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6/27/22 Monday

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Iran Asks to Join BRICS

The Islamic Republic of Iran has applied to join BRICS, a loose group of five industrializing non-European nations, after being invited to its summit in China last week.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh revealed the move at a Monday press conference, explaining that Iran joining BRICS would result in "added values" for all parties, according to Tasnim News Agency.

"Iran's unique geographical position and its capacities in the fields of energy, transit, and trade have caused the BRICS members to pay special attention to Iran, as a golden route to connect the East to the West," Iran's state owned Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) argued on Sunday.

"If Iran and other powerful countries join the grouping, it can be even stronger and challenge Western policies," IRNA added.

The community, formed by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) in 2009, have worked to coordinate multilateral economic relationships that are rarely focused in Europe, the traditional center of world capitalism. Together, they account for 26.7% of the world's land surface area, 41.5% of the world's population, and 23.2% of the total productive potential of humanity.

The 14th BRICS summit was remotely hosted by China on June 24 and saw Beijing invite the leaders of 13 other developing nations to attend, including Iran and Algeria, Argentina, Egypt, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Senegal, Uzbekistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Malaysia and Thailand.

Speaking at the start of the summit, Chinese President Xi Jinping urged the world to "reject hegemony, bullying and division," denouncing the recent invitations extended to South Korea and Japan to attend the NATO summit in Madrid later this week.

"Some countries attempt to expand military alliances to seek absolute security, stoke bloc-based confrontation by coercing other countries into picking sides, and pursue unilateral dominance at the expense of others' rights and interests," Xi said, referring to the United States and NATO. "If such dangerous trends are allowed to continue, the world will witness even more turbulence and insecurity."

At the summit, the five BRICS nations vowed to widen its Shanghai-based New Development Bank (NDB), following the successful admission of Bangladesh, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Uruguay. The bank can serve as an alternative to Western-based development banks, which are often accused of facilitating wealth extraction from the Third World to the world's richest nations.

Last year, Iran's application was accepted to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), an Asian trade and political bloc that includes three of the five BRICS members and has more explicit goals than BRICS for regional economic integration.

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Iran's move also comes as negotiations have stalled with the European Union to restart the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a 2015 deal that lowered US economic sanctions against Iran in exchange for Tehran accepting strict limitations on the quality and quantity of uranium it could refine. The US unilaterally pulled out of the deal in 2018, accusing Iran of secretly pursuing a nuclear weapon, but talks to restart the deal began last year after US President Joe Biden took office.

"A final deal is within reach if other parties have the will to do so," Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian tweeted on Saturday, following a meeting with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell. "Iran is resolute on reaching a good, strong & durable deal."

Talks are reportedly set to begin again later this week, following a several-month hiatus. However, they will reportedly be held in Qatar, an Arab country with good relations with both Washington and Tehran. Politico reported on Monday that Rob Malley, the US special representative for Iran, was slated to arrive in Doha later that day.

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'Zero Covid' Policy Could Last Five Years, Beijing's Top Communist Official Reportedly Says

Weeks after Chinese President Xi Jinping insisted that "persistence is victory," the top Communist official in Beijing's municipal government reportedly said that the Chinese capital city will maintain its "Zero Covid" policy for another five years.

According to media reports, the newspaper Beijing Daily published a story on Monday afternoon quoting Cai Qi, the Communist Party of China's secretary in Beijing and a former mayor of the city.

"In the next five years, Beijing will unremittingly grasp the normalization of epidemic prevention and control," the story originally quoted Cai as saying, according to the UK Guardian.

Now, the article only says the city will "make unremitting efforts to normalize epidemic prevention and control" to "control quickly and resolutely block the transmission channels of the epidemic."

It goes on to note the various efforts that must be improved, including a "normalized nucleic acid testing and key screening" process, regularizing cleaning and inspection of public spaces, and controlling entry and exit of the vast city of 21.5 million, which is deeply connected with the surrounding Hebei Province and nearby coastal metropolis of Tianjin.

China adopted the "Zero Covid" policy in 2021, when the arrival of the Delta variant of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, brought an increasingly stubborn new outbreak. However, the principles underlying it - that mass lockdowns, with logistical networks funneling food, supplies and medicine to residents under quarantine while medical workers test the entire population for infection - were forged in early 2020, when China fought off the world's first outbreak of the virus.

Throughout 2021, the policy was extremely successful, limiting mainland China to just two COVID-19 deaths that year. By comparison, at least 415,000 Americans died of the virus in 2021.

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However, it wasn't until early 2022 that the Omicron variant, even more infectious than Delta and with a penchant for causing asymptomatic cases, really put China's "Zero Covid" policy to the test. Between the beginning of April and the beginning of June, the Chinese government spent some $26 billion on COVID-19 tests as huge cities like Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Xi'an were placed in lockdown for weeks at a time and their tens of millions of residents tested several times in an attempt to track down, isolate and treat all cases of the disease.

Despite its success at preventing mass death among its 1.4 billion people, the Chinese government has been extensively criticized by the West, which has variously accused them of lying about the extent of the outbreak, terrorizing its population with the lockdowns, and claiming that the policy in unsustainable. When World Health Organization (WHO) Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus suggested in May that China would be better off if it abandoned "Zero Covid," Beijing fired back.

"The purpose [of Zero Covid] is solely to protect people's life and health to the greatest extent possible and underpin sustained, sound and steady economic and social development," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said at the time. "In China, we have the foundation, the conditions and the capability to achieve dynamic zero-COVID. We have every confidence in winning this hard battle and making greater contributions to the united global response."

A study published in May by researchers at Shanghai's Fudan University and at Indiana University in the United States warned that if China's "Zero Covid" policy were removed and the respiratory virus allowed to spread unimpeded across Chinese society - as has happened in most other countries - it would "generate a tsunami of Covid-19 cases" that would kill at least 1.5 million people.

Just over 5,200 people in China have died of COVID-19 since it appeared in late 2019, while about 6.3 million have died globally, including 1 million in the United States.

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Ethiopia Denies Sudanese Claims it Executed Seven Soldiers as Khartoum Withdraws Envoy

Addis Ababa has denounced Sudan's version of the events that transpired on the border a day prior as a "misrepresentation," claiming the seven Sudanese soldiers who were killed had crossed the border into Ethiopia.

"The incident took place within Ethiopian territory after incursions by a Sudanese regular army unit supported by elements of the terrorist TPLF," the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry said in a Monday press release, referring to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) armed group that controls the northern Tigray province.

"The Ethiopian Government regrets the loss of life as a result of a skirmish between the Sudanese army and a local militia of which an investigation would be carried out soon," the ministry said, adding that it "categorically rejects the misrepresentation of these facts by the Sudanese defense forces that unjustly put the blame on Ethiopia while it was the Sudanese army unit that has crossed into the Ethiopian border provoking the incident."

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"The Government of Ethiopia believes that the incident was deliberately concocted to undermine the deep-rooted relations between the peoples of Ethiopia and the Sudan. On top of that, the incident was designed to destruct Ethiopia from its path of peace and development," the ministry added.

A day prior, Sudan's ruling armed forces, which seized power from the civilian leadership of the provisional government last October, accused the Ethiopian Army of an "execution of seven Sudanese soldiers and a citizen who were prisoners of war."

"[T]his treacherous situation will not pass without a response," the Sudanese Army said, vowing it would "respond to this cowardly behavior."

On Monday, Sudan's acting foreign minister, Ali Al-Sadiq Ali, summoned the Ethiopian ambassador demanding answers and recalled Sudan's ambassador in Addis Ababa.

The clash reportedly occurred in the vicinity of Al-Fashaga, an area of rich farmland in Sudan that abuts the border with Ethiopia and Eritrea. Addis and Khartoum have long feuded over control of the area, but reached a compromise in 2008 that allowed Ethiopian farmers to work the land under Sudanese administration. However, after the TPLF rebelled against the Ethiopian government in November 2020, Sudanese forces re-occupied the area, reigniting the dispute.

It also comes amid an ongoing refugee problem in Sudan, where the UN Refugee Agency has recorded more than 73,000 Ethiopians who have fled the fighting in Tigray, and a heated dispute between Ethiopia and downstream nations like Sudan and Egypt over the filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile.

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Cool Customer: Congresswoman 'Proud' of Daughter for Reaction to Pelosi Pushing Her for Photo Op

A US congresswoman is speaking out after a video emerged of her daughter being seemingly pushed by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) during a recent event.

When Rep. Mayra Flores (R-TX) was being sworn in on June 21, her family posed with Pelosi for photos, during which time the highest-ranking congresswoman seemed to push Flores' daughter to the side to give herself more room.

The girl, who was leaning a little close to Pelosi, managed to get close enough for the senior lawmaker to bump her while gesturing for someone else to come over. Seemingly realizing her proximity to the child, Pelosi can be seen in the video using the same elbow she gestured with to push the girl several inches to the side.

"I am so proud of my strong, beautiful daughter for not allowing this to faze her. She continued to smile and pose for the picture like a Queen," Flores tweeted on Sunday, quote-tweeting a video shared by Hollywood actor James Woods of the incident.

