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FOR THE LOVE OF GUNS

After a school shooting that killed 19 children and 2 teachers in their community, Uvalde residents — many of whom have used guns from a young age — are re-thinking their relationship with guns. TEXAS, 3.



Southwest Journalist

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN ■ DOW JONES NEWS FUND CENTER FOR EDITING EXCELLENCE ■ SWJOURNALIST.COM ■ THURSDAY, JUNE 2, 2022



\$7.68 > \$7.50

U.S. gas prices top federal minimum wage

VICTOR SWEZEY
Southwest Journalist

With the dramatic rise in gas prices across the country showing no signs of abating, a handful of the most expensive stations have crossed a crucial milestone: the federal minimum wage.

The federal minimum wage is \$7.25 for “covered nonexempt employees,” according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

According to CBS News, 15 gas stations in California had gas prices higher than the federal minimum wage Wednesday. Furnace Creek Fuel in Death Valley National Park, topped the list with a price of \$8.55 per gallon. The average price of gas nationally was \$4.63 per gallon, according to AAA.

Texas shares the federal government’s minimum wage, meaning motorists in California are paying

more for a gallon of gas than many Texans make for an hour of work. California’s minimum wage currently sits at \$14 an hour — almost two times more than what people are paying at the pump.

Texas’ gas prices sit below the national average at \$4.29 per gallon.

“The gas prices are really hurting my pocket right now,” Houston driver Dominic Ballair told KHOU 11 News. “I really have to use a credit card to pay for gas.”

America faces its highest inflation rate in 40 years, and the global oil market is in turmoil in the wake of Russia’s February invasion of Ukraine. The U.S. responded by banning all imports of Russian oil in March, further diminishing supply in a sector already producing below capacity due to pandemic-related supply chain and staffing issues.

Gas is not the only essential consumer good that has become more expensive in recent months, leading national consumer confidence to drop to its lowest levels since the end of the Great Recession in 2009, according to Gallup. The study found that 46% of Americans believe the economy is “poor,” and 77% of Americans believe it is “getting worse.”

President Joe Biden recently announced that tackling inflation is his top priority, as consumer prices rose by over 8.3% in the last year, The Associated Press reported.

Oil industry experts believe that the gas prices are not likely to decline significantly soon.

“We could have \$6 a gallon gasoline prices before this summer’s over, I’m afraid,” said independent energy analyst David Blackmon, FOX 4 News in Dallas-Fort Worth reported.



FRANCISCO SECO/AP PHOTO

A man walks next to heavily damaged buildings and destroyed cars following Russian attacks in Bakhmut, Donetsk region, eastern Ukraine, on May 24. The region, along with neighboring Luhansk, is part of the Donbas, where Russian forces have focused their offensive.

Pentagon: US will share missiles to aid Ukraine

LOLITA C. BALDOR AND BEN FOX
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. will send the Ukrainian military four sophisticated, medium-range rocket systems and ammunition to help try to stall Russian progress in the Donbas region of its country, but it will take at least three weeks to get the precision weapons and trained troops onto the battlefield, the Pentagon said Wednesday.

Colin Kahl, the defense undersecretary for policy, said the U.S. has received assurances at the highest government levels that Ukraine will use the rockets to defend its nation and not launch them into Russia. The agreement underscores U.S. concerns about provoking a wider war with Russia while still providing Ukraine the weapons it has desperately requested in recent weeks.

The rocket systems are part of a new \$700 million tranche of security assistance for Ukraine from the



TONY OVERMAN/THE OLYMPIAN VIA AP

A launch truck fires the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System produced by Lockheed Martin during combat training in the high desert of the Yakima Training Center, Washington.

U.S. that also includes helicopters, Javelin anti-tank weapon systems, radars, tactical vehicles, spare parts and more.

“It is a grinding fight,” he said during a Pentagon briefing. “We believe that these additional capabilities will arrive in a timeframe that’s relevant and allow the Ukrainians to very precisely target the types of things they need for the current fight.”

The U.S. decision to provide the advanced rocket systems tries to strike a balance between helping Ukraine battle ferocious Russian artillery barrages and not providing arms that could allow Ukraine to hit targets deep inside Russia and trigger an escalation in the war.

In a guest essay published Tuesday evening by The New York Times, President Joe Biden confirmed that he would “provide the Ukrainians with more advanced rocket systems and munitions that will enable them to more precisely strike key targets on the battlefield in Ukraine.”

■ UKRAINE, Page 2



IAN MAULE/TULSA WORLD VIA AP

Two people hug outside at Memorial High School where people were evacuated from the scene of a shooting at the Natalie Medical Building Wednesday.

Four killed in Tulsa shooting

TULSA, Okla. — Four people were killed Wednesday in a shooting at a Tulsa medical building on a hospital campus, a police captain said.

Tulsa Police Department Deputy Chief Eric Dalglish confirmed the shooter was also dead, apparently from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

The unidentified gunman carried a handgun and a rifle during the attack, Dalglish said.

“Officers are currently going through every room in the building, checking for additional threats,” police said in a Facebook post just before 6 p.m.

Police responded to the call three minutes after dispatchers received the report and made contact with the gun-

man one minute later, Dalglish said.

Police Capt. Richard Meulenbergh also said multiple people were wounded and that the medical complex was a “catastrophic scene.”

Police and hospital officials said they were not ready to identify the dead.

St. Francis Health System locked down its campus Wednesday afternoon because of the situation at the Natalie Medical Building, which houses an outpatient surgery center and a breast health center.

Tulsa resident Nicholas O’Brien, whose mother was in a nearby building when the shooting occurred, told reporters that he rushed to the scene.

“I was pretty anxious. So once I

got here and then I heard that she (his mother) was OK, the shooter had been shot and was down, I felt a lot better. It still is horrible what happened,” O’Brien said.

The shooting Wednesday comes eight days after an 18-year-old gunman armed with an AR-style semi-automatic rifle walked into Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, and killed 19 children and two teachers before being fatally shot himself; and more than two weeks after a shooting at a Buffalo supermarket in which a white man is accused of killing 10 Black people in a racist attack.

A reunification center for families was set up at a nearby high school.



CRAIG HUDSON/AP PHOTO

Actor Johnny Depp waves to supporters as he departs the Fairfax County Courthouse May 27 in Fairfax, Va. The jury in Depp's high-profile libel lawsuit against ex-wife Amber Heard found that both were defamed but awarded Depp more money.

Jury: Heard defamed Depp

DENISE LAVOIE
Associated Press

FAIRFAX, Va. — A jury on Wednesday awarded Johnny Depp \$10.35 million in his libel lawsuit against ex-wife Amber Heard, vindicating his stance that Heard fabricated claims she was abused by Depp before and during their brief marriage.

The jury also found in favor of Heard, who said she was defamed by Depp's lawyer when he called her abuse allegations a hoax. The jury awarded her \$2 million in damages.

Heard, who was stoic in the courtroom as the verdict was read, said she was heartbroken.

"I'm even more disappointed with what this verdict means for other women. It's a setback. It sets back the clock to a time when a woman who spoke up and spoke out could be publicly humiliated. It sets back the idea that violence against women is to be taken seriously," she said in a statement posted on her Twitter account.

Depp, who was not inside the courtroom Wednesday, sued Heard for libel in Fairfax County Circuit Court over a December 2018 op-ed she wrote in *The Washington Post* describing herself as "a public figure represent-

ing domestic abuse." His lawyers said he was defamed by the article even though it never mentioned his name.

While the case was ostensibly about libel, most of the testimony focused on Heard's claims of physical and sexual abuse. Heard enumerated more than a dozen alleged assaults.

