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Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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Putin says Russia wants end to war in Ukraine

Dec 22 (Reuters) - President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday that Russia wants an end to the war in Ukraine and that this would inevitably involve a diplomatic solution. Putin made the comments a day after U.S. President Joe Biden hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the White House and promised him continued and unwavering U.S. support.

“Our goal is not to spin the flywheel of military conflict, but, on the contrary, to end this war,” Putin said. “We will strive for an end to this, and the sooner the better, of course.”

White House spokesman John Kirby said Putin has “shown absolutely zero indication that he’s willing to negotiate” an end to the war, which began when Moscow sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24.

“Quite the contrary,” Kirby told reporters during an online briefing. “Everything he (Putin) is doing on the ground and in the air bespeaks a man who wants to continue to visit violence upon the Ukrainian people” and “escalate the war.” Sweden’s foreign minister says NATO talks with Turkey progressing well
 EU holds back all of Hungary’s cohesion funds over rights concerns
 Blinken thanks Turkey for work on Black Sea grain initiative
 Kirby reiterated that Biden was open to talks with Putin, but only after the Russian leader “showed a seriousness about negotiations” and after consultations with Ukraine and U.S. allies.

Russia has persistently said it is open to negotiations, but Ukraine and its allies suspect a ploy to buy time after a series of Russian defeats and retreats that have swung the momentum of the 10-month war in favour of Kyiv.

“I have said many times: the intensification of hostilities leads to unjustified losses,” Putin told reporters.

“All armed conflicts end one way or another with some kind of negotiations on the diplomatic track,” he added. “Sooner or later, any parties in a state of conflict sit down and make an agreement. The sooner this realization comes to those who oppose us, the better. We have never given up on this.”

Russia says it is Ukraine that is refusing to talk. Kyiv says Russia must halt its attacks and give up all territory it has seized.

Putin also played down the significance of the Patriot air defense system that Biden agreed to supply to Zelenskyy, saying Russia would find a way to counter it.

He said it was “quite old” and did not work like Russia’s S-300 system. “An antidote will always be found,” he said, boasting Russia would “crack” the Patriots.

“So those who do it are doing it in vain. It’s just prolonging the conflict, that’s all.”



Russian President Vladimir Putin visits an exposition of projects ahead of a meeting of the State Council on youth policy in Moscow, Russia, December 22, 2022. Sputnik/Valeriy Sharifulin/Pool via REUTERS

Lawyer urged White House aide to ‘downplay’ Jan. 6 knowledge -testimo-

Dec 22 (Reuters) - A former lawyer for ex-White House aide Cassidy Hutchinson told her to “downplay” her knowledge of events leading to the U.S. Capitol riot on Jan. 6, 2021, telling her “the less you remember, the better,” according to a transcript of her testimony released on Thursday.

Attorney Stefan Passantino advised Hutchinson in preparing for a February deposition before the U.S. House of Representatives committee probing the Capitol attack to say that she could not recall certain events, she told the committee in September. Hutchinson testified that Passantino, a former White House ethics lawyer under former U.S. President Donald Trump, never directed her to lie to the committee, but urged her not to try to refresh her memory and volunteer information about key events.

“The less the committee thinks you know, the better,” Hutchinson recalled Passantino telling her, the transcript released by the committee showed.

Passantino did not immediately respond to a request for comment. He told CNN earlier this week that he represented Hutchinson “honorably, ethically, and fully consistent with her sole interests as she communicated them to me.”

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 U.S. population growth inches higher in 2022, driven by immigration
 The Jan. 6 panel is scheduled to release a final report detailing its findings later on Thursday.

Hutchinson, who worked as a top aide to then White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, later switched attorneys and became a star witness for the committee. She detailed at a public hearing in June that Trump knew many of his supporters were carrying weapons on the morning of Jan. 6.

The September interview was conducted after Hutchinson agreed to waive attorney-client confidentiality to discuss her legal team. She is now represented by law firm Alston & Bird.

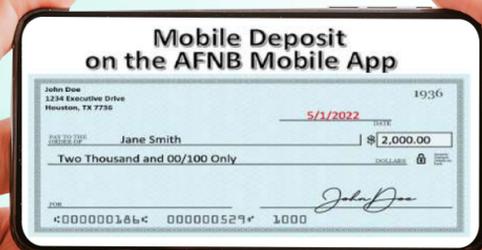
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OPEC+ oil output cut shows widening rift between Biden and Saudi royals

WASHINGTON/LONDON, Oct 7(Reuters) - The OPEC+ organization's decision this week to cut oil production despite stiff U.S. opposition has further strained already tense relations between President Joe Biden's White House and Saudi Arabia's royal family...

