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6/30/22 Thursday

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Arab Women Call for 'General Strike' Against Femicide After Spate of Murders in Egypt, Jordan, UAE

Arab women are organizing online for what they call a "general strike" on July 6 to protest against femicide and violence against women, following a number of shocking murders in recent weeks.

"The level of violence is extraordinary, so our action must be extraordinary, and our loss, whatever it may be, will not be greater than the loss of women's lives," says the Facebook event for organizing the protest. More than 19,100 people have shown interest in it and more than 3,200 said they were "going" to the event, which is not taking place in any particular location.

In a statement, the Women's Strike group calls especially on women in "feminist, legal, civil, and political groups to alert, stand in solidarity, and prepare for a women's strike that transcends borders."

On July 7, "we women refrain from carrying out our work and tasks (if possible), a women's strike in which we centrally express our solidarity, and we leave the freedom of choice decentralized to any expression of protest, which includes everything," the statement says.

The protests have been motivated by a number of shocking murders across the Arab world recently, including Nayera Ashraf in Egypt, Iman Rashid in Jordan, and Lubna Mansour in the United Arab Emirates. All were young, in their late teens or 20s, and were slain by men in fits of anger.

According to United Nations data, one-third of women globally will experience gender-based violence, including 37% of Arab women, although six in 10 victims refrain from asking for any type of support or protection.

"What it illustrates is that more than ever, the violence that women face across the globe is not based on a specific culture, or a faith or a class, it is purely because they are women," Huda Jawad, the UK-based external co-director of the international Muslim feminist group Musawah, told Middle East Eye on Wednesday.

Indeed, women in a number of countries around the globe have taken to the streets en masse to demonstrate against femicide and violence against women, including in South Africa, the Dominican Republic, and France. In just the past few months, large demonstrations have been staged in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Ciudad Juárez and Mexico City,Mexico, and Istanbul, Turkey, the lattermost provoked by the attempted closure of the group "We Will Stop Femicide Platform Association" on accusations it committed "activity against law and morals."

"There really needs to be an understanding that violence against women and girls is systemic," Jawad explained. "It starts from a spectrum from kind of jokes, further things like harassment, discriminatory laws against employment, education, choices of marriage. Women are not recognized as legal entities in their own right, according to these laws - not in Islam, but according to these laws. When we live in a legal context that says perpetrators are allowed to

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commit violence and harm to women with impunity and with the blessing of the law, it is no surprise that we have these incidents."
Jawad cited the prophet Mohammad as precedent for her position, noting that "his first divine message, an act from Allah, was to stop female infanticide." She said "there are examples where the codification of equality for women according to Islamic practices and customary laws is possible," such as in Morocco and Tunisia, and even recent moves in Saudi Arabia.
"Allah says 'I made you from one soul and I made you equal," she noted. "If we're good enough for God, then we're good enough for man."

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Biden Calls for 'Exception to the Filibuster' to Pass Federal Abortion Law

Long hesitant to support circumventing the US Senate's filibuster rule, US President Joe Biden called for an "exception" to be made in order to pass federal pro-abortion legislation in the wake of the Supreme Court's recent ruling, which has allowed it to become illegal in large parts of the country.
Biden seemed to cave to heavy political pressure on Thursday, demanding Senate Democrats use whatever means at their disposal to pass the Women's Health Protection Act (WHPA).
"I believe we have to codify Roe v. Wade into law," Biden told reporters in Madrid on Thursday, where he is attending a NATO summit. "And the way to do that is to make sure Congress votes to do that. And if the filibuster gets in the way - it's like voting rights - it should be we provide an exception for this. We require an exception for the filibuster for this action."
"We have to codify Roe vs. Wade into law," Biden also wrote on Twitter. "If the filibuster gets in the way, we should provide an exception to the filibuster to deal with the Supreme Court decision."
The WHPA would codify the language of Roe vs. Wade into the US federal law code. That 1973 ruling, which legalized abortion in the US and created a framework for its legal regulation, was overturned by the high court earlier this month in a ruling that provoked nationwide demonstrations and international condemnation.
The bill passed the Democrat-controlled House last September when the first signs arose that Roe might be imperiled by the high court's new conservative majority, but it failed to get through the evenly-split Senateafter several Democrats voted against it in May.
The filibuster rule allows a minority of senators to block the progress of a bill by speaking nonstop and refusing to yield the floor, requiring 60 votes in the 100-person body to end the filibuster. The rule is not part of the US Constitution and was adopted separately by the upper congressional chamber, meaning lawmakers could also remove it themselves if they so desire.
After Biden's inauguration in January 2021, Republicans threatened to filibuster almost every bill in his progressive agenda, including infrastructure and climate change spending bills to the Equality Act, which would ban discrimination against LGBTQ people nationwide, and the WHPA.
Faced with GOP obstinacy, Biden has for more than a year resisted calls in his own party for the

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

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filibuster rule to be ended. His Thursday demand for it to be circumvented is the first time he has publicly backed such a move.

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Photos: DR Congo Inters Remains of Murdered First Leader Patrice Lumumba Returned by Belgium

The remains of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's first democratically-elected leader, Patrice Lumumba, were laid to rest in the country's south on Thursday, 61 years after he was murdered in a coup backed by the United States and DR Congo's former colonial ruler, Belgium.
"Dear national hero, it was on the night of the 27th of November 1960 that you left Kinshasa, then Leopoldville, in total anonymity. Here you are again, 61 years later, under the gentle sun of this 30th of June, the sacred day of our liberation from the colonial yoke," said President of the Democratic Republic of Congo Felix Tshisekedi at the ceremony.
"We will proudly teach to our children the importance of this date so they will also be able to tell their sons and grandsons about the glorious history of our struggle for freedom," he said.
Lumumba was killed in January 1961 by a firing squad, less than a year after securing the independence of DR Congo from Belgium. The country had quickly fractured amid a mutiny by troops backed by the US, UK, and Belgium, who feared Lumumba's left-wing politics and perceived closeness to the Soviet Union would deny them access to the minerals and strategic resources for which Europeans had colonized the Congo River basin decades earlier.
Lumumba's body was desecrated after his death. Gerard Soete, a Belgian police officer who claimed to have dissolved much of Lumumba's corpse in acid and burned the rest, kept the only known remnant of the ousted leader: a gold tooth.
Earlier this month, King Philippe of Belgium visited the DRC and personally delivered the gold tooth to the Congolese government. On Thursday, it lay inside a casket draped in the DRC flag, and will be interred in a mausoleum in the capital of Kinshasa after touring the country for several weeks.
In 2002, the Belgian government formally apologized for its role in Lumumba's assassination.
The Belgian monarchy had gained personal control over the Congo in 1885 as part of a compromise by competing European powers in the country, which is rich in minerals, palm oil, and rubber, among other resources. Under King Leopold II, the brutality of colonial rule reached new heights, and between 10 and 15 million Congolese were killed by Belgian colonial authorities.
Lumumba joined the movement for Congolese independence in 1958 and quickly became a prominent leader, attending the All-African People's Conference in Ghana hosted by that country's Pan-Africanist leader, Kwame Nkrumah. Two years later, the Congolese National Movement declared independence and won the first elections, with Lumumba being appointed prime minister days after the country officially became independent on June 30.
However, less than two weeks later, troops mutinied across the country and Belgium intervened militarily, with most Europeans in the country regrouping in the southern Katanga Province,

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

where much of the country's mineral wealth lay. President Joseph Kasavubu removed Lumumba from office in September, claiming he feared a Soviet intervention, and Lumumba regrouped in the eastern city of Stanleyville (today Kisagani).
Meanwhile, Kasavubu was himself overthrown by the military chief, Mobutu Sese Seko, whose government was then recognized by the United Nations. He remained the country's military ruler for the next 30 years.
Lumumba was arrested in October 1960 and executed in January 1961 amid continued support for his release in the country.

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DPRK Traces Covid Outbreak to 'Alien Things' Touched by Soldier, Student Near South Korean Border

A new report published by the government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) purports to have tracked down the first cases of COVID-19 that entered the country, tracing the outbreak to two young men in the country's south.
The report was published on Friday by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), a state-run news and television station.
"The investigation results showed that several persons coming from the area of Ipho-ri in Kumgang County in Kangwon Province to the capital city in mid-April were in fever," the report said, according to the Seoul-based Yonhap News Agency. "A sharp increase of fever cases was witnessed among their contacts and a group of fevered persons emerged in the area of Ipho-ri for the first time."
The first people to contract the mysterious illness, which was later identified as the Omicron B.A.2 subvariant of COVID-19, were an 18-year-old soldier with the surname Kim and a five-year-old kindergartener with the surname Wi. It notes they came in contact "with alien things" near residential quarters in Ipho-Ri in early April.
"With the confirmation of the epidemic inroads course, the State Emergency Epidemic Prevention Headquarters saw to it that an emergency instruction was issued: an instruction stressing the need to vigilantly deal with alien things coming by wind and other climate phenomena and balloons in the areas along the demarcation line and borders and trace their source to the last, strengthen the all-people supervision and report system, in which anyone notifies of alien things instantly after seeing them, and tighten such anti-epidemic measures as making the emergency anti-epidemic teams strictly remove those things," the report concludes.

Since early 2020, after the COVID-19 outbreak began in neighboring China, the DPRK closed its borders in an effort to keep the virus at bay, although that didn't stop rumors about hidden outbreaks from spreading even faster through the Western press.
However, without a mass vaccination program like China's to complement the travel ban, once the virus did enter the unvaccinated population, it spread like wildfire. Beijing has since rushed

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

millions of masks, vaccines, and other safety equipment to the DPRK, but Pyongyang still refuses help from the US and UN.
As of Wednesday, the state epidemic agency has detected more than 4.7 million cases of COVID-19 in the country of roughly 25.8 million people, and detected 4,730 new cases that day. No information about deaths has been released, but judging by the US' death rate of 0.01%, about 54,500 people in DPRK are likely to have died from the illness, most of them elderly.

