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8.28.23 Monday

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Double Trouble: Florida Braces for 'Major Hurricane' in Gulf as Powerful Storm Eyes Atlantic Coast

Meteorologists are warning that two powerful hurricanes could soon exist off North America's Atlantic coast, one of which is on an impact course for the US state of Florida. The second, while far stronger, seems likely to spin out to sea rather than make landfall.

The Atlantic hurricane season made a rude entrance on Monday after having been upstaged by a rare West Coast hurricane last week.

The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) warned that Tropical Storm Idalia, currently churning northward through the Yucatan Channel between Mexico and Cuba, would strike the Gulf coast of Florida by the middle of the week as a major hurricane.

Idalia is expected to reach hurricane-strength winds in excess of 75 miles per hour later on Monday, and the NHC said it will become a "dangerous major hurricane over northeastern Gulf of Mexico by early Wednesday," with winds at least 110 miles per hour in strength. Landfall is expected later on Wednesday.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis told residents at a Monday conference to prepare for "major impact" on the Gulf coast and has placed 33 counties under a state of emergency.

According to NHC estimates, a long stretch of coast from Tallahassee to Tampa should expect a storm surge of between 6 and 11 feet as the storm's strong winds literally shove the sea up onto land ahead of its arrival. However, storm surge alerts extend as far south as the Florida Keys and even include parts of Florida's eastern coast, where Idalia is expected to exit to the sea after crossing the peninsula.

Storms of such strength are capable of causing catastrophic damage not just from storm surge, but from their powerful winds as well, and inland flooding triggered by huge downpours for hours on end. Tornadoes can also spawn in a hurricane's storm bands, adding to the chaos.

The Gulf of Mexico is unnaturally warm this year. A month ago, observed temperatures along the Florida coast peaked at 101 degrees Fahrenheit - more than 15 degrees above normal - amid a prolonged heat wave.

Still, on Monday, sensors along Idalia's projected path showed waters up to 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Since hurricanes feed off the warm water they pass over and become stronger, unnaturally hot waters is feared by meteorologists to be the progenitor of unnaturally strong storms as well.

However, Idalia isn't the only storm out there, either. A look at the expected wind fields in the region shows a deadly beast lurking in the east.

A few hundred miles off Florida's Atlantic coast sits Hurricane Franklin, which crossed Hispaniola last week as a tropical storm and causing flooding and damage in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, where the storm is blamed for at least three deaths.

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After reentering the Atlantic, Franklin slowly churned northward for several days, and by Monday afternoon had intensified into a powerful Category 4 hurricane - the first major storm of the Atlantic hurricane season.
Franklin's trajectory presently takes it through the gap between the US East Coast and the British overseas island of Bermuda, before hooking eastward and going out to sea.
While it won't strike land with its powerful eye wall, Franklin is disturbing the seas for hundreds of miles in every direction. The NHC has warned of "life-threatening surf and rip current conditions" all along the US East Coast, and noted the storm will have a more significant impact on Bermuda.

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'No Antidote': Ukrainian Troops Terrified of Russia's Unstoppable Precision Gliding Bombs

The US isn't the only country that can use GPS satellites to drop bombs precisely onto targets: Russia has been converting gravity bombs, JDAM-style, into precision-guided weapons. They've had an astounding effect during the special operation in Ukraine, as combatants on both sides have said, an expert told Sputnik.
Western media has turned its attention to another Russian weapon being used in Ukraine, highlighting how feared it is by Ukrainian forces: the FAB-500 and UPAB-1500, the latter of which is called the KAB by the Ukrainians. The massive gliding bombs, which can have warheads of up to 2,000 pounds, have emerged as an adaptation to Ukrainian air defenses by allowing Russian pilots to drop them far from the front lines.
As both Russian and Ukrainian personnel have attested, the gliding bombs have played a significant role in denting Ukraine's so-called counteroffensive, which has taken months and an appalling number of lives to advance just a few kilometers southward.
Alexei Leonkov, a military analyst and editor of Arsenal Otechestva (Arsenal of the Fatherland), told Sputnik on Monday that the weapons are both a practical solution and an effective weapon, which is why the enemy fears them so much.
"The fact is that the air defense systems that Ukraine receives as military assistance from NATO countries cannot defend against this type of target, because these targets do not produce a signal, they fly along a gliding trajectory. As a rule, they are deployed without entering the area guarded by air defenses. These glide bombs are made from conventional bombs by simply adding a special device - the so-called wings. There are adjustable bombs, they have a warhead of 500 or 1500 kilograms," he said.
In that way, the FAB-500 glide bombs are essentially the same as the United States' JDAM kits used to turn conventional bombs into guided munitions.

"This kind of ammunition is used in those fortified areas that have serious fortifications and in those places in the 'gray zone' where the enemy is trying to concentrate units in order to reach our first line of defense. There is no way to stop such ammunition, so when it strikes its target, it is, as a rule, a 100% success, and the enemy has 100% losses. Since there is no antidote, they

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are afraid of them, and the West cannot in a short time create any system that could identify these bombs and shoot them down," he said, noting that "Russia does have such systems."
Leonkov explained how the bombs work in more detail, noting they are actually even more accurate than the JDAM.
“These are bombs that are used to hit Ukrainian positions. This is a remake of conventional free-falling bombs, it simply adds the appropriate mechanism that turns an ordinary bomb into a projectile that can fly a distance of 30 to 50 kilometers. At the same time, they are used as conventional bombs with the help of our fighter-bombers and attack aircraft. The first demonstration of these bombs is called FAB 500M-62. A special device is added to this bomb, which makes this bomb glide. As a rule, it does not affect its weight and size properties,” he explained.
Leonkov noted that converting unguided bombs into guided munitions offers "big savings," since producing purpose-built guided bombs cost substantially more and the FAB-500 still strikes its targets accurately thanks to the added computer, which automatically corrects its flight path. That computer works with a device called the SVP-24, which is onboard the firing aircraft, that calculates the correct trajectory for the pilot to deploy the bomb correctly, too.
"Thus, it reaches the target that it hits. There is a special product, it is not adjustable, it is called UPAB-1500B, a guided aerial bomb, which weighs 1.5 tons. It is made by 'Region,' a company that is part of the Tactical Missile Arms Corporation. And this guided aerial bomb is a specialized product, but the 1500-kilogram aerial bomb was also taken as the basis. And then control mechanisms - wings - were added to it and a small device was added that allows this bomb to also plan and hit targets with high precision."
"From American guided bombs, they differ in price and accuracy of use," Leonkov noted. "Ours are accurate, their average deviation from the target point is no more than 10 meters. It is considered a precision munition. That is, the refinement of this product made it possible, firstly, to launch it at a distance of up to 50 kilometers. What that means is that when this bomb is deployed, the aircraft is not threatened by enemy air defenses, which are mostly medium-range anti-aircraft missile systems. And then the bomb flies to the target and hits it."
Leonkov said the bombs have made a big impact on the battlefield, busting up enemy fortified positions that had previously posed problems for Russian ground forces.
"The strike impact on especially fortified points has increased. Those same points, as participants in the hostilities have said, even a 120-millimeter shell does not cause significant damage to. And such fortified areas were shown - there are bunkers cast from concrete, with anti-fragmentation lining, with hermetic anti-explosion doors - such a hardpoint in which the enemy can survive any raid."
"But when these bombs began to be used, the situation began to change dramatically. Firstly, these fortified areas are being destroyed, and secondly, the warhead, for example, in the UPAB-1500, is almost 1 ton - a ton of ammunition that destroys this kind of structure. Such bombs were used during the liberation of Artemovsk, when the militants occupied a residential building, turning it into an impregnable fortress. And with a UPAB strike, this residential building was leveled to the ground, burying all the militants under it. This, of course, was terrible, because until a certain time such houses had to be stormed, incurring losses. And then one UPAB arrived, and there is no longer a fortified area."

