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Remnants of 2,000-Year-Old Roman Settlement in Switzerland Hailed as 'Extraordinary' Find

At its height in the First Century CE, Rome ruled a vast empire that stretched from Great Britain to Babylon with an estimated population as high as 76 million. The so-called "Pax Romana" or "Roman Peace" across the region allowed a high development of trade and culture before it began to decline in the Third Century CE.

Swiss archaeologists have stumbled upon the remnants of a stone wall built by the Roman Empire some 2,000 years ago, the largest such find in nearly a century.

The wall was found near Cham, a municipality of Zug canton in central Switzerland. At the time it was built, the area was on the Roman Empire's northern frontier, separating it from Germania.

Switzerland's Office for the Preservation of Monuments and Archaeology has called the find "sensational" and "extraordinary," the first of its kind in the area in nearly 100 years, according to the archaeologists.

"At the moment, we're wondering what this complex of buildings was used for," Kathrin Rüedi, from the Historical Monuments and Archaeology Service, said in a state news release, adding it could have been either a villa, an inn, or a temple.

The discovery includes a perimeter wall surrounding an area of at least 5,300 square feet (500 square meters) that would have surrounded a group of buildings. Inside they have found fragments of a plaster wall, iron nails, gold fragments that may have once been jewelry, and a host of everyday items such as glassware, pots, amphoras and millstones.

The inclusion of imported Roman tableware known as terra sigillata - "sealed earth" in Latin - and detailed glass vessels suggests the site included elite Roman citizens. The amphorae, which would have been imported from Greece or elsewhere in the Mediterranean, likely brought foods such as wine, olive oil, or fish sauce.

Copper and bronze coins were also found, including a silver denarius minted in the First Century BCE, during the reign of Julius Caesar.

While other Roman artifacts and structures have also been found across Switzerland, they are not the oldest in the region. Items judged to be from a Celtic culture have also been discovered, as the tribes held sway across much of Central and Western Europe before the Roman conquests or the arrival of German migratory tribes from the north and east. At the peak of their power, an alliance of Celtic tribes sacked Rome under the Senones chieftain Brennus in 390 BCE.

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'Rough Country': Ukraine's Burisma Courted Hunter Biden for 'Protection' Amid Oligarch Feuds

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The story of why Hunter Biden was on the board of Ukrainian gas company Burisma after the US-backed coup in 2014 shouldn't surprise anyone familiar with the dynamics of business in post-Soviet Eastern Europe, nor should the US-orchestrated removal of a prosecutor investigating the firm, a journalist told Sputnik.

Recently, Fox News interviewed Viktor Shokin, the former Ukrainian prosecutor general, and asked about the circumstances of his removal from office in 2016.

"I have said repeatedly in my previous interviews that [then-Ukrainian President Petro] Poroshenko fired me at the insistence of the then-Vice President Biden because I was investigating Burisma," Shokin said.

"[Poroshenko] understood, and so did Vice President Biden, that had I continued to oversee the Burisma investigation, we would have found the facts about the corrupt activities that they were engaging in. That included both Hunter Biden and Devon Archer and others," he continued.

The White House subsequently dismissed Shokin's allegations as "lies" and "debunked" falsehoods, criticizing Fox for airing the interview at all.

Ironically, US President Joe Biden has confirmed Shokin's story. At an event hosted by the Council on Foreign Relations think tank in January 2018, Biden boasted about getting Shokin fired by threatening to withhold a $1 billion loan to Kiev.

"I looked [at my watch] and said 'I'm leaving in six hours, if the prosecutor's not fired you're not getting the money. Well son of a b*tch! He got fired, and they put in place someone who was solid," Biden recalled at the CFR event.

Nebojsa Malic, a Serbian-American journalist, blogger and translator and senior writer at RT, told Radio Sputnik on Monday that Ukraine has been wracked by corruption since it became an independent nation in 1991, amid the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and that Burisma's recruitment of Hunter Biden, Joe Biden's son, to its board of directors in 2014 was characteristic of the way companies have sought out powerful political "patrons" in such an environment.

"Here's a blatant example, like a confession, so to speak, of essentially withholding aid. These were loan guarantees from the IMF, but in practical terms, this was money from the US taxpayers, in exchange for a political move," Malic said of Joe Biden's 2018 admission.

"Now, the big point of disagreement, and you'll hear Biden's defenders say this is that, well, Shokin was fired because he was incompetent and he wasn't actually investigating corruption and he wasn't actually investigating Burisma and Burisma had nothing to do with anything - except Burisma actually hired Hunter Biden as protection, because the man knew nothing about oil and gas exploration, he was there simply because his last name was Biden and his father was in charge of Ukraine policy," the journalist said. "This is blatantly obvious to even the willfully blind."

"And his business partner, Devon Archer, has testified to that effect as well: he literally said 'they contacted us that they needed some cover.' I'm not sure he said 'cover,' he said something about doing some work in DC to handle the pressure. The exact phrasing doesn't really even matter, it's for the lawyers to deal with. But the issue is that Archer was very forthright, that, you know, the reason Burisma hired Biden is to protect itself from investigations. And Shokin was sniffing around because these guys were owned by a notoriously corrupt oligarch working in a notoriously corrupt country that was even more notoriously corrupt after the coup that the US

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sponsored in 2014 and put in a new government, thanks to Victoria Nuland, and Biden was invited to 'midwife' this thing, in her immortal words. So the notion that there was no corruption and Burisma was clean and that Hunter Biden had nothing to do with anything and he was just a good boy who was on some drugs and got involved with some shady people but knew nothing and did nothing is just ludicrous."

"And then you have his father confessing that he did exactly what he did. And then you replace Shokin with somebody 'more solid.' Here's the issue: I know of the person who replaced Shokin, I had to do a double-take when I read who replaced him because I wasn't paying attention to Ukrainian politics in 2018, but the name sounded familiar. And so I looked it up. And this is the same guy who was advising President Poroshenko, another oligarch, that was put into place by essentially Victoria Nuland, again," Malic explained.

"Back in 2015, when Ukraine signed the second Minsk agreement after failing to crush Donbass by force again, he said that Ukraine should do the same thing as Croatia 20 years prior: arm itself, get instruction from Americans, and then when the time is right and with American blessing, destroy the separatists in a week. He was referring to the biggest act of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans in the 1990s, which was the expulsion of Serbs from Croatia."

"This is the man Joe Biden considered 'solid.' Solid in what respect, that he's going to do what he's told? As it clearly has nothing to do with his prosecutorial skills or abilities," the journalist said.

"And sure enough, this guy got replaced by another prosecutor who himself got replaced by another prosecutor. And that particular prosecutor's office is essentially being used to go after Zelensky's political opponents now, so I guess it's going to be considered 'turbo solid' in Washington," Malic said.

'A Corrupt Oligarchy' Since 1991

The journalist explained that due to pro-Western policies that saw Soviet state property "sold off for pennies" in the aftermath of the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine suffered an enormous population loss amid the resulting socioeconomic catastrophe.

"You name it - it's collapsed," Malic quipped.

"Ukraine is actually a corrupt oligarchy and has been since 1991 or thereabouts. It's a case study of what happens when a post-Soviet country chooses to do what the West told it to do," he said. "They had a dozen or so oligarchs snap up all of the country's wealth because essentially all of the property of the state was sold off for pennies to speculators like Poroshenko, who ended up owning the biggest candy company in the country."

He noted that while in Russia, President Vladimir Putin had reined in the power of the oligarchs, much to the chagrin of the West, "in Ukraine, nobody ever purged the oligarchs. They ruled their regions as sort of feudal kingdoms and they came together in support of this post-coup government, with each looking for their own interests. You had these oligarchs bankrolling the neo-Nazi volunteer battalions - the notorious Azov* and even more notorious Aidar** - which were essentially private militias set up by an oligarch who ended up clashing with Poroshenko and being declared persona non grata and fleeing to Israel, where he had citizenship. You had various oligarchs doing oil and gas deals with various American companies, and Burisma was one of them," Malic explained.

"Just after 2004 - the first Orange Revolution that people have forgotten about - at the time, Western media were bragging about how the West had developed a perfect technique to win

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other people's elections through a combination of propaganda and demonstrations and essentially soft coups. And of course, they had to scale back that rhetoric after it became obvious what they were doing."