"No child should be pushed to the side for a photo op. PERIOD!!" she added.

Woods' original tweet read: "I love this princess stood her ground, while Nancy showed her true colors."

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Flores, a Mexican-American woman who was born in Mexico's Tamaulipas state, won a special election in March to replace Rep. Filemon Vela, a Democrat who recently resigned. Flores' victory flipped the district to the Republicans, narrowing Pelosi's already razor-thin Democratic majority in the US House of Representatives. However, she will have to defend the seat again in November, when Vela's term would have been completed.
Drew Hammill, Pelosi's deputy chief of staff, fired back on Monday.
"It's sad to see 'news outlets' that know better misrepresent the Speaker's effort to ensure Rep. Flores' daughters wouldn't be hidden behind her in all of the photos of such an important moment for their family," Hammill said, replying to a Fox News story about the incident.

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Pecker on a Plane: Man Airdrops D*** Pic to Fellow Passengers, Gets Arrested
By - Mary Manley

A man was outed on a plane after he airdropped an explicit photo of himself to others aboard a Southwest Airlines flight. Another passenger aboard the plane caught the alleged d*** pic sender red-handed and exposed him in a now-viral TikTok video.
TikTok user DaddyStrange333 filmed a video of a man she referred to as "Larry," catching him in the act as he sent an explicit photo of his 'member' through the AirDrop feature on his iPad to passengers on a flight. The video's text says, "Meet Larry who just airdropped a whole flight photos of his peepee. Thankfully I accepted it, and immediately started speaking up. Stay tuned for the police escort."
The TikTok user captioned the video: "Lawrence Martin from Texas, gross. I saw his iPad had AirDrop open, so I knew it was him and, yes, I sure did make a scene."
In the video, the TikTok user can be heard heroically reprimanding the goon, who had children seated behind him, "This man is AirDropping explicit photos," she tells the flight attendant. She is later heard saying, "It's sexual harassment… it's disgusting."
The flight attendant then addresses "Larry" and asks him why he's sending inappropriate photos. Larry responds by saying, "Just having a little fun."
"That's not fun for anyone, though." The flight attendant responded.
"Peep the wedding ring," commented the user DontWorryAboutIt on the viral TikTok video.
"I just sent this to my flight attendant mom. She was not surprised," wrote TikTok user BoomCaitBoom.
The same TikTok user later posted an updated video, which reads, "I know people are asking for an update: a few of us had to meet with an FBI agent who told us Larry was arrested and will be spending the weekend in whatever airport jail looks like. If I get an update I will!"
"There was a child who was sent the photo but didn't approve the AirDrop, his dad was ready to fight. Outside of that we all got statements and were told to wait for a phone call and we may get updates. What a day," the TikTok user wrote.
DaddyStrange explained in a follow-up video that "Larry" admitted to her that he did mean to AirDrop the photo to fellow passengers on the plane.

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Despite being reprimanded by DaddyStrange333 and the flight attendant, Larry continued viewing the explicit photo even though there were children seated behind him. She says she is unaware of Larry's status but that the FBI took down reports following the incident and, according to the TikTok user, apparently told her they would "book him."
"We can confirm this unfortunate incident occurred on a recent flight from Detroit to Denver," a Southwest Airlines spokesperson told The New York Post. "Our Flight Attendants immediately addressed the situation and the Crew requested local law enforcement officers meet the flight upon arrival, which they did and subsequently apprehended the individual responsible."

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Amtrak Derailment in Missouri Leaves at Least 3 Dead
By - Mary Manley

At least three people are dead following the derailment of an Amtrak train in Missouri. The train was traveling to Chicago from Los Angeles when it hit a dump truck near Mendon, Missouri, at 12:42 p.m. local time at an uncontrolled train crossing.
Uncontrolled crossings do not have any lights or electronic devices to signal approaching cars that a train is crossing and are common on rural roads.
On Monday, an Amtrak train derailed, flipping onto its right side after it collided with a dump truck at a crossing near Mendon, Missouri, a small rural community with a population of less than 200 people. Eight cars and two locomotives of the Southwest Chief train flipped off the tracks. According to Amtrak spokeswoman Kimberly Woods, there were 243 passengers aboard the train as well as 12 crew members.
Dax McDonald, a software engineer from Phoenix, was on board during the crash and recounted the accident. He said he saw two trucks through his window on the right side of the train car and recalled looking at one of the trucks thinking, "This guy better slow down." He said he was riding the second-to-last car when he heard a loud bang.
"It's horrifying. The real insanity happened a second after that. You could see it start to tip," said McDonald. The car then tipped over onto its right side, causing McDonald's two sisters who were traveling with him to fly towards him.
"I basically looked over to see them careening toward me," he said.
McDonald and other passengers had to assist a woman after she hit her head and began seizing. In addition to weathering the impact of the crash, passengers faced the dangerous and difficult task of exiting a derailed train with broken glass surrounding them.
"It turns into a giant trap. You have to be able to climb, like rock-climbing," said McDonald, describing him and his sisters trying to climb out of the windows which were now above them.
Three deaths and 50 injuries were reported after the accident. Eight medical transport helicopters responded to the scene, according to Matt Daugherty, who is the director of business development at Lifeflight Eagle Air Ambulance in Kansas City, Missouri.
"They've instituted a mass casualty response plan," said Daugherty, who adds that the flight team will be bringing patients to trauma centers in Kansas City and Columbia, Missouri. Fire

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department agencies from four counties also responded to the scene, according to a dispatcher in Salisbury.
While those who were critically injured were flown to nearby hospitals, other injured passengers were taken to the Northwestern High School in Mendon, Missouri.
CNN reports that 16 Boy Scouts and eight leaders of the troop were also on board when the train derailed. Scott Armstrong, director of National Media for Boy Scouts of America, confirmed to CNN that no members of the troop were hurt. The troop also stayed on the train to help passengers who were injured.
The Amtrak accident in Missouri is the second accident involving an Amtrak train in two days. On Sunday afternoon three people were killed near Brentwood, California, when their car crossed in front of a train. Steve Aubert, a fire marshal with the East Contra Costa Fire Protection District, blamed the lack of road signage for the accident.
“It’s an unmarked, no-signal crossing, with signs that just say, 'Hey, beware of fast-moving trains coming,'” Aubert said. Police are referring to the train derailment as a “large-scale event.”
The National Transportation Safety Board announced that it would be launching an investigation into the accident.

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Alligator Kills Person in South Carolina, Dragged Man into a Retention Pond
By - Mary Manley

The fatal alligator attack near Myrtle Beach, South Carolina on Friday is the second such incident to occur in less than a month in the United States. On May 31, the body of a man was found near a lake in Largo, Florida. Fatal alligator attacks are uncommon in the United States and on average happen less than once a year.
Between 1999 and 2019, alligators killed only 10 people in the Southeast region of the United States, according to the Center for Disease and Prevention.
On Friday, an unnamed victim was killed by an alligator at approximately 11:45 a.m. near Excalibur Court outside of Myrtle Beach, SC. Horry County Fire Rescue first responded to the scene in a water rescue call.
"Upon arrival, units determined that an alligator took hold of a neighbor who was near the edge of a retention pond and retreated into the retention pond," the Horry County Police Department said on Facebook, adding that the body was recovered and the alligator was “removed.”
The victim’s identity has yet to be released and officials are still investigating the attack.
"Our hearts go out to the family and community members impacted by this tragic incident," wrote the Horry County Police Department on social media.
A biologist from the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources advised the police to humanely euthanize the alligator as soon as it was found.
Alligators are not uncommon in the area where Friday’s attack occurred. A nearby neighbor posted a photo of alligators behind his condominium in mid-May.

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"I couldn't have imagined that it was likely one of these alligators that would later kill a man," Jason Repak, a neighbor of the victim, wrote. "My prayers and heart go out to the family as my arms wrap tighter around my kids and dogs near these ponds."
Repak adds that it's common to see alligators walking between retention ponds.
"We've always looked at the alligators as a part of the community," he said. "Everybody treats them with a healthy respect. You try to maintain distance from the banks, and when you see them out, you admire them from afar. They're a part of nature."
Alligator mating season runs from the beginning of May through the month of June as female alligators begin to lay eggs in June and early July. Male alligators are especially aggressive during mating seasons and force other male gators out of ponds, meaning more alligators are traveling longer distances and have wider home ranges.

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More than 40 People Found Dead in Tractor Trailer in Possible Human Smuggling Case
By - Ian DeMartino

At least 46 people are dead after being left in a tractor trailer on the southwest side of San Antonio, Texas. Sixteen other individuals were transported to hospitals in the area, according to KSAT reporter Dillon Collier.
Police say there were around 100 people in the trailer, found in the late afternoon on Monday. The individuals have been described as migrants. One local reporter called it a possible human smuggling case.
Border patrol officers were spotted arriving at the scene around 8 p.m. First responders were already attending to the victims and were spotted using thermal imaging along footpaths in the woods and along a nearby railroad track, apparently searching for individuals who may have left the truck.
Monday was a particularly hot day in San Antonio, with temperatures reaching 101 F around 3pm, according to Weather Underground. The truck was found in a secluded area of San Antonio. It was initially reported that 25 individuals in the trailer were dead, but that number has quickly risen. It is expected that the number will continue to rise, with some suggesting it could exceed 50. An investigation is underway.
The truck was discovered sometime before 7 p.m. (CDT).

