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7/7/22 Thursday

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California Announces $100 Million Program to Develop, Make Cheap Insulin

California Governor Gavin Newsom announced on Thursday that the Golden State would begin manufacturing its own insulin - the latest effort in the state's attempt to make the diabetes drug more affordable.

"Nothing epitomizes market failure more than the cost of insulin," Newsom said in a Thursday statement. "Many Americans experience out-of-pocket costs anywhere from $300 to $500 per month for this life-saving drug."

Newsom's program will set aside $100 million to contract for the effort; half will go to developing low-cost insulin products and the other to build a factory in the Pacific coastal state for producing it. He said the contractor would produce insulin "at a cheaper price, close to at-cost."

According to Newsom's office, roughly 4 million Californians have been diagnosed with diabetes, a group of metabolic disorders characterized by abnormally high concentrations of sugar in the bloodstream. The most common cause is a failure by the pancreas to produce insulin or for the body to respond to the insulin it produced, which is necessary to break down sugar for the body to use.

Without a regular supplement of insulin, the shortage can induce diabetic ketoacidosis, a condition that without treatment almost invariably leads to death. However, even with treatment, it can destroy internal organs and cause loss of eyesight or require the amputation of limbs.

Diabetes was the seventh-leading cause of death in the US in 2019, with 87,647 Americans dying of the disease.

Manufacturing insulin is already cheap to do, costing about $10 per vial to make. However, the trio of pharmaceutical companies that make insulin in the US - Eli Lilly, Sanofi, and Novo Nordisk - have steadily increased the price, charging up to 30 times the cost of production.

Sabrina Caudillo, a 24-year-old college student who lives in La Puente, told the Los Angeles Times last month that she felt like a "prisoner" to the pharmaceutical industry after being diagnosed with diabetes in 2017.

"I remember crying my eyes out at CVS and realizing it's going to be like this for the rest of my life," she said, explaining that even with insurance, she still has trouble affording her insulin supplies and paying for the insurance itself.

"This disease is really expensive, and I'm barely making it every month," Caudillo added.

US President Joe Biden has pushed for Congress to pass a law limiting insurance co-pays for insulin to $35, although nothing has been done yet on Capitol Hill.

Some have speculated that Newsom, also a Democrat, could become a challenger to Biden in the 2024 US presidential race if the incumbent seeks a second term. The Wall Street Journal declared on Wednesday that barbs traded online between Newsom and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who is seen as a likely Republican contender in 2024, constituted the beginning of Newsom's campaign.

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'We Are Congolese, Not Rwandans'; M23 Rebels Say 'Ceasefire' Doesn't Cover Them Amid New Fighting

A day after a tentative path to normalized relations between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda was reached in Luanda, new violence has broken out between the M23 rebel group, which Kinshasa says is controlled by Kigali, and Congolese forces.

Fighting was reported in the town of Kanyabusoro in Rutshuru Territory on Thursday between M23 and DR Congo armed forces (FARDC), according to Agence France-Presse. The city that sits on the border with Rwanda and was seized by M23 last week

A day prior, a "ceasefire" had been announced by Angolan President Joao Lourenco after he invited his Congolese and Rwandan counterparts to Luanda for peace talks. The previous six weeks have seen both nations threaten war and accuse each other of sponsoring proxy forces in Congo's North Kivu Province.

"We are Congolese, not Rwandans. If there is a ceasefire, it can only be between us and the Congolese government," Willy Ngoma, spokesman for the M23, told AFP on Thursday. He denied the M23 was responsible for the firefight, claiming FARDC had fired on them first.

Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi has accused Rwandan President Paul Kagame, a Tutsi, of sponsoring the predominantly Tutsi M23 group - accusations somewhat supported by a United Nations report but which Kagame's government has long denied.

The Wednesday agreement overseen by Lourenco established a new "roadmap" to stabilizing Congo-Rwanda relations as well as the North Kivu area, including reviving a long-dormant Congo-Rwanda commission in Luanda, which had been created in the early 21st century to end the fighting of the previous war.

According to the text of the roadmap printed by the Rwanda New Times on Thursday, the deal requires the M23 to cease hostilities and withdraw immediately "from occupied positions." It also requires both governments to "defeat" the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and its many splinter groups "which are at the origin of tensions between Rwanda and DRC and play a major role in the insecurity of the DRC."

The FDLR militia is a Hutu Power group in North Kivu descended from those responsible for the 1994 genocide of Rwandan Tutsis and Twa, and Kigali has accused Kinshasa of cooperating with it.The Project on Violent Conflict, a US Department of Homeland Security-funded project, has substantiated some of those allegations, writing that "the relationship between the FARDC and the FDLR oscillates between open conflict and covert cooperation."

"This roadmap does not commit the M23," Ngoma told AFP in Goma, a city on the border with Rwanda. "We are Congolese, we have nothing to do with Rwanda. We are asked to leave here, but to go where? It is impossible."

The M23 also originated in the Congo Wars, but demobilized in 2013 following a deal with Kinshasa. However, the group once again took up arms late last year, claiming the government had not kept its end of the deal.

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Speaking to the state-owned France24 on Monday, two days before the Luanda deal was reached, Ben Shepherd, a leading specialist on DR Congo and the Great Lakes Region from the London-based Chatham House, said it was unlikely the present situation would actually result in open warfare between Kinshasa and Kigali.
“But the stakes are high. Beyond the tragic consequences for the people of eastern DR Congo, which should never be underestimated, there are real possibilities for inadvertent escalation. The last round of violence between the M23 and DR Congo was ended by a SADC [Southern African Development Community]-led intervention; this time round, the EAC [East African Community] is proposing an intervention force, despite Rwanda itself being an EAC member state, and southern Africa’s heavyweights, notably Angola and South Africa, still having significant stakes in the game,” he said.
“It is imperative that DR Congo does not become once again a battleground for competing geo-political aspirations, but this will take careful diplomacy,” he added.

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Photos: China Starts Construction of First Commercial Space Launch Site in Hainan

Construction began on a new commercial spacecraft launch site on Wednesday, located near the existing launch site in the southern city of Wenchang. China’s commercial space industry is small, but the government is planning ahead for a major expansion in the coming years, as its state-directed space program accelerates.
Speaking at a groundbreaking ceremony in Wenchang, Hainan Provincial Governor Feng Fei said that once the project is completed in 2024, the island province will use it to turn Wenchang into a world-class spaceport, establishing an “entire space industry chain” including carrier rockets, satellites, and data processing centers.
China Aerospace Construction Group is building the facility for the Hainan government and three state-owned space firms: China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp and China Satellite Network Group.
The nearby Wenchang Space Launch Center is operated by the Chinese state alongside three other launch centers in Jiquan, Taiyuan, and Xichang, which together focus on state programs like lunar exploration and manned space flight. However, the new commercial launch center will be aimed at meeting China’s burgeoning commercial space industry in the longer term.
"The existing government-run launch centers are well developed but they are too busy to handle the increasing demands from the commercial space sector and it is not uncommon that even a government-assigned mission would have to wait for arrangement at those sites," Hu Shengyun, a senior rocket designer at China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp, told China Daily.
He added that the state-operated launch sites were not designed for the volume of traffic that the commercial site will have to handle, so it is better if they don’t have to worry about it.
The new commercial launch site will also feature a rocket recovery site and specialized launch pads for the Long March 5, 7 and 8 families of rockets, and will have a launch pad reserved for

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manned missions to the Moon. It will also include facilities for rocket assembly and testing. Its location so close to Earth's equator will give rockets a major speed boost, saving on fuel. Ningbo, in the eastern Zhejiang Province, is also expected to build a similarly impressive commercial launch facility, as is Haiyan in Shandong Province.

However, the private space industry sector, which is still small in China, reportedly has doubts about the new facility.

"I don't think those pads are going to be cheap," a source who works for a commercial launch start-up based in Beijing told the South China Morning Post. "I'm not sure how many commercial launches will be planned each year, but that is likely to be a small number, so each launch is going to be really expensive."

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UN Security Council to Vote on 6-Month Extension of Cross-Border Humanitarian Aid to Syria's Idlib

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is due to vote on Thursday on extending humanitarian aid deliveries for six months instead of a year, as per a request by permanent council member Russia.

The original proposal, drafted by Ireland and Norway, called for a 12-month extension to the program, which will expire on Sunday without action by the council. Russia's alternate proposal calls for a six-month extension, as well as "a special working group" of council members, major donors, regional parties, and representatives of international humanitarian agencies "in order to regularly review and follow up on the implementation of this resolution," according to the Associated Press, which obtained a draft of the resolution.

According to reports, the vote was delayed until late on Thursday, making it likely the issue might not be decided until Friday.

Last year, the humanitarian aid delivered to Syria's Idlib Governorate was cut from two border crossings to one, at Bab al-Hawa in the far north, just west of Aleppo. According to Medecins du Monde, more than 2.4 million Syrians benefit from the aid, with more than 9,500 trucks of food, medicine and other goods crossing in 2021. MDM is among those groups demanding a 12-month extension.

The territory is controlled primarily by Hay'at Tahrir ash-Sham*, the latest iteration of Al-Qaeda in Syria, which was previously known as Jabhat Al-Nusra, as well as allied Turkish troops, present without the permission of the Syrian government in Damascus.

In the past, Russia has opposed expanding aid through Turkey, arguing it violates Syrian sovereignty to circumvent its territory and supply a rebel group. Dmitry Polyanskiy, Russia's deputy ambassador to the UN, accused the West last week of "flirting with terrorist elements and trying to use them for their own geopolitical purposes."

"The main threats to the security of Syria and for the entire region are associated with the continued large-scale presence of terrorists who have taken refuge in the territories not

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controlled by Damascus in Idlib, Zaevfratya and At-Tanf," Polyansky said at a UN meeting on June 28.

"In this context, we are convinced that the path to resolving the Syrian crisis lies through the end of the illegal foreign military presence in violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the unconditional cessation of regular Israeli air strikes, the last of which hit Damascus International Airport on July 10," Polyansky added.

Luis Moreno Ocampo, a former chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Court in the Hague, Netherlands, told the UNSC ambassadors that any kind of cross-border aid meant council members "could find themselves materially supporting a UN-designated terrorist organization," according to the AP, which obtained a copy of the letter.

To avoid a "flagrant violation" of its own resolutions, the UNSC should closely monitor the deliveries to ensure terrorist groups "are not involved in implementing humanitarian aid." The other option, he said, is to remove Hay'at Tahrir ash-Sham from the terrorist list.

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DeSantis Most Likely Running For President, But Can He Take on Trump?
By - Mary Manley

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis was born in Jacksonville, Florida. He graduated from both Yale and Harvard before joining the Navy and was deployed to Iraq in 2007. He later became a federal prosecutor before entering politics. The governor is also known for championing controversial new laws that have drawn condemnation from human rights groups.

DeSantis is likely to run for president despite the fact that doing so would pit him against former President Donald Trump, to whom many in the Republican party are afraid of showing any signs of "disloyalty." Moreover, Trump's favorability rating among Republican voters hasn't fallen much since he left office, but that hasn't yet stopped other party heavyweights from eyeing a bid for the seat of the commander-in-chief.

"My belief is they're all going to run, and a big reason they're running is based on the fact that if Mike Pence can run, we can all run," said Tony Fabrizio, a Republican pollster and strategist. "What's the loyalty argument if your vice president is running against you for president?"

Despite being the only U.S. president to be impeached twice, polls currently show him to be leading a hypothetical Republican race with a 42% favorability rating. However, he may ultimately decide not to run, as he's still under investigation by the New York state attorney general, the FBI, local district attorneys and lawmakers.

An insider close to Trump, who did not want to reveal his name, told NBC News that Trump is watching DeSantis with a measure of resentment and nervousness, though it would be difficult for Florida's governor to defeat a former president with a support base so intense that it attacked Capitol Hill on January 6, following President Joe Biden's win in the 2020 presidential elections.

If Biden backs out of the race, said the insider, Trump—whose political motives seem to be encouraged by grudges as opposed to civic duty—would be less likely to run again. The scandals surrounding Trump may also be enough to keep him from announcing a run for the

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presidency. Behind him in the polls is Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who is planning a private fundraiser in Utah set for July 18 and is gathering the country's wealthiest Republican donors. His team has released little to no information on the fundraising event in an effort to shield it from the public's curious eyes.

