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11/20/23 Monday

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Federal Court Rules Only US Gov Can Sue for Voting Rights Act Violations, Not Individuals

Although they make up 13.6% of the US population, in parts of the US South, Black Americans can be up to 40% of the population of some states. That same region also has a centuries-long history of depriving that population of their rights - a legacy of the 246-year period when Black people were enslaved laborers for white slaveowners.

In a Monday ruling, a US federal court has dealt what legal experts describe as a devastating blow to the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the law that banned "Jim Crow" racial segregation and other forms of racial discrimination in the United States.

The 8th Circuit US Court of Appeals ruled 2-1 on Monday that Section 2 of the 1965 law does not provide for "private right of action," meaning individuals and civil rights groups cannot sue under the law, only the federal government can.

"After reviewing the text, history, and structure of the Voting Rights Act, the district court concluded that private parties cannot enforce Section 2," the judges wrote. "The enforcement power belonged solely to the Attorney General of the United States."

The ruling upheld a lower court's decision from 2021.

Sophia Lin Lakin, the director of the Voting Rights Project at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), who argued the case before the court, told US media, "the ruling has put the Voting Rights Act in jeopardy, and is very cavalierly tossing aside critical protections that voters have very much fought and died for."

Lakin added that the ruling would create "orders of magnitude of a difference" for enforcing the Voting Rights Act, which had seen challenges from individuals and organizations for decades.

"It's hard to overstate how important and detrimental this decision would be if allowed to stand," Rick Hasen, a prominent election law expert at UCLA Law School, wrote on Election Law Blog. "If minority voters are going to continue to elect representatives of their choice, they are going to need private attorneys to bring those suits."

The actual case comes from Arkansas and is about allegations of racial gerrymandering, or the unnatural shaping of electoral districts to create unfair voting conditions for certain social groups or political parties.

The lawsuit, brought by the state chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and others, accused the state legislature of drawing legislative districts that diluted the power of the Black voters in the state, effectively ensuring that mostly white politicians would win elections.

The NAACP was founded in 1909 and played a key role in the decades-long legal challenges to "Jim Crow," as the system of racial segregation in the American South was called. Jim Crow effectively deprived Black citizens of the right to vote and mandated separate facilities and institutions for Black and white people, relegating Black folks to inferior ones even though the 1898 Supreme Court ruling that legalized segregation technically required them to be equal.

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In 1954, the high court found the “separate but equal” principle was impossible to achieve and invalidated the 1898 ruling, but only in 1964 did Congress pass a law banning all forms of racial discrimination across the United States. The following year, the Voting Rights Actprovided additional protections against racial discrimination in voting - a right expressly protected by the US Constitution.

In 2013, the Supreme Court gutted a key part of the Voting Rights Act that required districts with a history of doing so to get approval from the federal government before changing their voting regulations. For decades before the law was passed, Southern states with large Black minorities had used voting requirements such as literacy tests and intimidation to stop would-be Black voters from casting their ballots.

In the decade since, the law has faced numerous challenges, including in North Carolina and Alabama, where the US Supreme Court has ruled lawmakers racially gerrymandered electoral districts and ordered them to redraw the maps.

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Watch Boeing 787 Airliner Become Largest-Ever Plane to Land on Antarctica

A Boeing 787 airliner crew has made history by being the largest aircraft to land on the icy wastes of Antarctica. However, don’t rush to book your next vacation flight just yet: the risky journey was undertaken to bring supplies to scientists at a remote outpost.

The Norse Atlantic Boeing 787 Dreamliner touched down on November 15 a special 9,840-foot-foot-long (3,000 meters) runway on Queen Maud Land, a part of Antarctica that faces southern Africa and is claimed by Norway.

Video of the historic event shows much of the crew of the nearby Norwegian Polar Institute turned out on a sunny spring day to see the massive plane land.

The airfield notably has no Instrument Landing System to guide planes in, requiring pilots to flex their visual judgment skills at what is effectively no different from landing in an open field or a desert plain.

Troll Airfield is no stranger to large transport aircraft, which over the years have included Ilyushin IL-76 and Lockheed C-130 cargo planes, as well as P-3 Orion maritime patrol aircraft and a Boeing 767 airliner. Two years ago, an Airbus A340 landed at the remote ice station. However, the wide-bodied Boeing 787 is by far the largest at 187 feet long with a 197-foot wingspan and weighing up to 500,000 pounds.

The flight wasn’t a commercial passenger trip, though: the NPI contracted Norse Atlantic to send a 787 because of the aircraft’s large cargo capacity, which brought 45 scientists to the remote research station and some 12 tons of supplies.

The 787 left Oslo on November 13 and flew to Cape Town, South Africa, before making the 2,600-mile trip straight southward for Troll Airfield.

“It is a great honor and excitement on behalf of the entire team Norse that we have achieved together a momentous moment of landing the first 787 Dreamliner,” Norse Atlantic Airways CEO, Bjorn Tore Larsen, said in a statement.

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"In the spirit of exploration, we are proud to have a hand in this important and unique mission. It is a true testament to our highly trained and skilled pilots and crew, and our state-of-the-art Boeing aircraft."
NPI director Camilla Brekke told US media: "This [flight] demonstrates our capability of performing more effective flight operations to Antarctica by carrying a larger scientific and logistics crew, more cargo, with a smaller environmental footprint."

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China Reportedly Sets Up Near-Space Command for Hypersonic Weapons Forces

According to reports from Chinese media, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) may have set up the first-ever military command for hypersonic weapons and other near-space military operations.
The report was carried in Chinese media on Monday and based on a paper submitted to the 11th China Command and Control Conference in October by researchers from the National University of Defense Technology in Changsha.
It refers to the PLA's Near-Space Command as a fifth command, joining the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Force.
"The near-space combat force is in the process of rapid development. The establishment of relevant units is not yet mature, and combat operations have not been standardized. The understanding of near-space combat command needs to be deepened," the researchers wrote.
"It is necessary to adjust the hierarchy of command and control powers, selection of command methods, implementation of executive orders and support for command communication," officials said.
The researchers said it was necessary for the PLA to be prepared to fight in near-space, which had become a hotly contested zone and could "determine the outcome of future battles."
Ironically, when the United States set up its Space Force (USSF) in 2019, the Pentagon cited purported threats posed to US space supremacy by Chinese and Russian technology, which includes anti-satellite (ASAT) missiles and supposed "stalker" satellites, among other weapons. China tested an ASAT missile in 2007 that successfully destroyed a malfunctioning Chinese satellite using a kinetic kill vehicle.
"The near-space force operates in a special battlefield. Actions carried out in sensitive areas or over the territory of other countries may trigger political or diplomatic reactions," they said, necessitating a higher level of command authority.
According to researchers, China realized that hypersonic weapons in particular could pose international political problems, as well as surveillance drones and other high-altitude equipment.
"The highest military command can approve the scale of use, activity areas and method of use to avoid causing political and diplomatic nuisance," the paper said.
China became the first country in the world to put hypersonic weapons into regular military service in 2019, and has added several more similar weapons since, which can be fired from

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land-based silos or transporter-erector-launcher trucks, sea-based warships and submarines, and by H-6N bomber aircraft in mid-flight.
Hypersonic weapons are one of the few to operate in near-space, which extends from 12 miles (63,000 feet) altitude up to the boundary of space at 62 miles altitude. There, the air is too thin for heavier-than-air aircraft to fly but too thick for satellites to operate.
However, it is ideal for hypersonic weapons, which use a rocket boost to achieve speeds above Mach 5 before detaching an unpowered glide vehicle that can maneuver to confuse and avoid enemy air defense systems.
At present, almost no air defense system in operation is known to be able to take down a hypersonic weapon in flight, although some, such as Russia's S-500 and the US' SM-6, have been purported to be able to do so under certain circumstances.
The researchers said this new capability "could change the pace of battles and bring a major impact to how a war would end," noting that in a future war, hypersonic weapons could be used to devastating effectiveness to paralyze an enemy's communications and transportation networks early in the conflict - including their ability to take offensive action in space and near-space.
"Hypersonic weapons can attack rocket launch sites, [destroying] the enemy's ability to fire anti-satellite missiles on our civilian satellite networks," the researchers said. "These attacks must be precise, overwhelming and merciless."
They also note that command and control hubs would be primary targets, as they always are in war.
At present, only China and Russia have hypersonic weapons in full military service. Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the United States have tested hypersonic weapons, but not yet announced their deployment with front-line forces. Several other nations have announced programs to develop hypersonic weapons.