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Kinzinger Warns of 'Christian Taliban' After Boebert Critiques US Separation of Church and State
By - Evan Craighead

Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-CO) is being labeled a religious extremist by some after proclaiming in a recent speech that she was "tired of this separation of church and state" in the US. The polarizing lawmaker's comments came alongside the SCOTUS decision to repeal Roe v. Wade – a move many view as an application of traditional religious values.
Boebert's vocal exasperation with the separation of church and state has prompted a rebuke from fellow Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-CA), who likened the Colorado Republican's ideology to that of the Taliban*.
"There is no difference between this and the Taliban," Kinzinger tweeted on Wednesday.
"We must opposed [sic] the Christian Taliban," he added. "I say this as a Christian."
Kinzinger, one of two Republicans on the House select committee probing the January 6 insurrection, clarified in a later tweet that he was specifically speaking out against "Christian nationalism."
"I can't find anywhere Jesus said that the Govt matters to him," Kinzinger tweeted.
Boebert's remarks were made prior to her 64%-36% primary win over challenger and Colorado state Senator Don Coram on Tuesday.
"The reason we had so many overreaching regulations in our nation is because the church complied. The Church is supposed to direct the government, the government is not supposed to direct the church," Boebert said.
"That is not how our founding fathers intended it," she said. "And I'm tired of this separation of church and state junk. That's not in the Constitution, it was in a stinking letter, and it means nothing like what they say it does."
The Colorado Republican has seemingly walked back her statement after accusations that she was advocating for the US to become a theocracy.
"Christian principles have informed and guided lawmakers in America since its founding. The Congresswoman believes that that should continue," Boebert spokesperson Benjamin Stout told Politifact.

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Video: Carnival Magic Cruise Receives Coast Guard Escort After Dozens Involved in Dance Floor Brawl
By - Evan Craighead

The mass incident occurred as the Carnival Magic cruise ship was returning to New York from an eight-day excursion with stops in the Dominican Republic, the Turks and Caicos islands, and a private island in the Bahamas.
Citing authorities, Pix 11 reported that the fight kicked off when two people began fighting on the nightclub dance floor. The one-on-one scuffle expanded into an all-out brawl as other individuals joined in.
Authorities first learned of the incident around 5:21 a.m. local time, according to the NYPD. Security aboard the vessel reportedly phoned the Coast Guard after attempting to de-escalate the 40- to 60-person brawl. A number of reports have suggested that the disagreement stemmed from an alleged threesome that occurred during the 8-day excursion.
"The Coast Guard escorted the cruise ship to Pier 88, confines of the MTN Precinct," read an NYPD statement. "Uniformed personnel and Traffic Agents met the ship and the ship disembarked passengers without further incident."
The Coast Guard confirmed the escort in a statement to PEOPLE, noting that they were called an hour before NYPD.
Footage from the incident has since made its way to social media, showing dozens of individuals fighting and attempting to break up a number of scuffles.
Be advised, the footage below may offend some audiences.
Carnival has insisted that its early morning docking at New York's Pier 88 was scheduled–which comes contrary to the NYPD's initial report of an emergency docking.
"Last night while Carnival Magic was returning to New York, a number of guests were involved in an altercation in a nightclub. Thankfully no serious injuries were reported and our onboard security team intervened," read a company statement.
"The ship arrived as scheduled this morning and shoreside law enforcement authorities were notified and met the ship to interview suspects and witnesses and conduct an investigation."
The jurisdiction of the incident has been questioned, as the ship was in international waters near both New Jersey and New York.

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Ex-UFC Champ Nurmagomedov in Hall of Fame Speech Recalls Paving Way for Russian Fighters

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

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MOSCOW, July 1 (Sputnik) - Former Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) Lightweight Champion and Dagestani native Khabib Nurmagomedov, during an acceptance speech to the UFC's Hall of Fame, recalled paving the way for other fighters from Russia as one of the first athletes from the country to compete in the mixed martial arts promotion.

"I become 16-0 and UFC signed me. I was first fighter from Russia, and a lot of people in my country was watching [sic]," Nurmagomedov said on Thursday evening. "January 2012, I make my debut in the UFC and I finish my opponent, and after that, UFC understand, they have to watch to this area and bring some good fighters from there. I'm very happy I was first guy for a lot of fighters who come after me."

Nurmagomedov achieved an undefeated 29-0 professional MMA record, earning accolades including world combat sambo championships, a UFC championship, ESPN's best MMA fighter of 2021, and now a place in the UFC Hall of Fame.

The UFC ranked Nurmagomedov as the №1 pound-for-pound men's fighter at the time of his official retirement from the sport in 2021. Nurmagomedov is best known for his victory over Conor McGregor in the most-watched UFC event of all time.

Nurmagomedov is the first Russian to hold a modern divisional UFC championship, although Russian Oleg Taktarov also won a UFC tournament in 1995 before the implementation of weight classes.

Nurmagomedov in his acceptance speech also discussed the importance of parents setting a positive example for their children, a value which he attributes learning from his late father, Abdulmanap Nurmagomedov, who himself was awarded the title Merited Coach of Russia for his work training Khabib and other professional Russian fighters.

Nurmagomedov, who himself started actively coaching other Russian fighters upon retirement from competition, predicted three more UFC championships will come from his gym in the next several years.

The athlete has met with Russian President and judo practitioner Vladimir Putin several times throughout his career and maintains the most-followed Russian accounts on social media.

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Assange Appeals UK's Decision to Extradite Him to US – Reports

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has appealed the United Kingdom's decision to extradite him to the United States where he is facing espionage charges, The Wall Street Journal reported on Friday, citing his lawyer.

Assange filed two appeals to the UK high court on Thursday in an effort to prevent his extradition, according to the lawyer.

The new legal dispute can last for months and delay Assange's extradition to the US, the report said.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

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US Plans to Allow Clinical Trials of Pig Organ Transplants - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The US government is considering allowing clinical trials of transplanting pig organs to humans, the Wall Street Journal said on Friday.
The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) hopes that this move will help resolve the serious shortage of donated human organs, the report said, citing a source familiar with the matter.
The specific time when the transplantation trials could begin is unclear, but proposals from researches would be handled on a case-by-case basis, the report said.
Several groups of researchers have recently received FDA guidance on methods of beginning clinical trials, the report said. Some, including those based at the universities of Alabama and Maryland, have said plan to seek FDA approval to launch trials, the report added.
More than 100,000 Americans have been placed on the national waiting list for transplants of kidneys, livers, hearts and other organs, according to the report.

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Russia Expert Gen. Cavoli Takes Over as Head of US European Command

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Gen. Christopher Cavoli assumed the leadership of the US European Command on Friday, the Department of Defense said in a press release.
Cavoli is "the soldier-statesman who this command needs at this moment of challenge," Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said at the change of command ceremony. He described the moment as a "hinge in history" in which Russia's special operation in Ukraine posed "the greatest threat to European security since the end of World War II."
Cavoli has served widely in Europe and speaks Russian, French, and Italian. He is the son of an Italian immigrant who became a US Army officer. He followed his father to many assignments in Europe, attending elementary and high school in Italy. After joining the army himself, he served on the Russia desk for the Joint Staff among many European assignments. Most recently, he led all of the US Army's efforts from Norway down to South Africa, covering more than 100 countries in between. Austin said he was "exceptionally well-prepared to further strengthen NATO's posture" on Europe's eastern flank.
Cavoli replaces Gen. Tod Wolters.

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RPT - Canada Seeks to Accelerate Europe's Transition to Renewables, Hydrogen - Ministry
OTTAWA, July 1 (Sputnik) - Canada is working with its partners to assist European states' transition to renewable energy and the use of hydrogen as it seeks to reduce dependence on Russian oil and gas, Natural Resources Canada told Sputnik.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

Media reported on Wednesday about the ongoing negotiations between Germany, Spain, and Canada, who seek news ways of stepping up energy exports from Canada's East Coast to Europe.
"Canada is working with its international partners as Europe seeks to reduce its dependence on Russian oil and gas in short- to medium-term, while accelerating the transition to renewables and hydrogen," Natural Resources Canada said on Thursday.
The so-called "green transition" includes transferring to such energy sources as hydrogen also liquefied natural gas (LNG).
"We recently established a working group with the European Union on LNG to explore the opportunities for Canada in that space," Natural Resources Canada said.
However, the Canadian government has imposed conditions on new LNG projects, including ensuring that a country's emission targets are not hindered by gas production and liquefaction. Undertakers of new projects must show that exports for Europe from the newly built facilities will replace Russian fossil fuels; oil and gas; and coal as a source of energy.
The Canadian government has said it will require any future project to comply with federal and provincial regulations on energy production and environmental targets.
"Ultimately, project investment decisions will be made by proponents based on their ability to comply with federal and provincial regulatory standards while competing within the global market," Natural Resources Canada said.

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RPT: REVIEW - Canadian Meat Producers Prevail in Bid to Block Mandatory Health Labels

OTTAWA, July 1 (Sputnik) - Canadian cattle producers prevailed in efforts to prevent the government from imposing saturated fat warning labels on meat, a move they warned would severely damage the economy.
On Thursday, Health Canada introduced a new regulation that requires front-of-package (FOP) labels on food products that are high in saturated fat, sugars and/or sodium beginning on July 20. However, the government exempted several meat products, which was welcome news for many producers.
"We're thankful for the many beef producers and Canadians who voiced their concerns and we're pleased that the Government listened to these voices and the science-based evidence demonstrating the health benefits of ground beef," Canadian Cattle Association (CCA) Senior Manager of Government Relations, Jennifer Babcock, told Sputnik.
Before the decision, the CCA in a joint press conference with Les Producteurs de bovins du Quebec, and lawmakers from Bloc Quebecois and the Conservative Party, warned Ottawa that the regulation would hurt both the economy and the reputation of the product.
Health Canada in 2016 proposed labeling these products in a bid to encourage citizens to make healthier choices and to fight obesity and chronic diseases. Unhealthy eating and obesity costs Canada up to C$7.1 billion ($5.5 billion) annually, according to data cited by the health ministry.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

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However, Canada's cattle sector generates C$22 billion in revenue per year and around 347,000 jobs on a national level, according to the CCA.
And, according to Babcock, 90% of Canadians consume ground beef on a weekly basis, which she said is an affordable protein that is full of nutrients such as iron, B12, and zinc, among others.
If the government had failed to provide the exemptions, the province of Quebec would have been hit especially hard. The province's cattle producers sold C$391 million worth of beef products in the year 2020, according to Les Producteurs de Bovin du Quebec.
Ahead of the announcement, Yves Perron, a Bloc Quebecois lawmaker, told Sputnik the labels would harm cattle producers and decrease interest in Canadian beef exports, while achieving nothing in return.