"After 2004, from what I was told by people who live there, things took a turn for the worse. For one brief period under a previous government, they had an experiment in flat taxation and corruption actually subsided because there wasn't enough of a gray area for people to manipulate things. And you had a booming software industry and you had all these video games coming out of Ukraine, and it seemed like they were on the upward swing," Malic said.

"And then in 2004, this coalition of oligarchs comes in and - you know, [Viktor] Yushchenko, [Yulia] Tymoshenko and that crew, and they fell out between themselves over oil and gas, and Tymoshenko herself has been convicted of corruption, although, you know, you never know in Ukrainian courts whether that was legitimate or a political conviction. And that in itself is telling. But that crew just brought the country down into ruin again. And four years later, they get voted out in favor of Yanukovich, the same guy that they forcibly removed in 2014."

“It's a divided country regionally, and it to some extent even ethnically and linguistically, and a lot of its politics was basically a tug-of-war between regional oligarchs, and the US would every so often go in and put its foot on the scale in favor of certain ones that were loyal to US policies," he noted.

Would-Be Oligarch Buster to Washington Tool

"Now, Zelensky was an exception to this rule because he wasn't an oligarch, he was an actor - an oligarch-sponsored actor. The oligarch who ran him basically bought a TV station and had this TV show produced portraying Zelensky as a president of Ukraine,” Malic explained.

“And then he gets laundered through this show and he gets elected on a peace platform and purging the oligarchs. And, you know, within six months when he goes to the front line, to, talk down these militants into obeying his orders, and he starts yelling, ‘I am the president’ - which, if you have to say you're the president, you're not - and they were basically saying [in response]: ‘if you don't do as we tell you, we’ll kill you.’ And there is this miraculous transformation of Volodymyr Zelensky from peacemaker into another tool of the Washington Establishment practically overnight.”

“Ukraine is a country - it's very sad because I know so many people from there, and they were saying that, you know, essentially ever since the Soviet Union fell apart, they had this whole tug-of-war between oligarchs who would fleece the state and the people and pocket the profits and would essentially bribe their way to wealth. And any time somebody tried to bring law and order to it, they would have a revolution or have them replaced or have them assassinated or accuse them of something else. It's been a really rough country for decades, even before the 2014 coup that set it on the path of war.”

“And so the fact that the first thing that Burisma does after the coup, essentially, is call the son of the sitting US vice president, who's in charge of Ukraine policy - I mean, why would they do this? Hunter Biden had literally just been discharged from the Navy for drug use. He had no useful life skills, he had no connections himself aside from his father. There's literally no other explanation than to get political cover and therefore immunize yourself from investigations of corruption. This is what people do in Eastern Europe: they find a powerful patron. If the local oligarch isn't powerful enough, you seek a foreign sponsor, be that the German embassy, the British Embassy or the Americans.”

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Aging Leopard Tanks 'Not Prepared' for Combat in Ukraine Hurt Rheinmetall's Reputation

A former US Army commander told Sputnik that the lackluster performance of the Leopard tanks in Ukraine was hurting maker Rheinmetall, as the Western media has built the aging weapons up as the latest "wunderwaffe" or "wonder weapon" that would turn the tide against Russia.
According to US media reports based on Ukrainian data, Ukraine has received 71 of the Leopard 2 main battle tanks promised to it, five of which have been destroyed outright and at least another 10 have suffered sufficient damage to send them back to repair stations in Poland and Germany.
Kiev has been promised 104 Leopard 2s in various configurations, the majority of which are the older A4 design with inferior turret gun and turret armor to the newer models. Another 178 Leopard 1 tanks, the predecessor to the Leopard 2, have also been promised, but a smaller number have been delivered, with 96 remaining in storage in Switzerland after Bern refused to allow the defense contractor RUAG to transfer them to Ukraine.
It's unclear how many Leopard 2s have taken part in the counteroffensive operation that began in June, but according to Earl Rasmussen, an international consultant and retired US Army lieutenant colonel, they have "absolutely not" been the game-changers they were imagined to be.
"I don't think most of the NATO systems - the whole strategy was not prepared for the type of war or type of conflict that we're actually seeing," he told Sputnik on Tuesday.
"The heavy artillery usage, we've got heavy tank battles that occur as well, and the ground conditions - the conflict is not against Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, even Syria," Rasmussen noted.
"The land conditions are completely different as well. So the military capabilities of Russia, and the ground conditions, and the escalatory dominance that Russia has, does not put the Western forces, and their equipment being supplied to an army that's really not fully trained to use it and kind of piecemealed together in there - it does not provide a good storyline. There's no way any individual thing is providing a 'game changer,'" he noted.
Rasmussen noted that in the various Middle Eastern conflicts where they've been used, Leopard 2 tanks have never faced this kind of combat. Having been introduced in the late 1970s, "warfare has changed" in the decades since the tank was designed.
"The Leopard 2 came into service initially back in the early 1980s, the Leopard 1s even before that. And the Leopard 2 has been upgraded over time as well, and that's the most sophisticated that Germany has. But warfare has changed, the ammunition has changed, they probably need some major upgrading in design. Based on some of the capabilities that Russia has that are out there, and China has that capability too, I don't know how you can look at them as being game changers."
He noted that when it comes to combat in Ukraine, "they haven't been coming out the greatest. I think the armor is probably not sufficient and the guns have not been operating sufficiently as well. And the number of rounds that are being fired is ridiculous out there. So it puts a lot of

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stress on the weapons system itself, not just the Leopard, but probably also the artillery capability, too, because the [Panzerhaubitze 2000] is the Rheinmetall's self-propelled artillery, it would not surprise me if they are deployed there as well."

Rasmussen said a few vulnerabilities had revealed themselves during the counteroffensive, such as the protective armor and their maneuverability, but that it was likely the tanks had not been tactically deployed correctly.

However, he noted that Rheinmetall, one of the tank's primary makers, has suffered reputationally, too, due to the Leopards not living up to the hype generated by the media.

"It's not helping the greatest for them. I don't know what their stock prices have been doing or sales. They're a major supplier - not just for the Leopard tank, which is actually manufactured by Krauss-Maffei - but they're a major supplier to BAE, which is a major British company, they own something like 40-50% of that. They have Rafael. They provide the main gun for the US Abrams M2 tanks. So their capabilities are integrated across multiple NATO systems. So depending on where they're seeing their weakness, with them saying they're not prepared for this type of warfare, that could affect a lot of other systems," he said.

"I think with them coming out admitting that their capabilities are questioned, I think you'll see people looking for other competitors," Rasmussen continued. "Maybe they'll turn to the US, I don't necessarily think they're going to turn to the British or even the French, and Korea seems to be really picking up. The main company there is Hanwha, and its sales have increased 60% during this time period, over the last year."

However, he predicted that Rheinmetall would eventually learn from its mistakes and recover, which might take a decade or more.

"They've been around for a long time. They're probably learning from this situation. And they're one of the largest companies in Germany, I think they've got almost 30,000 employees, they've got partnerships around the world. So I think they have the capability to catch up, but they probably have to do some rigorous analysis and it may be 10 years to work in a whole new generation of systems and stuff," he concluded, noting that it is likely that the company has already started analyzing their weaknesses.

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Video: Louisiana Facing Down 'Unprecedented' Number of Wildfires, Breaking State Records

Amid an unprecedented year for wildfires around the globe, the latest place to experience record-breaking blazes is Louisiana, which has seen the most fire-prone conditions in a generation emerge in recent weeks.

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Across the Bayou State, officials have tracked more than 450 wildfires this summer, including the massive Tiger Island and Longville fires, which by themselves have consumed 50,000 acres. At least two deaths have been attributed to the fires.

"Wildfires this many and of this intensity are unprecedented," Mike Strain, Louisiana's agriculture and forestry commissioner, told US media. "With this kind of heat, the low humidity and the lack of rainfall, this is probably the driest conditions, the most drought-prone conditions we've had in a generation."

More than three-quarters of the state is experiencing severe drought conditions, and temperatures shattered all-time highs over the weekend, with New Orleans International Airport registering 105 degrees Fahrenheit (over 40 degrees Celsius) on Sunday. The state capital of Baton Rouge is set to break its record for three-month average temperature by more than 3 degrees, according to media reports.

"Our state has never been this hot and dry and we have never had this many fires," Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said on social media.