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Leonkov noted that weapons like the UPAB-500 and FAB-500 fill in an important gap, saving expensive and valuable weapons like the Kalibr cruise missiles and Zircon hypersonic weapons for more difficult and specialized tasks.
"The question here is, firstly, price and quality. If you are doing a task that can be completed with such ammunition, then it is justified. After all, a Kalibr is, firstly, a long-range weapon, a high-precision weapon and its speciality is hitting especially protected objects, where you need to have penetrating abilities that break through concrete structures, bunkers," he said.
"That's when the Kalibr is used. The UPAB-1500 or FAB-500 are of course cheaper than the Kalibr. And if you can achieve results with cheaper ammunition, then you should use them. But if these ammunition types don't work, then we need to look for those which might work: in this case, Kalibr and Zircon missiles."

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Putin Reportedly Agreed to Meeting in Spring of 2022 With Scholz, Macron - But Refused Zelensky

According to a new book by a German journalist, Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed early into the special operation in Ukraine to discuss the conflict with the German and French leaders, but refused to include the Ukrainian president in the talks.
The revelation comes from a new book by filmmaker and journalist Stephan Lamby called “Emergencies: Governing in Times of War,” which was released earlier this month.
Lamby published a description of a conversation between German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron, in which Scholz informed his fellow NATO ally about his recent conversation with Putin. The story is told from Scholz’s perspective and the excerpt from Lamby’s book is described in a German daily.
Although the author doesn’t give an exact date for the conversation, Putin spoke with both leaders on March 4, 2022, about a week after the special operation in Ukraine was declared and Russian forces intervened in the country, and reportedly agreed to tripartite talks at that time.
Scholz reportedly told Macron that Putin had told him “nothing new,” elaborating Russia’s position on Ukraine and its goals in the special military operation, including the demilitarization and de-Nazification of Ukraine, and asked Berlin to recognize Crimea as part of Russia and the Donbass republics as independent states - this was several months before the two republics and two other former Ukrainian provinces voted in referenda to join the Russian Federation.
However, Scholz said he and the Russian leader discussed more, too.

"Something bothers me more than the talks: He is not complaining about all the sanctions,” Scholz reportedly said to Macron. “I don't know if he did that in conversation with you. But he didn't even mention the sanctions.”
"When I asked him whether there should be a meeting on Ukraine, sooner or later, with you, me, [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelensky and with him, Putin, he didn't completely refuse,"

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Scholz continued. "But he mentioned two conditions. Firstly, there must be no reason for a ceasefire. Then he just talked about the three of us, you, me and him. Without Zelensky."
At this point it should be remembered that prior to the launching of the special military operation, Moscow had been trying for months to negotiate with Kiev and the NATO powers to defuse tensions, including elaborating Russia's security red lines that precluded Ukraine joining the NATO alliance and the positioning of NATO weapons on Russia's borders.
Russia had previously worked with France and Germany to create the Minsk Accords, aiming to put an end to the conflict in the Donbass region. However, Kiev did have been neglecting the implementation of the agreement, continuing constant attacks against the people of Donetsk and Lugansk for eight years, which resulted in thousands of deaths.

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Vibe Check: 'Ukraine Cannot Become a Member of NATO' Amid Conflict, EU Commissioner Says

In recent comments on French media, a top European Union official reaffirmed that Ukraine will be unable to join the NATO alliance, as it has long sought to do, while it remains in conflict with Russia.
"As long as the conflict continues on European territory, Ukraine cannot become a member of NATO," Thierry Breton, the EU's commissioner for internal market, said on Monday.
"Otherwise, under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, this will mean entry into the conflict of all of the countries in the alliance," he added.
Article 5 is the line in the organization's founding charter that provides for collective defense of all members: triggering Article 5 means all 31 members of the alliance will come to the defense of their fellow member under attack. It has only been invoked once, by the United States following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks carried out by the Al-Qaeda* terrorist network.
Breton added that Ukraine "understands" this, despite Kiev's recent outbursts criticizing the alliance for being indecisive and slow to act.
Indeed, NATO and several key member states have repeatedly reiterated that serious changes have to happen in Ukraine before it will be considered for admission into NATO - as its constitution now enshrines as a goal - or to the European Union.
Although the EU is not an alliance, the politico-economic bloc maintains standards for membership similar to NATO, including functioning democratic systems, efforts to curb corruption and graft, and a lack of internal conflict inside its borders.
Instead, Washington has reportedly increasingly floated the idea of an Israel-like arrangement with Kiev, providing it with the first pick of advanced new US-made weaponry and extensive bilateral training and industrial cooperation in the military field, but stopping short of a written collective security arrangement.

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Despite a consciousness about the risks of open war with Russia if Ukraine were made into a formal ally, the NATO powers have continued to funnel weapons to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, effectively turning them into a proxy force for fighting Russia.

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US Police Detain Gunman Who Killed Lone Faculty Member in UNC-Chapel Hill Shooting

The campus shooting comes just days into the school year, which kicked off on August 21.
Authorities confirmed on Monday that a faculty member was killed in a fatal shooting that prompted the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill (UNC) and the surrounding community to be placed under lockdown orders. The gunman is in police custody.
UNC Police Chief Brian James told reporters that no charges have been filed in the case as investigators are continuing to determine the "how" and the "why" of the incident. A motive and whether the gunman knew the faculty remains uncertain.
James further indicated that officials are looking for a firearm, which they are unsure whether it was legally registered.
The first alert of an armed and dangerous person on campus was issued by the university at 1:04 p.m. local time - two minutes after shots were initially heard near a laboratory on campus. A subsequent message at 2:24 p.m. announced a shelter-in-place order as the reported gunman was said to be at-large. An all-clear was issued by 4:14 p.m. by officials after the suspect went into police custody at 2:31 p.m.
Campus police earlier released a photo of a person of interest and warned the public to steer clear of the individual but have not yet offered any additional details regarding the person.
Photos from the scene showed dozens of police cruisers on the scene as helicopters were reported to be monitoring the area from the skies.
One video appeared to captured the moment that a suspect was taken into custody
Another video captured the moment as some students jumped from windows to get away from the campus after getting word of initial active shooter reports.
Kelly Kendall, a student at UNC-Chapel Hill, told a local news station that many students are in shock and are unsure how they intend to proceed with the school year, which only just came underway on August 21.
"The feeling is just shock ... it's certainly a shocking feeling seeing how the situation can change so fast and place we love and feel safe at," Kendall said, adding that many are scared to leave buildings.
"In terms of going back to normal, I'm just not sure how quickly that is going to happen."
Classes are scheduled to resume on Thursday.
With a student body of 20,000 undergraduate students and 12,000 in the graduate program, complaints have been voiced by the student body over the university's alert system, specifically over a lack of details.
An investigation into the Monday incident remains ongoing.

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Scotland Hosts One of Largest Hunts for Loch Ness Monster in 50 Years

The Scottish folklore creature is believed to inhabit Loch Ness, a large lake in the Scottish Highlands that measures 23 miles (36 kilometers) in length with a maximum depth of 788 feet (240 meters).

The largest “Nessie” hunt in more than 50 years kicked off this weekend in the Scottish Highlands, and involved hundreds of volunteers who hoped to finally catch - or better understand, the mystery of the Loch Ness monster.

The “hunters” included those from the Loch Ness Centre who paired up with the independent research team Loch Ness Exploration. In their hunt, officials used surveying equipment they say has not been previously used at the site of Loch Ness, including thermal drones, boats with infrared cameras and underwater hydrophones.

