for the last 2-3 years, and this has peaked now when they arrested Imran Khan on [May 9]," Dr Hasan Askari Rizvi, a prominent independent political and defense analyst based in Lahore, Pakistan, told Sputnik on Thursday.

Noting the court's recent release order, Rizvi said that "given the confrontation, it seems that the government and the NAB, the Accountability Bureau, will again arrest him maybe in a day or so. So we think that this confrontation will go on because the government doesn't appear to be interested in elections and they want to move him aside from the political domain so that he does not become a threat in the elections."

Rizvi said he expected the arrest, ordered by the office of the High Court in Islamabad, would be ruled illegal, calling it "a violation of the legal tradition that is established in Pakistan."

"However, the government will not sit back. Imran Khan is likely to be arrested for one reason or the other in 24 or 48 hours. That's what we expect," he added.

The expert said Khan will still have to go back to the Islamabad high court on Friday to apply for bail.

"And we'll see what happens to that case that he's going to file tomorrow. And if he doesn't get a bail, then there is a greater possibility that the NAB and the government may arrest him again," Rizvi said.

"Tomorrow, he will go to the Islamabad high court, because he was there in that court on the 9th of May for the appearance and for bail. Then he was arrested inside the office of the court, and therefore he will go there to apply for, I think, bail tomorrow. And we'll see what happens to that case that he's going to file tomorrow. And if he doesn't get a bail, then there is a greater possibility that the NAB and the government may arrest him again."

Asked about the affair's potential international repercussions, Rizvi said that was "not the focus of attention of this controversy," telling Sputnik "the issues at stake are domestic."

"On the one hand, the [economy in Pakistan](#) is in shambles, facing a lot of problems, and this has enabled Imran Khan to mobilize popular support for him, especially amongst the young people. And therefore the government is somewhat reluctant to hold elections because they feel that given his popularity at the moment, he may perform better and that may put the present

government out of power. And then they fear that Imran Khan would also use state apparatus against them," he explained.

However, he noted that the crisis has the potential to disrupt projects such as the infrastructure work undertaken as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor - which would only make the political instability worse.

"I think nobody in Pakistan benefits, because this diverts attention from the economic problems that Pakistan is facing. Pakistan has a serious economic crisis and there is a lot of inflation and price hikes in Pakistan, which have adversely affected the common people, who find it difficult to cope with the increasing prices," he added.

"Therefore, the chances of the government addressing these economic problems in relation with the international system and economic problems in relation to common people, they will not be able to address that. Which means that if political conflict persists, then the economic crisis will also persist. And if the economic and political crises continue, then, I'm afraid, Pakistan may go through a longer period of instability."

Rizvi also sought to assuage concerns about Pakistan's roughly 70-90 nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands as a result of the crisis, explaining there is "no difference of opinion on the nuclear issue" between Khan and Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, who replaced him after his ouster.

"They share the major features of Pakistan's external relations and also relevance and importance of nuclear capability as a deterrence and its importance for security. That is equally shared by the government and the opposition. That's why they are not raising this kind of issue."

"Secondly, in this nuclear program, the security forces of Pakistan are playing an important role and they are managing a lot of security affairs relating to nuclear and non-nuclear issues. And the security forces are a very cohesive, very integrated and disciplined institution. Therefore, they will continue to take care of that. And I don't think this conflict that is there between government and opposition will have any negative implications for Pakistan's security imperative that also includes nuclear security," Rizvi explained.

Syed Ali Zia Jaffery, Deputy Director at the Center for Security, Strategy and Policy Research, University of Lahore, and Associate Editor of Pakistan Politico, told Sputnik that Sharif's [government fears Khan cannot be defeated](#) electorally.

"As evidenced by the events of the past 13 months, Imran Khan is Pakistan's most popular leader by a stretch, there are no two ways about it. His popularity as per the latest surveys, is roughly between 61 and 68%. And his rivals, even when combined, do not constitute half of it. Also, he has conducted close to 70 political gatherings, which have drawn huge crowds all across the country. Besides, he has won 29 of the 37 by-polls that have been held across the country. And yes, the government has tried its level best to stop the elections despite the orders of the Supreme Court and clear cut provisions of the Constitution," Jaffery said. "So absolutely, I think the government feels that, as of now, Imran Khan cannot be defeated electorally." Jaffery said that Khan's release "will help calm some nerves out there," noting that "had this decision not come today, things could have escalated further."

However, he added that "nobody benefits from this chaos. Chaos is never good news for any country, including Pakistan. The government, by using high-handed tactics, is not making things

easier for itself, as the public is not happy with it and its policies. Add to the mix soaring inflation and unemployment the government has a big problem on its hands.”

Similar to Rizvi, he also rejected the idea that attitudes about foreign relations had any appreciable impact on the crisis.

“I think Imran Khan had and has a very clear stand on Pakistan's foreign policy. I think what he wanted was to anchor his foreign policy within the constructs of Pakistan's economic development, internal security, and regional connectivity. And with that in mind, he obviously wanted to have excellent relations with the US and strategic relations with China. He was willing to have a major say in Pakistan's policy towards the Muslim world, as evidenced by his being keen to mediate between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as between the US and Iran. And he was also turning a page, so to speak, with Russia,” he said.

“That said, at the state level, Pakistan's policy is pretty consistent. Pakistan does not want to get into camp politics. If anything, it wants to be a melting pot for all countries and interests. So, while there would be attitudinal and tactical differences between Khan's approaches towards foreign policy and those of the opposition, Pakistan's core direction will remain rather similar,” Jaffrey added.

However, it could have a major impact not just on the progress of the CPEC, but the entire Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Chinese-financed, globe-spanning infrastructure megaproject.

“Pakistan is one of the most integral parts of China's Belt and Road initiative, simply because of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Definitely, instability in Pakistan is not good news for Sino-Pak relations. While instability will not cause a rupture in ties, it does not work well for Pakistan's economy. The economy is not nosediving like anything. And this continued political instability is going to badly impact the economy. And when the economy takes a hit, Pakistan's ability to partner China as one of the linchpins of the BRI gets hampered. So obviously, when political stability will come and the economy will start to recuperate, Pakistan will be in a better position to partner with China and create win-win scenarios in the region and beyond.”

Jaffery noted that Pakistan's nuclear weapons system is “foolproof,” saying the command and control (C2) system is “well in place and working” and there was no connection “between instability in Pakistan and Pakistan's nuclear weapons safety.”

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PacWest Bank Shares Resume Decline, Prompting Fears of More Bank Collapses

The California-based regional bank has lost 70% of its share value over the past year, with 40% of that loss coming in the last month amid troubles by other banks around the globe.

In a new filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission ([SEC](#)) on Thursday, PacWest Bancorp revealed large new cash outflows in recent days from the bank it owns, Pacific Western Bank, but reaffirmed its ability to fund those withdrawals with available liquidity.

According to the filing, which was actually for the first financial quarter that ended on March 31, PacWest also noted it [lost 9.5% of its share value](#) in the week preceding May 5.

The majority of those withdrawals, it said, came after media reports the company was “evaluat[ing] all options to maximize shareholder value” as part of the continued fallout of the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank earlier this year.

It also said in the filing that the Federal Reserve’s seizure and sale of First Republic Bank had “heightened market and customer fears of additional bank failures, including PacWest.”

The fear is palatable as First Republic, Silicon Valley Bank, and Signature Bank have all collapsed amid bank runs in the last few months, and even large banks like Switzerland’s Credit Suisse have required significant stabilization measures at the state level.

JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon told US media on Thursday he thinks regional banks are “quite strong” but added “I think we have to assume there’ll be a little bit more” to the crisis.

News of PacWest’s losses only triggered further losses, with PacWest’s stock value collapsing another 23% on Thursday.

PacWest also revealed to the SEC on Thursday that its total deposits had declined by 16.9% in the first quarter of 2023.

“While the deposit news is not what the company wants to report, if the outflows are truly from the venture depositors and not the core bank, that is better news, despite the higher total outflow disclosure. The financial result is that the company is borrowing more to replace those deposits,” RBC Capital Markets analyst Jon Arfstrom said in a note to clients and reported in the media.

In response to the news, PacWest announced it had pledged another \$5.1 billion the day prior at the Federal Reserve’s discount window, giving it an additional borrowing capacity of \$3.9 billion and a total of \$15 billion in immediately available liquidity. By contrast, the Beverly Hills-based bank has just \$5.2 billion in uninsured deposits.

The collapse of several banks and uncertainty in the stability of others has led to increased questioning of the long-term stability of financial markets as a whole, with US media reports on Thursday pondering if another 2008-like crash was already in motion. That financial catastrophe resulted in the largest market losses since 1929 and triggered the Great Recession, a period of near-global economic malaise, and concurrent social unrest.

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‘What’s in the Way’? Marcos Seeks Finalization of South China Sea Code of Conduct at ASEAN

Washington has sought to woo members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), nearly all of which have formed close economic partnerships with Beijing in recent years, as part of its efforts at “great power competition” with Russia and China.

Speaking on Tuesday ahead of a meeting with leaders of ASEAN member states, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. said he would push for completion of the decadeslong talks to form a universal code of conduct for the South China Sea.

“Where are we having a hard time? How can we fix that problem? That’s what these meetings should be for. And I think we’ll get to that point because everybody wants this to work.

Everybody wants to have a code of conduct,” Marcos said on Tuesday. “So, what’s getting in the way? Let’s talk about it.”

Marcos added that the disputes between regional powers over [conflicting claims](#) in the waterway would not ease until the code of conduct is adopted. Five nations have declared their rights over islands and sea lanes in the South China Sea, including the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam, and the People’s Republic of China, as well as Taiwan, a rebellious Chinese province governed by a US-backed authority.

Framework for Resolution

Talks on establishing a code of conduct have been [ongoing for two decades](#), but acquired a new urgency as the United States has increasingly used the disputes to shoulder its way into regional politics, posturing as the defender of smaller ASEAN states against what it calls Beijing’s “expansionism.”