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RPT - Mariupol Refugees Say Ukraine Military Used Them as Shields - Volunteer

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Numerous refugees from the city of Mariupol have confirmed that the Ukrainian military used them as human shields while fighting with the Russian army and in shelling civilians in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), Elena Sirota, a coordinator of a large volunteer group from the Russian city of Taganrog, told Sputnik.
"Every day, we are receiving approximately 1,000 refugees and all of them share how the fascists used them as shields," Sirota said. "They would position vehicles in the yards of buildings and houses then they would push people out of the upper floors of buildings to the basements, install their weapons there, attack the DPR and wrap-up immediately. As a result, civilians would then be in the midst of a counter-attack with the Ukrainian troops hiding behind them."
Many refugees said the Ukrainian extremists arrived in Mariupol well before Russia started its special military operation in the country, and began robbing stores and pharmacies at the end of January and the beginning of February, she said.
Sirota also said the Ukrainian troops went so far as to bomb the theater in Mariupol to score public relations points as the collective West would falsely blame Russia and did.
A member of Sirota's team lived in Mariupol until 2014 when he had to leave because his support for the DPR in the referendum for independence that year effectively put a target on him for the extreme nationalists. The man settled in the south of Russia but then came to Taganrog - located 100 kilometers (62 miles) east of Mariupol - to help the refugees.
"The man said he cried during the removal of debris from the bombed theater as saw a 22-year-old man who miraculously survived. The horrific tactic the Ukrainian fascists used was to 'invite' people to the bomb shelter and then board them up from the outside and shoot at any who tried to escape. The Russian soldiers found anybody in the underground shelter cellars but did find 12 dead people near the entrance," Sirota said.
The men also said he witnessed how the Ukrainian troops used another tactic by firing indiscriminately from the now infamous Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, Sirota said.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

Other refugees recalled the Ukrainian troops placing their weapons right in front of the local shopping center where civilians had sheltered. The medical workers who tried to care for the sick civilians and children asked the military to leave, but were told "there are no sick people and children in war."

Sirota noted that the ensuing terror and subsequent chaos exacted a heavy psychological toll on the residents turned refugees. She recalled an elderly lady maximally saddened because she thought her daughter and granddaughter were killed in the shelling. However, volunteer enthusiasts who met the woman in Taganrog used social media and found the two members of her family in the Czech Republic where they escaped seeking safety and the elderly woman since re-unified her daughter and granddaughter.

Sirota explained she has been working as a volunteer assisting refugees since the opening of the humanitarian corridor as her Orthodox Christian duty was to help as much as possible the large numbers of people in distress.

Sirota also said that volunteers work in three shifts around the clock. During the first week, Sirota said she saw more than 1,000 wounded civilians, including a 12-year-old girl who was blown up by a mine and her chest was torn off.

"We met people at a neutral territory - at Russia's customs post and in the volunteer group's big camp right behind it. Our first goal is to meet the refugees, provide food, warmth, medical support, listen and console them as well as re-assure them by informing them what will happen next," she said.

Sirota said many of the refugees did not know that humanitarian corridors have been opened because the Ukrainian authorities hid or did not give relevant information and tried to scare the populace by telling outrageous made-up stories about concentration camps in Russia.

"We must tell the people about their prospects, assure them they are not going to a concentration camp and we will not confiscate their documents," Sirota said.

While some of the refugees opted to go to a number of cities and regions in Russia, including in Nizhny Novgorod, Yaroslavl, Kazan, Saransk, Kaluga, several hundreds of them decided to stay in Taganrog to be closer to home, she said.

Sirota said wheelchairs and strollers for children are in great demand, and chiefs, many of whom are working in prestigious restaurants, are now cooking huge quantities of food that include 700 liters of soup with 30 kilos of chicken and vegetables every day.

"We have buckwheat and stew at our field kitchen, we are making salads, buying medications," Sirota said. "An ER team is working at our post, but they have only specific drugs, while people need valerian, medications for blood pressure or thyroid. We even opened a small pharmacy and it costs about 20,000 rubles [$350] per day. We also need diapers for children and for adults."

Special humanitarian teams are delivering food and other aid to parts of Mariupol just near the Azovstal plant, where some 2,500 neo-Nazi troops of the Azov battalion and other extremist units hid inside. Civilians, who were trapped in the area, spend weeks in basements without electricity, gas and water. However, volunteers as well as Orthodox Christian clergy are now providing them with food as well as stoves and gas tanks for cooking.

"People experienced real hell," Elena said, acknowledging that she and the volunteers have been affected by a multitude of emotions but could not show the refugees to avoid further distress. "When it gets really bad, I go outside, cry somewhere behind a tent, then come back –

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

smile again and try to solve problems, tell people that we love them and are ready to help in any situation."
Being an Orthodox Christian, having faith, certainly helps a great deal whether even the seemingly toughest situations, she said, adding that almost all volunteers are believers and belong to different denominations.
"We are sure that it is an imperative to help every person, despite their nationality, faith and politics. If God is with us, we have nothing to fear," Sirota added.

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Pentagon Reviewing Proposals From Firms to Develop New Weapons to Help Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Defense is reviewing 1,300 proposals from 800 companies to develop new weapons and commercial capabilities that they may be able to produce in order to help Ukraine amid Russia's special military operation, CNN reported citing a US defense official.
The proposals include air defense, anti-armor, anti-tank, anti-personnel, coastal defense, drones, secure communications, and counter battery, which are all key needs Ukraine has identified, the report said on Thursday.
The Pentagon is expected to decide on which proposals to pursue in the coming weeks, the report said.
The United States intends to improve the capacity of the US industrial base in order to support Ukraine's needs should the conflict continue for a long time, the report said.
Earlier this year, US defense officials met with major US defense firms to discuss the capability of the US industrial base to support Ukraine's military needs should the conflict continue for a long time. Congress also approved a $40 billion package to provide assistance to Ukraine.
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. The Russian Ministry of Defense said the operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger.

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REVIEW - Canadian Meat Producers Prevail in Bid to Block Mandatory Health Labels

OTTAWA, July 1 (Sputnik) - Canadian cattle producers prevailed in efforts to prevent the government from imposing saturated fat warning labels on meat, a move they warned would severely damage the economy.

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On Thursday, Health Canada introduced a new regulation that requires front-of-package (FOP) labels on food products that are high in saturated fat, sugars and/or sodium beginning on July 20. However, the government exempted several meat products, which was welcome news for many producers.

"We're thankful for the many beef producers and Canadians who voiced their concerns and we're pleased that the Government listened to these voices and the science-based evidence demonstrating the health benefits of ground beef," Canadian Cattle Association (CCA) Senior Manager of Government Relations, Jennifer Babcock, told Sputnik.

Before the decision, the CCA in a joint press conference with Les Producteurs de bovins du Quebec, and lawmakers from Bloc Quebecois and the Conservative Party, warned Ottawa that the regulation would hurt both the economy and the reputation of the product.

Health Canada in 2016 proposed labeling these products in a bid to encourage citizens to make healthier choices and to fight obesity and chronic diseases. Unhealthy eating and obesity costs Canada up to C$7.1 billion ($5.5 billion) annually, according to data cited by the health ministry. However, Canada's cattle sector generates C$22 billion in revenue per year and around 347,000 jobs on a national level, according to the CCA.

And, according to Babcock, 90% of Canadians consume ground beef on a weekly basis, which she said is an affordable protein that is full of nutrients such as iron, B12, and zinc, among others.

If the government had failed to provide the exemptions, the province of Quebec would have been hit especially hard. The province's cattle producers sold C$391 million worth of beef products in the year 2020, according to Les Producteurs de Bovin du Quebec.

Ahead of the announcement, Yves Perron, a Bloc Quebecois lawmaker, told Sputnik the labels would harm cattle producers and decrease interest in Canadian beef exports, while achieving nothing in return.

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FBI Adds Bulgarian National to 10 Most Wanted List, Offers $100,000 Reward for Capture

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The FBI has added Bulgarian National Ruja Ignatova to its Ten Most Wanted Fugitive list for participating in multi-billion dollar fraud and offered $100,000 for information that would lead to her capture, the FBI announced in a release.

"The FBI New York, along with the United States Attorney's Office in the Southern District of New York and the IRS Criminal Investigation Newark Field Office, named Ruja Ignatova (a.k.a. 'Cryptoqueen') to the FBI Ten Most Wanted Fugitive list for allegedly defrauding investors of billions of dollars," the release said on Thursday. "The FBI is offering a reward of up to $100,000 for information leading to her arrest."

The FBI said Ignatova has been indicated by a federal grand jury and the US District Court for Southern District of New York issued a warrant for her arrest in October 2017.