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Report: Biden Donors, Advisers Struggling Over How to Address President's Age

US President Joe Biden, who turned 81 on Monday, is the oldest president in the country's history. Insiders are reportedly worried about how to respond to voter apprehension over his age.
Advisers to Joe Biden are reportedly considering a number of strategies to address concerns about the American president's advanced age.
"The one number in the polling that was concerning… had to do with age, and that is one thing you can't reverse no matter how effective Joe Biden is behind the scenes," said Democratic adviser David Axelrod, referring to polling showing the majority of Americans believe Biden is too old to serve another term as president.
"In front of the camera, what he's projecting is causing people concerns, and that is worrisome," said Axelrod.

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Biden's advisers have reportedly acknowledged the president sometimes appears frail in public appearances. They've responded to the issue by considering minimizing the distances the president walks on camera and having him wear more comfortable shoes.

Advisers are also attempting to prevent the president from climbing stairs when possible. Biden generated attention early in his term when he was filmed stumbling while ascending the stairs to Air Force One; the octogenarian president has slipped while walking up the steps to the presidential plane as recently as September.

Biden also attracted attention last year when he fell from his bicyclewhile exercising in his home state of Delaware, turning an attempt to demonstrate the president's physical fitness into another gaffe.

While Biden allies admit he occasionally appears physically weak, they insist he's still mentally capable of fulfilling responsibilities. But the president has been widely known for being gaffe-prone throughout his career. Some worry his propensity towards verbal flubs is only exacerbating worries over this age.

Donors are advising Biden's team to "lean in" on the issue, portraying the president's age as a source of wisdom and encouraging them to portray him as an affable "Grandpa Joe" in contrast to his likely rival, former US President Donald Trump.

"I think the strategy is not to even address it, to consider questions like that stupid or silly," said one anonymous donor who took issue with the campaign's strategy thus far. "Literally everyone is talking about it, even amongst donors. But the response is always: 'What are you going to do?'"

One political operative worried the campaign has become defensive over the issue, claiming, "They bristle in ways that aren't helpful."

Some analysts have noted Trump's age as well – the billionaire former president is just four years younger than Biden. Political scientist Kyle Kondik says Trump is judged less harshly than Biden because Trump is known for speaking in a more informal, off-the-cuff manner.

Biden was 78 years old when he won the presidency in 2020, making him the country's oldest elected president.

He's the only US president classified as a member of the Silent Generation, an age group shaped in their early childhood by the lingering economic disruption of the Great Depression and America's entry into World War II.

Biden was known for his testy relationship with younger voters during his presidential campaign; he once claimed to "have no empathy" for the challenges of Millennials and Generation Z. He's tried to cultivate a better relationship with the age group during his time as president, proposing a student loan forgiveness plan that was largely rolled back by the US Supreme Court.

"It's difficult for him [Biden] to connect with the younger generation," said one independent voter when asked about the issue on US television. "Our electorate is getting younger and younger and younger and we're electing people who are getting older and older and older."

The age of a number of the United States' most prominent politicians has provoked concerns in some quarters that the country has become a gerontocracy, or a political system dominated by the elderly.

Former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) only recently stood down from her position as leader of the Democratic Party in the country's lower legislative chamber at the age of 82.

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Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), age 81, has recently suffered two widely commented upon health incidents in public.
Former Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), who had become the oldest-sitting member in US Congress, died in office earlier this year at the age of 90. Her mental decline had been noted for some time, with even members of her party saying she had become unfit to serve. Observers speculated Feinstein suffered from dementia as she appeared confused and disoriented while fulfilling her duties in the Senate.

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US May Want 'Wider War' in Middle East to 'Take Out Iran'

Hostilities in the Palestine-Israel conflict have remained at an all-time high going on nearly two months since Hamas launched its October 7 surprise attack. An analyst has said Israel is becoming "bogged down indefinitely" in Gaza and claimed US military involvement would be "much costlier" than predicted.
The United States may be hoping for a broader conflict to break out amidst Israel's military campaign in Gaza in order to damage Iran and other foes, according to author Jeremy Kuzmarov.
The claim was made on Sputnik's Political Misfits on Monday as Kuzmarov discussed the geopolitical situation in the Middle East with hosts John Kiriakou and Michelle Witte.
"The leadership in the United States and Israel are hardline neoconservatives," said Kuzmarov, who also serves as the managing editor of CovertAction Magazine.
"I think they have their own desires in the Middle East," he added. "They may want to draw in other countries and have a wider war so they can finally take out Iran."
While Kuzmarov suggested US President Joe Biden may be slightly less hawkish than politicians such as former US Vice President Dick Cheney, he insisted the US commander-in-chief should still be considered a "neoconservative," a political movement traditionally associated with an interventionist foreign policy.
Kuzmarov said the Israeli government also favors an aggressive military stance in the region.
"Israel wants to control southern Lebanon," he said.
"I think they have plans for 'greater Israel,'" the military analyst added, referring to the belief by some in the country that Israeli land should extend into Gaza and the West Bank. Some Israelis use the term to advocate for control of the full extent of territory ruled by the Biblical Israelites, which would include portions of modern-day Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.
Israel currently occupies a portion of Western Syria known as the Golan Heights and frequently engages in bombing campaigns in the country. The Middle Eastern nation has been involved in periodic wars with its neighbors since its founding in 1948.
"I think they [Israel] feel emboldened that the US is behind them and they can go forward with their plan until the Palestinians are crushed," said Kuzmarov. "I think they're excited, this is their

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moment they've been waiting for for years, to crush the Palestinians and take over everything. And that's what they've always wanted, certainly the Likud Party."
"They have plans for how they can transform the whole area economically," Kuzmarov added. "And I think they're pursuing those goals."
Biden also spoke of "a better future for the Middle East" during his recent Oval Office address, referring to a US-led plan to build a rail corridor through the region.
Some analysts have suggested Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would like to formally annex Gaza in order to ensure control over natural gas discovered off the coast of the disputed territory, which would be transported via a new pipeline. Access to the deposits would increase exports to the United States and other allies, where energy costs have soared due to sanctions on Russia and Venezuela.
"The Iranians in my view have played this whole thing over the last six weeks perfectly," said Kiriakou, noting the country's restraint after the Israeli prime minister called for an attack on their historic foe in the hours after Hamas' October 7 operation. Kiriakou also praised China's attempts to broker a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, claiming the Asian superpower is "serious about being the peacemakers in the Middle East."
"The likes of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan appreciate that, with the US… not seen as an honest broker in the region," he added.
Kuzmarov agreed that China is "starting to build its stature in the world arena" by attempting to navigate tensions between world powers, such as when they negotiated an historic agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia earlier this year.
"I think they [China] are gaining a lot of capital," Kuzmarov said. "There is respect for them in developing world countries given their history. And China's always empathized with groups that have experienced colonialism. So there's identification with the Palestinians."
Kuzmarov speculated Israel's military action in the besieged Gaza Strip could end poorly for the US ally, despite the advantage of American largesse.
"They're going to be bogged down indefinitely in Gaza," said Kuzmarov. "They may be overconfident. The hubris of Israel you can compare perhaps to the United States in Vietnam. It may be a lot harder for them to wipe out Hamas and achieve their goals there than they thought."
"The whole population [in Gaza] has been geared toward opposing Israel. They hate Israel and they'll fight for their lives to the death. If Israel's bogged down in a long Gaza campaign, they can't fight on so many fronts at once, just like any other army. They have to be realistic."
Kuzmarov also noted Hamas' expertise in sabotage and tunnel warfare. "They [Israel] are not going to succeed in the way they envision," he concluded.
Kuzmarov and Kiriakou agreed the United States has only offered perfunctory criticism of their Israeli ally. Kiriakou claimed the US is "joined at the hip with Israel" and called Israel's attacks against Gaza's Al-Shifa Hospital a "crime against humanity."
"They've been talking about these tunnels for years," said Kiriakou, expressing skepticism over Israeli claims the hospital served as a covert "command and control center" for Hamas. "There are no independent observers who have seen these things, at least not for any length of time."