DeSantis has drawn criticism from liberals and human rights activists, as well as overwhelming support from fellow Republicans for signing controversial Florida laws including the "Stop WOKE" act, which went into effect on Friday. The law restricts colleges, universities, and businesses from being able to discuss with students or employees the subject of discrimination based on race, sexual, orientation or gender.

The bill essentially bans the teaching of critical race theory in higher education (reminder: this is where American adults pay to be taught) or schools will lose their funding. Critical race theory is an academic concept dating back over 40 years ago which discusses the pervasiveness of racism in the legal system.

DeSantis also did little to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the state of Florida while openly criticizing the federal government for their vaccine and mask mandates despite the fact that COVID-19 vaccines have saved tens of millions of lives across the globe.

DeSantis also defended his decision to have Florida be the only state that did not pre-order vaccinations for children under 5 years old, though he quickly loosened his restrictions on that decision and began allowing health care providers to order COVID-19 vaccines from a federal program for children between six months and five years of age.

The 43-year-old governor of Florida also wrote into law the "Don't Say Gay" bill which restricts teachers from having conversations about LGTQ issues and identities in the classroom. Representatives of the Orange County Classroom Teachers Association also accused school officials Monday of telling teachers to not wear rainbow articles of clothing and to remove pictures of their same-sex partners from their desks as well as to remove LGBTQ "safe space" stickers from their classroom doors.

DeSantis and his team have yet to declare his candidacy for president and have not given any hints that may do so to the press. But that's not uncommon in the world of politics.

Politicians are very careful about announcing their presidential bids, and will use an entire political team to meticulously choose a time and place to launch them, says columnist Jules Witcover of The Baltimore Sun. They typically make the announcement in their home state, with unremarkable speeches that focus on the celebration of running for president rather than any core policies or big promises.

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The Parasite-Infested Giant African Land Snail is Back in Florida
By - Mary Manley

The giant African land snail can reach 8 inches in length and 5 inches in diameter, and each snail can produce 1,200 eggs per year on its own. The species is native to East Africa and is

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also found in Asia, but Florida is battling these gastropods again, despite declaring them eradicated last year after a 10-year struggle that cost $23 million.

More than 1,000 of the slow-moving creatures have been wrangled in New Port Richey since June 23, when the first one was discovered. The snails not only eat hundreds of types of plants, they also crawl up the sides of buildings and consume the calcium from the stucco and plaster found there before leaving behind their droppings.

"These snails could be devastating to Florida agriculture and natural areas as they cause extensive damage to tropical and subtropical environments," the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (FDACS) warned.

Beyond the damage to plants and buildings, the snails carry with them a dangerous threat to humans, too. Rat lungworm (Angiostrongylus cantonensis) most often infect the lungs of rats and other rodents, but can be transmitted through their digestive system. The lungworm larvae is then found in rat feces, which then infect the snails.

Humans can come into contact with the lungworms either by eating undercooked snails, fruits and vegetables contaminated by the infected snails, or consuming undercooked frogs and crabs that have snacked on a sick snail. While the parasite sometimes dies in a human's central nervous system, other times it can travel through the brain and cause meningitis: a swelling around the brain and spinal cord which can lead to paralysis, comas, and death.

Thankfully, thus far scientists have yet to detect rat lungworm in the snails that have been wrangled in Pasco County, says Greg Hodges, who is an assistant director of the Florida Department of Agriculture's Division of Plant Industry.

"Let me assure you, we will eradicate these snails. We have done it twice before, and we will do it again – it is not a question of if, but when. Together, let's locate, communicate, and eradicate, so Florida can again be GALS free," said Florida Commissioner Nikki Fried.

The state of Florida has set up a quarantine that runs from the northwest corner of the U.S. 19-Ridge Road intersection, and east to Little Road and south to Trouble Creek Road in New Port Richey, Pasco County. In this quarantine area, residents are restricted from touching or moving found snails, as well as plants, soil, compost, and yard waste. Those who do find any other snails are asked to contact state authorities.

At least 30 state employees are searching for the snails and are being assisted by dogs trained to sniff out the invasive critters. Authorities are also using metaldehyde to kill the snails, a pesticide that affects their mucus production and causes lethal dehydration.

The last time Florida dealt with a snail invasion, those giant African snails were dark gray and brown, but now? Authorities are finding the snails to have whiter, cream-colored bodies and dark shells. These newer snails are heavily sought after in the pet trade industry, but in Florida it is illegal to import or own a giant African snail without a permit. However, Florida state authorities have discovered individuals doing just that.

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Two Girls Die Due to TikTok 'Blackout Challenge', Parents Sue
By - Mary Manley

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The TikTok challenge known as the “blackout challenge” encourages participants to choke themselves until they pass out. The strangulation videos showed up on the childrens’ “for you” page which shows TikTok users what they are most likely to enjoy based on an algorithm that encourages social media addiction.

TikTok is now facing multiple lawsuits after at least seven children under the age of 15 died while attempting the “blackout challenge”, alleges a suit filed against TikTok in June. The challenge encourages social media users to choke themselves with belts, purse strings, or similar items until they pass out.

The parents of Arriani Jaileen Arroyo gave their daughter a smartphone at the age of 7, she then downloaded TikTok and became “addicted” to the platform, her parents said. She started trying internet challenges but because those challenges involved foods and beverages Arriani’s parents thought little of them.

Then on February 26, 2021 Arriani was found with a leash tied around her neck, inspired by the TikTok choking challenge; she died that same day.

Other children across the globe—not just in America—have died from trying the “blackout challenge”: a 10 year-old in Italy, a 14 year-old in Australia, as well as a 12 year-old in Colorado, a 12 year-old in Oklahoma, and a 10 year-old in Pennsylvania. Lalani Erika Renee Walton, 8, also died while attempting the blackout challenge.

Family members of Lalani and Arriani are now suing TikTok. They are being represented by the Social Media Victims Law Center, a law firm that “works to hold social media companies legally accountable for the harm they inflict on vulnerable users”, according to their website. This is the second lawsuit the social media app has faced following a fatal incident involving the blackout challenge.

“TikTok has specifically curated and determined that these Blackout Challenge videos — videos featuring users who purposefully strangulate themselves until losing consciousness — are appropriate and fitting for small children,” the lawsuit reads.

The company argues that the “blackout challenge” has been around for years. Between 1995 and 2007 CDC discovered 82 deaths caused by “the choking game” which saw kids aged six to 19 die.

"This disturbing ‘challenge,’ which people seem to learn about from sources other than TikTok, long predates our platform and has never been a TikTok trend,” TikTok said in a statement. “We remain vigilant in our commitment to user safety and would immediately remove related content if found. Our deepest sympathies go out to the family for their tragic loss.”

In 2019 TikTok had to pay $5.7 million in settlement charges after violating a children’s privacy law, said the Federal Trade Commission who filed the charges. The app “illegally collected personal information from children” after it failed to require parents’ permission before signing up for the app. The Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) requires websites to ask children under the age of 13 to get their parents’ permission before sharing personal information online.

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Republicans Slam Biden For Allowing SPR Oil To Be Shipped Overseas
By - Ian DeMartino

With oil prices near historic highs, Americans are struggling to fill their gas tanks. In March, Biden announced the release of 1 million barrels of oil a day from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

After a report came out Wednesday revealing that 5 million barrels of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) had been sent to Asian and European countries, Republicans have been slamming President Biden for the mistake.

In late March, Biden announced that he was releasing 1 million barrels a day from the SPR for eight months, in an attempt to lower fuel prices for Americans that have been skyrocketing since the West issued harsh sanctions on Russia.

But, according to the report, instead of going to U.S. refineries, 5 million barrels of crude oil went to other countries, including China.

"The American people deserve answers as to why our emergency energy reserves are being sent to foreign adversaries like the Chinese Communist Party, compromising our energy security and national security," stated House Energy and Commerce Committee Member Cathy McMorris Rodgers in a statement to Fox News Digital.

Meanwhile, Michigan Representative Fred Upton, also a Republican, tweeted on Thursday that "The Strategic Petroleum Reserve is meant for national emergencies – not policy blunders," while noting that the administration still has not answered his and McMorris Rodgers' letter to Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm asking about how Biden's release of the SPR may be emboldening China. That letter was sent in early June, before the report of the missing 5 million barrels was released by Reuters.

"What do they have to hide?" McMorris Rodgers asked when speaking about the letter.

Instead of tapping the SPR, Republicans would prefer Biden authorize increased domestic production of oil.

"President Biden needs to remember that our strategic energy reserves are for emergencies, not to cover up bad policies. America needs to flip the switch and increase our capacity to produce and refine oil here at home," McMorris Rodgers stated. "Now is not the time to use our strategic stockpile."

The SPR is currently at its lowest level since December 1985.

"After multiple failed attempts to lower U.S. gas prices by robbing our emergency strategic petroleum reserve, will someone please inform the decision makers at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue that we have much larger and more strategic undeveloped energy resources that can be extracted, processed, and utilized cleaner and safer right here at home benefiting American workers and businesses?" Bruise Westerman, a Republican representative from Arkansas told Fox News Digital.

Meanwhile, U.S. crude inventories have reached their lowest levels since 2004, even as refineries are running near their peak capacity. According to Reuters, U.S. Gulf Coast refineries are running at 97.9% utilization.

At a press conference on Tuesday, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said she was not aware of the report. At Thursday's press conference, Jean-Pierre did not address the

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report but did she call Biden tapping the SPR “historic” and mentioned the administration’s call to issue a holiday on federal taxes on gasoline.

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Americans Are Fighting Inflation by Buying Busch Light
By - Ian DeMartino

Busch Light was introduced in 1989, launching in Missouri, Illinois, and Texas. It quickly went nationwide and soon outsold its parent beer, Busch. At the time, it cost about $3.49 a six-pack. With inflation near 40-year highs and gas prices still far above normal, sub-premium beer Busch Light is flying off the shelves.

Busch Light’s manufacturer, beer giant Anheuser-Busch (A-B), has had less than stellar years recently. The company’s flagship beers Budweiser and Budlight have been consistently shedding market share, but the company’s cheapest option Busch Light has been performing well, jumping 4% in sales over the last year. It is now among the top three fastest-growing beers in the country and is also the country’s best-selling sub-premium beer.

Meanwhile, Busch Light’s competitors Coors Light and Miller Light have, like Bud Light, seen their sales drop in recent years. Busch Light’s success cannot be entirely attributed to inflation; its sales have increased over the past three years, well before gas prices and inflation started pinching Americans’ wallets, but it is hard not to think it is a factor.

Harry Schuhmacher, editor of Beer Business Daily, told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch that inflation and gas prices are undoubtedly contributing factors. He believes drinkers of premium light beers are likely switching to Busch Light to help make ends meet.

“If they’re living paycheck to paycheck, they’re definitely going to go that route,” Schumacher said.

It probably does not hurt that Busch Light makes a significant percentage of its sales at gas stations, where consumers are particularly feeling the pinch.

According to buykegbeer.com, the national average price of a ½ barrel keg of Busch Light is $80. Each keg contains 15.5 gallons of beer, making the price of Busch Light $5.16 per gallon when purchased that way. While that is higher than the national average price of gas, currently $4.75, it is cheaper than gasoline in multiple states, including the entire West Coast, Alaska, Hawaii, and Illinois.

Unfortunately, no car can currently run on Busch Light.

A-B pushing Busch Light’s presence on social media, as well as a Super Bowl commercial featuring Kenny G, and a sponsorship of the County Music Association Festival that made Busch Light the official beer of the event, are also factors cited for Busch Light’s recent rise in popularity.

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Highland Park Shooter's Father Under Criminal Investigation for Son's Firearm Purchase
By - Ian DeMartino

Robert Crimo III was arrested for allegedly killing seven people during a Fourth of July parade in Highland Park, Illinois.

The father of the Highland Park shooter will be criminally investigated, according to The Guardian, for signing off on his son's firearm license in 2019. On July 4, 2022, his son allegedly murdered seven people and injured at least 40 more.

Robert Crimo Jr., the father of Robert Crimo III, sponsored his son's firearm license in 2019. In Illinois, gun purchasers must be at least 21 years of age if they do not have the written consent of their parent or legal guardian. Crimo Jr. admitted to signing the affidavit to media outlets before the criminal investigation became public. By signing the document, he agreed to be held liable "for any damages resulting from the minor applicant's use of firearms or firearm ammunition."