Texas Governor Greg Abbott blamed President Biden for the deaths. "These deaths are on Biden." The Republican Governor wrote on Twitter "They are a result of his deadly open border policies."
As Twitter user Texas Blueblone pointed out, if the United States actually had an open-border policy, there would be no need for migrants to sneak through in a truck during the heat of summer.

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Woman Suing Deshaun Watson Sets Sights on Houston Texans With New Lawsuit
By - Ian DeMartino

One of the women who is suing Cleveland Browns Quarterback Deshaun Watson is now suing his former team, the Houston Texans.

Twenty-four women have sued Deshaun Watson accusing him of behaviors ranging from indecent exposure to sexual assault. Twenty of those cases have been settled out of court, but the woman who is suing the Texans is not among them, and her case against Watson remains active.

The lawsuit, filed on Monday, alleges that the Texans knew or should have known of Watson's actions and that they provided him with resources to enable his behavior.

The lawsuit also states that the Texans provided Watson with rooms at a swanky downtown hotel called the Houstonian, massage tables, and a non-disclosure agreement form for massage therapists to sign.

The NDA, the lawsuit says, came after a massage therapist posted Watson's photo on Instagram along with a message saying "I could really expose you." The lawsuit also states that Watson engaged in sexual misconduct with that woman during a massage.

The woman in the lawsuit alleges that Watson contacted her on Instagram asking for a massage. She says she had two encounters with the quarterback. During the second massage, she says that Watson exposed himself to her before ejaculating on her body.

Watson has maintained his innocence throughout.

According to the lawsuit, the Texans were also informed that Watson was seeking out massages on Instagram because the company that provides massage services for the team, Genuine Touch, complained about the practice. The lawsuit also alleges that Genuine Touch informed the team that Watson had sexual relations with at least two of their massage therapists.

The woman's lawyer, Tony Buzbee, says that he expects more lawsuits will be brought against the team soon.

The Texans released a statement, saying they are aware of the lawsuit and have "supported and complied" with law enforcement during their investigations. "We will continue to take the necessary steps to address the allegations against our organization," the statement reads.

The NFL declined to comment on the lawsuit.

Watson has faced two grand juries, but neither decided to bring criminal charges against the former Pro-Bowler. Watson still faces the four civil lawsuits that were not settled, as well as possible discipline from the league.

ESPN reported late last week that Watson has a hearing with a disciplinary officer jointly appointed by the NFL and the NFL Players Association on Tuesday. Watson reportedly tried to settle with the NFL but an agreement could not be reached. ESPN also reported that during those meetings, the NFL was insistent that Watson be suspended for the entirety of the 2022/2023 season.

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Watson previously stated that he has “no regrets” about how he behaved during any of the massage sessions.

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VP Kamala Harris Did Not Believe Justices When They Said Roe Was Settled
By - Ian DeMartino

Vice President Kamala Harris says she did not believe Justices Brett Kavanaugh and Neil Gorsuch when they said Roe v. Wade was settled precedent during their confirmation hearings.
"It was clear to me when I was sitting in that chair as a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, that they were ... very likely to do what they just did. That was my perspective. That was my opinion. And that's why I voted like I did," Harris told CNN in her first interview since the Supreme Court overruled Roe v. Wade, opening the door to abortion bans at the state level.
Harris voted against confirming Kavanaugh and Gorsuch.
Her comments come after Republican Senator Susan Collins of Maine stated that she felt misled by Kavanaugh, who she claims assured her that he would not vote to overturn Roe v. Wade.
Harris also talked about how her elderly mother-in-law will have experienced the freedoms provided by Roe v. Wade for a larger portion of her life than Harris’ daughters will if abortion rights are not restored.
The vice president also revealed that the administration is looking into ways to help women in states that have outlawed abortion get access to the care they need. She said the federal government may help women with child care and travel expenses when seeking abortions out of their home states.
However, she added that the administration is not considering letting abortion providers offer services on federal land in states that have banned abortion, a solution some Democrats have advocated for.
The vice president was asked about the significance of Justice Clarence Thomas’ controversial concurring opinion, where he said the court should reexamine cases that used similar arguments to Roe, including those dealing with same-sex marriage, contraception, and gay sex.
"I think he just said the quiet part out loud," Harris told CNN. "And I think that is why we all must really understand the significance of what just happened. This is profound. And the way that this decision has come down, has been so driven, I think, by the politics of the issue versus what should be the values that we place on freedom and liberty in our country."
Outside of the abortion case, Harris spoke about other issues facing the administration. She called inflation the highest priority for the Biden administration but did not get into specifics on how they plan to bring prices down.
Concerning the January 6 hearings, Harris praised her predecessor, former Vice President Mike Pence, for not succumbing to pressure from Trump. She would not say if she supports criminal charges being brought against the former president.

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She was also asked about House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn's comments that he would support her if Biden declined to run for reelection. Harris said unequivocally that her boss will be running in 2024.
"Joe Biden is running for reelection, and I will be his ticket mate. Full stop."

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Uvalde Mother Who Rushed Into the Besieged School to Save Her Children Says Police Are Harassing Her
By - Ian DeMartino

On May 24, Salvador Ramos entered Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, TX, with an assault-style rifle. He murdered 19 children and two teachers. Law enforcement waited 77 minutes before confronting Ramos, leading to intense criticism.
The mother who rushed into Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, TX, to save her children while a gunman rampaged and police stood by, now says she is being harassed by law enforcement.
Angeli Rose Gomez rushed to the school that her two young boys attend the moment she heard there was an active shooter. While police waited outside, gunshots and the screams of children could be heard by the growing crowd of concerned parents.
Police waited 77 minutes after their arrival before confronting and eventually killing the shooter. During that time, Gomez and other parents pleaded with law enforcement to save their children. Gomez was eventually cuffed by police, who told her to cooperate and calm down. She eventually convinced the police to uncuff her and then she ran to the school, hopping a fence and running to the door window of her eldest son's classroom. She was eventually able to get him and the other students in the class out, but her youngest child was still inside.
Ignoring the danger to her safety and the threats of law enforcement, she then frantically searched the school for her other child, eventually finding and freeing him. 19 third and fourth graders, along with two teachers, were killed in the shooting.

Gomez, who says cops tackled parents trying to do the same thing as her, became a national sensation after telling her story, but now she says law enforcement officers are harassing her and her family.
"The other night we were exercising and we had a cop parked at the corner like, flickering us with his headlights," she told the local Fox affiliate. The situation has gotten so bad that Gomez has sent her boys away so they don't have to witness the harassment. "Just so my sons don't feel like they have to watch cops passing by, stopping, parking."
Gomez also recently attended a Uvalde city council meeting, where she and other community members held signs demanding that School District Police Chief Pete Arredondo be fired. On Wednesday, Arredondo was placed on administrative leave, but that is not enough for Gomez and others in the Uvalde community; they want Arredondo gone permanently and without pay.
Earlier this year, Arredondo was elected to the Uvalde city council. He was sworn in days after the shooting in a ceremony that was closed to the public. Since that time, Arredondo missed his

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first two council meetings and his request for a leave of absence was denied. If Arredondo misses another meeting, the council could vote to remove him.
As for Gomez, she says her next plan is to sue the city. She has retained the services of attorney Mark Di Carlo, who says he is representing 15 parents in Uvalde. The lawsuit has not yet been filed and Di Carlo says he wants to wait until they gather as much evidence as possible before bringing it to court.
“The fact that [Arredondo] wasn't fired immediately based upon whatever it is, hours of video, from testimonies such as Angeli's, is an indication that there is some sort of what, corruption or wrong-doing," Carlo explained.

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US to Provide Additional $55Mln in Immediate Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - The United States will provide an additional $55 million in aid to Afghanistan in response to the needs of residents affected by the recent earthquake, the US State Department said on Tuesday.
"In response, the United States will provide nearly $55 million in additional immediate humanitarian assistance through the US Agency for International Development to urgently reach those most affected by the natural disaster," the State Department said in a statement.
The new funding will bring the total humanitarian assistance provided by the United States to $774 million in the last year, the statement said.
The additional disaster relief assistance will reach people affected by the earthquake with critical relief items such as shelter materials, cooking pots, cans to collect and store water, blankets, solar lamps, clothes and other household items, the statement said.
On Wednesday, a powerful 6.1 magnitude earthquake struck eastern Afghanistan that resulted in the death of some 1,000 Afghans. The provinces of Paktika and Khost bordering Pakistan have been among the worst affected areas. The Afghan government has urged the international community and humanitarian organizations to help them deal with the impact of the earthquake.

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Biden Administration Closely Monitoring Reports About Dead Migrants in Texas - White House

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is closely monitoring reports about the discovery of the bodies of several dozen dead migrants in the US state of Texas, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Tuesday.
"We are closely monitoring the absolutely horrific and heartbreaking reports out of San Antonio, Texas. The President [Joe Biden] has been briefed and he is going to continue to be regularly updated,” Jean-Pierre told reporters.