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"I've struggled with this news over the weekend because when I was at the CIA we would routinely falsify evidence against our enemies and release that false information to the public through the media," said Kiriakou, a former officer at the US Central Intelligence Agency.
Kiriakou served as an analyst at the CIA for 14 years, joining the agency after being recruited by a graduate school professor at George Washington University. The whistleblower is known for publicly revealing the CIA's secret torture program in December 2007. The agency retaliated by seeking his indictment and incarceration, and he was sentenced to 30 months in US federal prison.
"They [Israel] are obviously in damage control mode because they're losing the PR war," agreed Kuzmarov. "This bombing of the hospital is just outrageous, it's caused horrific suffering and it's a violation of international law."
"Even the BBC…was contradicting that," said Kuzmarov of Israeli assertions of a vast tunnel system beneath Al-Shifa Hospital. Various other prominent news outlets have also expressed skepticism towards Israeli claims in recent days.
"They've been caught in a lie – a big lie – with serious implications."

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McCarthy: GOP 'Even Closer' to Biden Impeachment

An impeachment inquiry against the US president was launched in September 2023 by Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) prior to his removal as House speaker, with officials focusing efforts on business dealings involving the president's son Hunter. The White House has called the impeachment effort unconstitutional.
Former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy recently offered an update on Republicans' impeachment inquiry against US President Joe Biden, revealing officials were inching ever close to a potential presidential ouster.
"We have systematically followed every place the facts have taken us each and every day," McCarthy said in a Sunday interview with US media. "And now it's moved even closer because now we've got the subpoenas going in to get the bank statements."
McCarthy claimed a number of alleged revelations stemming from Republicans' investigation.
"No one in America would have known that President Biden has lied, that they did receive money from China…that he did get involved in the business dealings," said McCarthy, referring to long-running claims of the US president's involvement in his son Hunter Biden's controversial business dealings in foreign countries.
Biden has denied the accusations, saying he lacked knowledge of his son's business ventures – a claim seemingly contradicted by recent evidence. Hunter Biden is currently being tried on federal weapons charges.
"We found all of this, the shell companies no one knew about prior," added McCarthy. "This is important."

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Biden has criticized House Republicans' efforts, which in recent days led to the issuing of subpoenas to the president's friends and family members. Special counsel Richard Sauber responded in a letter obtained Friday, calling the subpoenas "harassment to the president to score political points."

"You appear so determined to impeach the president that you have misrepresented the facts, ignored the overwhelming evidence disproving your claims, and repeatedly shifted the rationale for your 'inquiry,'" wrote Sauber to House Oversight Chair James Comer (R-KY) and House Judiciary Chair Jim Jordan (R-OH).

Sauber claimed House Republicans' efforts lack "constitutional legitimacy" because the inquiry was launched without a full vote of House members.

Comer responded to the letter also claiming Republicans' investigation "has unearthed new facts that contradict the White House's and President Biden's personal attorney's narrative of the events."

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Carbon Emissions From World's Richest 1% Will Kill 1.3 Million People by 2030 - Report

The report comes before a United Nations climate summit set to take place next week in Dubai.

The Occupy Wall Street movement ushered in a new paradigm in the way people talk about inequality, claiming the world's wealthiest 1% enjoy political and economic privilege lacked by everyone else.

Now, a new report finds that privilege extends to carbon emissions.

The study, released Monday by the British charity Oxfam, found that the richest 1% of the global population create as much "planet-heating pollution" as the poorest two-thirds. Researchers say those carbon dioxide emissions made up 16% of the Earth's total in 2019.

"The super-rich are plundering and polluting the planet to the point of destruction, leaving humanity choking on extreme heat, floods and drought," said Amitabh Behar, interim executive director of Oxfam International.

1.3 million deaths from heat-related causes will result from these emissions alone between 2020 and 2030, according to the report.

"Climate change is already worsening inequality both between and within countries," read an Oxfam news release.

"Climate breakdown and inequality are locked in a vicious cycle – Oxfam has seen first-hand how people living in poverty, women and girls, Indigenous communities and Global South countries are feeling the unequal brunt of climate impacts, which in turn increase the divide. The report finds that seven times more people die from floods in more unequal countries."

The report offered stark recommendations to address the divide, saying the world must "get off fossil fuels quickly and fairly." The authors recommended addressing inequality as part of efforts to respond to climate change and said human welfare should be placed "over endless profit."

So far, few politicians in wealthy countries seem to be advocating that kind of systemic economic change.

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Over 400,000 Public Workers Start 3-Day Strike in Quebec to Demand Pay Hike

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – A major three-day strike involving some 420,000 public sector workers began in the Canadian province of Quebec on Tuesday after failure to reach an agreement on better salaries.

What is set to be the most significant strike affecting Quebec in the last 50 years is set to last until November 23, midnight. It will affect multiple public services such as education, health and social services whose operations will be halted.

The Front Commun (Common Front) represents the majority of teachers, personal support workers, and several thousand other personnel in the academic, health and social services sectors.

On November 6, the Front Commun, which represents 420,000 public servants from some of Quebec's largest labor unions held a first day of strike to demand better pay to offset the soaring cost of living, brushing aside a "ludicrous" proposal to increase their salaries by only 10.3% over a five-year period.

Later that day, the organization announced that unless a deal was achieved between unions and the provincial government, a three-day strike would be held between November 21-23.

The unions jointly determined that the proposed increased was insufficient, considering that inflation levels were set to grow to 18% over the same period. The increase was also contested due to Quebec's move to hike the salaries of lawmakers by 30%.

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US Extends USS Gerald R. Ford Deployment in Eastern Mediterranean Sea - EUCOM

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – The United States has extended the deployment of the Ford Carrier Strike Group in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, the US European Command (EUCOM) confirmed to Sputnik.

"We can confirm that the Ford Carrier Strike Group continues to operate in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea," a EUCOM spokesperson said in a statement.

The US is dedicated to its security commitments to NATO and its global partners, the statement added.

US military routinely operates across the globe and is flexible and agile to respond to the changes in the operational environment, the statement said.

In response to the Israel-Hamas war, the US has deployed its two major carrier strike groups, USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and USS Gerald R. Ford, to the region.

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Canada Urges Israel to Take Action Against Extremist Settler Violence - Foreign Ministry

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - Ottawa calls on the Israeli government to take steps to halt the settler violence against Palestinians, Global Affairs Canada said in a press release.

"Canada strongly condemns the extremist settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank and is also gravely concerned by reports of Palestinian communities being forcibly removed from their lands in the West Bank," the release said on Monday. "Canada, along with partners, calls on the Government of Israel to take immediate action to stop such further occurrences of extremist settler violence."

Canada also calls on Israel to protect the Palestinian population and hold those responsible for the violence accountable under the law. The violence, the release added, negatively impacts efforts to achieve a negotiated two-state solution.

"As has been the position of successive Canadian governments, Canada does not recognize permanent Israeli control over territories occupied in 1967, and strongly opposes illegal settlement outposts in the West Bank. The settlements constitute a serious obstacle to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East," the release said.

The US over the weekend said it was ready to issue visa bans against Israeli extremists attacking civilians in the West Bank.

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US Democratic Senators Urge Biden to Press Israel on Gaza Aid, Civilians - Letter

(Updates with more details in paras 6, 7; edits throughout)

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - A group of Democratic US senators sent a letter to President Joe Biden urging him to press Israel to allow humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip and protect the civilian population there amid its ground offensive against the Palestinian movement Hamas.

"As you and your administration work with Israel and international partners to secure the release of hostages and respond to the terror attack on Israel, we join you in your urgent call for humanitarian assistance for Palestinian civilians in Gaza," the letter said on Monday. "We encourage you to work with international partners to achieve expeditious implementation of a plan for sustained humanitarian aid in Gaza."

The letter was signed by 13 senators, including Tammy Baldwin, Tim Kaine, Chris Van Hollen, Dick Durbin, Brian Schatz, Michael Bennet, Martin Heinrich, Jeff Merkley, Peter Welch, Elizabeth Warren, Tammy Duckworth, Ed Markey and Jeanne Shaheen.

The lawmakers said in the letter that a heightened and prolonged suffering in Gaza is not only intolerable for the Palestinian civilians but is also expected to negatively impact the security of

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Israeli civilians.

The suffering in Gaza has the potential to exacerbate existing tensions and erode regional alliances, the letter said.

"Professional militaries have a dual responsibility throughout their campaigns to minimize civilian casualties during tactical operations and to sustain living conditions for civilians," the letter also said.