Crimo Jr. signed the application despite his son having two previous encounters with the police. One of those encounters occurred in September 2019, during which Crimo III allegedly stated that he would "kill everybody" in his family. Law enforcement confiscated 16 knives, a dagger, and a sword from Crimo III's room that day, but they were returned after Crimo Jr. claimed that the weapons were his and were only stored in his son's room for "safekeeping."

When asked if he regretted the decision to sign off on his son's firearm purchase, Crimo Jr. said he does not. "Had I purchased guns throughout the years and given them to him in my name, that's a different story. But he went through that whole process himself." Crimo Jr. also noted that his son purchased firearms himself before the shooting.

Crimo III is currently 22 years old and would not have needed to get his parents' permission for a firearm license if he applied for one after his 21st birthday.

Crimo Jr. says his son had "good morals" and that the two had talked about the Copenhagen, Denmark, shooting that took place a day earlier. During that conversation, Crimo Jr. says that his son called the Denmark shooter "an idiot."

Police say that Crimo III told them he had planned another massacre at a Wisconsin Fourth of July parade after he left Highland Park. He instead decided to return to Illinois where he was arrested driving his mother's vehicle.

This is not the first time the parents of an alleged mass shooter have found themselves in legal trouble. Two parents in Michigan were charged with involuntary manslaughter after their 15-year-old son used a gun they purchased to murder four classmates.

There were 13 mass shootings nationwide over the Fourth of July weekend.

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Family Members of Jacob Blake and Breonna Taylor Arrested at Jayland Walker Protest
By - Ian DeMartino

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Protests against police violence and brutality have been ongoing in Akron, Ohio, after police shot and killed Jayland Walker. Walker was unarmed at the time and a preliminary medical report indicated that he suffered more than 60 gunshot wounds.

Jacob Blake's father, Jacob Blake Sr, and Breonna Taylor's aunt, Bianca Austin were arrested Wednesday night while attending a protest in Akron, Ohio, against the police killing of Jayland Walker.

Protesters gathered in front of the Akron Police Department on Wednesday after a curfew was lifted by Mayor Dan Horrigan. The curfew was originally put in place after protests against the killing broke out last week.

The younger Jacob Blake was paralyzed after police shot him multiple times in the back. Breonna Taylor was killed by police while sleeping in her bed after law enforcement executed a no-knock warrant on her residence. Since those incidents, both Blake Sr and Austin have become active in the movement against police brutality and violence.

Justin Blake, a relative of Jacob Blake, told NBC that Jacob Blake Sr and Austin traveled to Akron with Families United, a group fighting against police brutality. They planned to support the family of Walker and the community protests.

A video posted by activist Russell Ellis, who goes by the Instagram and Twitter handle jolly_good_ginger, is purported to have been filmed by Austin. In the video, police can be seen chasing and then restraining a man while another cop punches him directly in the face. Ellis says that the man in the video is Michael Harris.

After police throw Harris to the ground, Blake Sr can be seen attempting to address the police and possibly putting his hands on the back of a police officer in the process of restraining Harris. He is then seen being arrested by police.

Blake Sr, who is elderly and disabled, was then reportedly transported to a hospital, where he remains. A bench warrant has been issued for his arrest, and he will likely be transported from the hospital to Summit County Jail after being released. Ellis, who says he spoke with Blake Sr on the phone, says he is in stable condition and his medical issue is not life-threatening.

Another video, taken sometime later, shows Austin and another activist, Cortez Rice, sitting in what appears to be the same van that appears in the earlier video while parked in an empty parking lot. Police approach the van and Cortez can be heard telling police that they are in the middle of an interview. They are both arrested and police can be heard refusing to tell them what they are being arrested for.

Harris and Blake Sr were charged with rioting, disorderly conduct, resisting arrest, and failure to disperse, according to Fox8. Austin was charged with rioting. Rice was charged with rioting, disorderly conduct, and failure to disperse, according to 19News.

Ellis says that Austin and Rice have since been bailed out. However, he further claims that a judge set bail for Michael Harris and that his advocacy fund has tried to bail him out but that they cannot because Harris is being uncooperative with police staff, a claim Ellis says Harris denied in a phone call.

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Blinken Discusses DPRK, China, Ukraine With Counterparts From Japan, S. Korea

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with his counterparts from Japan and South Korea on the sidelines of the G20 ministerial in Indonesia on Friday to exchange views on trilateral cooperation, North Korea, China and Ukraine.
"Secretary Blinken and the Foreign Ministers discussed efforts to enhance trilateral cooperation across the Indo-Pacific and around the world in support of our shared values and desire for regional peace, stability, and prosperity. They shared views on the challenges posed by the People's Republic of China," spokesman Ned Price said.
The diplomats also discussed Ukraine and ways to support Ukrainians.
They condemned North Korea's ballistic missile launches and discussed expanding trilateral security cooperation. "The Secretary reiterated the United States' commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and immediate resolution of the abductions issue," Price added.

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US Fed Facing Stiffer Rate Hike Challenge After Sterling June Jobs Growth
(Updates headline and paras 1-3; adds details, context in paragraphs 4-13)
WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US employers added 372,000 jobs in June, the Labor Department said Friday as it reported a figure more than 100,000 above economists' expectations while keeping the jobless rate unchanged at 3.6% for a third straight month in what would likely be a stiffer challenge for the central bank in fighting inflation.
"Total nonfarm payroll employment rose by 372,000 in June, and the unemployment rate remained at 3.6 percent," the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a unit within the Labor Department, said, announcing the so-called monthly non-farm payrolls report.
Economists polled by US media had forecast a non-farm payroll growth of 268,000 in June, versus the May level of 390,000.
A jobless rate of 4% or below is, meanwhile, seen by the Federal Reserve, or Fed, as full employment. The central bank is keeping a close watch on all labor data to gauge how much tolerance the job market will have toward higher interest rates.
"The Fed wants to see some moderation in the labor market in order to cool wage pressure but there are no signs of it here," economist Adam Button said in a post on the ForexLive platform. "This increases the odds of a 75 bps [basis points] hike at the end of the month and of the Fed continuing to hike beyond 3.5% early next year."
Economists say the Fed kept rates "too low for too long" and its attempts at catch-up now could unravel recovery made since last year from the coronavirus pandemic. The central bank risks pushing the United States into a recession in its fight to bring ramping inflation under control, they say.
US inflation has been persistently running at four-decade highs since late last year, with the closely-watched Consumer Price Index growing at an annualized rate of 8.6% as of May. Record growth in jobs and wages has been identified as one of the reasons for the runaway

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inflation as employment security and higher disposable income allowed Americans to pay more for everything. The Fed's tolerance for inflation is a mere 2% a year and it has vowed to raise interest rates as much as necessary to achieve that.

US unemployment reached a record high of 14.8% in April 2020, with the loss of some 20 million jobs in the aftermath of the coronavirus breakout. Jobs recovery has been stellar since, with the unemployment rate staying at 3.6% since April this year. Wages have risen month after month since April 2021, expanding by a cumulative 6.4% over the past 15 months, or an average of 0.4% a month.

The Fed left interest rates at between zero and 0.25% for two years during the pandemic and only raised them in March this year. It began with a hike of 25 basis points, or quarter-percentage point, then raised it by 50 basis points, or a half percentage point, in May. In June, it imposed an increase of 75 basis points, or three quarters of a percentage point — its highest in 28 years — bringing current rates to between 1.5% and 1.75%.

The drone of recession talk has gotten louder across America since the Atlanta division of the Federal Reserve, or Fed, forecast a 1% contraction in second quarter gross domestic product, or GDP. Officially, the Commerce Department reported a 1.6% GDP decline for the first quarter. Typically, an economy is considered to be in recession if there are two straight quarters of GDP decline.

The sterling non-farm payrolls report released on Friday was in contrast to softening labor market trends indicated by other employment data earlier in the week.

Private sector employment tracker Challenger, Gray & Christmas reported on Thursday that the United States saw the highest number of job cuts in 16 months in June.

The Labor Department said in a separate report on Wednesday that job openings declined to 11.25 million in May from 11.68 million in April, despite there remaining almost two vacancies for every unemployed person.

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Secretary Yellen to Push Price Cap on Russian Oil During Asia Visit - US Treasury

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is seeking to use her upcoming trip to Asia to push for a price cap on Russian oil, the department said on Friday.

Yellen will attend the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting in Bali, Indonesia from July 15-16. She will also travel to Tokyo on July 12-13 and Seoul on July 19.

"Secretary Yellen will also discuss with partners a price cap on Russian oil to limit revenue for Russia's military while at the same time dampening the impact of the war on gas and energy prices in America and globally. In addition, the Secretary will also continue her work on the coordinated global response to the spillover effects of Russia's war, including growing food insecurity," the statement said.

In June, Yellen said that the US and its allies were working on a collective plan to place a price cap on Russian oil that would allow more crude to reach the market while slashing Russian oil revenues.

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Canada Sanctions Russian Patriarch Kirill, Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman, Ex-Yandex CEO

OTTAWA, July 8 (Sputnik) - Canada has imposed sanctions on Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill and Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova among 21 Russian nationals, in response to the country's special operation in Ukraine, according to a government release. The sanctions list also includes former Yandex CEO Tigran Khudaverdyan, Interior Ministry spokeswoman Irina Volk, humanitarian cooperation agency Rossotrudnichestvo and dozens of media personalities.

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Biden Says He Is Stunned, Outraged By Abe Assassination, US Stands With Japan

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden says he is stunned and outraged by the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and added that the United States stands with Japan in its moment of grief, according to a statement released by the White house on Friday.
Abe died Friday at the Nara Medical University Hospital after being shot several times during a public speech. He was 67 years old.
"I am stunned, outraged, and deeply saddened by the news that my friend Abe Shinzo, former Prime Minister of Japan, was shot and killed while campaigning. This is a tragedy for Japan and for all who knew him. I had the privilege to work closely with Prime Minister Abe," Biden said. "The United States stands with Japan in this moment of grief. I send my deepest condolences to his family."

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Canada Bans Imports of Certain Gold Goods From Russia – Global Affairs

OTTAWA, July 8 (Sputnik) - Canada banned the imports of certain types of gold goods from Russia on Friday, in an effort to escalate financial pressure on the country over its special operation in Ukraine, according to a Global Affairs Canada release.
"The Government of Canada has banned the import of certain gold goods from Russia, shutting these products out of formal international markets and further limiting Russia's ability to raise

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funds to wage war," the release stated. The ban includes six types of goods, ranging from nonmonetary powdered and non-powdered gold to parts and articles of jewelry.

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Canada Targets Russian Media, Watchdog Roskomnadzor With New Sanctions

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - Canada unveiled on Friday a new batch of sanctions against Russia, targeting media watchdog Roskomnadzor and its executives, major news outlets and channels including Sputnik, RT, the TASS news agency.
"To counter the Kremlin's disinformation campaign, Canada is imposing sanctions against 29 state-sponsored disinformation and propaganda agents and 15 entities controlled or owned by the Russian government and involved in disinformation efforts. This includes Sumbatovich Gasparyan, the Head of the International Department at Russia Today (RT) state media holding, with considerable influence in Russia," the statement said.
The sanctions list also includes Channel One, NTV, VGTRK, Gazprom Media, Regnum news agency and news anchor Ekaterina Andreeva.

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US Adds 372,000 Jobs in June, Unemployment Rate Stays at 3.6% - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US employers added 372,000 jobs in June, more than 100,000 above economists' expectations, while the jobless rate remained unchanged from May's level of 3.6%, Labor Department data showed on Friday.
"Total nonfarm payroll employment rose by 372,000 in June, and the unemployment rate remained at 3.6 percent," the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a unit within the Labor Department, said in a news release. An unemployment rate of 4% or below is defined by the Federal Reserve as maximum employment.
Economists polled by US media had forecast a jobs growth of around 268,000 in June, versus the May level of 390,000.