"There's not a corner of the globe you can go to where people haven't heard of 'Nessie,' but it is still one of our biggest questions – what is the Loch Ness Monster," Paul Nixon, general manager of the Loch Ness Centre, said.

"I don't know what it is. All I know is that there is a big something in Loch Ness. I have seen sonar scans of objects the size of transit vans underneath the water moving."

In 1934, one of the most recognizable photos of 'Nessie' first surfaced, showing a creature with a long neck and dinosaur-like serpentining from the water’s surface.

But 60 years later, that photo proved to be a hoax. The monster captured by Robert Wilson was just a toy submarine with a plastic head attached to it.

However, debunking one photo has not diminished the monster’s legend. In 1972, the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau pursued the largest search in Loch Ness history (until this weekend), however they found nothing. Then in 1987, Operation Deepscan used sonar equipment to scan the lake, and claimed they found an “unidentified object of unusual size and strength.”

There have also been more than 1,100 “officially” recorded 'Nessie' sightings, according to the Loch Ness Centre.

Alan McKenna, the head of the Loch Ness Exploration, said the group did manage to find evidence during this weekend’s search while using hydrophones.

"We did hear something. We heard four distinctive 'gloops'," said McKenna. "We all got a bit excited, ran to go make sure the recorder was on and it wasn’t plugged in."

“It may well be gas escaping from the bottom of the loch,” he added. “It could be an animal... Of course it could be the elusive Loch Ness Monster."

The legend of 'Nessie' dates back to ancient times, with stone carvings depicting a mysterious animal with flippers. And according to a 7th-century biography of the Irish monk, St. Columba, the monster once attacked a swimmer in 565 AD, before turning on another man just as Columba intervened.

“It’s about inspiration,” said McKenna. “For very selfish reasons I don’t want the Loch Ness mystery or interest in Loch Ness itself to diminish in any way whatsoever at all.”

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'Nessie,' which is most often described as a dragon, or a plesiosaur, now brings in as much as 41 million pounds ($52 million) each year to Scotland's economy.
"I think there's always going to be a small part of me that wants to believe," said Craig Whitefield, 29, a medical administrator from Scotland who spent the weekend watching the surface of Loch Ness, waiting for something to appear.
"It's the same with every legend out there," he said. "It just takes one person to believe and it just continues."

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Neil DeGrasse Tyson Rebuffs UFO Claims: US Gov't Not 'Competent' Enough to Keep Aliens Secret

The matter of alien life has over the last several months remained a hot-topic button in the American news cycle, even more so after a US House Oversight Committee hearing on unidentified anomalous phenomena, more popularly known as UFOs.
American astrophysicist, author and television host Neil deGrasse Tyson recently admitted the US government did not have the capability to successfully keep the existence of extraterrestrials secret.
The established figure made the remarks after being asked by a US tabloid at California's Los Angeles International Airport whether the government needs to be more "open and honest" with the American public on the topic.
"Do you think the government is that competent, that they can actually keep such a secret? Oh, my gosh, when did you get that much confidence in the US government?" Tyson said to the reporter while laughing.
"If we had an alien invasion, more than the US government would know about it. We would know about it," the "Cosmos" host explained, when asked if he thinks the US government doesn't know "much" about aliens and UFOs.
"With cameras, and smartphones… We are crowdsourcing an alien invasion of Earth. Because everybody has a camera," he added.
Tyson then explained the only way the US government would know about aliens or extraterrestrials, before the rest of Earth, would be if they had a "special affection" for the "US government and the Navy."
"We have things we don't understand in the sky. I think the government should investigate those, because I don't want to be susceptible to a risk that we don't otherwise know about," explained Tyson, adding he believes some fraction of the federal government's budget should go towards investigating extraterrestrial activity.
The question about UFOs was raised during the first GOP primary debate in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on Wednesday. Former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie was asked if, as president, he would be open with the American public about the truth regarding the government's interactions with extraterrestrials and unidentified aerial phenomena (UAPs) or UFOs.

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“I get the UFO question?” Christie joked in response to the question.
“The job of the president of the United States is to level with the American people about everything. The job of the president of the United States is to stand for truth,” Christie answered.
The moderator, Martha MacCallum, expanded on her question by adding that more Americans are concerned about UFOs following a congressional hearing last month. During the hearing, three former military officials told Congress they believe the government knows more about UFOs and extraterrestrials, than is currently available to the public.

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Israel Looks to Implement Laser Defense System in Next Two Years

An Israeli official has announced that, within a year, “Israel will be the first country to have partial laser protection.” The official added that in just two years, the country will have full protection.
Rafael Advanced Defense Systems chairman Yuval Steinitz revealed on Sunday that Israel will have partial laser defenses this time next year.
"One year from now – Israel will be the first country to have partial laser protection. In two years there may be complete protection – against missiles, shells, rockets, or anything else. This will protect us both in the South and in the North," said Steinitz.
“The laser-defense system is truly great news. It will be both land- and air-based. I do want to be cautious regarding time frames. In another two years, we expect to deploy systems along the Gaza Strip border to test this tool’s effectiveness,” outgoing Israel Defense Forces (IDF) chief of staff Aviv Kohavi said this past January.
“It has worked very well in field tests. If this experiment works – and we continue to integrate and enhance the laser-defense system over two years – we will move as fast as possible to deploy it across the entire North. I cannot commit to a specific number of years. I don’t want to be optimistic and I also don’t want to be pessimistic.”
The Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Iron Beam has been in development for nearly 20 years, and will be integrated directly into the Rafael-made Iron Dome air defense batteries. Thus far, the Iron Dome has intercepted about 95% of aerial threats fired from Gaza.
Insiders have reported that by attaching the Iron Beam system, the IDF expects to save money as the laser costs just a “few dollars to fire,” and does not need to be restocked compared to the cost of a Tamir interceptor, which is $50,000. The laser is also capable of striking its target within seconds.
One drawback to the laser system, however, is that it has a shorter range than Israel’s Iron Dome, and can only hit targets located five to six miles away (eight to 10 kilometers). The laser can also engage just a single target at a time, whereas the Iron Dome can intercept multiple threats at once. The executive vice president of Rafael’s land and naval division, Ran Gozali, boasted the laser beam can be focused to the “diameter of a coin in a 10-kilometer range.”
Other countries have closely watched the development of the Israeli defense systems. In December of 2022, the US aerospace, arms and defense company Lockheed Martin

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announced a partnership agreement with Rafael, asking the firm to build and export a similar version of the laser system for the US.

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Powerful Magnitude 7.0 Earthquake Hits Indonesia's Bali, Java Islands

Official readings detected two strong aftershocks, but luckily no reports of damage or casualties have emerged.

A powerful earthquake measuring a magnitude 7.0 struck north of Indonesia's popular resort island of Bali as well as near the Lombok islands.

According to the European-Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC), the epicenter of the earthquake that struck early in the Bali Sea was about 126 miles (203 kilometers) north of Mataram, a city that rests on the western side of the western side of the island of Lombok, and 516 km below the Earth's surface.

No tsunami warning was issued following the earthquake. Additionally, no damages or injuries have yet to be reported.

The quake was first felt by residents just before 4 a.m. local time (2000 GMT) in areas across the coast of Bali and Lombok. The earthquake's aftershocks registered at magnitudes 6.1 and 6.5, both of which were later downgraded to magnitudes 5.4 and 5.6.

While Indonesia is no stranger to earthquakes, many people rushed out of their homes and hotels to seek higher ground and avoid getting stuck in any collapsing structures.

"I thought the walls were going to come down on the hotel," said one Australian tourist.

"Several guests left their rooms but were still in the hotel area," said the hotel manager of Mercure Kuta Bali, adding that guests had since returned to their rooms as there was no damage to the building.

