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7/26/24 Friday

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Netanyahu Halts Medical Evac of Injured Children in Gaza

On Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned from the United States early to discuss the recent explosion in Israeli-occupied Golan Heights that killed 12 Arab Druze children.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has delayed a flight that was scheduled to carry more than 150 injured and sick Palestinian children to the United Arab Emirates for treatment. It is not known if or when the flight will be rescheduled.

Last week, Netanyahu instructed his government to develop a plan to transfer patients out of Gaza and into a third country. Citing government officials, Israeli media reported on Sunday that Netanyahu made the decision after an explosion on a football field in Israel-occupied Golan Heights killed 12 Arab Druze children. Israel blames Hezbollah for the attack, but the Lebanese group denied the accusations and said it was an Israeli air defense missile that fell on the field. Golan Heights is part of Syria and has been illegally occupied by Israel since 1967 and was unilaterally annexed by Israel in 1981, a move condemned by the United Nations Security Council.

The original decision to evacuate the sick and injured children came after the human-rights group Physicians for Human Rights - Israel petitioned the country's high court asking for a court order to force the government to evacuate the sick and wounded. The Physicians for Human Rights decried Netanyahu's reversal, calling it "a cruel game by the Israeli government with children's lives," adding that the Golan Heights tragedy"must not be exploited for cynical political purposes; endangering the lives of sick children in Gaza will not bring back the children of the north."

A court hearing on the petition from the group is scheduled for August 4. Last week, Netanyahu canceled a plan ordered by Israel's defense minister to build a field hospital for children in Gaza. According to an estimate in late June by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, nearly 15,000 children have been killed in Gaza since October 7.

"Gaza has become a graveyard for children, with thousands of others missing, their fates unknown," Save the Children's Regional Director for the Middle East Jeremy Stoner said. "There must be an independent investigation and those responsible must be held accountable."

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FBI Confirms Trump Was Struck by Bullet, 'Whole or Fragmented'

The shooter was 20-year-old Thomas Crooks, who killed a member of the audience and injured two others in the crowd before Trump's Secret Service detail neutralized him.

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The US Federal Bureau of Investigation announced Friday that former President Donald Trump was hit by a bullet or the fragment of one after FBI Director Christopher Wray stirred controversy by suggesting that it wasn't clear whether or not Trump was shot or hit by shrapnel.

"What struck former President Trump in the ear was a bullet, whether whole or fragmented into smaller pieces, fired from the deceased subject's rifle," said the FBI in a statement.

Some law enforcement officials, including Wray, have questioned what struck Trump the day of his attempted assassination. The former president suffered a wound to his right ear and was briefly hospitalized after a gunman fired shots at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania on July 13.

Wray provided testimony at a US House Judiciary Committee hearing Wednesday relating to the July 13 assassination attempt, claiming there was "some question about whether or not it's a bullet or shrapnel that, you know, that hit his ear."

The former president published a lengthy post on Truth Social Thursday insisting he was hit by a bullet, claiming the FBI had "lost the confidence" of the country.

"No, it was, unfortunately, a bullet that hit my ear, and hit it hard. There was no glass, there was no shrapnel," Trump posted. "The hospital called it a 'bullet wound to the ear,' and that is what it was. No wonder the once storied FBI has lost the confidence of America!"

Representative Dan Goldman (D-NY) has accused Trump of politicizing the assassination attempt. Trump campaign adviser Steven Cheung told CNN that "anyone who believes this conspiracy bulls**t is either mentally deficient or willfully peddling falsehoods for political reasons."

According to one US official, the FBI is seeking to interview Trump to obtain a victim statement as part of its investigation.

"Since the day of the attack, the FBI has been consistent and clear that the shooting was an attempted assassination of former President Trumpwhich resulted in his injury, as well as the death of a heroic father and the injuries of several other victims," the FBI said in a statement.

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T-Rex May Have Been 70% Bigger Than Previously Believed

A team of researchers took into consideration factors including population size, growth rate, lifespan, and the incomplete nature of the fossil record.

According to a new study, the king of dinosaurs may have been 70% heavier and 25% longer than previously thought.

Paleontologists from the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa, Ontario, said the carnivorous T-Rex could have weighed up to 33,000 pounds (15,000 kilograms), which would make it 35% heavier than an average school bus.

In an effort to determine how big the dinosaur could get, scientists first examined the fossil record, which shows that a total of about 2.5 billion T-Rex once lived on Earth. But just 32 adult fossils have ever been found.

The largest T-Rex on record is a specimen named "Scotty", which weighed an estimated 19,555 lbs (8,870 kg) when it was alive. But the largest T-Rex "would have been about 70% bigger"

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than Scotty, said study co-author Jordan Mallon, a research scientist and head of palaeobiology at the Canadian Museum of Nature.

“Our study suggests that, for big fossil animals like T-Rex, we really have no idea from the fossil record about the absolute sizes they might have reached,” said Mallon, whose team also took into consideration other factors including population size, growth rate, lifespan, and the incomplete nature of the fossil record.

“It's fun to think about a 15 tonne T-Rex, but the implications are also interesting from a bio-mechanical or ecological perspective," he said.

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'Democracy' Saved

Although Harris is not yet the party's official nominee, Democratic lawmakers and elites have endorsed her candidacy and a majority of delegates to the party's convention have said they will back her.

This weekend, US President Joe Biden formally bowed out of the 2024 US presidential race. The development came after months of assertions Biden would continue on as the Democratic Party nominee. Biden endorsed his vice president, former Senator Kamala Harris, to take his place and his campaign funds are reportedly being transferred to her nascent campaign. Harris accepted, and announced she will seek the Democratic Party’s nomination.

“I am honored to have the President’s endorsement and my intention is to earn and win this nomination. Over the past year, I have traveled across the country, talking with Americans about the clear choice in this momentous election. And that is what I will continue to do in the days and weeks ahead,” Harris said in a statement. “I will do everything in my power to unite the Democratic Party — and unite our nation — to defeat Donald Trump and his extreme Project 2025 agenda.”

Biden moved to transfer his campaign's financial war chest to Harris, which former President Trump’s campaign has challenged by filing a complaint with the Federal Election Commission. The campaign's general counsel David Warrington argued that transferring the funds is little more than a “thinly veiled $91.5 million excessive contribution from one presidential candidate to another.”

Rick Hasen, an election law expert at UCLA, told CNN he doesn't think “most campaign finance lawyers believe that this is a best reading of the law,” but said the move could be tied up in FEC proceedings for years and won’t be resolved before the election.

According to campaign experts who spoke to the website Verify, Harris is allowed to use the campaign funds because she and Biden shared the same campaign account, which has ballooned to $91 million. The FEC has “long permitted candidates for president and vice president to share a campaign account,” said Daniel Weiner, director of the Brennan Center’s Elections and Government Program.

Democrats reportedly plan to hold a virtual roll call vote to confirm their nominee in the first week of August, although the Democratic National Convention will not begin until August 19. Only 300

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signatures will be required to qualify for a virtual ballot and an AP survey found Harris has the backing of more than 1,900 delegates as of Monday night.
Although Harris is not yet the party's official nominee, many Democratic lawmakers and elites have endorsed her candidacy and a majority of delegates to the party's convention have said they will back her.
California Governor Gavin Newsom, who many expected to take Biden's place, quickly endorsed Harris on X, claiming no one is "better to prosecute the case against Donald Trump's dark vision" than Harris.
A source from Harris' campaign said she is working hard to win support from any challengers. "She's already rallying all the potential candidates behind her," the source said. "You're going to see everyone fall into place."
Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, who has also been viewed as a possible Democratic contender for the White House, shrugged off Republican criticism that Harris' rise to the top of the ticket is undemocratic. The Michigan governor joined other Democratic Party leaders in throwing her support behind Harris.
"It's hard to take the Republican criticism seriously because one day it's, 'Joe Biden shouldn't be running' and the next day it's, 'well, he should be running,'" she said Thursday. "Give me a break."
"I think it's the right decision and that's why we have a vice president," Whitmer argued. "Kamala Harris has been his No. 2 for four years. No one should be surprised that if he steps away that she's the one to step into the breach."

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Harris Saddled with Bidenomics, Gaza Policy in Race for White House – Analyst

Should Harris secure her seat in the Oval Office, it is expected that she will follow Biden's foreign policies, the German news agency Deutsche Welle reported.
US President Joe Biden officially bowed out of the 2024 US presidential race Sunday, following months of assertions he would not drop out. Biden endorsed his vice president, Kamala Harris, to take his place as the Democratic Party's nominee.
Former President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama endorsed Harris for president Friday, the Washington Post reported, and a "phone call" from the former president and first lady was released in a campaign ad posted to social media. In the ad, the Obamas thorw their support behind Harris who thanked the two for their "friendship".
Dan Lazare, an independent investigative journalist and author, joined Sputnik's The Critical Hour program on Friday, suggesting Harris may seem appealing to voters for stepping up to the plate at the last minute. However she faces an uphill battle as Americans continue to overpay for basic needs and blame Bidenomics for their empty wallets, he argued.
"Kamala Harris is in the honeymoon period. So she's glamorous. Everything she does is right. It's just perfect. You know, everyone loves her," Lazare explained. "And this will last, I don't know, what? A few more days? A few more weeks? Certainly not beyond Labor Day, and that's where the real mud wrestling starts."

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“And she's got her vulnerabilities,” he added. “She gave a nice little talkafter meeting with Netanyahu, but unfortunately it didn't make any sense. And she did manage to throw in an attack against Iran, which is completely bonkers. She accused Iran of backing Hamas; well, yes, Iran has backed Hamas. But the implication is that Iran was somehow behind October 7th and there is absolutely no evidence in support of that. In fact, there's a good deal of countervailing evidence against that.”