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Blinken, French, UK, German Ministers Discuss Ukraine, Iran at G20 Meeting

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has discussed Ukraine and Iran with French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, German Foreign Minister Annalena

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Baerbock, and UK Second Permanent Under Secretary and Political Director Tim Barrow on the sidelines of the G20 ministerial in Bali, spokesman Ned Price said on Friday.
"They discussed joint efforts to provide Ukraine with additional security and humanitarian support as it continues to defend against Russia's unprovoked and unjustifiable war of choice. They also reviewed ways to address the global food security concerns that have resulted from Russia's deliberate targeting of Ukrainian agriculture," the statement read.
The ministers also discussed Iran and the 2016 nuclear deal.
"They expressed concern about the pace of developments in Iran's nuclear program and reiterated their commitment to a mutual return to full compliance with the JCPOA, calling on Iran to drop its extraneous demands and to quickly agree to the deal that is currently available," Price said.
In addition, Blinken met with his Indonesian counterpart, Retno Marsudi.
"Secretary Blinken thanked the Foreign Minister for hosting the G20 Ministerial and emphasized the importance of the U.S.-Indonesia Strategic Partnership. They discussed ways the United States and Indonesia can work to increase bilateral trade and investment, including through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework," the State Department said.
The two also discussed the Ukraine crisis, Afghanistan and minorities' rights.
The meeting of G20 foreign ministers is being held in Bali, Indonesia, on July 7-8.

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Biden to Sign Executive Order on Friday to Support Abortion Rights - White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will sign an executive order on Friday to support abortion rights after the historic Roe v. Wade ruling was overturned, the White House said.
"Today, President Biden will sign an Executive Order Protecting Access to Reproductive Health Care Services. This Executive Order builds on the actions his Administration has already taken to defend reproductive rights by: Safeguarding access to reproductive health care services, including abortion and contraception; Protecting the privacy of patients and their access to accurate information; Promoting the safety and security of patients, providers, and clinics; and Coordinating the implementation of Federal efforts to protect reproductive rights and access to health care," the statement said.

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UN Chief Warns G20 About Famine Risks

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned G20 nations on Friday about the risk of multiple famines this year.

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"There is a real risk of multiple famines this year. Next year could be even worse," Guterres said in a video message to the G20 foreign ministers' meeting.
Guterres said that the Ukraine conflict is contributing to other crises and may cause social and economic devastation. The UN chief believes that the Ukraine crisis is behind the current spike in food prices and increase in the number of undernourished people.
Guterres told the ministers that without fertilizers, shortages could spread from corn and wheat to all staple crops, including rice, significantly impacting billions of people.
To alleviate the crisis, the UN is working to find a plan to enable the exports of grain out of Ukraine and grain and fertilizers out of Russia, the secretary-general added.
The meeting of G20 foreign ministers is being held in Bali, Indonesia, on July 7-8.

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UN Chief in Address to G20 Says Multilateralism Only Way to Tackle Food, Climate Crises

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on G20 nations on Friday to step up multilateral efforts to address the food crisis and climate changes.
"Strengthening multilateralism – the theme of this session – is not a choice, but a necessity. It is the only way to avoid widespread food shortages, deepening climate chaos, and a wave of poverty and destitution that will leave no country untouched," Guterres said in a video message to the G20 foreign ministers' meeting in Bali.
Guterres devoted a significant part of his speech to the global food crisis, which he believes has been exacerbated by the conflict in Ukraine.
The secretary-general said that the UN is working to find a plan that allows for the safe and secure exports of Ukrainian-produced food through the Black Sea and unimpeded access to global markets for Russian food and fertilizers.
The meeting of the G20 foreign ministers is being held in Bali, Indonesia, on July 7-8.

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Threat of Turkish Operation in Syria Wards Off Investment in Oil Fields - SDC
WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - Syrian Kurds at the moment have no ongoing talks with international companies on the oil fields in the region, as the looming threat of Ankara's invasion wards off investment, Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) Representative in the United States and member of the Presidential Committee, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.
"There is no discussion because of the lack of stability in the area," Saker said. "The threat of invasion especially wards off investment."
Last fall, Saker told Sputnik that the Syrian Kurds would be willing to cooperate with the American energy companies on their oil fields if the US Government granted a waiver.

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Ex-US President Donald Trump signed the Caesar Act, which set out Washington's plan to impose sanctions on Syrian government officials as well as foreign companies that work with Damascus to help reconstruction efforts, back in December 2019.
In August of 2020, Trump signed a deal for a US company, Delta Crescent Energy, to develop oil fields in Syrian territories in the country's northeast, which are under control of the Kurdish-led and US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces.
Former US Special Representative for Syria James Jeffrey then said that the United States was not involved in private oil deals made by Kurds in northeast Syria.
Damascus has said the United States is in Syria illegally and is engaged in theft of Syrian oil under the excuse of fighting the Islamic State terrorist group (banned in Russia).

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Syrian Kurds Cooperate Militarily With Damascus Solely to Maintain State Sovereignty - SDC

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Syrian Kurds cooperate militarily with Damascus for the sole purpose of maintaining the state's sovereignty as well as its unity against Turkey amid Ankara's plans to conduct a military operation in the northern part of the country, SDC Representative in the United States, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.
"Our military cooperation with Damascus is about maintaining Syrian sovereignty and unity against a foreign invader that seeks to occupy Syrian territory," Saker said.
Nuri Mahmoud, spokesperson for the People's Protection Unit (YPG), told Sputnik earlier that they are working in coordination with Syrian officials to develop a common working formula and draw up a defense plan in case of a Turkish invasion.
"Our relations with Damascus remain strictly military," Saker said. "We seek to meet with all Syrian political actors to reach a political solution, but the Damascus government does not want to meet and discuss political negotiations right now."
Turkey's presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said earlier that Ankara stands ready to undertake a new military operation in northern Syria that could begin at any moment. Damascus has repeatedly called the presence of Turkish forces in the border area and in Syria illegal and has urged Ankara to withdraw its troops.
"We would like to have both, international and Syrian support to counter the Turkish threat, especially a no-fly zone," Saker said. "Syrians must stand united against foreign invasions and the international community has a responsibility to prevent an attack that will only benefit ISIS [Islamic State terror group, banned in Russia]."
The armed conflict in Syria has been ongoing since 2011, with various insurgent groups, including terrorist organizations, fighting the Syrian Army to oust the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad. In late 2017, the Islamic State was declared defeated in Syria and Iraq, but counterterrorism mop-up operations are still underway.
The United States backs Kurdish armed groups in Syria despite protests from Damascus. The US military currently controls parts of the provinces of Al-Hasakah, Raqqa, Aleppo and Deir Ez-Zor, where the largest Syrian oil and gas fields are located.

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The Syrian government does not recognize the so-called autonomous administration of northern and eastern Syria, and calls the presence of the US military on its territory an occupation and its theft of Syrian oil - state piracy.

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Syrian Kurds Warn Turkish Operation May Lead to Thousands of IS Detainees Breaking Free
(Adds background in paras 3-6)
WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Syrian Kurds are warning that a potential military operation by Turkey in northern Syria will make it impossible to safeguard prisons there and thousands of fighters from the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) may break free, Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) Representative in the United States, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.
"There are no changes [at present] but we are worried about being able to properly guard the prisoners and administer the facilities in the event of a Turkish attack," Saker said. "A Turkish invasion would destabilize the region, and would make it nearly impossible to continue to guard the ISIS [Islamic State] prisoners. If Turkey invades, thousands of ISIS detainees may break free to terrorize the world once again."Saker shared that the SDF currently have some 11,000 foreign fighters in detention centers throughout northeast Syria.
Earlier, Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said that Ankara was ready for a new military operation in northern Syria, it could begin at any moment. Damascus has repeatedly called the presence of Turkish forces in the border area of Syria, which carry out operations there against Kurdish formations, illegal and urged Ankara to withdraw its troops.
The armed conflict in Syria has been going on since 2011, with Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces fighting different insurgent groups. In late 2017, IS was declared defeated in Syria and Iraq, but counterterrorism operations are still underway.
Washington backs the Kurdish armed groups located in the country despite protests from the Syrian government.
Damascus does not recognize the so-called autonomous administration of northern and eastern Syria, and calls the presence of the US military on its territory an occupation and state piracy with the aim of outright theft of oil.

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Syrian Kurds Say Russia Assured Them Will Not Green Light Turkish Military Operation - SDC
(Adds details, background in paras 4-13)
WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), the political wing of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, has received assurances from Russia that Moscow will not green light Turkey's planned military operation in northern Syria, SDC Representative in the United States Bassam Saker told Sputnik.
"Russia has assured us that they will not give a green light to Turkey to invade and their forces have not changed. They have increased patrols in certain areas," Saker said.
Turkey's presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said earlier that Ankara stood ready to undertake a new military operation in northern Syria that could begin at any moment. The Syrian government has repeatedly called the presence of Turkish forces in the border area or inside Syria illegal and has urged Ankara to withdraw its troops.
Saker said a Turkish invasion would destabilize the region, cause death, destruction and displacement, and will contribute to the spreading of terrorism.
"We call upon all nations to act to prevent Turkish hostilities against Syria. Syrians must unite and reach a political solution for a peaceful, stable and prosperous future," he said.
Saker also pointed out that the Syrian Kurds have good relations with both Russia and the United States and have undertaken diplomatic visits to both countries.
"We hope to have more of them soon," he added.
In June, Russia's special presidential envoy for Syria Alexander Lavrentyev told Sputnik that a possible Turkish military operation in northern Syria will create new threats to Turkey's security itself.
Lavrentyev emphasized that the possible military operation may boost separatist sentiments among the Kurds, who may try to establish their own state. Such a scenario is not in line with the interests of Turkey and neither with those of Syria, Iraq and Iran.
The Russian diplomat added that the operation would have negative consequences for the whole region and finding a diplomatic solution would be the best option.
The armed conflict in Syria has been ongoing since 2011, with different insurgent groups, including terrorist organizations, fighting the Syrian Army to oust the government of President Bashar Assad. In late 2017, the Islamic State (terrorist group banned in Russia) was declared defeated in Syria and Iraq, but counterterrorism mop-up operations are still underway.

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The United States backs the Kurdish armed groups in Syria despite protests by Damascus. The US military currently controls parts of the provinces of Al-Hasakah, Raqqa, Aleppo, and Deir Ez-Zor, where the largest Syrian oil and gas fields are located.
The Syrian government does not recognize the so-called autonomous administration of northern and eastern Syria, and calls the presence of the US military on its territory an occupation and state piracy as it steals Syrian oil.

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"Russia has assured us that they will not give a green light to Turkey to invade and their forces have not changed. They have increased patrols in certain areas," Saker said.
Turkey's presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said earlier that Ankara stood ready to undertake a new military operation in northern Syria that could begin at any moment. The Syrian government has repeatedly called the presence of Turkish forces in the border area or inside Syria illegal and has urged Ankara to withdraw its troops.

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Syrian Kurds in Contact With US About Turkey's Planned Military Operation - SDC
(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-8)
WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), the political wing of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, is in touch with the US government about Turkey's planned military operation in northern Syria and have been reassured that Washington stands opposed to it, SDC Representative in the United States, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.
"We are in contact with the United States about the planned operation and they have assured us that they are against any Turkish operation," Saker said. "They are speaking to the Turks and trying to diplomatically prevent an attack, however, beyond diplomacy, the assistance they provide is strictly related to the fight against ISIS [Islamic state terror group, banned in Russia] and this will not change."
Turkey's presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said earlier that Ankara stood ready to undertake a new military operation in northern Syria that could begin at any moment. The Syrian government has repeatedly pointed out that the presence of Turkish forces in the border area and inside Syria is illegal and has urged Ankara to withdraw its troops.
Saker said the cooperation between the Syrian Kurds and the United States remains strong.

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"It is focused on the anti-ISIS mission and countering the continuing threat of ISIS cells, while also promoting stability in liberated areas," Saker added.
The armed conflict in Syria has been ongoing since 2011, with different insurgent groups, including terrorist organizations, fighting the Syrian Army to oust the government of President Bashar Assad. In late 2017, the Islamic State was declared defeated in Syria and Iraq, but counterterrorism mop-up operations are still underway.
The US government backs Kurdish armed groups located in Syria despite protests from the Syrian government. The US military currently controls parts of the provinces of Al-Hasakah, Raqqa, Aleppo, and Deir Ez-Zor, where the largest Syrian oil and gas fields are located.
The Syrian government does not recognize the so-called autonomous administration of northern and eastern Syria, and calls the presence of the US military on its territory an occupation and state piracy as it steals Syrian oil.

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Syrian Kurds in Contact With US About Turkey's Planned Military Operation - SDC

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), the political wing of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, is in touch with the US government about Turkey's planned military operation in northern Syria and have been reassured that Washington stands opposed to it, SDC Representative in the United States, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.
"We are in contact with the United States about the planned operation and they have assured us that they are against any Turkish operation," Saker said. "They are speaking to the Turks and trying to diplomatically prevent an attack, however, beyond diplomacy, the assistance they provide is strictly related to the fight against ISIS [Islamic state terror group, banned in Russia] and this will not change."