Indonesia's disaster agency BNPB cited the quake's depth as the reason for little to no damage being reported across the island nation. "The quake is so deep so it should not be destructive," a spokesperson told media.

Situated along the so-called 'ring of fire,' Indonesia frequently experiences natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis. In fact, in December 2004, over 200,000 people were killed across the region after an earthquake ranging between magnitude 9.1 and 9.3 triggered a tsunami. Officials have reported that the powerful quake caused waves that reached 167 feet along the country's Aceh province.

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3M to Pay $6Bln in Lawsuit Over Alleged Combat Earplug Induced Hearing Loss on Servicemen

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WASHINGTON August 29 (Sputnik) – 3M has agreed to disburse $6 billion to settle a lawsuit after the military alleged combat earplugs supplied by them caused hearing loss on soldiers, the company said on Tuesday.

"Today, 3M (NYSE: MMM) announced that it has reached an agreement with the court-appointed negotiating plaintiffs' counsel to resolve the Combat Arms Earplug litigation against Aearo Technologies (Aearo) and 3M. Under the agreement, 3M will contribute a total amount of $6.0 billion between 2023 and 2029, which is structured under the agreement to include $5.0 billion in cash and $1.0 billion in 3M common stock," the company's statement reads.

3M said the settlement agreement aims at resolving all outstanding claims involving the Combat Arms Earplug products in a multi-district litigation in Florida and in the coordinated state court action in Minnesota, as well as potential future lawsuits.

The company stressed that by agreeing to the settlement, it was not admitting its liability, noting that if the combat earplugs are "used properly", they remain safe and effective.

Moreover, if parts of the agreement terms were to be unfulfilled, 3M is ready to further plead its cause in the litigation, the statement continued.

In late July 2022, 3M had established a $1 billion trust fund to compensate US servicemen and to address the nearly 235,000 related cases it had then. The claimants alleged that the company's combat earplugs were defective and did not protect them.

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FBI Investigates Migrants Who Entered US With Help of Smuggler With IS Ties – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) – US authorities are investigating a dozen Uzbek nationals who sought asylum at the border with Mexico and allegedly entered the country with the help of a smuggler connected with the Islamic State (IS, a terrorist group banned in Russia), CNN said on Tuesday.

FBI is still trying to "identify and assess" all of those individuals but currently has no evidence of a specific terrorist plot, the report said, citing a statement from National Security Council spokesman Adrienne Watson.

However, two US officials confirmed that the authorities are closely scrutinizing 15 migrants as possible criminal threats, it added.

Top national security and administration officials held several urgent meetings related to the incident. They also informed key congressional committees on the matter, two sources said.

The report noted that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) screened a number of migrants from Uzbekistan earlier this year, but no red flag information was found, and the people were all released into the US pending a court date, it added.

Only later, the FBI learned about an illegal network helping the Uzbeks enter the US, the report said. Law enforcement found that at least one member of that group has links with the IS, according to the report.

"There was no indication—and remains no indication—that any of the individuals facilitated by

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this network have a connection to a foreign terrorist organization or are engaged in plotting a terrorist attack in the United States," Watson said in a statement quoted by CNN.
Watson pointed out that the authorities are still finding some individuals who entered the country as part of that network, the report said.

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Biden, Lula at UNGA Event to Call for Better Working Conditions - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - Presidents Joe Biden and Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will call for improved working conditions in the United States and Brazil during a joint event on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly next month, Bloomberg reported.
The meeting is scheduled to take place on September 19 after both presidents address the General Assembly, the report said on Monday, citing people from the Brazilian government familiar with the plans.
Brazilian Labor Minister Luiz Marinho told the news agency that the leaders "will launch a kind of manifesto calling attention to the need to improve labor relations."

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Police Say 1 Faculty Member Killed in North Carolina University Shooting

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - Police at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill said that one faculty member has been killed in a shooting during the afternoon and the university has canceled classes today and Tuesday.
"We regret to report that one of our faculty members was killed in the shooting. The loss is devastating; the shooting damages the trust and safety that we so often take for granted," University of North Carolina Police Chief Brian James said during a press briefing on Monday.
James said that a suspect has been taken into custody, but that the weapon used in the shooting has not yet been recovered.

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Russia's Espionage Allegations Against US Embassy Worker Without Merit - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - Russia's espionage charges against an employee of the US Embassy in Moscow are without merit, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement.

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Russia is charging Robert Shonov with confidential collaboration with a foreign state or organization aimed at undermining Russia's national security. Shonov was arrested in March.

"We have seen the video shown on Russia's state media depicting the alleged confession of Russian citizen, Mr. Robert Shonov, as well as images of apparent Federal Security Service (FSB) summons for two diplomats working at US Embassy Moscow in connection to the case. The allegations against Mr. Shonov are wholly without merit," the statement said on Monday.

Shonov was allegedly instructed to collect information on the progress of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine and on the mobilization processes in Russia.

Shonov was employed by a company contracted to provide services to the US Embassy in Moscow in compliance with Russian law, the statement also said.

The State Department strongly protests attempts by Russia's security services to "intimidate and harass" US government employees, the statement added.

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Musk, Zuckerberg to Attend US Congress Artificial Intelligence Forum Next Month - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - Tech billionaires Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg will attend a congressional forum on artificial intelligence (AI) next month alongside other industry leaders, Axios reported, citing sources familiar with the matter.

Musk and Zuckerberg will participate in a closed-door AI insight forum on September 13, the report said on Monday. The forum is organized by US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

The event is intended to inform members of Congress about AI technology and build the foundations for regulation, the report said.

Musk and Zuckerberg will attend the event amid back-and-forth talk of a physical fight between the two social media moguls. Google CEO Sundar Pichai, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates will also attend the forum, the report added.

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Over Half of All Americans Worry Over Growing Role of AI in Daily Life - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - More than half of all Americans are now more worried by the growing use and power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) rather than excited about its prospects, a new Pew Research Center survey revealed.

"Overall, 52% of Americans say they feel more concerned than excited about the increased use of artificial intelligence. Just 10% say they are more excited than concerned, while 36% say they feel an equal mix of these emotions," the Pew Research Center said in a statement published with the survey results on Monday.

The share of Americans who are mostly concerned about AI in daily life has risen sharply by

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14% in less than two-thirds of a year since December 2022, when 38% expressed this view, the statement said.
"Those who have heard a lot about AI are 16 points more likely now than they were in December 2022 to express greater concern than excitement about it. Among this most aware group, concern now outweighs excitement by 47% to 15%. In December, this margin was 31% to 23%," the statement said.
People who have heard a little about AI are 19% more likely to express concern today than they were in December 2022 and a majority now express greater concern than excitement (58%) about AI's growing role in daily life, while just 8% report the opposite feeling, according to the statement.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) -

RUSSIAN SECURITY COUNCIL
* The West wanted to create a "second Ukraine" out of Belarus even before Russia undertook its special military operation, Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council Alexey Shevtsov has said.
* The deployment of Russia's tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus is a response to the aggressive actions of the collective West near the borders of the Union State of Russia and Belarus, Shevtsov said.
* The fact that the United States is developing biological weapons, including those aimed at certain ethnic groups, has been confirmed, Shevtsov said.

G20 SUMMIT
* Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the telephone the upcoming G20 summit and the format of the Russian head of state's participation in it will be announced later, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sputnik on Monday.
* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov could represent Russia at the upcoming G20 summit, the office of the Indian Prime Minister said.