Marcos isn’t the only regional leader eager to get the talks moving more quickly. Ahead of a round of negotiations in Jakarta in March, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi told his Chinese counterpart, Qin Gang, that “Indonesia and ASEAN would like to produce an effective, substantive and actionable (code of conduct).”

Qin agreed, noting that together, China and ASEAN would jointly safeguard peace and stability in the waterway, which handles some \$3.4 trillion in maritime trade each year.

Once finalized, the document will [provide a framework](#), based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, through which they can [settle their disputes](#), which include fishing and drilling rights in the South China Sea.

The US has cast doubts on the code of conduct, saying it fears China is pushing the negotiations in its favor. One influential US think tank [has even proposed](#) sabotaging the existing talks, developing an alternative with the ASEAN states that is more amenable to US interests, and attempting to impose it on Beijing.

‘The Train May Have Already Left the Station’

Ahead of the ASEAN summit, which is being held in Labuan Bajo in eastern Indonesia, experts said they expected little immediate headway to be made in the delicate code of conduct talks. Despite the ongoing negotiations, “we are not optimistic that there will be a signing this year,” Sharon Seah, senior fellow and coordinator at the ASEAN Studies Centre at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, told Singaporean media.

“The train may have already left the station because of events that are happening on the ground,” she said, referring to an ongoing war of words between Beijing and Manila. The two nations have sparred over fishing rights, [US military bases](#), and the conducting of military maneuvers, among other issues.

Speaking in Germany on Wednesday, Qin said Southeast Asian nations “should not be forced to take sides” in what he characterized as a “new cold war.”

“[A] new cold war and competitiveness of great powers shouldn’t appear in the Asia-Pacific region. We believe that Indonesia and ASEAN will make their judgment and choice independently and autonomously in the fundamental interest of the stability, development and prosperity of the region,” he said.

Other issues discussed at the ASEAN summit included the ongoing political crisis in Myanmar, where ASEAN has struggled to implement a “five-point consensus” for peace since the 2021

military coup; efforts on the eradication of human trafficking; the preparation of a roadmap for Timor Leste's full membership in ASEAN; and the signing of the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Protocol.

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Elon Musk Reveals New Twitter CEO Will Take Over Post in Six Weeks

Musk has served as Twitter CEO since his October 2022 takeover, shortly after dismissing then CEO Parag Agrawal along with several other executives. He previously indicated he intended to move away from the CEO post by years' end.

Elon Musk has announced he will officially be stepping down as CEO of Twitter in six weeks' time after finding a new person for the role.

The announcement was made in a Thursday tweet in which he detailed he would be transitioning to "exec chair & CTO, overseeing product, software & sysops."

"Excited to announce that I've hired a new CEO for X/Twitter," Musk [wrote](#). "She will be starting in ~6 weeks!"

Musk did not identify the new chief executive officer by name, nor did he provide any specifics on the individual's work experience.

The Twitter chief commented in mid February that he intended to appoint his successor by the end of the year, but that he first wanted to ensure the social media platform remained stable. "I'm guessing probably towards the end of this year should be good timing to find someone else to run the company because I think it should be in a stable position around the end of this year," he had said at the World Government Summit in Dubai.

The development comes after Musk previously stated in December 2022 that he would be honoring the results of a public poll he created that asked Twitter users whether he should step down as Twitter chief.

At the time, the final [poll results](#) revealed 57.5% of participating users were in favor of his departure from the CEO gig. A total of 17,502,391 users voted in the poll.

After months of stalled talks and legal filings, Musk officially took hold of Twitter in October 2022 as part of a \$44 billion acquisition. He had stated then that he never intended to remain the permanent CEO of the platform.

In the months that followed, his arrival at the company was marked by a loss of advertisers, budget cuts and severe staffing losses.

Talk of Musk's shift away from Twitter came on the heels of reports speculating investors felt as though his other companies were suffering, and that the South African entrepreneur was becoming increasingly distracted with his new purchase.

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Report: Rumored Tesla Successor Became Musk Favorite by Staying Out of Limelight

In February, Musk revealed he would be appointing a successor for his company Tesla by the end of 2023, and would announce said succession via Twitter, a company which he also owns. Tesla is rumored to have found a potential successor for CEO Elon Musk as board members are reportedly betting on CFO Zach Kirkhorn to take the reins at the automotive company, new reports have detailed.

Kirkhorn's name was reportedly thrown into a potential CEO list last year while the company was dealing with a lawsuit from a Tesla shareholder claiming Musk's 2018 compensation plan was "beyond the bounds of reasonable judgment," and that the \$44 billion payout allowed Musk the ability to focus his attention elsewhere, such as his buyout of Twitter.

US media [reported](#) Kirkhorn allegedly won the top spot by staying in Musk's shadow and being willing to "share the bad news."

"He doesn't take the limelight from Elon," said Kurt Kelty, a vice president at battery-materials company Sila and former senior director of battery technology at Tesla.

Tesla insiders and staff reportedly said Kirkhorn is able to "share the bad news even louder and faster than the good news" with Musk, a method of communication the CEO prefers. The CFO has also been seen as a mediator between Musk and other Tesla employees, as Musk has been rumored to be an explosive employer to work for, a rumor which he has denied.

Kirkhorn and Musk both studied similar fields at the same school as each other—the University of Pennsylvania, which has given the two a shared language, according to reports.

Reports have suggested the relationship between Kirkhorn and Musk can be compared to the same partnership as Steve Jobs and his successor Tim Cook. While Musk works as the visionary, Kirkhorn is reportedly careful that his lofty ideas are fine-tuned.

"Predictability is everything with a CFO," former Tesla board member Steve Westly said. "What you can't do is surprise people, and he has not surprised people."

Kirkhorn, who has worked for over a decade at the company, has also pulled his weight in managing Tesla. After coming on board, the CFO reportedly saved Tesla from hemorrhaging money for more than a decade.

Before Kirkhorn was promoted to his role as CFO, Tesla was valued at about \$50 billion, the company is now valued at over \$500 billion.

The latest comes after Musk revealed earlier Thursday that he will be stepping down as the CEO of Twitter, a role which he acquired in October of 2022 when he purchased the social media platform to the tune of \$44 billion. He will be announcing the new CEO in just six weeks.

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How Deep-Diving Hammerhead Sharks Survive Depths of 2,500 Feet

While scientists have long wondered how a hammerhead shark is able to survive frigid temperatures when deep-diving for their prey, they may soon no longer need be stumped on the matter.

The hammerhead shark may be the first known fish to hold its breath while plunging for prey, a new study has revealed.

A Thursday-released study has revealed that scalloped hammerhead sharks hold their breath by clamping their gills shut in order to dive over 2,500 feet below surface to conserve their body's temperature.

Sharks are ectothermic creatures, meaning they are cold-blooded, and as such their body temperatures match the temperature of the water they traverse.

And while this species is known to swim in coastal waters with warmer temperatures, that doesn't mean they don't also dive more than 2,600 feet below surface for their prey in temperatures that drop as low as 41 degrees Fahrenheit (5 degrees Celsius).

Mark Royer, a researcher at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology, has said the most rapid point of heat loss "for any fish, even a high-performance fish, is always at the gills."

"Imagine you're on a warm sunny beach, and then you hop out of the warm water and immediately plunge into an ice bath," explains [Royer](#), who led the study. If the shark can't maintain its body heat, then it can't swim, and if water isn't moving across its gills it essentially drowns.

While some sharks and fish have evolved in having a specialized heat-exchange systems at their gills, such as the mako shark, the great white shark, as well as the tuna and marlin fish, the scalloped hammerhead did not develop this evolutionary trait and must resort to closing both its mouth and gills.

Through using a small device, which Royer compared to a Fitbit, the researchers found that once the shark was done diving, it then pitched itself upward at an 80-degree angle and "shoot[s] towards the surface," and their body temperature remained the same as they returned to the surface.

The shark is believed to be able to hunt while holding its breath for at least 17 minutes.

The new discovery that hammerhead sharks essentially hold their breath while diving for prey "still shocks and baffles" Royer.

The study was published in the journal [Science](#).

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NOAA Warns El Nino Arrival Could Mark 'Significant' Event, Persist Into Winter

El Nino is a term used to refer to the "warming of the ocean surface or above-average sea surface temperatures" in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, according to the US Geological Survey, and can affect weather patterns across the globe.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) warned on [Thursday](#) that an El Nino system is readying to strike the Pacific Ocean this summer, and that it may stay in place through the coming winter months.

According to the NOAA Climate Prediction Center (CPC), the chance of El Niño developing this summer is now over 90%, a forecast that plays a major role in the number of hurricanes experienced in North America during hurricane season.

A transition from [#ENSO](#)-neutral is expected in the next couple of months, with a greater than 90% chance of El Niño persisting into the Northern Hemisphere winter. An [#ElNiño](#) Watch remains in effect. <https://t.co/5zlzaZ1aZxpjw/cDdEBWpbM6>
— NWS Climate Prediction Center (@NWSCPC) [May 11, 2023](#)

Over the last three years, the strip of water where El Niño occurs has been cooler than average (a system which is referred to as La Niña). But this period of cooler temperatures ended in March as the waters began to warm again (becoming El Niño).

The area has not created an El Niño system yet, as the temperatures must first reach at least 0.9 degrees Fahrenheit above average for the length of at least a month, and continue for several months. But NOAA predicts a moderate El Niño is expected to begin sometime between this month and July. The odds of El Niño lasting into the Northern Hemisphere's winter are now at least 82%.

[Ben Noll](#), a New Zealand meteorologist, noted current sea-surface temperatures are already on a trajectory that is warmer than both 1997 and 1982, years which spurred strong El Niño events. This summer's El Niño could not only be the first since 2018 and 2019, but is predicted by the administration to be a strong one.