Depp said that he never hit Heard and that she was the abuser, though Heard's attorneys highlighted years-old text messages Depp sent, apologizing to Heard for his behavior, as well as profane texts he sent to a friend in which Depp said he wanted to kill Heard.

In the case, Depp had to prove not only that he never assaulted Heard, but that Heard's article defamed him. He also had to prove that Heard wrote the article with actual malice. And to claim damages, he had to prove that her article caused the damage to his reputation as opposed to any number of articles before and after Heard's piece that detailed the allegations against him.

Depp, in his final testimony to the jury, said the trial gave him a chance to clear his name.

"No matter what happens, I did get here and I did tell the truth and I have spoken up

for what I've been carrying on my back, reluctantly, for six years," Depp said.

Heard, on the other hand, said the trial has been an ordeal inflicted by an orchestrated smear campaign led by Depp.

"Johnny promised me — promised me — that he'd ruin my life, that he'd ruin my career. He'd take my life from me," Heard said in her final testimony.

Both performers emerge from the trial with reputations in tatters and unclear prospects for their careers.

Depp, a three-time best actor Oscar nominee, had until recent years been a bankable star. His turn as Capt. Jack Sparrow in the "Pirates of the Caribbean" film helped turn it into a global franchise, but he's lost that role.

Heard's acting career has been more modest, and her only two upcoming roles are in a small film and the upcoming "Aquaman" sequel due to come out next year.

Depp's lawyers fought to keep the case in Virginia, in part because state law provided some legal advantages compared with California, where the two reside. A judge ruled that Virginia was an acceptable forum for the case because *The Washington Post's* printing presses and online servers are in the county.

U.S. sends medium-range rockets to aid Ukraine

■ Continued from Page 1

Biden had said Monday that the U.S. would not send Ukraine "rocket systems that can strike into Russia." Any weapons system can shoot into Russia if it's close enough to the border. The aid package unveiled Wednesday would send what the U.S. considers medium-range rockets — they generally can travel about 45 miles, officials said.

"The Ukrainians have given us assurances that they will not use these systems against targets on Russian territory," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday. "There is a strong trust bond between Ukraine and the United States."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Wednesday that the U.S. is "deliberately and diligently pouring fuel on the fire." He added that the Kremlin doesn't trust Kyiv's assurances that the multiple rocket launch systems supplied by the U.S. will not be used to attack Russia.

The expectation is that Ukraine could use the rockets in the eastern Donbas region, where they could both intercept Russian artillery and take out Russian positions in towns where fighting is intense, such as Sievierodonetsk.

Sievierodonetsk is important to Russian efforts to capture the Donbas before more Western arms arrive to bolster Ukraine's defense. The city is in an area that is the last pocket under Ukrainian government control in the Luhansk region of the Donbas.

Biden added in his *New York Times* essay: "We are not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders. We do not want to prolong the war just to inflict pain on Russia."

It's the 11th package approved so far and will be the first to tap the \$40 billion in security and economic assistance recently passed by Congress.

The rocket systems would be part of Pentagon drawdown authority, meaning the arms transfer would involve taking weapons out of existing U.S. inventory and getting them into Ukraine quickly. Ukrainian

troops would also need training on the new systems, which could take at least a week or two.

Officials said the plan is to send Ukraine the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, or HIMARS, which is mounted on a truck and can carry a container with six rockets.

The system can launch a medium-range rocket, which is the current plan, but is also capable of firing a longer-range missile, the Army Tactical Missile System, which has a range of about 190 miles and is not part of the plan.

Since the war began in February, the U.S. and its allies have tried to walk a narrow line: send Ukraine weapons needed to fight off Russia, but stop short of providing aid that will inflame Russian President Vladimir Putin and trigger a broader conflict that could spill over into other parts of Europe.

Over time, however, the U.S. and allies have amped up the weaponry going into Ukraine. To that end, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been pleading with the West to send multiple launch rocket systems to Ukraine as soon as possible to help stop Russia's destruction of towns in the Donbas.

The rockets have a longer range than the howitzer artillery systems that the U.S. has provided Ukraine. They would allow Ukrainian forces to strike Russian troops from a distance outside the range of Russia's artillery systems.

"We are fighting for Ukraine to be provided with all the weapons needed to change the nature of the fighting and start moving faster and more confidently toward the expulsion of the occupiers," Zelenskyy said in a recent address.

Ukraine needs multiple launch rocket systems, said Philip Breedlove, a retired U.S. Air Force general who was NATO's top commander from 2013 to 2016.

"These are very important capabilities ... and they not only need them, but they have been very vociferous in explaining they want them," said Breedlove. "We need to get serious about supplying this army so that it can do what the world is asking it to do."

Russia has been making incremental progress in the Donbas, as it tries to take the remaining sections of the region not already controlled by Russian-backed separatists.



EVAN VUCCI/AP PHOTO

President Joe Biden speaks in the Oval Office of the White House on Tuesday. The Biden administration is expected to announce it will send Ukraine a small number of high-tech, medium-range rocket systems, a critical weapon that Ukrainian leaders have been begging for as they struggle to stall Russian progress in the Donbas.



MATIAS DELACROIX/AP PHOTO

A protester holds a rainbow flag as she drinks water during a rally against homophobia, transphobia and biphobia in Caracas, Venezuela, May 28.

Pride Month returns; community honors history

OWEN HENDERSON
Southwest Journalist

AUSTIN — June is Pride Month, a month-long celebration of the LGBTQ community. As the month's celebrations get underway, here's a rundown of what you need to know:

Why June? Pride Month is June to honor the Stonewall uprising and to celebrate the LGBTQ community, its history and the effect its members have had on the world.

What happened at the Stonewall uprising? On June 28, 1969, police raided the Stonewall Inn, a Manhattan gay bar, which sparked resistance from patrons. Protests ensued outside the bar and around the city over the next week. Many regard these uprisings as a turning point in the fight for LGBTQ civil rights.

Who can celebrate? Anyone is welcome to celebrate Pride, whether or not they are a member of the LGBTQ community.

Why the rainbow flag? The original rainbow flag was commissioned from artist Gilbert Baker by one of the first openly gay elected officials, San Francisco city supervisor Harvey Milk, for Pride celebrations in 1978. The stripes nod to the stripes of the American flag, while the colors represent the diversity of the community and its values. In recent years, the pride flag has been amended to be more inclusive, with the addition of pink, blue and white stripes to honor transgender people and black and brown stripes to honor people of color.

What will be happening in Texas this year? After two years without a Pride celebration because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Austin Pride parade will return Aug. 20.

Dallas Pride takes place on June 4 at the city's Fair Park, with a parade on June 5.

San Antonio will host a Pride Week starting June 17 with a kickoff party at the San Antonio Zoo, including a drag show, interfaith service and golf tournament. Festivities will finish with a parade on June 25.

Houston's celebrations will last throughout the month of June and include a movie showcase, a fashion show, and a 5K and 10K walk/run. The month will conclude with a Pride festival and after-party on June 25.



AP PHOTO/EVAN VUCCI

Adm. Linda Fagan attends a change-of-command ceremony at U.S. Coast Guard headquarters Wednesday.

Biden: 'About time' for 1st female armed services chief

WILL WEISSERT
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden hailed Adm. Linda Fagan as new commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard and the armed forces' first female service chief, declaring during a change-of-command ceremony on Wednesday, "It's about time."

"The trailblazing career of Adm. Fagan shows young people entering the services, we mean what we say: 'There are no doors — no doors — closed to women,'" Biden told around 2,000 cheering guests at Coast Guard headquarters.

Fagan relieved Adm. Karl L. Schultz, becoming the first woman in U.S. history to lead a branch of the armed forces.