The White House pushed hard to prevent the OPEC output cut, these sources said. Biden hopes to keep U.S. gasoline prices from spiking again ahead of midterm elections in which his Democratic party is struggling to maintain control of the U.S. Congress.

The U.S. administration lobbied OPEC+ for weeks. In recent days, senior U.S. officials from energy, foreign policy and economic teams urged their foreign counterparts to vote against an output cut...

Amos Hochstein, Biden's top energy envoy, along with national security official Brett McGurk and the administration's special envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking, traveled to Saudi Arabia last month to discuss energy issues, including the OPEC+ decision.

Latest Updates

Danielle Smith, new premier of Canada's oil-rich Alberta, set to defy Trudeau

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Analysis: Defeats in Ukraine stoke crisis for Vladimir Putin

Putin orders Russia to seize Exxon-led Sakhalin 1 oil and gas project They failed to prevent an output cut, just as Biden did after his own July visit.

US officials "tried to position it as 'us versus Russia,'" said one source briefed on the discussions, telling Saudi officials they needed to make a choice.

That argument failed, the source said, adding that the Saudis said that if the United States wanted more oil on the markets, it should start producing more of its own.

The United States is the world's No. 1 oil producer and also its top consumer, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.



The Saudi government media office CIC did not respond to Reuters emailed requests for comment about the discussions.

"We are concerned first and foremost with the interests of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and then the interests of the countries that trusted us and are members of OPEC and the OPEC + alliance," Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz told Saudi TV Wednesday.

OPEC weighs its interests with "those of the world because we have an interest in supporting the growth of the global economy and providing energy supplies in the best way," he said.

Washington's handling of the Iran nuclear deal and withdrawal of support for a Saudi-led coalition's offensive military operations in Yemen have upset Saudi officials, as have actions against Russia after the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

A U.S. push for a price cap on Russian oil is causing uncertainty, Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told Bloomberg TV after the OPEC cut, noting the "lack of details and the lack of clarity" about how it will be implemented.

A source briefed by Saudi officials said the kingdom views it as "a non-market price-control mechanism, that could be used by a cartel of consumers against producers."

A Biden-directed sale of 180 million barrels of oil in March from the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve put downward pressure on oil prices. In March, OPEC+ said it would stop using data from the International Energy Agency (IEA), a Western oil watchdog, due to Saudi-led concerns the United States had too much influence.

Editor's Choice



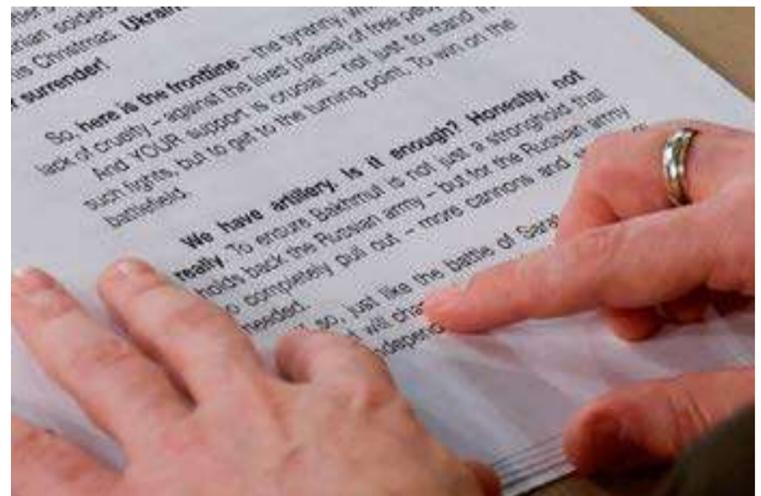
FC Barcelona's Asisat Oshoala celebrates scoring their first goal during Women's Champions League Group D FC Barcelona v FC Rosengard match at Camp Nou, Barcelona, Spain. REUTERS/Albert Gea



Handout photo from Buckingham Palace of the ledger stone at the King George VI Memorial Chapel, St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, Britain in this undated handout released September 24. Royal Collection Trust/The Dean and Canons of Windsor/Handout via REUTERS



Cesar, 34, a pilgrim from Mexico, walks on the San Antolin beach while continuing his pilgrimage in the "Camino de Santiago del Norte", in Llanes, Spain September 24. REUTERS/Nacho Doce