The lawmakers emphasize the significant humanitarian crisis in Gaza, with 1.6 million Palestinians internally displaced - half in makeshift UN shelters - and urged the Biden administration to prompt Israel to collaborate with international relief agencies regarding non-combatants in Gaza.

"This humanitarian crisis will precipitate a significant and preventable loss of human life if not addressed immediately. More than half of Gaza's hospitals have shut down, desalination plants are struggling to remain operational and the last operative flour mill has been shut down due to a lack of fuel," the letter said.

More than 12,000 civilians have been killed and well over 30,000 others injured in Israel's indiscriminate bombardments of Gaza amid its ground invasion of the Palestinian enclave.

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US Remains Unaware of Official US-Russia Interaction - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller acknowledged the possibility that US and Russian officials may have had contact at the recent Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, but said he was unaware of any such communication.

"It's a big conference [APEC]. I can't ... rule out someone said hi in the hall, but I'm not aware of it," Miller said on Monday during a press briefing.

The remarks came in response to a reporter's question about whether US and Russian officials had any contact during the APEC Summit last week in San Francisco.

APEC, a trade and economic forum comprising 21 member economies in the Asia-Pacific region, held its leaders' summit in San Francisco from November 11-17.

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US Not Planning to Cut Ties With SpaceX Over Musk's Antisemitic Remark - White House

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The United States does not intend to cut ties with SpaceX over an antisemitic remark Elon Musk supported, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said during a press briefing.

On Wednesday, Musk replied to a post on X, which claimed that Jewish communities were

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pushing hatred against white people, saying it is "the actual truth."

"I'm not aware of any efforts to do that, but I think we've been very clear about the rhetoric and how inappropriate it is and we'll call it out every time we see it," Kirby said on Monday when asked about whether the United States would abandon cooperation with SpaceX because of Musk's statement.

Last week, film companies Warner Bros., Sony Pictures, Paramount, and Lionsgate reportedly suspended advertising on social network X due to Musk's "anti-Semitic" comments. A similar decision was made by Walt Disney, as well as technology companies IBM and Apple.

Kirby explained that the United States relies a lot on private sector industries that play a key role in US innovation, research and development on new systems, especially in the realm of space and cyberspace.

This cooperation between the US government and private sector serves a big benefit to addressing US national security threats, Kirby added.

"There's innovation out there in the private sector that we'd be foolish to walk away from," Kirby said.

Just because the United States is not cutting ties with Musk and his companies does not mean they accept or agree with or condone in any way the antisemitic rhetoric that he pushed, Kirby said.

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US Democratic Senators Urge Biden to Press Israel on Need for Aid to Gaza - Letter

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - A group of senators from President Joe Biden's Democratic Party urged him to press Israel on the need to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza and to protect the civilian population, according to the text of a letter published by the lawmakers.

"As you and your administration work with Israel and international partners to secure the release of hostages and respond to the terror attack on Israel, we join you in your urgent call for humanitarian assistance for Palestinian civilians in Gaza. We encourage you to work with international partners to achieve expeditious implementation of a plan for sustained humanitarian aid in Gaza," said the letter, published on Monday.

The letter was signed by 13 Senate Democrats, Senators Ed Markey, Tammy Baldwin, Time Kaine, Chris Van Hollen, Dick Durbin, Brian Schats, Michael Bennet, Martin Heinrich, Jeff Merkley, Peter Welch, Elizabeth Warren, Tammy Duckworth and Jeanne Shaheen.

The senators said the heightened and prolonged suffering in Gaza is not only intolerable for Palestinian civilians but is also expected to negatively impact the security of Israeli civilians. The lawmakers also emphasized that suffering in Gaza had the potential to exacerbate existing tensions and erode regional alliances.

"Professional militaries have a dual responsibility throughout their campaigns to minimize civilian casualties during tactical operations and to sustain living conditions for civilians," the letter added.

On October 7, Palestinian group Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against

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Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing and abducting people in neighboring Israeli communities. Israel launched retaliatory strikes and ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, cutting off supplies of water, food, and fuel.

On October 27, Israel launched a large-scale ground incursion inside the Gaza Strip with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages.

The conflict has resulted in the deaths of around 1,400 people in Israel and over 11,000 in the Gaza Strip.

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Trump's Doctor Says Ex-President in 'Excellent Health,' Likely to Remain Healthy For Years

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - Former US President and 2024 presidential candidate Donald Trump is in excellent health and likely to remain healthy in the coming years, physician Bruce Aronwold said in a statement.

"It is my opinion that President Trump is currently in excellent health, and with his continued interest in preventative health monitoring and maintenance, he will continue to enjoy a healthy lifestyle for years to come," Aronwald said on Monday.

Trump's physical exams were within normal range and his cognitive exams were exceptional, the statement said. Cardiovascular studies were normal and all cancer screenings came back negative, the statement said.

The former president's lab analysis results were more favorable than prior testing in some areas, the statement said. Trump has lost weight through an improved diet and physical activity, the statement said.

Trump is running for the Republican Party nomination in 2024, potentially setting him up for a rematch against incumbent US President Joe Biden. Biden, who turned 81 on Monday, is the oldest serving president in US history, reportedly prompting his team to urge him to take extra safety precautions.

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US Bars Entry to 2 Russian Military Officials for 'Rights Violations' in Ukraine – Blinken

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – The United States banned entry to two Russian military officials for their alleged roles in the extrajudicial killings of Ukrainian civilians in Andriivka, a village near Kiev, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement.

"The Department of State is designating Azatbek Omurbekov, also known as 'The Butcher of Bucha,' a Colonel in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation for his involvement in gross violations of human rights, namely the extrajudicial killings of unarmed Ukrainian civilians from Andriivka, Ukraine," the statement said on Monday.

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"The Department is also designating Daniil Frolkin, a Guard Corporal in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation due to his involvement in a gross violation of human rights, namely the extrajudicial killing of an unarmed Ukrainian civilian in Andriivka," the statement added. "As a result of today's action, Omurbekov, Frolkin, and their immediate family members are ineligible for entry into the United States."

The State Department claims that Omurbekov was the one who led Russia's 64th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade to Bucha, Ukraine, where he and his subordinate military personnel committed executions of civilians, according to the statement.

Immediately after the start of the special operation in February 2022, Russia took under control the territory of the Kiev region, including Bucha, a small city in the northeast of Kiev. Following the Russian military withdrawal from the region, Ukrainian authorities accused Russia of numerous killings of civilians in Bucha, as well as in the surrounding areas, including Andriivka.

Moscow denies its role in the killings of civilians and claims that the footage of the murdered local residents, which was distributed in the western media, is nothing more than a staging and provocation on the part of Kiev to put pressure on the Western ruling circles in order to achieve their goals in the conflict with Russia.

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Law Must Change for Police to Have Right to Investigate Sexual Offenses in CAF – Blair

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – Canada must change its legislation for law enforcement to have permanent jurisdiction to investigate cases of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), Minister of National Bill Blair said on Monday.

Blairs remarks addressed a question on when the ministry would be stripping the CAF from having jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute cases of military sexual offenses.

"All new cases are now being referred to the civilian criminal justice system. We are also taking the steps that are required to ensure that these matters can be investigated by the police of jurisdiction and not by the military police," Blair said from Parliament Hill. "In order to make that change permanent, we know that we're going to have to change the law. We have been doing that work in consultations with Madame Justice Arbour [Louise], and with the Canadian Armed Forces."

When pressed on why fifty percent of the 250 cases reported since November 2021 interim-recommendations, are still being handled by the military police, Blair said that National Defense wants all cases of sexual misconduct to be investigated by the law enforcement agencies of jurisdiction, however noting that in some instances they happened outside of Canadian jurisdiction,

The Minister also noted that he remains committed to implementing the recommendation made in the Arbour Report.

In April 2021, the Department of National Defense (DND) announced that former Supreme Court Justice Louise Arbour was to conduct an Independent External Comprehensive Review to address cultural issues within the Canadian military, notably those on sexual misconduct and

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the way such behaviour was to be reported.
The report was submitted in May 2022, and highlighted 48 eight recommendations, most of which were accepted by then Minister of National Defense Anita Anand who said CAF would be implementing them.