"This is what an admiral and service chief in the United States armed forces looks like," the president said.

He thanked Fagan for all the work she did throughout her career to "open the doors of opportunity just a little bit wider."

"Now we need to keep working to make sure Adm. Fagan may be the first but not the only," Biden said. Biden didn't mention Russia's war with Ukraine in his address but said "the choices the world makes today" will "shape the direction of the world throughout the 21st century."

The Biden administration will call on the Coast Guard more frequently to combat the threats of climate change, he said. Wednesday marked the first day of a hurricane season that is anticipated to be "the seventh straight year of above-average hurricane activity in the Atlantic."

Biden also called the Coast Guard an "essential element" of his administration's Indo-Pacific strategy and said he plans to guard against overfishing by Chinese interests.



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2022 ATTENDEES

MAYA CHADDA
Belmont University
WGBH (Boston)

SHIFRA DAYAK
University of Maryland
Stars & Stripes

LAUREN GUZY
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Fredericksburg Standard

KERI HEATH
Wittenberg, BA; Dublin, MA
Galveston Daily News

OWEN HENDERSON
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
San Francisco Chronicle

JESS HUFF
Lufkin Daily News

ANNA JACKSON
Belmont University
Houston Chronicle

ANASTASIA JOHNSON
Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism
Los Angeles Times

DANIA KALAJI
University of Georgia
Bay City News Foundation

GAYLA MURPHY
The Brazosport Facts

REEGAN SAUNDERS
Kent State University
San Francisco Chronicle

CLAIRE SCHNATTERBECK
Columbia University
patch.com

BRADY STONE
Texas A&M University
Kansas City Star

VICTOR SWEZEY
Columbia University
Tampa Bay Times

CJ VETTER
Texas State (2022)
Hays Free Press

ISAIAH WASHINGTON
American University
WGAL (Lancaster, PA)

PAYTON WILLIAMS
Cameron University (2022)
The Lawton Constitution

CATHERINE WILSON
University of Maryland College Park (2022)
New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung

BRIEFS

Cuellar, Cisneros runoff too close to call

The Texas primary runoff between Democratic U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar and his progressive challenger, Jessica Cisneros, was too close to call Wednesday, more than a week after the election.

After a final update in Bexar County, Cuellar leads Cisneros by 136 votes, or 0.3%, out of 45,282 ballots counted as of Wednesday afternoon.

The race doesn't qualify for an automatic recount, but Cisneros can request and pay for one. Counties have until Friday to certify their results from the May 24 runoff. The state has until June 11 to complete its canvass.

Cisneros also ran against Cuellar in 2020, losing by 4%.

Cuellar, one of the last anti-abortion Democrats in Congress, was endorsed by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and others. Cisneros had the support of Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders and New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

The winner of Texas' race will face Cassy Garcia, who won the Republican runoff for the seat.

Mourners bury Uvalde teacher and her husband

UVALDE — Mourners gathered Wednesday at Sacred Heart Catholic Church to say goodbye to Robb Elementary School teacher Irma Garcia, who died in the shooting at the Uvalde grade school and her husband, Joe, who died two days later from a heart attack.

Nineteen children and two teachers — Garcia and her co-teacher, Eva Mireles, 44 — were killed May 24 when a teenage gunman burst into their classroom.

Irma, 48, was finishing up her 23rd year as a teacher at Robb Elementary. In a letter posted on the school's website at the beginning of the school year, Garcia told her students that she and Joe had four children.

Joe, 50, collapsed and died after dropping off flowers at his wife's memorial. The couple would have been married 25 years on June 28.

DPS: School door shut, didn't lock before attack

An exterior door at Robb Elementary School did not lock when it was closed by a teacher shortly before a gunman used it to get inside, leaving investigators searching to determine why, state police said.

State police initially said a teacher had propped the door open shortly before Salvador Ramos, 18, entered the school.

They have now determined that the teacher, who has not been identified, propped the door open with a rock, but then removed the rock and closed the door when she realized there was a shooter on campus, said Travis Considine, chief communications officer for the Texas Department of Public Safety. The door was designed to lock when shut but did not lock, Considine said.

Investigators confirmed the detail through additional video footage.

Indicted protest officers sue Austin for \$1M

Austin police officers facing indictments over their use of force during racial justice protests two years ago are suing the city, saying they didn't receive training on how to use the "less than lethal" rounds employed during the demonstrations. They also contend that city officials knew the rounds were defective and "did nothing to remove them from service."

When protesters flooded the streets of Austin in May 2020 after the murder of George Floyd, Austin police officers used 12-gauge shotguns to fire beanbag rounds — small cloth baggies filled with lead — at demonstrators. Several people were seriously wounded and sued the city, resulting in over \$13 million in settlements.

The five officers who filed the lawsuit Wednesday were Joshua Jackson, Rolan Rast, Todd Gilbertson, Derrick Lehman and Alexander Lomovtseva.

The officers are seeking over \$1 million in compensation for the physical injuries, post-traumatic stress and lost wages that resulted from their involvement in the protests and what they are calling negligent leadership.

The lawsuit also names activist groups as defendants, including Black Lives Matter and the Austin Justice Coalition, for encouraging "rioting, looting and violence."

Longhorns, Aggies to host NCAA tourney games

OMAHA, Neb. — Texas and Texas A&M will be sites for NCAA baseball tournament play starting later this week.

Texas, with a 42-18 record, is hosting for the 29th time and Texas A&M (37-18) is hosting for the 12th time while Georgia Southern and Maryland are first-time hosts among the crop of 16 Division I sites.

Each regional will be made up of four teams playing in a double-elimination format. All are scheduled from Friday through Monday. Regional winners advance to best-of-three super regionals, and those eight winners go on to the College World Series in Omaha beginning June 17.

Tennessee (53-7) is expected to be the No. 1 overall seed after sweeping the SEC regular-season and tournament championships.

Other SEC hosts are Auburn (37-19), Florida (39-22) and Texas A&M (37-18).

ASSOCIATED PRESS
AND TEXAS TRIBUNE



KAYLEE GREENLEE BEAL/THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Dolores Contreras, 75, lives next door to her childhood home and a few houses down from Robb Elementary School, where she, her nine siblings, children and grandchildren all attended classes in Uvalde.



KAYLEE GREENLEE BEAL/THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Rene Nolasco explained the appeal of owning an assault rifle by equating it to owning a sports car: "People don't need sports cars to get around, but they like the way it feels to drive them."



KAYLEE GREENLEE BEAL/THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Ricky Freitag sits in his father-in-law's office in Uvalde. He said of hunting for sport in the area: "That's always been the culture here."

For the love of guns

Uvalde questions relationship with weapons

BRIAN LOPEZ
The Texas Tribune

UVALDE — For most of his life, Ricky Freitag has been a hunter. From shooting his first hog when he was 10 to teaching his own 10-year-old how to handle a firearm, it's a tradition etched into his family.

His father and grandfather, who was a state game warden, introduced him to the sport. His father-in-law is an avid hunter, and Freitag often tags along with him.

In this South Texas town, many young boys grow up dreaming of that perfect shot.

"That's always been the culture here," Freitag, 31, said. "When I shot my first animal, it was just a surreal experience."

Longtime Uvalde residents say the city is a hunting mecca and the love for guns goes along with it.

For 40 years, the town has held its annual Hunters Roundup event, which brings thousands of hunters together to talk game, eat food and raffle guns.

Uvalde is an attractive location for hunters. Ranches, lush with wildlife like white-tailed deer, surround the city.

Freitag hunts on a ranch about 8 miles out.