The town of Merryville in the western Beauregard Parish was forced to evacuate its entire 1,200-strong population last week as the Tiger Island Fire exploded, becoming the state's largest on record, burning 33,000 acres. It has consumed at least 20 structures. As of Tuesday, the Tiger Island Fire was only 50% contained.

Many of the fires are being sparked by lightning strikes, authorities said, with lightning being blamed for at least 10 fire outbreaks per day.

However, some fires have also been set off by industry. On Friday, two naphtha storage tanks at the Marathon Petroleum oil refinery in Garyville caught fire, pouring black smoke in the sky. According to Marathon, tests have so far found "non-detectable air quality impacts" as a result of the blaze, although no other tests independent of the company have been reported in the media so far. Several residents told local media they felt nauseous, dizzy and had headaches during the fire.

The refinery is the country's third-largest, producing a variety of petroleum products from asphalt and gasoline to plastics. Residents within two miles of the plant were temporarily evacuated. The fire was contained in a few hours, but two responders suffered minor injuries and 10 firefighters reported heat stress, according to local reports.

The Louisiana fires have come in the wake of a devastating blaze on the Hawaiian island of Maui earlier this month that killed more than 100 people and nearly completely consumed the historic port city of Lahaina, a town of 15,000. A lawsuit against Hawaii Electric alleges the company's uninsulated electrical wires were responsible for the fire, which broke out amid strong winds driven by an offshore hurricane. The power company has admitted its electrical poles were toppled by the winds and that it had no contingency plan for shutting down the power grid as a result of the fire risk.

In Canada, a slew of wildfires have for months poured smoke in the skiesthat has reached around the planet, pumping more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than the northerly country typically emits in an entire year. Other fires have raged in Italy, Greece, Spain, and the Canary Islands, among numerous other places affected by deadly heat waves.

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Video: 127-Year-Old Water Main Breaks in NYC's Times Square

The water main break affected roughly 300,000 customers who rely on subway lines 1, 2 and 3 for their daily commute.

A 127-year-old water main under New York City's infamous Times Square gave way overnight Tuesday, releasing an estimated 1.8 million gallons of water into the subway system and completely upended the morning commute for many New Yorkers.

The underground water main pipe erupted on Seventh Avenue between 43rd and 44th streets at about 3 a.m. local time, said Richard Davey, the president of New York City Transit. With Subway lines 1, 2 and 3 affected by the break, an estimated 300,000 New Yorkers who use those lines during a regular rush hour were said to have been left in transit limbo.

It took a reported 90 minutes for crews to shut off the water, with officials then proceeding to clean and repair the flooded area. By late morning, the subway lines were running once again but with delays in both directions.

"The main impact, of course, has been on the subways, because the water main is above the subway station here," Rohit Aggarwala, the commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection, said earlier on Tuesday. "And so for that hour and a half or so when the water was running [it] was running into the subway system."

"The water main is from 1896. It's a 20 inch main, so a pretty big, high-pressure water main," Aggarwala said. "The original design and the maintenance of this system is more important than the age."

Davey explained the break was due to the system's old age as well as its location underground, two factors that make it prone to flooding. He added that the Department of Environmental Protection, and the NYC Transit should work together to ensure that future breaks are resolved more quickly.

"Typically, this is a lower-ridership week for us, so we should have been able to handle the capacity. I heard of no crowding issues on other lines, but if this were two weeks from now, when a Tuesday after Labor Day we certainly would have been more challenged," Davey said.

Excavation on the issue has left a large hole at the intersection of 40th Street and Seventh Avenue. Surrounding streets were open by rush hour, as the cleanup crew attempted to get at least one lane of traffic open for commuters.

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Rare Blue Supermoon to Appear This Week With Special Appearance From Saturn

Get your cameras ready! The next super blue moon will not occur for another 14 years.

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Blue moons are relatively rare, occurring just once every two to three years but - luckily, the next one is expected to occur this Wednesday at 9:35 p.m. ET (0135 GMT on Thursday).
A supermoon occurs when the moon is both full and at, or near its closest point to Earth, according to the US space agency NASA. It occurs three to four times a year; however, if in one month two full moons occurs, the second is referred to as a "blue moon."
Therefore, if there are two supermoons in one month, the second one is called a "super blue moon." But the name has nothing to do with its color, unfortunately. The moon will appear as blue if small air particles like smoke or dust "scatter away" red wavelengths of light.
The first supermoon of this year was in July, while the fourth and final moon will appear in September.
The planet Saturn will also make an appearance alongside the blue supermoon. It will be visible as a bright point just 5 degrees above and to the right of the moon. However, actually seeing the ringed planet may prove to be difficult due to the moon's incredibly bright glare.
During a supermoon, the moon appears not only brighter, but is also 14% larger. But NASA says that difference in size may be hard to perceive, as it is like comparing a quarter to a nickel.
This week's super blue moon, or blue supermoon, will be an incredibly rare spectacle.
According to Italian astronomer Gianluca Masi, founder of the Virtual Telescope Project, the next one will not be visible until 2037.
Masi, who hopes to livestream the event as it sets below Rome's skyline, explained that those who wish to see the moon don't need any special telescopes or binoculars, adding that just using one's own eyes - weather permitting, of course - would be sufficient.

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Archaeologists Unearth 3,000-Year-Old Peruvian Tomb Housing Priest's Remains

The discovery of the tomb marks one of the oldest archeological discoveries in the area; however, officials have indicated that its age is not its most peculiar quality.
Archaeologists in northern Peru have discovered a 3,000-year-old tomb, the country's Culture Ministry announced over the weekend.
The Pacopampa Archaeological Project, which has been working to excavate the site since 2005 and made the big reveal on Sunday, has revealed that the tomb's remains belong to a priest.
The "Priest of Pacopampa," named in reference to the archaeological zone where his tomb was found, was buried around 1,200 BC. The priest, who was buried under six layers of ash mixed with black earth, is believed to have been an elite religious leader in the Andean country.
The upper edge of the tomb had been adorned with two seals or emblems, and was decorated with ceramic bowls. Both the ceramic bowls and the seals were painted with the same substance applied to people's bodies during ancient rituals, which only elite members of the society participated in.
One seal depicts an anthropomorphic face looking east, while the other depicts a jaguar looking west.

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One thing in particular stood out to one of the archeologists about this tomb: its size. Yuji Seki, the project leader, said it was nearly two meters (2.2 yards) in diameter and meter (3.3 feet) deep. Seki said the large size was “very peculiar” and noted that the position of the body was also strange as the priest's body was found lying face down with one half of it extended and his feet crossed.

Along with the remains, researchers also found a bone carved into the shape of a tupu, a pin worn by women in the Andes in order to fasten their textile garments.

“Though this person is a man, the associations are very peculiar,” Seki explained. “I think this was a leader in his time.”

According to Peru’s Culture Ministry, the Priest of Pacopampa is about five centuries older than the tombs of the “Lady of Pacopampa,” which was discovered in 2009, and is also older than the “Serpent Jaguar Priest” unearthed in 2015. The “Lady of Pacopampa" died in 750 BC, while the “Serpent Jaguar Priest" died in 700 BC.

Still, the “Priest of the Pututos'” tomb is older than this most recent discovery, the ministry says. The "Priest of the Pututos" was first discovered last year, and dates back to 1,000 BC.

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‘Ukraine Responsible for Own Military Operations’– Pentagon on Attacks on Russian Cities

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) –The Ukrainian army is responsible for carrying its own military operations throughout the Russian territory, a Pentagon spokesperson told Sputnik on Wednesday.

“As we’ve said since the beginning of Russia’s unprovoked invasion last year, Ukraine is responsible for their own operations, so I refer you to them to speak to these attacks,” the spokesperson said.

On Tuesday night, several Russian regions and cities experienced drone attacks. Among them, the Moscow, Pskov, Voronezh, and Bryansk regions.

Pskov Governor Mikhail Vedernikov said earlier today that the Russian Defense Ministry was repelling an overnight drone attack on Pskov airport. The attack caused a fire at the airport and damaged an Il-76 military transport aircraft. According to preliminary data, there were no casualties in the incident.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has been briefed on the situation, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said

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Over 161,000 People in Florida Have No Power as Hurricane Idalia Makes Landfall

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WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) – Almost 161,000 customers in Florida have no electricity as hurricane Idalia made landfall on the state's coast, the Poweroutages.us portal said on Wednesday.