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US Urges Diminution in Violence Against Palestinians in West Bank- State Dept

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The US is open to positive actions by the Government of Israel in reducing violence against Palestinians in the West Bank and holding the perpetrators accountable, US Department of State spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.
"If we saw a significant diminution in violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, and if we saw the Government of Israel taking steps to hold those responsible for violence accountable, that's certainly something we would welcome, something we can consider when taking into account what kind of actions we might take. But we want to see those steps happen as soon as possible," Miller said during a press briefing.
Furthermore, Miller said that there has been a clear communication from the US President emphasizing the stance that the current level of extremist violence against innocent Palestinian civilians in the West Bank is deemed unacceptable.
"The violence needs to stop. The perpetrators need to be held accountable. We want to see people prosecuted when they have violated the law," Miller said. He added that in addition to the government of Israel taking steps to promote accountability, there are measures the US can also consider, with a variety of options currently under consideration.
On October 7, Palestinian group Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing and abducting people in neighboring Israeli communities. Israel launched retaliatory strikes and ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, cutting off supplies of water, food, and fuel. On October 27, Israel launched a large-scale ground incursion inside the Gaza Strip with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages.
The conflict has resulted in the deaths of around 1,400 people in Israel and over 11,000 in the Gaza Strip.

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RECAST - Canada Announces C$3.9Mln Contract to Improve Alaska Highway - Public Services Ministry

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) said on Monday that it is awarding a C$3.9 million ($2.8 million) contract to improve a section of

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the Alaska Highway, which includes dedicated funds for the indigenous community.
PSPC Minister Jean-Yves Duclos announced that the government of Canada awarded ACL Construction Ltd. the contract to improve the Pink Mountain intersection of the Alaska Highway.
The highway runs from British Columbia through Yukon and into Alaska, serving as an important source of economic prosperity in the region, Duclos said in a statement.
"For decades, the Alaska Highway has served as an essential travel corridor for Yukon residents and goods, as well as a major attraction for tourists," Member of Parliament for Yukon Brendan Hanley also said in the statement. "As a government, we'll continue to invest in modernizing northern infrastructure in close partnership with local First Nations."
Canada will ensure that at least 12.5% of the construction contract value will go to Indigenous suppliers and workers, the statement said. The project will take place on the traditional territories of the British Columbia First Nations, the statement said.
PSPC has worked closely with the First Nations and seeks chances to engage on projects along the highway, the statement added.
Construction is set to start in May 2024 and finish in September, according to the statement.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) -

ISRAEL INVASION OF GAZA
* Israeli shelling of a UNRWA school in the Gaza Strip that sheltered displaced residents, killed at least 12 people, the Palestinian news agency WAFA reported on Monday.
* US Special Envoy and Coordinator for International Energy Affairs Amos Hochstein arrived in Israel for talks with senior officials on the need to prevent a war between Israel and Lebanon, Axios reported.
* The Israeli forces have captured key targets of the 'Zaytun' battalion of Hamas in the Gaza City, including the central headquarters and a command center, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said.
* The death toll in the Gaza Strip has surpassed 13,300 since October 7, the Palestinian enclave's authorities said.

RUSSIA-FINLAND BORDER SITUATION
* The Russian Foreign Ministry said on Monday that it has lodged a protest to the Finnish Ambassador in Moscow Antti Helantera over Helsinki's decision to close border checkpoints between the two countries.
* The Finnish government discussed the border situation with Russia through diplomatic channels, but talks brought no results, Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo said.
* Russia does not exclude that Finland will close all checkpoints at the border with Russia, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko said.

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CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Monday that Ukraine is "utterly dependent" on US aid.
* US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that he met with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during his surprise visit to Ukraine and reaffirmed the United States' support for the country's urgent battlefield needs and long-term defense requirements.
* Austin announced a new $100 million aid package for Ukraine that includes air defense munitions and anti-tank weapons.
* The package includes another High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) and ammunition as well as TOW and Javelin missiles, the Pentagon said.
* Russia repelled one Ukrainian attack and Kiev lost more than 130 soldiers and nine equipment units in the Donetsk direction in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* There were no attempts at contacts between the United States and Russia to resolve the crisis in Ukraine at the APEC summit last week, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN ARGENTINA

* Russia respects the choice of the Argentinian people in electing their new president, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday.
* Russian President Vladimir Putin congratulated Argentina's President-elect Javier Milei, adding that Moscow counts on further development of the partnership with Buenos Aires, the Kremlin said.
* Milei said that he will visit the United States and Israel before taking office.
* The International Monetary Fund looks forward to working with Milei and his administration to implement economic reforms that will safeguard economic stability and promote growth, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said.

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US Ready to Facilitate Talks Between Armenia, Azerbaijan on Remaining Issues – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) – The United States is willing to facilitate talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan on all remaining issues following the recent escalation, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"We would welcome a role in facilitating those talks. We've seen other countries offer to facilitate those talks. We think it's important that the two countries talk face-to-face to reach a durable agreement," Miller said during a press briefing.

The United States continues to engage the leadership of both Armenia and Azerbaijan to facilitate a dignified and durable peace between the countries, Miller added.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on Saturday that Armenia had negotiated the basic principles of a future peace agreement with Azerbaijan, but Baku has not yet confirmed its

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commitment to the three principles proposed by Yerevan.

In September 2023, Azerbaijan took control of Nagorno-Karabakh in a lightning offensive, prompting almost all local residents to flee to Armenia. Over 100,000 people of Nagorno-Karabakh's estimated 120,000 Armenian population left the region by the end of September. The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities declared that the unrecognized state would cease to exist on January 1, 2024.

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Canada Announces $3.9Mln Contract to Improve Alaska Highway - Public Services Ministry

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"For decades, the Alaska Highway has served as an essential travel corridor for Yukon residents and goods, as well as a major attraction for tourists," Member of Parliament for Yukon Brendan Hanley also said in the statement. "As a government, we'll continue to invest in modernizing northern infrastructure in close partnership with local First Nations."

Canada will ensure that at least 12.5% of the construction contract value will go to Indigenous suppliers and workers, the statement said. The project will take place on the traditional territories of the British Columbia First Nations, the statement said.

PSPC has worked closely with the First Nations and seeks chances to engage on projects along the highway, the statement added.

Construction is set to start in May 2024 and finish in September, according to the statement.

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US Expects Palestinian Authority to Play Role in Governing West Bank, Gaza - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) – The United States expects the Palestinian Authority to play a role in the governance of the West Bank and Gaza after the Israeli military operation is over, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"The Palestinian Authority right now is the representative of the Palestinian people and we would fully expect it to play a role in governance both in the West Bank and Gaza," Miller said during a press briefing.

Miller underscored that the United States remains committed to its goal of the establishment of

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a united Palestinian state of the West Bank and Gaza where the Palestinian people plays a role in self-determination.

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US Urges Release of Israeli-Linked Ship, Crew Seized in Red Sea - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - The United States demands the swift release of an Israeli-linked ship and its crew seized by Houthi forces in the Red Sea, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.
"I will say that the Houthi seizure of the motor vessel Galaxy Leader in the Red Sea is a flagrant violation of international law. We demand the immediate release of the ship and its crew, and we will consult with our allies and UN partners as appropriate on next steps," Miller said during a press briefing.

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US Would Welcome China Playing Constructive Role in Middle East - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) – The United States would welcome China playing a more constructive role in the Middle East and this was one of the topics covered during conversations between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese top diplomat Wang Yi, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.
"We would welcome China to play a constructive role in the Middle East. The Secretary has made this clear personally in his conversations with Wang Yi," Miller said during a press briefing. "He called Wang Yi on his first trip to the Middle East and said if there's anything they can do to prevent the conflict from widening in terms of using the lines of communication that they have available to countries in the Middle East, we would welcome that."

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White House Says 'Genocidal' Word Being Used Inappropriately, Only Applies to Hamas

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday that the word "genocide" is being used inappropriately in the war in the Gaza Strip and should only apply to the Palestinian Hamas movement.
"This word 'genocide' is getting thrown around in a pretty inappropriate way by lots of different folks," Kirby said during a press briefing. "What Hamas wants, make no mistake about it, is

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genocide."

Israel, Kirby added, is not trying to wipe the Palestinian people or Gaza "off the map." Israel is trying to defend itself against a genocidal terrorist threat, Kirby said.

On October 7, Hamas launched a surprise attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip. Israel declared war on Hamas and launched massive retaliatory strikes on the Gaza Strip as well as imposed a full blockade of fenced off Palestinian enclave, completely cutting off supplies of water, food, medicines, electricity and fuel.