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"In February 2018, a superseding indictment was issued charging Ignatova with one count each of Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud; Wire Fraud; Conspiracy to Commit Money Laundering; Conspiracy to Commit Securities Fraud; and Securities Fraud," the release said.
The FBI said Ignatova founded OneCoin Ltd., a Bulgaria-based company that marketed an alleged cryptocurrency, but to execute the scheme she made false statements and representations to individuals in order to solicit investments.
"She allegedly instructed victims to transmit investment funds to OneCoin accounts in order to purchase OneCoin packages, causing victims to send wire transfers representing these investments," the release said
The FBI also said OneCoin is believed to have defrauded victims out of more than $4 billion. Ignatova may travel on a German passport to the United Arab Emirates, Bulgaria, Germany, Russia, Greece and/or countries in Eastern Europe, the FBI added.

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US Offers $10Mln Reward for Info on Foreign Election Interference Operations - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is offering $10 million for any information about foreign interference operations in US elections, the Department of State said in a press release.
"The US Department of State's Rewards for Justice (RFJ) program, which is administered by the Diplomatic Security Service, is offering a reward of up to $10 million for information on foreign interference in US elections," the State Department said in the release on Thursday.
The United States is specifically seeking information that leads to the identification or location of any foreign person or foreign entity that is knowingly engaged in foreign election interference, the release said.
The State Department describes foreign election interference as certain conduct that includes a foreign person that violates federal criminal, voting rights, or campaign finance law. The State Department also warns that foreign election interference can be conducted by agents acting on behalf of a foreign government or criminal enterprise.
In addition, the State Department also warns that foreign election interference may be covert, fraudulent, deceptive, and could include undermining confidence in results.

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Officials Swear in Ketanji Brown Jackson as US Supreme Court Associate Justice

(Updates with details in paras 5-7)

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WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Chief Justice John Roberts and outgoing Associate Justice Stephen Breyer swore in Ketanji Brown Jackson as an associate justice of the US Supreme Court, following Breyer's decision to retire.

Roberts and Breyer on Thursday administered constitutional and judicial oaths to Jackson, officially making her the first black woman to serve as a Supreme Court justice.

Breyer, 83, retired at noon on Thursday, the Supreme Court's final opinion issuance day for the summer, after almost 28 years of service as an associate justice.

Jackson, who previously served on the Washington, DC Court of Appeals, had her nomination confirmed by the US Senate in April, fulfilling a campaign promise by President Joe Biden to appoint the first black woman to the bench.

Biden issued a statement calling the swearing in ceremony "historic" and praised Jackson's representation on the court as a role model for young, black girls in the United States.

"The Supreme Court just gained a colleague with a world-class intellect, the dignified temperament the American people expect of a justice, and the strongest credentials imaginable," the statement said.

Biden also praised Breyer and his career, calling him an "extraordinarily brilliant jurist" and thanking him for his years of service.

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After 6-Month Winning Streak, Oil Sees Monthly Loss in June on Recession Fears

NEW YORK, July 1 (Sputnik) - Oil markets posted their first monthly loss in seven, as fears of a US recession drove benchmark crude prices down sharply in June after non-stop gains from the end of November.

Brent, the global benchmark for crude, finished trading on its most-active September contract at $109.03 per barrel on Thursday. While that was still higher from Brent's first-quarter close of $107.91, it was lower by some 4% on the day and more than 11% on the month.

US crude's West Texas Intermediate benchmark, meanwhile, settled at $105.76 a barrel - also down about 4% on the day and about 8% down for June.

It was oil's first and biggest monthly drop since November's loss of 16% for Brent and 20% for WTI.

US gross domestic product likely contracted by an estimated 1% in the second quarter of 2022, the Atlanta Federal Reserve said on Thursday. It was the first official forecast of recession by a division of the central bank, after the 1.6% economic decline in the first quarter.

Crude prices also fell after producer cartel OPEC+ and its allies confirmed a previously-agreed production of nearly 650,000 barrels per day for July and August - up more than 50% from June. The Saudi-led and Russia-supported alliance of 23 oil producers said the higher output will be necessary to meet demand projected over the next two months from people making up for road and air travel limited in the past two summers by the coronavirus pandemic.

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Blinken, Palestine's Abbas Discuss Biden Upcoming Trip to Middle East - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinlken spoke by telephone with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to discuss President Joe Biden's trip to the Middle East and the ongoing investigation into the killing of Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.
"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to discuss President Biden's upcoming trip to the Middle East," Price said in a press release said on Thursday. "The Secretary also emphasized the importance of thorough, transparent, and impartial investigations into the circumstances of Shireen Abu Akleh's killing."

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Canada Seeks to Accelerate Europe's Transition to Renewables, Hydrogen - Ministry

OTTAWA, July 1 (Sputnik) - Canada is working with its partners to assist European states' transition to renewable energy and the use of hydrogen as it seeks to reduce dependence on Russian oil and gas, Natural Resources Canada told Sputnik.
Media reported on Wednesday about the ongoing negotiations between Germany, Spain, and Canada, who seek news ways of stepping up energy exports from Canada's East Coast to Europe.
"Canada is working with its international partners as Europe seeks to reduce its dependence on Russian oil and gas in short- to medium-term, while accelerating the transition to renewables and hydrogen," Natural Resources Canada said on Thursday.
The so-called "green transition" includes transferring to such energy sources as hydrogen also liquefied natural gas (LNG).
"We recently established a working group with the European Union on LNG to explore the opportunities for Canada in that space," Natural Resources Canada said.
However, the Canadian government has imposed conditions on new LNG projects, including ensuring that a country's emission targets are not hindered by gas production and liquefaction. Undertakers of new projects must show that exports for Europe from the newly built facilities will replace Russian fossil fuels; oil and gas; and coal as a source of energy.
The Canadian government has said it will require any future project to comply with federal and provincial regulations on energy production and environmental targets.
"Ultimately, project investment decisions will be made by proponents based on their ability to comply with federal and provincial regulatory standards while competing within the global market," Natural Resources Canada said.

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Atlanta Fed Lowers 2nd Quarter GDP Forecast to -1%, Signaling US Economy in Recession

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - US gross domestic product fell by an estimated 1% in the second quarter of 2022, the Atlanta Federal Reserve said in the first official forecast of recession by a division of the central bank following the 1.6% economic decline in the first quarter.

"The GDPNow model estimate for real GDP growth (seasonally adjusted annual rate) in the second quarter of 2022 is -1.0 percent on June 30, down from 0.3 percent on June 27," the Atlanta Fed said in a statement on Thursday.

Two straight quarters of GDP decline technically place any economy in a recession.

US GDP contracted by 3.5% in 2020, in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic. The following year, it posted a growth of 5.7%, its strongest in four decades, as the economy rebounded forcefully from business lockdowns and other restrictions imposed during the height of the pandemic. Since the start of 2022, inflation growing at its fastest pace in 40 years has negatively impacted GDP.

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US Officials Fail to Secure Release of American During Venezuela Visit - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - A US delegation that traveled to Venezuela earlier this week failed to secure emergency medical evacuation of detained US citizen Matthew Heath amid concerns that he may commit suicide, Heath's aunt Trudy Rutherford said.

"Despite the best efforts of Roger Carstens, the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, the US delegation that visited Caracas this week was not able to secure any emergency medical evacuation for Matthew," Rutherford said in a statement on Thursday.

Rutherford added that they believe Heath's physical and mental health continue to be at risk and that he may attempt a suicide.

Heath's family is urging the US government to continue high-level engagement with the Venezuelan government in order to secure the release of Heath and other US citizens detained in Venezuela.

Heath, a Marine veteran, was arrested in Venezuela on September 2020 and charged with offenses related to terrorism and arms trafficking. The Venezuelan authorities have claimed Heath was in possession of a rocket launcher, an Uzi sub-machine gun, C4 explosives and pictures of an oil refinery in Venezuela.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) -

BIDEN'S NEWS CONFERENCE IN MADRID
* The United States intends to support Ukraine as long as it takes, President Joe Biden said on Thursday
* Biden said that he needs Congressional approval to sell F-16 jets to Turkey, and expressed hope that the White House could get it.
* Biden said that the oil price cap will allow Russia to make profit but not at "exorbitant" prices.
* G7 leaders tasked their teams with working on details of the price cap on Russian oil, Biden said.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS
* Indonesian President Joko Widodo said on Thursday that he conveyed a message from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Russian President Vladimir Putin.
* Ukraine has decided to break diplomatic relations with Syria after Damascus recognized the independence of the Donbas Republics, the Foreign Ministry said.
* The United States will announce over $800 million in additional assistance to Ukraine, including air defenses, in the coming days, Biden said.

GLOBAL FOOD MARKETS
* The Russian government has decided to temporarily restrict the export of rice, rice cereals and feed amino acids, the Agriculture Ministry said on Thursday.
* A Russian vessel carrying 7,000 tons of grain from the Ukrainian port Berdyansk has nothing to do with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' efforts to broker a deal to get grain and fertilizer out of Ukraine, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.
* Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Thursday he was planning to hold talks on the "grain corridor" with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskyy within the week.

IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL
* Russia sees no alternative to the 2016 Iran nuclear deal and supports efforts to restore it, Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy told a UNSC meeting on Thursday.
* The United States believes Iran should drop demands that go beyond the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action if it wants to the revive the 2016 nuclear deal, Deputy Permanent Representative Richard Mills said.
* Iran said that the E3 countries - comprising France, Germany and the United Kingdom - disregarded the promises related to the JCPOA and left Tehran with no option but to put a break on its commitments to the accord, the Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations Majid Takht-Ravanchi said.

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* The United Nations calls on the United States to lift sanctions on Iran as outlined in the 2016 nuclear deal and extend oil trade waivers, Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo said.

SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA
* The United States has blocked more than $1 billion in assets held by Russian businessman Suleiman Kerimov in the US-based Heritage Trust, the Department of the Treasury said in a pess release on Thursday.
* The European Union is suffering from sanctions imposed by the United States against Russia much more than Washington itself, which means that the US probably wants to weaken the bloc as its competitor as well, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

US SUPREME COURT
* The US Supreme Court on Thursday issued a decision narrowing the authority of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, ruling that such powers must rest with Congress or be clearly delegated by lawmakers to an agency.
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Atlanta Fed Says US GDP Fell 1% in 2nd Quarter in First Official Recession Forecast
Sputnik

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US to Show Support for Detainees in Cuba Amid Sentencing for 2021 Riots - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - The United States will work with its allies to show support for what it believes are unjustly detained individuals in Cuba who were given harsh prison sentences for participating in last year's anti-government protests, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Thursday.
"The United States is deeply concerned by the ongoing harsh sentencing of political protesters in Cuba, and we will continue to work with our partners around the world to demonstrate our collective support for the rights of Cubans who are unjustly detained," Price said in a press release. "Cuban judges have sentenced over 550 Cuban protesters to more than 4,000 combined years. Protesters are sentenced to prison, forced labor, or other punitive measures. These numbers include more than 20 protesters arrested as minors."
On July 11, 2021, protests broke out in Cuba for the first time in years in which protesters made demands for holding free elections and alleviating poverty, among others. Government supporters then gathered in great numbers and held counter rallies.
The Cuban authorities accused the United States of precipitating the unrest, but Washington dismissed the allegations as false, saying the protests in Cuba would sway the future US policy toward the island nation.
Meanwhile, the Cuban government continues to hold in detention more than 700 protesters who took to the streets nearly one year ago to criticize the government's failure to respect their human rights and fundamental freedoms, Price said.

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"Hundreds of protesters languish in jails on arbitrary charges because they criticized the regime and its leaders," he said. "Despite video and photographic evidence to the contrary, the Cuban government attempts to justify their detentions, prosecutions, and draconian sentences by falsely claiming the protests were largely violent. Today's class of political prisoners are made up of Cubans from across Cuba and from all walks of life."
Price said the Cuban authorities actions seek to prevent the citizens from asserting their rights and create fear of reprisals.
"Cubans have a right to freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly under Cuba's constitution and as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," he said. "The Cuban government must allow its people to freely express their hopes and aspirations, rather than rule through fear and intimidation."

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US Capitol Police Says Arrested 181 Abortion Rights Activists for Blocking Streets

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - The US Capitol Police said on Thursday that it has arrested 181 people who were obstructing traffic at a street intersection near the Supreme Court building while protesting against the court's ruling on abortions.
"We arrested 181 people for crowding, obstructing or incommoding ... for blocking the intersection of Constitution Avenue, NE and First Street, NE. The intersection reopened at approximately 1:20 p.m.," the US Capitol Police said via Twitter.
The Capitol Police pointed out that they had given at least three warnings before they started arresting protesters for illegally blocking the intersection.
Earlier in June, the US Supreme Court overturned the precedent established in the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision and ruled that states may regulate the practice of abortion.
Some US states already have so-called "trigger laws" that would outlaw or restrict the practice of abortion but allow exceptions such as in cases when the life of the mother is in danger.

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IMF Approves $183Mln to Help Jordan Cope With Global Economic Challenges - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Board has approved $183 million to help Jordan deal with global economic challenges caused by inflation, the IMF said on Thursday.
"The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) today completed the 2022 Article IV Consultation for Jordan and the Fourth Review Under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF)," the IMF said in a press release. "The completion of the review will make SDR 137.24 million (about US$183 million) immediately available."

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The new funding brings the IMF's total contribution to Jordan to $1.3 billion since 2020, the release said.
The IMF is helping Jordan deal with higher financing needs brought on by inflation and other global financial challenges, especially needed as it deals with hosting 1.3 million Syrian refugees, the release added.
The IMF also pointed out that Jordan faces very high unemployment levels among its young. However, Jordan has implemented reforms to increase the government's revenues by reducing tax evasion and closing tax loopholes, according to the release.

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Florida Judge Declares State Law Banning Abortions at 15 Weeks Unconstitutional - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - A judge in Florida declared the state's new law prohibiting abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy to be unconstitutional and blocked it from taking effect starting Friday, CNN reported.
In his verbal ruling, Second Judicial Circuit Court Judge John Cooper stated that he was going to temporarily block a law that would ban abortions in Florida after some state abortion providers challenged the measure in the court, the report said.
Florida Governor Ron DeSantis' office said in a statement that the state is planning to appeal the ruling.
Earlier in June, the US Supreme Court overturned the precedent established in the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision and ruled that states may regulate the practice of abortion.
Some US states already have so-called "trigger laws" that would outlaw or restrict the practice of abortion but allow exceptions such as in cases when the life of the mother is in danger.

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Monkeypox Cases in Canada Increase to 278 - Health Authority
OTTAWA, June 30 (Sputnik) - Canada's Health Authority on Thursday reported 110 new monkeypox cases since the last nationwide update on June 16 and said the total number now stands at 278.
"In Canada, as of June 29th, 2022, 278 confirmed cases of monkeypox have been reported nationally, including 202 from Quebec, 67 from Ontario, 5 from Alberta and 4 from British Columbia," Canada's Chief Public Health Officer Theresa Tam said via Twitter.
Although the virus does not naturally target a specific group of individuals, most cases have been detected among sexually active homosexual males 20-69 years of age, Tam said.
As of June 22nd, there were more than 3,400 actives monkeypox cases reported in 50 countries.

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Monkeypox is a zoonotic disease transmitted from animals to humans and is endemic in some African countries. The pathogen comes from the same family of viruses that causes smallpox, which was eradicated in 1980.
The first outbreak of monkeypox in non-endemic countries was reported in May.

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US Distributes Additional $92Mln to Victims in FIFA Corruption Case - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - The United States has distributed an additional $92 million to compensate the victims in the recent International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) corruption case, the US Department of Justice said on Thursday.
"The Department of Justice announced today a further distribution of approximately $92 million in compensation for losses suffered by FIFA, the world organizing body of soccer; CONCACAF, the confederation responsible for soccer governance in North and Central America, among other jurisdictions; CONMEBOL, the confederation responsible for soccer governance in South America; and various constituent national soccer federations (collectively, the "Victims")," the Justice Department said in a press release.
The funds, which were set aside following the Justice Department's $201 million penalty fee in August 2021, were forfeited to the US government following a long-running investigation and prosecution of corrupt practices in international football, the release said.
To date, the prosecutions have resulted in charges against more than 50 individuals and corporate defendants from more than 20 countries, primarily in connection with the offer and receipt of bribes paid by sports marketing companies to soccer officials in exchange for the media and marketing rights to various soccer tournaments and events the release added.
The bribe payments were laundered to hide the illicit activity as well, according to the release.

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US Blocks Over $1Bln in Assets Linked to Russian Businessman Kerimov - Treasury
(Updates with details in paras 3-6)
WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - The United States has blocked more than $1 billion in assets held by Russian businessman Suleiman Kerimov in the US-based Heritage Trust, the Department of the Treasury said in a press release on Thursday.
"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced it has issued a Notification of Blocked Property to Heritage Trust, a Delaware-based trust in which OFAC-designated Russian oligarch Suleiman Abusaidovich Kerimov holds a property interest," the release said. "As of June 30, 2022, Heritage Trust holds assets valued at over $1 billion. This action ensures that those assets remain blocked and inaccessible to Kerimov."

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Heritage Trust was created in 2017 for the purpose of holding and managing Kerimov's US-based assets, the release said.
The Treasury Department formally notified the Heritage Trust that it is subject to the same prohibitions placed on Kerimov that require them to ban all transactions made by a US person or that involve any links to property belonging to Kerimov within the United States, the release said.
The prohibitions also ban the making of any contribution or provision of funds, goods or services for Kerimov's benefit, the release said.
Kerimov is a member of the Federation Council of Russia's Federal Assembly and was designated by the US government in April, the release added.

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New York City to Offer Paxlovid Antiviral Drug at Mobile COVID-19 Testing Sites - Reports
WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - New York City is launching a program to provide free courses of the antiviral treatment Paxlovid to people who test positive for COVID-19 at mobile screening units, The New York Times reported on Thursday.
New York City Mayor Eric Adams is expected to announce the so-called "Test to Treat" program during an event alongside White House COVID-19 chief Ashish Jha, the report said.
The program, the first of its kind in the United States, attaches clinicians to three mobile testing units in the city who are able to prescribe Paxlovid to those who need it, according to the report.
The number of sites is set to expand to over 30 by the end of July, the report also said.
The initial sites will be located away from the city center, in working class areas of Manhattan, Queens and East Bronx, the report added.
"By getting lifesaving medications into the hands of New Yorkers minutes after they test positive, we are once again leading the nation to deliver accessible care to those who need it," Adams was quoted in the report as saying in a statement.
Paxlovid, created by pharmaceutical company Pfizer, is approved for emergency use in the treatment of mild-to-moderate COVID-19 cases in adults and pediatric patients 12 years of age and over who weigh at least 88 pounds.
As of June 30, over 546.9 million people have been infected with COVID-19 worldwide, with over 6.3 million deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University.

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UPDATE - UN Providing $1Mln to Aid Afghans Affected by Earthquake in Paktika Province - Spokesman
(Updates with details in para 4, modifies headline)

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UNITED NATIONS, June 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations will allocate $1 million to provide housing to Afghans affected by the recent earthquake that left at least 1,000 people dead and many others wounded, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.
"Quick update from Afghanistan where the UN Refugee Agency and the UN Development Program signed an agreement to provide a million dollars for housing and infrastructure costs in Paktika province," Dujarric said during a press briefing.
The money will also go toward funding various other projects such as solar lighting, water systems, roads, and bridges damaged by the earthquake, Dujarric said.
The funding will help improve Afghans' access to sustainable housing and is part of the UN's overall humanitarian response to the earthquake, Dujarric said.
Last week, a powerful 6.1 magnitude earthquake struck eastern Afghanistan, leaving more than 1,000 people dead and 1,500 others injured. The provinces of Paktika and Khost bordering Pakistan were among the areas worst affected by the earthquake.
Taliban (under UN sanctions over terrorism) leader Hibatullah Akhundzada has urged the international community and humanitarian organizations to help the Afghan government deal with the consequences of the earthquake.