"States and territories by customers out: Florida 161,326," the portal said.

Another 8,000 people have no power in Georgia and North Carolina, which Idalia is expected to hit later in the day or Thursday.

US National Hurricane Center (NHC) warned that the hurricane's maximum sustained winds are 120 miles per hour. "Catastrophic storm surge and damaging hurricane-force winds continue," the NHC said.

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Hurricane Idalia Makes Landfall in Florida as Category 3 Storm - National Hurricane Center

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - Hurricane Idalia has made landfall in the US state of Florida as a dangerous category 3 storm with wind speeds of up to 125 miles per hour (201 kilometers per hour), the National Hurricane Center (NHC) said on Wednesday.

"NOAA Doppler radar imagery indicate that the eye of Idalia made landfall along the coast of the Florida Big Bend near Keaton Beach around 745 AM EDT (1145 UTC). Data from an Air Force Reserve Hurricane Hunter aircraft indicate that Idalia's maximum sustained winds were near 125 mph (205 km/h)," the NHC said in a statement.

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ANALYSIS - Constraints on US Military Aid to Kiev Could Be 'Decisive' Factor in Ukraine Conflict

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - Resistance in Congress, depleted stockpiles, among other constraints on US military assistance could be decisive factors in the Ukraine conflict, with both sides committed to winning and no diplomatic path in sight, experts told Sputnik.

President Joe Biden is asking Congress for an additional $24 billion in security, economic, and humanitarian assistance to get Ukraine through next year, although Republicans in the House are opposing sending more aid to Kiev.

Earlier on Tuesday, the US unveiled a $250-million security assistance package for Ukraine that includes High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), AIM-9M and Javelin missiles, TOW anti-tank and Hydra-70 air-to-ground missiles in addition to other weapons and munitions.

NO PATH TO PEACE

Meanwhile, although Russia has repeatedly said it is willing to engage in negotiations, the White House and Kiev have clearly stated they are opposed to talks until Ukraine makes gains on the battlefield.

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"I don't see it [conflict ending] happening soon because I think that Ukraine still thinks they can win, and I think Russia wants to wait till after the US election to see if [ex-President] Donald Trump comes back in," former US defense analyst Ivan Eland told Sputnik. "There's really not going to be a solution."

Eland said the conflict is probably going to "lock up" with neither side able to muster the resources to sustain the fighting.

"Either the peace is usually achieved by one side winning or the other side winning, or the two sides getting so exhausted that they call it a day," Eland said.

Former US Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland, whose memoir "The Envoy: Mastering the Art of Diplomacy with Trump and the World," recently published, said he does not see any path to peace talks.

"I don't think there is any interest [within the Biden administration] in beginning any serious discussions until the Russian military has been severely weakened beyond the point of where they are today," Sondland told Sputnik.

Winslow Wheeler, who served as a national security adviser for the US Senate and Government Accountability Office between 1971 and 2002, predicts that internal issues will stifle progress given reaching a deal will require comprise.

"That means major concessions by Ukraine, Russia and NATO, which for domestic political reasons no one is currently willing to make," Wheeler said. "Current US hysteria regarding China makes our picking up their proposals complicated, again mostly because of our domestic politics, but no viable avenue to serious negotiations should be spurned."

POTENTIAL GAME-CHANGING LIMITATIONS

The US has already provided Ukraine with more than $43 billion in military assistance since Russia's military operation started, but Kiev's requirements continue to grow. Meanwhile, Moscow continues to report that Russian forces have destroyed significant amounts of heavy weaponry and equipment the US has supplied Ukraine.

Eland indicated that eroding supplies, in addition to Republican resistance, are also a major constraint that could undermine the Biden administration’s ambitious spending plans to support Kiev.

Sondland, in fact, believes that the US failing to meet Kiev’s requirements could determine the outcome of the conflict.

"What the Ukrainians need to make this decisive, is they need the US to literally push all of our chips on the table," Sondland.

For example, Sondland said Ukraine needs include more long-range weapons, like Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS), and more Patriot missile defense systems.

Eland, however, pointed out that providing aid to Ukraine through the presidential drawdown authority is depleting US stockpiles.

"They’re using ammunition at such a rate against Russia, that the defense industry is having trouble keeping up - they're depleting US stock [and] US stocks have to be replaced," Eland said.

As a result, Eland added, US readiness to defend NATO and East Asian countries is reduced since there may not be enough ammunition.

Moreover, Eland said Ukraine is a European issue. The United States does not have a genuine national security interest in Ukraine, he added.

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"It should be more of a European effort. The United States is trying to pivot to Asia, and the Biden administration has done that, but there's a cost. We don't have unlimited resources, and the Europeans are all very rich," Eland said.

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Nuland, Pakistan Foreign Minister Discuss Need for 'Timely, Fair' Elections - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - Acting US Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and Pakistani Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani in a phone conversation discussed the importance of the South Asian country holding timely and free elections, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a press release.

Earlier this month, Pakistan's parliament was dissolved for national elections, although an oversight body delayed the vote for four months. Pakistan's constitution stipulates that elections should be held within 90 days of dissolving parliament.

"Acting Deputy Secretary Nuland and Foreign Minister Jilani discussed the importance of timely, free and fair elections in a manner consistent with Pakistan's laws and constitution," Miller said on Tuesday.

Election uncertainty comes amid political turmoil caused by the jailing of former prime minister and opposition leader Imran Khan. Earlier on Tuesday the Islamabad High Court suspended Khan's sentence and ordered his release on bail.

In early August, a court sentenced the cricket star to three years in prison after finding him guilty in a corruption case.

Khan's ouster from office in a no-confidence vote last year sparked a political crisis as thousands rallied across the country in support of the former cricket star. Khan's political party, Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), called for an independent investigation into the potential US role in his removal.

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Red Cross Deploys 400 Personnel, 75 Vehicles Ahead of Hurricane Idalia in Florida

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) – American Red Cross is deploying over 400 disaster personnel and dozens of special vehicles in advance of Hurricane Idalia's landfall in Florida, the agency's Vice President Brad Kieserman told reporters.

"Currently, there are more than 400 Red Cross disaster responders either in Florida or traveling to Florida today. We got shelter supplies for up to 20,000 individuals that are staged in Jacksonville, Florida," Kieserman said on Tuesday.

The agency has over 75 special equipment vehicles ready to deliver essential equipment, shelter supplies, food and other items once the storm passes, he added.

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US National Hurricane Center (NHC) warned that Idalia would reach Florida on Wednesday and pass near or along the coast of Georgia and South and North Carolina later that day and Thursday.

The NHC noted that Idalia became a category 2 hurricane.

“Data from an Air Force Reserve Hurricane Hunter aircraft indicate that maximum sustained winds have increased to near 100 mph (155 km/h) with higher gusts,” it said in its latest advisory.

The NHC forecasts additional strengthening, and expects that Idalia would become a major hurricane before it reaches Florida.

Local media reported that the hurricane may affect six cities along its path, including Tallahassee, Tampa, Sarasota, Gainesville, Jacksonville in Florida, and Savannah in Georgia.

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Pacific Island Palau Agrees to Let US Coast Guard Enforce Laws in Its Waters - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The Pacific island nation of Palau has signed a new agreement with the United States that will allow the US Coast Guard to enforce regulations in its own economic zone or territorial waters, the Coast Guard announced in a press release.

"As part of a continued commitment to enhancing maritime governance and promoting regional sovereignty, representatives of the United States and the Republic of Palau signed an expanded bilateral law enforcement agreement on August 23, 2023, on the sidelines of the Joint Heads of Pacific Security conference in Palau," the release said on Monday.

The new agreement enables the Coast Guard to enforce regulations at sea in Palau's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) on behalf of Palau without a Palauan officer present, the release said.

"The United States and the Republic of Palau share common interests and values supporting a free and open Indo-Pacific. This agreement will help us meet our security commitments in Palau by increasing maritime domain awareness and preventing IUU Fishing within Palau's EEZ," US Embassy to Palau Chargé d'Affaires, Andrew McLean said in the release.

The agreement follows a similar deal negotiated with the Federated States of Micronesia in October 2022, the release added.

The agreement will help Palau monitor its EEZ, protect against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing as well as deter uninvited vessels from conducting questionable maneuvers within our waters, President Surangel Whipps said in the release.