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The White House spokesperson said the Biden administration will continue to take the necessary actions to disrupt human smuggling networks that have no regard for the lives of people.
US corporate media reported earlier that at least 40 bodies of illegal immigrants were found dead in a tractor-trailer in San Antonio. The reports said 46 dead bodies were found but an additional 16 migrants were still showing signs of life and had been transported to hospitals for treatment.
Numerous critics of the Biden administration have pointed out that the number of illegal immigrants entering the United States since Biden assumed office in January 2021 has reached record high and well exceeds 2 million.

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US to Announce New Long-Term Deployment of Troops in Europe on Wednesday - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - The United States will announce on Wednesday a new long-term deployment of troops in Europe, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.
"In the summit you will see that the alliance will follow through on this commitment [to enforce NATO's posture in response to the Ukraine crisis]," he said. "The United States will be making specific announcements tomorrow on land, see and air of additional force posture commitments over the long term, beyond the duration of this crisis, however long it goes on."

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White House Expects Biden, Erdogan to Have Chance to Talk on Wednesday

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - The White House expects that presidents Joe Biden and Recep Tayyip Erdogan will have an opportunity to hold bilateral talks on the margins of the NATO summit in Madrid on Wednesday, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.
"In terms of our bilateral meeting, we do expect at some point tomorrow President Erdogan and President Biden will have a chance to talk," Sullivan told a briefing.
The modalities of the talks arebeing still worked out, with no time fixed or the framework for the meeting agreed yet.
Sullivan expressed the belief that Turkey's concerns over Sweden and Finland's NATO membership bids will be addressed.
"We also believe and we are confident that ultimately they will become members of the alliance, and Turkey's concerns will be fully addressed," he said.

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US Begins Talks With India on How Russia Oil Price Caps Work – White House

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) – The United States has begun talks with India on how Russia oil price caps work, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.
"We have begun talks with India on how the price cap would work and what implications would be," Sullivan told reporters, adding that this is an ongoing diplomatic discussion.
US President Joe Biden did not speak directly about this issue with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, however senior government officials have discussed the topic, Sullivan noted.

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Biden to Meet With S. Korean, Japanese Leaders on NATO Sidelines Wednesday - White House

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will meet with the leaders of South Korea and Japan on the sidelines of the NATO summit in Madrid on Wednesday, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.
Four Asia-Pacifc partners were invited to the NATO summit in Madrid, which is taking place on June 28-30.
"The president tomorrow will have an opportunity to host a trilateral meeting with the president of Korea and the prime minister of Japan," Sullivan told a briefing on Tuesday.

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NATO Summit to Set Strategic Direction of Alliance for Years to Come - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - The ongoing NATO summit will set the strategic direction for the alliance for the years to come, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.
Madrid is hosting the leaders' summit on June 28–30.
"The summit will provide an opportunity to set the strategic direction of the alliance in the coming years," he told reporters.

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RPT - New Canada Sanctions 'Empty Symbolism,' Cannot Affect Russian Economy - Envoy in Ottawa

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - Canada's latest sanctions against Russia are of a symbolic nature and unable to affect the Russian economy, Ambassador in Ottawa Oleg Stepanov told Sputnik.

Earlier in the day, Canada imposed sanctions on six individuals and 46 entities linked to Russia's defense sector, as well as on more than two dozen individuals and entities in Belarus and Ukraine. Canada has also moved to prohibit export of certain advanced technologies to Russia, including quantum computers and advanced manufacturing equipment as well as expressed intent to sanction Russian-state sponsored "disinformation agents," according to the statement.

"Apparently, the Canadian side cannot offer anything good, constructive, so they enthusiastically took on a destructive role and are playing it with pleasure," Stepanov said. "But I want to emphasize once again that all these sanctions are absolutely empty symbolism, because they cannot have any effect on the Russian economy."

The diplomat expressed the belief that sanctions will have a zero effect.

"It is difficult to take it seriously, because the inclusion of high-tech companies from Russia in this sanctions list will not have any impact either on them or the Russian side. It is quite obvious that in their activities they did not and would not have any business contacts with the Canadian side, so another expansion of the list is another gesture of empty symbolism of the Trudeau cabinet."

When asked whether he was invited to the Canadian Foreign Ministry to be informed of the announcement, Stepanov replied: "We have already passed this period."

"Now the Trudeau cabinet is stamping these sanctions in an automatic mode," he said. "In fact, if you remember, some time ago, Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly publicly promised to issue some kind of regular anti-Russian measures every week or two. This is what the Canadian government seems to be doing now in an automatic mode."

Stepanov added that this "unfriendly and hostile" step by Canada will be met with a response.

The diplomat noted that trade and economic relations between Russia and Canada are completely destroyed, while the Trudeau cabinet is being guided by the need to "show off in front of their Western allies" and the local Ukrainian community.

The leaders of the Group of Seven, who are currently meeting in Germany for their 2022 summit, have agreed to increase pressure on Russia by enforcing new sanctions on Moscow and its allies. Canada has imposed Russia-related sanctioned on 1,500 individuals and entities since 2014, with 1,070 added to the list after Russia began its special military operation in Ukraine on February 24.

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RPT - ROCOR Synod to Discuss Election of New First Hierarch, Church-Related Issues - Archbishop

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - Synod of Bishops of the Russian Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) will convene on June 30 in New York City to discuss the election of the new First Hierarch at the upcoming Bishops Council in September, along with current issues of the church life, Archbishop Gabriel (Chemodakov) of Canada and Montreal told Sputnik.

"I think we will probably discuss some of the logistics of the Council and process of the election of First Hierarch, so that everyone is familiar with the details when they come to the meeting," said Archbishop Gabriel, who is assigned to the pre-Council commission.

Election of the First Hierarch will be the first order of the Council, which starts on September 13, he added.

The Archbishop did not rule out that the Synod will discuss the situation with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), which declared independence in May.

"We obviously united with the Moscow Patriarchate, we are in communion with the Russian Church since 2007, and we have a very good relationship with the Primate of the UOC Metropolitan Onufrii. Of course we are very concerned," Gabriel added.

The seat of the ROCOR First Hierarch became vacant after the six church Primate Metropolitan Hilarion (Kapral) passed away on May 16.

ROCOR's Bishops Council, which is convened primarily for the election of the First Hierarch, will take place on September 13-21.

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Vice President Harris Swears in Bridget Brink as New US Ambassador to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - Vice President Kamala Harris swore in Bridget Brink to serve as the US Ambassador to Ukraine during a ceremony at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House complex.

Brink's husband, Nicholas Higgins, held the US Constitution and Bible upon which the new US envoy to Kiev took her oath before Harris in the vice presidential ceremonial office on Monday.

Brink, nominated by President Joe Biden in April, was confirmed unanimously by the US Senate on May 18 before arriving in Kiev on May 29. Her arrival marked the first time in about three years that the US had an ambassador in the country.

Before her appointment, Brink was the US Ambassador to Slovakia since August 15, 2019. Previously, she served as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs (2015-2018) and Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassies in Uzbekistan (2014-2015) and Georgia (2011-2014).

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US Conducts Strike in Syria's Idlib Targeting Terrorist Leader - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - US forces conducted an airstrike targeting a senior leader of the al-Qaeda-linked terrorist group Hurras al-Din (both banned in Russia,) US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement.
"CENTCOM Forces conducted a kinetic strike in Idlib province, Syria, June 27, targeting Abu Hamzah al Yemeni, a senior leader of Hurras al-Din, an al-Qaeda-aligned terrorist organization. Abu Hamzah al Yemeni was traveling alone on a motorcycle at the time of the strike," the release said on Monday. "The removal of this senior leader will disrupt al-Qaeda's ability to carry out attacks against US citizens, our partners, and innocent civilians around the world."
CENTCOM said an initial review indicates no civilian casualties.
Groups like Hurras al-Din, the release added, continue to present a threat to America and its allies.

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UPDATE 2- Amtrak Train Derails in State of Missouri, Leaving 3 Dead - Authorities
(Adds official confirming death in headline, lede, updates throughout)
WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - An Amtrak train that derailed in the state of Missouri after crashing into a dump truck has left three dead, a highway patrol public information official said at a press briefing.
"There are multiple injuries and we can confirm there are three fatalities," Missouri State Highway Patrol Corporal Justin Dunn said on Monday. "Two on the train, and one in the dump truck."
The train, he added, had eight cars including a baggage car. Dunn said seven cars derailed after the crash at an "uncontrolled crossing."
CNN earlier in the day reported that there were at least 50 injuries, citing an official.
Earlier in the day, Amtrak said there were a total of 243 passengers on the train traveling eastbound on BNSF track from Los Angeles to Chicago on Monday. The company said eight cars and two locomotives derailed after striking a truck that was obstructing a public crossing near Mendon, Missouri.
The train service activated its Incident Response Team and deployed emergency personnel to the scene, the release added.
The Missouri State Highway Patrol in a tweet said it and numerous other agencies have responded to the crash. Local and surrounding agencies are on scene providing mutual aid assistance, the patrol said.
In addition, two Boy Scout troops from Wisconsin who were on the train stayed on the scene to provide aid, Scott Armstrong, director of National Media for Boy Scouts of America, told CNN.