It could also be the first year when global surface temperatures, on average, are riding against the Paris Agreement's stringent climate change target of 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit (1.5 degrees Celsius) above pre-industrial levels.

While El Niño is a naturally occurring event, it can accelerate human-caused climate change as the ocean heat is transferred to Earth's atmosphere.

"A moderate to strong El Niño substantially increases the chance that 2024 will be the warmest year on record, and the odds that it might be the first year to surpass 1.5°C," Zeke Hausfather, a climate research lead, told [US media](#).

As El Niño affects the entire globe, some of the major weather events in the coming year could include: hurricanes, trade winds, much-needed rainfall for dry areas but also flooding for areas which are already saturated, a dryer Australia with an increase in wildfire risks, tropical cyclones in and around Hawaii, and coral bleaching events.

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Soulless CNN - Cartoon

By - Ted Rall

Former US President Donald Trump joined CNN on Wednesday for a "town hall meeting" that quickly descended into a Trump-style rally. The decision to invite Trump onto their network was heavily criticized by both CNN insiders as well as viewers, as Trump consistently referred to the network as "fake news" during his presidency.

A backlash against Chris Licht, the CEO of CNN, has brought the network to new lows with critics asking how the network will cover the 2024 election after inviting Trump, an indicted former president, to host what was essentially a MAGA rally during its prime-time broadcast. During his appearance, Trump bulldozed over CNN moderator Kaitlin Collins for 70 minutes at St. Anselm College, New Hampshire, and continued to push fraudulent claims that the 2020 election was rigged, and called E. Jean Carroll—who won a lawsuit against Trump for defamation and battery—a “whack job.”

Anderson Cooper, a CNN anchor favored by liberal media, defended on Thursday the network’s decision to hand Trump a public platform as a bipartisan effort.

“If we all only listen to those we agree with, it may actually do the opposite. If lies are allowed to go unchecked, as imperfect as our ability to check them is on a stage in real-time, those lies continue and those lies spread,” Cooper said on Thursday.

“If you’re angry or upset, I understand. But you have the power to do something about it,” he concluded. “You can actually get involved. You can make a difference, whatever side of the aisle you’re on. After last night, none of us can say, ‘I didn’t know what’s out there. I didn’t know what’s coming.’”

Similar to the public’s reaction to the Trump town hall, Cooper’s remarks have not landed well among viewers.

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Canada's Joly to Discuss Syria, Sudan, Ukraine With Kuwaiti Counterpart – Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) – Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly will host her Kuwaiti counterpart, Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on Friday for talks on Syria, Sudan and Ukraine, Global Affairs said.

“The Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today announced that on May 12, 2023, she will welcome Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Canada for his first official visit here,” the ministry said in a statement.

The ministers are expected to address shared priorities in regional and international security, notably the crises in Syria, Sudan and Ukraine.

Other topics will include climate change, the two nations’ commitments to multilateralism and international law, according to the statement.

Global Affairs Canada also highlighted a “strong history of collaboration” with Kuwait, including in the fight against the Islamic State terrorist group (banned in Russia), as well as the country’s role in Canada’s evacuation efforts in Afghanistan in 2021.

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US Senator Vows to Fight Biden's New 'Job-Killing' Coal and Gas Plant Rules

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - A senator who represents West Virginia, one of the largest coal mining states in the US, vowed to issue a formal challenge to the Biden administration's new emissions requirements that threaten the existence of coal and gas-fired power plants across the country.

Earlier in the day, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) unveiled new pollution standards that will require fossil fuel-fired power plants to reduce emissions by up to 90 percent by 2030 or shut down, according to an analysis by Scientific American magazine.

"The Clean Power Plan 2.0 announced today is the Biden administration's most blatant attempt yet to close down power plants and kill American energy jobs. The EPA has already tried this illegal overreach, which was ultimately overturned by the Supreme Court, but not before it devastated communities in West Virginia and across the country," Senator Shelley Moore Capito said in a statement on Thursday. "I plan to introduce a Congressional Review Act resolution of disapproval to protect workers and families from the disastrous impacts of these latest job-killing regulations."

West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey said the rule appears to "utterly fly in the face of the rule of law." The US Supreme Court, the official said in a press release, has placed significant limits on what the EPA can do and he plans on ensuring that "those limits are upheld."

Chris Hamilton, President and CEO of the West Virginia Coal Association, said the rule is specifically designed to shut down the state's power plants.

"What EPA is doing is economic suicide. West Virginians will lose jobs. Americans will continue to pay increasingly more expensive power bills. Our nation's electric system will become even more unreliable. And energy security in the United States will become more dependent on foreign countries and potentially foreign adversaries," Hamilton said in a press release. "Ideology doesn't manufacture megawatts. Coal does."

On Wednesday, Senator Joe Manchin, also from West Virginia, ahead of the proposal's unveiling said he would oppose every single one of President Joe Biden's EPA nominees until this "government overreach" is halted.

The EPA said the proposal would avoid up to 617 million metric tons of total carbon dioxide (CO2) through 2042, equivalent to cutting the annual emissions of 137 million passenger vehicles - or half the cars in the US.

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Blinken Says US Ready to Provide Ukraine What It Needs to Launch Counteroffensive

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the Biden administration is ready to fill Kiev's requirements to launch a counteroffensive against Russia and is determined to ensure UK's supply of long-range missiles adds up to what Ukraine needs.

"If there are gaps, if there are shortages, they'll tell us and we will make every effort to make

good on them," Blinken told PBS on Thursday when asked about US support for Ukraine's counteroffensive.

Blinken also said Washington is determined to ensure that Britain's supply of long-range missiles will "add up to what Ukraine needs."

Earlier in the day, CNN reported, citing Western officials, that the UK had sent long-range Storm Shadow cruise missiles to Ukraine after receiving guarantees from Kiev that they would not be used against targets in Russia.

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New York Charges 24-Year-Old Veteran in Chokehold Death of Homeless Subway Rider - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - Prosecutors in New York are charging a 24-year-old Marine Corps veteran with second-degree homicide for his alleged role in the death of a homeless rider on the New York City subway system, NBC reported, citing the Manhattan District Attorney's Office.

The defendant, Daniel Penny, will appear in Manhattan criminal court for arraignment on Friday, the report said on Thursday.

Penny placed 30-year-old Jordan Neely in what appeared to be a chokehold during an altercation on the subway system. Penny's lawyers have claimed that Neely was aggressively threatening others and that the veteran acted to protect himself and fellow passengers, the report said.

The New York City Medical Examiner ruled Neely's death a homicide by compression of the neck.

Neely's death prompted demonstrations in New York City, with officials including Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez speaking out against Penny's use of physical force.

New York Governor Kathy Hochul and New York City Mayor Eric Adams also pointed to the role that mental health may have played in the incident.

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US Lawmaker Introduces Bill to Impose Sanctions on Those Responsible for Endangering ZNPP

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - US Congressman and Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Gregory Meeks introduced a bill to impose sanctions on any person or entity that is responsible for endangering the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) in Ukraine, the committee said in a press release.

"This bill would place sanctions on Russia's nuclear agency, Rosatom, which has financially

supported the war in Ukraine, as well as any who've undermined the nuclear facility's safety," the release cited Meeks as saying on Thursday.

On Sunday, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) expressed concern over the potentially dangerous situation at ZNPP.

ZNPP Site Director Yuri Chernichuk said on Saturday that all of plant's units were shut down and the equipment was maintained in accordance with all safety and security regulations. Chernichuk said that there was no need to evacuate the ZNPP staff or Enerhodar residents.

Located on the left bank of the Dnipro River, the ZNPP is the largest nuclear power plant in Europe by the number of units and energy output. It came under Russia's control in early March 2022 and has since been repeatedly shelled, raising international concerns over a possible nuclear accident. An international mission led by Grossi first visited the plant on August 31-September 5 last year. IAEA observers have since been staying at the plant on a rotational basis. Following the visit by the mission, the IAEA published a report in which it confirmed multiple attacks on the ZNPP.

On October 5, 2022, the ZNPP was placed under the control of Russian institutions by order of Russian President Vladimir Putin. On December 8, Moscow sent proposals to the IAEA with specific parameters for creating a security zone around ZNPP.

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US House Speaker Says Not Enough Progress Made on Debt Ceiling Talks to Reconvene Leaders

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

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said the postponement of the meeting between President Joe Biden and the congressional leadership on raising the debt ceiling was due to the fact that not enough progress was made during the staff-level talks and should not be seen as a delay.

"The White House didn't cancel the meeting - all of the leaders decided that it's probably in the best of our interest to let the staff meet again before we get back together," McCarthy said on Thursday. "It's not a delay... I don't think there is enough progress for the leaders to get back together."

McCarthy said he expects the leaders to meet again sometime next week. Postponement should not be read as a signal that talks are falling apart, McCarthy said earlier, adding that it will be more productive to let staff meet again, according to an NBC report.

Biden is feeling the pressure of negotiations as the time until a potential default dwindles, McCarthy said. The Treasury Department has said that the United States could default on its financial obligations as early as June.

Biden met with congressional leaders earlier this week to discuss raising the debt ceiling, during which both sides reiterated their stances; Republicans have proposed a plan to raise the debt ceiling in exchange for cuts to government spending, while Democrats have insisted on raising it without concessions.

The leaders were set to meet again on Friday, while staff met in the meanwhile to advance negotiations.

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McCarthy Says Not Enough Progress Was Made on Debt Ceiling Talks Yet to Reconvene

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said the postponement of the meeting between US President Joe Biden and congressional leadership on raising the debt ceiling was due to the fact not enough progress was made and should not be seen as a delay.

"The White House didn't cancel the meeting - all of the leaders decided that it's probably in the best of our interest to let the staff meet again before we get back together," McCarthy said on Thursday. "It's not a delay... I don't think there is enough progress for the leaders to get back together."