But after a shooter used an AR-15-style rifle to kill 21 people at Uvalde's Robb Elementary School last week, some residents are rethinking what gun ownership means.

It remains to be seen how lawmakers will react.

For now, Republican state leaders are signaling they will reject stricter gun control measures once again and instead try to steer the conversation toward mental health resources and arming teachers.

Texas Democrats, on the other hand, have already called for a special session to pass sweeping gun reform, which would include raising the minimum age to buy a gun from 18 to 21; requiring universal background checks for all firearm sales; implementing "red flag" laws to allow the temporary removal of firearms from those who pose imminent danger; requiring a waiting period after purchasing a gun; and regulating civilian ownership of high-capacity magazines.

In Uvalde, where guns are often used for home protection or hunting, opinions differ on what new gun laws would look like in the aftermath of the shooting.

Dolores Contreras, 75, who lives a few houses down from Robb Elementary, doesn't own any guns herself but said she understands the culture and the need to own them in a town like this one.

Her nephews hunt and have taken part in that sport since they were little.

Before the shooting, most of her safety concerns had little to do with gun violence and more with drug and human smuggling, she said.

But even then, there is no need for military-style assault rifles to be sold in Uvalde, she said.

"There's no war here," Contreras said. "Why even sell those guns? I don't think that was right for [the gun store] to be selling those big, big guns."

Hunting and gun ownership holds a sentimental value in the Freitag family.

From an early age Freitag was taught that guns aren't a toy — they're something you have to respect.

Freitag has obtained all the correct licenses and

taken shooting classes.

"Me growing up and actually having the opportunity to [hunt] — that's something that I can maybe pass on to my kids," he said.

Freitag owns about 50 guns, ranging from hunting rifles to AR-15s, the same military-style weapon the gunman used in last week's shooting.

He said it's easier to hunt wild pigs with that weapon.

Other than using guns for sport, Freitag usually carries a handgun as he goes about his day. His job in Uvalde is to tow cars and sometimes people get angry when he takes someone's vehicle.

While he's out late on the job, his wife also keeps a gun handy.

Alex Covarrubias, a resident of Uvalde for more than 25 years, also has his own gun at home for protection.

But before last week's shooting, he never had really thought about the kinds of weapons that are available to people once they turn 18.

Now he's also calling for a change in the age limit to buy high-powered rifles that can cause so much harm in a matter of seconds.

Authorities say the gunman in last week's shooting picked up a rifle at a nearby gun store after his 18th birthday.

That should've been a warning sign, Covarrubias said.

"Taking out a rifle on the first buy — it should have been a red flag right there," he said. "It's too big of a gun for here."



DARIO LOPEZ-MILLS/AP PHOTO

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott speaks May 27 about the elementary school shooting in Uvalde, Texas. Abbott called for recommendations in response to the shooting.

Abbott seeks input on school violence

BY PATRICK SVITEK
The Texas Tribune

Gov. Greg Abbott on Wednesday called on the Texas Legislature to form special committees to make legislative recommendations in response to the Uvalde school shooting.

In a letter to House Speaker Dade Phelan and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, the Senate's presiding officer, Abbott told his fellow Republicans the state "must reassess the twin issues of school safety and mass violence." He said the committee process should start immediately and outlined five topics he would like the committees to take up.

Notably, the topics include firearm safety. Last week, Abbott essentially ruled out gun restrictions as a response to the massacre, in which a gunman killed 19 students and two adults last week at Robb Elementary School. He focused his attention on mental health care and school security in his public comments.

The other topics Abbott charged leadership with making recommendations on were school safety, mental health, social media and police training.

Phelan responded to Abbott's call by saying in a statement that "conversations about the issues outlined by Gov. Abbott are already underway in the Texas House and will continue to be a top priority in the months leading up to the next school year and the legislative session."

He added that the House "will get to work immediately."

A spokesperson for Patrick did not immediately respond to comment.

The committees are different from a special legislative session, which Democrats — and at least a couple

Republicans — have asked for since the shooting. Abbott has not ruled that out.

Abbott's critics quickly argued that the time for committees has passed. They pointed out that the Legislature also formed special committees after mass shootings in 2019, and those discussions did not prevent the Uvalde school shooting from happening.

Abbott's Democratic challenger for reelection, Beto O'Rourke, panned Abbott's push for legislative committees.

"Anyone can call for a committee. Only a governor can call a special session," O'Rourke tweeted. "Do your job."

The 2019 committees on gun violence followed the anti-Hispanic massacre at a Walmart in El Paso. A Democratic state senator from the area, César Blanco, sent Abbott a letter Wednesday saying that he appreciated the call for committees since the Uvalde shooting but noted, "We have solutions ready now."

He cited nine bills he filed in the first session after the Walmart shooting, including a proposal to extend background checks to cover private gun sales. While Patrick initially showed interest in that idea — even suggesting he would stand up to the National Rifle Association to pass it — it was a short-lived crusade and the legislation never got a Senate committee hearing.

The Texas State Teachers Association called Abbott's announcement Wednesday "very weak."

"The victims' families and all Texans deserve better than that," the association's president, Ovidia Molina, said in a statement.

Anyone can call for a committee. Only a governor can call a special session. ...
Do your job.
BETO O'ROURKE

Booming Austin fights US Census headcount

MIKE SCHNEIDER
Associated Press

Austin became the largest U.S. city to challenge its 2020 census figures when it filed an appeal with the Census Bureau last week, saying it has more than the 961,855 residents tallied during the nation's once-a-decade head count.

City officials believe around 7,000 housing units were missed, mostly in newly developed neighborhoods. In some cases, housing units were placed in the wrong location, said Lila Valencia, Austin's city demographer.

Among the 50 biggest U.S. cities, Austin's growth rate of 21.7% between 2010 and 2020 was the second-largest in the nation, trailing only Fort Worth, which grew by 24%. As of last July, Austin was the 11th most populous city in the U.S.

Austin is at the center of one of the most booming metro areas in the U.S., attracting about 150 new residents a day in the middle of the past decade. Figures released last week show that two Austin suburbs, Georgetown and Leander, were the two fastest-growing cities in the U.S. last year, expanding by more than 10% each.

Recently, the Austin metro area has been a jobs magnet.

It's home to Tesla's corporate headquarters as well as a high-tech hub for entrepreneurs attracted to its highly educated workforce and the University of Texas' flagship school.

The census figures were used to divvy up congressional seats among the states and redraw political districts.

Nothing can be done to change numbers for those purposes, but the outcome of any challenges can determine whether the cities and counties get their fair share when it comes to the distribution of \$1.5 trillion in annual federal funding.

Valencia said an inaccurate count would cause Austin to miss an unknown amount of funding for affordable housing, parks and low-income students.

It's unknown how many people live in the 7,000 housing units. However, an average of almost 2.4 people live in each household in Austin, which translates into 16,800 people.

"This affects the quality of life of residents, so it's worth it to make sure we get every single dollar that we deserve," Valencia said.

The 2020 census undercounted the overall U.S. population by only 0.24%. The count was challenged by the coronavirus pandemic, natural disasters and political interference from the Trump administration. But some minority groups were undercounted at greater rates than the previous decade. Historically, racial and ethnic minorities, renters and young children are the people who have been undercounted.

A report released several weeks ago by the Census Bureau showed that Texas was undercounted by 1.9%, which translates to about 560,000 residents. Several states that were undercounted, including Texas, spent less money on promoting census participation. Texas was among several states with undercounts that did not direct as many resources as other states did to encourage residents to fill out census forms.

Until Austin filed an appeal, Detroit had been the largest U.S. city to challenge its 2020 census numbers.