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RPT - Johnson's Departure May Set Stage for Collapse of Other Governments in Europe - Expert

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's resignation over a sexual misconduct scandal involving a senior party lawmaker will likely be followed by government changes in several other European countries, Executive Vice President of the Eurasia Center in Washington, DC Earl Rasmussen told Sputnik.
Johnson on Thursday announced his resignation, stressing that he would continue to fulfill the role of party leader and prime minster until his successors are appointed.
"Note this follows the collapse of Macron's government in France as well as other EU countries. Many more will likely see changes ahead to include Germany and Italy," Rasmussen said.

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He believes that all major Western leaders, including in the US, "need to be replaced" before the world will see "the potential for improvement."
Johnson's resignation itself came as no surprise, according to the expert. "We also have seen diminishing support for Johnson's conservative party as well," he noted.
Rasmussen expressed overall concerns that the West is moving "on a very dangerous path" both economically and militarily.
"Fences will mend over time but not until western leaders are replaced with those that care for their own people and countries and respect all countries' sovereignty. We are moving in uncharted waters and the next several years will be challenging but there is still hope for a brighter future for all," he said.
Last week, Christopher Pincher resigned as deputy chief whip of the UK's Conservative Party after being accused of sexual misconduct in one of London's private members club. A number of politicians claimed that Johnson appointed Pincher to the post despite knowing about sexual misconduct allegations. On Tuesday, Johnson apologized and admitted, "in hindsight it was the wrong thing to do."
The scandal has led to a string of resignations, with dozens of officials stepping down from Johnson's government, including such key figures as Health Secretary Sajid Javid and Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak.

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Zelenskyy Says Would Love to See Biden in Ukraine, Realizes Security Issues Stand in Way

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in an interview said he wants to see President Joe Biden visit Ukraine but understands that security issues might stand in the way.
"We would love to see President Biden in Ukraine. I heard that he supported the idea. There are some security moments, which stand in the way of his visit, we understand that," Zelenskyy told CNN on Thursday. "I truly think this would help the Ukrainians."
Ukrainian support and trust for the United States is very high, he added.
Zelenskyy also said other world leaders' visits to Ukraine are important as well.
"They come despite the rockets flying in. They are not afraid of [Russian President Vladimir] Putin because the world is much bigger than one leader of one country," he said.
On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. Russia said twin goals of the special operation are to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine.
The Russian Ministry of Defense has said the operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger.

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US Assistance for Ukraine Not Enough to Defeat Russia - Zelenskyy

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The substantial assistance the United States is providing Ukraine is not enough to help it defeat Russia, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in an interview.

"[The] United States are helping Ukraine, helping a lot, but it's not enough in order to win," Zelenskyy told CNN on Thursday.

Zelenskyy said Ukraine does not want other countries fighting in its territory but pointed out that the United States as a world economy can help Ukraine with both arms and finances, and to influence the decisions of other European countries to better support Ukraine.

Earlier on Thursday, US Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville said that the Ukrainian government seeks attack helicopters and air-and-missile defense systems but the more weapon systems the Ukrainians obtain from the United States and the allies, "the more they desire."

The total US military assistance to Ukraine since the President Joe Biden assumed office has amounted to $7.6 billion dollars.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. Russia said twin goals of the special operation are to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine.

The Russian Ministry of Defense has said the operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger.

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Zelenskyy Says Johnson's Resignation Will Not Change UK Policy on Ukraine

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in an interview that UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's resignation will not change the United Kingdom's policy towards Ukraine.

"And I'm sure the UK policy toward Ukraine is not... changing because of Boris Johnson's resignation," Zelenskyy told CNN in an interview on Thursday.

However, Zelenskyy said he is unsure if Johnson's resignation will affect the speed of UK aid delivered to Ukraine, which was being sent quite quickly under his leadership.

Earlier on Thursday, Johnson announced that he will step down as prime minister and leader of the Conservative Party but will remain in his post until a new prime minister is appointed.

Johnson has been grappling with calls to resign after a series of revelations showed that several social gatherings were held at his offices throughout 2020 and 2021 in violation of COVID-19 distancing rules. The situation was aggravated by the reports that two more parties were held

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on April 16 last year, right before Prince Philip's funeral, when the United Kingdom still maintained the COVID-19 restrictions and was in national mourning.

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US Provides Additional $117Mln in Humanitarian Aid to South Sudan - USAID

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is allocating an additional sum of $117 million for food assistance to South Sudan amid a trifecta of devastating natural disasters, internal conflict and acute food insecurity, the US Agency for International Development said in a press release.

"The United States, through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), is providing more than $117 million in additional humanitarian assistance for the people of South Sudan, who continue to experience the devastating effects of violence, food insecurity, the COVID-19 pandemic and successive years of widespread flooding," the release said on Thursday.

USAID said the funds, which were secured from the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust and added to funds from the US Agriculture Department, "will provide an additional $670 million in food assistance to respond to historic levels of acute food insecurity around the world."

USAID officials said the money will complement food and nutrition provided by the UN World Food Program. The latter is assisting more than one million people, including refugees and residents in South Sudan, who are facing malnutrition and acute food insecurity across.

"The United States continues to stand with the people of South Sudan as the country experiences compounding crises," the release said.

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Twitter Takeover by Elon Musk in Jeopardy Due to Unverifiable Spam Account Data - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The takeover of social media company Twitter by entrepreneur Elon Musk is imperiled by unverifiable data about the number of spam accounts on the platform, The Washington Post reported, citing people familiar with the deal.

Discussions by Musk's team on funding for the $44 billion deal have ceased due to concerns about the verifiability of Twitter's figures regarding the number of spam accounts, the report said on Thursday.

Musk could take drastic action and alter the course of the negotiations, one source reportedly said.

Musk would be required to pay $1 billion to pull out of the deal, which would likely spark lawsuits, the report added. Twitter could try to lock Musk into the purchase if they can prove the cancellation is not related to the company's core business, according to the report.

In April, Musk reached an acquisition agreement with Twitter at $54.20 per share in a transaction valued at approximately $44 billion. However, Musk put the deal on hold in May to

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allow his team to review the veracity of Twitter's claim that less than 5% of accounts on the platform are bots or spam.
Twitter has not been cooperative with Musk regarding the matter, another person familiar with the deal reportedly said.
Musk in late June at the Qatar Economic Forum expressed optimism about the deal moving forward despite the unresolved issues inhibiting it, as well as his ability to bolster free speech and inclusiveness on Twitter as its leader.

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Two US Homeland Security Officials Charged in Scheme to Quiet China Critics - Justice Dept

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - A US grand jury indicted two current and former homeland security officials and three Chinese nationals for allegedly attempting to intimidate and silence critics of Beijing inside the United States, the Justice Department said in a press release.
"A grand jury returned an indictment in federal court in Brooklyn charging five defendants with various crimes pertaining to a transnational repression scheme orchestrated on behalf of the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC)," the release said on Thursday.
Among the defendants are US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) deportation officer Craig Miller and former DHS agent Derrick Taylor, the release said, who were charged with obstruction of justice for destroying evidence related to a list of US-based dissidents targeted in the scheme.
Three of the defendants - Fan Liu, Matthew Ziburis, and Qiang Sun - destroyed the artwork of a Chinese dissident in Los Angeles, California, whom they spied on using surveillance equipment in the artist's workplace and car, according to the release.
Four of the defendants were arrested in March and June, but Qiang Sun remains at large, the Justice Department said. If convicted, the defendants face prison sentences ranging from 20 to 30 years, the release added.

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Oil Snaps 2-Day Selloff as US Recession Fear Fades, Crude Up $4

NEW YORK, July 8 (Sputnik) - Crude prices jumped some $4 a barrel, or about 4%, on Thursday, rebounding from the near $15, or 15%, loss in two previous sessions.
The rebound came amid widespread belief the market had been oversold on fears of a US recession and that supply will stay below demand in the near future, regardless of economic conditions.
"This perhaps highlights the disconnect between the speculative market on the futures exchanges, and the reality of the physical market where futures contracts remain heavily in

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backwardation, signaling immediate oil supplies are as tight as ever," Jeffrey Halley, who oversees Asia Pacific research for the financial company OANDA, said.
Backwardation refers to higher pricing for oil meant for immediate delivery versus that which is stored for later sales. It is the backbone of the bull market in oil and has been in force since crude's price recovery from the demand destruction caused by the 2020 coronavirus outbreak. This year's oil rally from the sanctions imposed on major energy exporter Russia for the conflict in Ukraine has also put market bulls in a near unassailable position for the most part.
In Thursday's trade, New York-traded West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled at $102.73 a barrel, up $4.20, or 4.3%, on the day. The US crude benchmark fell to a near three-month low of $95.10 on Wednesday.
London-traded Brent, the global benchmark for crude, settled at $104.65 a barrel, up $3.96, 3.9%, on the day. Brent also hit a near three-month low in the previous session, sliding to a bottom of $98.52.
The rebound seemed at odds with data on weekly oil inventories from the Energy Information Administration (EIA), which reported an unexpected build last week in balances for US crude. Crude stockpiles stood at 8.235 million barrels in the week that ended July 1, the agency said in its Weekly Petroleum Status Report. Historical data showed that to be the highest build for US crude since the week ended May 6, when inventories stood at 8.487 million barrels. Analysts had forecast a 1.04-million barrel drop instead for crude last week.
But the EIA also reported drawdowns of 2.5 million barrels in gasoline inventories and 1.3 million in distillate balances for last week. Gasoline is the number one automobile fuel in the United States, while distillates are used for turning out the diesel for trucks, buses, trains and ships and the jet fuel for airplanes.
Analysts had projected a 0.48-million-barrel decline for gasoline and 1.13-milion-barrel build for distillates last week.
"I remain unconvinced that the fall in prices is anything more than an adjustment to recessionary fears and speculative noise in the futures space," Halley said. "We are yet to see demand destruction."
Earlier on Thursday, Federal Reserve Board of Governors member Chris Waller said that fears of a US recession were "overblown" and the US central bank needed to "front-load" interest rate hikes, raising them early and heavily if necessary, to tame inflation roaring at 40-year highs.

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Wall Street Sees Biggest Rally in 2 Weeks as Fed Says Recession Fears 'Overblown'

NEW YORK, July 8 (Sputnik) - Wall Street witnessed its biggest rally in two weeks after Federal Reserve Governor Chris Waller said on Thursday that fears of a US recession that had triggered a selloff across markets have been "overblown."
The S&P 500 index, representing the top 500 US stocks, closed up 1.5%, its most for a day since June 24th. The Wall Street benchmark had been on the rise of late, gaining a cumulative 3% over the last four sessions.

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The Dow Jones Industrial Average, comprising stocks of 30 large US corporations, rose 1.1%, rising for a second day in a row for a compounded gain of 1.4%.
The Nasdaq Composite, which comprises marquee technology names such as Apple, Netflix and Google, was the outlier of the three, surging 2.3% on the day. The tech barometer has gained 5.4% in four sessions.
Stocks were up and running and gaining steam after Waller told a live-streamed event that fears of a US recession were probably exaggerated.
"I personally think some of the fears of inflation are kind of overblown," Waller said. "A lot of the forecasting models predicting probabilities of recession are not even over 50% or less, depending on what the model is."
Talk of recession has intensified across the United States Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta forecast a 1% contraction in GDP for the second quarter. Officially, the Commerce Department reported a 1.6% decrease in GDP for the first quarter. An economy is considered to be in recession if there are two straight quarters of GDP decline.
A cluster of economic data of late has also suggested that the United States may be headed for a recession.
A closely-followed barometer of the US services sector hit 20-month lows last month, data on Wednesday showed. The United States also saw the highest number of job cuts in 16 months in June, a private-sector employment tracker said in monthly data on Thursday that indicated the red-hot US labor market may be cooling. That came after the Labor Department reported a day earlier that job openings declined to 11.25 million in May from 11.68 million in April.
US inflation itself has been persistently running at four-decade highs since late last year, with the closely-watched Consumer Price Index growing at an annualized rate of 8.6% as of May.
The Federal Reserve's target for inflation is 2% per year and the central bank has vowed to raise interest rates as much as necessary to achieve the target. However, economists have said they fear the Federal Reserve's aggressive interest rate hikes will land the United States into a deep recession.