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FBI Gathering Enormous Database DNA on US Population as Fast as China Does - Reports

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WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The FBI is now putting together a gigantic database on millions of Americans and collecting DNA profiles at the same rate as China, which is gathering similar biological tracking information on its own population, US media reported.

The FBI has already gathered 21.7 million DNA profiles on 7% of the US population of more than 300 million, according to the federal agency's own data that has been reviewed by the Intercept news platform, the Intercept said in a report.

The FBI further plans to rapidly increase its DNA data collection operation in scale and is going to nearly double its current $56.7 million DNA cataloging budget by adding $53.1 million to it for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, according to its submission for funding to Congress, the report said.

In an April 2023 statement submitted to Congress, FBI Director Christopher Wray said the Bureau had collected 90,000 samples per month, which was more than ten times the historical sample volume.

The rate of new DNA samples collected from the general population was expected to rise to 1.5 million per year, Wray said, according to the report.

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IMF Says 29 Countries Pledged to Give Over $103Bln in Special Drawing Rights to Trusts

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced that 29 countries have pledged to channel $103.4 billion in Special Drawing Rights (SDR) to the organization’s trusts to close fundraising gaps.

"Twenty-nine members have pledged to voluntarily channel a total of USD 103.4 billion (SDR 73 billion) as of June 23, 2023," the IMF said in a report on Tuesday.

SDR channeling has been critical in supporting the IMF’s Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust and the Resilience and Sustainability Trust, the report said.

However, more efforts are required to maximize the impact of the 2021 allocations and close fundraising gaps for the trusts, the report said.

In August 2021, the IMF authorized a SDR allocation equivalent to $650 billion to aid in post-pandemic economic recovery. The allocation proved beneficial for the global economy by helping meet the long-term global need for reserves and supporting market confidence in developing countries, the report said.

Countries with stronger economies channeled part of their allocations to developing and more vulnerable countries, amplifying the benefits of the SDR allocation, the report added.

France and Japan channeled the highest amount of their allocations proportionally, 40%, followed by Australia at 38% and China at 34%, according to the report.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) -

WESTERN SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

* The new $250-million security assistance package for Ukraine includes TOW anti-tank and Hydra-70 air-to-ground missiles in addition to other missiles and munitions, the US Defense Department said on Tuesday.

* The new assistance package will also include AIM-9M and Javelin missiles and various artillery and small arms munitions, including for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

* The United States is confident in its ability to provide assistance to Ukraine through the end of the fiscal year, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

* The net profit of Russia's Gazprom under the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) decreased by 8.5 times compared to the same period last year and amounted to 296.2 billion rubles ($3.1 billion) in January-July 2023, Deputy Chairman of the Gazprom Management Committee Famil Sadygov said on Tuesday.

* Gas futures in Europe have decreased by almost 10% to $390 per 1,000 cubic meters, according to data from the London-based ICE exchange.

UKRAINIAN ATTACKS IN RUSSIA

* There are casualties in the Klimovo settlement of Russia’s Bryansk Region that was shelled by the Ukrainian military on Tuesday and a child is among the victims, Governor Alexander Bogomaz said.

* Russian air defense systems took down a Ukrainian aircraft-type drone over the territory of the Bryansk Region, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The Russian military has intercepted a Ukrainian drone over the Black Sea, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Kiev wants to believe that the West supports Ukraine in its desire to destroy "everything Russian," including in Crimea, but does not understand the risks of dragging others into the conflict and therefore different points of view clash, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday.

* The Ukrainian military lost more than 400 soldiers in the Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia directions in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The United States views Crimea as part of Ukraine and Kiev will decide how and where to conduct operations amid Russia's military operation, a Pentagon spokesperson told Sputnik.

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Trump Says Ramaswamy Has 'Talent,' Could be 'Very Good' Pick for Vice President

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said during an interview with Blaze TV on Tuesday that billionaire and Republican presidential hopeful Vivek Ramaswamy shows a lot of promise and could make a good pick for vice president.

"He's a smart guy, he's a young guy, he's got a lot of talent, he's a very, very, very intelligent person. He's got good energy, and he could be in some form of something, I tell ya, I think he'd be very good," Trump said, when asked whether he would consider Ramaswamy for his running mate.

A breakout candidate for the 2024 Republican nomination, Ramaswamy was the only contender at last week's Republican presidential primary debate who said he would not support providing additional funding to Ukraine. Instead, Ramaswamy has proposed a peace treaty that would freeze the current battle lines in Ukraine, respect Russia's position on Crimea, and prevent Ukraine from entering NATO.

Political analysts have suggested that Ramaswamy's showing at the recent debate has made him a credible vice-presidential candidate and a good pick for Trump, who could potentially garner support from minorities and millennials by choosing him as a running mate.

Despite his decision to skip the debate, Trump continues to hold expansive leads in every primary survey.

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Costa Rican President Assures Biden Will Remain One of US Strongest Allies

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves Robles on Tuesday told US President Joe Biden that Costa Rica will remain one of the United States' strongest allies because the two countries share the same economic and security interests.

"I can affirm you, Mr. President, that Costa Rica has been and shall remain one of the strongest allies in world regarding your economic and security interests that are our own," Chaves said during remarks at the White House prior to the bilateral meeting.

Biden said they will discuss security cooperation and especially cooperation regarding organized crime.

According to media reports, Biden and Chaves are also expected to discuss issues concerning immigration in the region and strengthening bilateral trade.

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US Navy Ships Depart Florida In Advance of Hurricane Idalia - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) – US Navy ships began departing Florida in advance of Hurricane Idalia, US Fleet Forces Command said on Tuesday.

"U.S. Navy ships are departing from NS [Naval Station] Mayport in Florida in advance of Hurricane Idalia," the command said on Twitter.

The command explained in a separate statement earlier that the littoral combat ship, USS Cooperstown, will be the first ship to depart from Mayport, while other vessels should leave it by the end of Tuesday.

US National Hurricane Center (NHC) warned that Idalia would reach Florida on Wednesday and pass near or along the coast of Georgia and South in North Carolina later that day and Thursday.

"Satellite images indicate that Idalia continues to strengthen, and maximum sustained winds have increased to near 90 mph (150 km/h) with higher gusts. Rapid intensification is expected before landfall, and Idalia is forecast to be a major hurricane when it reaches the Gulf coast of Florida Wednesday morning," the NHC said in advisory.

Idalia is expected to produce up to 12 inches of rainfall, particularly near landfall in northern Florida, it added.

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US Scientists Make Kidney 'Bioreactor' as Alternative to Dialysis, Transplant - University

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - A group of scientists at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) are developing a kidney cell bioreactor that could replace the need for dialysis or transplants in patients experiencing kidney failure, UCSF said on Tuesday.

"[The scientists] have shown for the first time that kidney cells, housed in an implantable device called a bioreactor, can survive inside the body of a pig and mimic several important kidney functions," UCSF said in a statement.

The new approach could one day allow doctors to treat kidney failure without patients needing dialysis or to suppress their immune systems for transplants, the statement said.

The bioreactor works in the background like a pacemaker for the heart, the statement said. The device also avoids triggering the patient's immune system, the statement said.

Scientists plan to eventually include different kidney cells with different functions in the bioreactor then pair it with a device that filters waste from blood, the statement said.

The research is led by The Kidney Project – a national research project focused on developing a bioartificial kidney. A bioartificial kidney would make treatment for kidney disease more effective and comfortable, the statement said.

The research will now proceed to month-long trials in animals, as required by the US Food and Drug Administration, the statement said.

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Beijing, Washington Preparing For Transportation of Pandas to China - Embassy

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - Beijing and Washington are preparing the transportation of giant pandas back to China, while also discussing future cooperation on giant panda conservation and research, Chinese Embassy Spokesperson Liu Pengyu told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Recently, the China Wildlife Conservation Association and the National Zoo in Washington had announced that the three giant pandas-Mei Xiang, Tian Tian and Xiao Qi Ji-will return to China at the end of this year as previously scheduled," Liu Pengyu said. "China and the US are going through the relevant procedures and preparing for the transportation to ensure that the panda family have a safe journey home. At the same time, the technical cooperation units of China and the United States are communicating on future collaboration on giant panda conservation and research."

White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday that the three panda bears in Washington may be returned to China at the end of the year.