The meeting between Biden, McCarthy and other chamber leaders will take place next week, instead of its initial Friday scheduling, NBC reported, citing three sources familiar with the matter. He also said the postponement should not be read as a signal that talks are falling apart, McCarthy also said, adding that it will be more productive to let staff meet again, according to the report.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) -

US BORDER CRISIS

* Individuals who attempt to enter the United States without utilizing the appropriate lawful avenues will face tougher consequences after the COVID-era Title 42 policy is lifted, Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said on Thursday.

* The transition from the pandemic-era Title 42 immigration policy, which ends at midnight, will be "swift and immediate," Mayorkas said.

* The US state of Florida is suing the Biden administration in an attempt to delay the end of the Title 42 immigration policy, which has prompted thousands of migrants to amass near the United States-Mexico border in anticipation of laxer enforcement, according to a court document.

GRAIN EXPORTS AGREEMENT

* Ukrainian Infrastructure Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov said that the meeting on the extension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, hosted by Istanbul, ended, and negotiations will continue

online.

* Russian state departments are evaluating proposals made by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres regarding the Black Sea Grain Initiative, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin said, adding that Moscow is against endless extensions of the deal.

* There was no progress made on the issue of reconnecting the Russian Agricultural Bank to the SWIFT payment system, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin said.

* The Black Sea Grain Initiative will cease to exist if there is no agreement on its extension by May 18, Vershinin said.

* The United Nations will continue its efforts to negotiate extending the grain exports agreement, formally known as the Black Sea Grain Initiative, and will try harder to tackle all challenges, including Russia's dissatisfaction with its part of the deal not being implemented, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

WESTERN MILITARY SUPPORT TO UKRAINE

* The UN Security Council will convene on May 18 to discuss Western arms supply to Ukraine, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday.

* UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said London will supply enough long-range Storm Shadow cruise missiles to Ukraine to satisfy Kiev's needs,

* Washington supports London's decision to provide long-range Storm Shadow missiles to Ukraine, Wallace said.

* The United Nations will not comment on the United Kingdom's stated plan to provide Ukraine with long-range Storm Shadow missiles, but wants the conflict to end in accordance with international law, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

* Poland has transferred 325 tanks and 14 MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine, Polish Permanent Representation to the European Union said.

* The United States has already delivered the first Abrams tanks to the European theater for Ukrainians to train and is doing everything possible to get tanks to Ukraine by early fall, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Many people in Donbas city Horlivka have suffered injuries after the Ukrainian military used Grad rockets on Thursday, Mayor Ivan Prikhodko said.

* Ukraine has lost up to 230 military and mercenaries in the Donetsk direction over the past day, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

OPEC OUTLOOK

* OPEC keeps its forecast for the global oil demand growth in 2023 unchanged, expects the demand to increase by 2.3 million barrels per day to 101.9 million barrels per day, according to its fresh report published on Thursday.

* OPEC has maintained its forecast for Russia's oil and condensate production in 2023 at the level of 10.28 million barrels per day and still expects it to decline by 750,000 barrels per day, according to the organization's fresh report.

* OPEC oil production decreased by 191,000 barrels per day in April to the level of March - to 28.6 million barrels per day, according to its fresh report published.

* Oil production in Russia in March decreased by 300,000 barrels per day month-on-month to 9.7 million barrels per day, according to a fresh report by OPEC.

IMF ON US POTENTIAL DEFAULT

* The International Monetary Fund (IMF) calls on Democrats and Republicans to reach a consensus and urgently address the issue of raising the debt ceiling that poses a risk to the United States to possibly default on its financial obligations, IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday.

* The IMF warned that a potential default in the United States could lead to “severe repercussions” for the global economy.

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Trump Files Notice of Appeal in Civil Suit Brought by E. Jean Carroll - Court Documents

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump has filed a notice of appeal with a New York District Court in the civil case brought by E. Jean Carroll, court documents revealed on Thursday.

Trump seeks to appeal a verdict passed down on Tuesday that found the former president liable for sexual abuse and defamation, and fined him \$5 million.

Carroll, 79, alleged that Trump raped her at a department store in Manhattan in 1996. Trump and his legal team have insisted that the allegations are fabricated.

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Biden's Meeting With Congressional Leaders Postponed Until Next Week - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden's meeting with congressional leaders to discuss the debt ceiling and looming default has been postponed until next week, The Washington Post reported on Thursday citing two people in the know.

Neither the White House nor the lawmakers have made any announcements about the postponement yet.

Biden was set to talk with congressional leaders on Friday to follow up on the earlier debt ceiling negotiations following his meeting with them earlier this week.

On Tuesday, Biden met with congressional leaders, including US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, to negotiate raising the debt ceiling. Last month, House Republicans passed legislation to raise the debt ceiling in exchange for cuts to government spending. However, Biden and Schumer rejected the measure.

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US House Passes Border Security Legislation Amid Title 42 Concerns

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives on Thursday passed border security legislation amid concerns about the thousands of migrants gathered at the United States' border with Mexico who are waiting to enter the country after the end of the Title 42 immigration policy later in the evening.

House lawmakers passed the bill, dubbed the Secure the Border Act, in a vote of 219-213, with two Republicans joining all Democrats in opposition.

The legislation would resume construction of a US-Mexico border wall, expand crimes that disqualify individuals for asylum and create an electronic verification system for employers to determine the eligibility of applicants.

The House passed the bill hours before the COVID-era Title 42 policy, which allows the US authorities to turn away migrants in the interest of public health, is set to expire.

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US Contacting States Detaining Alleged Russian Spies to Effectuate Prisoner Swap - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - The United States is reaching out to countries that have detained alleged Russian spies, including Brazil, Germany and Norway, as part of Washington's effort to secure a prisoner swap for US citizens Evan Gershkovich and Paul Whelan, CNN reported on Thursday.

The Biden administration is casting a wide net, approaching allied countries who have alleged Russian spies in custody to gauge whether they would be willing to make a trade as part of a larger prisoner swap package, the report said.

The United States is also considering cutting down on some of the sanctions imposed on Russia as part of a the effort to secure a prisoner swap, the report said.

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Elon Musk Says He Hired New CEO For X/Twitter, She Will Start in 6 Weeks

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) – US billionaire Elon Musk said on Thursday that he hired a new CEO for X/Twitter, who will start to work in 6 weeks.

"Excited to announce that I've hired a new CEO for X/Twitter. She will be starting in ~6 weeks!" Musk said.

Musk also stated that he is transitioning his role at X/Twitter to an executive chair and CTO in order to oversee product, software, and system operations.

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Sullivan-Wang Meeting First Step Toward More Regular Communications - US Official

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - The meeting between US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and China's top diplomat Wang Yi is the first step toward more regular communications between the two officials to discuss bilateral ties and Washington is interested in maintaining this channel of communication with China, a senior Biden administration official said on Thursday.

"I think we want to maintain this channel. We see this is the first step of what I hope are additional conversations in the future on a more regular basis," the official said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Thursday, Sullivan and Wang concluded their two-day talks on Vienna on bilateral ties, the Ukraine conflict and cross-Strait issues.

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Sullivan Told Wang Yi US-China in Competition, Not Confrontation – Senior Official

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi that China and the US are in competition but not in conflict or confrontation, a senior US administration official said on Thursday.

"The security advisor underscored that the United States and the PRC are in competition, not in conflict or confrontation," the senior administration official told reporters.

The official noted that both agreed to maintain channels of communication to manage competition between the US and China.

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Sullivan, Wang Did Not Discuss Blinken's Visit to China During Meeting – US Official

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and China's top diplomat Wang Yi did not discuss possible dates or any other details of Secretary of State

Antony Blinken's future visit to China during their two-day meeting in Vienna, a senior US administration official said on Thursday.

"We didn't discuss dates. This meeting wasn't about scheduling. We do anticipate there'll be engagements and visits in both directions over the coming months," the official said during a press briefing.

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US OKs Possible \$8.5Bln Sale of Chinook Helicopters, Related Equipment to Germany - DSCA

(Adds details in paras 4-6)

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – The US has approved the potential sale of 60 CH-47F Chinook helicopters and their related equipment to Germany, in a \$8.5 billion deal, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency said on Thursday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Germany of CH-47F Chinook Helicopters, and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$8.5 billion," the agency said in a press release.

Germany will be acquiring 60 CH-47F Block II Cargo Helicopters with customer-unique modifications, the release said, adding that the sale would be in support of the US foreign policy and national security as it would bolster NATO's capabilities.

The \$8.5 billion sale will include 140 T-55-GA-714A engines, 72 AN/AAR-57 Common Missile Warning Systems, and 284 AN/ARC-231A Communications Security radios, according to the release.

Additionally, the US will be selling an undisclosed number of radar detection sets, electronic counter-countermeasures radios, advanced flight control systems, high frequency transponders, air navigations systems, and night-vision devices among others.

An estimated 30 contractor representatives will temporarily be deployed to Germany's Main Operating Bases (MOBs) to assist in aircraft maintenance for a period of three to five years, the release said.

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US Senator Pushes Bill to Harden Military Sites in Indo-Pacific Amid China-Taiwan Tensions

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - A new bill introduced in the Senate calls on the Pentagon to strengthen US facilities in the Indo-Pacific to deter potential Chinese attacks amid growing tensions over Taiwan, Senator Marco Rubio's office announced on Thursday.

"US Senator Marco Rubio introduced the Deterring Chinese Preemptive Strikes Act, to direct the US Department of Defense to harden US facilities in the Indo-Pacific to help further deter a preemptive strike against US forces and assets in the region by China ahead of an invasion of

Taiwan," the senator's office said in a press release.

If passed, the bill would require the Defense Department to identify aircraft shelters in the region in need of structural and defense improvements and subsequently provide a plan to Congress for conducting necessary upgrades to those shelters.

