

Russia, China not creating military alliance Says Putin in an interview

REUTERS, Moscow

Russia and China are not creating a military alliance and the cooperation between their armed forces is "transparent", President Vladimir Putin said in comments broadcast yesterday, days after hosting Chinese leader Xi Jinping in the Kremlin.

Putin and Xi professed friendship and pledged closer ties, including in the military sphere, during their March 20-21 summit, as Russia struggles to make battlefield gains in what it calls a "special military operation" in Ukraine.

"We are not creating any military alliance with China," Putin said on state television. "Yes, we have cooperation in the sphere of military-technical interaction. We are not hiding this."

"Everything is transparent, there is nothing secret."

China and Russia signed a "no limits" partnership accord in early 2022, just weeks before Putin sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine.

Beijing has refrained from criticising Putin's decision and has touted a peace plan for Ukraine. The West has dismissed its proposals as a ploy to buy Putin more



time to rebuild his forces in Ukraine. Washington has said recently that it fears Beijing could arm Russia, something China denies.

In his televised remarks, Putin dismissed suggestions that Moscow's increased ties with Beijing in areas such as energy and finance meant that Russia was becoming overly dependent on China, saying these were the views of "jealous people".

"For decades many have desired turning China against the Soviet Union and Russia, and vice versa," he said. "We understand the world we live in."

Putin also accused the US and Nato of seeking to build a new global "axis" that he said bore some resemblance to the WWII alliance between Germany, Italy and Japan.

Putin named Australia, New Zealand and South Korea as being in line to join a "global Nato" and referenced a defence deal signed by UK and Japan earlier this year.

"That is why Western analysts... are talking about the West starting to build a new axis similar to the one created in the 1930s by the fascist regimes of Germany and Italy and militarist Japan," he said.

BOATS SINK OFF TUNISIA

29 African migrants die

REUTERS, Tunis

At least 29 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa died when their two boats sank off the coast of Tunisia as they tried to cross the Mediterranean to Italy, the Tunisian coast guard said yesterday.

Separately, in the last four days, five migrant boats have sunk off the coast of the southern city of Sfax, leaving 67 missing and nine dead, after a significant increase in boats heading towards Italy.

Tunisia has taken over from Libya as a main departure point for people fleeing poverty and conflict in Africa and the Middle East in the hope of a better life in Europe.

Houssem Jebabli, a senior official in the national guard told Reuters that the Tunisian coast guard had also rescued 11 people off the coast of Mahdia, further north.

The coast guard said it had stopped about 80 boats heading for Italy in the past four days and detained more than 3,000 migrants, mostly from sub-Saharan African countries.



Dhamrai Pourashava, Dhamrai, Dhaka

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805680	LGCRP/Dhamrai/2022-23/W-02 Construction of RCC Pipe Drain & Uni Block Road	26-April-2023 16:00	27-April-2023 13:00	27-April-2023 13:00
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Palestinian men scuffle with Israeli security forces in the West Bank town of Huwara, yesterday. Two Israeli soldiers were wounded on Saturday, the military said, in a drive-by shooting claimed by a Palestinian armed group in Huwara.

PHOTO: AFP

RAHUL GANDHI'S REMOVAL AS MP Congress sees opportunity to unite opposition

NDTV ONLINE

In the support that Rahul Gandhi received from Opposition parties after his disqualification from the Parliament, the Congress has found an opportunity to take further its attempt to unite the parties opposed to the ruling BJP.

Gandhi's conviction in a defamation case and his consequent removal from the Lok Sabha last week witnessed backlash from a vocal and united Opposition. The Congress, the main opposition party in the parliament, has welcomed this rare show of support.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, a Gandhi family loyalist, said people were unhappy earlier with other parties as they were not coming together when the country is not going in the right direction.

"But now they have started backing us and everybody is happy with their support,"

he said at a protest against Gandhi's disqualification in Delhi yesterday.

"I am happy that all opposition parties are standing together with Rahul ji. I want to thank them as they stood with us at such a time to save democracy," said Mallikarjun Kharge, who heads the Congress party.

His colleague Jairam Ramesh, a party veteran, had earlier said the Opposition parties should take the issue of opposition unity forward in a systematic way.

"The Congress president has been coordinating with opposition parties every day in parliament, now this has to be done outside also," he had said.

Opposition unity remains a hot topic ahead of next year's national elections, a precursor to electing the Prime Minister by elected representatives.

The fractured opposition has been one of the greatest advantages for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata

Party. Attempts to unite the resisting non-BJP voices are yet to show positive results as they scramble to find common ground over their diverse ambitions.