"It has been 51 years since Chinese giant pandas Ling Ling and Xing Xing came to the United States as friendship ambassadors in 1972. Starting from 2000, China and the United States began cooperation on giant panda conservation and research," Liu Pengyu said. "Many good results have been achieved on breeding, disease prevention and control, technical exchanges and public awareness. This has played a positive role in protecting endangered species and enhancing the friendship between the Chinese and American peoples."

Liu Pengyu went on to say that the facilities and equipment of the National Zoo in Washington are fully functional, the breeding management system is sound, and the operation standardized and the food supply guaranteed.

"The zoo has outstanding scientific research strength, and is equipped with experienced full-time breeders and a professional veterinary team. All conditions there can guarantee quality living conditions of giant pandas," he added. "Since the cooperation began, Mei Xiang and Tian Tian have given birth to four cubs, bringing joy to the American people and our two peoples closer to each other. In particular, the birth of Xiao Qi Ji, whose name means 'little miracle', during the pandemic brought encouraging news to panda lovers all over the world."

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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Hunter Biden Coordinated With US Democratic Strategists to End Ukraine Probes - Reports

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WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - Hunter Biden coordinated with Democratic Party strategists to help end corruption probes by former Ukrainian Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin into Ukrainian energy company Burisma, Daily Mail reported on Tuesday.

Biden engaged with Burisma executive Vadym Pozharskyi and Mykola Zlochevsky to strategize ways to shut down Shokin's investigation, the report said, citing emails from a laptop abandoned by Biden.

Biden connected Burisma to Blue Star Strategies, which is run by former Democratic officials.

"I would like us to formulate a list of deliverables, including… meetings/communications resulting in high-ranking US officials in Ukraine (US Ambassador) and in US publicly or in private communication/comment expressing their 'positive opinion' and support of Nikolay [Zlochevksy]/Burisma to the highest level of decision makers here in Ukraine," Pozharskyi said in an email outlining Blue Star Strategies' role.

The "ultimate purpose" of the effort was to shut down any Ukrainian cases against Zlochevsky, the email said.

The report comes amid investigations by US House lawmakers into alleged foreign bribery and influence peddling by Hunter Biden and then-Vice President Joe Biden. Lawmakers allege that the Bidens received millions of dollars to help pressure Ukraine to fire Shokin and end his probes into Burisma.

Joe Biden has repeatedly denied discussing foreign business matters with his son.

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Pentagon Says Remains Confident in Osprey Aircraft Regardless of Recent Incidents

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department remains confident in the Osprey military aircraft regardless of recent crashes, Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday.

"I think we do certainly have confidence in the Osprey," Singh said during a press briefing. "If anything changes, if these investigations lead to something that would cause us for a service to adjust anything about how we believe the Osprey should be used, we would do that, but at this time, we have confidence."

Most recently, three US Marines died in an Osprey crash in Australia over the weekend. Singh said the incident is under investigation.

Osprey aircraft have crashed on multiple occasions over the years, killing more than 50 people to date, according to media reports.

Last August, the US Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) temporarily grounded all 52 of its CV-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft due to an "increased number of safety incidents."

Osprey is a multifunctional tiltrotor aircraft, which combines vertical takeoff, flight and landing capabilities inherent to a helicopter, as well as the speed, range and economy of an aircraft. Ospreys are used primarily for special operations on enemy territories.

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Pentagon Says Confident in US Ability to Support Ukraine Through End of Fiscal Year

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - The United States is confident in its ability to provide assistance to Ukraine through the end of the fiscal year, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday.

"We're confident that we will have enough money to meet Ukraine's need through the fiscal year," Singh said during a press briefing.

However, the Pentagon is hopeful that Congress will pass a supplemental funding request for further Ukraine aid, Singh added.

Earlier this month, the Biden administration requested $13 billion in funds for Ukrainian military aid as part of a larger $40 billion supplemental funding request.

The current fiscal year runs through September 30. Congress is currently considering ways to fund the US government beyond the end of the fiscal year and avoid a shutdown, including a short-term extension.

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New US Ukraine Aid Package Includes TOW Missiles, Hydra-70 Rockets - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - The new $250-million security assistance package for Ukraine includes TOW anti-tank and Hydra-70 air-to-ground missiles in addition to other missiles and munitions, the US Defense Department said on Tuesday.

"The capabilities in this package, valued at up to $250 million, include… tube-launched, optically-tracked, wire-guided (TOW) missiles... and Hydra-70 rockets," the Defense Department said in a press release.

The package also includes other munitions such as for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS); AIM-9M air defense missiles; Javelin and other anti-armor systems; 155mm and 105mm artillery rounds; and three million small caliber rounds, the release said.

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US National Zoo Evacuated Due to Bomb Threat - Statement

(Updates with details in para 4)

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - The US National Zoo in Washington was evacuated on Tuesday due to a bomb threat that police are now investigating, according to a statement from the facility.

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"The Zoo is temporarily closed due to a bomb threat," the zoo said in a statement. "Reopening information will be posted when it becomes available. All other Smithsonian museums are open. Out of an abundance of caution, staff and visitors have been evacuated as the Metropolitan Police Department investigates."

For its part, the Metropolitan Police Department said the zoo had been evacuated as a precaution while its forces investigated the threat

The Metropolitan Police Department later in the day that its explosive ordinance disposal team conducted a precautionary sweep of the zoo and found no hazardous materials.

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Biden Admin. Holds Wind Energy Auction in US Gulf of Mexico to Power Half Million Homes

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration held its first-ever offshore wind energy auction for the US Gulf of Mexico, netting a $5.6 million bid to generate renewable energy that would power to nearly half a million homes, the Department of the Interior said in a press release on Tuesday.

Under the winning bid by RWE Offshore US Gulf, an approximate 1.24 gigawatts of offshore wind energy would be generated in the Lake Charles Lease Area in Louisiana to provide electricity to 435,400 homes, the release said.

The auction helps the Biden administration deliver on its pledge "to advance a clean energy economy that will lower energy costs for families and create good-paying jobs as we help tackle the climate crisis," US Interior Secretary Deb Haaland said in the release.

Earlier this week, the Biden administration said it launched its fourth major offshore wind project under its green energy drive, adding around 700 megawatts of electricity capacity from the initiative, which is located offshore the US state of Rhode Island.

The administration has said its goal is to deploy 30 gigawatts of offshore wind energy capacity by 2030.

The administration had approved three previous wind projects offshore Massachusetts, the South Fork Wind project offshore Rhode Island and New York and the Ocean Wind 1 project offshore New Jersey.

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DHS Chief Calls On US Senate to Reauthorize Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - US Senate should reauthorize as soon as possible the Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards (CFATS) that allows inspections of facilities with dangerous chemicals, Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said on Tuesday.

"The Senate must reauthorize CFATS as soon as it is back in session. Time is not our ally when it comes to confronting terrorists, chemical weapons, and chemical threats," Mayorkas said at the 2023 Chemical Security Summit.

US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) reported on July 28 that Congress allowed the statutory authority for the CFATS program to expire.

Mayorkas pointed out that CFATS recently received overwhelming support in the US House.

"Reauthorization is popular, it is bipartisan, it is common sense, and it is critical," he added.

He also warned that the chemical threat environment is rapidly evolving and should not become a partisan endeavor.

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Miami Mayor Francis Suarez Says Suspending 2024 US Presidential Campaign

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - Miami Mayor Francis Suarez said on Tuesday that he is suspending his 2024 US presidential election campaign after failing to make the stage for the first Republican Party primary debate last week.

“It was a privilege to come so close to appearing on stage with the other candidates at last week’s first debate,” Suarez said in a statement via social media. “While I have decided to suspend my campaign for president, my commitment to making this a better nation for every American remains.”

Suarez said he would continue to amplify the voices of the Hispanic community, noting that it is the fastest-growing voting group in the United States. Republicans need to do more to attract Hispanic voters, who believe in values such as faith, family, freedom and hard work, the statement said.

The Biden administration is failing the country by not addressing rising inflation or crime, the statement said. The next US president must play a “major role” in bringing safety and prosperity

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to cities around the country, the statement said.
Suarez added that he looks forward to working with Republican presidential candidates to ensure the party puts forward a strong nominee.