"Hope is not a strategy. We need to proactively protect our military facilities worldwide. Hardening our assets in the Indo-Pacific is a commonsense way to protect our interests and deter hostile actions aimed at the US or our allies," Rubio is quoted as saying in the release.

On Wednesday, Defense News reported that US Pacific Fleet commander Adm. Samuel Paparo will hold a closed-door briefing with the House China Committee about potential Chinese military action in Taiwan.

China has repeatedly called on the United States to put an end to its arms sales to and military ties with Taiwan. Beijing says it strives for a peaceful resolution to reunite with the breakaway province, but will not renounce the right to use force.

Taiwan has been governed independently from mainland China since 1949. Beijing views the island as its province, while Taiwan - a territory with its own elected government - maintains that it is an autonomous country, but stops short of declaring independence. Beijing opposes any official contacts of foreign states with Taipei and considers Chinese sovereignty over the island indisputable.

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US Disappointed Iranian Diplomat to Chair Human Rights Forum at UN – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – The United States finds it disappointing and "deeply troubling" that an Iranian representative has been appointed to chair the Social Forum of the UN Human Rights Council, State Department spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Thursday.

"This is obviously deeply troubling. The appointment of the Iranian Ambassador, the representative of an egregious, consistent human rights violator to chair such a group simply undermines its already limited usefulness," Patel said during a press briefing. "We are disappointed that the president of the council made this decision and it is not appropriate for Iran to serve in a leadership position on a body that is supposed to be associated with the promotion and protection of human rights."

Patel pointed out that the United States, which has not participated in the Social Forum in the past, opposed its creation in 2015, believing that it would have limited utility and add additional costs.

Earlier this week, Human Rights Council President Vaclav Balek announced his decision to appoint Ali Bahreini, ambassador of Iran to the UN office in Geneva, to chair the 2023 Social Forum scheduled to be held on November 2-3.

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US OKs \$8.5Bln Possible Sale of Chinook Helicopters, Related Equipment to Germany - DSCA

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US Will Resume SPR Purchases After Mandated Sales End in June - Energy Secretary

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - The United States will resume buying oil for its Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) after congressionally mandated sales end in June, US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said on Thursday.

"Right now, in addition to the maintenance that is happening, the life-extension program, we're also doing congressionally mandated sales, and that congressionally mandated sale of 26 million barrels will be completed by June, and it's at that point where we will flip the switch and then seek to purchase," Granholm said during a House energy panel subcommittee hearing.

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UNSC to Hold Russia-Requested Meeting on Western Arms Supply to Kiev on May 18 - Mission

UNITED NATIONS, May 11 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will convene for a Russia-requested meeting on May 18 to discuss Western arms supply to Ukraine, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday.

"On Thursday, May 18, at 22:00 Moscow time [19:00 GMT], there will be a meeting on Western arms supply to Ukraine," Polyanskiy wrote on Telegram.

The event will follow a May 15 meeting on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, which was requested by the West.

On May 11, Russia will organize an informal Arria-formula meeting on the persecution of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the diplomat said.

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Milley Says Plans to Attend Arctic Defense Conference Scheduled in Couple of Weeks

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Mark Milley said on Thursday that he is planning to attend the Arctic defense conference that is scheduled to take place in a couple of weeks.

“I am attending the Arctic conference here shortly in just a couple of weeks, which I do every six months or so, and that has all the chiefs of defense of the Arctic nations, not including Russia, by the way,” Milley told a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing.

Milley pointed out that he personally considers the Arctic a critical geographic region of geostrategic importance.

At the end of April, a three-day Arctic security forum of senior military officials from ten NATO countries and Sweden was held in Turku, Finland.

The forum was co-chaired by its founding members, the United States and Norway. Other participating countries include Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and the Netherlands.

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US Energy Secretary Says America Needs Pipeline Permitting Reform ‘Across The Board’

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said on Thursday that the United States needs permitting reform across the board in order to reliably distribute power and process critical minerals.

"We need permitting reform across the board," Granholm said during testimony to a House energy panel subcommittee.

It takes "far too long" to permit critical mineral processing facilities in the US, Granholm said.

The US needs pipeline infrastructure to dispatch power including natural gas, hydrogen and carbon capture, Granholm also said.

Granholm added that she is hopeful about the prospect of working with Congress on permitting reform.

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US Might Sanction Georgian Companies, Airports If Flights to Russia Resume – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – The United States would be concerned and even consider imposing sanctions on companies and airports in Georgia if the resumption of direct flights between Russia and Georgia entails servicing of aircraft subject to import and export controls, State Department spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Thursday.

“If direct flights between Russia and Georgia resume, we, of course, would be concerned that companies in Georgia and airports could be at risk for sanctions if they service aircraft subject to import and export controls,” Patel said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Thursday, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili welcomed Russia's decision to cancel the visa regime with the country and resume direct flights between the two nations, saying that it would simplify life for citizens and business activities.

On Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin lifted a ban on Russian airlines flying directly to Georgia. In a separate decree, the Russian president also canceled the visa regime for Georgian citizens, with the exception of those going to work in Russia, starting May 15. Georgian Deputy Economic Minister Mariam Kvrivishvili said later in the day that the country would allow airlines not under Western sanctions to conduct direct flights to Russia, but Tbilisi had not yet received any notifications from Moscow about the resumption of flights.

The visa waiver was harshly criticized by Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, who called the move a provocation.

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Transition From Title 42 Will Be ‘Swift And Immediate’ – Mayorkas

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – The transition from the pandemic-era Title 42 immigration policy, which ends at midnight, will be “swift and immediate,” US Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said on Thursday.

“The transition to Title 8 processing will be swift and immediate,” Mayorkas told reporters during a briefing at the White House.

The Title 42 policy, first utilized under the Trump administration amid the COVID-19 pandemic, allowed the US to turn away migrants to prevent the spread of disease. Use of the policy is set to expire Thursday night, leading thousands of migrants to the US’ southern border with the expectation of easier entry.

After Title 42 ends, migrants will be subject to deportation under an authority known as Title 8, which may punish illegal migrants with a five year bar on re-entry into the United States or criminal prosecution if a migrant attempts another unlawful entry into the country.

Mayorkas noted that the US authorities surged 24,000 Border Patrol agents and officers, thousands of troops, contractors, and over a thousand asylum officers and judges.

“Starting at midnight people who arrive the southern border will be subject to our immigration enforcement authorities under Title 8 of the US Code,” he said.

He also warned that these individuals will be presumed ineligible for asylum. They may face significant consequences for unlawful entry, including a minimum five-year ban on reentry and potential criminal prosecution, he added.

US President Joe Biden earlier this week said that the administration expects the situation near the border to be chaotic.

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ICC Directly Connected to Economic Suffering, Insecurity in Libya - Russian Diplomat to UN

UNITED NATIONS, May 11 (Sputnik) - The International Criminal Court (ICC) is part of the reason why Libya's internal situation is a real catastrophe, Maria Zabolotskaya, a Russian deputy envoy to the UN, said on Thursday.

"Libya has greatly suffered economically and it has been thrown back for decades. The countries of the region to date are suffering from the terrorist threat which was a direct consequence of these events. This is a genuine catastrophe and the ICC is directly connected to it," Zabolotskaya, who is the Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN on Legal Affairs, Human Rights and Counterterrorism, said.

Moscow has repeatedly accused the West of using Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's case at the ICC to invade the country in 2011. Near the end of last year, Russia suggested that the UN Security Council should question whether it is worth continuing meetings on reports by the ICC given the lack of results.

Libya has been grappling with multiple crises after the Western military intervention of 2011 overthrew its longtime adversary, Muammar Gaddafi, and created a power vacuum that split Libya into rival factions. The UN has been struggling to fill the void by helping Libyans hold a general election, although internal divisions led it to cancel the vote set for 2021.

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US House Republican Introduces Bill to Reform Pentagon, Prevent Further 'Politicization'

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – US House Republican Mike Waltz on Thursday introduced legislation to push for reforms of the Pentagon that he says will stop its politicization and boost military readiness.

"On Thursday, U.S. Congressman Mike Waltz (FL-6) introduced the Working to Address Recruiting and Retention to Improve Our Readiness (WARRIOR) Act that will provide much-needed reforms to prevent the Biden Administration from further politicizing the Department of Defense and improve military readiness," his office said in a statement.

Waltz, who chairs the House Armed Services Committee Readiness Subcommittee, argued that under the Biden administration, the Pentagon has become more politicized, which harms US military readiness.

He also expressed frustration that young Americans do not want to enlist, describing the situation as "the worst recruiting crisis" since the Vietnam War.

"The reforms proposed in this legislation will restore a merit-based culture to our ranks, audit unnecessary and political DEI [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion] programs, and require cost-benefit analysis reports for green-energy focused proposals," the lawmaker said.

The proposed legislation requires an audit of the programs by the Pentagon. It also directs the secretary of defense to submit a report to Congress with a description of the purpose of each program.

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FDA Changes Blood Donor Requirements to Increase Donor Pool - Statement

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a statement on Thursday that it has finalized new recommendations for determining eligibility of blood donors that is expected to increase the donor pool.

"Today, the US Food and Drug Administration finalized recommendations for assessing blood donor eligibility using a set of individual risk-based questions to reduce the risk of transfusion-transmitted HIV," the statement said. "These questions will be the same for every donor, regardless of sexual orientation, sex or gender. Blood establishments may now implement these recommendations by revising their donor history questionnaires and procedures."

The FDA explained that it made the changes after reviewing data from other countries that share similar rates of HIV infection and which have already put in place risk-based eligibility for blood donations, the statement said.

Under the new rules, a person who reports a new sexual partner, more than one sexual partner, or recent anal sex activity will be instructed to wait at least three months to donate blood, the statement said.

In addition, those individuals taking medications to treat or prevent HIV would also be blocked from donating blood, the statement said.