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Officer Who Killed George Floyd Sentenced Again to Over 20 Years in Prison - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US District Court Judge Paul Magnuson sentenced former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin to 20 years and four months in prison for violating federal civil rights laws during the incident in which he killed George Floyd in May 2020, FOX 9 reported.
Chauvin was found guilty in 2021 by the state of Minnesota of second-degree murder in Floyd's death and sentenced to over 22 years in prison. The additional federal sentence for civil rights violations will be served concurrently with the state sentence, according to the report on Thursday.

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In addition to admitting to depriving Floyd of his civil rights by kneeling on his neck for an extended period of time, ultimately leading to his death, Chauvin also pleaded guilty to unrelated charges of using excessive force against a black 14-year-old boy in 2017.
During the sentencing hearing, Chauvin addressed Floyd's family to wish them well in life, the report said.
Chauvin's mother also spoke during the hearing to ask the judge to sentence Chauvin to a federal prison near Minnesota or Iowa where his family lives, the report added.
The other former officers involved in the incident - Tou Thao, J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane - were also found guilty in federal court of violating Floyd's civil rights by not intervening to stop Chauvin from continuing to kneel on his neck.
The judge said during the sentencing hearing that Chauvin ruined the lives of his fellow former officers, to the report said.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) -

BORIS JOHNSON RESIGNS
* UK Prime Minister and Conservative Party Leader Boris Johnson on Thursday announced his resignation from both positions, saying that he would fulfill both duties until his successors are appointed.
* It is too early to predict the impact of the resignation of Johnson on Russian-British relations, Russian Ambassador to London Andrey Kelin said.
* Johnson told ministers that the government will not try to make any significant changes in the direction of leadership until a new head is elected, Sky News reported.
* The government crisis in the United Kingdom is not Kremlin's priority, though Moscow is still paying particular attention to it, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

BRITTNEY GRINER CASE IN RUSSIA
* US basketball player Brittney Griner has said in a Russian court that she is guilty of smuggling cannabis oil, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Thursday.
* The US Embassy in Moscow's Deputy Chief of Mission, Elizabeth Rood, said that she had handed over a letter from US President Joe Biden to Griner.
* US National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby declined to confirm reports that former US ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson will travel to Russia to attempt to free Griner.

BIDEN TRIP TO SAUDI ARABIA
* Energy security will "clearly" be a topic of discussion during the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit on July 16 in which US President Joe Biden will participate, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Thursday.

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* US President Joe Biden will meet with Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and his leadership team and also with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during his trip to Riyadh next week, Kirby said.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS
* Russia will hold an informal UN Security Council meeting on Nazism and fascism in Ukraine on July 11, Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday.
* Some countries are using the Ukraine crisis to impose unilateral sanctions against China and other countries, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said.
* US government spending on military biological activities in Ukraine in Pentagon's interests since 2005 has exceeded $250 million, Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, the head of the radiation, chemical and biological defense of the Russian armed forces, said.
* The preparation of sabotage activities by the Ukrainian terrorist group in the city of Kherson was personally controlled by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a militant detained by the Russian armed forces said during testimony.

ENERGY MARKETS
* Gas futures prices in Europe exceeded $1,900 per 1,000 cubic meters on Thursday for the first time since March 1 and are currently increasing by almost 7%, according to the London-based ICE exchange.
* German Economy Minister Robert Habeck urged Canada to resolve the issue with the Nord Stream turbine, asking to send the turbine to Germany, and not to Russia, if this is a legal issue for Ottawa.

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US-UK Alliance Remains Strong Amid Prime Minister Johnson's Resignation - White House

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The alliance between the United States and the United Kingdom will remain strong despite the resignation of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Thursday.
Earlier in the day, Johnson announced that he will step down as prime minister and leader of the Conservative Party but will fulfill his obligations until a new prime minister is appointed.
"Our alliance with the United Kingdom continues to be strong," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing. "Our special relationship with the people in the country will continue to endure. None of that changes."
Jean-Pierre said she had nothing to preview about a potential call between US President Joe Biden and Johnson.
Johnson has been grappling with calls to resign after a series of revelations showed that several social gatherings were held at his offices throughout 2020 and 2021 in violation of COVID-19 distancing rules. The situation was aggravated by the reports that two more parties were held

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on April 16 last year, right before Prince Philip's funeral, when the United Kingdom still maintained the COVID-19 restrictions and was in national mourning.
Johnson later apologized and said paid a fine issued by the Metropolitan Police.
The final point that marked a major political crisis in the United Kingdom was the recent scandal involving former deputy chief whip Christopher Pincher. Last week, Pincher resigned after being accused of sexual misconduct in a private members club in London. A number of politicians claimed that Johnson appointed Pincher to his post despite knowing about previous investigations of his transgressions.
The scandal has led to a string of resignations, with dozens of officials stepping down from Johnson's government, including such key figures as Health Secretary Sajid Javid and Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak.

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US Says Basketball Star Brittney Griner Guilty Plea Not to Impact Negotiations With Russia

WASHINGTON, July 7 - (Sputnik) - US basketball player Brittney Griner's guilty plea in a Moscow court will not have any impact on the ongoing negotiations with the Russian authorities about her release, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Thursday.
Griner, a basketball player for the Phoenix Mercury, was arrested in mid-February at a Moscow airport for carrying cannabis oil. On Monday, she pleaded guilty in a Moscow court on bringing the cannabis oil to Russia.
"It will have no impact on any of the negotiations for the President [Joe Biden], the national security team, the State Department, the special envoy that I just spoke about," Jean-Pierre said.
The Biden administration is going to do everything it can to bring home Griner safely, Jean-Pierre said.
The administration is also trying to ensure that another US citizen who is imprisoned in Russia, Paul Whelan, is returned home to the United States as well, she added.

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Biden Officials Gave Paul Whelan's Family Update on Progress to Secure His Release

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Biden administration officials has provided the family of Paul Whelan an update on the progress made toward securing his release from Russia, US National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Thursday.
On Wednesday, the Whelan family expressed frustration that President Joe Biden did not call them but did call the relatives of basketball player Brittney Griner, who is detained in Russia and has pleaded guilty on charges of drug possession.

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"Just yesterday, White House staff joined the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs [Roger Carstens] on a call with [Paul Whelan's sister] Elizabeth and in fact, the envoy's office, his team, they held a bi-weekly call with Elizabeth to give her updates and pass any information that they can on progress towards securing his release," Kirby said during a conference call.
Paul Whelan, who in addition to being a US citizen is also a citizen of Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom, was arrested in Russia in December 2018 on espionage charges. A court in Moscow sentenced him to 16 years.
He has denied the charges and insisted to have visited Russia because a friend was getting married. Court papers have revealed that he had frequented Russia since 2007.

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Only 43% of Americans Say Biden Doing Good or Excellent Job on Covid Response - Poll

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Only 43 percent of Americans believe President Joe Biden is doing a good or excellent job in responding to the pandemic, a Pew Research poll revealed on Thursday.
"Four months ahead of the November midterm elections, President Joe Biden's standing on the issue of the coronavirus outbreak has diminished. A majority of adults (56%) say he is doing an only fair or poor job responding to the outbreak, compared with 43% who say he is doing an excellent or good job," the pollster said in a press release accompanying the data.
The pollster also noted that at the start of his term 65% of Americans said they were "confident in his ability to deal with the outbreak." And, in October of 2020, according to Pew, Biden held a clear advantage over then-president Donald Trump as the candidate viewed by voters as more capable of handling the pandemic response.
In addition, a majority of Americans gave the US overall response to the pandemic a lackluster evaluation, the poll added.
According to the survey, 62% of Americans believe the US has given "too little priority" to meeting K-12 educational needs during the outbreak, with 48% feeling the same about supporting quality of life and 46% with respect to supporting economic activity.

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US Sees Sanctions as Having Impact on Russia, Vows to Broaden Them - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The United States sees that sanctions imposed on Russia are having impact on the country's economy and promises to broaden the restrictive measures, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Douglas Jones said on Thursday.

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"Sanctions are having an impact. We have seen Russia defaults on their foreign loans, we have seen their inability to replace a lot of their weapon systems that they are loosing in Ukraine as a result of export default. We have seen another impacts on their economy," Jones said.
The United States will continue to put economic pressure on Russia not only by maintaining the current sanctions regime, but by broadening restrictions and enhancing its implementation, Jones added.
On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. Russia said the goal of the special operation is to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine.
In response, the United States and its allies in the collective West imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia, including restrictive measures against industries, banks, government agencies and organizations as well as officials and their families.

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White House After Griner Pleads Guilty Says US Athlete Wrongfully Detained in Russia

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - US National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Thursday, when asked about WNBA player Brittney Griner pleading guilty in a Russian court on the charge of smuggling cannabis oil, that they continue to believe the US athlete was wrongfully detained.
"The Russian Federation is wrongfully detaining Brittney under intolerable circumstances," Kirby told a conference call. "I won't speak to the specifics of her legal case. That's really a question put to her representatives, but the President's been clear about the need to see every American wrongfully detained or held hostage to be released, including Brittney."
The Biden administration continues to work on Griner's and other Americans' cases very aggressively, Kirby said.
On February 17, Griner was detained at a Moscow airport for allegedly carrying cannabis oil in her luggage. If convicted on the charge against her, Griner faces a sentence of up to 10 years in prison. Griner was playing for the UMMC Yekaterinburg basketball team in Russia during the WNBA off-season.

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Godfather Actor James Caan Dies at 82 – Family

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) – Famous US actor James Caan, best known for his role of mafioso Sonny Corleone in The Godfather blockbuster, has died at the age of 82.

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"It is with great sadness that we inform you of the passing of Jimmy on the evening of July 6," his family wrote on social media on Thursday.
The family asked Caan's fans to continue to respect their privacy during this difficult time, without providing details on the cause of his death.
Caan was born on March 26, 1940 in New York to the family of a Jewish immigrant who had fled Nazi Germany. His filmography counts over 90 movies and almost two dozen TV shows, including Cinderella Liberty, The Gambler and others. He was nominated for four Golden Globes, an Emmy, and an Oscar, and was awarded a motion pictures star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1978.

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Texas National Guard, Police to Return Illegal Migrants on US Southern Border - Governor

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Texas national guard troops and state police officers have the authority to apprehend and return illegal immigrants on the US southern border, Texas Governor Greg Abbott's office said on Thursday.
"Governor Greg Abbott today issued an executive order authorizing and empowering the Texas National Guard and the Texas Department of Public Safety to apprehend illegal immigrants who illegally cross the border between ports of entry and return them to the border," Abbott's office said in a press release.
This year, the monthly number of illegal migrants apprehended on the southern border hit three record highs in March, April, and May, reaching more than 200,000 each month and setting the Biden administration on pace to hit a second consecutive record for most illegal migrants apprehended on the southern border.

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Russia to Hold UN Security Council Meeting on Nazism in Ukraine July 11 - Polyanskiy

UNITED NATIONS, July 7 (Sputnik) - Russia will hold an informal UN Security Council meeting on Nazism and fascism in Ukraine on July 11, Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday.
"On Monday, July 11, at 15:00 NY/22:00 Moscow time, we are holding another informal UN Security Council Arria-Formula meeting, dedicated to Nazism and fascism in Ukraine," the diplomat said on Telegram.
"This is our answer to those Western colleagues who question one of the goals of our operation in Ukraine - denazification - and claim that we are exaggerating the scale of the problem," he added.

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US Agrees to Lift Tariffs on Canadian Solar Products – Global Affairs Canada

OTTAWA, July 7 (Sputnik) – The United States has agreed to lift its 2018 safeguard tariffs imposed on Canadian solar products after losing a dispute under the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement earlier this year, Canadian Trade Minister Mary Ng said on Thursday.
In 2018, the US introduced safeguard tariffs on Canadian exports of solar products in order to protect domestic products. The measures made imports from Canada fall by 82%. In 2021, Canada resorted to a CUSMA mechanism in order to reach a settlement with the US by creating a dispute panel, with the final report being delivered in February this year finding that the tariffs violated certain rules.
"Today, I welcomed the agreement reached with the United States to remove the U.S. safeguard tariffs on solar products from Canada. This agreement follows Canada's victory at a CUSMA dispute panel earlier this year, which found that the United States' tariffs were in violation of CUSMA," Ng said in a statement.
Ng said the move is recognition of Canada's place in the fight against climate change, adding that the government would always stand up for the solar industry in and outside of Canada
"Our government will always stand up for our world class solar industry and the thousands of workers and jobs across the country," Ng added.
All the documents submitted by Canada to solve the dispute will be available for open consultation under their public versions, on the Trade Agreement Secretariat system.