On July 2, CNN reported that three-quarters of US voters said the Democratic Party would have a better chance of holding onto the White House were Biden to drop out of the race and have someone else on the ticket.

“[Harris] talks out of both sides of her mouth, but then again, Biden does the same thing. He comes up with a few words of concern for the plight of the Palestinians even as he ships more bombs off to Israel. And she is equally two-sided, but joining in on this attack against Iran is really dangerous because Israel wants to drag America to a war with Iran, but Iran is not part of this conflict,” Lazare emphasized.

Should Harris secure her seat in the Oval Office, it is expected that she will follow Biden’s foreign policies, the German news agency Deutsche Welle reported. "Harris's policy appears to pursue a conflicted de-escalation with Iran by trying to reach, if not a new nuclear deal, at least a new agreement or understanding that would pause Iran's nuclear weapon development," said Arman Mahmoudian, a lecturer and international affairs analyst at the University of South Florida.

However, Harris will also be interested in influencing a new generation of “human rights-oriented policies toward Iran, specifically improving women’s rights,” said Mahmoudian.

Harris has consistently defended the nuclear agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was achieved during Obama’s presidency, the report said.

Trump’s policy of “maximum pressure” on Iran resulted in him pulling out of the deal because he thought he could negotiate a “better deal” than his predecessor.

“Iran does not want a war. It doesn't want a wider war. In fact, the new president, who's just been elected, clearly wants to avoid that at just about any possible cost,” said Lazare.

“It's really outrageous. I mean, I expect nothing from Harris on the war. I think she'll have a few kind words to say. She'll throw out a few cliches about the importance of sparing civilian casualties. In the end, she will satisfy Israel's every need for war. She will back it to the hilt until Netanyahu decides this operation is over. So, I expect her to respond exactly the same way as Biden has responded.”

On Tuesday, Harris visited the key battleground state of Wisconsin and quickly went on the offensive. "I know Donald Trump's type," Harris said, recounting her days as a prosecutor who pursued fraud cases, accordingto The New York Times.

The Vice President touted the prospect of representation for younger generations of Americans as well as her promise to protect access to abortion. Age has often been considered a weakness for both Trump, 78 and Biden, 81. Harris is 59 years old, six years younger than the average US retirement age of 65.

“She will appeal to the hardcore Democrats and she will appeal much less to those wavering in between, and that is the crucial population. She has Bidenomics to worry about. How the hell can she get out from under that albatross? I mean, the economy has hurt all working people of all colors,” Lazare said.

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“Inflation is a killer. Housing costs, automobile costs, insurance costs have been devastating. Every single voter out there has suffered the consequences and the poorer you are, the more you have suffered. So, yeah, the educated elite will go for Harris, but the ones who have taken it on the chin, I think, will respond very differently.”

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China’s Meltdown-Proof Nuclear Power Plant Could Be Blueprint for Cleaner Future

Nuclear power can provide a large and reliable source of low-carbon energy that will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat climate change. The design could also help China reduce its dependence on coal.

China’s Tsinghua University has unveiled the world’s first “meltdown-proof nuclear power plant,” according to a report in The Independent.

The design represents a major step forward for nuclear safety and could prevent disasters resulting from the extreme heat generated by nuclear fission. Overheating can result in an explosion and the release of dangerous radiation if not properly managed.

The Chinese plant uses an innovative design called a “pebble-bed reactor” to reduce the risk of meltdown. Older reactor designs such as Pressurized Water Reactors (PWR) require active intervention to shut down in an emergency, while their safety systems require an outside power source to operate pumps that circulate coolants.

But pebble-bed reactors are unique because their fuel rods are not cooled by circulating water. Instead, the reactor is essentially a big unpressurized hopper filled with spherical pebbles made of layers of enriched uranium fuel, carbon that acts as a moderator, and silicon carbide coating. These billiard ball-sized spheres are provided by the German company SGL Group and are very resistant to heat. The coolant is helium gas which is chemically neutral and will remain gaseous at any temperature.

According to another report the pebbles are able to withstand temperatures of "up to 1,600°C (3,000 °F)". The pebbles’ heat causes the helium to naturally circulate when the pumps are turned off. Because of the high surface-to-volume ratio of the pebbles, heat loss exceeds heat generation.

The Chinese researchers tested the reactors by connecting them to a 210-MWe steam turbine which moderated the nuclear reactions and safe temperatures were maintained, with the core shutting down in a matter of minutes and both reaction and temperature stabilizing in about 35 hours.

On March 11, 2011, Japan experienced the Great East Japan Earthquake which was followed by a powerful tsunami, resulting in a severe nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. Three of six reactors at the plant sustained severe core damage and released hydrogen and radioactive materials.

The 1970s-era plant design was due to be phased out before its backup diesel generators were disabled by the tsunami, causing the meltdown. Rubble and debris prevented emergency crews from reaching the plant in time to prevent an explosion.

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Musk Began Meetings to Support Trump Long Before He Endorsed Him - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) – US billionaire Elon Musk began privately gathering support for former President Donald Trump several months before he publicly endorsed him, the Washington Post reported on Monday.

Musk endorsed Trump on July 13. However, on February 16, he participated in a meeting where several entrepreneurs and top political strategists discussed the 2024 campaign, the report said.

According to the meeting's attendees, Musk expressed pro-Trump views, the report said. While pointing out that he is not a big fan of the former president, he expressed confidence that Trump would solve the issue of illegal migration.

Musk also asked people in the room to tell their friends to vote for Trump, and some of the participants agreed to do so, the report added.

In May, Musk helped to launch America PAC, the committee which soon reported raising $8.5 million, the report said. He also expressed his readiness to donate to Trump's campaign, but both Musk and Trump have denied reports that he is committed to contributing $45 million a month.

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Blinken, Israeli President Discuss Preventing Escalation After Golan Heights Attack

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stressed the need to prevent escalation during a call with Israeli President Isaac Herzog on Monday after children were killed in the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights village of Majdal Shams by what Israel alleged was a rocket attack by Hezbollah, according to a readout from the State Department.

"The Secretary reaffirmed the United States' ironclad commitment to Israel's security against threats from Iranian-backed terrorist organizations, including Hezbollah," the readout stated. "He emphasized the importance of preventing escalation of the conflict and discussed efforts to reach a diplomatic solution to allow citizens on both sides of the border between Israel and Lebanon to return home."

Blinken expressed condolences for those killed in Majdal Shams and wished a speedy recovery for those injured.

On Saturday, an apparent rocket attack on a soccer field in the predominantly Druze village of Majdal Shams in the Israel-occupied Golan Heights killed 12 children and injured 20 others.

Hezbollah denied Israel's allegations that it had targeted the village. The Majdal Shams Regional Council said that none of the 12 Druze children killed were Israeli citizens and held only Israel residency cards.

Since October 7, the Israeli army and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters have regularly exchanged

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fire across the border.

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QUAD Ministers Urge Israel Not to Undermine Prospects of Two-State Solution - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) – The foreign ministers of the Quad group of countries - the United States, Japan, India and Australia – on Monday urged Israel to desist from engaging in actions that undermine the prospects of a two-state solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Any unilateral actions that undermine the prospect of a two-state solution, including Israeli expansion of settlements and violent extremism on all sides, must end. We underscore the need to prevent the conflict from escalating and spilling over in the region," the joint statement said.

QUAD countries remain committed to a sovereign, viable and independent Palestinian state that considers Israel's security concerns as part of a two-state solution and that allows for Israelis and Palestinians alike to live in just, lasting and secure peace, the statement said.

In mid-July, the International Court of Justice found that Israel's settlement activities in the Palestinian territories violate international law. The Palestinian delegation called on the court to declare Israel's occupation of its territories illegal as it could be the last hope for a two-state solution.

The QUAD is an intergovernmental security forum for strategic dialogue between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, founded in 2007 and reestablished in 2017 after a nine-year pause.

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Quad Says to Launch Maritime Legal Dialogue to Support Rules-Based Order in Indo-Pacific

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) – The United States and its partners from the Quad group of nations expressed their intention on Monday to launch a maritime legal dialogue to support efforts to uphold the rules-based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific.

Foreign ministers from the Quad countries — the US, Australia, India and Japan — issued the statement after their meeting in Tokyo.

"We intend to launch a Quad maritime legal dialogue under the Quad Maritime Security Working Group," they said.

The parties plan to focus their expertise on international law of sea issues in support of our efforts to uphold the rules-based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific.

They also want to enhance regional maritime security through capacity-building cooperation, according to the statement.

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US Envoy for Ukraine's Economic Recovery Arrives in Kiev - Ambassador

WASHINGTON, July 29 (Sputnik) - US Special Representative for Ukraine's Economic Recovery Penny Pritzker has arrived in Kiev, US Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget A. Brink said on Monday.

"A warm welcome back to Kyiv, @SpecRepUkraine!" Brink wrote on X.

Pritzker was joined on her trip by CEOs from American government and commercial services contractor Amentum, US nuclear power company Westinghouse and Chicago-based construction firm Clayco Inc, the ambassador said.

Brink stated that a "transparent business environment" and "strong rule of law" are critical to Ukraine's recovery and its EU path.

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RPT - Canada's Trudeau Part of 'Globalist Managerial Class,' Does Not Have Final Say - Brother

NASHVILLE, July 29 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is only part of the "globalist managerial class," but he does not have the final say, Kyle Kemper, the leading activator of the Kennedy presidential campaign and Trudeau's brother, told Sputnik in an interview.