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New US Aid Package for Ukraine Includes AIM-9M Missiles, HIMARS, Other Munitions - Blinken

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - The new $250 million dollar military assistance package for Ukraine will include AIM-9M and Javelin missiles and various artillery and small arms munitions, including for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.
"[The package] includes AIM-9M missiles for air defense, munitions for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, 155mm and 105mm artillery ammunition, mine-clearing equipment, Javelin and other anti-armor systems and rockets, over 3 million rounds of small arms ammunition, ambulances, demolition munitions for obstacle clearing, as well as spare parts, services, training and transportation," Blinken said in a release.

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US Job Openings Near 2.5-Year Low, Signaling Fed Progress in Inflation Fight - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - The number of jobs open in the United States fell to a near two-and-a-half-year low in July, according to US Labor Department data on Tuesday.
There were 8.8 million jobs open at the end of July, a drop from the 9.16 million in June, the US Labor Department's Job Opening and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) showed.
The report came ahead of Friday's non-farm payrolls for August, which will be crucial for the Federal Reserve's next decision on interest rates scheduled for September 20.
"Not only were the job openings the lowest since March 2021, the number of hires decreased and the quits rate decreased as well [by 253,000]," economist Greg Michalowski said on the ForexLive platform. "If workers are less willing to quit their jobs, it means they are less confident about getting another job sooner rather than later."
Inflation hit four-decade highs of more than 9% per year in June 2022 due to trillions of dollars of US government relief spending following the 2020 coronavirus outbreak. The Fed responded with its most aggressive interest rate hikes in 20 years, going from a base rate of 0.25% in March 2022 to 5.5%.
While price growth has stabilized at 3% per year now, a robust labor market has allowed Americans to continue spending, preventing the Fed from achieving its 2% target for inflation.
Weekly jobless claims have continued to decline in the United States, with unemployment hitting more than 50-year lows, while average hourly earnings have not contracted in a single

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month since April 2021.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said last week the labor market's rebalancing was "incomplete" and pointing out that getting inflation back to 2% goal will require "some softening" in labor market conditions.

Powell made clear that US rates will follow inflationary pressure and the Fed is prepared to raise interest rates further and intends to hold policy at a restrictive level until being confident inflation would move sustainably down toward the central bank's objective.

Wall Street economists polled by US media have predicted a non-farm payrolls growth of 170,000 for August. If the predictions turn out to be accurate, it would be the smallest growth in monthly jobs since February 2021, overwriting a similar milestone set in July when the 187,000 new payrolls then proved the lowest in two-and-a-half-years.

Most polled money market traders say they think the Fed will leave the key US lending rate unchanged at 5.5% at its September 20 meeting. But some 43% said the central bank will likely opt for a 0.25 percentage point increase at its November policy meeting.

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Florida Orders Evacuation in Counties Expected to Be Hit by Hurricane Idalia

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - Mandatory evacuations have been ordered in several counties in Florida ahead of the expected landfall of Hurricane Idalia, the state's Division of Emergency Management said on Tuesday.

"Mandatory evacuation order begins at 9 a.m. on Tuesday, August 29, 2023, and be completed by 7pm on Tuesday, August 29, 2023," the Division of Emergency management said in a statement regarding communities in Dixie County in northern Florida.

Similar evacuation orders have been issued for another 23 counties in Florida, the statement said.

"The Florida Division of Emergency Management works to ensure that Florida is prepared to respond to emergencies, recover from them, and mitigate against their impacts," the Division of Emergency Management said in a separate statement.

Multiple counties across Florida are under hurricane warning and watch, the statement added.

The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said Idalia would reach the Gulf Coast of Florida later on Tuesday or early tomorrow morning.

"Hurricane conditions are expected within the hurricane warning area in Florida by tonight or early Wednesday, with tropical storm conditions beginning today," the NHC said.

The hurricane is expected to pass "near or along" the coasts of Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina later on Wednesday and Thursday, the NHC added.

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Price of Living in Maui 'Enormous' in Wake of Wildfires - Resident

LAHAINA, Hawaii, August 29 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Living expenditures have skyrocketed in areas of Maui impacted by the recent wildfires with grocery costs doubling, resident Eric David Poulsen told Sputnik.

Wildfires that erupted in Maui on August 8 have left at least 115 dead while 388 are still missing, according to officials. The Lahaina fire, which remains 90% contained, burned an estimated 2,170 acres, the county of Maui said in its most recent update.

"The expense to live here is enormous. You know at the grocery store it used to be $150, and then it was $300 to feed a family of four per trip," Poulsen said.

Poulsen also said the two companies he has worked for - Keller Williams and Towel Tracker in Michigan - have been incredibly supportive to them financially in finding a place to live and meeting expenses.

On what is next and whether, he can apply for any grants, Poulsen shared that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) advised him to apply for a Small Business Administration (SBA) loan. FEMA works with SBA to offer low-interest disasters loans.

"But we don't know what is next: I do have money for gas and to feed my family and that's the only thing I know," he added.

Right after the fires, the FEMA said it pledged more than $5.6 million in aid to about 2,000 affected households in Maui and the White House announced that it will distribute a one-time payment of $700 per household.

There is much speculation over what caused the fire, with a majority blaming the Hawaiian Electric company for allegedly neglecting to turn off its equipment during hurricane warnings. But Poulsen believes it was "Mother Nature."

"I know that wind... comes like once a decade off that mountain and whether it was because of the hurricane or the high pressure, I don't know. But I do know that that wind can come and it came and it was ignited," Poulsen said.

Hawaiian Electric in an update on Sunday said its lines were carrying no current by the time flames erupted and the cause of the fire "has not been determined."

US President Joe Biden visited Hawaii on August 21 and stayed about 6 hours. Biden traveled to a few locations inside the Lahaina area, where the fire happened. The president sparked outrage by comparing the Maui wildfires to nearly losing his ‘67 Corvette during a fire at his house 15 years ago.

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US Calls on States to Ratify Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty 'Without Waiting' - Jenkins

UNITED NATIONS, August 29 (Sputnik) - The United States urges states to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) "without waiting," US Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security Bonnie Jenkins said on Tuesday.

"As you recognize our own efforts, we also call on all states and especially those listed in

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Annex two of the treaty, to ratify the CTBT without waiting for others to do so," Jenkins said.
Jenkins made the comment during a high-level plenary meeting at the UN General Assembly to commemorate and promote the International Day against Nuclear Tests.
Jenkins emphasized that the United States is concerned about Russian President Putin's rhetoric about Russia's willingness to resume nuclear testing.
Jenkins ended her statement by saying that all states "must recommit" to a legally binding ban on nuclear tests.
Russia has said it believes the responsibility for the CTBT not entering into force for more than a quarter of a century lies with the United States. Russia has also said the United States refused to ratify the CTBT and is showing an obvious inclination to resume nuclear testing.

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Pentagon Says Crimea Part of Ukraine, Kiev Decides How And Where to Conduct Operations

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - The United States views Crimea as part of Ukraine and Kiev will decide how and where to conduct operations amid Russia's military operation, a Pentagon spokesperson told Sputnik on Tuesday.
According to media reports, Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said the West supports Ukraine in everything, including Kiev's strikes on Crimea.
"The US has been clear that Crimea is part of Ukraine and that Ukraine will decide how, when, and where to conduct operations to defend themselves," the spokesperson said in response to Podolyak's statement.
Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said earlier in the day that Kiev wants to believe that the West supports Ukraine in its desire to destroy "everything Russian," including in Crimea, but does not understand risks of dragging others into the conflict, and therefore different points of view clash.
US media reported recently that the decision by the Ukrainian military to strike targets on the Crimean Peninsula is being perceived with skepticism by several US officials. The United States, according to reports, is not actively advising Ukraine to strike Crimea, adding that the longer the counteroffensives stalls, the higher the chances of failure are.

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New Book Reveals Biden Admin. Did Not Foresee Disastrous US Withdrawal From Afghanistan

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - The disastrous US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 was unforeseen by the Biden administration as late as the beginning of that month, according to a new book by author Franklin Foer.
In an excerpt of "The Last Politician: Inside Joe Biden's White House and the Struggle for

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America's Future" adapted for The Atlantic, Foer depicts President Biden as being unfailingly stubborn and arrogant to the end of the disastrous US withdrawal.

Biden believed that unlike his predecessors, he could rise above pressures from the military and foreign policy establishments to finally withdraw the United States from an unwinnable mission in Afghanistan, the book said.