Israel then launched a ground invasion of Gaza with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas. However, Israel has been widely criticized about conducting war crimes and crimes against humanity - some claiming Israel is committing a genocide - by indiscriminately bombarding Gaza. Some 12,000 Palestinian civilians have been killed during Israel's military operations so far and more than 30,000 have been wounded.

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US Coast Guard Probes Source of Some 1.1Mln Gallons of Oil Leaked Into Gulf of Mexico

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - The US Coast Guard said on Monday it is seeking to determine the source of an oil discharge near a Main Pass Oil Gathering (MPOG) underwater pipeline in the Gulf of Mexico, where 1.1 million gallons of crude oil were potentially released.

"The Unified Command continues to monitor and respond to an oil discharge near the Main Pass Oil Gathering (MPOG) company's pipeline system ... Initial engineering calculations indicate potential volume of crude oil that could have been released from the affected pipeline is 1.1 million gallons," the Coast Guard said in a statement. "The Unified Command is working diligently to determine the source of the release."

According to the statement, the Unified Command conducted multiple overflights on Friday and Saturday, observing visible oil moving southwest from the Louisiana shore and deploying three skimming vessels to recover surface oil.

"On Saturday and Sunday, overflights observed intermittent surface sheens. Additional surface observations are ongoing with two Coast Guard cutters on scene and additional overflights," the statement said.

The vehicles sent last week haven't found the source of the leak yet, but they will keep checking the pipeline if the weather allows, the statement said.

The Coast Guard is overseeing efforts to reduce the impact of the oil discharge, while the Unified Command collaborates with federal, state, and local agencies to ensure public safety, environmental protection, and a comprehensive response to the incident, the statement added.

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US Looks Forward to Working With Argentina President-Elect Milei - White House

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) -The United States is looking forward to working with Argentina's President-elect Javier Milei and his administration, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday.

"We look forward to working with him and his administration," Kirby said during a press briefing.

On Sunday, Milei won the runoff of the presidential election by defeating the candidate of the ruling Union for the Homeland alliance and Minister of Economy Sergio Massa.

Milei, who belongs to the far-right La Libertad Avanza alliance, will take office on December 10.

Milei advocates discarding the local currency for the US dollar in Argentina and stands for a foreign policy oriented toward the United States and Israel.

During presidential campaign, Milei also spoke against Argentina joining BRICS and cooperating with China, Brazil and Russia.

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Over 800 US Citizens Evacuated From Gaza Through Rafah Border to Date - White House

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - A total of 800 Americans have been evacuated from Gaza through the Rafah border crossing in Egypt, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday.

"The total number of US citizens that we've been able to move out of Gaza through that Rafah crossing is now up to 800," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Earlier in the day, Egypt's State Information Service said over 8,000 evacuees from the Gaza Strip have arrived in Egypt via the Rafah border crossing, including 6,713 foreign nationals and dual citizens.

The Rafah crossing is the only route in and out of Gaza for the civilian population there, as well as the main artery for humanitarian aid into the Palestinian enclave.

On October 7, Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing some 1,200 people and abducting over 200 others in neighboring Israeli communities. Israel launched retaliatory strikes and ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, cutting off supplies of water, food, and fuel. On October 27, Israel launched a large-scale ground incursion inside the Gaza Strip with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. The conflict has resulted in the deaths of over 13,000 people in the Gaza Strip.

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Canada Introduces Measures to Prohibit Trade With Raw Elephant Ivory, Rhinoceros Horns

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WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government is announcing the imposition of stricter measures that prohibit trade with raw elephant ivory and rhinoceros horn across the country's borders, Environment and Climate Change Canada said on Monday.

"These new, stricter measures will result in the prohibition of the import and export of raw elephant ivory and raw rhinoceros horn with very limited exceptions," Environment and Climate Change Canada said in a statement.

Exceptions include ivory and horns whose destinations are museums and zoos or whose import serves the purposes of scientific research or in assisting law enforcement, the statement said.

The possession of worked household and personal items made with the prohibited material will now require a permit, the statement said.

Canada adheres to its obligations under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora through a permitting system for imports, exports and re-exports, the statement added.

An average of 14 elephant tusks and two rhinoceros horns were imported yearly from 2015-2021, according to government data.

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Biden, Xi Agreed To Meet Again But No Specific Date Set - Kirby

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping have agreed to meet again, however, there has been no specific date set, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday

"They agreed that they would meet again, but there was no date put on the calendar," Kirby said.

Biden and Xi held extensive bilateral talks on the margins of the APEC Summit on Wednesday on a wide range of diplomatic and security matters. The two leaders agreed to improve communications and resume direct military-to-military contacts. Biden, despite saying that progress was made during the conversations, referred to Xi as a "dictator" after the summit.

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US Not Tracking Specific Credible Threat to Homeland Over Thanksgiving Holiday - Kirby

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - The White House is not tracking any particular credible threat to the United States over the upcoming Thanksgiving holidays, however, it is watching the situation closely with regards to potential spillover of the Middle East war, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday.

"We're not tracking any specific credible threat here at home over the holiday," Kirby said.

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Kirby said Washington is watching very closely for spillover effects from the fight between Israel and Hamas, both against the Jewish community and the Muslim community in the United States.

On October 7, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing and abducting people in neighboring Israeli communities. Israel launched retaliatory strikes and ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, cutting off supplies of water, food, and fuel.

On October 27, Israel launched a large-scale ground incursion inside the Gaza Strip with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages.

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Hamas Hostage Deal Closer That Ever But There Are Still Things to Be Done - Kirby

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - A hostage deal with Hamas is closer than it has ever been but there are still things to be done, White House Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Monday.

"I do not have an update for you on the hostage deal that we're trying to negotiate. But as you heard the deputy national security adviser say yesterday, we believe we're closer than we've ever been, so we're hopeful, but there's still work to be done," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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WHO Staff in Gaza Operate in Uncertainty, This Must Improve - Emergency Official

UNITED NATIONS, November 20 (Sputnik) - The World Health Organization staff in Gaza do not know what is coming next as they operate in areas with no easing of conflict, Health Emergencies Program Executive Director Michael Ryan said on Monday.

"Many of our staff are operating in situations where there's been no deconfliction… delivering supplies and other things - really not knowing what might happen next so that must improve," Ryan told a briefing.

On October 7, Palestinian group Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing around 1,200 people and abducting over 200 others in neighboring Israeli communities. Israel launched retaliatory strikes and ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, cutting off supplies of water, food, and fuel.

On October 27, Israel launched a large-scale ground incursion inside the Gaza Strip with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. The conflict has resulted in the deaths of over 13,000 people in the Gaza Strip, according to local authorities.

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US President Biden Says Applauds Ratification of UAW-Big Three Labor Deal

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Monday that he applauds the ratification of a labor deal between the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the so-called Big Three automakers, which came as a result of UAW strikes earlier this year.

"The UAW has announced that their dedicated union members who fought together, stood together, and walked the picket line together have now voted together to ratify their record contracts," Biden said in a statement. " I want to applaud the UAW and each of our Big Three auto companies for their good faith negotiations to reach this record contract."

UAW suspended their strike against the Big Three — General Motors, Stellantis and Ford — after reaching a tentative agreement to increase compensation.

The agreement demonstrates how union actions can uplift all workers, Biden said. Automakers Toyota, Honda, Hyundai and Subaru have also announced wage increases in the wake of the agreement.

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UN Spokesperson Says There Will Be Investigation Into Gaza Conflict to Have Accountability

UNITED NATIONS, November 20 (Sputnik) - The United Nations believes there will be an investigation into the Gaza conflict but only after the conflict is over, the UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"I have no doubt there will be full investigations done in order to have accountability once this conflict is over," Dujarric told a briefing.

On October 7, Palestinian group Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing around 1,200 people and abducting over 200 others in neighboring Israeli communities. Israel launched retaliatory strikes and ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, cutting off supplies of water, food, and fuel. On October 27, Israel launched a large-scale ground incursion inside the Gaza Strip with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. The conflict has resulted in the deaths of over 13,000 people in the Gaza Strip.

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Canada Launches $1.1Bln Critical Minerals Infrastructure Fund - Natural Resources Minister

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WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government launched a seven-year Critical Minerals Infrastructure Fund (CMIF) worth C$1.5 billion (US$1.1 billion) to enable sustainable production and meet the booming demand fueled by the race to net-zero emissions, Natural Resources and Energy Minister Jonathan Wilkinson said on Monday.