"Unfortunately, my brother is the spokesperson for the Canadian government or the Prime Minister, but I don't really feel that he's the one who is calling the shots. He is part of this globalist managerial class," Kemper said on the sidelines of the annual Bitcoin Conference held in Nashville from July 25-27.

He added that Robert F. Kennedy Jr. could "shift the energy" even in Canada if he became the next US president, explaining that Canada is "kind of like the 51st state" of the United States.

The Canadian people care a lot about US politics, Kemper said.

"Canada needs to fix itself a little bit and there's a lot of people that are waiting and wanting change," he said, adding that people in Canada cannot afford to live.

The US presidential election will take place on November 5.

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RPT - Trudeau's Brother Says US Democrats Trying to Block Kennedy Jr. From Ballot

NASHVILLE, July 29 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Kyle Kemper, a leading activator of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s presidential campaign and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's brother, told Sputnik that the Democratic Party is scared of RFK, trying to block his access to the ballot.

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"The Democratic Party is trying to keep Bobby off the ballots. They do not want Americans to be able to vote for him fairly. They're trying to put [former US President President] Trump in jail. They want the same thing that [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelenskyy wants and has, which is no elections or completely rigged elections," Kemper said on the sidelines of the annual Bitcoin Conference, which was held in Nashville from July 25-27.

The tactics of the Democratic National Convention (DNC) are "quite deplorable," while many traditional liberals do not want to be associated with it, he added.

"So with Kennedy as an alternative, he can be the remedy to this broken, divided, toxic, polarized American political landscape and help make talking great again because we need just to talk. There's been so much divide and conquer divisive, so much hate," Kemper said, explaining the impact Kennedy's election would have.

Kennedy spoke at the Bitcoin Conference on Friday, a day before the speech of former President Donald Trump. The Bitcoin community generally enjoyed Kennedy's speech, saying he was very thoughtful, and appreciated that he has a large portion of his wealth invested in the cryptocurrency.

As an independent presidential candidate, Kennedy has worked to secure ballot access in all 50 states. Yet, he is facing stiff opposition from Democratic political opponents who are trying to block his bid for the November election with multiple lawsuits. The DNC vowed to keep trying to challenge Kennedy's ballot access "and make sure that he is playing by the rules."

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UPDATE - Canada's Trudeau Part of 'Globalist Managerial Class,' Does Not Have Final Say - Brother

(Adds more remarks by Trudeau's brother in paras 6-7, background in para 8)

NASHVILLE, July 28 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is only part of the "globalist managerial class," but he does not have the final say, Kyle Kemper, the leading activator of the Kennedy presidential campaign and Trudeau's brother, told Sputnik in an interview.

"Unfortunately, my brother is the spokesperson for the Canadian government or the Prime Minister, but I don't really feel that he's the one who is calling the shots. He is part of this globalist managerial class," Kemper said on the sidelines of the annual Bitcoin Conference held in Nashville from July 25-27.

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The Canadian people care a lot about US politics, Kemper said.

"Canada needs to fix itself a little bit and there's a lot of people that are waiting and wanting change," he said, adding that people in Canada cannot afford to live.

The situation in Canada is "desperate" for many people, Kemper also said.

"I am concerned about the Canadian political and societal structure, integrity, and happiness quotient. People are scared. People are poor," he said.

In mid-June, an Ipsos poll revealed that nearly 70% of Canadians would like to see Trudeau

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step down from the premiership position. In addition, three in four Canadians would like to have another party take over the government and only a quarter say they believe the Liberals deserve to be reelected.

The US presidential election will take place on November 5.

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"The Democratic Party is trying to keep Bobby off the ballots. They do not want Americans to be able to vote for him fairly. They're trying to put [former US President President] Trump in jail. They want the same thing that [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelenskyy wants and has, which is no elections or completely rigged elections," Kemper said on the sidelines of the annual Bitcoin Conference, which was held in Nashville from July 25-27.

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Trudeau's Brother Says RFK Jr. Becoming Next US President Would Be Best for Canada

NASHVILLE, July 28 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Canada's situation would improve if Robert F. Kennedy Jr. became the next US president, a leading activator of Kennedy's campaign and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's brother, Kyle Kemper, told Sputnik in an interview.

"I think the best thing for Canada would be for Bobby to get an office down here," Kemper said on the sidelines of an annual Bitcoin Conference, which was held in Nashville from July 25-27.

Kennedy is a true leader - the most qualified, experienced and spiritually centered person, which is why Kemper devoted the last 16 months to supporting his campaign, he added.

"He has a storm, and he's bringing energy in from all around, and it's just growing," Kemper said, adding that whatever happens in the US will greatly impact life in Canada.

Kennedy spoke at the Bitcoin Conference in Nashville on Friday, a day before the speech of former President Donald Trump. The Bitcoin community generally enjoyed Kennedy's speech, saying he was thoughtful and educated. They also wanted him to invest much of his wealth in Bitcoin.

During his speech, the independent US presidential candidate said that if elected, he would make all US-owned Bitcoin a strategic asset. In addition, Kennedy said he would focus on the second executive order on day one, directing the US Treasury to purchase 550 Bitcoins per day until the country has reserves of at least 4 million.

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RPT - Trump Won Sympathy of US Crypto Community, But Needs to Be Consistent - Expert

NASHVILLE, July 28 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump is currently considered by the crypto community as the most preferred candidate for the post of head of state, but it is important that the politician's campaign promises are followed by real actions, US entrepreneur and cryptocurrency analyst Rich Rines told Sputnik.

"It is a hard question. I did see that RFK [Robert F. Kennedy Jr.] actually recently mentioned that the majority of his wealth is in Bitcoin, which is pretty awesome. I loved to hear that. I was not expecting that. I think overall, Trump right now seems to be the winner," Rines said on the

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sidelines of a major annual Bitcoin Conference, which is taking place in Nashville from July 25-27.

At the same time, he said that politicians' statements alone are not enough, because you can vote based on those statements, but it comes down to the actions that follow.

"And I think that's like, the scary part right now is, like, some of the candidates have flip flopped, and you have to know whether or not that will remain true, especially after getting elected ... There's a lot of fears with the current administration trying to change their tune, but over the last four years, been very against crypto, so it's hard, and like, we'll have to see what happens in the real world," the cryptocurrency expert added.

The cost of Bitcoin, the first capitalization of the cryptocurrency, at the opening of the US exchange on Saturday exceeded $69,000 in anticipation of Trump's speech on the final day of the Bitcoin Conference in Nashville.

The politician made cryptocurrencies part of his election campaign, and a number of analysts expect that after his speech on the final day of the conference, the cost of Bitcoin may rise sharply. At the same time, other industry analysts are urging the crypto community not to make rosy plans for Donald Trump's tenure as US president. In particular, back in 2020, the Republican president was one step away from making a decision to ban Bitcoin.

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US National Security Council Condemns Golan Heights Attack

MOSCOW, July 28 (Sputnik) - US National Security Council (NSC) told Sputnik on Saturday it condemned the shelling of the city of Majdal Shams in Israeli-controlled Golan Heights, which had left 12 young people killed.

"We condemn this horrific attack that reportedly killed a number of teenagers and children playing soccer on a Saturday evening in the village of Majdal Shams in northern Israel. Our hearts go out to the families of those who lost loved ones today, and we are praying for a speedy recovery for those who have been injured," the council's spokesperson said in a statement.

Israel continues to face severe threats to its security, and the United States will continue efforts to end these attacks, it said.

"Our support for Israel’s security is iron-clad and unwavering against all Iranian backed terrorist groups, including Lebanese Hezbollah," the NSC added.

Lebanese movement Hezbollah denies involvement in the shelling of the town of Majdal Shams. Despite this, Israeli officials began to declare the imminence of war against Hezbollah and Lebanon.

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Trump Wants to Keep 100% of Bitcoin US Currently Holds as Strategic Stockpile

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NASHVILLE, July 28 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Saturday he wanted to keep 100 percent of all Bitcoin holdings the US currently has and keep it as a strategic national stockpile, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Saturday.

"I am announcing that if I am elected, I elect policy of my administration United States of America to keep 100 percent of all the Bitcoin the US government currently holds or acquires into the future. We'll keep 100 percent. I hope you do well, please," Trump said at the Bitcoin 2024 conference in Nashville.

"This will serve, in effect, as the core of the strategic national Bitcoin stockpile," he added.

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Trump Says Will Fire Chair of US Securities Gary Gensler on Day One as President

NASHVILLE, July 27 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump has said he is planning to lay off US Securities and Exchange Commission chair Gary Gensler on his day one as US president if elected, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Saturday.

"From day one I will fire Gary Gensler," Trump said at the Bitcoin 2024 conference in Nashville.

The cost of bitcoin, the cryptocurrency's first capitalization, at the opening of the American exchange on Saturday, exceeded $69 thousand in anticipation of Trump's speech on the final day.

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Trump to Lay Out Plan to Ensure That US Will Be ‘Crypto Capital of Planet’ - Correspondent

NASHVILLE, July 27 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Saturday he wants the United States to lead world in the crypto industry, Sputnik correspondent reported.

"This afternoon, I'm laying out my plan to ensure that the United States will be the crypto capital of the planet and the Bitcoin superhero," Trump said at the Bitcoin 2024 conference in Nashville.

The cost of bitcoin, the cryptocurrency's first capitalization, at the opening of the American exchange on Saturday, exceeded $69 thousand in anticipation of Trump's speech on the final day.