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Federal Reserve Needs to 'Front-Load' Rate Hikes as US Recession Fears Overblown - Waller

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Fears of a recession in the United States are overblown and the US central bank needs to "front-load" interest rate hikes, raising them early and heavily if necessary, to tame inflation that is roaring at 40-year highs, Federal Reserve Board of Governors member Chris Waller said on Thursday.
"I personally think some of the fears of inflation are kind of overblown," Waller told a live-streamed event. "A lot of the forecasting models predicting probabilities of recession are not even over 50% or less, depending on what the model is."
Talk of recession has gotten louder across the United States since the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta forecast a 1% contraction of GDP in the second quarter. The Commerce Department reported a decline in GDP of 1.6% for the first quarter. Typically, an economy is considered to be in recession if there are two straight quarters of GDP decline.

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A cluster of economic data of late has suggested that the United States may be headed for an economic slowdown.

A closely-followed barometer of the US service sector hit 20-month lows last month, data on Wednesday showed. The United States saw the highest number of job cuts in 16 months in June, a private sector employment tracker said in monthly data on Thursday that indicated the red-hot US labor market may be cooling. That came after the Labor Department reported a day earlier that job openings declined to 11.25 million in May from 11.68 million in April.

US inflation has been persistently running at four-decade highs since late last year, with the Consumer Price Index growing at an annualized rate of 8.6% as of May. The central bank's target for inflation is 2% per year and it has vowed to raise interest rates as much as necessary to achieve that.

Many economists say the Federal Reserve has kept interest rates "too low for too long" and its catch-up now could unravel recovery made since last year and possibly even push the United States into a recession.

The Federal Reserve left interest rates at between zero and 0.25% for two years during the coronavirus pandemic and only raised them this year in March. It began with a hike of 25 basis points, or quarter-percentage point, then raised it by 50 basis points, or a half percentage point, in May. In June, the Federal Reserve imposed an increase of 75 basis points, or three quarters of a percentage point - the highest in 28 years - bringing current rates to between a 1.5% and 1.75% range.

Economists say they think the Federal Reserve will push ahead with another 75 basis point hike at its next rate hike meeting on July 27 – a move Waller said would support.

"I support a 75 bps [hike] at [the] July meeting, and I am probably in favor of a 50 bps rise at the September meeting," he said, referring to the next meeting scheduled on September 21 during which the decision on the interest rate hike will be made. "We need to front-load rate hikes, with large increases early."

The Federal Reserve's interest rate hikes have given the impression that the central bank was out to crash prices of assets like houses and oil that analysts say have risen too much and too fast over the past year and have fed inflation.

"The climb in house prices over the last couple of years is insane [but] the Fed is not trying to crash either the housing, or commodity markets," Waller said. "Inflation is too high, and doesn't seem to be easing. I believe we have a good shot at achieving a soft landing. The economy is relatively strong."

The central bank's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee said in the minutes of its June meeting released on Wednesday that there is a real danger of high inflation becoming entrenched within the US economy and appropriate rate hikes may be the only way to balance prices with growth.

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RPT - Canada Heading Toward Short-Lived 'Moderate' Recession in 2023 - RBC

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OTTAWA, July 7 (Sputnik) - Canada is heading toward a short-lived but moderate recession next year as interest rates are being raised to address inflation and labor shortages, the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) said on Thursday.

"This recession will be moderate and short-lived by historical standards and can be reversed once inflation settles enough for central banks to lower rates," RBC said in a report.

The BRC said employment shortages and high inflation are posing a problem because they limit the consumers' ability to pay for groceries and gasoline as the pump, the report said.

The economy is experiencing pressures due to the global stresses on the supply chains that have been caused in part by the conflict in Ukraine and have affected energy and agricultural prices, the report said.

The Bank of Canada has no choice but to impose higher interest rates even though such a move may mean contracting the economy, the report said.

However, introducing higher rates now could prevent lager "damaging" interest rate hikes, continuing with ten years of low inflation, the report said.

The BRC said it expects the recession to be moderate and short-lived given that global inflation may be peeking and Canadians are spending less on consumer goods and more on services that were unavailable in the past two years as a result of the coronavirus pandemic measures.

"Prices are still rising too fast and inflation won't slow sustainably until demand falls. But once that happens, central banks will ease interest rates again," the report added.

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CORRECTION - Canada Heading Toward Short-Lived 'Moderate' Recession in 2023 - RCB

OTTAWA, July 7 (Sputnik) - Canada is heading toward a short-lived but moderate recession next year as interest rates are being raised to address inflation and labor shortages, the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) said on Thursday.

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Kirby Declines to Say if Ex-US Envoy Richardson Traveling to Russia to Free Griner

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - US National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby on Thursday declined to confirm reports that former US ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson will travel to Russia to attempt to free detained WNBA basketball player Brittney Griner.

Earlier in the day, Griner pleaded guilty in a Russian court on the charge of smuggling cannabis oil.

"I don't think I've got anything for you on that today," Kirby said during a conference call.

Richardson is known for being dispatched to negotiate the release of Americans detained overseas.

On February 17, Griner was detained at a Moscow airport for allegedly carrying cannabis oil in her luggage. If convicted on the charge against her, Griner faces a sentence of up to 10 years in prison. Griner was playing for the UMMC Yekaterinburg basketball team in Russia during the WNBA off-season.

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Ghislaine Maxwell Submits Appeal to Overturn Sex Trafficking Conviction - Court Filings

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Ghislaine Maxwell submitted a notice of appeal to a New York district court in an attempt to overturn her conviction and 20-year prison sentence for sex trafficking and sexual abuse charges, according to court documents filed on Thursday.

Maxwell, an associate of sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein, played a key role in his scheme to sexually exploit young girls for years, according to prosecutors. Maxwell was convicted in December on five sex crimes charges and sentenced to 20 years in prison in June.

Federal prosecutors sought a prison sentence of 30 to 55 years, arguing in a memorandum that Maxwell "played an instrumental role in the horrific sexual abuse of multiple young teenage girls."

Epstein allegedly committed suicide in a New York detention center in August 2019 while awaiting trial for sex trafficking charges.

Maxwell's legal team in January called for a new trial in her case after a member of the jury who convicted her told the media that they were a victim of sexual assault - am issue that was raised on the prospective jurors' questionnaire.

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US Exploring With Mideast Nations Idea of Integrating Their Air Defenses - White House

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The United States is exploring ideas about integrating various Middle Eastern countries' air defense capabilities in order to achieve a more effective coverage against Iran's growing ballistic missile program, US National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Thursday.
"Bilaterally, we're talking with nations across the region about air defense capabilities specifically and what we can do to assist with air defense and then exploring the idea of being able to kind of integrate all those air defenses together so that there truly is a more effective coverage to deal with the growing Iranian threat," Kirby said during a conference call.

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Energy Security 'Clearly' Will Be Topic of Discussion at GCC Summit - White House

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Energy security will "clearly" be a topic of discussion during the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit on July 16 in which US President Joe Biden will participate, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Thursday.
"Clearly, energy security will be a topic of discussion," Kirby said during a press briefing.
The GCC is a regional political and economic union of Middle Eastern countries - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

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UN Chief Tells G20 Ministers Strengthening Multilateralism 'Not Choice But Necessity'

UNITED NATIONS, July 6 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Thursday told the Group of Twenty (G20) countries' foreign ministers that strengthening multilateralism is not a choice but a necessity in order to avoid widespread food shortages and poverty.
"Strengthening multilateralism - the theme of this session - is not a choice, but a necessity," Guterres said in a video message. "It is the only way to avoid widespread food shortages, deepening climate chaos and a wave of poverty and destitution that will leave no country untouched."
The UN Secretary-General devoted a significant part of his speech on the global food crisis and said he believes it has been exacerbated by the conflict in Ukraine.

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Guterres said the United Nations is working on a plan that would enable a safe and secure export of Ukraine-produced foods via the Black Sea and an unimpeded access to global markets for Russian food products and fertilizer.
The meeting of the G20 foreign ministers is held in Bali, Indonesia, from July 7-8.

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Biden During Trip to Riyadh to Meet With Saudi King Salman, Crown Prince - White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will meet with Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and his leadership team and also with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during his trip to Riyadh next week, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Thursday.
"The President [Biden] will sit down in a bilateral meeting with King Salman and his leadership team. As you know, the Crown Prince is on that leadership team, so he'll be a part of that meeting," Kirby said during a press briefing. "[T]he President will be seeing the Crown Prince in the context of that larger bilateral discussion."

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Canada Heading Toward Short-Lived 'Moderate' Recession in 2023 - Central Bank

OTTAWA, July 7 (Sputnik) - Canada is heading toward a short-lived but moderate recession next year as interest rates are being raised to address inflation and labor shortages, the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) said on Thursday.
“This recession will be moderate and short-lived by historical standards and can be reversed once inflation settles enough for central banks to lower rates,” RBC said in a report.
The BRC said employment shortages and high inflation are posing a problem because they limit the consumers' ability to pay for groceries and gasoline as the pump, the report said.
The economy is experiencing pressures due to the global stresses on the supply chains that have been caused in part by the conflict in Ukraine and have affected energy and agricultural prices, the report said.
The Bank of Canada has no choice but to impose higher interest rates even though such a move may mean contracting the economy, the report said.
However, introducing higher rates now could prevent lager “damaging” interest rate hikes, continuing with ten years of low inflation, the report said.
The BRC said it expects the recession to be moderate and short-lived given that global inflation may be peeking and Canadians are spending less on consumer goods and more on services that were unavailable in the past two years as a result of the coronavirus pandemic measures.

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"Prices are still rising too fast and inflation won't slow sustainably until demand falls. But once that happens, central banks will ease interest rates again," the report added.

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Only 2 Justice Dept. Agencies Following Cyber Supply Chain Risk Protocol - Watchdog

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Only two agencies within the US Justice Department were compliant with the department's Cyber Supply Chain Risk Management (C-SCRM) protocol meant to mitigate exposure to cybersecurity risks in IT procurements, the Office of the Inspector General for the Justice Department said in a report on Thursday.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) were the only agencies that properly followed the Justice Management Division's (JMD) Cyber Supply Chain Risk Management policies, the report said.

"We concluded that... only ATF and the DEA were compliant with the JMD C-SCRM requirements that we reviewed, having established policy-driven processes that flagged applicable purchase requests, and consistently submitting those items to JMD to undergo its C-SCRM process," the report said.

The Cyber Supply Chain Risk Management program run by JMD covers all Justice Department agencies except the FBI, who has their own version of the program. The programs manage cyber supply chain risks by considering vulnerabilities posed by IT procurement of computers, software, drones and radio systems.

The report references a 2020 cyber intrusion in US technology companies and government agencies that used the management software SolarWinds to gain access as an example of a recent supply-chain related compromise.

The report recommended JMD provide communication, outreach, and training to Justice Department components and develop procedures to assess their efforts.

Cyber Supply Chain Risk Management controls could be bypassed and high-risk IT could be installed without JMD authorization or a risk mitigation plan if efforts are not made to improve the program, the report said.

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Johnson's Departure May Set Stage for Collapse of Other Governments in Europe - Expert

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) – UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's resignation over a sexual misconduct scandal involving a senior party lawmaker will likely be followed by government changes in several other European countries, Executive Vice President of the Eurasia Center in Washington, DC Earl Rasmussen told Sputnik on Thursday.

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Earlier in the day, Johnson announced his resignation, stressing that he would continue to fulfill the role of party leader and prime minster until his successors are appointed.
"Note this follows the collapse of Macron's government in France as well as other EU countries. Many more will likely see changes ahead to include Germany and Italy," Rasmussen said.
He believes that all major Western leaders, including in the US, "need to be replaced" before the world will see "the potential for improvement."
Johnson's resignation itself came as no surprise, according to the expert. "We also have seen diminishing support for Johnson's conservative party as well," he noted.
Rasmussen expressed overall concerns that the West is moving "on a very dangerous path" both economically and militarily.
"Fences will mend over time but not until western leaders are replaced with those that care for their own people and countries and respect all countries' sovereignty. We are moving in uncharted waters and the next several years will be challenging but there is still hope for a brighter future for all," he said.
Last week, Christopher Pincher resigned as deputy chief whip of the UK's Conservative Party after being accused of sexual misconduct in one of London's private members club. A number of politicians claimed that Johnson appointed Pincher to the post despite knowing about sexual misconduct allegations. On Tuesday, Johnson apologized and admitted, "in hindsight it was the wrong thing to do."
The scandal has led to a string of resignations, with dozens of officials stepping down from Johnson's government, including such key figures as Health Secretary Sajid Javid and Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak.