The Census Bureau told Detroit officials that they needed to provide more information before the city's appeal could move forward, a city spokesperson said in an email Wednesday.

States and municipalities have until the middle of next year to appeal their census figures. Challenges are rarely successful, but almost 30 have been launched. They have been filed primarily by small towns and counties, about half of which are in the South.

Residents of prisons, nursing homes and college dorms — places known as group quarters — were among the most difficult people to count during the 2020 census since students on campus were sent home when the pandemic began in the U.S. in March 2020, and prisons and nursing homes went into lockdowns against the spread of the coronavirus.

Because of the difficulties in counting these residents, the Census Bureau created a separate program for challenges of group quarter counts. The bureau will start accepting those appeals next week.

AUSTIN BY THE NUMBERS

21.7%
Growth between 2010 and 2020
150
Number of new residents a day for the past decade
10%
Growth of Georgetown and Leander in last year
7,000
Suspected number of housing units missed in Census count
2.4
Average number of people per household

‘NO JOKE’



Dhroov Bharatia, 13, from Plano competes during the Scripps National Spelling Bee, in Oxon Hill, Md. “The prelims is no joke. Every stage of the bee is so important,” said Dhroov. Leaner and meaner in its post-pandemic iteration, the spelling bee returned to its usual venue this week for the first time in three years, and spellers were greeted with a new preliminary-round format that gave them no time to get comfortable. Read more at www.swjournalist.com.

Biden, formula makers meet

BY ZEKE MILLER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Wednesday acknowledged the strain on families from nationwide shortages of infant formula as he met with manufacturers while his administration tries to address the situation by importing foreign supplies and using the Defense Production Act to speed domestic production.

The White House said a third round of formula shipments from overseas will begin next week, from producer Kendamil in Britain. Shipments from Bubs Australia will be delivered next week as well.

“There’s nothing more stressful than feeling you can’t get what your child needs,” Biden said, adding that as a father and a grandfather, he understands how difficult the shortages have been for parents and their children.

Biden hosted a roundtable with leaders of manufacturers ByHeart, Bubs Australia, Reckitt, Perrigo Co. and Gerber. The list is notable for the absence of Abbott Nutrition, whose Michigan plant was shut down in February over safety concerns, sparking the shortage in the United States.



Workers unload a Fedex Express cargo plane carrying 100,000 pounds of baby formula at Washington Dulles International Airport.

He was joined by Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra and Surgeon General Vivek Murthy. The meeting was a chance to provide an update on what the administration is calling “Operation Fly Formula.” The plan involves importing formula and using the Korean War-era production law that requires suppliers to prioritize their orders, which should ease production bottlenecks.

The White House also said the latest shipments would bring Kendamil formula from Heathrow Airport in London to U.S. airports over a three-week period, starting June 9. The flights will carry about 3.7 million 8-ounce bottle equivalents, shipped free of charge by United Airlines.

The first shipments will include Kendamil Classic Stage 1 and Kendamil Organic formulas, which will be

available at Target stores across the United States.

Bubs Australia will ship the equivalent of 4.6 million 8-ounce bottles of its infant formula on Defense Department-contracted commercial aircraft from its hub in Melbourne, Australia, to Pennsylvania and California on June 9 and June 11, respectively.

Biden said that without such efforts, “it would have taken three weeks to get this product to the United States,” but it arrived “in three days.”

The push on imports will help but will not immediately bring an end to supply shortages that have left people who depend on formula facing empty shelves or limits on purchases.

The Food and Drug Administration began focusing on Abbott’s plant last fall while tracking several bacterial infections in infants who had consumed formula from the facility. The four cases occurred between September and January, causing hospitalizations and two deaths.

After detecting positive samples of rare but dangerous bacteria in multiple parts of the plant, the FDA closed the facility and Abbott announced a massive recall of its formula on Feb. 17.



Lt. Cmdr. Sam Urato points to decals on the fuselage of the Lockheed WP-3D Orion “hurricane hunt” aircraft representing the hurricanes it has penetrated during a hurricane awareness tour at Washington National Airport.

Record-breaking storm season begins

BY SETH BORENSTEIN
Associated Press

BILOXI, Miss. — Batten down the hatches for another nasty hurricane season.

Nearly every natural force and a bunch of human-caused ones — more than just climate change — have turned the last several Atlantic hurricane seasons into deadly and expensive whoppers. The season started Wednesday and looks like another note in a record-breaking refrain, experts warn.

They say many factors point to, but don’t quite promise, more trouble ahead: the natural climate event La Nina, human-caused climate change, warmer ocean waters, the Gulf of Mexico’s deep hot Loop Current, increased storminess in Africa, cleaner skies, a multidecade active storm cycle and massive property development along the coast.

“It’s everything and the kitchen sink,” Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach said.

In the past two years, forecasters ran out of names for storms. It’s been

a costly rogue’s gallery of major hurricanes — with winds of at least 111 mph — striking land in the past five years: Harvey, Irma, Maria, Florence, Michael, Dorian, Humberto, Laura, Teddy, Delta, Zeta, Eta, Iota, Grace and Ida.

More Category 4 and 5 hurricanes made U.S. landfall from 2017 to 2021 than from 1963 to 2016, National Hurricane Center Director Ken Graham said.

Graham, echoing most experts and every preseason forecast, said “we’ve got another busy one” coming.

Last year, the Atlantic set a record for six above-average hurricane seasons in a row, smashing the old record of three in a row, and forecasters predict a seventh in 2022.

The only contrary sign is that for the first time since 2014, a storm didn’t form before the official June 1 start of the hurricane season, but forecasters are watching the Eastern Pacific’s record-setting Hurricane Agatha that looks likely to cross over land and reform as Alex in the Gulf of Mexico later this week.

It’s everything and the kitchen sink
PHIL KLOTZBACH

Gridlock may delay extra COVID funds

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The U.S. is headed for “a lot of unnecessary loss of life,” the Biden administration said, if Congress fails to provide billions more dollars for the pandemic’s next wave. Yet the quest for that money is in limbo as the latest victim of the election-year gridlock that has stalled or killed a host of Democratic priorities.

President Joe Biden’s appeal for vaccine funding, testing and treatments has hit opposition from Republicans, who’ve fused the fight with the precarious politics of immigration. Congress is in recess, and the next steps are uncertain, despite admonitions from White House COVID-19 coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha of damaging consequences from “every day we wait.”

Administration officials say they’re running low on money to stock up on, or even begin to order, the latest vaccines, tests and treatments. Also lacking are funds to reimburse doctors treating uninsured patients and

to help poor countries control the pandemic.

House and Senate Democrats have been wrangling over how to resolve the stalemate and which chamber should vote first. It’s an open question whether they’ll ever get the Republican Party votes they’ll need to pull the legislation through the 50-50 Senate. Prospects in the narrowly divided House are unclear as well.

“There is still an urgency to pass a COVID relief package,” Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said last week. “It’s very, very much needed.”

Optimists hope the measure could start rolling once Congress returns. Pessimists say without quick resolution, Democrats may not have enough leverage to push the money to passage until early fall. That’s when they could stuff it into legislation that may be needed to finance government — a bill that would avert a federal shutdown, a pre-election distraction Republicans will be desperate to avoid.

John Hinckley released after 41 years in custody

BY JESSICA GRESKO
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — John Hinckley, who shot President Ronald Reagan in 1981, will be freed from all restrictions June 15 as long as he continues to do well living in the community in Virginia as he has for six years, a federal judge said Wednesday. The ruling caps Hinckley’s four-decade journey through the legal and mental health systems.

The judge noted that Hinckley, who turned 67 on Sunday, was profoundly troubled when he shot Reagan but that he had been able to get mental health help. Hinckley has shown no signs of active mental illness since the

mid-1980s, the judge noted Wednesday, and has exhibited no violent behavior or interest in weapons.