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Trump Won Sympathy of US Crypto Community, But Needs to Be Consistent - Expert

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"It is a hard question. I did see that RFK [Robert F. Kennedy Jr.] actually recently mentioned that the majority of his wealth is in Bitcoin, which is pretty awesome. I loved to hear that. I was not expecting that. I think overall, Trump right now seems to be the winner," Rines said on the sidelines of a major annual Bitcoin Conference, which is taking place in Nashville from July 25-27.

At the same time, he said that politicians' statements alone are not enough, because you can vote based on those statements, but it comes down to the actions that follow.

"And I think that's like, the scary part right now is, like, some of the candidates have flip flopped, and you have to know whether or not that will remain true, especially after getting elected ... There's a lot of fears with the current administration trying to change their tune, but over the last four years, been very against crypto, so it's hard, and like, we'll have to see what happens in the real world," the cryptocurrency expert added.

The cost of Bitcoin, the first capitalization of the cryptocurrency, at the opening of the US exchange on Saturday exceeded $69,000 in anticipation of Trump's speech on the final day of the Bitcoin Conference in Nashville.

The politician made cryptocurrencies part of his election campaign, and a number of analysts expect that after his speech on the final day of the conference, the cost of Bitcoin may rise sharply. At the same time, other industry analysts are urging the crypto community not to make rosy plans for Donald Trump's tenure as US president. In particular, back in 2020, the Republican president was one step away from making a decision to ban Bitcoin.

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Lockheed Martin Sikorsky to Design New NATO Vertical Take Off Rotorcraft - Release

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin has received a contract to design a new vertical take off and landing rotary wing aircraft for use by NATO's armed forces, the giant US defense contractor announced in a press release.

"The NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA) has awarded Lockheed Martin Sikorsky a contract award to study integrated platform concepts that could fulfill NATO’s next generation rotorcraft requirements through its Next generation Rotorcraft capability (NGRC) program," the release said on Friday.

Lockheed Martin Sikorsky’s European Industry Group includes Tier-1 aerospace suppliers, such as BAE Systems, ELT Group, ESG Elektroniksystem-und Logistik GmbH, GE Aerospace, Hellenic Aerospace Industry, Kongsberg, Liebherr-Aerospace Lindenberg GmbH, MAGroup, Malloy Aeronautics, SAFRAN, Rheinmetall and TERMA, the release noted.

“Sikorsky is ready to design a rotorcraft prototype for NATO’s NGRC concept study to support defense and deterrence for an ever-changing global environment. Years of investment and rigorous flight testing with multiple X2 technology demonstrators have proven its ability to change the future airspace," Sikorsky Future Vertical Lift Vice President Andy Adams said in the release.

The NGRC program initiative began in 2022 and includes France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and Canada with the United States and Spain acting as

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observers, Lockheed Martin said.

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Kennedy Says Wants to Transfer Current Bitcoin Holdings to Strategic Assets

NASHVILLE, July 27 (Sputnik) - Independent US presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said that he would make all US-held Bitcoin a strategic asset if elected, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

"… I intend as the President of the United States to sign an executive order on day one, directing the Department of Justice, and the US Marshals, to transfer approximately 200,000 Bitcoin held by the US government to the United States Treasury … for the strategic assets," Kennedy said speaking at the main stage of the annual Bitcoin conference in Nashville on Friday.

In addition, Kennedy said that he would focus on the second executive order on day one, ordering "the US Treasury to purchase 550 Bitcoin daily until the US holds in reserves of at least 4 million Bitcoins."

Kennedy also expressed his approval of Former President Donald Trump's idea to hold part of the reserves in Bitcoin and hopes that Trump's interest in the currency goes beyond mere politics.

On Saturday morning, Trump is set to speak at the Bitcoin conference.

As of Friday morning, Bitcoin's price increased to nearly $68,000 in anticipation of Trump's speech.

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Democrats Made Mistake Picking 'Vain, Unknowledgeable' Kamala Harris - Ex-US Diplomat

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Democratic Party leaders made a mistake in selecting and supporting Vice President Kamala Harris as their standard bearer to replace elderly President Joe Biden, former US diplomat and political commentator James Carden told Sputnik.

"[Harris] is both vain and unknowledgeable, a common affliction in Washington," Carden said on Friday.

Biden announced Harris as his chosen successor in a brief message and then in a short nationally televised broadcast earlier this week. Since then, party leaders including former President Barack Obama and former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi have rallied to her support.

However, Harris had almost no experience as a lead or lone candidate on the US national stage, and her brief foray into that arena had been a catastrophe, Carden recalled.

"Her 2020 [presidential] run was a disaster," he said.

Harris had grave weaknesses that had previously prevented her from playing the national role to which she aspired, Carden explained.

"She cannot debate and cannot give an inspiring speech," he said.

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Most political commentators including many Republicans have said this week that Harris would certainly prove a far more formidable opponent for Republican candidate and former President Donald Trump than the 81-year-old Biden.

However, Carden rejected that argument saying that the Democrats had made a mistake picking her and would have done better sticking with Biden.

Harris was still the beneficiary of uncritical support from the US mainstream media but this would not last, Carden cautioned.

"I don't think her honeymoon season with the general public is going to last too long. Once the general public begins to tune in to the campaign in September and October they will take a good long look at her and not like what they see and hear," he concluded.

On Thursday, Harris accused Trump of backpedaling from having a nationally televised debate with her.

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US Officials Set August 18 as Earliest Date for Starliner Crew Return to Earth - NASA

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - US space flight executives have set August 18 as the earliest practical date for US astronauts Barry "Butch" Gilmore and Sunita "Suni" Williams to return to Earth on their problem-plagued Boeing CST-100 Starliner from the International Space Station (ISS), NASA Commercial Crew Program Manager Steve Stich told reporters.

The Starliner and its crew will return no earlier than August 18, Stich told a press conference at Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Friday.

The window for the return flight would extend into early September, Stich added.

NASA's planned schedule for crewed flights to and from the ISS over the next two months was first to "bring Butch and Suni home on Starliner, [then] launch Crew 9 [to the ISS] and then bring Crew 8 home," he said.

Starliner was launched with its two-astronaut crew on June 5 but five of its 28 thrusters failed at different times during its flight to the ISS and five helium leaks were also recorded. The spacecraft's return flight was originally scheduled for June 14 but has been repeatedly delayed since then while engineers back on Earth tried to solve the problems, NASA officials have acknowledged.

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Canadian Govt. Matching Red Cross Donations for Wildfire-Affected Jasper – Trudeau

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) – Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Friday that the Canadian Government was matching donations made to the Red Cross in support of wildfire-affected communities in Jasper, Alberta.

“We’re matching individual donations made to the @RedCrossCanada to help communities in Jasper and across Alberta affected by wildfires,” Trudeau wrote via X. “If you can, donate to

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redcross.ca, and let's do what Canadians do best in hard times: come together."

Earlier in the day, Albertan Prime Minister Danielle Smith and Canadian Emergency Preparedness Minister Harjit Sajjan said during a situation update that about a third of the historic town of Jasper had been destroyed by raging wildfires.

Major infrastructure such as the hospital emergency service building, schools, the activity center, and the wastewater treatment facility, have been spared from the fires.

Minister Sajjan said 175 wildfires were active within Alberta, having burnt 2.3 million hectares (5.7 million acres) of land. An estimated total of 17,000 individuals have fled their homes.

On Tuesday, citizens of Jasper Township and the individuals at the Jasper National Park were ordered to evacuate the region towards neighboring British Columbia due to the looming threat of wildfires.

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FBI Says What Struck Trump in Ear Was Bullet, Either Whole or Fragments of It

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The FBI said in a statement on Friday that what struck former President Donald Trump's right ear during an assassination attempt was a bullet but it could have been the whole round or fragments of it.

"What struck former President Trump in the ear was a bullet, whether whole or fragmented into smaller pieces, fired from the deceased subject's rifle," the FBI said as quoted by Fox News.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) -

MIDDLE EAST TENSIONS

* Former US President Donald Trump told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he will work to bring peace to the Middle East and combat anti-Semitism on college campuses in the United States if re-elected in November, the Trump campaign said on Friday.

* US and UK aircraft carried out new raids on the positions of Yemen's Ansar Allah movement, whose members ans supporters known as Houthis, in western Yemen, a source in local authorities told Sputnik.

* The Palestinian movement Hamas does not agree to Israel's new conditions for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, Hamas spokesman in Lebanon Walid Kilani told Sputnik.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico in a telephone conversation offered to Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal a technical solution to resume oil transit from the Russian company Lukoil, the Slovak government said on Friday.

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* The Ukrainian armed forces have lost up to 4,640 soldiers in battles with Russia's Yug (South) group of forces in the past week, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* The security situation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (NPP) remains extremely difficult, the International Atomic Energy Agency said.

FROZEN RUSSIAN ASSETS
* The European Union will send the first tranche of military aid to Ukraine in the amount of $1.6 billion from revenue of frozen Russian assets, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Friday.
* The EU decision to give Ukraine $1.6 billion from revenue of frozen Russian assets is illegal, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

RAILROAD INCIDENT IN FRANCE
* Rail traffic between Germany and Paris has been disrupted due to vandalism on the French LGV Est high-speed line, the German railway company Deutsche Bahn told RIA Novosti on Friday.
* Train traffic has been restored in France, but the trains are running up to two hours late, the French national railroad company SNCF said.