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UPDATE - Amtrak Train Derails in State of Missouri, Leaving 50 Injured, 3 Dead - Reports
(Adds details in headline, lede paras 2-5)
WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - An Amtrak train that derailed in the state of Missouri has left 50 injured and three dead, CNN reported citing a company official.
Amtrak said there were a total of 243 passengers on the train traveling eastbound on BNSF track from Los Angeles to Chicago on Monday. The company said eight cars and two locomotives derailed after striking a truck that was obstructing a public crossing near Mendon, Missouri.
The train service activated its Incident Response Team and deployed emergency personnel to the scene, the release added.
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Blinken Says US Must Do More to Support Global Food Security, Biden to Announce More Soon

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - The United States will have more efforts to announce on supporting global food security in the coming weeks and months, including by President Joe Biden during the Group of Seven (G7) summit taking place in Germany, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.
"Since the Russian aggression began in February, the United States has committed nearly $2.8 billion in emergency food assistance," Blinken said in a statement on Monday. "We'll be able to do even more in the weeks and months ahead, and you can expect further announcements of our additional support soon, including from the President at the G7 meeting."
Blinken noted that the United States also has $5.5 billion in new funding for global food security that was approved by Congress last month.
Blinken pinned responsibility for the global food market's instability on Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, specifically alleging that Russian forces have blocked the export of grain from ports on the Black Sea.
Russia has said that Black Sea has been heavily mined by Ukrainians, but Moscow has secured at least two safe sea corridors for food and other exports. Russian President Vladimir Putin said

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earlier in June that there are no barriers to the export of grain from Ukraine except for danger of non-deactivated mines.

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Biden to Unveil Extension of US Military Mission in Poland During NATO Summit - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will announce an extension of the increased US military presence in Poland while in Madrid for a NATO leaders summit, NBC News reported, citing a European and several US officials.
Biden is set to unveil the extension, as well as changes to the US military's presence in the Baltic nations, as part of his trip to Europe for G7 and NATO summits, two defense officials, two former administration officials and a European official reportedly said.
Biden could also announce the addition of two more ships to the US Navy's presence at Naval Station Rota in Spain, the report added.

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FBI Seized Phone of Ex-US President Trump's Election Attorney Last Week - Reports
WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) seized the cell phone of former US President Donald Trump's election attorney John Eastman last week, CNN reported citing a new court filing from the lawyer.
Eastman filed a lawsuit in the US state of New Mexico in which he disclosed the search and seizure of his phone by federal agents who approached him while he was exiting a restaurant and "forced" him to unlock his iPhone 12 Pro, the report said on Monday.
The agents were able to get access to Eastman's emails on the phone while the device was sent to the Justice Department for forensic search, the report said.

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ROCOR Synod to Discuss Election of New First Hierarch, Church-Related Issues - Archbishop

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - Synod of Bishops of the Russian Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) will convene on June 30 in New York City to discuss the election of the new First Hierarch at the upcoming Bishops Council in September, along with current issues of the church life, Archbishop Gabriel (Chemodakov) of Canada and Montreal told Sputnik.

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"I think we will probably discuss some of the logistics of the Council and process of the election of First Hierarch, so that everyone is familiar with the details when they come to the meeting," said Archbishop Gabriel, who is assigned to the pre-Council commission.
Election of the First Hierarch will be the first order of the Council, which starts on September 13, he added.
The Archbishop did not rule out that the Synod will discuss the situation with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), which declared independence in May.
"We obviously united with the Moscow Patriarchate, we are in communion with the Russian Church since 2007, and we have a very good relationship with the Primate of the UOC Metropolitan Onufrii. Of course we are very concerned," Gabriel added.
The seat of the ROCOR First Hierarch became vacant after the six church Primate Metropolitan Hilarion (Kapral) passed away on May 16.
ROCOR's Bishops Council, which is convened primarily for the election of the First Hierarch, will take place on September 13-21.

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US Urging Cyprus to Impose Ban on Cypriot Vessels Hauling Russian Oil - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - The United States is pushing the government of Cyprus to impose a ban on Cypriot-flagged vessels hauling Russian oil for sale to third countries, Bloomberg said in a report, citing a person familiar with the matter.
Cypriot Finance Minister Constantinos Petrides in a conversation with US counterpart Janet Yellen on Monday expressed concern about the proposal due to the fact that many countries are not sanctioning Russian oil, the person reportedly said.
Yellen during her conversation with Petrides also discussed the goal of implementing a price limit on Russian oil in an effort to diminish the Kremlin's oil revenue while also keeping world oil supplies stable, the Treasury Department said in a statement.
The price cap could serve as an exception the partial ban on Russian oil by the European Union, Yellen said earlier this month.
Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said Western sanctions against Russia would have no effect on the country's oil exports and predicted a surge in profits from energy shipments this year.

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Sikorsky Wins More Than $2.2Bln Deal to Build 120 More Black Hawk Helicopters - Pentagon

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WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - The Sikorsky Corporation, a division of Lockheed Martin, has won a more than $2.2 billion US Army contract to build 120 more H-60M Black Hawk ground support helicopters, the US Defense Department announced.
"Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation [of] Stratford, Connecticut, was awarded a $2,278,598,185 firm-fixed-price contract for procurement of 120 H-60M Black Hawk helicopters and related support for fiscal years 2022-2026, including options for an additional 135 aircraft," the Defense Department said in a press release said on Monday.

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UN Security Council to Meet on Ukraine Tuesday Afternoon

UNITED NATIONS, June 27 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Security Council is going to meet on Ukraine on Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. EST (7:00 p.m. GMT), according to the council's program.
The Mission of Ukraine to the UN requested the meeting following a missile attack on a shopping mall in Kremenchuk that left 13 dead, Reuters reported citing the regional governor.
"Today, on 27 June, the Russian Federation committed another act of terror, shelling with missiles a crowded shopping center in Kremenchuk, Poltava region," Ukrainian Ambassador to the UN Sergiy Kyslytsya said in a letter on Monday to the Albanian Mission, which has the Presidency of the Council for June. "Taken into account ongoing violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity by the Russian Federation, coupled with war crimes and crimes against humanity against the civilian population, and upon the instructions of my Government, I have the honor to request an urgent meeting of the Security Council in accordance with Article 34 and 35 of the United Nations Charter under the agenda item 'Maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine.'"
On the other hand, Russia disputed the blame.
"Looks like we are dealing with a new Bucha-style Ukrainian provocation. One should wait for what our Ministry of Defense will say, but there are too many striking discrepancies already. Exactly what the Kiev regime needs to keep the focus of attention on Ukraine before the NATO Summit," Russia's UN Deputy Envoy Dmitry Polyanskiy said on his Twitter account.
On Saturday, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said the Russian military destroyed Ukrainian facilities for fuel processing and storage near the southern cities of Kremenchuk and Lysychansk with precision strikes.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) -

G7 SUMMIT

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* The G7 countries intend to limit Russia's revenues from the export of gold, the White House said on Monday, adding that the US Treasury Department will issue a decree banning gold imports from Russia.
* The G7 leaders announced their intention to continue to impose individual sanctions against Russia due to its special operation in Ukraine.
* Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy in his address to the G7 leaders made clear that he wants to shorten the conflict with Russia, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said.

WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA
* US President Joe Biden signed a proclamation on Monday to increase duties on certain items of imports from Russia, the White House announced.
* Canada has moved to prohibit export of certain advanced technologies to Russia, including quantum computers and advanced manufacturing equipment as well as expressed intent to sanction Russian-state sponsored disinformation agents, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's office said.
* Canada is imposing sanctions on six individuals and 46 entities linked to Russia's defense sector, as well as on more than two dozen individuals and entities in Belarus and Ukraine, the Prime Minister's Office said.
* Canada is imposing sanctions on 13 Belarusian officials and two entities, including Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko and key ministers, the Prime Minster's Office said.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS
* The Department of Defense believes that Russia did not target a residential building in Kiev, and the building was damaged while Russia was striking a nearby ammunition factory, a senior US defense official said on Monday.
* The Ukrainian forces determine the targets they seek to destroy while the United States is providing the equipment to them amid Russia's special military operation there, a senior Defense Department official said.
* Morocco has requested communication with its citizen sentenced to death in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), Foreign Minister Natalya Nikonorova said.
* The United States is finalizing a new defense package for Ukraine that includes advanced medium and long-range air defense capabilities, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan confirmed.
* The US did not notify Russia of its plans to supply Ukraine with a medium to long range surface-to-air missile defense system, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

ENERGY MARKETS
* The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said on Monday it will not be releasing its weekly oil inventory report for a second straight week due to a hardware failure and will be issuing the data "as soon as possible."
* The European Union has finally approved new legislation, according to which underground gas storage facilities are required to fill 80% of their capacities by November 1, 2022, and 90% in subsequent years, the European Commission said.

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BRICS

* Moscow views the expansion of BRICS positively but understands that this issue needs to be carefully assessed, Kremlin aide Yury Ushakov said on Monday when asked about Argentina's initiative to join the organization.
* Iran has applied to join the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, China, India, South Africa) group, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said.