"The FDA has worked diligently to evaluate our policies and ensure we had the scientific evidence to support individual risk assessment for donor eligibility while maintaining appropriate safeguards to protect recipients of blood products. The implementation of these recommendations will represent a significant milestone for the agency and the LGBTQI+ community," the statement added.

The FDA is working closely with the blood collection industry to help ensure prompt application of the new recommendations, according to the statement.

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Mayorkas Vows 'Tougher Consequences' for Illegal US Entry After Title 42 Ends

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - Individuals who attempt to enter the United States without utilizing the appropriate lawful avenues will face tougher consequences after the COVID-era Title 42 policy is lifted, Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said on Thursday. "To those who do not use our available lawful pathways, we will deliver tougher consequences, using our immigration law authorities," Mayorkas said during a press briefing at the White House.

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US Finances, Controls International Criminal Court - Russian Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, May 11 (Sputnik) - The United States and its satellites in the collective West are financing the processes the International Criminal Court (ICC) is interested in pursuing and are effectively promoting their political goals through the ICC, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Maria Zabolotskaya said.

"The collective West without any shame is openly paying for the processes the ICC is interested in," Zabolotskaya said on Thursday. "The ICC therefore has just become an international screen behind which the United States and its satellites are dealing with their own political tasks."

At the same time, the US laws enable Washington not to submit to the ICC and negate processes against any US national, Zabolotskaya added.

Russia has for a long-time been dissatisfied with the work of the ICC and has suggested that the UN Security Council question whether it is worth continuing meetings on reports submitted by the court given the lack of results from such meetings.

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US Charges HSBC, Scotia Capital With Widespread Recordkeeping Failures

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – The US government charged HSBC Securities and Scotia Capital with widespread recordkeeping failures, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) announced on Thursday.

"The Securities and Exchange Commission today charged HSBC Securities (USA) Inc. and Scotia Capital (USA) Inc. for widespread and longstanding failures by both firms and their employees to maintain and preserve electronic communications," the SEC said in a statement.

Both companies admitted their fault and agreed to pay penalties of \$15 million and \$7.5 million, respectively.

"The SEC's investigation of HSBC Securities and Scotia Capital, both registered broker dealers, uncovered pervasive and longstanding use of off-channel communications at both firms. As described in the SEC's orders, the firms admitted that their employees often

communicated 'off-channel' about securities business matters on their personal devices, using messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp," according to the statement.

US authorities found that the two companies did not keep or preserve "the substantial majority" of the communications. By doing so, they violated the federal securities laws, the SEC said.

The companies agreed to cooperate with the investigation, which discovered that failings involved employees at multiple levels of authority, including supervisors and senior executives, the statement said.

"Both HSBC and Scotia Capital self-reported and self-remediated their recordkeeping violations, and the reduced penalties in these cases reflect their efforts and cooperation," Director of the SEC's Division of Enforcement Gurbir Grewal said.

Separately, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission announced settlements with the firms for related conduct, according to the statement.

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UN Has No Comment on UK Plan to Provide Ukraine Long-Range Missiles, Wants Conflict to End

UNITED NATIONS, May 11 (Sputnik) - The United Nations will not comment on the United Kingdom's stated plan to provide Ukraine with long-range Storm Shadow missiles, but wants the conflict to end in accordance with international law, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

"We are not commenting on individual weapon transfers as they occur. We want to see an end to this conflict in line with international law and relevant resolutions," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

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US State of Florida Sues Biden Admin. to Delay End of Title 42 Immigration Policy - Filing

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - The US state of Florida is suing the Biden administration in an attempt to delay the end of the Title 42 immigration policy, which has prompted thousands of migrants to amass near the United States-Mexico border in anticipation of laxer enforcement, according to a court document filed Thursday.

The emergency motion, filed by the State of Florida in the US District Court for the Northern District of Florida, seeks a temporary restraining order to "preserve the status quo" until parties can brief motions for a preliminary injunction or to postpone the effective date of the new policy. The lawsuit lists US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas as the defendant.

"The Biden Administration's behavior, if left unchecked, makes a mockery of our system of justice and our Constitution. Florida asks the Court to respond by 4 p.m. Eastern daylight time

and to rule on this motion by 11:59 p.m. Eastern daylight time, when the Title 42 order expires," the filing said.

The filing argues that under the new migrant parole policy announced by the Department of Homeland Security, "tens of thousands" of illegal immigrants will be released into the US and make their way to Florida, where the state will expend increased costs on education, incarceration and healthcare.

The Title 42 policy, first utilized under the Trump administration amid the COVID-19 pandemic, allowed the US to turn away migrants to prevent the spread of disease. Use of the policy is set to expire Thursday night, leading thousands of migrants to the US' southern border with the expectation of easier entry.

US President Joe Biden said earlier this week that the administration expects the situation near the border to be chaotic. The state of Texas and the Pentagon have both sent service members to the border to conduct support operations.

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US Coast Guard Seriously Understaffed, Failing to Meet Recruiting Goals - Report

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - The US Coast Guard is seriously understaffed and has failed to meet its recruiting goals for the past four years, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report on Thursday.

"The Coast Guard - a multi-mission military service employing more than 55,000 personnel - has reported that it is about 4,800 members short and has missed its recruiting targets for the past four fiscal years," the report said.

In March, the service reported completing workforce requirements determinations for 15 percent of its units, the report said.

"The Coast Guard has also faced recruitment and retention issues within its cyberspace workforce, specialized forces, and marine inspectors. Competition with higher paying jobs in the private sector, limited opportunities for promotion, and long work hours have made it challenging to recruit and retain these personnel," the report added.

The GAO made 29 recommendations to address the problem but as of April 2023, the Coast Guard had implemented only five of them, according to the report.

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US Inflation Pressure Subsiding Further as Producer Prices Cool in April - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 18 (Sputnik) - US inflation pressure is subsiding, with producer price data released on Thursday showing the smallest growth in more than two years, which makes a stronger case for the Federal Reserve to pause its interest rate hikes in its efforts to fight

inflation.

The Labor Department reported that producer prices - or what wholesalers of merchandise charge retailers - saw a smaller-than-expected growth in April.

The so-called Producer Price Index (PPI) posted a year-on-year growth of 2.3% in April, versus a 2.7% gain in March.

This was the lowest annual growth in the PPI since January 2021, the Labor Department said. The PPI data comes on the heels of Wednesday's reading for the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which showed a smaller-than-expected growth as well for April, though the progress there was far more modest.

The CPI rose 4.9% in the 12 months to April, also expanding at its smallest pace in two years, the Labor Department said. But the change in itself was small when compared to the annual CPI growth of 5% for March.

On the overall, economists said the two sets of data indicated progress in the Fed's battle against inflation, intensifying the debate on whether the central bank should pause its rate hikes from June.

The central bank has raised rates by ten times since the end of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2022, adding a total of 5% to the previous 0.25%.

After its last rate hike, the Fed said it will "closely monitor" data in the coming months and assess their effectiveness in helping the United States return to its inflation target of 2%.

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UN Will Continue Contacts to Extend Grain Exports Agreement - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, May 11 (Sputnik) - The United Nations will continue its efforts to negotiate extending the grain exports agreement, formally known as the Black Sea Grain Initiative, and will try harder to tackle all challenges, including Russia's dissatisfaction with its part of the deal not being implemented, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

"What I can tell you is that contacts will continue over the next few days," Dujarric said. "There are challenges... We are trying to address all of them and trying to do whatever we can to make sure that this very important initiative continue and as well as we see progress on our efforts on facilitation of Russian grain and fertilizer."

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US Sees Importance of Ammonia Pipeline, Hopes Grain Deal Extended - Sanctions Coordinator

UNITED NATIONS, May 11 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that the ammonia pipeline is crucial globally and hopes Russia and Ukraine can find agreement on the resumption of fertilizer

exports, the Head of the Office of Sanctions Coordination at the US Department of State Jim O'Brien said on Thursday.

Earlier today, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin said that the Black Sea Grain Initiative will cease to exist if there is no agreement on its extension by May 18.

"On the ammonia pipeline - we appreciate that it is important for the world, the greater supply of fertilizer. So we support whatever the parties can agree on this," O'Brien said at a virtual presser.

The grain deal between Russia and Ukraine was brokered by the United Nations and Turkey in July 2022 to facilitate exports of agricultural products from Black Sea ports during the conflict.

The package agreement also includes a memorandum of understanding between Russia and the UN to unblock Russian grain and fertilizer exports via the Black Sea, which, according to Moscow, has not been implemented due to Western sanctions. The deal has since been extended twice, most recently in March, and is due to expire on May 18.

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Trudeau Approves Alberta's Request for Military Assistance in Fighting Ongoing Wildfires

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday that he had approved Alberta's request for military assistance in fighting the ongoing wildfires in the province.

"Update for Albertans: We've approved the province's request for federal assistance.

@CanadianForces are going to provide firefighting support and airlift resources, assist with the evacuation of isolated communities, and help keep people safe. We'll continue to be here for you," Trudeau said via Twitter.

On Monday, Albertan Prime Minister Danielle Smith held a conversation with Trudeau in which she requested assistance from the federal government to fight wildfires in the province.

As of May 10, 17,386 Albertans have been evacuated from wildfires area or are at risk of being affected, the government of Alberta said in a daily update, of whom 13,829 have registered at their designated evacuation centers.

According to information available on the Alberta Wildfire Status Dashboard, there are currently 82 active fires throughout the province, 39 pose no further risk, 20 are under control, while 23 are expected to keep growing.

So far this year, 426 wildfires have been reported in Alberta, 4% were caused by lightning, 47% are of human nature, and 49% are still under investigation.

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US to Get First Arleigh Burke-Class Destroyer With Anti-Air Warfare Capability Soon - Navy

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - The US Navy in the coming months will obtain its first Flight III variant of an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer capable of both anti-air warfare and ballistic missile missions and equipped with the newest surface radar, Rear Adm. Thomas Anderson said in a congressional hearing on Thursday.