DRONE ATTACKS IN RUSSIA
* The Russian air defense systems took down a Ukrainian aircraft-type drone over the territory of the Belgorod region, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Monday.
* Two US-made drones - MQ-9 Reaper and RQ-4 Global Hawk - have been detected flying toward the Russian border over the southwestern part of the Black Sea, but Russian fighter jets prevented the country's border being violated, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

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TRUMP TRIAL

* The trial against former President Donald Trump for alleged crimes linked to the January 6 Capitol riot and efforts to overturn the 2020 election will begin on March 4, 2024, US district judge Tanya Chutkan said on Monday.

* Trump said that he will appeal the decision of a US judge to begin a trial on March 4, 2024 to resolve charges related to alleged efforts to overturn 2020 election results.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Ukraine lost more than 185 soldiers in the Donetsk area over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Monday.

* Russian ships used cruise missiles to destroy a Ukrainian military depot holding aviation weapons and ammunition, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* Russia's air defense systems destroyed a Ukrainian cruise missile off the coast of Crimea, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

BLACK SEA GRAIN INITIATIVE

* Substantive agreements on a possible trilateral grain deal between Russia, Turkey and Qatar do not exist at present, but various discussions are ongoing, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday.

* Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan plans to visit Sochi in near future to discuss the grain agreement, the ruling AKP party spokesman Omer Celik said.

* The passage of the second ship along the maritime "grain corridor" is unrelated to talks with Russia on the resumption of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, Peskov said.

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House Panel Seeks Records Related to Weiss's Special Counsel Appointment in Hunter Probe

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - The House Oversight Committee in a letter to US Attorney General Merrick Garland on Monday requested all records pertaining to his decision to appoint US Attorney David Weiss as Special Council for the Hunter Biden investigation.

"Now, recently reported information raises additional concerns about the Department's unusual actions in this matter, and suggests that the Department under your leadership has been attempting to circumvent the rule of law in favor of Hunter Biden, President Biden, and the Biden family," the letter said.

Weiss was already overseeing the investigation in the role of US Attorney.

The committee is asking the Justice Department to provide all requested items related to Weiss' appointment by September 11.

Hunter Biden faces tax evasion and firearms charges, which were set to be resolved by a plea deal and pre-trial diversion agreement. However, the arrangement collapsed and the parties have since reached an impasse in attempting to reach a new deal.

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Three Panda Bears in Washington May Be Returned to China at End of 2023 - White House

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - The three panda bears in Washington may be returned to China at the end of the year, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday.
"I think the pandas are supposed to leave at the end of the year," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing. "I don't have anything new to share, any update to share on the pandas timeline."
The Smithsonian National Zoo in Washington and the China Wildlife and Conservation Association have a three-year agreement to keep three panda bears in the US capital through 2023. The agreement is set to expire in December.

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Tropical Storm Idalia Strengthens as It Nears Cuba - National Hurricane Center

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) on Monday issued an advisory that tropical storm Idalia is gaining strength while approaching Cuba.
"Idalia is strengthening as it nears the Western tip of Cuba," the advisory said.
The NHC warned in the advisory that a life-threatening storm surge and dangerous winds are becoming "increasingly likely" for some parts of the US state of Florida.
The NHC said it expects Idalia to pass near or over western Cuba later on Monday and reach the Gulf coast of Florida on Wednesday.
"Storm surge will raise water levels by as much as four to six feet above normal tide levels along the southern coast of Pinar del Rio, Cuba," the advisory said. "Near the coast, the surge will be accompanied by large waves."
Hurricane conditions are expected in parts of Florida by late Tuesday or Wednesday, with tropical storm conditions beginning on Tuesday, the advisory added.

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Canada, Ukraine Begin Negotiations on Long term Security Commitments – Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, August (Sputnik) – The Canadian and Ukrainian governments have begun formal negotiations on long-term bilateral security commitments, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said on Monday.
“Last Friday, Government of Canada officials met with their Ukrainian counterparts to discuss long-term security commitments between our two countries. During the meeting, Canadian

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officials reiterated Canada's commitment to using all tools at our disposal to support Ukraine as it defends its sovereignty and territorial integrity," GAC said in a statement.

Ottawa and Kiev will build upon current joint efforts on several shared priorities to enhance and guide cooperation for the coming years, the statement said, adding that discussion would be aimed at pairing Canadian capabilities to Ukrainian needs.

Among those is ensuring Ukraine's ability to protects itself from Russia's special military operation, and any potential eventual aggression, the statement said, by ensuring the creation of a sustainable military force and enhancing the country's economic strength and stability.

GAC added that officials will further discuss the immediate financial and technical needs of Ukraine, as well as Kiev's implementation of judicial, economic, and anti-corruption reforms, among others which are required to fulfill the county's Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

The statement noted that Canada along with allies and partners would continue to stand by Ukraine so long as the conflict is ongoing.

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UPDATE: Suspect at North Carolina University Campus In Police Custody - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) -Police have detained a suspected shooter at North Carolina's University Campus, US media reported on Monday.

A person has been taken into custody, while police ask students, staff and faculty to stay sheltered in place for the time being, according to WRAL News.

The University of North Carolina said earlier on Monday that Police reported an "armed and dangerous" person at the campus premises at Chapel Hill.

State Governor Ron Cooper said he spoke with the local law enforcement authorities and offered them all necessary support to capture the shooter and protect the campus.

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Trump Still Dominates Republican Primary Polls Despite Contenders' Post-Debate Gains

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump continues to hold massive leads in every single primary survey despite skipping last week's debate, although some rivals have slightly closed the gap or at least left an impression on the minds of many voters.

Trump in a Truth Social post on Monday claimed that "rumors are strong in political circles" that Florida Governor Ron DeSantis' campaign is in "shambles" and he may drop out of the 2024 US presidential race due to poor poll numbers to run for a US Senate seat.

Ironically, Trump's rumor propagation comes the same day at least one poll showed DeSantis is actually closing the gap. According to an Emerson College survey released on Monday, Trump's

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lead in the Republican primary has dropped by six points to 50% after sitting out his party's first national debate last week. Eight Republican candidates took the stage in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on August 24 while Trump, who has led most polls by over 40 percentage points, chose to do an interview with Tucker Carlson.

DeSantis secured 12% of the vote in the Emerson survey, a gain of two points since the August 19 pre-debate poll. Businessman Vivek Ramaswamy, despite positive feedback on his debate performance, saw his poll numbers drop by a point to 9%. Former Vice President Mike Pence received 7% of support, a 4-point jump from the pre-debate survey, while former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley saw the biggest jump, gaining five points to tie Pence at 7%.

Trump also fell six points in an InsiderAdvantage survey published a day after the debate. The poll also showed that while most believe Ramaswamy "won" the debate by a thin margin, DeSantis and Haley benefitted the most when it comes to whom voters cast ballots for on election day. Trump garnered 45% of votes in the poll followed by DeSantis (18%), Haley (11%), and Ramaswamy (7%).

US constitutional historian and commentator Dan Lazare was impressed with Ramaswamy's energy and willingness to clash with political veterans he shared the stage with.

"Vivek... is like the super-bright undergraduate who can't stop raising his hand. He's bubbling over with ideas that he's eager to share with everyone else in the room whether they want to hear them or not," Lazare told Sputnik.

Retired US Army Colonel and international consultant Earl Rasmussen, former vice president of the Eurasia Center, described Ramaswamy as a "welcome surprise." On foreign policy, Ramaswamy clearly stood by his convictions against funding the conflict in Ukraine and involvement with foreign intervention, Rasmussen said.

Former merchant banker, financial analyst and columnist Martin Hutchinson suggested that by his strong showing, the 38-year-old Ramaswamy had already made himself a credible vice-presidential running mate for Trump next year.

"Ramaswamy is the only credible candidate... it would be smart for Trump to make him his vice-presidential candidate [to] attract minorities and millennials," he said.

Retired Brown University Assistant Professor of Economics Barry Friedman noted that Haley gave a relatively good showing, but he questioned whether Trump would ever pick her for vice president.