Hinckley was confined to a mental hospital in Washington for more than two decades after a jury found him not guilty by reason of insanity in shooting Reagan. Starting in 2003, Friedman began allowing Hinckley to spend longer and longer stretches in the community with requirements such as attending therapy and facing travel restrictions.

Hinckley’s longtime lawyer, Barry Levine, said the case had “started with a troubled young man who inflicted great harm” but that, in the end: “I think we have salvaged a life.”

BRIEFS

Sheryl Sandberg, No. 2 exec at Facebook, steps down

SAN FRANCISCO — Sheryl Sandberg, the No. 2 executive at Facebook owner Meta, is stepping down. Sandberg has served as chief operating officer at the social media giant for 14 years. She’s leaving Meta in the fall and will continue to serve on the company’s board.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said in his own Facebook post that Javier Oliván will serve as Meta’s new COO, although it will be a different job than the one Sandberg held for the past 14 years.

While Sandberg has long been Zuckerberg’s No. 2 in the company’s Menlo Park, Calif., headquarters, she also had a very public-facing job, meeting with lawmakers, holding focus groups and speaking out on topics such as women in the workplace and, most recently, abortion.

Sandberg, who lost her husband Dave Goldberg suddenly in 2015, said she is “not entirely sure what the future will bring.”

Accused gunman indicted on terror, hate charges

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The white man accused of killing 10 Black people in a racist attack on a Buffalo supermarket was indicted by a grand jury Wednesday on domestic terrorism and hate crime charges that would carry a mandatory life in prison sentence.

Payton Gendron will be arraigned Thursday on the new, 25-count indictment, building on a previous murder charge prepared in the hours after the May 14 shooting.

The 18-year-old has now also been charged with using a weapon while committing a felony and for the attempted murders of three people who were shot during the attack, but survived. Murder charges were filed for each of the victims including eight customers, the store security guard and a church deacon who drove shoppers to and from the store.

Gendron has pleaded not guilty. The crime and number of victims was likely to guarantee a life sentence if Gendron is convicted.

Shooting kills 1, wounds 2 after Louisiana graduation

NEW ORLEANS — An elderly woman was killed and two men wounded when an argument between two women erupted into gunfire Tuesday morning near the Xavier University of Louisiana Convocation Center after a high school graduation, New Orleans police said.

The males received wounds that were not life-threatening, authorities told news outlets.

Deputy Superintendent Chris Goodly told reporters he did not know whether the people who fought in the parking lot were the ones who pulled guns, or how many guns or bullets were fired.

Three people were being questioned, The Times-Picayune and The New Orleans Advocate reported.

The shooting comes as New Orleans is grappling with rising homicides. The Metropolitan Crime Commission reported 120 homicides as of May 30, up from 80 a year earlier and 51 at this time in 2019 — a year when killings marked a 49-year low.

Mom killed, 2 kids hurt parasailing in Florida Keys

PIGEON KEY, FLORIDA — A woman from Illinois was killed and two young children were injured when a sudden storm prompted a boat captain to cut loose their parasail, which then dragged them across the ocean and slammed them into a bridge in the Florida Keys, authorities said.

A nearby boater saw them hit the water and rushed to rescue them, pulling the victims into his boat and taking them to waiting paramedics, the U.S. Coast Guard said in a news release sent Tuesday night.

The 33-year-old woman from Schaumburg, Illinois, had already died by the time they arrived at the nearby Sunset Grill Marina, authorities said. Her 10-year-old son and 9-year-old nephew were taken to hospitals.

John Callion, a fishing guide, raced around Pigeon Key to reach them and told the Miami Herald that the Memorial Day storm developed suddenly.

The Coast Guard and the state’s wildlife agency are investigating. Neither responded to questions about the boat’s captain Wednesday.

Colorado boat flips 13 people, kills two

PUEBLO, COLORADO — A boat flipped over in high winds on a Colorado lake over Memorial Day weekend, sending 13 people into the water and leaving two dead.

The eight children and three adults were on the large, flat boat at Lake Pueblo State Park when it capsized Sunday evening.

One adult — Jessica Prindle, 38, of the community of Pueblo West — died at the scene, the Pueblo County coroner’s office said.

A Colorado Parks and Wildlife rescue team found a second victim’s body Tuesday morning after an all-night search, the state agency said in a statement. The coroner’s office identified the second victim as Prindle’s husband, 30-year-old Joshua Prindle.

The 11 others in the boat survived and were treated for hypothermia at hospitals, Colorado Parks and Wildlife said in a statement.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BRIEFS

Colombian drug lord dies in Miama prison

MIAMI — Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, an elderly leader of the former Cali cartel that smuggled vast amounts of cocaine from Colombia to the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, has died in a U.S. prison, his lawyer said Wednesday.

In 2020, a judge denied Rodríguez Orejuela, who was in his 80s, early release on compassionate grounds from a prison in Butner, North Carolina.

Rodríguez Orejuela and his brother, Miguel, built a huge criminal enterprise that succeeded the Medellín cartel once run by drug lord Pablo Escobar.

The Rodríguez Orejuela brothers were captured in 1995 and imprisoned in Colombia. Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela's prison release date was scheduled for Feb. 9 2030. His younger brother is serving his sentence at a Pennsylvania prison.

Pipeline rupture spews oil into Libyan desert

CAIRO — A pipeline rupture on Tuesday in Libya is spewing thousands of barrels of oil into the desert, as workers strive to seal off the leak.

The damage to a land pipeline linking the Sarir oil field to the Tobruk terminal on the Mediterranean was the latest blow to Libya's struggling oil industry, as renewed tensions divide the country.

The Arabian Gulf Oil Company, which operates the pipeline, estimates that some 22,000 barrels a day were being lost from the leak. The company blamed lack of pipeline maintenance for the leakage.

The spill comes as crucial oil facilities including the country's biggest field were still closed amid a political impasse that threatens a return of violence. Libya has been wrecked by conflict since the NATO-backed uprising-turned-civil war toppled and later killed longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi in 2011.

China-based earthquakes kill two, injure 14

BEIJING — Two earthquakes killed at least four people and damaged houses in southwestern China on Wednesday, authorities and state media said.

Fourteen others were injured, at least one seriously, a state broadcaster CCTV said. All of the dead and injured were in Boxing county in Sichuan province.

A magnitude 6.1 quake struck at a depth of 10 miles in Ya'an city, about 65 miles southwest of Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan, the China Earthquake Network Center said. A magnitude 4.5 quake, also in Ya'an, followed three minutes later, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

China's deadliest earthquake in recent years was a 7.9 magnitude quake in 2008 that killed nearly 90,000 people in Sichuan.

Malaysia freezes chicken exports, worries Singapore

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — Malaysia suspended exports of live chickens Wednesday to guarantee adequate supplies for domestic markets, prompting distress in neighboring Singapore, where chicken rice is a national dish.

Singapore consumers rushed to stock up on fresh chicken ahead of the ban, with local media reporting that shelves in some wet markets and supermarkets have been cleared of the meat.

The Singapore government has urged consumers to switch to frozen chicken and other alternative meats, and is exploring new markets for fresh chicken.

Malaysia's ban comes as countries worldwide grapple with soaring food prices, fueled partly by the Ukraine war. Ukraine is a major exporter of corn and grains that are key components of chicken feed.

Apart from the export ban, Malaysia also abolished import permits for chicken and other foods to boost food supply and curb prices amid public anger.