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Trump Says Will Host Rally Soon in Pennsylvania Town of Butler Where Shooting Took Place

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump said on Friday that he will soon hold another rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, the same town where an assassination attempt on his life took place earlier this month.
"I WILL BE GOING BACK TO BUTLER, PENNSYLVANIA, FOR A BIG AND BEAUTIFUL RALLY, HONORING THE SOUL OF OUR BELOVED FIREFIGHTING HERO, COREY, AND THOSE BRAVE PATRIOTS INJURED TWO WEEKS AGO," Trump said in a statement on social media.
Trump said he will provide more details about the event at a later time.
On July 13, Trump suffered a gunshot wound to his right ear and was briefly hospitalized following an assassination attempt at his rally in Butler. Thomas Crooks, 20, killed a member of the audience and injured two others in the crowd before the Secret Service neutralized him.
The FBI continues to investigate the assassination attempt.
The incident prompted US Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle to resign from her leadership role following criticism of the agency for not preventing the assassination attempt.

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Trump Removes Ear Bandage for First Time Since Attempted Assassination – Footage

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WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump removed the ear bandage he wore on his ear for the first time since the failed assassination attempt, images and video footage showed on Friday.

During his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier on Friday at the Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida as part of Netanyahu's visit to the United States, Trump appeared without the bandage he wore on his right ear following an injury caused by a stray bullet at the time of his failed assassination attempt.

On July 13, a gunman attempted to assassinate Trump during a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, but Trump evaded death by tilting his head at the last second and only sustained a wound to his right ear.

The gunman, Thomas Crooks, killed a member of the audience and injured two others before the US Secret Service sniper team eliminated him.

The incident prompted US Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle to resign.

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US Stocks Trim Losses After Tumultuous Week

NEW YORK, July 26 (Sputnik) - Wall Street trimmed its losses for the week as investors plowed into value stocks while returning cautiously to so-called growth ones after a tumultuous week for US equity markets.

The S&P 500 Index, which tracks stocks of the top 500 US companies, settled on Friday at 5,461 for a gain of 1.1% on the day. For the week, however, the S&P lost 0.8%, adding to the prior week's 2% decline — the most since mid-April.

The technology-heavy Nasdaq Composite Index, which comprises stocks such as Amazon, Apple, Netflix, and Google, closed at 17,362 for a rise of 1% on the day. For the week, the Nasdaq fell 2.1%, after the previous week's drop of 3.7%, its most since mid-April too.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest indicator for US equity markets, finished at 40,589 for an advance of 1.6% on the day. The Dow has been Wall Street's outlier, rising 0.7% in the latest week for a fourth straight week of gains that put the index up a cumulative 3.8%.

Stocks rebounded on Friday after the Personal Consumption Expenditures Index, a US inflation tracker closely followed by the Federal Reserve, grew 2.5% in the year to June, closing in on the central bank's 2% target that could pave the way for an interest rate cut.

The Fed will get its first opportunity to review rates at its policy meeting on July 31, although Wall Street is betting on a cut happening at the central bank's September 18 meeting.

"A cut in September [is] priced in," economist Greg Michalowski wrote on the ForexLive forum, noting that the Fed appeared on course to cut as much as 67 basis points, or 0.67%, from rates in 2024.

The central bank itself has only indicated two rounds of cuts before the end of the year, typically in installments of 25 basis points, or 0.25%, per reduction.

The last time the Fed cut rates was in March 2020 — at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic — when it slashed a full 100 basis points, or 1%.

Rates are currently in a range of between 5.25% and 5.5%, their highest since 2002.

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About a Third of Canadian Town of Jasper Lost to Wildfires – Albertan Premier

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) – Preliminary data shows that about a third of the historic Canadian town of Jasper has been destroyed by raging wildfires, the Prime Minister of the Province of Alberta Danielle Smith said on Friday.

Smith made the remarks during a joint press conference with Canadian Minister of Emergency Preparedness Harjit Sajjan and Jasper Mayor Richard Ireland, among others.

"Although more time is needed to complete a detailed assessment of the damage, it is clear, sadly, that many homes and some businesses have been lost. Our preliminary observation shows that about 33% of Jasper townsite endured total or partial structural loss," Smith said during a press conference.

She noted, however, that all major infrastructure, including the hospital emergency service building, schools, the activity center and the wastewater treatment facility, have been protected from the wildfires.

The fire continues to rage in the community, Mayor Ireland said. The first priority remains the protection of those who stayed behind to protect the township from the wildfires, he added.

Minister Sajjan said 175 wildfires were active within Alberta, having burnt 2.3 million hectares (5.7 million acres) of land. An estimated total of 17,000 people have fled their homes.

On Tuesday, citizens of Jasper Township and the individuals at the Jasper National Park were ordered to evacuate the region towards neighboring British Columbia due to the looming threat of wildfires.

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US Prepared to Work With Winner of Venezuelan Election if Transparent - Official

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The United States is prepared to work with the winner of the Venezuelan presidential election as long as the vote is transparent, a senior Biden administration official said on Friday.

"The United States is prepared to work with the winner of this election, as long as there's a transparent and fair election process, it's verified by domestic and international observers," the official said during a press briefing.

The United States also stands ready to support a peaceful, negotiated post-election period and consider measures facilitating a peaceful transition of power in case President Nicolas Maduro does not win.

The Biden administration is hopeful that it will be able to improve the bilateral relationship between the United States and Venezuela after the election, the official added.

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Venezuelans will head to the polls on July 28 to elect a new president. The registration of candidates was completed in April. Candidates from most political parties, including a right-wing opposition movement, will be included in the ballots. Maduro will also participate seeking his third term.

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UPDATE - Oil Prices Down 3rd Week In Row, Most Since April, As China Worries Persist

(Updates with settlement prices in paras 3-6; modifies headline and lede)
NEW YORK, July 26 (Sputnik) - Crude prices posted a third straight week of declines and their worst since May amid persistent worries about demand in China, the top importer of oil and its biggest consumer after the United States.
At Friday's close, both the US and UK crude benchmarks were down a cumulative 2% on the average from five days of trading.
In the latest session, US West Texas Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled at $77.16 per barrel, down $1.12, or 1.4%. For the week, WTI was off by 3%. That was its biggest weekly drop since the 6.9% decline in the week to May 3 and came after prior back-to-back weekly declines of 2.5% and 1.1%.
UK-origin Brent crude finished Friday's New York session at $81.13 per barrel, down $1.24, or 1.5%, on the day. While Brent's weekly decline of 1.8% did not set a major milestone like WTI, it, nevertheless, also marked a third straight drop after prior weekly losses of 2.8% and 1.7%.
July was also shaping into the poorest month in three for bulls in oil, with WTI down 5.4% and Brent off 6% for the month after May's drop of 6% and 7%, respectively.
Those losses have weighed sharply on the 2024 oil rally, leaving the US crude benchmark up just 6.6% on the year, while the UK gauge shows an annual gain of 4.5%.
The latest declines in WTI and Brent wiped out a brief two-day rebound this week that came after data showed China's total fuel oil imports dropped 11% in the first half of 2024.
"China's apparent oil demand fell by 8.1% in June to 13.66 million barrels per day, raising concerns about consumption," energy market analyst Arslan Ali wrote on the FX Empire portal.
The Chinese oil demand outlook added to concerns about the prospects of a ceasefire in the Hamas-Israel war for Gaza that could cut into the geopolitical risk premium for crude prices.
Crude prices hit six-week lows on Tuesday partly on concerns of a potential Israel-Hamas ceasefire. Before that, the Gaza war zone and its proximity to some of the world's biggest oil producers — including Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates — had been a boon to the 2024 oil rally, especially after some disruption to crude shipments from rockets fired by Hamas.
Efforts by Egypt and Qatar to broker a ceasefire in Gaza have, however, escalated over the past month, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu telling families of hostages held by Hamas this week that a deal to secure their release could be near. Netanyahu delivered a speech to the US Congress on Wednesday and met US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris at the White House.
On the bright side, consumption numbers for US crude, gasoline, and distillates have all been

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off the charts lately, negating some of the bearish sentiment in oil.

The US Energy Information Administration (EIA), in its Weekly Petroleum Status Report on Wednesday, noted a crude inventory decline of 3.741 million barrels for the week ended July 19, adding to the prior week's tumble of 4.87 million. US crude inventories have fallen almost 25 million barrels in all over the past four weeks.

For gasoline, the agency cited a decline of 5.572 million barrels in the latest week versus a build of 3.328 million barrels the prior week. Analysts had a forecast build of 1.4 million barrels instead. Gasoline is the primary motor fuel in the United States and makes up the largest component of the country's energy mix.

In distillates, the EIA reported a drop of 2.753 million barrels, against the gain of 1.53 million forecasts by analysts after the prior week's build of 3.454 million. Distillates are primarily processed into the diesel required by trucks, buses, and ships, and also go into making airplane fuel.

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US Secret Service Gives Codename 'Bobcat' to Vance - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The US Secret Service gave the codename Bobcat to Senator and Republican vice presidential nominee JD Vance, the Daily Mail reported, citing a longtime friend of Vance.

The codename references the Breathitt County Bobcats in his family's hometown of Jackson, Kentucky, the report said on Thursday.

The codename also reflects his ties to Ohio, where the Ohio University's Bobcats reside, the report said. The codename straddles Vance's two homes and big influences in life, his friend reportedly said.

Former US President and 2024 Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump selected Vance as his running mate, pointing to his legal credentials and successful career in the finance and technology sectors.

Vance's campaign activities will focus on appealing to workers and farmers in Ohio, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Minnesota, Trump said.