As of August 1, a month before completing the withdrawal, the Biden administration still believed that an orderly transition of power to a governing coalition between the Taliban and the government of President Ashraf Ghani was possible, the book said.

There were even discussions of Secretary of State Antony Blinken going to Qatar to preside over a signing of an accord, the book pointed out.

In addition, the State Department believed that it would be able to keep the US embassy in Kabul open after the withdrawal, the book said.

The administration assessed that the Afghan military would be able to hold off the Taliban for months and no one thought there would be a need to resort to emergency scenarios, the book said.

By August 15, Taliban fighters began entering Kabul, including the presidential palace, with little resistance from Afghan soldiers while Ghani fled Afghanistan without providing advance knowledge to the US government.

The White House, backed by the CIA, did not adjust its posture despite US Central Command head Gen. Frank McKenzie warning a week earlier that Kabul could be surrounded by the Taliban within a month, the book said.

As of August 12, the US intelligence community still did not think the Taliban would try to storm Kabul until after the planned US withdrawal on August 31, the book said.

Foer then describes how the Biden administration, lacking will and resources, unwittingly fell into relying on the Taliban to act in good faith and keep order across Kabul while the US evacuation proceeded.

By mid-month, hundreds of thousands of desperate Afghans from the countryside were flooding into Kabul to escape retribution from the Taliban and trying to find a way out with the withdrawing Americans, the book said.

The Biden administration believed it could avoid a repeat of the similarly disastrous US withdrawal from Saigon in 1975, but the situation at the Kabul airport quickly worsened, complete with chaotic scenes of Afghans' grisly deaths as they attempted to board airplanes and flee, the book said.

The situation was further complicated when 13 US service members and dozens of Afghans were killed in terrorist bombing explosions outside of Kabul airport. In the ensuing chaos, the US government managed to evacuate in a rather manic and ad-hoc manner about 124,000 people, the book said.

Despite the public outcry at the numerous casualties and destruction amid the unorganized withdrawal, Biden nevertheless believed his decision to pull the United States out of Afghanistan was the correct one, the book said.

Biden's faith in his decision was never shaken, except when a relative of a US service member killed in the terrorist bombing at the Kabul airport on August 26 screamed at him to "burn in Hell," the book added.

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Franklin Foer is a staff writer for The Atlantic and former editor of The New Republic.

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US National Archives Has 5,400 Emails, Records Linked to Biden Pseudonym - Comer

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - The US National Archives has approximately 5,400 emails and records linked to a pseudonym allegedly used by US President Joe Biden to discuss foreign business with his son Hunter Biden, US House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer said on Tuesday.

"The National Archives has ADMITTED to possessing 5,400 emails and records connected to then-VP Biden's 'Robert L. Peters' email account," Comer said in a statement via social media.

Earlier this month, the US House Oversight Committee requested information from the National Archives on the Robert Peters email address, which Biden allegedly used as a pseudonymous means of communication.

The panel has requested unredacted documents from the National Archives due to a belief that redactions could cover up the names of people copied on emails sent by the account, particularly on those pertaining to Ukrainian policy, Comer said on Monday in an interview with Fox Business.

The House lawmakers are investigating alleged criminal activity by the Biden family, including foreign bribery and influence peddling involving Ukrainian energy company Burisma.

The probe could be impacted by a US government shutdown, which would occur if Congress fails to fund the government beyond the end of next month, Comer said. However, Comer added that he is optimistic that the government will avoid a shutdown.

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US House Majority Leader Scalise Diagnosed With Cancer

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) – US House Majority Leader Steven Scalise announced Tuesday that he had been diagnosed with blood cancer.

"After a few days of not feeling like myself this past week, I had some blood work done. The results uncovered some irregularities and after undergoing additional tests, I was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma, a very treatable blood cancer," Scalise wrote on Twitter.

Scalise said he had started treatment, which would take the next several months.

He added that he expects to return to Washington and continue working during treatment.

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US Envoy on Partnership With Japan, ROK: Nothing Can Be Future-Proof

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) – The United States, South Korea and Japan are eager to continue their recently launched trilateral partnership despite any potential internal policy developments in the future, Deputy Assistant to the President and Coordinator for Indo-Pacific Affairs on the National Security Council Kurt Campbell said on Tuesday.

"Nothing can be future-proof. But I would also underscore that there are examples of countries that faced complex histories that have managed to create new relationships in the future," Campbell said during a conversation at the Center for Strategic and International Studies when asked about the prospect of cooperation in light of the upcoming elections in all three countries.

Campbell stated that historically, many countries had profound differences with each other but were able to get through the challenges and build new partnerships. In particular, he recalled tensions between France and Germany in the 1970s but mentioned that they solved many of these issues "very effectively" through cooperation in different areas.

"Every circumstance is different, but we are determined and intend to try to do what we can to solidify and continue this trajectory in the future," Campbell said.

In mid-August, US President Joe Biden, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held a trilateral meeting at Camp David. They announced a partnership between the three countries on a wide range of regional and global issues.

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US Congressman Says Millions of Americans Financially Backing China, Lawmakers Must Act

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) - Congress must act to prevent millions of people in the United States from unwittingly providing financial support to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), US Congressman Mike Gallagher said on Tuesday.

"Millions of Americans have become financial backers of the CCP without knowing it... It is up to Congress to erect strong, enduring guardrails around outbound investment in China," Gallagher said in an opinion-editorial piece for the Washington Post.

Earlier this month, President Joe Biden directed the Treasury Department to restrict investment in Chinese companies engaged in quantum computing, artificial intelligence or the semiconductor industry.

The Biden administration's measure is a "good first step," but will not alone address the problem of outbound investment to China, Gallagher said.

Congress must get a full accounting of the issue by establishing transparency measures for technologies critical to US national security, Gallagher also said.

The US government should further restrict investments that support China's military modernization, surveillance measures or alleged genocide of Uyghurs, Gallagher added.

Moreover, the Biden administration should remove US retirement savings, pension funds and

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federal Thrift Savings Plan from Chinese investments, Gallagher said.

Biden's executive order focuses on active investments such as venture capital and private equity, which only accounts for 17% of total US capital investments in Chinese companies, Gallagher said.

The New York Federal Reserve should stress-test banks for specific situations where US investments could lose much of their value, such as if China invades Taiwan, Gallagher said.

"Given the gaps in President Biden's executive order, as well as the impermanence inherent in any executive order, Congress has a duty to act," Gallagher said.

Gallagher serves as Chairman of the US House Select Committee on the CCP. The panel began investigating major US investments in blacklisted Chinese companies earlier this summer. Gallagher has said that the committee's findings so far are "troubling."

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Child Poverty Rates in Canada Increased to 15,6% Since 2020 – Advocacy Group

WASHINGTON, August 29 (Sputnik) – Canada's child poverty rates have hit a new threshold with nearly 15,6% or 1.1 million children aged 0-17 living in low-income families throughout the country up from 13.5% in 2020, Children First Canada said on Tuesday.

On Tuesday, the advocacy group published a new report in which it revealed the top 10 threats that children in Canada are currently facing.

"Child poverty rates have increased sharply; 15.6% of children aged 0-17 (over 1.1 million children across Canada) live in low-income households – up from 13.5% in 2020, according to the most recent data from the Census Family Low Income Measure, After Tax," the group's report said.

In addition, 60% of low-income families expressed being "very concerned" about their ability to meet their daily essential needs as the prices of food and housing keep increasing, the statement said.

Furthermore, Children First said that approximately 1.8 million children aged eighteen or less faced food insecurity in 2022, a 400,000 increase from 2021.

Among the other threats to Canadian children listed in the report, 60% reported having experienced a form of child abuse before the age of 15, the report said, adding that Indigenous children are twice more likely (15.2%) to experience physical or sexual abuse by adults than their non-indigenous counterparts (7.5%).

The report added that 51% of youth aged 12-18 had experienced depression, and 39% admitted to feeling anxious during the COVID-19 pandemic, further noting that individuals living in low-income backgrounds, facing abuses and/or discrimination faced poor mental health more often.

Unintentional and preventable injuries, vaccine-preventable illnesses, systemic racism and discrimination, infant mortality, bullying, limited physical activity and climate change were also listed.

In light of the report findings, the advocacy group called for the establishment of a Federal

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Commissioner for Children and Youth, the development of a national strategy on the matter, and a national data registry on the health and well-being of Canadians.

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