COVID lockdown removed; Shanghai returns to life

SHANGHAI — China's largest city, Shanghai, began returning to normalcy amid the easing of a strict two-month COVID-19 lockdown that has drawn unusual protests over its heavy-handed implementation.

Shanghai's Communist Party committee issued a letter online proclaiming the lockdown's success and thanking citizens for their "support and contributions." The move came amid a steady rollback in compulsory measures that have upended daily life for millions while severely disrupting the economy and global supply chains.

While defending President and Communist Party Chief Xi Jinping's hardline "zero-COVID" policy, the country's leadership appears to be acknowledging the public backlash against measures seen as trampling already severely limited rights to privacy and participation in the workings of government.

The government says all restrictions will be gradually lifted, but local neighborhood committees still wield considerable power to implement sometimes conflicting and arbitrary policies. The country's borders also remain largely closed and the government has upped requirements for the issuance of passports and permission to travel abroad.

ASSOCIATED PRESS



FRANCISCO SECO / ASSOCIATED PRESS

A volunteer helps a man leaving his home in a building damaged by an overnight missile strike, in Sloviansk, Ukraine.

Food security drops amid Ukraine war

ASSOCIATED PRESS

UNITED NATIONS — The U.S. ambassador to the U.N. on Tuesday said the Biden administration supports the shipment of Russian grain and fertilizer to address increasing global food insecurity sparked by the war in Ukraine.

Linda Thomas-Greenfield told reporters at U.N. headquarters that there are no U.S. sanctions on Russian shipments of grain and fertilizer, but she said companies are "a little nervous" and have been holding back.

Thomas-Greenfield said the United States is prepared to give "comfort letters" to grain and fertilizer exporters and insurance companies in an attempt to get badly needed agricultural products out of Russia.

She said the Biden administration is "very supportive" of efforts by U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to allow grain exports out of Ukraine by train and the Black Sea, as well as his work to ensure Russian food and fertilizer have unrestricted access to global markets.

A U.N. spokesman said Tuesday that Rebeca Grynspan, the secretary-general of the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development, visited Moscow on Monday and held "constructive discussions" with First Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Belousov on facilitating Russian grain and fertilizer exports.

Global hunger levels are at a new

high, Guterres said. He said Ukraine and Russia together produce almost a third of the world's wheat and barley and half of its sunflower oil, while Russia and its ally Belarus are the world's number two and three producers of potash, a key ingredient of fertilizer.

BRUSSELS

The European Union urged its international partners to avoid placing trade barriers on farm products as Russia's war on Ukraine risks further fueling a possible global food crisis.

"We call on all partners not to restrict trade on agricultural products," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said after an EU summit Tuesday in Brussels.

Ukraine has said Russia is blocking the export of 22 million tons of its grain, some of it destined for Africa. African countries imported 44% of their wheat from Russia and Ukraine between 2018 and 2020, according to the U.N.

Von der Leyen said the EU is trying to help get food out by road and rail, but land transport assistance might only provide for a fifth of Ukraine's usual monthly exports.

"It is of course more tedious and expensive, but it is necessary to get this wheat out," she said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said the EU's sanctions are making things worse. Putin said he's willing

to help ease concerns if the restrictive measures are lifted.

Also in Brussels, the chair of the African Union, Senegal's President Macky Sall, has told European Union leaders that Russia's blockade of Ukraine ports is paving the way for a "catastrophic scenario" of widespread shortages and price hikes across his continent.

In another addressed to the summit, Sall said that a halt to grain and fertilizer exports via the Black Sea is very worrying for a continent hosting 282 million undernourished people. He said that the price of fertilizer across Africa has already tripled compared to 2021.

Charles Michel, the EU Council president, said that "the EU is sparing no efforts to free Ukraine's exports over land and exploring alternative sea routes."

African countries imported 44% of their wheat from Russia and Ukraine between 2018 and 2020, according to U.N. figures. The African Development Bank is already reporting a 45% increase in wheat prices on the continent.

KYIV

Russia's top diplomat has again blamed the hampering of exports of Ukrainian grain and a global food crisis on Kyiv and the West.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said earlier in the week that Russia guarantees "free export of Ukrainian grain by ships that are now locked in Ukrainian

ports," but Ukraine first needs to "determine the coastal waters that are in the territorial sea of Ukraine."

Lavrov told a news conference after meeting with his Bahraini counterpart Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani that if that is done, "in the open sea ... Russia's naval forces will ensure the unimpeded passage of these ships to the Mediterranean Sea and further to their destinations."

Lavrov added that the West must consider whether it wants to prioritize "PR" over taking "concrete steps" to solve the issue of food security.

ISTANBUL

Turkey's foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu reported Russia's Lavrov will visit Turkey on June 8 for talks that will address among other things opening a Black Sea corridor for Ukrainian grain exports.

Cavusoglu also said in a video interview with the state-run Anadolu news agency that the French and German ambassadors had been summoned to the Foreign Ministry over demonstrations in their countries by groups considered by Ankara to be terrorists.

Turkey has said activities of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, in Sweden and Finland are one of its objections to those countries joining NATO. The PKK is designated a terrorist organization by the European Union and U.S.

Costa Rica hospital hacked

BY JAVIER CÓRDOBA AND CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN
Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica — Another attempted hacking of a Costa Rican government agency's computer system led the country's public health agency to shut down its systems Tuesday to protect itself, complicating the medical care of thousands of people.

At least 30 of the Social Security agency's 1,500 servers were infected with ransomware, according to the government.

The latest breach follows an attack by the Russian-speaking Conti gang in April. That ransomware attack targeted multiple Costa Rican government agencies, especially its finance ministry, which still has not recovered control of some of its systems.

This time the attack appeared to come from another ransomware gang known as "Hive."

Conti and Hive were separate ransomware operations, said Brett Callow, a ransomware analyst at Emsisoft. Some analysts more recently, however, suspect they have established some sort of working relationship.

"Conti likely partnered with other ransomware operations because it's been increasingly challenging for them to collect payments since declaring their support for Russia and threatening attacks on U.S. critical infrastructure," Callow said.

Álvaro Ramos, president of the Social Security agency, said in a news conference Tuesday that the quick shutdown of their systems prevented the cyber criminals from gaining control and encrypting their data as happened in the earlier attacks.

Later Tuesday, however, a portal Hive uses to negotiate with its targets appeared to indicate otherwise.

"To decrypt your systems you have to pay \$5,000,000 in Bitcoin," Hive's message said.

Payroll and pension were not affected, according to the Social Security agency's general manager Roberto Cervantes. He added that some 300 systems experts were working on the issue.

But for Costa Ricans who depend on the public health system, Tuesday was a confusing mess.

Roger González, a retired publicist in San Jose, said he was also told he would not be able to fill his prescriptions in the health center's pharmacy for the next two days and that an electrocardiogram that he was supposed to schedule Tuesday would be put off until systems were back up.

"The first thing the guard told us was that there was no system to wait for the doctor because she would attend to us with the physical (medical) file, not with the computer, because they do not want to turn them on allowing the virus to spread," he said.

The shutdown was also keeping the government from updating its COVID-19 infection numbers and issuing orders to those infected to isolate, according to the Ministry of Health.

Social Security agency officials said they expected their systems to be back up in the coming days.



MYANMAR MILITARY / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Four injured people lie on the pavement after an explosion at a bus stop in downtown Yangon on Tuesday. One person was killed and nine wounded when what authorities described as a handmade bomb exploded.

1 killed in Myanmar bombing

BY GRANT PECK
Associated Press

BANGKOK — Myanmar's military government and its opponents traded accusations over a bomb that exploded Tuesday in the middle of the country's largest city, Yangon, killing one and wounding nine others.