"I'd hypothesize that he would prefer another social and fiscal conservative from the Northern Midwest, the Bible Belt, or maybe Virginia, or Arizona," he said.

Although rivals have made gains, political commentator Charles Ortel said the entire affair was irrelevant given Trump's position in the party.

"Trump dominated from offstage on a new platform of ad-free interaction where he continued to demonstrate his passion and compassion to restore American opportunities and the nonpartisan rule of law," he said. "No other candidate comes close to having his insight, skills, and voice. He still connects and motivates masterfully."

Lazare said the debate could not compare in significance with Trump's continuing eminence among Republican voters.

"The real takeaway from Wednesday's debate is that none of it amounts to a hill of beans since Trump already has the nomination sewn up. The gods on Mount Olympus want a Trump-Biden rematch, and therefore a Trump-Biden rematch is what they'll get barring a heart attack or

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stroke," he said.

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MLK's Greatest Dreams Still Unfulfilled in US 60 Years After Epic Speech - Experts

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - Dr. Martin Luther King's greatest visions for full racial equality and social justice remain unfulfilled in the United States 60 years after his legendary "I Have a Dream," speech, experts told Sputnik.

On August 28, 1963, King gave his historic speech to a quarter of a million people on the Washington National Mall. The speech, delivered in front of the Lincoln Memorial, came at the end of the March on Washington for civil and economic equality for African Americans.

Yet courageous and visionary as it was, even then, University of Houston Professor of African American History Gerald Horne said King was limited in the harsh truths he felt free to point out.

"The speech remains worthy of study but not only because of what it portended - an agonizing retreat from the more horrific aspects of US apartheid - but also because of what it did not dare to acknowledge," Horne told Sputnik. "By August 1963 the United States was embroiled in a Cold War with the then Soviet Union and found it difficult to pose as a paragon of human rights virtue as long as neo-apartheid stalked the land. Hence, Jim Crow - US apartheid - had to go."

This context set the stage for King's emergence as the great moral national leader of the Civil Rights movement, Horne pointed out. But hate and racism remained potent forces in US society and politics, he emphasized.

"Alas, less than five years later [King] was assassinated as reactionary forces nationally fought back vigorously against the idea of justice. And, sadly, these forces have yet to be extirpated today," he said.

California State University Emeritus Professor of Political Science Beau Grosscup emphasized that while still unfulfilled in its most important and most sweeping aspirations, King's legendary speech remained an indispensable guiding beacon for future generations of American reformers and crusaders for social and economic justice.

"There is little doubt that Dr. King's 'I have a Dream' speech has reached iconic status and that initially it served as the battle cry for the unfulfilled promises of the American Dream. For those few who bother to listen, it still rings with fierce ambition, reminding us how far there is to go in the voice of one man, as well as the determination to get there," he said.

However, Grosscup said the shining idealism and hope King evoked 60 years ago in his speech remained more elusive and unrealized than ever in the 21st century United States.

"Unfortunately, time and events have pushed the aspirations spoken that day, despite their ringing tones, aside, reminding us of a distant time full of naive hope and determination that stands in direct contrast to the current climate in which fascist leaders openly claim without shame, they alone represent - stand for the ideas spoken by the iconic MLK, and in which the 'benefits' of slavery are openly spoken of and supported politically," he said.

Nevertheless, a panoramic view of the huge crowd on the Washington Mall that day still stands as the definitive powerful reminder of the forces that, when organized, will still defeat the current

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crisis of fascism, sending it to the dustbin of history, Grosscup stated.

US constitutional historian and political commentator Dan Lazare pointed out that even King bought into the misleading myth of American exceptionalism. Lazare noted that King in his speech said: "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'"

"This is American liberalism at its purest, a doctrine that holds that progress in these blessed United States is a process of renewal in which Americans must continually circle back to the original truths that made them great. But it's nothing more than a form of neo-Toryism since it is based on the proposition that truth lies in the past and that America's destiny, unique among the nations of the world, is to continually unfold in ever 'more perfect' form," Lazare said.

America is no more perfect than France, Germany, or, for that matter, Lichtenstein, he added.

"Progress does not mean renewal, but, rather, a process in which the past is continually overthrown so that society can advance ever more boldly," Lazare said.

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North Carolina Police Reports Armed Person in University Campus – Statement

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) –Police in North Carolina reported an “armed and dangerous” person at the University of North Carolina premises at Chapel Hill, the University said on Monday.

“Police report an Armed and Dangerous Person On or Near Campus,” the statement said.

The authorities urged students and personnel to stay in a shelter. “This is an ongoing situation. Suspect at large,” the statement added.

State’s Governor Ron Cooper said he spoke with the local law enforcement authorities and offered them all necessary support to capture the shooter and protect the campus.

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US State Department Approves $104Mln Sale of Air-to-Surface Missiles to Japan - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - The US State Department approved a potential $104 million sale of Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles to Japan, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Monday.

“The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Japan of Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles with Extended Range (JASSM-ER) and related equipment for an estimated cost of $104 million,” DSCA said in a statement.

Japan requested to buy up to 50 JASSM-ERs, as well as training missiles and other related equipment, the statement said. The proposed sale would support US foreign policy and national

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security goals by improving the security of an Indo-Pacific ally, the statement said.
The sale would not impact the United States' defense readiness or alter the basic military balance of the region, the statement added.

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Florida Governor Warns Residents There Will Be Power Outages Amid Tropical Storm Idalia

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - Florida Governor Ron DeSantis on Monday warned residents on the path of tropical storm Idalia to prepare for power outages.
Earlier in the day, the National Hurricane Center (NHC) on Monday issued storm surge and hurricane warnings for the West coast of Florida. The NHC further said Idalia is forecast to become a hurricane later on Monday and eventually a dangerous major hurricane over the northeastern Gulf of Mexico by early Wednesday.
"Floridians on the path of this storm should be prepared to lose power...even here in the Tampa Bay area, there's going to be power outages, so just be prepared for that," DeSantis said during a press conference.
DeSantis said the storm is expected to make landfall on Florid Gulf Coast on Wednesday.
Moreover, DeSantis said he has talked to President Joe Biden and other local officials about response efforts to the storm.

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Trump Says Will Appeal March 4, 2024 Trial Date for 2020 Election Case

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Monday that he will appeal the decision of a US judge to begin a trial on March 4, 2024 to resolve charges related to alleged efforts to overturn 2020 election results.
"Today a biased, Trump Hating Judge gave me only a two month extension, just what our corrupt government wanted, SUPER TUESDAY. I will APPEAL!" Trump said in a statement via social media platform Truth.
Earlier on Monday, US district judge Tanya Chutkan set a trial date for March 4, 2024, just one day before so-called Super Tuesday – a day on which more than a dozen states hold primary elections for the 2024 US presidential election. Trump requested the trial be held after the 2024 race, while prosecutors wanted it to start in January.
Trump in the statement characterized the case as election interference and a "witch hunt" against him.

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Cryptocurrency Giant Binance Considering Leaving Russian Market - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - Cryptocurrency firm Binance is considering leaving the Russian market due to difficulties posed by Western sanctions, the Wall Street Journal reported on Monday.

"All options are on the table, including a full exit," a Binance spokesperson said, as quoted in the report.

The company on Monday further limited its Russian peer-to-peer trading service, restricting all users in Russia from exchanging digital tokens for any other currency than rubles, the report noted.

Binance is the world's leading blockchain ecosystem and cryptocurrency infrastructure provider with a range of financial products, including the largest digital asset trading exchange globally.

The US Justice Department is reportedly investigating whether Binance has been used to evade US sanctions on Russia, according to Bloomberg and the Wall Street Journal.