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy addresses a joint meeting of the U.S. Congress in the House Chamber of the U.S. Capitol in Washington. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst



Dressed as Santa Claus, Issa Kassissieh sits astride a camel while a dancer dances next to him, as he visits Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem's Old City. REUTERS/Ammar Awad



Denver Nuggets dancers perform in the third quarter against the Memphis Grizzlies at Ball Arena, Denver, Colorado. Isaiah J. Downing-USA TODAY Sports

The Center Has A Goal Of Fostering Intergenerational Connections

New Alief Neighborhood Center Is The New Model For What A Community Center Can Be

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



Alief Neighborhood Center



The main entry at Alief Neighborhood Center features bleacher seating, expansive views of the park, and artwork from the Red Thread Collective.

Key Point
The New Alief Neighborhood Center Amenities Include A Skate Park, Health Center, and Library That Will Open Under One Innovative Roof

A grove of 22 mature live oaks is about the only thing left from the old Alief Community Center in Houston. The building and the rest of the site were scrapped to make way for a new, multipurpose neighborhood center and park, but the value of old-growth shade in Texas is on display in the front yard of the two-story building that's nearing completion after two years of construction. An entry drive swoops up and around the grove, in deference to the trees, and meets up with a first level that's been elevated above the five-hundred-year flood mark. A soaring roof covers the massive entry patio. Jonas Risen, lead designer for the building's architect, Page, calls it "the biggest front porch in Texas." Sixteen-foot tall aluminum letters hang above that porch, spelling out "ALIEF" like a welcome sign to the surrounding neighborhood, announcing the structure to Texas as the first multipurpose center of its kind. The 70,000-square-foot Alief Neighborhood Center combines the functions of the sixty-year-old recreation hall it replaces, with the added bonuses of a public library, a senior center, and a women, infants, and children (WIC) clinic run by the Houston Health Department. The strikingly modern building—clad in glass, battleship-gray aluminum panels, and brick that's a shade lighter than black—rises two stories above a 38-acre park. A public pool, a skate park, soccer fields, and courts for tennis, pickleball, and basketball are arranged around a massive playground behind the building. "We hope that this will be a model that will be replicated across the city," said Richard Vella, assistant director of Houston's General Services Department (GSD), who conceived of the massive project and is overseeing its completion.

It might seem obvious to combine so many services for neighborhood residents in one structure, but it's a rarity for publicly funded buildings. The GSD manages the construction and maintenance of more than three hundred facilities in the city, from fire stations to city parks, but every entity requests its own funding for its own buildings to be renovated or rebuilt as they reach the ends of their useful lives. It's a process designed to be territorial rather than collaborative, and it isn't unique to Houston. But in Alief, the GSD recognized that three public buildings in the neighborhood were all due for replacement. Vella had studied the multipurpose MacBain Community Centre in Niagara Falls, Ontario, and he decided the time was right for a similar project in Houston—one in which the Alief WIC center, the library, and the community center would join forces. "By combining those departments, we were able to be more efficient and provide more than we would have if it were three independent buildings," said Dimitri Karavias. He's the division manager of capital planning and operations for GSD, and he managed this project personally. Of the three old buildings, it was the community center that had been ignored for far too long. "[Residents] advocated for this project for over twenty years," Karavias said. One of those locals was Tiffany Thomas. She grew up in the neighborhood, graduated from Alief Elsik High School, then went on to represent the next generation on the Alief ISD school board. In 2019 she won the city council seat for Alief. "One of my first votes was to authorize the funds for

the construction of the building," Thomas said of her participation in the unanimous vote in January 2020. There was no federal or state help for the \$59 million project, which was entirely supported by city funds. Thomas credits the Alief Super Neighborhood Council for keeping the pressure on the city to provide the funding, and said it felt good for her vote to help give Alief a win like that.

Alief Swarm, a sculpture by artist Bennie Flores Ansell, adds color to a two-story area at an intersection of parks, library, and health department spaces.