Congress leaders had asserted no opposition front was possible without it amid a buzz over a third front by regional leaders that would exclude the BJP and the Congress.

Gandhi's Lok Sabha membership was cancelled after he was convicted in a defamation case for saying PM Modi shared the same last name as fugitive businessmen Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi.

"How come all thieves have Modi as the common surname," he had said at a pre-election rally, a remark that the ruling BJP projected as a smear campaign against those with the Modi surname, shared by an electorally critical disadvantaged community.

A court in Gujarat sentenced Gandhi to two years in jail, but he was allowed to walk free on bail to appeal verdict. The conviction made him ineligible to continue as a Lok Sabha member.



DEVASTATING TORNADO Mississippi death toll hits 25

REUTERS, Silver City

Rescuers combed through rubble on Saturday after a powerful storm tore across Mississippi late on Friday, killing at least 25 people there and one person in Alabama as it levelled hundreds of buildings and spawned at least one devastating tornado.

The tornado stayed on the ground for about an hour and cut a path of destruction some 170 miles (274 km) long, according to Nicholas Price, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Jackson, Mississippi.

US President Joe Biden approved an emergency declaration for Mississippi yesterday. Biden ordered federal aid to supplement state, tribal and local recovery efforts in the affected areas, a White House Statement said.

In Rolling Fork, a town of around 1,900 in western Mississippi that was hit the hardest, homes were reduced to rubble, tree trunks snapped like twigs and cars were tossed aside like toys. The town's water tower lay twisted on the ground.

Michael Searcy, a storm chaser who saw the tornado approach Rolling Fork, spent hours helping to rescue trapped people.

"As soon as we would go from one vehicle to the next vehicle or from building to building, we could hear screams and we could hear cries for help," he told Reuters. "And we were just basically in small groups, digging through the rubble, trying to find and extricate people."

Members of one family narrowly escaped by taking shelter in a bathroom and the high winds dropped a van on top of the home, Searcy said.

BLOW TO TAIWAN

China opens ties with Honduras

REUTERS, Beijing

China established diplomatic ties with Honduras yesterday after the Central American country ended its decades-long relationship with Taiwan, while Taiwan's foreign minister accused Honduras of demanding exorbitant sums before being lured away by Beijing.

The ending of ties with Taiwan had been expected after the Honduran foreign minister travelled to China last week to open relations and President Xiomara Castro said her government would start ties with Beijing.

China said its foreign minister, Qin Gang, and Honduran Foreign Minister Eduardo Enrique Reina signed the deal on diplomatic recognition in Beijing, ending relations with Taiwan dating back to the 1940s.

A brief statement late on Saturday, the Honduran foreign ministry said it recognised the People's Republic of China as the only legitimate government that represents all of China and that Taiwan is an "inseparable part of Chinese territory".

China claims democratically ruled Taiwan as its own territory with no right to state-to-state ties, a position Taipei strongly rejects. China demands that countries with which it has ties to recognise its position.

'Not a crime'

Trump dismisses NY probe at Texas rally

AFP, Waco

Donald Trump staged his first presidential campaign rally in Texas Saturday, brushing off his potential indictment as he railed against multiple criminal probes threatening his bid for the White House. The Republican addressed several thousand supporters – far fewer than the 15,000 he had expected – in the city of Waco as he braced for possible charges over a hush-money payout just days before the 2016 election, to a porn star alleging a sexual encounter. Maintaining the investigation was over "something that is not a crime, not a misdemeanor, not an affair," Trump told supporters how he had been the victim of "one witch hunt and phony investigation after another." The former president has made a torrent of increasingly bellicose statements, claiming "misconduct" by prosecutors he refers to as "human scum" who are pursuing cases against him in New York, Washington and Atlanta.

Used exorcism to fight crime

Says Colombia police chief

AFP, Bogota

Colombia's chief of police said he and other officers have used exorcism and prayer to tackle crime and the country's most powerful criminals, including drug cartel leader Pablo Escobar. Sitting in his office surrounded by crucifixes, effigies of the Virgin Mary and other Catholic symbols, General Henry Sanabria told local media on Saturday that these religious practices have helped the police throughout the last 50 years of armed conflict in the South American country. As examples, he recalled police operations in which Escobar (in 1993), FARC guerrilla leader Alfonso Cano (2011) and his military chief known as "Mono Jojoy" (2010) were killed. "The existence of the devil is certain. I have seen him. I have felt him," Sanabria said in an interview with Semana magazine.



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