NATO SUMMIT

* NATO countries will discuss the transformation of the alliance's response force and decide to increase the number of its high readiness forces to over 300,000 during the summit in Madrid, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said on Monday.
* NATO leaders will label Russia as "the most significant threat to collective security" in a new strategic concept for 10 years, Stoltenberg said.

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Amtrak Train Derails in State of Missouri in 'Mass Casualty Event' - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - An Amtrack train derailed in the state of Missouri in what is described as a mass casualty event, The Daily Beast reported on Monday.
The report said, citing a witness on the scene, that a rescue helicopter and crew were on the scene but there was no confirmation of any possible fatalities.
Amtrack said there were a total of 243 passengers on the train.

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US, Taiwan Hold Inaugural Meeting on New Bilateral Trade Initiative - USTR

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - The United States and Taiwan held the inaugural meeting of the bilateral Initiative on 21st-Century Trade, the Office of US Trade Representative (USTR) said in a statement.
"This initiative will unlock market opportunities, promote innovation and create inclusive economic growth for our workers and businesses," the statement said.
Deputy US Trade Representative Sarah Bianchi led the US delegation at the inaugural meeting, which organized under the auspices of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO).
Both sides reiterated their shared interest in developing specific ways to deepen the bilateral economic and trade relationship, the statement said.
They also confirmed their readiness to advance mutual trade priorities based on shared values and promote innovation and inclusive economic growth for workers and businesses, the statement said.

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"The commitments will cover a number of trade areas, including trade facilitation, regulatory practices, agriculture, anti-corruption, small- and medium-sized enterprises, digital trade, labor, environment, standards, state-owned enterprises, and non-market policies and practices," the statement added.
The two sides decided to continue the talks in the near future, according to the statement.

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New Canada Sanctions 'Empty Symbolism,' Cannot Affect Russian Economy - Envoy in Ottawa

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"Apparently, the Canadian side cannot offer anything good, constructive, so they enthusiastically took on a destructive role and are playing it with pleasure," Stepanov said. "But I want to emphasize once again that all these sanctions are absolutely empty symbolism, because they cannot have any effect on the Russian economy."
The diplomat expressed the belief that sanctions will have a zero effect.
"It is difficult to take it seriously, because the inclusion of high-tech companies from Russia in this sanctions list will not have any impact either on them or the Russian side. It is quite obvious that in their activities they did not and would not have any business contacts with the Canadian side, so another expansion of the list is another gesture of empty symbolism of the Trudeau cabinet."
When asked whether he was invited to the Canadian Foreign Ministry to be informed of the announcement, Stepanov replied: "We have already passed this period."
"Now the Trudeau cabinet is stamping these sanctions in an automatic mode," he said. "In fact, if you remember, some time ago, Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly publicly promised to issue some kind of regular anti-Russian measures every week or two. This is what the Canadian government seems to be doing now in an automatic mode."
Stepanov added that this "unfriendly and hostile" step by Canada will be met with a response.
The diplomat noted that trade and economic relations between Russia and Canada are completely destroyed, while the Trudeau cabinet is being guided by the need to "show off in front of their Western allies" and the local Ukrainian community.
The leaders of the Group of Seven, who are currently meeting in Germany for their 2022 summit, have agreed to increase pressure on Russia by enforcing new sanctions on Moscow and its allies. Canada has imposed Russia-related sanctioned on 1,500 individuals and entities

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since 2014, with 1,070 added to the list after Russia began its special military operation in Ukraine on February 24.

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US Armed Forces Struggle to Meet 2022 Recruiting Goals Across All Branches - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - The US armed forces are struggling to meet recruiting goals for fiscal year 2022 across all branches of service, NBC News reported on Monday, citing multiple US defense officials and recruiting data.

Only 9% of young Americans eligible to serve in the military are inclined to do so, an internal Defense Department survey reportedly said. Just 23% of Americans between 17 and 24-years old are qualified to serve without a waiver, Army Chief of Staff James McConville told Congress last month.

Young Americans believe they're going to be physically or emotionally injured by military service, one senior US military official familiar with recruiting issues said in the report. The trend is likely to continue amid declining familiarity with military service, other officials also said.

Approximately 57% of young Americans polled in the Defense Department survey believe they would experience emotional or psychological problems after military service, the report said. Almost half think they would suffer physical problems as well, according to the survey.

The army has only met 40% of its enlisted recruiting goals for fiscal year 2022, which ends September 30, the report said. However, the final quarter following high school graduations is typically when the armed forces recruit the most candidates, the report noted.

While the Space Force is set to make its goal of roughly 500 Guardians for the fiscal year, the Air Force is over 4,000 recruits short of where they should be at this time, according to a senior defense official.

The navy and Marine Corps are also hopeful about making their recruiting goals, but have not yet met them, the report said. The Coast Guard has only filled approximately 55% of its active-duty entitlements, the report also said.

The Pentagon is reviewing its service disqualifiers, including some medical conditions that typically require waivers for service, in order to address recruiting challenges, multiple defense officials reportedly said.

Branches including the army, navy and Air Force are offering unprecedented signing bonuses of up to $50,000 for particular specialties, the report said. The military is also considering permitting soldiers to use social media platforms like TikTok to attract recruits, the report added.

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Taiwan-Based Tech Giant to Build $5Bln Silicon Wafer Plant in Texas

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WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - Taiwan-based tech giant GlobalWafers is investing $5 billion to build a major new facility in Texas to manufacture enough silicon wafers, the basic component for semiconductors, to meet projected US demand, the company and White House announced on Monday.

"Hsinchu, Taiwan-based global semiconductor silicon wafer company, GlobalWafers, announced today that it plans to build a state-of-the-art 300-millimeter [12-inch] silicon wafer factory in Sherman, Texas," the company said in a statement. "Construction is expected to commence later this year."

The new complex, the first of its kind the US has seen in 20 years, will be able to manufacture up to 1.2 million wafers per month after multiple stages of equipment installation, in alignment with market demand, and could support up to 1,500 jobs, the release said.

US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo in the same release welcomed the new project as a critical step in rebuilding the US domestic semiconductor supply chain.

The White House in a separate release said GlobalWafers will invest $5 billion to build the factory. Raimondo in the White House statement said the US is at a "tipping point" in the semiconductor supply chain.

The company said the 12-inch silicon wafers are the essential basis for all advanced semiconductor production.

The announcement comes amid a global semiconductor shortage that has hit US companies hard in a number of sectors including automotive, electronics, power generation, and even specialized critical equipment like medical devices, among others.

The shortage of microchips cost the US economy $240 billion in 2021, the US broadcaster CBS News reported, citing experts. Earlier in June, the Federal Reserve in a report said the supply disruption of microchips and commodities since the economic recovery that followed the 2020 coronavirus outbreak have also led to unusual price growth.

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US Urges China to Fulfill Pledge to Fight Illegal Fishing – White House

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) – The United States urges China to fulfill its commitment to fight illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU), a senior US administration official said on Monday.

"We also call on the PRC [the People's Republic of China] to fulfill its pledge and actively participate in and support the international community in fighting against IUU fishing," the official told a press briefing.

The official noted that the United States has engaged bilaterally with Beijing to identify concerns about IUU fishing, promote China's full implementation of flag state responsibilities, and encourage China to improve implementation of international measures and cooperation with agreements like the Agreement on Port State Measures.

Earlier in the day, President Joe Biden signed a National Security Memorandum on combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing activities. Among others, the memorandum provides

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the US government with a defined set of actions to address the problem of IUU fishing, including IUU fishing committed by distant water fishing fleets, and associated criminal activities, such as the use of forced labor in the food supply chain.

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Canada Sanctions Belarusian Prime Minister, Cabinet Members – Trudeau

OTTAWA, June 27 (Sputnik) – Canada is imposing sanctions on 13 Belarusian officials and two entities, including Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko and key ministers, Justin Trudeau's office announced on Monday.
"These new actions, which build on the government of Canada's already extensive sanctions regime, include: Imposing restrictions on six individuals and 46 entities linked to the Russian defense sectors, sanctioning 15 Ukrainian individuals supporting the Russian occupation of Ukraine, and sanctioning 13 government and defense individuals and two entities in Belarus," the prime minister's office said.
Along with Golovchenko, Canada sanctioned Interior Minister Yuri Sivakov, Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei, Finance Minister Yury Seliverstov, Economy Minister Alexander Chervyakov, Energy Minister Viktor Karankevich, Information Minister Vladimir Pertsov, Minister of Communications and Informatization Konstantin Shulgan.
The restrictions also target Belramoshservice and Belteleradio Company.
Furthermore, Canada put more restrictions on the exports of consumer products to Belarus, particularly of elements required to manufacture high-technology goods.

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New York State Judge Strikes Down Law Allowing Non-US Citizens to Vote - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - New York State Supreme Court Justice Ralph Porzio struck down as unconstitutional a New York City law allowing residents who are not US citizens to vote in local elections, the New York Times reported on Monday.
The law, which would have permitted more than 800,000 noncitizens to vote in elections for local positions like mayor, violates the state's constitutional guidelines allowing only citizens to vote, the report cited Porzio as saying.
The New York City Council passed the law in December and set in to take effect in January of 2023.
However, Porizio said granting noncitizens the right to vote would require a referendum, the report said.
New York State and federal Republican Party officials challenged the law, sparking a national debate about expanding voting rights to noncitizens, the report added.