Each Houston city council district is denoted with a letter. Alief is in District F. "The joke is that the 'F' stands for forgotten," Thomas said. That's due somewhat to Alief's location outside the beltway, west of Sam Houston Parkway, but it's also because Alief is a low-income neighborhood with a majority-minority population. It is home to first-generation immigrants from across the world and to refugee communities, including those from one state over. After Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, Louisiana natives sought shelter here, many permanently. Thomas's neighbors when she was growing up were from Vietnam, Guatemala, Iraq, and Ghana. More than eighty languages and dialects are spoken in Alief ISD schools. "We are the cultural currency of the city," Thomas often says. It has become her tagline for the community she represents, and it's meant to remind people that Alief is a big reason Houston enjoys its much-celebrated cultural diversity. Thanks to the forgotten district, the city's residents enjoy experiences like traditional Chinese lion dance ceremonies in a local park, specialty foods imported to Wazobia African Market, and immigrant artwork exhibited at Alief Art House. There's also a diverse selection of restaurants, like the famed Crawfish & Noodles a block east of the neighborhood center and the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Thai restaurants that surround the Hong Kong City Mall. James Beard Award finalist and Texas Monthly Top 50 BBQ restaurant Blood Bros. BBQ is too far down Bellaire to be in Alief proper, but it's run by a trio of pitmasters proud of their Alief upbringing. Hell, Lizzo and Kelly Rowland both attended Elsik, the same high school as Thomas, and comedian Mo'Nique attended Hastings, their rival high school in Alief. Still, she said, "no one has really championed us."



The exterior children's area at Alief Neighborhood Center.

In February 2014, Thomas decided it was time for the community to champion itself. She had just won

the school board election, and she had some leftover campaign funds that she used for a robocall to neighborhood residents. "I want to invite you on Saturday to the Alief Community Center," she remembers recording. A hundred residents arrived, not knowing exactly why they'd been summoned, and she asked them for input on a new community center. It didn't yet have funding or an architect, but Thomas wanted the neighborhood to envision its own future. "We get to create what we want it to look like," she told them. Thomas is a natural at this sort of organizing. She teaches courses on community planning and development at Prairie View A&M University. That early meeting was the first of many, and they were eventually led by GSD and the architecture firm. "Their attitude was positive and enthusiastic," Risen of Page said of the residents he and his team worked with. (Risen was a classmate of mine at Tulane's architecture school.) "There was some concern, as you might expect, that they wouldn't be able to provide the services they were used to providing in a shared space," he said, but the design team was able to show how residents would have access to more services, not fewer.

Rethinking The Future AWARDS



The Alief Neighborhood Center combines three City of Houston departments (Library, Parks, & Health) to create a civic center at the heart of the redeveloped 37-acre urban park. Raised out of the floodplain, the building's elevated 'front porch' frames a space for the diverse community to come together, share ideas, and express an identity unique to Alief. The Center is a model for resilient design in a post-hurricane Harvey environment—a 'Lilly-pad' for those seeking shelter from the storm.

Rethinking The Future Awards 2020 First Award | Public Building (Concept)
Project Name: Alief Neighborhood Center
Studio Name: EYP Inc.
Design Team: John Smith, Jonas Risen, Peter Dregrom, Robert Burrell, Yuliana Hernandez, Guillermo Andrade
Area: 70,000 GSF
Year: 2021
Location: Alief Neighborhood, Houston Tx
Consultants: MEP Engineer – Collaborative En-

gineering, Fire Protection -Addleman, IT/AV/Security – 4b Technology, Landscape Architect – SWA, Cost Estimator – Project Cost Resources, Food Services-Worrell Design Group, Aquatics-Counselman Hunsaker, Structural Engineer-Dally, Skate Park Design-Action Sports Design

He gave me a few examples as we walked around the construction site: Parents waiting for WIC services downstairs could send their kids up to the library. Seniors could watch healthy cooking classes aimed at treating diabetes in the WIC demonstration kitchen. Children in after-school enrichment programs would have use of what's called the TechLink space, which has a green screen and video equipment for making films, audio-recording and mixing equipment for music, and a garment center with sewing and embroidery equipment for designing clothing and costumes. The hope is that by offering all these services in one place, the neighborhood center will be a home to residents of all ages. A dad who stops by for a pickup basketball game might return with his kids who want to record music, or a senior who comes to watch a grandkid play soccer might decide to take up pickleball. The building's plan is meant to foster real community connections between generations that would normally use separate facilities. The surrounding park's design was just as important as that of the building. Architects designed around the grove of oaks that shaded the front of the old building, which will remain a quiet outdoor space away from the sports facilities. The site was dead flat when design began, and the team searched for ways to create elevation. The building already had to be raised at least seven feet to meet new post-Harvey flood regulations, so the architects decided to put the parking lot underneath. (Athletes returning from the basketball court or the soccer fields to their shaded cars in summer will certainly applaud that decision.)