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Blinken, Kenyan President Discuss Ongoing Violence in DRC - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has discussed the ongoing violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) with Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Thursday.
"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken called Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta today to discuss the government of Kenya's efforts to address the continued violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)," Price said in a press release.
Blinken welcomed the Nairobi Process, which has brought together the leaders of the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, South Sudan, and Tanzania, he said.
"The Secretary noted these heads of state meetings are instrumental for facilitating the de-escalation of regional tensions, and in particular between the DRC and Rwanda," Price said.
Blinken also stressed the importance of free and fair Kenyan elections, the spokesperson added.
He also engaged on other regional issues, including US efforts to support African countries suffering from food insecurity due to the historic drought and the crisis in Ukraine, Price added.
According to the the World Health Organization, over 80 million people in eastern Africa are facing a lack of food and clean water. With that in mind, the organization will establish an aid-providing hub in Nairobi.
The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said four consecutive rainless periods have affected the Horn of Africa states, especially Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya, making them face what is believed to be "the most prolonged drought in recent history" and consequent lack of food and water.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

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Record Low 38% of US Adults 'Extremely Proud' to Be American - Gallup

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - A record low 38 percent of adults polled in the United States say they are extremely proud to be American, a Gallup survey revealed on Thursday.
"The 38% of US adults who say they are 'extremely proud' to be American is the lowest in Gallup's trend, which began in 2001," the pollster said in a press release accompanying the survey.
The result marks the historical low for "extremely proud" by 4 points, but is well below the average of 55%, the release added.
The poll also found 27% of Americans are "very proud," 22% moderately, 9% only a little, and 4% not at all.
The highest readings followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks, when America was awash in patriotism, Gallup said. But researchers note that extreme national pride in the US has been trending downward since 2015.
In terms of partisan breakdown, the pollsters found record-low national pride among Republicans and independents, with Republicans' extreme national pride currently at its lowest point in the trend at 58 percent.
Likewise, independents' extreme pride, which stands at 34 percent, is also the lowest on record for this category. And all three major party groups show double-digit declines in pride versus 2013, with Democrats' 30-point decline the largest.
The current 32-point gap in Democratic versus Republican pride is larger than the historical average though smaller than the record-high 54-point gap in 2019, according to the release.
All groups have become less inclined to say they are proud of their country in recent years, potentially due to deepening political divisions, gridlock in Washington, racial tensions, COVID-19, and inflation, Gallup concluded.

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Mariupol Refugees Say Ukraine Military Used Them as Shields - Volunteer

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - Numerous refugees from the city of Mariupol have confirmed that the Ukrainian military used them as human shields while fighting with the Russian army and in shelling civilians in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), Elena Sirota, a coordinator of a large volunteer group from the Russian city of Taganrog, told Sputnik.
"Every day, we are receiving approximately 1,000 refugees and all of them share how the fascists used them as shields," Sirota said. "They would position vehicles in the yards of buildings and houses then they would push people out of the upper floors of buildings to the

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

basements, install their weapons there, attack the DPR and wrap-up immediately. As a result, civilians would then be in the midst of a counter-attack with the Ukrainian troops hiding behind them."

Many refugees said the Ukrainian extremists arrived in Mariupol well before Russia started its special military operation in the country, and began robbing stores and pharmacies at the end of January and the beginning of February, she said.

Sirota also said the Ukrainian troops went so far as to bomb the theater in Mariupol to score public relations points as the collective West would falsely blame Russia and did.

A member of Sirota's team lived in Mariupol until 2014 when he had to leave because his support for the DPR in the referendum for independence that year effectively put a target on him for the extreme nationalists. The man settled in the south of Russia but then came to Taganrog - located 100 kilometers (62 miles) east of Mariupol - to help the refugees.

"The man said he cried during the removal of debris from the bombed theater as saw a 22-year-old man who miraculously survived. The horrific tactic the Ukrainian fascists used was to 'invite' people to the bomb shelter and then board them up from the outside and shoot at any who tried to escape. The Russian soldiers found anybody in the underground shelter cellars but did find 12 dead people near the entrance," Sirota said.

The men also said he witnessed how the Ukrainian troops used another tactic by firing indiscriminately from the now infamous Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, Sirota said.

Other refugees recalled the Ukrainian troops placing their weapons right in front of the local shopping center where civilians had sheltered. The medical workers who tried to care for the sick civilians and children asked the military to leave, but were told "there are no sick people and children in war."

Sirota noted that the ensuing terror and subsequent chaos exacted a heavy psychological toll on the residents turned refugees. She recalled an elderly lady maximally saddened because she thought her daughter and granddaughter were killed in the shelling. However, volunteer enthusiasts who met the woman in Taganrog used social media and found the two members of her family in the Czech Republic where they escaped seeking safety and the elderly woman since re-unified her daughter and granddaughter.

Sirota explained she has been working as a volunteer assisting refugees since the opening of the humanitarian corridor as her Orthodox Christian duty was to help as much as possible the large numbers of people in distress.

Sirota also said that volunteers work in three shifts around the clock. During the first week, Sirota said she saw more than 1,000 wounded civilians, including a 12-year-old girl who was blown up by a mine and her chest was torn off.

"We met people at a neutral territory - at Russia's customs post and in the volunteer group's big camp right behind it. Our first goal is to meet the refugees, provide food, warmth, medical support, listen and console them as well as re-assure them by informing them what will happen next," she said.

Sirota said many of the refugees did not know that humanitarian corridors have been opened because the Ukrainian authorities hid or did not give relevant information and tried to scare the populace by telling outrageous made-up stories about concentration camps in Russia.

"We must tell the people about their prospects, assure them they are not going to a concentration camp and we will not confiscate their documents," Sirota said.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

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While some of the refugees opted to go to a number of cities and regions in Russia, including in Nizhny Novgorod, Yaroslavl, Kazan, Saransk, Kaluga, several hundreds of them decided to stay in Taganrog to be closer to home, she said.

Sirota said wheelchairs and strollers for children are in great demand, and chiefs, many of whom are working in prestigious restaurants, are now cooking huge quantities of food that include 700 liters of soup with 30 kilos of chicken and vegetables every day.

"We have buckwheat and stew at our field kitchen, we are making salads, buying medications," Sirota said. "An ER team is working at our post, but they have only specific drugs, while people need valerian, medications for blood pressure or thyroid. We even opened a small pharmacy and it costs about 20,000 rubles [$350] per day. We also need diapers for children and for adults."

Special humanitarian teams are delivering food and other aid to parts of Mariupol just near the Azovstal plant, where some 2,500 neo-Nazi troops of the Azov battalion and other extremist units hid inside. Civilians, who were trapped in the area, spend weeks in basements without electricity, gas and water. However, volunteers as well as Orthodox Christian clergy are now providing them with food as well as stoves and gas tanks for cooking.

"People experienced real hell," Elena said, acknowledging that she and the volunteers have been affected by a multitude of emotions but could not show the refugees to avoid further distress. "When it gets really bad, I go outside, cry somewhere behind a tent, then come back – smile again and try to solve problems, tell people that we love them and are ready to help in any situation."

Being an Orthodox Christian, having faith, certainly helps a great deal whether even the seemingly toughest situations, she said, adding that almost all volunteers are believers and belong to different denominations.

"We are sure that it is an imperative to help every person, despite their nationality, faith and politics. If God is with us, we have nothing to fear," Sirota added.

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US Supreme Court Narrows EPA Authority to Regulate Greenhouse Gas Emissions

(Updates with more details in paras 9-11)

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court on Thursday issued a decision narrowing the authority of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, ruling that such powers must rest with Congress or be clearly delegated by lawmakers to an agency.

“Capping carbon dioxide emissions at a level that will force a nationwide transition away from the use of coal to generate electricity may be a sensible ‘solution to the crisis of the day,’” Chief Justice John Roberts said in the court’s majority opinion. “But it is not plausible that Congress gave EPA the authority to adopt on its own such a regulatory scheme. … A decision of such magnitude and consequence rests with Congress itself, or an agency acting pursuant to a clear delegation from that representative body.”

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

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The case brought before the Supreme Court involved challenges to the EPA's authority under the Clean Air Act to require coal-fired power plants to reduce their production of electricity, or subsidize it with green energy sources in order to combat greenhouse gas emissions.
The requirement was issued in 2015 under the Clean Power Plan as being the "best system of emission reduction" for existing coal-fired power plants.
The Supreme Court's decision ruled that the EPA lacks the authority to implement the rule under the Clean Air Act.
Justices Elena Kagan, Stephen Breyer and Sonia Sotomayor issued a dissenting opinion in which they argued that the EPA was indeed granted authority by Congress under the Clean Air Act to issue such a regulation.
"The majority says it is simply 'not plausible' that Congress enabled EPA to regulate power plants' emissions through generation shifting," Kagan said in the dissenting opinion. "But that is just what Congress did when it broadly authorized EPA in Section 111 to select the best system of emission reduction for power plants."
The decision came on the last day of the Supreme Court's opinion "issuance days" for the rest of the summer, as well as the last day of Breyer's tenure on the bench.
US President Joe Biden issued a statement later on Thursday in which he called the ruling "devastating" and outlined steps that his administration will take in response to the decision.
"I have directed my legal team to work the Department of Justice and affected agencies to review this decision carefully and find ways that we can, under federal law, continue protecting Americans from harmful pollution, including pollution that causes climate change," the statement said.
The Biden administration will push for additional congressional action on clean energy and continue using lawful executive authority, including that still legally held by the EPA, to address environmental concerns, the statement also said.