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Fabien Levy, spokesperson for New York City Mayor Eric Adams, said city officials are evaluating how to proceed in light of the ruling, according to the report.

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Canada Sanctions 6 Individuals, 46 Entities Linked to Russia's Defense Sector - Trudeau

OTTAWA, June 27 (Sputnik) - Canada is imposing sanctions on six individuals and 46 entities linked to Russia's defense sector, as well as on more than two dozen individuals and entities in Belarus and Ukraine, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's office announced on Monday.
"These new actions, which build on the government of Canada's already extensive sanctions regime, include: Imposing restrictions on six individuals and 46 entities linked to the Russian defense sectors, sanctioning 15 Ukrainian individuals supporting the Russian occupation of Ukraine, and sanctioning 13 government and defense individuals and two entities in Belarus," the Prime Minister's Office said.
Among the sanctioned individuals are Chechen lawmaker Adam Delimkhanov, who fought in the battle for Mariupol; Rostelecoms President Mikhail Oseevsky and the former head of Aeroflot Mikhail Poluboyarinov.
The leaders of the Group of Seven (G7), who are meeting in Germany for their 2022 summit, have agreed to increase pressure on Russia by enforcing a new round of sanctions on the country as well as on its allies and facilitators in Ukraine.
Earlier in June, Canada imposed a new round of sanctions on Russia by banning 28 types of consultants from working for Russian oil, gas and chemical firms.
Canada has imposed Russia-related sanctioned on 1,500 individuals and entities since 2014, with 1,070 added to the list after Russia began its special military operation in Ukraine on February 24.

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UN Asks for $110Mln in Emergency Aid Following Earthquake in Afghanistan

UNITED NATIONS, June 27 (Sputnik) - The United Nations launched an emergency appeal following last week's earthquake in Afghanistan, calling for $110 million, UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.
"Our teams in the country today launched an emergency appeal following last week's earthquake. The appeal calls for $110 million to urgently help 362,000 people for the next three months in the hardest hit areas," Dujarric said at a press briefing.
The UN and the Afghan government have been largely involved in the operations to save civilians, however, the United Nations said it does not have heavy machines and equipment and relies on the Afghan authorities to provide it.

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UN Chief Briefs G7 Leaders on Ongoing Grain Export Negotiations - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, June 27 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has briefed the leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) countries on the ongoing negotiations to broker a deal on grain and fertilizers exports from Ukraine and Russia, United Nations spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"He did give them an update," Dujarric said during a press briefing. "The talks are ongoing to reach that goal of that goal of the package deal."

The UN Secretary-General also pointed out the impact of the situation of scarcity of grains and fertilizer on the developing countries, he said.

"He focused his remarks on underscoring the continuing global impact on developing countries, especially on developing countries and the food crisis because of the war in Ukraine," Dujarric said.

The United Nations continues its efforts to bring together Russia and Ukraine and help them place their food products back on the world markets, Dujarric added.

According to the United Nations, the food crisis has aggravated hunger in the world and the developing countries are suffering the most.

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Cyberbullying Surpasses Offline Bullying as Suicide Risk Factor in Young Teens - Study

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - Cyberbullying is now a more significant suicide risk factor among young teenagers than offline bullying, a new study published in the JAMA Network Open medical journal revealed on Monday.

Researchers investigating the link between cyberbullying and attempts at suicide in adolescents 10-13 years of age found the association between them "was significant over and above other suicidality risk factors, including offline peer aggression experiences or perpetration," the study said.

The study also found that unlike situations of offline bullying in which being either victim or perpetrator has been associated with suicidality, the perpetrators of cyberbullying are not linked to increased suicidality.

Female and black respondents were more likely to experience cyberbullying than male and respondents of other races, the study said.

Male and Black respondents were more likely than female participants and those of other races to participate in cyberbullying, the study also said.

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The researchers' findings can inform adolescent suicide prevention strategies, including routine evaluation of adolescents' experience with cyberbullying by clinicians and educational staff, the study added.
The study was conducted by researchers from the Baruch Ivcher School of Psychology in Israel and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia in the United States, according to the study.

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Israel Strikes Damascus Airport After Tacit US Approval - Russian Deputy Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, June 27 (Sputnik) - Israel conducted airstrikes and hit the Damascus international airport earlier in the month after receiving a tacit approval from the United States, Russian Deputy Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Monday.
"On 10 June, Israeli air force again launched strikes against the territory of Syria, this time targeting the international airport of Damascus. The airport sustained heavy material damage - the tarmac was badly hit, which put on hold all flights, including humanitarian," Polyanskiy said.
Israel's actions came after receiving a tacit approval from the United States, which is also intentionally blocking the Syria peace process, he said.
"It may seem that Israel received a carte blanche to engage in illegitimate unilateral action upon silent approval of Washington that basically blocked all opportunities to have the peace process recovered," Polianskiy said.
In return, the Unite States and its allies on the UN Security Council have tried to impose an "economic truce" on Palestinians without meeting their legitimate aspirations and letting them have a sovereign state, he also said.
Polianskiy noted that Israel's actions reflect the collective West's hypocrisy and double standards toward international law and human rights - an attitude that is also reflected in their behavior Ukraine.
Patterns of behavior and political approach of certain countries are applied in conflicts across the range, he added.

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New York Announces State's First Cyber Security Czar – Governor

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) – New York Governor Kathy Hochul announced on Monday she has appointed a veteran cybersecurity expert as the state's first chief cyber officer.
"New York State is taking an aggressive, nation-leading approach to transforming our cybersecurity infrastructure to combat emerging threats and fortify our information assets," Hochul said in a statement, as quoted by her office. "I am thrilled to appoint Colin Ahern as New York State's first ever Chief Cyber Officer. In an era of increasingly advanced cyber threats,

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Colin's proven expertise and experience in the military, the private sector, and government will be critical to identifying cyber risks, enhancing our defense systems, preventing attacks, and ensuring that New Yorkers and our institutions remain protected."
Ahern is a decorated army veteran and a leading expert in cybersecurity, intelligence and cyber-resilience and intelligence. He will helm the state's inter-agency efforts to protect the state from increasingly prevalent and sophisticated cyber threats, the office said.
Ahern has deep and extensive experience in cyber security. Before his work in city government, Ahern worked in the financial services field as a cyber threat researcher and security engineer. He became an officer in the Army after he joined the Army Reserves following the September 11 terror attacks. He later served two tours in Afghanistan. When he ended his army career, Ahern was a company commander at the US Army Cyber Brigade, where he helped create a specialized cyberspace operations organization.
Ahern is an adjunct associate professor at the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs and a guest lecturer at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies.

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Canada Bans Tech Exports to Russia Like Quantum Computers, Advanced Mfg Equipment - Ottawa

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - Canada has moved to prohibit export of certain advanced technologies to Russia, including quantum computers and advanced manufacturing equipment as well as expressed intent to sanction Russian-state sponsored disinformation agents, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's office said in a statement on Monday.
"Canada will also take additional and immediate measures to ban the export of certain advanced technologies that could improve Russia's domestic defense manufacturing capability, including quantum computers and advanced manufacturing equipment, associated components, materials, software, and technology," the statement said. "The Prime Minister also announced Canada's intention to introduce sanctions against state-sponsored disinformation and propaganda agents and entities controlled by senior Russian government officials, to counter the Kremlin's disinformation, which it has used to attempt to excuse its unjustifiable and unprovoked war in Ukraine."

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Biden Signs Proclamation to Increase Duties on Certain Articles From Russia
(Updates with background in paras 4-7)
WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden signed a proclamation on Monday to increase duties on certain import items from Russia, the White House announced.

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"NOW, THEREFORE, I, JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR. ... do hereby proclaim as follows: To increase the column 2 rates of duty on imports of certain articles of the Russian Federation as set forth in paragraph 5 of this proclamation, HTSUS [Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States] heading 9903.90.08 and new US Note 30 to subchapter III of chapter 99 of the HTSUS are provided for in Annex A to this proclamation," the statement said.

Earlier on Monday, G7 countries agreed to explore options for using revenues collected by new tariffs on Russian goods to help Ukraine.

US exports to Russia have decreased by approximately 97% over the past several months, while Russia's imports of goods from across the world could have fallen by 40%.

The new measures will further limit Russia's ability to "benefit economically from sales to the US market and are carefully calibrated to impose costs on Russia, while minimizing costs to US consumers," the statement said.

Earlier on Monday, The G7 leaders announced their intention to continue to impose individual sanctions against Russia because of its special military operation in Ukraine. The G7 countries said will cut off Russia from participating in world markets, as well as limit its revenues, including from gold exports, the statement also said.

The G& said that it also plans to further limit Russia's access to key industrial inputs, services and technologies produced by our economies, particularly those supporting the country's armament industrial base and technology sector, the statement added.