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US Ready to 'Calibrate' Sanctions Based on Venezuelan Election Outcomes – Official

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) – The United States is ready to "calibrate" its sanctions policy concerning Venezuela depending on how the presidential elections go on Sunday, a senior US administration official said on Friday.

"The United States is prepared to calibrate our sanctions policy, vis a vis events as they may unfold in Venezuela," the official said during a press briefing. "As we look at the post-electoral period, we will continue to evaluate and update our sanctions policy, as required."

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Venezuelans will head to the polls on July 28 to elect a new president. The registration of candidates was completed in April. Candidates from most political parties, including a right-wing opposition movement, will be included in the ballots. Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro will also participate, seeking his third term.

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Biden Meets With Jordanian King, Praises Country's Efforts in Gaza Crisis - White House

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden spoke with Jordanian King Abdullah II, commending Jordan's humanitarian efforts in Gaza and discussing support for the Palestinian Authority and efforts for a ceasefire, the White House said in a statement on Friday.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. spoke today with His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. He commended Jordan’s extraordinary humanitarian response in Gaza under His Majesty’s leadership, which has been critical in addressing the humanitarian crisis in northern Gaza," the statement said.

Biden informed King Abdullah II about the ongoing efforts to secure a ceasefire in Gaza and the release of the remaining hostages, along with plans to increase humanitarian aid to the Gaza residents during the ceasefire period, the statement said.

"The two leaders discussed the situation in the West Bank and the President’s efforts to enhance the viability of the Palestinian Authority through encouragement of reforms and ensuring the PA has the revenues it needs to deliver for the Palestinian people," the statement added.

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US Seeks Guarantees Americans Will Not Be Paying Off Ukraine’s $50Bln Loan - Yellen

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The US government is seeking assurances that taxpayers will not be responsible for paying off the $50 billion loan for Ukraine backed by frozen Russian sovereign assets, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told Reuters on Friday.

In June, the leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) nations agreed to provide a $50 billion loan to Ukraine by using funds generated from frozen Russian assets.

"We need assurances that make it clear that American taxpayers are not going to be on the hook to pay off these loans. And we want to make sure it satisfies the budget scorers that these assets will be the source of repayment for these loans," Reuters quoted Yellen as saying in an interview on the sidelines of the G20 finance leaders meeting in Brazil.

Yellen said the G7 countries will likely reach an agreement on the terms of the $50 billion loan for Ukraine by October.

The Treasury Secretary called the talks in Brazil constructive, including the guarantees that the Russian assets would remain frozen long enough to pay off the loan for Ukraine.

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Russian officials have said the seizure of more than $300 billion of Russian assets by Western countries is theft and violates international law.

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US State Street Bank Agrees to Pay $7.4Mln for Anti-Russia Sanctions Violations - Treasury

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The US Department of the Treasury announced in a statement on Friday that State Street Bank has agreed to pay more than $7 million for violating sanctions imposed on Russia.

"The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) today announced a $7,452,501 settlement with State Street Bank and Trust Company (State Street), a Massachusetts-based financial institution, on behalf of itself and its subsidiary, Charles River Systems, Inc. (Charles River)," the statement said.

State Street Bank agreed to settle its potential civil liability for 38 apparent violations of the anti-Russia sanctions imposed over the Ukraine conflict, the statement said.

The apparent violations involved invoices between 2016 and 2020 for certain customers who were subject to appropriate directives and executive orders, as well as certain payments outside of the applicable debt tenor accepted by Charles River from these customers, the statement added.

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Freeland Says Discussed China's Economic Impact at G7 with S. Korean Deputy Prime Minister

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - Canadian Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said on Friday that she and South Korean Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok had a detailed discussion about the challenges posed by China's overcapacity and oversupply at the Group of Seven (G7) summit.

"We did have a good and candid conversation at the G7, specifically about Chinese overcapacity and oversupply," Freeland said during a media teleconference.

Freeland mentioned that the complementary meeting focused on Canada and South Korea exploring ways to collaborate, with Canada chairing the G7 and South Korea set to host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum next year.

Freeland added that they discussed the economic impact and potential coordinated responses, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between the countries' economies.

Freeland participated in the G7 and Group of 20 (G20) Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meeting in Brazil this week, where she worked with Canada's allies to enhance the resiliency of global supply chains and foster economic growth.

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Trump Will Try to Bring Peace to Middle East, Combat Anti-Semitism if Elected - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he will work to bring peace to the Middle East and combat anti-Semitism on college campuses in the United States if elected in November, the Trump campaign said on Friday.

Trump and Netanyahu met at former's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida as part of Netanyahu's visit to the United States, during which he also delivered remarks to lawmakers at the US Capitol.

"President Trump expressed his solidarity with Israel after the heinous October 7 attack, and pledged that when he returns to the White House, he will make every effort to bring Peace to the Middle East and combat anti-Semitism from spreading throughout college campuses across the United States," the Trump campaign said in a statement on the meeting.

Netanyahu also thanked Trump for his administration's efforts to promote stability in the Middle East through initiatives like the Abraham Accords, moving the US Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights and ending the Iran nuclear deal, the statement said.

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UPDATE - Trump Says Harris' Remarks After Netanyahu Meeting Thursday 'Disrespectful'

(Updates with more details in paras 4, 5; corrects description in lede)

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump said on Friday that he found remarks by presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris' after a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to be disrespectful.

On Thursday, Harris said after her meeting with Netanyahu that although she reaffirmed the United States' commitment to defending Israel, she would not stay silent about Israel's handling of the Gaza war, especially the high death toll of Palestinian civilians killed by Israeli troops. Harris emphasized that it is time for Netanyahu to end the conflict.

"I think her remarks were disrespectful, they weren't very nice," Trump said alongside Netanyahu at Mar-a-Lago in Florida. "Pertaining to Israel. I actually don't know how a person who's Jewish can vote for her. But that's up to them. But she was simply disrespectful to Israel in my opinion."

Trump noted that he has always had good relations with Netanyahu and Israel.

Moreover, Trump described the Gaza deal negotiations as tough, adding that Hamas needs to release the remaining hostages it holds "immediately."

Netanyahu was in Washington earlier this week to address a joint session of the US Congress and to meet with President Joe Biden, Harris and other US officials.

Netanyahu's speech was met by a mass demonstration of anti-war and pro-Palestine protesters

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near the US Capitol building.

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Trump Says Harris' Remarks After Netanyahu Meeting Thursday 'Disrespectful'

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump said on Friday that he found remarks by presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris' after a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to be respectful.

On Thursday, Harris said after her meeting with Netanyahu that although she reaffirmed the United States' commitment to defending Israel, she would not stay silent about Israel's handling of the Gaza war, especially the high death toll of Palestinian civilians killed by Israeli troops. Harris emphasized that it is time for Netanyahu to end the conflict.

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Netanyahu was in Washington earlier this week to address a joint session of the US Congress and to meet with President Joe Biden, Harris and other US officials.

Netanyahu's speech was met by a mass demonstration of anti-war and pro-Palestine protesters near the US Capitol building.

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Bitcoin Has All Chances to Serve as Universal Currency - Investor

NASHVILLE, July 26 (Sputnik) - Prior experience shows that interest in Bitcoin grew even more when governments tried to control the premier cryptocurrency and Bitcoin will serve as a tool for setting universal standard value for all states, Miller Value Funds founder and investor Bill Miller told Sputnik in an interview.

“If you look at history, it would show that countries try to control what people want to do and shut down things like Bitcoin. It hasn't worked well. In fact, interest in Bitcoin has gone up when governments have tried to do that," Miller said on the sidelines of the annual Bitcoin conference in Nashville from July 25-27.

Miller pointed out that Bitcoin is an excellent tool to achieve greater collaboration across the globe as well as effectively serve as a unit of measurement.

"I think it's a great tool as a universal standard of value to keep all sorts of nation-states honest,” Miller said.

The investor pointed out he believes Bitcoin will eventually overtake fiat currency and become the main reserve currency.

“I do think it [Bitcoin] ultimately moves beyond. I think it takes the ultimate reserve role in the world,” Miller said.

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Miller clarified that there will be room for both currencies but ultimately Bitcoin will end up becoming worth a lot more.

On Saturday morning, former President Donald Trump is set to speak at the Bitcoin conference. Miller said the conference participants are looking forward to Trump's speech in the hope that he will be on the "right side" and speak out in support of blockchain technology.

As of Friday morning, the price of Bitcoin increased to almost $68,000in anticipation of Trump's speech.

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Burns to Meet Israeli, Qatari, Egyptian Officials in Rome to Discuss Gaza Deal – Reports

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - CIA Director William Burns will meet with Israeli, Qatari and Egyptian officials in Rome to finalize the proposed Gaza ceasefire and hostage deal, Axios reported on Friday, citing US and Israeli officials.

Burns is expected to meet on Sunday with Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed Bin Abdul Rahman al-Thani, Mossad Director David Barnea and Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel, the report said.

The meeting will primarily focus on the strategy for the way forward in the stalled talks to reach a ceasefire in Gaza and release all remaining hostages. The officials are not planning to negotiate the remaining gaps in the deal.

"[Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu wants a deal that is impossible to get. At the moment, he isn't willing to move and therefore we might be headed for a crisis in the negotiations rather than a deal," an Israeli official was quoted as saying.

On Thursday, Axios reported that the families of US hostages held by Hamas since October 7 accused Netanyahu in front of US President Joe Biden of slow-walking the negotiations on the deal, to which Netanyahu responded that he was not slow-walking anything and pledged that Israel will send an updated proposal for Hamas within days.