The views from the higher floors across the site are stunning. A climbing wall rises from behind the playground, with a skate park beyond. (Between the two is a crest that project leaders have dubbed Mount Alief, from which the full site can be surveyed. It's where Karavias said he starts all of his site tours.) A local skate shop was so excited about the skate park that it shared a drone shot of the park on social media. Local skaters arrived, but they were asked to be patient and wait until it was no longer a construction zone before perfecting their kickflips. Thomas was excited to tell the skate park's designer about the buzz he'd created, especially since he's her neighbor. More than seven years after that first meeting, Thomas will be there to help cut the ribbon when the doors open in late October. "Other districts are now saying, 'We want one of those,'" she said with a giddy laugh. She knows her neighborhood now has a jewel it'll soon be able to enjoy, as well as an iconic building that will draw people in from around the region. Being the envy of the rest of Houston is a position Thomas feels plenty comfortable with, and she hopes it will help change the negative perception of her home. She said simply, "It's what we deserve." (Courtesy Texas Monthly)

New Alief Neighborhood Center Represents Future Cultural Reality Of Area

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



The Alief Neighborhood Center combines three City of Houston departments (Library, Parks, & Health) to create a civic center at the heart of the redeveloped 37-acre urban park. Raised out of the floodplain, the building's elevated 'front porch' frames a space for the diverse community to come together, share ideas, and express an identity unique to Alief. The Center is a model for resilient design in a post-hurricane Harvey environment—a 'Lilly-pad' for those seeking shelter from the storm.

BUILDING AWARDS-
Rethinking The Future Awards 2020 First Award | Public Building (Concept)
The \$52 million, 63,000-square-foot multi-purpose facility at 11903 Bellaire will combine a health clinic, community center and library into one space. The structure, which will sit in 37-acre Alief Park, will consolidate the Hennington-Alief Regional Library at 7979 South Kirkwood and the park's existing community center, both of which are aging. It also will replace the area's Women, Infants and Children Center, which today leases space at 12660 Beechnut. City council passed one item appropriating \$4.8 million for contractor EYP Inc. to begin construction on the new center, and another item giving Manhattan Construction \$100,000 for construction management services.

The 70,000sf 2-story new building is elevated over a parking area providing convenient access to the building programs directly above. Health Department programs provided include W.I.C. (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), DAWN (Diabetes

Awareness Network) that provides support for a variety of chronic illnesses, and a Senior Center. The Parks Department programs include a full-size competition gymnasium with a perimeter elevated walking track above, a community fitness center and spaces to support youth after-school and summer programs.



The library, located on the second floor, and accessed through a grand 'stair-a-torium' in the lobby contains light-filled stack-space and reading

areas with expansive views both to the park to the south and to the existing grove of preserved trees on the north. Directly adjacent to the library, HPL's technology-rich TechLINK youth maker-doer program contains spaces for collaboration, the 'Tiny Techs' children's area, music recording studio, virtual reality stations, photo/video lab, and a maker space.

Site amenities include a competition soccer field, two full-size practice soccer fields, two futsal courts (fast-paced soccer played on a hard-surfaced smaller court) baseball field, skate park, tennis courts, children's playground, outdoor swimming pool facility, community gardens, a marketplace venue, and outdoor event space areas. The Alief Neighborhood Center is

scheduled to open in early 2022.

The Mission Of The Alief Neighborhood Center



To Foster A Culture Of Health



To Create A Heart For Civic Engagement



All In A Spirit Of Shared Collaboration



With The Biggest Front Porch In Texas!

Related

Community Resource Center Opens

Sponsored by the ITC Community Empowerment Organization with the collaboration of the SEONE Corporation, the Community Resource Center opens its door on Tuesday, April 6, 2021, at the Southern News Group building. The mission of the Community Resource Center is to serve as a "one stop-shop" for the underserved minority population in the southwest area of Houston. The Center will provide members of the community with information that will empower them to improve their quality of life and to also serve as a way for participants to access the rich pool of resources avail-

able to them.



Southern News Group, Houston, Texas

Members of the community who have questions about any of the variety of issues the Center will address are encouraged to schedule interviews with the Center. The Center will link the person with a professional who can best address their needs.



The areas the Center will address include disaster assistance, loans and grants, small business development, tax information, immigration, legal issues, workforce, housing and renting, veterans issues, medical, healthcare service, education, skills development, children and child welfare and city services. The Center's services will be led by senior educator, Dr. Tina Agosa and many other assistants.