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Canada Sanctions 6 Individuals, 46 Entities linked to Russia's Defense Sector - Trudeau

OTTAWA, June 27 (Sputnik) – Canada is imposing sanctions on six individuals and 46 entities linked to Russia's defense sector, as well as on several individuals and entities in Belarus and Ukraine, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's office announced on Monday.

"These new actions, which build on the Government of Canada's already extensive sanctions regime, include: Imposing restrictions on six individuals and 46 entities linked to the Russian defence sectors, Sanctioning 15 Ukrainian individuals supporting the Russian occupation of Ukraine, and Sanctioning 13 government and defence individuals and two entities in Belarus," the office said.

Canada has sanctioned 1,070 individuals and entities since Russia began its special military operation in Ukraine.

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US Working to Deploy Excalibur Precision Artillery Shells in Ukraine - Defense Official

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WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - The United States is working to deploy Excalibur precision-guided, extended-range artillery shells for 155mm howitzers in Ukraine amid Russia's special military operation there, a senior US Defense Department official said on Monday.
"We are working on Excalibur deployment [in Ukraine]," the official said during a press briefing.
The official added that the United States is currently conducting training for Ukraine troops on US artillery systems, High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) and howitzers. The training is taking place in Germany and the United Kingdom.
The United States has so far committed to Ukraine 126 howitzers and eight HIMARS systems. The first batch of four HIMARS systems has already arrived in Ukraine, according to the country's defense ministry.
The Excalibur projectile (M982) is a precision weapon, impacting at a distance of less than two meters from the target and it extends the reach of .39-caliber artillery to 40 km (24 miles) and .52-caliber artillery to more than 50 km (30 miles). The weapon is developed and manufactured by Raytheon and BAE Systems AB.
On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. Russia has said the operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and its goal is to demilitarize and de-Nazify the country.

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US Takes Putin's Remarks on Nuclear Missiles in Belarus 'Seriously' - Pentagon Official

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - The United States has always taken "seriously" Russia's threat to use nuclear weapons and considers it irresponsible for Russian President Vladimir Putin to talk about deploying nuclear missiles in Belarus, a senior US Defense Department official said on Monday.
"It seems pretty irresponsible of a national leader to talk about the employment of nuclear weapons and to do so in a generally cavalier fashion," the official said during a press briefing. "In terms of my concerns… the way that that statement read from Putin was 'hey, we're gonna give them [Belarus] Iskanders, you know, and, oh, by the way, they can hold nuclear weapons.'"
The United States is certainly taking the statement seriously and has taken the threat seriously from the very beginning, the official said.
The US strategic forces are always monitoring the situation regarding potential nuclear threats, the official added.
On Saturday, Putin said during a meeting with his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko that Russia is ready to modernize Belarus's fleet of Su-25 attack aircraft and would supply the country with Iskander-M nuclear-capable ballistic missile systems over the next several months.

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One Million US Voters Switched From Democrat to Republican Party in Past Year - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - More than one million registered US voters switched allegiance from the ruling Democrat party, which currently controls the federal government and both chambers of Congress, to the Republican party over the past year, the Associated Press reported on Monday.
In all, more than 1 million voters in 43 of the 50 US states have changed their registration from the Democrats to the Republicans and the movement has been most pronounced in middle class suburbs across the United States, where national elections are usually decided, the report said.
The conclusion is not based on any opinion polls but on the hard data of voter registration records across the United States, the report said.
The shift was occurring strikingly among what it described as suburban swing voters who were crucial to the Democratic victories in the 2016 presidential and congressional elections, the report also said.
The movement is also occurring in cities and small towns and in regions generally identified with both parties, the report added.
The change has been documented across suburbs around Denver in the West, Atlanta in the South to Atlanta and Pittsburgh and Cleveland in the Industrial Northeast as well as in and around Des Moines in the Midwest, according to the report.

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Biden Signs Proclamation to Increase Duties on Certain Articles From Russia

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden signed a proclamation on Monday to increase duties on certain items of imports from Russia, the White House announced.
"NOW, THEREFORE, I, JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR., ...do hereby proclaim as follows: To increase the column 2 rates of duty on imports of certain articles of the Russian Federation as set forth in paragraph 5 of this proclamation, HTSUS heading 9903.90.08 and new U.S. Note 30 to subchapter III of chapter 99 of the HTSUS are provided for in Annex A to this proclamation," the statement said.
Earlier in the day, G7 countries agreed to explore options for using revenues collected by new tariffs on Russian goods to help Ukraine.

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Minnesota Authorities Say Detected First Potential Monkeypox Case

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - The Minnesota Department of Health said in a press release on Monday that the first potential monkeypox case in the state has been detected after a patient was tested over the weekend.

"The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) today reported a presumptive case of monkeypox virus infection in an adult in the Twin Cities area. Initial testing was completed on Saturday at the MDH Public Health Laboratory and confirmatory testing is being done at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta," the release said.

The patient was likely exposed to the virus while traveling abroad and is receiving outpatient care, the release also said.

The MDH in coordination with local health officials is conducting contact tracing to identify individuals who may be at risk due to close contact with the patient, the press release added.

Monkeypox is a rare viral disease that is usually transmitted to people from wild animals and is endemic in some African countries. The disease can be transferred through body fluids, respiratory droplets and other contaminated materials. The disease usually results in fever, rash and swollen lymph nodes.

As of June 24, more than 200 monkeypox cases have been reported in 26 other US states, the release said.

Several US doctors have appealed to the public not to panic because monkeypox is easily detectable and it is a treatable disease.

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Pentagon Believes Russia Did Not Target Residential Building in Kiev - Official

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon believes that Russia did not target a residential building in Kiev, and the building was damaged while Russia was striking a nearby ammunition factory, a senior US defense official said on Monday.

"We are seeing that they are trying to hit targets. As an example, that target that resulted in the civilian casualties over the weekend, that target, those apartments were adjacent to or near a factory that we know constructs munitions for the Ukrainians," the official told a briefing. "So, it does give an indication that in that case, in particular, they were trying to hit a military target."

Earlier in the day, the Russian Defense Ministry said Russia struck the Artem plant in Kiev, which produced ammunition for Ukrainian multiple rocket launchers. The Russian military said that one of Ukraine's anti-aircraft missiles fell on a nearby apartment building, while trying to repel the attack.

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US Weekly Oil Data Delayed 2nd Straight Week by 'Hardware Failure' - Energy Agency

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said on Monday it will not be releasing its weekly oil inventory report for a second straight week due to a hardware failure and will be issuing the data "as soon as possible."
The EIA said it had discovered on June 17 a voltage irregularity that led to hardware failures on two of its main processing servers.
"This issue prevented us from processing and releasing several reports last week, and unfortunately, it continues to affect our ability to release data this week," the EIA said, adding that it has been able to collect data throughout the outage.
"We will continue to provide timely updates as we bring our systems back online and will share a schedule for our product releases as soon as possible," the EIA said.

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Ukrainians Determining Targets to Destroy, Not US - Senior Pentagon Official

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - The Ukrainian forces determine the targets they seek to destroy while the United States is providing the equipment to them amid Russia's special military operation there, a senior Defense Department official said on Monday.
"We are apathetic, if that's the right term in terms of the targeting. What I mean by that is, the Ukrainians are determining the targets that they shoot at. We have provided the systems to the Ukrainians," the official said during a press briefing.
The Ukrainian troops were "pretty amazing" in their training abroad and based on the training they are determining the targets that they need to hit, the official said.
"This is this is their fight and they're doing that," the official added.

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US Supreme Court Rules in Favor of Right to Personal Prayer at School Sporting Events

WASHINGTON, June 27 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court on Monday ruled in favor of the individuals' right to engage in personal religious observance in school settings such as praying after sporting events.
The case in question involved high school football coach Joseph Kennedy being fired because he prayed on the field after the conclusion of his team's practice and matches. The Bremerton School District in the state of Washington fired Kennedy over concerns that allowing him to pray may be interpreted as endorsement of his religious beliefs.

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"Here, a government entity sought to punish an individual for engaging in a brief, quiet, personal religious observance doubly protected by the Free Exercise and Free Speech Clauses of the First Amendment," Justice Neil Gorsuch said in the court's written opinion. "And the only meaningful justification the government offered for its reprisal rested on a mistaken view that it had a duty to ferret out and suppress religious observances even as it allows comparable secular speech. The Constitution neither mandates nor tolerates that kind of discrimination."

Three justices dissented from the majority decision, arguing that the Constitution does not authorize or require public schools to embrace religious conduct by officials. Official-led prayer threatens students' and parents' rights to religious liberty under the First Amendment, the dissenting justices said.

"Today's decision is particularly misguided because it elevates the religious rights of a school official, who voluntarily accepted public employment and the limits that public employment entails, over those of his students, who are required to attend school and who this Court has long recognized are particularly vulnerable and deserving of protection," Justice Sonia Sotomayor said in the written dissenting opinion.

Justice Clarence Thomas noted in a written concurring opinion that the Supreme Court did not decide whether or how public employee's First Amendment rights may be different from those enjoyed by the general public, or what burden a government employer must shoulder to justify restricting employees' religious expression.

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