Earlier in the month, Israel and Hamas resumed talks on a ceasefire in Gaza in exchange for the return the remaining Israeli hostages. The talks have been frozen since May when Biden announced a plan for a ceasefire deal in Gaza and an exchange of hostages.

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No Evidence Trump Hit By Anything Other Than Bullet in Assassination Attempt -Ex-Physician

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - There is no evidence suggesting that Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump was hit by anything other than a bullet during the assassination attempt on his life earlier this month, Trump's former White House physician Ronny Jackson said in a letter on Friday.

"During the Congressional Hearing two days ago, FBI Director Christopher Wray suggested that it could be a bullet, shrapnel, or glass," Jackson said. "There is absolutely no evidence that

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it was anything other than a bullet."
Jackson, who now serves as a US Congressman, said he has continued to monitor Trump's health and well being along with his primary care physician since the assassination attempt.

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Majority of US Voters Believe Biden Should Resign as President - Poll

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - A majority of likely voters in the United States believe that US President Joe Biden should resign his leadership role, according to a Rasmussen Reports poll released Friday.
Fifty-two percent (52%) of respondents believe that Biden should resign from office, after having ended his 2024 reelection bid, the poll report said.
More than three-quarters of respondents, 76%, approve of Biden's decision to withdraw from the 2024 presidential race, the poll report said.
Biden ended his reelection campaign following concerns among some Democrats about his viability as a candidate, after a poor debate performance against Republican nominee Donald Trump.
Biden endorsed US Vice President Kamala Harris as his replacement.
The poll surveyed 1,074 likely US voters from July 22-24. The poll has a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

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Bitcoin Price to Continue Increasing Regardless of US Election Outcome - Investor

NASHVILLE, July 26 (Sputnik) - The value of Bitcoin will continue to increase in the long term regardless of which candidate wins in the upcoming US presidential election in November, Miller Value Funds founder and investor Bill Miller told Sputnik in an interview.
"Regardless of who wins, Bitcoin is going up over the long term," Miller said on the sidelines of the annual Bitcoin 2024 conference held in Nashville, Tennessee, from July 25-27.
Miller said former President and presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump, who was one step away from introducing a ban on Bitcoin during his time in office, apparently radically revised his views on this issue.
"The fact that there are presidential candidates and an ex-president here talking shows how far it's come from being this weird technology that nobody understood to now gaining momentum," Miller said.
The investor emphasized that Bitcoin is at its highest price during what has developed to be the premier Bitcoin conference and said he could not be more excited about it.
The conference participants are looking forward to Trump's upcoming speech and hope he will be on the "right side" and speak out in support of the blockchain technology.

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As of Friday morning, the price of Bitcoin increased to almost $68,000 in anticipation of Trump's speech at the conference in Nashville.

Trump made the issue of Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies part of his election campaign and a number of analysts expect that after his speech the price of Bitcoin may increase still.

Some analysts, however, have urged the cryptocurrency community not to get ahead of themselves plans given Trump's former stance seeking to ban Bitcoin.

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Biden Says US Postponed Removal of Some Lebanese From US Due to Israel-Hezbollah Tensions

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Friday announced a temporary halt to the deportation of certain Lebanese nationals in the United States, citing the worsening humanitarian situation in Lebanon amid soaring tensions between Israel and Hezbollah.

"Humanitarian conditions in southern Lebanon have significantly deteriorated due to tensions between Hezbollah and Israel. While I remain focused on de-escalating the situation and improving humanitarian conditions, many civilians remain in danger; therefore, I am directing the deferral of removal of certain Lebanese nationals who are present in the United States," Biden said in a White House memorandum.

Biden said he directed the Secretary of Homeland Security to postpone the removal of Lebanese nationals for 18 months after determining that doing so was in the foreign policy interest of the United States.

However, Biden said some Lebanese would be excluded from the deferral, including those who voluntarily return to Lebanon after the date of his memorandum, have not resided continuously in the US, are inadmissible or deportable under specific legal provisions, have serious criminal convictions, are subject to extradition, pose a threat to public safety, or could adversely impact US foreign policy by remaining in the country.

Tensions on the Israeli-Lebanese border worsened after the start of Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip in October. The Israeli army and Hezbollah fighters have exchanged fire almost daily in areas along the border.

The Israeli military said in June that it had approved plans for an offensive against Lebanon, while Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said that Israel could launch an all-out war against the neighbor. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said the group would invade northern Israel if the confrontation intensified.

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Apple Signs Onto Voluntary Commitments for Responsible AI – White House

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) – The White House announced on Friday that Apple had joined other major AI companies in signing onto voluntary commitments to promote responsible

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AI innovation, according to a release.

"Today, the administration announced that Apple has signed onto the voluntary commitments, further cementing these commitments as cornerstones of responsible AI innovation," the release stated.

Last year, building upon the voluntary commitments received by 15 major American AI companies, US President Joe Biden issued an executive order directing federal agencies to take action to address the safety and security risks posed by AI.

The agencies also reported on Friday that they had met all of their commitments under the order on schedule thus far and were making progress on longer-term actions.

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China Urges US to Put Pressure on Israel to Reach Ceasefire in Gaza - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, July 26 (Sputnik) - China is urging the United States to put pressure on Israel to reach a ceasefire in Gaza, Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Fu Cong said on Friday.

"We do believe that it's time to stop the killing and we urge the United States to put pressure on Israel to achieve a ceasefire as soon as possible," Fu said.

The Chinese ambassador also expressed concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Asked about the recent visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamen Netanyahu to Washington, Fu said it provided an opportunity for the United States to find a solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

"We have always been urging the United States to put more pressure, and now, when he is here, I think the US should use this leverage," Fu added.

On Thursday, Netanyahu met with US Vice President Kamala Harris in Washington to discuss the war in Gaza and the efforts to ensure the release of Israeli hostages. Following the meeting, Harris publicly called on Israel to agree on a ceasefire as soon as possible in order to end the suffering of the Palestinians.

Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir earlier on Friday rejected Harris' call for a ceasefire.

Israel and Hamas resumed indirect negotiations on a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip earlier in July. The talks have been at a standstill for more than a month after US President Joe Biden announced a new plan to resolve the conflict on behalf of Israel.

Israeli negotiators and mediators have held several rounds of talks in Doha and Cairo in recent weeks, but no breakthrough has been announced.

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Hong Kong 'Strictly Enforces' UNSC Sanctions Against Russia – HK Government

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WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) – Hong Kong insisted on Friday that it "implements and strictly enforces" UN Security Council sanctions, amid a public call by Ukraine's foreign minister for the Asian financial hub to clamp down on Russian efforts to use it to circumvent trade sanctions.

"The HKSAR government implements and strictly enforces United Nations Security Council's sanctions. Any action taken by the HKSAR government will be in strict accordance with the laws of Hong Kong," according to a statement provided to the South China Morning Post by a spokesperson from the chief executive's office.

"In the meeting, Mr. Lee introduced the present economic situation of Hong Kong and its business opportunities and market potential. He also explained the importance and respect for the rule of law in Hong Kong," the spokesman added, referring to Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee's meeting with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on Thursday.

Following the meeting, the Ukrainian foreign ministry had issued a statement saying Kuleba "called on the Hong Kong administration to take measures to prevent Russia and Russian companies from using Hong Kong to circumvent the restrictive measures imposed for Russia's aggression against Ukraine."

"The Minister stressed that Russia's machinations should not spoil Hong Kong's reputation as a highly developed liberal economy based on unwavering respect for the rule of law," it added.

On Thursday, The New York Times also released an investigative report that identified a cluster of Russian-controlled shell companies in Hong Kong that have facilitated the trade of millions of American computer chips and sensors to sanctioned Russian military technology companies.

On Monday, the US-based Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation released a report on Hong Kong's "leading role" in evading sanctions and facilitating the flow of money, oil, and restricted technology to Russia, Iran and North Korea.

Kuleba's visit to Hong Kong followed his meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi and other Chinese officials on Wednesday.

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Pentagon Admitted to Spreading Propaganda Against Chinese COVID-19 Vaccine – Reports

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) – The US Department of Defense quietly admitted it had been running a smear campaign against China's COVID-19 vaccine in the Philippines during peak months of the pandemic, Reuters reported on Friday citing a document from June 25.

According to the report, the Pentagon sent a formal letter to the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs and Department of National Defense in June acknowledging that it had deliberately discredited China's Sinovac vaccine to combat COVID-19.

"It is true that the (Department of Defense) did message Philippines audiences questioning the safety and efficacy of Sinovac," the report quoted the document as saying.

In the letter, the Pentagon also admitted that it had "made some missteps" in its COVID-related messaging and concluded that its anti-vax campaign was "misaligned with our priorities," the report said.

The document also assured the Philippines that the US military "has vastly improved oversight and accountability of information operations" since 2022 and "ceased COVID-related messaging

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related to COVID-19 origins and COVID-19 vaccines in August 2021," according to the report.
Reuters reported in June that in order to counter China's growing influence in the Philippines, the Pentagon's secret social media campaign aimed to discredit the safety and efficacy of the Sinovac vaccine developed by China, as well as other aid, such as face masks, supplied by China.
Most of the posts, made by at least 300 Twitter accounts, appeared in the summer of 2020 and centered on the slogan #Chinanagvirus, which means "China is the virus" in Tagalog. The campaign began in spring 2020 and expanded beyond Southeast Asia and ended in mid-2021.