"Within the next few months, we will deliver among other things the Navy's first Flight III destroyer. DDG 125, the 75th ship of the Arleigh Burke-class with its upgraded combat system will provide the ability for one ship to perform both anti-air warfare and ballistic missile defense missions with improved performance via the world's newest and most capable surface radar," Anderson told a US House Oversight Committee hearing.

The integrated air and missile defense capability meets the growing ballistic missile threat by improving radar sensitivity and enabling longer-range detection of increasingly complex threats, Anderson said.

As of February, the US Navy has received 72 Arleigh Burke Class destroyers while Congress has provided funding for three more ships in the financial year of 2023, Anderson added.

According to media reports, the new destroyer was named USS Jack H. Lukas on September 17, 2016, by then-Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus and laid down on November 8, 2019, in Ingalls, Mississippi.

The ship will be reportedly stationed at Port Tampa Bay in Florida and is expected to arrive for the commissioning ceremony in Fall 2023.

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IMF Says Grain Deal Important Way to Provide Food to Global Economy

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) considers the Black Sea grain initiative an important measure to provide food and support for the global economy, IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday.

"The Black Sea grain initiative... [has] obviously been an important way of providing food to the global economy," Kozack told reporters.

She pointed out that many countries in the world are facing food insecurity. The IMF sees it is very important to implement all measures that can be taken to help the most vulnerable members of the global community, Kozack added.

The United Nations, Turkey, Russia, and Ukraine held a high-level meeting on the grain exports agreement in Istanbul from May 10-11.

Earlier on Thursday, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin said the Black Sea Grain Initiative will cease to exist if an agreement on extending it is not reached when it expires on May 18.

The agreement was brokered by the United Nations in July 2022 to ensure a safe corridor for grain and fertilizer exports from Black Sea ports. The agreement also includes a memorandum of understanding between Russia and the United Nations to unblock Russian grain and fertilizer exports via the Black Sea, which, according to Moscow, has not been implemented due to

Western sanctions. The agreement has since been extended twice, most recently in March.

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OSCE to Monitor if Russia Engages in 'Malign Influence' in Montenegro - US Envoy

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - The Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) will monitor very carefully the situation in Montenegro regarding possible “malign influence” exerted by Russia, US Ambassador to the OSCE Michael Carpenter said on Thursday.

“We will be paying attention to see whether Russia or other actors engage in malign influence in Montenegro,” Carpenter said.

The ambassador accused Russia of having a “pattern of engaging in malign influence” in Montenegro, particularly during the elections in 2016.

Carpenter also noted that the so-called Western Balkans are permanently facing disinformation from the outside, especially from Russia.

“So, we will be watching very carefully,” Carpenter said.

A snap parliamentary elections in Montenegro are scheduled for June 11.

Russia has repeatedly rejected the allegations it is attempting to influence Montenegro's internal affairs.

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US Weekly Jobless Claims at 1-½ Year Highs, Raising Chance for Fed Rate Pause

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - The number of Americans on jobless benefits has hit 1-½ year highs, according to weekly data from the Labor Department on Thursday that raised the chance for the Federal Reserve to withhold interest rate hikes from June as the central bank advances in its fight against inflation.

Initial claims for unemployment insurance rose by 22,000 during the week to May 6 to reach 264,000, the highest since October 2021, Labor Department data showed. Economists polled by US media had forecast total claims for the period at just around 245,000.

The weaker labor picture coincided with separate data from the department that showed producer prices — or what wholesalers of merchandise charge retailers — posting a smaller-than-expected growth in April.

The so-called Producer Price Index, or PPI, posted a year-on-year growth of 2.3% in April, versus 2.7% gain in March. This was the lowest annual growth in the PPI since January 2021.

“The data move [in jobless claims] to the upside is starting to support weaker employment,” economist Greg Michalowski said in a posting on the ForexLive forum. He said the unemployment data along with weaker PPI “support a Fed that is likely to keep rates

unchanged."

The Fed has identified robust job and wages growth as two of the key drivers of inflation.

The Fed has a mandate of ensuring "maximum employment" through a jobless rate of 4% or below, and keeping inflation "manageable." The last was a task easily achieved before the COVID-19 breakout, when prices expanded less than 2% a year. The pandemic and the trillions of dollars of relief spending by the government, however, triggered runaway inflation since mid-2021.

The labor market has been the juggernaut of US economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, with hundreds of thousands of jobs being added without fail since June 2020 to make up for the initial loss of 20 million jobs to the pandemic. Average monthly wages have also grown without a stop since May 2021.

The central bank has raised rates by 10 times since the end of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2022, adding a total of 5% to the previous 0.25%.

After its last rate hike, the Fed said it will "closely monitor" data in the coming months and assess their effectiveness in helping the United States return to its inflation target of 2%.

That has given hope to the central bank's watchers that the Fed could call for a pause at its next decision on rates on June 14.

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Canadian Government to Introduce Legislation on Foreign Agents Registry in June - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - Canada has decided to go forth with the creation of a foreign agents' registry and will try to introduce a related bill by the end of the Parliamentary session in June, Radio-Canada reported on Thursday.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has tasked the Ministry of Federal Justice to present a Bill to the House of Commons on the creation of a foreign agents' registry, either by the end of June or sometime during Fall's Parliamentary session, the report said citing obtained information.

The decision was reportedly made after a majority of those who participated in the government's public consultations on the issue which ended on May 9, voted in favor of establishing said registry.

Citing a source in the government, the report said there was an urgent need for establishing a foreign agents registry to ensure the protection of both Canadians and the country's democracy.

The registry would require that individuals acting in the name of a foreign state, to advance their interests and objectives, unveil their ties to the government they're related to, the report added.

Failing to report ties with a foreign government and all violations to the legislation would suppose legal consequences, ranging from a fine to incarceration, the report continued.

Although talks on the creation of a foreign agents' registry have been ongoing for a long time, the issue received particular attention ever since Canadian media reported in 2022, that Chinese diplomatic staff had allegedly tried to influence the outcomes of the 2019 and 2021

federal elections.

Various diplomatic rows have ensued with Beijing, the latest one leading to the expulsion of a Toronto-based Chinese consular official over his alleged role in intimidating conservative lawmaker Michael Chong and his relatives over his sponsorship of a motion accusing Beijing of genocide against Uighurs.

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US Does Not Sanction Russian Grain-Deal Products, Speaks to Banks Regularly - US Official

UNITED NATIONS, May 11 (Sputnik) - The United States is in contact with financial institutions and does not sanction Russian products or transactions in food or fertilizers, the Head of the Office of Sanctions Coordination at the US Department of State Jim O'Brien said on Thursday.

"We speak with US and foreign banks regularly, to make clear what our position is. We do not sanction Russian food and fertilizer or transactions in food and fertilizer," O'Brien said.

We have made it clear by publishing general licenses, he added.

Earlier today, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin said that the Black Sea Grain Initiative will cease to exist if there is no agreement on its extension by May 18.

The grain deal was brokered by the United Nations and Turkey between Russia and Ukraine in July 2022 to facilitate exports of agricultural products from Black Sea ports during the conflict. The package agreement also includes a memorandum of understanding between Russia and the UN to unblock Russian grain and fertilizer exports via the Black Sea, which, according to Moscow, has not been implemented due to Western sanctions. The deal has since been extended twice, most recently in March, and is due to expire on May 18.

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UPDATE - US Lawmakers Hear From Navy Officials on Shipbuilding Efforts Amid Competition With China

(Adds additional details in para 6, corrects figure in paras 5)

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - US House lawmakers heard from Navy officials on Thursday about the United States' shipbuilding efforts amid increasing strategic competition with China in the maritime domain.

The House oversight panel's Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs heard from US Navy Program Executive Officer (PEO) for Ships RADM Thomas Anderson and PEO for Unmanned and Small Combatants RADM Casey Moton.

"The security of our country and preservation of our national interests remains reliant on a superior naval force, strategically postured to adapt to constantly evolving geopolitical challenges and threats," the Navy officials said in a joint statement. "To maintain the maritime

dominance of the Joint Force, the Department of the Navy continues to invest in the modernization of our existing capabilities and acquisition of future capabilities, including those of our allies and partners.”

Lawmakers questioned Anderson and Moton about the United States' shipbuilding capability relative to China, with Beijing's fleet set to outgrow Washington's in the coming years, according to Congressman Glenn Grothman.

China is expected to field approximately 400 ships by 2025, Grothman said. The US fleet currently consists of 296 battle force ships, with 56 others under construction and 76 more under contract, the Navy officials said in their testimony.

The National Defense Authorization Act for 2018 required a 355-ship fleet, Grothman noted. Reaching that goal is expected to cost at least another \$120-\$130 billion, with the Biden administration eyeing a more ambitious 500-ship fleet, Grothman said.

Both the quality and quantity of ships built are important, the officials said.

The United States is investing in technologies including hypersonic strike capabilities and unmanned vessels, the officials said.

The US Navy and Marine Corps must provide “unmatched operational capability” to best support efforts to counter China, the officials said. A persistent, forward US presence is essential for the success of its deterrence efforts, the officials said.

However, the US faces a challenge of low availability of blue-collar labor, Anderson said during questioning by lawmakers. China's commercial shipbuilding sector also gives it an advantage, whereas the United States' outsourcing to foreign countries is more limited, Anderson said.

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US Banks With Over \$50Bln in Assets to Help Pay for Recent Bank Failures - FDIC

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - US banks with more than \$50 billion in assets will help the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) cover its \$16 billion bill for addressing recent US bank failures, a statement from the regulator said Thursday.

A new "special assessment" fee of 0.125% would be applied to the uninsured deposits of banks in excess of \$5 billion, based on the amount of uninsured deposits any particular bank held at the end of 2022, the FDIC said.