Binance has refuted such allegations, saying that it diligently complies with global sanctions and prevents blacklisted individuals and entities from accessing to its platform.

The cryptocurrency exchange giant has recently also faced difficulties in European markets. It had to exit the Netherlands after failing to obtain the necessary permits from local regulators, and French authorities opened an investigation into its local unit for allegedly illegally providing digital asset services and money laundering.

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UN Concerned About Libyan Minister's Safety After Meeting Israeli Counterpart - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, August 28 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is concerned about the safety of Libyan Foreign Minister Najla Al-Mangoush after reports of threats following a meeting with her Israeli counterpart, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"We have no particular comment on whatever bilateral context it may have had. I think we are concerned about the safety of the foreign minister, as there are reports that she's been threatened and that she had to flee the country. Her safety is paramount and imperative," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

On Sunday, Government of National Unity head Abdul Hamid Al-Dbeibeh removed Al-Mangoush from her post because she met with Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen in Italy.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry said the meeting of the two countries' foreign ministers in Italy was the first ever and the ministers discussed opportunities for cooperation, among other topics.

However, shortly thereafter, the Libyan Government of National Unity said that the meeting was "random and unofficial," emphasizing that it does not support normalization of relations with Israel and continues to take a firm stance on the Palestinian issue.

Media reported on Sunday that protests began in a number of cities in Libya after reports of the

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meeting between Al-Mangoush and Cohen emerged. The protesters demanded that Al-Mangoush resign from her post.

Libya and Israel have never established diplomatic relations. Since Libya gained independence in 1951 and throughout the reign of its longtime leader Muammar Gaddafi, Libya was part of the Arab countries' boycott of Israel.

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US Deputy Defense Secretary Says 'Far From Satisfied' With US Defense Industry Performance

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks on Monday said she is not satisfied with the performance of the US defense industrial complex.

"I'm far from satisfied that everything is working as it should," Hicks said during remarks at a National Defense Industrial Association conference.

Hicks pointed out numerous shortcomings in the US defense industry, workforce shortages, inability to allocate or expend resources fast enough, limited ability to leverage non-traditional suppliers, restraints from Congress and insufficient investment in US research and development, among other issues.

Hicks pointed out that Pentagon officials, over the last two-and-a-half years, have been systematically mapping and debugging the Defense Department's innovation ecosystem.

She also underscored that security-related roadblocks would remain, even while other work is ongoing to make the US defense industry ecosystem run faster and smoother.

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National Hurricane Center Issues Warnings for Florida West Coast, Including Tampa Bay

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - The National Hurricane Center (NHC) on Monday issued storm surge and hurricane warnings for the West coast of Florida, including for Tampa Bay, due to the approaching hurricane Idalia.

"A Storm Surge Warning has been issued from Englewood northward to the Ochlockonee River, including Tampa Bay. A Hurricane Warning has been issued from the Middle of Longboat Key northward to the Ochlockonee River, including Tampa Bay," the NHC said in an advisory.

The NHC also warned that life-threatening storm surges and dangerous winds are becoming increasingly likely in different parts of Florida.

"Idalia is forecast to become a hurricane later today and a dangerous major hurricane over the northeastern Gulf of Mexico by early Wednesday," the advisory said.

Earlier on Monday, the White House said President Joe Biden approved an emergency declaration for Florida, which would allow unlocking of federal funds to provide necessary

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support to the state.

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Biden to Visit Vietnam on September 10 for Meeting With General-Secretary - White House

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will meet with General-Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Nguyen Phu Trong during a trip to Hanoi on September 10, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. will travel to Hanoi, Vietnam on September 10, 2023. While in Hanoi, President Biden will meet with General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong and other key leaders to discuss ways to further deepen cooperation between the United States and Vietnam," Jean-Pierre said in a statement.

The two officials will discuss ways to grow Vietnam's tech-focused economy, expand people-to-people ties, address climate change and increase stability in the region, the statement said.

On September 11, Biden will travel back to the US state of Alaska to commemorate the 22nd anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, the statement added.

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German Ambassador to US Says Berlin Will Be More Rigorous in Blocking Chinese Investments

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - Germany will be more aggressive in blocking Chinese investments in the country, German Ambassador to the United States Andreas Michaelis said on Monday.

"The answer I can say is - yes, on both counts," Michaelis said when asked if Germany will take stronger action to block Chinese investments and whether Brussels and Berlin are considering outbound investment screening.

Michaelis, who spoke at a Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank event, added that Germany wants to be careful with regard to the dual-use aspects of certain categories of goods, so it has readjusted its dual-use policy.

Germany, like the United States, is particularly careful about its dual-use goods such as quantum technologies and artificial intelligence, which can be used in the defense industry, Michaelis said.

Germany has a "very intense" dialogue with China, but issues like Taiwan are addressed privately, Michaelis also said.

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US Plans to Field Thousands of Autonomous Systems to Counter China - Deputy Defense Chief

(Updates with more details in paras 5-7)
WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - The United States will develop thousands of autonomous military systems, or drones, in the next two years in an effort to counter China, Deputy US Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks said on Monday.
"We're going to field attritable autonomous systems at a scale of multiple thousands, in multiple domains, within the next 18-24 months," Hicks said in a statement via social media.
The effort, dubbed Replicator, will counter China's arsenal with superior US technology, made in collaboration with commercial industry, the statement said.
Drones have been increasingly utilized on battlefields around the world for both, surveillance and for offensive purposes.
The effort will provide the United States with military "mass" to counter China, Hicks said during remarks to a National Defense Industrial Association conference.
The effort will both deter aggression and provide capabilities to win in the event of a conflict, Hicks also said.
The systems will be developed and field in line with the Defense Department's "ethical approach" to artificial intelligence and autonomous systems, Hicks added.

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Pentagon Says US Has Given Ukraine More Than 3.1Mln Artillery, Rocket Rounds

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - The United States has provided Ukraine more than 3.1 million rounds of artillery, rockets and other long-range munitions, Deputy US Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks said on Monday.
"In the 18 months since then, we've sent Ukraine over 3.1 million rockets, missiles, mortars and artillery rounds – and that's only four of the categories of munitions," Hicks said during remarks at a National Defense Industrial Association conference.
The US has also cooperated with the private sector to help Ukraine access commercial technologies that aid them on the battlefield, Hicks said.
The US has provided more than $43 billion in total military assistance, Hicks added.

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UN Mission in Mali Must Adhere to Strict Withdrawal Timeline - Russian Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 28 (Sputnik) - Russia emphasizes the need for the United Nations to strictly adhere to the established deadlines for the withdrawal of its mission in Mali, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the world body Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Monday.

"We stress the need for strict adherence to the deadlines set out in this document for the withdrawal of the main UN forces which must be completed by December 31 of this year," Polyanskiy said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

The process of liquidating the infrastructure of the UN mission, more commonly known by its acronym MINUSMA, needs to be equally streamlined, Polyanskiy added.

On June 30, the UN Security Council unanimously voted to end MINUSMA and fully withdraw the mission by the end of 2023.

The decision came after the Malian government asked the United Nations to urgently withdraw MINUSMA from the country. The government said the UN mission's ten-year presence in Mali failed to adequately respond to the security situation there and contributed to the escalating tensions.

Earlier in August, MINUSMA announced that it would expedite its withdrawal from Mali due to the worsening security situation there.

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Organized Cybercrime to Become Threat to Canada's National Security in Two Years – CCCS

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) – Organized cybercrime is poised to become a potential threat to Canada's national security and economic progress in the next two years, the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (CCCS) said on Monday.

"We assess that organized cybercrime will very likely pose a threat to Canada's national security and economic prosperity over the next two years. Organized cybercriminal groups can impose significant financial costs on their victims. These groups often have planning and support functions in addition to specialized technical capabilities, such as bespoke malware development," the CCCS assessment reads.