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Wall St. Driven to Worst First-Half in 50 Years by Recession Fears

NEW YORK, June 30 (Sputnik) - US stocks were headed Thursday for their biggest first-half loss in any year since 1970 as investors worried the Federal Reserve's aggressive rate hikes will return the economy into a recession last seen during the worst of the coronavirus pandemic.
The S&P 500 index, representing the top 500 US stocks, was 20% down for the first half of 2022 as trading neared its close for June. Based on historical data, that was the biggest drop in the opening half of any year since 1970.
A 20% drop also puts the S&P in bear-market territory given the general classification for any market that's down as much or more from its most recent high. In the S&P's case, it has fallen to under 3,810 points from a record high of 4,818 points in January.
The Nasdaq Composite, which comprises marquee technology names such as Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, was down almost 30% for the first six months of the year, a record first-half-yearly loss for the index founded in 1971.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

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The Dow Jones Industrial Average, comprising stocks of 30 large US corporations, was on track to a first-half loss of 16%. Historical data showed that to be the biggest since 1962.
"Stock markets have fallen heavily in June so it seems only fitting that they're ending the month with big losses as reality continues to bite," Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said. "There's a strong likelihood of recession this year or next and investors are increasingly accepting that fate as well."
Economists fear that under its quantitative tightening approach, the Federal Reserve, or Fed, will push the economy into a recession with aggressive rate hikes and the planned sale of hundreds of billions of dollars of bonds in its holdings.
This month's 75-basis point rate hike was the Fed's highest in 28 years. The economy contracted by 1.6% in the first quarter of 2022 and will technically slip into a recession if it does not return to positive growth by the end of the second quarter.
St. Louis Fed President Jim Bullard, arguably the central bank's biggest policy hawk, said earlier this week that the central bank needed to stay ahead of inflation by front-loading interest rates. Another Fed banker — Mary Daly of the St. Louis Federal Reserve — also supported the front-loading of rates on Monday to halt inflation.
Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), has been growing at its fastest pace in four decades since late last year. Latest figures for the CPI showed it expanding by 8.6% in the 12 months to May.

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UN Providing $1Mln to Providing Housing to Afghans Affected by Earthquake - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, June 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations will allocate $1 million to provide housing to Afghans affected by the recent earthquake that left at least 1,000 people dead and many others wounded, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.
"Quick update from Afghanistan where the UN Refugee Agency and the UN Development Programme signed an agreement to provide a million dollars for housing and infrastructure costs in Paktika province," Dujarric said during a press briefing.
The money will also go toward funding various other projects such as solar lighting, water systems, roads, and bridges damaged by the earthquake, Dujarric said.
Last week, a powerful 6.1 magnitude earthquake struck eastern Afghanistan, leaving more than 1,000 people dead and 1,500 others injured. The provinces of Paktika and Khost bordering Pakistan were among the areas worst affected by the earthquake.
Taliban (under UN sanctions over terrorism) leader Hibatullah Akhundzada has urged the international community and humanitarian organizations to help the Afghan government deal with the consequences of the earthquake.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

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US Blocks Over $1Bln in Assets Linked to Russian Businessman Kerimov - Treasury

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - The United States has blocked more than $1 billion in assets held by Russian businessman Suleiman Kerimov in the US-based Heritage Trust, the Department of the Treasury said in a pess release on Thursday.
"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced it has issued a Notification of Blocked Property to Heritage Trust, a Delaware-based trust in which OFAC-designated Russian oligarch Suleiman Abusaidovich Kerimov holds a property interest," the release said. "As of June 30, 2022, Heritage Trust holds assets valued at over $1 billion. This action ensures that those assets remain blocked and inaccessible to Kerimov."

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Iran Has Right to Use Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes - China's UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, June 30 (Sputnik) - China believes Iran has the right to use outer space for peaceful purposes, Permanent Representative to the UN Zhang Jun said on Thursday.
"As a member of the international community, Iran has every right to the peaceful uses of outer space. We all have different interpretations of the nature of Iran's missile and space programs," Zhang told a UNSC meeting on Iran.
The envoy stressed that all parties to the JCPOA should interpret UNSC resolutions related to Iran correctly.
"We hope the parties concerned will accurately interpret the provisions of the Security Council resolutions on the issue of Iran's missile launch and avoid undermining the bigger picture of JCPOA implementation," he added.
Iran launched a solid-fueled rocket with a satellite carrier on Sunday, a day after Tehran and the European Union agreed to resume the nuclear deal talks. On Tuesday, Iran and the US held EU-mediated indirect talks in Doha. Iranian media described them as unsuccessful, as the sides could not agree on sanctions lifting.

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Iran Ambassador to UN Says E3 Countries Disregarded JCPOA-Related Promises

UNITED NATIONS, June 30 (Sputnik) - Iran said that the E3 countries - comprising France, Germany and the United Kingdom - disregarded the promises related to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and left Tehran with no option but to put a break on its

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

commitments to the accord, the Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations Majid Takht-Ravanchi said on Thursday.
"Unfortunately, the E3 disregarded their obligations and promises, leaving Iran with no choice but to utilize its rights under paragraph 26 and 36 of JCPOA to partially suspend its commitments on May 8, 2019," Takht-Ravanchi said during a UN Security Council meeting on Iran and its compliance with resolution 2231.

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Russian Vessel Carrying Grain From Ukraine Not Part of UN-Led Efforts - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, June 30 (Sputnik) - A Russian vessel carrying 7,000 tons of grain from the Ukrainian port Berdyansk has nothing to do with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' efforts to broker a deal to get grain and fertilizer out of Ukraine, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.
"This is not part, as far as I know, part of the Secretary-General's effort," Dujarric said during a press briefing. "Discussions on that effort to bring Ukrainian grain and Russian grain, fertilizer out to the global markets are continuing at a rather intense clip."

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Officials Swear in Ketanji Brown Jackson as Associate Justice of US Supreme Court

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - Chief Justice John Roberts and outgoing associate justice Stephen Breyer swore in Ketanji Brown Jackson as an associate justice of the US Supreme Court on Thursday, following Breyer's departure from the bench.
Roberts and Breyer administered constitutional and judicial oaths to Jackson, officially making her the first black woman to serve as a Supreme Court justice in US history.
Breyer, 83, retired from the bench at noon on Thursday, the court's final opinion issuance day for the summer, after almost 28 years of service as an associate justice.
Jackson, who previously served on the Washington, DC Court of Appeals, had her nomination confirmed by the US Senate in April, fulfilling a campaign promise by President Joe Biden to appoint the first black woman to the bench.

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Russia's Deputy UN Envoy Says No Alternative to JCPOA

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

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UNITED NATIONS, June 30 (Sputnik) - Russia sees no alternative to the 2016 Iran nuclear deal and supports efforts to restore it, Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy told a UNSC meeting on Thursday.
"I wish to stress the fact that there is still no alternative to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Our duty is to safeguard this deal and to revive it. The Russian Federation wholeheartedly supports negotiations to resume implementation of the JCPOA through the initially agreed upon frameworks," Polyanskiy told a briefing on Iran.

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Iran Should Drop Demands That Go Beyond JCPOA - US Deputy Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, June 30 (Sputnik) - The United States believes Iran should drop demands that go beyond the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action if it wants to the revive the 2016 nuclear deal, Deputy Permanent Representative Richard Mills said on Thursday.
"We can only conclude a deal and implement it if Iran drops its additional demands that are outside the scope of the JCPOA," Mills said.
He also thanked the European Union for facilitating indirect talks between the US and Iran.
"We would like to thank the EEAS and High Representative Borrell for going quite literally the extra miles in support of concluding and reaching understanding on mutual return to full implementation of the JCPOA. In light of these efforts, we were all the more disappointed that during High Representative Borrell's visit to Tehran on Saturday and in the indirect discussions the EEAS conducted in Doha this week, Iran continued to make demands that go well beyond the JCPOA," Mills said.

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Blinken Says Discussed Macedonia's EU Accession With Country's President at NATO Summit

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday that he met with N. Macedonian President Stevo Pendarovski on the margins of the NATO summit and discussed Washington's support for Macedonia on its years-long path to a potential EU membership.
"Good meeting with North Macedonian President Stevo Pendarovski on the margins of the NATO Summit. We discussed steps to support North Macedonia, our newest NATO Ally, as it move forward on its merited EU accession path [sic]," Blinken said via Twitter.
Macedonia was granted EU candidate member state status in 2005 and the European Commission has recommended starting accession negotiations since 2009. The European Council approved the decision to start integration negotiations with Albania and Macedonia but

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

the process has been hampered by demands by Bulgaria, which has effectively requested Macedonia to renounce its history, national identity and language.
The Bulgarian parliament last week lifted its veto on Macedonia's accession to the European Union with preconditions, including a request for the Bulgarian minority in Macedonia to be included in the country's constitution as a constituent people.
French President Emmanuel Macron said that the European Union fully accepts the Bulgarian demands to be a part of the framework process for EU membership, causing outrage among Macedonians. The Macedonian World Congress has called on the government to reject the French-Bulgarian framework altogether as it denies the basic right of the Macedonian nation to exist.
The European Council last week also urged all countries seeking EU membership to impose sanctions on Russia over its special military operation in Ukraine. EU candidate countries include Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Moldova, Montenegro, Turkey and Ukraine.
The NATO Summit in Madrid where the meeting between Blinken and Pendarovski took place has focused on the alliance's response and future strategic thinking in regards to Russia, including listing Russia as its "most significant and direct threat" to security.

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Canada to Provide Ukraine With Combat Vehicles, Drone Cameras Worth $388Mln - Trudeau

OTTAWA, June 30 (Sputnik) - Canada will provide Ukraine with up to 39 Armored Combat Support Vehicles and six drone cameras that will complete the US$388 million in military aid allocated in the 2022 budget, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced in a press release on Thursday.
"Canada is providing an additional six drone cameras and is currently in process of finalizing negotiations to supply Ukraine with up to 39 armored combat support vehicles (ACSVs), including elements for repairs and servicing. This will complete the allocation of $500 [US$388] million in military support for Ukraine announced in Budget 2022", the release said.
This announcement comes as Trudeau, Foreign Minister Melanie Joly and Defense Minister Anita Anand participated in the NATO Summit in Madrid, Spain, from June 28-30.
On June 29, Anand announced that Canada will deploy additional personnel, infrastructure and military capabilities in the region as part of Operation Reassurance, the country's largest military deployment outside its own borders
At present, some 1,400 Canadian service members are stationed in the Baltics.
On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. Since, Canada and its collective West allies have imposed comprehensive sanctions on Russia and provided Kiev with offensive and defensive weapons in the amount of multiple billions of dollars.