"Through the $1.5-billion Critical Minerals Infrastructure Fund, Canada will make strategic investments in projects to help enable and grow the sustainable development of these minerals, reinforcing Canada's position as a global supplier of choice for clean technology, clean energy and the resources the world needs to build a prosperous net-zero economy," Wilkinson said in a press release.

Critical minerals, Wilkinson added, are a generational economic opportunity and major enablers of clean technologies and clean energy sources. Demand for critical minerals is projected to rise exponentially as the global economy shifts to low-carbon solutions, he added.

The initial call for proposals will open C$300 million under two streams: the Pre-construction and Project Development Stream and the Infrastructure Deployment Stream, the release said.

Nongovernmental companies will be able to claim up to C$50 million per project whereas provincial and territorial governments will be allowed to request up to C$100 million when investing in public initiatives, the statement said. Applications made under the current CFP will be open until midnight February 29, 2024, according to the release.

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Biden Confuses Taylor Swift with Britney Spears in Bad Joke Attempt During Turkey Pardon

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Monday confused Taylor Swift for Britney Spears during a bad joke attempt at the annual turkey pardon in the White House.

Biden was joking about the odds the two turkeys - Liberty and Bell - faced among other turkeys to be picked to be pardoned. He compared it to the odds Swift fans have when trying to secure a ticket to her ongoing Eras Tour.

"You could say, even, this is harder than getting a ticket to the Renaissance tour or, or, or Britney's tour," Biden said. "She's down in, it's kinda warm in Brazil right now."

Swift's tour is currently in Brazil but it has faced some challenges due to extreme temperatures.

A fan became seriously ill amid the heat wave before Swift took the stage on Friday in Rio de Janeiro. Swift postponed a second show in Rio de Janeiro on Saturday and rescheduled it for Monday.

According to reports, Ana Clara Benevides, 23, fainted while in the front row of Swift's concert and given CPR before taken to the hospital where she suffered a second cardiac arrest and died.

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New US Military Package For Ukraine Includes HIMARS, Tow Missiles, Javelins - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - The newly announced aid package for Ukraine includes another High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) and ammunition as well as tow missiles and Javelins, the Defense Department revealed in a press release on Monday.

"This announcement is the Biden Administration's fifty-first tranche of equipment to be provided from DoD inventories for Ukraine since August 2021," the release said. "The capabilities in this package, valued at up to $100 million, include: Stinger anti-aircraft missiles; One High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) and additional ammunition; 155mm and 105mm artillery rounds; Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wire-Guided (TOW) missiles; Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems."

The package also includes over 3 million rounds of small arms ammunition, demolition munitions for obstacle clearing as well as cold weather gear and spare parts, according to the release.

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Pentagon Chief Says Discussed With Kiev's Leaders Battlefield Needs, Other 'Issues'

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Monday that he met with Ukraine's leaders to discuss a number of issues including their current operations and battlefield needs.

"I had a good chance to discuss a number of issues with President [Volodymyr] Zelenskyy and Mr. [Rustem] Umerov, talked about current operations," Austin said during remarks in Kiev. "I wanted to reassure the leadership that the United States of America will continue to support Ukraine."

The group, Austin said, discussed actions the United States is going to continue to make to ensure that Ukraine has what it needs on the battlefield.

Austin said he continues to see bipartisan support in Congress to provide further aid to Ukraine, but acknowledged that there are some things that the Biden administration needs to continue to work through with lawmakers to get its $106 billion supplemental request approved.

The meeting was also an opportunity to refocus and make sure that the United States and Ukraine maintain alignment between the operations on the ground and President Joe Biden's objectives, according to Austin.

Moreover, Austin said he talked with Umerov about the minister's near term and midterm objectives leading the Ministry of Defense.

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Pentagon Chief Announces $100Mln Ukraine Aid Package, Including Air Defense Munitions

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Monday announced a new $100 million aid package for Ukraine that includes air defense munitions and anti-tank weapons.

"I announced today another $100 million drawdown, using presidential drawdown authority, to provide additional artillery munitions, additional interceptors for air defense and a number of anti-tank weapons as well. So our support continues," Austin said after meeting with Ukrainian leadership in Kiev.

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US Federal Appeals Court Opens Hearing Into Trump Gag Order

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) – The US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit began a hearing on Monday into former US President Trump's challenge against a gag order in his criminal case regarding his alleged attempt to overturn the 2020 election.

US District Judge Tanya Chutkan, who is overseeing the case, issued the gag order last month after the government had shown that Trump's public attacks on individuals, including those related to the case, had led to them being threatened and harassed.

Judge Patricia Millet, one of the three judges on the panel hearing the appeal, sharply challenged the merit of the Trump team's proposed legal test of "clear and present danger" as a basis for a gag order instead.

She disputed whether it presented a different standard for trial participants compared to outsiders; moreover, criminal law would likely already cover actions that involved clear and present danger.

Millet also noted that the Supreme Court had ruled that "clear and present danger" was not a mechanical formulation, but a balancing test. In Trump's case, it would mean striking a balance between political campaign speech and the integrity of the criminal trial, but in Millett's view his team was not able to provide anything other than a criminal law violation to satisfy their proposed test.

The court adjourned the case until November 30.

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Biden Says Believes Hostage Deal Between Israel, Hamas Near

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Monday that he believes a hostage deal between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas movement is near.

"I believe so...yes," Biden said when asked if he believes Israel and Hamas are close to reaching a deal for the release of hostages.

The president showed his fingers crossed.

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US Must Stop Preventing UNSC From Addressing Israel Actions in Gaza - Cuban Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, November 20 (Sputnik) - The United States must stop hindering the work of the UN Security Council to address alleged war crimes committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip, Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations Gerardo Penalver Portal said on Monday.

"The United States, which has guaranteed criminal impunity for this genocide, must stop hindering the work of the Security Council in this domain," Portal said.

The ambassador made the comments during a UN General Assembly briefing on the situation in Gaza.

Portal explained that Israel is ignoring all UN resolutions and all of its obligations as an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

"These are war crimes and crimes against humanity, which must stop now," Portal said.

The ambassador also noted that indiscriminate attacks on civilians and crucial infrastructure constitute collective punishment and violate international law.

There must be an immediate ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian movement Hamas, Portal said.

Continued inaction on the matter will cost additional innocent lives, Portal added.

Israel's bombardment and invasion of Gaza has resulted in the death of 12,000 residents and the wounding of 30,000 others.

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SF Police Say Protests During APEC Summit Were Largely Peaceful, No Significant Incidents

SAN FRANCISCO, November 20 (Sputnik) - Protests during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in San Francisco were largely peaceful, with no attacks on summit participants or journalists, a San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) spokesperson told Sputnik.

"Overall the protests were largely peaceful ... There were no reported attacks on summit participants or journalists," Sgt. Kathryn Winters said.

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However, Winters said 80 individuals were arrested in connection with a demonstration on the Bay Bridge and 29 cars were also towed.

"On Wednesday, November 15, SFPD had four arrests; one person was arrested for aggravated assault, two for blocking a sidewalk, and one for trespassing. On Thursday, November 16, one individual was arrested for battery. These arrests were made by the SFPD and were all related to protest activity," Winters said.

In a separate statement to Sputnik, the United States Secret Service said that "there were no significant security incidents during APEC."

APEC, a trade and economic forum comprising 21 member economies in the Asia-Pacific region, held its summit in San Francisco from November 11-17. US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping had a summit on the margins of the forum.

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IMF, World Bank, WTO Unable to Reverse Trend of Geo-Economic Fragmentation – Rousseff

UNITED NATIONS, November 20 (Sputnik) – The Bretton Wood institutions, namely the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), have been unable to reverse the trend of the economic fragmentation and increased social fragility around the world, BRICS's New Development Bank President, Dilma Rousseff said on Monday.

“The so-called Bretton Woods institutions, the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO have not demonstrated their ability to reverse the trend of geo-economic fragmentation and increased social fragility,” Rousseff said during a UN Security Council (UNSC) meeting.

She added that the world today is facing a host of crises, including the absence of growth and high inflation, a sharp increase in inequality resulting in insecurity and instability becoming a new norm rather than an exception.

Rousseff also called upon the UNSC to empower the United Nations and reform the Bretton Wood institutions.