Among the key judgements, the CCCS found that ransomware is likely the most disruptive form of cybercrime affecting Canada as it is pervasive in nature and can seriously affect an organization normal functioning.

Moreover, it was assessed that over the next two years, "high value" organizations participating in critical infrastructure sector nationally and internationally will continue to be targeted by financially motivated cybercriminals.

In addition, according to CCCS's assessment, Russia and to a lesser extent Iran, are acting as "safe heavens" for cybercriminals, from where they can launch their cyberattacks on western targets.

CCCS further assessed that Russian intelligence services and law enforcement agencies "almost certainly" maintain some sort of relationship with cybercriminals, allowing them to

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operate without consequences.

"They do so as long as cybercriminals focus their attacks against targets outside of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)," the assessment added.

Earlier today, the CCCS released its Baseline cyber threat assessment: cybercrime, in which jointly with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) they highlight key judgments on cybersecurity.

The cybersecurity agency said the sources employed in the assessment were of classified and unclassified nature, further noting that the goal of presenting the analysis was to inform professionals in the field of cybersecurity, and the overall threat that cybercrimes pose to Canada and Canadians.

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Trump Says DeSantis Campaign in 'Shambles,' May Drop Out of 2024 US Presidential Race

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - Florida Governor Ron DeSantis may drop out of the 2024 US presidential race due to poor poll numbers and pursue instead a spot in the US Senate, former President Donald Trump said on Monday.

"Rumors are strong in political circles that Ron DeSanctimonious, whose Presidential run is in shambles, and whose poll numbers have absolutely crashed, putting him 3rd and 4th in some states, will be dropping out of the Presidential race in order to run, in Florida, against Rick Scott for Senate," Trump said in a statement via Truth Social.

Trump and DeSantis are both bidding for the Republican Party's nomination for the 2024 US presidential election. Trump currently leads in primary polling ahead of primary and caucus elections next year. DeSantis has trailed Trump, but placed himself at the front of the pack of other presidential hopefuls.

However, DeSantis failed to boost momentum for his campaign during the first Republican primary debate last week, political analyst Keith Preston told Sputnik. Trump opted to skip the debate due to his lead in the polls, leaving eight other contenders to make a mark in his absence.

DeSantis was outshined by other contenders such as businessman Vivek Ramaswamy, who became the breakout candidate of the debate, Democracy Institute director Patrick Basham told Sputnik.

DeSantis was ignored by other candidates due to his campaign becoming "irrelevant," Basham added.

Trump holds 49.2% support, DeSantis 15% and Ramaswamy 10.1%, according to FiveThirtyEight primary poll averages released Monday. DeSantis' support has fallen from a high of nearly 40% in February.

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US Judge Says Trump Trial in 2020 Election Case Will Begin on March 4, 2024

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - The trial against former President Donald Trump for alleged crimes linked to the January 6 Capitol riot and efforts to overturn the 2020 election will begin on March 4, 2024, US district judge Tanya Chutkan said on Monday.

Chutkan set the trial date after rejecting a request from Trump's legal team to hold the trial after the 2024 US presidential election and also rejecting the request from government prosecutors to hold the trial in January 2024, according to a Sputnik correspondent in the courtroom.

The trial start date comes one day ahead of the so-called "Super Tuesday," during which more than a dozen US states hold primary elections as part of the 2024 presidential race.

Trump's attorneys said the trial date is inconsistent with his right to a fair trial.

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Trump Trial in January 6 Case Will Not Extend Into 2026 - Judge

(Update: adds details, background in paras 3-5)

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - Federal judge Tanya Chutkan, who presides over the criminal case of former President Donald Trump's alleged role in the January 6 events at the US Capital, rejected on Monday a request from Trump's legal team that his trial be held in 2026.

"You are not going to get two more years. This case is not going to trial in 2026," Chutkan said, according to a Sputnik correspondent in the courtroom.

However, the government's proposal to start the trial in January 2024 is also unacceptable, Chutkan said.

The court is aware of and considering other charges and scheduled trials involving Trump as it sets its own trial date, Chutkan added.

Trump faces criminal charges in the state of Georgia as well for his alleged role in efforts to overturn 2020 election results. The legal cases also come amid Trump's re-election bid in the 2024 US presidential election.

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The effort, dubbed Replicator, will counter China's arsenal with superior US technology, made in collaboration with commercial industry, the statement said.

Autonomous systems, also known as drones, have been increasingly utilized on battlefields around the world for both surveillance and offensive purposes.

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Biden, DeSantis Discuss Florida Preparations for Hurricane Idalia - White House

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden spoke over the telephone with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and informed him that he approved an emergency declaration for the state amid preparations for Hurricane Idalia, the White House said on Monday.

"President Biden spoke to Governor DeSantis this morning. He told him that he quickly approved the Emergency Declaration for Florida as they prepare for Hurricane Idalia," the White House said in a statement.

The US National Hurricane Center warned earlier that tropical storm Idalia is expected to become a hurricane on Monday and make landfall in Florida on Wednesday morning.

The White House emphasized that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has pre-deployed personnel and assets in preparation for the hurricane response efforts.

"FEMA's National Response Coordination Center has also been fully activated to support any requests for federal assistance," the statement said.

Biden vowed the federal government will provide full support to the state of Florida in the efforts to deal with the effects of the hurricane, the statement added.

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US House Speaker, Top Republicans Plan Biden Impeachment Inquiry for September - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and other top Republican officials are in talks to advance an impeachment inquiry into US President Joe Biden in September, CNN reported on Monday.

McCarthy told top Republicans that he intends to initiate the impeachment inquiry by the end of next month, the report said, citing Republican sources familiar with the talks.

McCarthy has previously hinted at the potential for an impeachment inquiry into Biden, threatening earlier this month to launch the process if documents are withheld from lawmakers investigating Biden and his family for alleged criminal activity.

An impeachment inquiry would grant Congress increased authority to subpoena Biden for documents like bank and credit card statements that could reveal financial ties to foreign sources, McCarthy has said.

However, Republican lawmakers do not ubiquitously support an impeachment inquiry, the report said. The party lacks the 218 votes needed to open an inquiry via floor vote, although there is no constitutional rule requiring they hold a vote, the report said.

The potential inquiry would also launch as Congress pushes to secure government funding before the end of September to avoid a government shutdown.

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Two People Hospitalized Following Rescue Helicopter Crash in US State of Florida - Sheriff

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - Two people were taken to the hospital for medical treatment following a fire rescue helicopter crash in the US state of Florida, the Broward Sheriff's Office (BSO) said on Monday.

"At approximately 8:46 am, emergency personnel responded to a call of an aircraft alert located southwest of the Pompano Beach Airpark. The helicopter involved in the crash is a BSO Fire Rescue helicopter. Pompano Beach Fire Rescue transported two people to an area hospital," BSO said in a statement via social media.

Motorists are advised to avoid the area, which BSO is working as a developing incident, the statement added.

The rescue helicopter crash comes as Florida braces for a potential hurricane later this week. Earlier on Monday, US President Joe Biden spoke with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis to coordinate federal disaster assistance in advance of the storm.

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Trump's Plea, Arraignment in Georgia Case Set for September 6 - Fulton County Court Docket

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WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - The plea and arraignment of former President Donald Trump in his Georgia criminal case is set for September 6 at 9:30 a.m., according to the Fulton County court docket.

Trump and 18 co-defendants all surrendered at the Fulton County jail last week, with all but one of them free on bond agreements.

The co-defendants will also be arraigned on September 6 but at a later time.

Trump and the co-defendants face 41 criminal counts related to the alleged attempt to overturn the 2020 US presidential election in Georgia.

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