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Two Men From Jamaica Plead Guilty to Telemarketing Sweepstakes Fraud Plot in US – DOJ

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) – Two men who participated in a $9.4 million international telemarketing sweepstakes fraud scheme pled guilty to defrauding a number of senior citizens and vulnerable victims in the United States, the Department of Justice said Thursday.
"Maurice Levy, 51, and Derrick Levy, 54, both of Jamaica, admitted that between July 2008 and September 2016, they worked in call centers in Costa Rica that defrauded victims in the United States," prosecutors said. "Derrick Levy and Maurice Levy admitted that they concealed their physical location using Voice-over-IP technology, which enabled them to give victims telephone numbers that, although bearing U.S. area codes, were actually answered at the call centers in Costa Rica."
The Levys told investigators they would call targeted individuals in the United States and tell that they had won a sweepstakes prize but needed to pay fees so that a purported prize could be delivered to them. However, after victims paid the initial fee, the Levys and their cohorts would call them back claiming that there had been a mistake, that the victim had actually won a bigger prize and that they needed to pay more money to claim that prize.
"Many victims sent tens of thousands of dollars to Maurice Levy, Derrick Levy, and their co-conspirators in response to these calls," prosecutors explained.
The fraud scheme netted the Levys more than $9,400,000 which they used to continue operating the call centers and to fund the lavish lifestyles of themselves and the other criminals involved. Maurice Levy pled guilty on June 29 to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and will be sentenced later. Derrick Levy pled guilty on January 25 to the same charge and will be sentenced on September 28.
The pair each face as much as 20 years in prison.

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Pfizer Seeks FDA Approval for Paxlovid Use on High Risk COVID-19 Patients – Statement

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - Pfizer issued a statement on Thursday that it has asked the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to approve its drug Paxlovid for patients who are at a high risk of a severe COVID-19 progression.
"Pfizer has announced the submission of a New Drug Application (NDA) to the FDA for approval of Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir [PF-07321332] tablets and ritonavir tablets) for patients who are at high risk for progression to severe illness from COVID-19," the release said.
Paxlovid is already approved for emergency use in the treatment of mild-to-moderate COVID-19 in adults and pediatric patients 12 years of age and over and who weigh at least 40kg or 88lbs, the release said.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 07/01/2022 10:56:11 AM

"The submission provides the longer-term follow-up data necessary for acceptance and potential approval," the release added.
According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, 50% to 60% of the population in the United States still has one or more risk factors for potentially developing a severe case of COVID-19.

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UK, France, Germany Say Iran Has Made 'Unrealistic Demands' at Doha Meeting on JCPOA

UNITED NATIONS, June 30 (Sputnik) - Iran has not seized the opportunity to work to advance the goals of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear agreement during the meeting in Doha and has made instead "unrealistic demands," the United Kingdom, France and Germany said on Thursday.
"Unfortunately, it is our understanding that at the meeting which ended yesterday in Doha, Iran once again refused to seize the opportunity and, instead, made new extraneous and unrealistic demands," the statement said.
Diplomats representing the three countries read the statement prior to the UN Security Council meeting set to discuss Iran and its compliance under the JCPOA.
The UN Security Council convened its biannual briefing on the implementation of resolution 2231 that endorsed the JCPOA.
UN Security Council members have been at odds on whether Iran's actions have contravened resolution 2231 or Tehran complies with it.

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US Supreme Court Rules Biden Administration Allowed to End 'Remain in Mexico' Policy

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is authorized to end the Trump-era "Remain in Mexico" policy requiring non-Mexican nationals who cross the land border into the United States to stay in Mexico during the course of their removal proceedings, the Supreme Court said on Thursday.
The legal questions presented to the court in the case were whether the Biden administration's decision to rescind the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) violated the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and whether the policy rescission was a valid final agency action by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).
States including Texas and Missouri launched a lawsuit challenging the rescission of the MPP, arguing that the decision violated the INA and Administrative Procedures Act. A district court and court of appeals initially ruled in favor of the states against the Biden administration.

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"For the reasons explained, the Government's rescission of MPP did not violate section 1225 of the INA, and the October 29 Memoranda did constitute final agency action. We therefore reverse the judgment of the Court of Appeals and remand the case for further proceedings consistent with this opinion," Chief Justice John Roberts said in the written majority opinion.
Justices Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas and Neil Gorsuch issued a dissenting opinion arguing that the Biden administration has no legal alternative to the policy and must continue enforcement of the rule.
"Due to the huge numbers of aliens who attempt to enter illegally from Mexico, DHS does not have the capacity to detain all inadmissible aliens encountered at the border, and no one suggests that DHS must do the impossible. But rather than avail itself of Congress's clear statutory alternative to return inadmissible aliens to Mexico while they await proceedings in this country, DHS has concluded that it may forgo that option altogether and instead simply release into this country untold numbers of aliens who are very likely to be removed if they show up for their removal hearings," Alito said in the dissenting opinion.
The ruling came down on the last of the Supreme Court's opinion "issuance days" for the rest of the summer, as well as the last day of Justice Stephen Breyer's tenure on the bench.
US President Joe Biden earlier in June at the Summit of the Americas announced over $645 million in funding for the Latin American region to help address issues including what the president called "historic refugee and migration flows."

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UN Urges US to Lift Sanctions as Outlined in JCPOA, Extend Oil Trade Waivers

UNITED NATIONS, June 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations calls on the United States to lift sanctions on Iran as outlined in the 2016 nuclear deal and extend oil trade waivers, Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo said on Thursday.
""We welcome the step taken by the United States in February 2022 to reinstate waivers on nuclear non-proliferation projects. We again appeal to the United States to lift or waive its sanctions as outlined in the Plan and to extend the waivers regarding the trade in oil with Iran," DiCarlo said.

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UN Urges Iran to Reverse Steps Taken in Breach of JCPOA Commitments - DiCarlo

UNITED NATIONS, June 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations urges Iran to reverse the steps taken in breach of its commitments under the 2016 nuclear deal, Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo said on Thursday.

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"We also again call on the Islamic Republic of Iran to reverse the steps it has taken that are not consistent with its nuclear-related commitments under the Plan," DiCarlo said.

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US Supreme Court Narrows EPA Authority to Regulate Greenhouse Gas Emissions

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court on Thursday issued a decision narrowing the authority of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, ruling that such powers must rest with Congress and an agency must be clearly delegated that authority by lawmakers.

"Capping carbon dioxide emissions at a level that will force a nationwide transition away from the use of coal to generate electricity may be a sensible 'solution to the crisis of the day,'" Chief Justice John Roberts said in the court's majority opinion. "But it is not plausible that Congress gave EPA the authority to adopt on its own such a regulatory scheme... A decision of such magnitude and consequence rests with Congress itself, or an agency acting pursuant to a clear delegation from that representative body."

The case brought before the Supreme Court involved challenges to the EPA's authority under the Clean Air Act to require coal-fired power plants to reduce their production of electricity, or subsidize it with green energy sources in order to combat greenhouse gas emissions.

The requirement was issued in 2015 under the Clean Power Plan as the being "best system of emission reduction" for existing coal-fired power plants.

The Supreme Court's decision ruled that the EPA lacks the authority to implement the rule under the Clean Air Act.

Justices Elena Kagan, Stephen Breyer and Sonia Sotomayor issued a dissenting opinion in which they argued that the EPA was indeed granted authority by Congress under the Clean Air Act to issue such a regulation.

"The majority says it is simply 'not plausible' that Congress enabled EPA to regulate power plants' emissions through generation shifting," Kagan said in the dissenting opinion. "But that is just what Congress did when it broadly authorized EPA in Section 111 to select the best system of emission reduction for power plants."

The decision came on the last day of the Supreme Court's opinion "issuance days" for the rest of the summer as well as the last day of Breyer's tenure on the bench.

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US Non-Energy, Food Inflation Shows Slower Annual Growth 3rd Month in Row - Commerce Dept.

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WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - Non-energy-and-food inflation in the United States grew at a slower annual pace for a third month in a row in May as the Federal Reserve kept up with aggressive interest rate hikes, data from the Commerce Department showed on Thursday.

The core portion of the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) Index, which is stripped of volatile energy and food prices, grew 4.7% in the year to May from 4.9% in the 12 months to April, the Commerce Department said.

In April, the core PCE Index slowed from an annual growth of 5.2% in March. Prior to that, the PCE showed an annual growth of 5.3% in February.

The main PCE Index, which includes energy and food prices, however, grew 6.3% in the year to May, unchanged from April. That led economists to think that the Federal Reserve still had some way to go in arresting inflation, especially with the average price of gasoline at US pumps hovering at $4.86 a gallon, not too far below June's record highs of $5.02.

"The broader market is reluctant to buy into the 'peak inflation ' narrative," economist Adam Button said in a post on the ForexLive platform.

Many economists say the Federal Reserve left "rates too low for too long" and its aggressive catch-up with that now could unravel the economic recovery made since last year from the coronavirus pandemic.

The Commerce Department reported that US Gross Domestic Product contracted by 1.6% in the first quarter of this year versus a 6.9% growth in the fourth quarter of 2021. If the current second quarter registers a negative growth as well, the United States would technically be in a recession.

The Federal Reserve kept rates at between zero and 0.25% for two years during the coronavirus pandemic and only raised them this year in March. It has since brought key lending rates to between a 1.5% and 1.75% range.

The US central bank has said it will continue with rate hikes until inflation returns to its annual target of 2%. The Consumer Price Index, which the US public follows more closely, grew at an annual pace of 8.6% in the year to May.

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