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China Calls on Developed Countries to Keep Promises on Climate Financing - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, November 20 (Sputnik) - China urges developed countries to keep their promises regarding climate financing and technology transfers to improve climate response capabilities, Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun said on Monday.

"We call for developed countries to earnestly fulfill their commitments on climate finance and technology transfer, and hope that the upcoming COP28 in Dubai will produce more practical results in helping developing countries improve their climate response capabilities," Zhang said.

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The ambassador made the comments during a UN Security Council meeting on promoting sustaining peace through common development.

Zhang emphasized during his remarks that sustaining peace worldwide cannot be achieved if few countries get even richer while others remain poor.

China is presiding over the UN Security Council during the month of November.

The climate conference COP28 is scheduled to take place in the United Arab Emirates from November 28-December 10.

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US Senate Panel Says Subpoenaing Tech Companies to Testify on Failure to Protect Kids

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - The US Senate Judiciary Committee said on Monday that it subpoenaed the heads of several tech companies to provide testimony to lawmakers on their failure to protect children online.

"The Senate Judiciary Committee has issued bipartisan subpoenas to the CEOs of Discord, Snap, and X to testify on their failure to protect children online," the panel said in a statement on X.

The panel will hold a hearing on the issue on December 6, the statement said. The panel is in talks with Meta (banned in Russia) and TikTok as well, and expects them to testify voluntarily, the statement said.

Tech companies have failed to police themselves at the expense of children, Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin said in a statement via X. The testimony will inform lawmakers on their legislative effort to protect kids online, the statement said.

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France Concerned About Israeli Military Action at Gaza's Al-Shifa Hospital - UN Ambassador

UNITED NATIONS, November 20 (Sputnik) - France is deeply concerned about Israel's military operations at the al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza, Permanent Representative of France to the UN Nicolas de Riviere said on Monday.

"We express our deep concern about the Israeli military operations in the al-Shifa Hospital," de Riviere said during a UN General Assembly briefing on the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Last week, Israeli forces conducted operations at the al-Shifa Hospital complex to search for Hamas infrastructure and assets. Israel claims to have found a "terror tunnel" underneath the hospital, where thousands of civilians and medical staff were located.

The hospital's patients and doctors will be transported to medical facilities in southern Gaza, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Sunday. However, those hospitals are already overburdened, WHO said, adding that the influx of new patients will place even greater strain on

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them.

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Delegation of Canadian Lawmakers, Jewish Community Leaders Arrives in Jerusalem - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - A Canadian delegation comprised of 60 individuals has arrived in Jerusalem in a visit to show solidarity with Israel, CBC News reported on Monday.

The delegation includes five Canadian lawmakers and several leaders of the Jewish community in Canada, the report said.

The delegation is scheduled to meet with Israeli officials and will honor the victims of the October 7 attack by the Palestinian group Hamas on Israel, the report said.

Delegation member and lawmaker Anthony Housefather of the Liberal Party said he intends to reiterate Canada's support for Israel, the report said.

The purpose of the visit is to give lawmakers a better insight of the October 7 events and the Israeli government plans to deal with the situation, the report said.

The delegation is also scheduled to meet with hostages' families and will advocate for their immediate release, the report said.

The trip had been planned before Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rebuked his Canadian counterpart Justin Trudeau for calling on Tel Aviv to exercise maximum restraint in its military operations in the Gaza Strip, the report said.

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Guterres Urges Action After UN Report Warns World Headed for 3°C of Warming

UNITED NATIONS, November 20 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday called for "record" action on climate as he presented a new report saying that the world is headed for 3°C (5.4°F) of warming throughout the century if climate mitigation efforts continue at the current level.

"Leaders must drastically up their game, now, with record ambition, record action, and record emissions reductions," Guterres told a briefing. "The next round of national climate plans will be pivotal."

The "Broken Record" report by the UN Environment Programme said that if current policies continue, global warming is estimated to be limited to 3°C. Delivering on all unconditional and conditional pledges by 2030 lowers the estimate to 2.5°C, with the additional fulfilment of all net-zero pledges bringing it to 2°C, the report said.

A temperature rise of about 3°C would exceed the 1.5°C and 2°C targets set at the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference in Paris.

The launch of the report comes ahead of the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference that will

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take place at Expo City, Dubai from November 30-December 12.

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Biden Team Wants US President to Walk Shorter Distances on Camera - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden's entourage associates are insisting that he walk shorter distances while on camera and wear more comfortable shoes, FOX News reported on Monday.

Biden turned 81 on Monday and is now the oldest serving president in the history of the United States.

Biden's associates have reportedly called for him to replace formal shoes for more comfortable options given and to walk shorter distance before cameras given age-related risks, the report said.

The measures aim to make Biden appear less stiff when walking as well as to reduce the risk of falling, the report said.

Democratic strategists and donors have been concerned over the lack of progress in handling Biden's "age issue" a year ahead of the presidential election, the report said.

In late September, media reported that Biden had begun to wear running shoes more often to mitigate the risks of falling and was using a shorter staircase to get into Air Force One, the report added.

Biden has been working with a physical therapist since November 2021 to improve his balance, according to the report.

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Georgieva Says IMF Ready to Work With Argentine President-Elect

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) looks forward to working with Argentine President-elect Javier Milei and his administration to implement economic reforms that will safeguard economic stability and promote growth, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Monday.

"We look forward to working closely with him and his administration in the period ahead to develop and implement a strong plan to safeguard macroeconomic stability and strengthen inclusive growth for all Argentinians," Georgieva said via X (formerly Twitter).

On Sunday, Milei won the runoff of the presidential election in Argentina, defeating the candidate of the ruling Union for the Homeland alliance, Minister of Economy Sergio Massa.

Milei will take office on December 10.

The IMF's Executive Board approved in August two reviews of its $44 billion loan program for

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Argentina, paving the way for an immediate disbursement of approximately $7.5 billion.

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US Supreme Court Declines to Review Convicted Former Policeman Chauvin's Case - Filing

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court refused to review the case of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who was convicted of killing George Floyd in 2020, a court order list revealed on Monday.

Chauvin appealed his case to the US Supreme Court after the Minnesota Supreme Court denied his request to consider a petition for a review in July.

Earlier in November, Chauvin also filed an appeal in a US federal court asking it to reconsider his case amid newly surfaced evidence that he was allegedly not the primary cause of Floyd's death, but the court rejected the appeal.

Chauvin is attempting to overturn the 2021 murder and manslaughter convictions based on a number of arguments, including that the state court deprived him of the right to a fair trial by refusing to change venues on the grounds of widespread negative publicity.

Following the state conviction and sentence of more than 22 years in prison, Chauvin also pleaded guilty to federal civil rights charges, for which he was given a concurrent sentence of 21 years in prison.

The murder of George Floyd in May 2020 sparked protests and riots across the United States, with a number of demonstrations linked to the broader Black Lives Matter movement.

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OpenAI Employees Threaten to Resign Unless Altman, Brockman Reinstated – Letter

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) – Some 490 OpenAI employees have signed a letter expressing their intention to resign unless the board responsible for firing Sam Altman and Greg Brockman resigns and reinstates them, according to a letter shared by Wired on Monday.

On Saturday, the board of directors of OpenAI, the developer of the ChatGPT artificial intelligence chatbot, sacked CEO Sam Altman, 38, following a review concluding that he was not consistently candid in his communications with the board.

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella said on Monday that Altman and OpenAI co-founder Brockman had been hired to lead a new research team on artificial intelligence.

"Your actions have made it obvious that you are incapable of overseeing OpenAI. We are unable to work for or with people that lack competence, judgement and care for our mission and employees. We, the undersigned, may choose to resign from OpenAI and join the newly announced Microsoft subsidiary run by Sam Altman and Greg Brockman," the letter reads.

The resignation will be immediate unless all OpenAI current Board members resign, the letter

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said, adding that the new board must include two new independent directors – Bret Taylor and Will Hurd – and reinstate Altman and Brockman to their respective roles.

"Microsoft has assured us that there are positions for all OpenAI employees at this new subsidiary should we choose to join," the letter added.

Open AI's ChatGPT gained popularity after its launch in November 2022, attracting its first million users in less than a week. In January, Microsoft said it would invest "billions of dollars" in OpenAI. Earlier in March, OpenAI unveiled a new multimodal AI model, GPT-4, which is capable of recognizing both text and images and solving complex problems with greater accuracy.

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