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US Weekly Crude Stockpiles at 2-Month High as More Drilling Rigs Activated - Energy Agency

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - US crude inventories hit a two-month high last week, according to data from the Energy Information Administration (EIA) that suggested an uptick in supply as domestic oil producers put more drilling rigs into action.
Crude stockpiles stood at 8.235 million barrels in the week that ended on July 1, the EIA said in its Weekly Petroleum Status Report. Historical data showed it to be the highest build for US crude since the week that ended on May 6, when inventories stood at 8.487 million barrels.
"It's definitely a sign of the higher availability of supply although production itself did not go up on the week," energy markets commentator John Kilduff said, referring to production that remained static at 12.1 million barrels per day.
Oil drilling data by Baker Hughes shows an additional 15 rigs being put to work over the past month, bringing the tally to 595 as of last Friday from 580 on June 10.

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US Test of Minotaur II Launch Vehicle Ends in Explosion - Air Force

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The US military conducted a test launch of a Minotaur II launch vehicle that exploded 11 seconds after it launched, Vandenberg Space Force Base said in a press release on Thursday.

The Minotaur II rocket was carrying a new intercontinental ballistic missile reentry vehicle called the Mk21A, which is being developed jointly by the US Air Force and Lockheed Martin, according to reports earlier this week.

"A Minotaur II+ rocket exploded approximately 11 seconds after launching from Test Pad-01 at 11:01 p.m. PDT [Pacific Daylight Time] Wednesday," the base said in a press release.

An investigative review board is working to determine the cause of the explosion, the release said.

There were no injuries in the explosion and the debris was contained to the immediate vicinity of the launch pad, the release said.

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Falcon 9 Booster Carries 53 More Starlink Mini-Satellites Into Earth Orbit - SpaceX

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - A Falcon 9 rocket successfully carried a batch of 53 mini-communications satellites into Low Earth Orbit (LEO), SpaceX announced on Thursday.

The launch took place on schedule at 9:11 a.m. EDT and was podcast live from the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in the US state of Florida.

So far, SpaceX has successfully launched more than 2,700 mini-communications satellites in its Starlink program.

The US government has approved a total of 12,000 satellites in the Starlink program and SpaceX has already applied to launch an additional 30,000 mini-satellites despite concerns that they may be hazardous to other spacecraft, both unmanned and unmanned.

The launch was the 13th successful operation of the reusable Falcon 9 rocket - a record, SpaceX said.

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US Army Chief of Staff Says More Weapons Ukrainians Get 'More They Desire'

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The Ukrainian government seeks attack helicopters and air-and-missile defense systems but they more weapon systems the Ukrainians obtain from the United States and the allies, "the more they desire," the US Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville said on Thursday.

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"They want helicopters, and certainly attack helicopters at that, and they want air and missile defense that we're seeing from most of our allies and partners. Those seem to be the capabilities that they want, and the more of that they can get, the more they desire," McConville said.

On Friday, the United States announced another military aid package for Ukraine worth $820 million that includes two advanced surface-to-air missile systems and four additional counter-artillery radars.

The new military aid package also includes additional ammunition for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) that the US government previously committed to Ukraine.

The total US military assistance to Ukraine since the President Joe Biden assumed office has amounted to $7.6 billion dollars.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. Russia said twin goals of the special operation are to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine.

The Russian Ministry of Defense has said the operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger.

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Ukraine Proves Long-Range Fires 'Extremely Important' to Future Wars - US Army Chief

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The conflict in Ukraine has shown that capabilities such as long-range precision artillery fire systems are critical to future military engagements, US Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville said on Thursday.

"Long-range precision fires are in high demand and we are seeing that that capability is extremely important in any future warfare. Our number one priority in the United States Army is long-range precision fires," McConville said during a media availability when asked about lessons learned from Ukraine in terms of modernization and approach to multi-domain operations. "We're learning from some of the systems that they're operating."

Unmanned aerial systems are also extremely important on the contemporary battlefield, McConville said. Aerial systems are used to perform much of the targeting for artillery units, according to McConville.

US President Joe Biden during a NATO summit in Madrid late last month announced plans to send another $800 million in security aid to Ukraine, including artillery ammunition, long-range air defense capabilities and counter-battery radar systems.

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Canadian Gov't Invests $7.7Mln in Research Into COVID Treatments

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OTTAWA, July 7 (Sputnik) – The Canadian government has allocated C$10 million ($7.7 million) to enhance development of COVID-19 medications for non-hospitalized patients, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research said on Thursday.

"Today, the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Health, announced an investment of $10 million under this collaboration to create a pan-Canadian platform to advance research into the effectiveness and clinical challenges of new COVID-19 treatments in non-hospitalized patients," the statement said.

Although the research will be carried out all across Canada, cooperation with the United Kingdom and European Union is also expected, with the goal being to prove whether or not the treatments effectively prevent hospitalization and post-COVID sequels.

The research will mainly focus on a medication called nirmatrelvir/ritonavir, also known as Paxlovid.

The chief public health officer of Canada, Theresa Tam, says the study will provide the ministry with the required information for a better "collective response" to the pandemic.

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Canada Reaches in May Largest Trade Surplus Since 2008 of $4.1Bln - Statistics Agency

OTTAWA, July 7 (Sputnik) - The Canadian economy reached during the month of May the largest trade surplus in the past 14 years that amounted to C$5.3 billion (US$4.1 billion), Statistics Canada said on Thursday.

"In May, Canada's merchandise exports rose 4.1% compared with April, a fifth consecutive monthly increase," Statistics Canada said in a press release. "Meanwhile, imports decreased 0.7%. As a result, Canada's merchandise trade surplus with the world widened from $2.2 billion [US$1.7 billion] in April to $5.3 billion [US4.1 billion] in May, the largest trade surplus since August 2008," the release said.

The increase in merchandise exports in May amounted to $52.6 billion and was largely driven by a 5.7% increase in energy exports of $15.7 billion, followed by the aviation sector with increases in aircraft sales, maintenance parts and the like, the release said.

In addition, Canada benefited by an increase in the demand for potash in part due the sanctions imposed by the collective West on the world's largest producers - Russia and Belarus, the release also said.

Canadian potash exports surged 34.9% and particularly saw gains in the Brazilian market as being highest on record, the release added.

In May, Canada's trade surplus with the United States increased 2.4% to $10.8 billion and the increase was driven by a greater demand for crude oil, according to the release.

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US Jobless Claims Increase by 4,000 Last Week After 4 Weeks of Little Change - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Jobless claims in the United States nudged higher by 4,000 last week after being barely changed at the 230,000 level for four straight weeks, the US Labor Department data revealed on Thursday.

Jobless claims came in at 235,000 last week, after moving back-and-forth by about a 1,000 or less from 230,000 in the four previous weeks, the Labor Department said.

The weekly jobless claims data came after private sector employment tracker Challenger, Gray & Christmas reported that the United States saw the highest number of job cuts in 16 months in June, indicating that the red-hot labor market may be cooling.

The Challenger, Gray & Christmas layoffs data came after a Labor Department report on Wednesday showed that US job openings decreased to 11.25 million in May from 11.68 million in April despite there being almost two vacancies for every unemployed person.

However, the Labor Department's more important June nonfarm payrolls report is due on Friday. Economists say some 268,000 payrolls were probably added last month - versus the 390,000 in May - holding the unemployment at 3.6% for a third straight month.

A jobless rate of 4% or below is considered by the Federal Reserve as full employment. The US central bank is keeping a close watch on all labor data to gauge how much tolerance the job market will have toward higher interest rates.

US inflation has been persistently running at four-decade highs since late last year, with the closely-watched Consumer Price Index growing at an annualized rate of 8.6% as of May. The Federal Reserve's target for inflation is 2% per year and it has vowed to raise interest rates as much as necessary to achieve that.

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US June Job Cuts Highest in 16 Months as Labor Market Shows Signs of Cooling - Tracker

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The United States saw the highest number of job cuts in 16 months in June, a private sector employment tracker said in monthly data on Thursday that indicated the red-hot US labor market may be cooling.

"Employers are beginning to respond to financial pressures and slowing demand by cutting costs. While the labor market is still tight, that tightness may begin to ease in the next few months," Andrew Challenger, senior vice president of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc, said in a statement.

US based employers announced 32,517 cuts in June, a 59% increase from the 20,476 cuts announced in the same month last year and 57% higher than the 20,712 cuts announced in May, Challenger data showed.

June also marked the highest monthly total for layoffs since February 2021, when 34,531 cuts were announced. It is the second time this year that job reductions were higher in 2022 than the corresponding month a year earlier.

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For all of second quarter 2022, employers announced 77,515 job cuts, the highest quarterly total since the first quarter of 2021, when 144,686 cuts were recorded. The number was also 39% higher than the 55,696 cuts announced in the first quarter of 2022 and 14% higher than the 67,975 cuts announced in the same quarter last year.

The private sector layoffs data came after a Labor Department report on Wednesday that showed US job openings declining to 11.25 million in May from 11.68 million in April, despite there remaining almost two vacancies for every unemployed person.

The Labor Department's more important June nonfarm payrolls report is due on Friday. Economists say some 268,000 payrolls were probably added last month — versus the 390,000 in May — holding the unemployment at 3.6% for a third straight month.

A jobless rate of 4% or below is seen by the Federal Reserve as full employment. The central bank is keeping a close watch on all labor data to gauge how much tolerance the job market will have toward higher interest rates.

US inflation has been persistently running at four-decade highs since late last year, with the closely-watched Consumer Price Index growing at an annualized rate of 8.6% as of May. The Federal Reserve's target for inflation is a mere 2% a year and it has vowed to raise interest rates as much as necessary to achieve that.

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White House Announces $1Bln Investment to Improve Airports Terminals Throughout US

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The Federal Aviation Administration has decided to grant a nearly $1 billion to 85 airports throughout the United States to improve their terminals, the White House announced on Thursday.

"The US Department of Transportation's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) will award nearly $1 billion from President Biden's bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding to 85 airports across the country to improve terminals of all sizes," the White House said in a statement.

The grants will expand the capacity of the terminals and provide greater accessibility for individuals with disabilities, the statement said.

"Building better airport terminals will improve customer experiences, move goods through the economy more efficiently to lower prices and enhance US competitiveness," the statement said.

Some of the international airports that will be granted funds include the ones in Pittsburgh, Huntsville and Orlando, the statement said.

In addition, several regional airports such as the Washington Municipal Airport, Chamberlain Municipal Airport and Fillmore County Airport will receive funds to improve airport access to historically disadvantaged populations and rural airports, the statement added.

The Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and Austin Bergstrom International Airport will receive funds to improve the accessibility to individuals with disabilities, according to the statement.

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US Authorizes Liquefied Petroleum Gas Exports to Venezuela Through July 12, 2023- Treasury

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The United States authorizes the exports of liquefied petroleum gas to Venezuela through July 12, 2023, the Department of the Treasury announced on Thursday.
"GENERAL LICENSE NO. 40A Authorizing Certain Transactions Involving the Exportation or Reexportation of Liquefied Petroleum Gas to Venezuela (a) Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this general license, all transactions and activities related to the exportation or reexportation, directly or indirectly, of liquefied petroleum gas to Venezuela, i...are authorized through 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time, July 12, 2023," the statement said.

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Top US General, Chinese Counterpart Discuss Ways to Improve Communication – Pentagon
WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley spoke with his Chinese counterpart, Gen. Li Zuocheng, on Thursday to discuss ways to improve crisis communications and reduce strategic risk, the Pentagon said.
"Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley spoke with People's Liberation Army of China Chief of the Joint Staff Department Gen. Li Zuocheng today by video teleconference," the Pentagon said in a press release. "Gen. Milley discussed the need to responsibly manage competition and maintain open lines of communication. Gen. Milley underscored the importance of the People's Liberation Army engaging in substantive dialogue on improving crisis communications and reducing strategic risk."

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