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US, Brazil Launch Joint Climate Initiative to Address Environmental Issues- Yellen

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik)- The United States and Brazil have launched a new climate initiative - the Brazil Fazenda-U.S. Treasury Climate Partnership - aimed at dealing with the outstanding environmental matters and boosting the region's green economy, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Friday.
"Minister Haddad, it was a pleasure meeting with you earlier this week, and I am very glad that we are jointly announcing the launch of the Brazil Fazenda-U.S. Treasury Climate Partnership today," Yellen said. "With this partnership, we now plan to work together bilaterally and multilaterally to address today's most pressing environmental challenges and strengthen the region's green economy."
Yellen stated that the partnership's efforts will concentrate on four key areas.
"First, we intend to work to bolster our clean energy supply chains, including by developing policy tools that crowd in private sector investment," she said. "Second, we intend to support efforts to improve the integrity and effectiveness of voluntary carbon markets, including through holding technical exchanges."
Moreover, the two countries plan to mobilize finance and develop innovative solutions to save and restore nature and biodiversity.
"And fourth, we are committed to joint work to facilitate countries' ease of access to multilateral climate fund resources by working to simplify and harmonize process, increase ambition, and mobilize private finance," she added.
Yellen is currently in Rio de Janeiro where she is attending a G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting.

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Oil Prices Heads for Worst Week in 2 Months as Demand Worries Persist

NEW YORK, July 26 (Sputnik) - Crude prices were headed for a third straight week of declines and the worst since May on persistent worries about demand in China, the world's biggest importer of oil and biggest consumer after the United States.

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With four hours to the week's settlement, both the US and UK crude benchmarks were down about 3% in the five days to Friday.

In the latest session, US West Texas Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was at $76.41 a barrel per 10:33 AM US Eastern Time (2:33 PM London), down $1.87, 2.4%. For the week, WTI was off by 4.7%.

That was WTI's biggest weekly drop since the 6.9% decline in the week to May 3 and came after prior back-to-back weekly declines of 2.5% and 1.1%.

UK-origin Brent crude was at $80.50 per barrel, also down $1.87 on the day, or 2.3%.

While Brent's weekly decline of 2.6% did not set a major milestone like WTI, it, nevertheless, also marked a third straight drop after prior weekly losses of 2.8% and 1.7%.

July was also shaping into the poorest month in three for bulls in oil, with WTI down 5.4% and Brent off 6% for the month after May's drop of 6% and 7%, respectively.

Those losses have weighed sharply on the 2024 oil rally, leaving the US crude benchmark up just 6.6% on the year, while the UK gauge shows an annual gain of 4.5%.

The latest declines in WTI and Brent that wiped out a brief two-day rebound this week came after data showing that China's total fuel oil imports dropped 11% in the first half of 2024.

"China's apparent oil demand fell by 8.1% in June to 13.66 million barrels per day, raising concerns about consumption," energy market analyst Arslan Ali wrote on the FX Empire portal.

The woeful Chinese oil demand outlook added to concerns about the prospects of a ceasefire in the Hamas-Israel war for Gaza that could cut into the geopolitical risk premium for crude prices.

Crude prices hit six-week lows on Tuesday partly on concerns of a potential Israel-Hamas ceasefire. Prior to that, the Gaza war zone and its proximity to some of the world's biggest oil producers - including Saudi Arabia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates - had been a boon to the 2024 oil rally, especially after some disruption to crude shipments.

Efforts by Egypt and Qatar to broker a ceasefire in Gaza have, however, escalated over the past month, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu telling families of hostages held by Hamas this week that a deal to secure their release could be near. Netanyahu delivered a speech to the US Congress on Wednesday and met US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris at the White House.

Consumption numbers for US crude, gasoline and distillates have all been off the charts lately, negating some of the bearish sentiment in oil.

The US Energy Information Administration (EIA), in its Weekly Petroleum Status Report on Wednesday, noted a crude inventory decline of 3.741 million barrels for the week ended July 19, adding to the prior week's tumble of 4.87 million. US crude inventories have fallen almost 25 million barrels in all over the past four weeks.

For gasoline, the EIA cited a decline of 5.572 million barrels in the latest week versus a build of 3.328 million barrels the prior week. Analysts had a forecast build of 1.4 million barrels instead. Gasoline is the primary motor fuel in the United States and makes up the largest component of the country's energy mix.

In distillates, the EIA reported a drop of 2.753 million barrels, against the gain of 1.53 million forecasts by analysts after the prior week's build of 3.454 million. Distillates are primarily processed into the diesel required by trucks, buses, and ships, and also go into making airplane

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fuel.

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Biden Issues Statement Honoring Late US Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Friday released a statement honoring the late US Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk, praising him for his work to bring peace to the region.

"As a member of President Clinton's National Security Council and two-time US Ambassador to Israel, Martin played an essential role in the Oslo Accords and the follow-on negotiations - the closest that Israelis and Palestinians have ever come to making peace," the statement said.

Indyk was raised in Australia and moved to Israel in 1973. Indyk decided to devote his career to building peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, inspired by the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, the statement said.

Indyk's commitment to peace was rooted in witnessing the conflict and realizing that Israel's existence is "fragile" and that peace is the only route to lasting security, the statement said.

Biden worked with Indyk during the Obama administration, in which Indyk served as Special Envoy for Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations, the statement said.

"[Indyk's] legacy lives on in the many officials across my Administration who were mentored by Martin and learned firsthand from his vast knowledge, integrity, and heart," the statement added.

Indyk's optimism and commitment to peace are as important now as they have ever been, according to the statement.

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Manhattan District Attorney Office Says Returned Art Stolen by Nazis to Collector's Family

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - The Manhattan District Attorney's Office said on Friday that it returned a drawing stolen by the Nazi German authorities to the family of the art collector to whom it originally belonged.

"Manhattan District Attorney Alvin L. Bragg, Jr., and Special Agent in Charge Ivan J. Arvelo of Homeland Security Investigations, New York, today announced the return of an eleventh artwork to the family of Fritz Grunbaum, an Austrian-Jewish cabaret performer whose art collection was stolen by the Nazi regime," the office said in a statement.

The drawing, "Seated Nude Woman, front view," was made by Austrian artist Egon Schiele. The office's Antiquities Trafficking Unit seized the drawing in 2024, the statement said.

The drawing is being returned from the estate of Gustav Papanek, an Austrian Jew who fled the Nazis in 1938 and was unaware the artwork was stolen from Grunbaum, the statement said.

Grunbaum's art collection included hundreds of pieces, including more than 80 works by

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Schiele, the statement said.

However, the Nazis imprisoned Grunbaum in Dachau and compelled his wife to turn over the collection to Nazi officials, the statement said. Both Grunbaum and his wife died in concentration camps, the statement added.

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New York Times Analysis Shows Bullet Hit Trump Amid Speculation It Was Shrapnel

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) - A New York Times analysis of the assassination attempt on former President Donald Trump in Pennsylvania revealed that a bullet rather than shrapnel hit his ear.

On Wednesday, FBI Director Christopher Wray said in a congressional testimony there is a question whether a bullet or a piece of shrapnel hit his Trump's ear.

Amid the lack of an official report as to what kind of object hit Trump's ear, the newspaper conducted an analysis of bullet trajectories, video and audio footage as well as photographs of the event that strongly indicated it was one of the eight bullets fired by the gunman at Trump.

The main evidence used in the analysis was a live video feed of Trump's reaction to the first three shots. The sound of bullets is heard as they pass the microphone with about a second between the first and second one, during which time between the two bullets Trump tried to reach his ear.

And according to a photo by Doug Mills, a New York Times photographer, Trump's fingered got blooded once he touched the ear.

The analysis shows that the first bullet that hit Trump then passed him and stroke the bleachers off to his left.

David Dutch, a participant i the rally, appears to have been injured by the second bullet that fired along a similar trajectory.

The newspaper also created a 3D model of the rally grounds that shows the positions of the shooter and of Trump, as well as the spot where the first bullet hit the bleachers.

According to the model and the trajectory analysis, the first bullet traveled in a straight line from the gunman to the bleachers, hitting Trump on its path. Thus, the analysis suggests that the bullet was not deflected by first hitting an object that would have then affected Trump with debris.

The incident took place on July 13 at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, during which Trump was briefly hospitalized having sustained a gunshot wound to his right ear. The gunman, Thomas Crooks, killed a member of the audience and injured two others before the US Secret Service sniper team eliminated him.

The incident prompted US Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle to resign.

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Pentagon Unable to Accurately Value Ukraine Military Aid, Overvaluation at $8.2Bln – GAO

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Sputnik) – The US Department of Defense (DoD) is unable to accurately estimate the value of military aid provided to Ukraine which has already led to a host of accounting errors resulting in more than $8.2 billion overvaluation of defense articles, according to a new report published by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) this week.

"GAO found that DOD's efforts to properly value defense articles for drawdown [for Ukraine] are hampered because the Foreign Assistance Act does not clearly define certain terms and DOD lacks PDA-specific valuation guidance," the report said. "DOD cannot have assurance that the articles will be valued accurately, which may result in a miscalculation of the remaining presidential determination authorization."

Just like the DoD's Inspector General in June, GAO found an array of new misvaluation errors totaling more than $2 billion and bringing the total amount of wrongly accounted-for articles for Ukraine to over $8.2 billion.

This in turn means that the newly found $2 billion could potentially be spent on purchasing military equipment and weapons for Ukraine.

Sputnik asked the DoD for clarification and whether the funds will be used to support the Ukrainian military efforts against Russia, but has not yet received any response.

In August 2023, the Pentagon announced that it managed to uncover an additional $6.2 in the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) for Ukraine due to an accounting error that overvalued the weapons and equipment from the previous PDAs.

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