Photos and videos of Tuesday's bombing that circulated on social media showing the bloodied victims sprawled on the sidewalk were a sharp reminder of the violence that has engulfed the country since the military seized power last year.

A story in Wednesday's edition of The Global New Light of Myanmar, a state-run newspaper, blamed the People's Defense Forces, the opposition movement's armed wing, but did not supply any evidence linking them to the blast.

The article said the attack was made with a "handmade bomb planted by PDF terrorists at a bus stop" roughly one block from the Sule Pagoda, a city landmark. The blast occurred at 3:20 p.m., and a 30-year-old man died of wounds in his chest and abdomen, state media said.

The Global New Light of Myanmar said a headmistress died and six educational personnel and a civil servant were injured. The blast occurred as state schools were preparing for their seasonal reopening.

The school system has been a battleground

between the military government and its foes, who generally have pressed for a boycott as a sign of rejection of army rule.

The nongovernmental organization Save the Children said in a statement issued Wednesday that there were at least 260 attacks on schools between May 2021 and April this year, and that explosions in and around school buildings accounted for almost three-quarters of that total.

"Attacks on schools, teachers and students have surged over the past year due to the conflict, leaving many of them scared to return to the classroom and, in some cases, with no schools left to attend," the group said.

A spokesperson for the self-styled National Unity Government, the main opposition body that loosely commands the PDF and its various local units, pinned the blame on the military government.

"The brutal genocidal military has been carrying out senseless bombings and killings against its own civilian population across Myanmar," said Sasa, the NUG's Minister of International Cooperation, said in a statement. Sasa uses only one name.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since last year's army takeover seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, sparking widespread nonviolent protests that were quashed with lethal force by the army and police. In turn, opponents of military rule took up arms and are now conducting an active insurgency in many parts of the country.

The brutal genocidal military has been carrying out senseless bombings and killings against its own civilian population across Myanmar

SASA



DOMINIC LIPINSKI / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II smiles while receiving the President of Switzerland Ignazio Cassis and his wife Paola Cassis during an audience at Windsor Castle in Windsor, England, April 28. Britain is getting ready for a party featuring mounted troops, solemn prayers — and a pack of dancing mechanical corgis during four days of pomp and pageantry in central London.

DIAMOND JUBILEE

UK to hold days-long bash to celebrate queen's 70-year reign

BY DANICA KIRKA
Associated Press

The nation will celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's 70-year reign this week with four days of celebration in central London. But behind the music, parties and a planned appearance by the queen on the balcony of Buckingham Palace lies a drive to show the royal family still remains relevant after seven decades of change.

The royals want to show that their support comes from all parts of a society that has become more multicultural amid immigration from the Caribbean, South Asia and Eastern Europe.

As part of the jubilee pageant, dancers from London's Afro-Caribbean community will don costumes of giant flamingos, zebras and giraffes to reimagine the moment in 1952 when Princess Elizabeth learned she had become queen while visiting a game park in Kenya.

The jubilee has caught public attention. Located around the corner from Buckingham Palace, the Cool Britannia gift shop has run out of Platinum Jubilee tea towels. Spoons are sparse. Mugs are in short supply.

It's not just foreign tourists who are buying all things Elizabeth. Visitors from around the U.K. are also hunting for jubilee mementos, said Ismayil Ibrahim, the man behind the counter.

Since assuming the throne after the death of her father on Feb. 6, 1952, Elizabeth has been a symbol of stability as the country negotiated the end of empire, the birth of the com-

puter age and the mass migration that transformed Britain into a multicultural society.

Yet through it all, the queen has built a bond with the nation through a seemingly endless series of public appearances as she opened libraries, dedicated hospitals and bestowed honors on deserving citizens.

The past two years have highlighted the monarchy's strengths as the queen alternately consoled a nation isolated by COVID-19 and thanked doctors and nurses battling the disease.

But the royal family's frailties were also on display as the 96-year-old monarch buried her husband and was slowed by health problems that forced her to turn over important public duties to Prince Charles. The passing came amid the all-too-public tensions with Prince Harry and his wife, the Duchess of Sussex, who made allegations of racism and bullying in the royal household, as well as the sordid allegations about Prince Andrew's links to the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

"There is no blueprint for a reign of this length, and, subsequently, I think the palace and courtiers are having to improvise all the time," said Ed Owens, a royal historian and author of "The Family Firm: Monarchy, Mass Media and the British Public 1932-1953."

"In the case of Elizabeth II, we haven't had a monarch this elderly who has reigned for so long and is so meaningful to so many people having to essentially transfer her role to the next in line."

Thursday, June 2

10 a.m.Trooping the Colour will begin early on Thursday, and members of the Royal Family will leave Buckingham Palace at 10.30am for the parade ground. "Trooping the Colour" will be broadcast on BBC One.

11 a.m.Trooping the Colour is expected to begin.

1 p.m.The RAF flypast over Buckingham Palace is expected, and the Queen and other royals will watch from the palace balcony.

9.25 p.m.The Royal Family will gather at Buckingham Palace to watch the Platinum Jubilee's principal beacon be lit.

9.45 p.m.Beacons across the UK, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands will then be lit up to mark the Queen's 70-year reign.

For British royalty, there's a Silver Jubilee (25 years), Ruby Jubilee (40 years), Golden Jubilee (50 years), Diamond Jubilee (60 years), Sapphire Jubilee (65 years) and Platinum Jubilee (70 years).



Long in shadow, Charles takes on bigger role

BY DANICA KIRKA
Associated Press

Queen Elizabeth II shows no signs of stepping aside after 70 years on the throne. But the aging sovereign is giving Prince Charles, her heir, an increasingly prominent role.

Last month Prince Charles, 73, accompanied by his wife, Camilla, presided over the State Opening of Parliament, one of the monarch's most important duties.

The subtle transition illustrates challenges confronting the royal family as the 96-year-old queen remains on the throne while Prince Charles becomes the ever more public face of the monarchy. As Britain celebrates the queen's Platinum Jubilee this week, the royals are working to cement the position of a sometimes misunderstood heir and demonstrate that the House of Windsor will live on.

It took years for many in Britain to forgive Prince Charles, whose infidelity and longtime links to Camilla torpedoed his relationship with Princess Diana, who died in a Paris car crash in 1997, five years after splitting from Prince Charles.

But the public mood has softened since Prince Charles married Camilla Parker Bowles in 2005.

Earlier this year, the queen sought to bolster the couple's position by expressing her "sincere wish" that Camilla be

known as "Queen Consort" when Prince Charles becomes king.

Prince Charles, meanwhile, has been ready to step in whenever required, most dramatically when he presided over the opening of Parliament and delivered the Queen's Speech, laying out the government's legislative program.

The event is a symbol of the monarch's constitutional role as the U.K.'s head of state.

The choreography of the day emphasized a queen who was absent, yet still present. Her throne was removed, but in its place the Imperial State Crown sat propped on a cushion. Prince Charles wore the uniform of an admiral of the fleet — rather than sweeping ermine robes.

Because he has been waiting in the wings for so long, his passions are well known.

For example, he began campaigning for environmental causes long before they were mainstream concerns. He has been accused of meddling in politics, something the monarch is barred from, by speaking up about property developments he opposed and other issues.

It may be the shape of things to come.

Prince Charles and Camilla will surprise residents at a street party held to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee on the long-running BBC show "EastEnders."



CARL COURT / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Britain's Prince Charles and Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall, listen as Queen Elizabeth II delivers the Queen's Speech during the State Opening of Parliament at the Palace of Westminster in London, June 4, 2014. After spending much of his adult life in the shadow of Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Charles has taken on a greater public role in recent years, increasingly standing in for his mother in her twilight years.