"Banking organizations with total assets over \$50 billion would pay more than 95 percent of the special assessment. No banking organizations with total assets under \$5 billion would be subject to the special assessment," the statement added.

According to the structure of the proposed fee, affected banks would pay over eight quarters beginning in June 2024. But the schedule could also be adjusted as the estimated losses to the insurance fund change, the FDIC said.

The extended timeline will minimize the impact on bank liquidity and is expected to have a negligible impact on capital, US media reports said.

A spate of US banks have landed in trouble over the past two months after their customers abruptly withdrew their deposits, requiring either government intervention to prop them up or an

outright sale to a stronger banking entity.

Last week, San Francisco-based First Republic was acquired by JPMorgan Chase, the largest US banking group. Prior to that, Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank were rescued by the FDIC in March.

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Russia's Defeat Means US is Safer, Ukraine and 'Rules Based Order' Are Preserved - Milley

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – Russia's defeat in its Special Military Operation means the U.S. is safer because Ukraine's sovereignty and the "rules-based order" are preserved, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Mark Milley said on Thursday.

"I think it does, because I think that 'lost' being defined as Ukraine remains a free, independent, sovereign country, with its territory intact, if that is the end result of this war, then I think [Vladimir] Putin will have failed in his attempts to take Ukraine and undermine the rules-based order," Milley told a Senate appropriations committee hearing.

Milley added that winning against Russia is an "existential" issue for Ukraine as it will determine its continuity as a state, noting that for Europe and the U.S. it will ensure global stability under the so-called rules-based international order.

The outcome of the conflict in eastern Ukraine is critical to issues outside of Ukraine, Milley said, noting that it might affect the decision making in Beijing over whether it will decide to take Taiwan forcefully.

"I think that the Chinese are watching the war between Russia and Ukraine very carefully," Milley added.

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Global Economy Can Face Severe Repercussions Of US Default - IMF

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned on Thursday that a potential default in the United States could lead to “severe repercussions” for the global economy.

“We are concerned about severe repercussions for both the US economy, but also the global economy,” IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack told reporters.

One of the repercussions the IMF sees is higher interest rates, she added. She also mentioned “some broader instability” in the global economy.

As Kozack noted, the transition from lower interest rates to higher levels in the United States affects many countries, particularly economies in debt distress.

“We would want to avoid those severe repercussions,” she said.

On Tuesday, US President Joe Biden met with congressional leaders, including House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, to negotiate lifting the US debt ceiling. Last month, House Republicans passed legislation to raise the debt ceiling in exchange for cuts to government spending. However, Biden and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer have rejected the measure.

Biden is set to meet again with congressional leaders on Friday to follow up on debt ceiling negotiations.

The US could default on its financial obligations as early as June if the debt ceiling is not raised, the Treasury Department said earlier this month.

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with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

IMF to Undertake First Review Mission in Ukraine Later in May - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) will conduct the first review mission in Ukraine later this month, IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday. "We do expect the first review mission to take place later in May," Kozack said.

The mission will focus on assessing the progress that the Ukrainian government has made in meeting the policy commitments and conditionality under the IMF program, particularly with respect to fiscal policy, governance and monetary exchange rate policy, Kozack said.

"Of course, the review will also take into account the recent economic and financial developments," Kozack said.

The IMF also will assess potential risks to the Ukrainian economy under the so-called baseline and downside scenarios, Kozack added.

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IMF Urges US to Urgently Address Risk of Default - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) calls on Democrats and Republicans to reach a consensus and urgently address the issue of raising the debt ceiling that poses a risk to the United States to possibly default on its financial obligations, IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack said on Thursday.

"We strongly encourage the parties in the US to come together to reach a consensus to urgently address this matter," Kozack said.

The discussions on this issue in the United States are taking place at a difficult time for the global economy and they have very serious repercussions not only for the country but for the entire world, Kozack added.

On Tuesday, President Joe Biden met with congressional leaders, including US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, to negotiate raising the debt ceiling. Last month, House Republicans passed legislation to raise the debt ceiling in exchange for cuts to government spending. However, Biden and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer rejected the measure.

Biden is set to meet again with congressional leaders on Friday to follow up on the earlier debt ceiling negotiations.

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Austin Says Sent Letter to China's New Defense Chief, Offered to Talk

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said on Thursday that he has reached out to new Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu, sent him a letter and offered to talk.

"There's a new minister of defense in the seat now. I've reached out to him and sent him a letter and offered to talk as well. I'll continue to do that. I think that's critical," Austin told a Senate appropriations committee hearing.

Austin said that he might be able to engage with his counterpart at an upcoming conference in Singapore.

"I think that we need to open that door and continue to engage each other," Austin added.

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UN to Work With All Sides on Achieving Full Implementation of Grain Deal - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, May 11 (Sputnik) - UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths has emphasized that the United Nations will continue working with all parties to achieve full implementation of the grain exports deal, formally known as the Black Sea Grain Initiative, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

"Mr. Griffiths stressed that the United Nations will continue to work closely with all sides to achieve the continuation and full implementation of the Initiative, in pursuit of their broader shared commitment to addressing global food insecurity," the statement said.

Earlier on Thursday, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin said the Black Sea Grain Initiative will cease to exist if an agreement on extending it is not reached by May 18.

The United Nations, Turkey, Russia and Ukraine held a high-level meeting on the grain exports agreement in Istanbul from May 10-11.

The agreement was brokered by the United Nations in July 2022 to ensue a safe corridor for grain and fertilizer exports from Black Sea ports. The agreement also includes a memorandum of understanding between Russia and the United Nations to unblock Russian grain and fertilizer exports via the Black Sea, which, according to Moscow, has not been implemented due to Western sanctions. The agreement has since been extended twice, most recently in March, and is due to expire on May 18.

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Austin on ICC: US Backs Russia Probe, But Has Concerns About Prosecution of Own Troops

(Fixes lede, adds background in para 2)

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said on Thursday

that he supports efforts by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to hold Russia accountable for its alleged war crimes in Ukraine, but remains concerned about reciprocity that can lead to the international body prosecuting American troops.

In late October, the ICC reopened an investigation into war crimes in Afghanistan, including into potential wrongdoings by US troops. The United States does not believe that the conduct of American forces in Afghanistan warrants an ICC investigation, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said back then.

"We support efforts to hold Russia accountable, but again I remain concerned about the protection of US military personnel," Austin told a Senate Committee in a testimony. "I do have concerns about reciprocity going forward, and we will continue to look for ways to support the effort of holding Russia accountable."

In March, the ICC issued a warrant for the arrest of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova, citing "unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation."

Russia denies any forceful transfer of children. The Kremlin has called the ICC a "puppet in the hands of the collective West," saying that the arrest warrant is meant to put further pressure on Moscow.

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Talks in Istanbul Focused on Togliatti-Odessa Ammonia Pipeline, Grain Deal Extension - UN

UNITED NATIONS, May 11 (Sputnik) - The United Nations' proposals regarding the resumption of the Togliatti-Odessa ammonia pipeline and an extension of the Black Sea grain deal were among the topics discussed during quadrilateral talks in Istanbul, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

"The meeting discussed the recent proposals by the United Nations, namely the resumption of the Togliatti-Odessa ammonia pipeline, the longer extension of the deal, improvements at the Joint Coordination Centre for stable operations and exports, as well as other issues raised by the parties," the statement said.

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Austin on ICC: US Backs Russia Probe, But Has Concerns About Prosecution of Own Troops

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said on Thursday that he supports efforts by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to hold Russia accountable for its alleged war crimes in Ukraine, but remains concerned about reciprocity that can lead to the international body prosecuting American troops in the future, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said on Thursday.

"We support efforts to hold Russia accountable, but again I remain concerned about the protection of US military personnel," Austin told a Senate Committee in a testimony. "I do have concerns about reciprocity going forward, and we will continue to look for ways to support the effort of holding Russia accountable."

In March, the ICC issued a warrant for the arrest of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova, citing "unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation."

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US Seizes 13 Internet Domains Allegedly Used by Lebanon's Hezbollah - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - The US authorities have seized 13 internet domains allegedly owned by Lebanon's Hezbollah, the Justice Department said on Thursday.

"The US Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia announced today the seizure of 13 domains used by Specially Designated Nationals (SDNs), Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs), and their members associated with Lebanese Hezbollah," the Justice Department said in a press release.

The Justice Department pointed out that five of the domains were registered in the Public Interest Registry - moqawama.org, almanarnews.org, manarnews.org, almanar-tv.org and alshahid.org.

Eight other domains were registered to Verisign, Inc. - manartv.net, manarnews.net, almanar-tv.com, almanar-tv.net, alidaamouch.com, Ibrahim-alsayed.net, alemdad.net, and naimkassem.net, it said.

All of the websites identified show a notice saying that they have been seized by the United States government for sanctions violations.

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US Moves First Abrams Tanks to European Theater for Ukrainians to Train - Austin

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – The United States has already delivered the first Abrams tanks to the European theater for Ukrainians to train and is doing everything possible to get tanks to Ukraine by early fall, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said on Thursday.

"We are doing everything possible to accelerate the delivery of these [Abrams] tanks and early fall is a projection," Austin told a Senate committee. "In the meantime, we have moved a number of tanks over into theater so that the Ukrainians can begin training on this capability,

and ... by the time they complete that training, the tanks will be available for them to use."

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Sullivan, China's Wang Discuss Ukraine, Cross-Strait Issues at Vienna Talks - White House

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and China's top diplomat Wang Yi have held two-day talks in Vienna to discuss bilateral ties, the Ukraine conflict and cross-Strait issues, the White House said on Thursday.

"National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met from May 10-11 with Chinese Communist Party Politburo Member and Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission Wang Yi in Vienna," the White House said in a statement.

The two had "candid, substantive, and constructive discussions on key issues in the U.S.-China bilateral relationship, global and regional security issues, Russia's war against Ukraine, and cross-Strait issues, among other topics," the statement added.