

Putin, Xi hail 'unyielding' ties

Putin and Xi signed a slew of agreements yesterday on trade, media and energy

● The two leaders talked about Ukraine

● Russia said it "positively assesses the objective and unbiased position of the Chinese side regarding the situation in Ukraine and welcomes China's aspiration to play a constructive role"

AFP | Beijing, China

President Xi Jinping hailed China and Russia's "unyielding" ties in talks with Vladimir Putin yesterday, as the pair met to underscore their alliance days after Donald Trump's own visit to Beijing.

Putin was received by Xi outside Beijing's opulent Great Hall of the People in much the same fashion as Trump last week, complete with chanting children and military fanfare.

But the language was much warmer, with Xi telling the Russian leader Beijing and Moscow have "continuously deepened our political mutual trust and strategic coordination with a

PUTIN-XI MEETING KEY TAKEAWAYS
The Russian and Chinese leaders met in Beijing on Wednesday, reaffirming their 'unyielding' partnership and signing on major global issues.

- 1 OUTDOING TRUMP**
 - Neither leader referred to the United States directly, but Putin said ties were at an "unprecedentedly high level", while Xi described relations as "unyielding".
 - Xi and Putin signed a slew of agreements on trade, media, and energy and extended their treaty of "friendly cooperation".
 - Putin invited Xi to visit Russia next year and said he intended to be at November's APEC summit in Shenzhen - which Trump has also said he will try to attend.
- 2 IRAN**
 - Xi told Putin that the Middle East was at a "critical juncture" and called for an "early end" to the conflict, in particular to secure energy supplies.
 - "A comprehensive ceasefire is of utmost urgency, resuming hostilities is even more inadvisable and maintaining negotiations is particularly important," he said.
- 3 NO PIPELINE BREAKTHROUGH**
 - Kremlin said there had been no breakthrough on the proposed "Power of Siberia 2" natural gas pipeline.
 - It would carry 50 billion cubic metres of gas a year, and help make up for the exports Russia used to send to Europe before the Ukraine invasion.
 - Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said there was a "basic understanding" on the route and how it will be built, but no "clear timeline" and "there are still some details to be worked out".
- 4 UKRAINE**
 - The two sides agreed that there needed to be a solution to the "root causes" of the Ukraine conflict.
 - They also supported "the search for a solution through dialogue and negotiations".
 - Xi has stuck to this stance during talks with Trump, and now with Putin.

THE BIG PICTURE Putin and Xi are deepening political, economic and strategic ties, presenting a united front on the world stage and challenging U.S. influence.



Russia's President Vladimir Putin and China's President Xi Jinping hold a tea chat in Beijing

an "unprecedentedly high level" despite "unfavourable external factors", Russian media footage showed.

In an apparent swipe at the United States, Xi warned of "unilateral and hegemonic counter-currents running rampant" in the world.

In contrast to Trump's visit last week, which yielded little in the way of immediate concrete announcements, Putin and Xi signed a slew of agreements on Wednesday on trade, media and energy.

The two leaders later had talks over tea, which the Krem-

lin had previously said would be reserved for "the most important issues" such as Ukraine, Iran and relations with the US.

That session lasted around 1.5 hours before Putin headed to the airport, according to Russian media.

Fossil fuel push

Analysts believed Putin would use his visit to push for progress on the "Power of Siberia 2", a major natural gas pipeline running from Russia to China through Mongolia.

But Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russian media

Wednesday that while the two sides had reached a "basic understanding" -- including on "the route and how it will be built" -- there was no "clear timeline", and "there are still some details to be worked out".

"Russia and China are actively cooperating in the energy sector... We are, of course, ready to continue reliably supplying all these types of fuel to the rapidly growing Chinese market," Putin said Wednesday.

Xi told Putin on Wednesday that "a comprehensive ceasefire is of utmost urgency, resuming hostilities is even more inadvisable and maintaining negotiations is particularly important".

The two leaders talked about Ukraine, Chinese state media said after the visit had ended, without giving further details.

On Wednesday Putin said that Russia and China were "committed to an independent and sovereign foreign policy".

In a joint statement released by the Kremlin, Russia said it "positively assesses the objective and unbiased position of the Chinese side regarding the situation in Ukraine and welcomes China's aspiration to play a constructive role".

China training Russian troops for Ukraine combat: German newspaper

AFP | Berlin

European intelligence agencies believe the Chinese military has trained hundreds of Russian soldiers for fighting in Ukraine, according to Germany's Die Welt newspaper which cited secret documents it had seen.

The Chinese People's Liber-



Representative image

ation Army (PLA) reportedly hosted covert training for several hundred Russian soldiers late last year at six military bases in China, the newspaper reported on Wednesday, citing the classified documents.

The training, according to the report, focused primarily on the deployment of drones and electronic countermeasures,

with many of the Russians sent to fight in Ukraine soon after, including with Russia's elite "Rubicon" frontline drone unit.

AFP could not independently verify the newspaper report.

Chinese troops have also reportedly received secret training in Russia.

Die Welt reported that European intelligence sources

believe that roughly 600 PLA soldiers spent time at Russian military bases last year learning about armored combat, artillery deployment and air defenses.

European intelligence agencies also believe that Russia and China have been sharing extensive information about advanced European and US-made weapons used by Ukraine, in-

cluding equipment captured on the battlefield by Russian troops.

According to the Die Welt report, particular interest has focused on US-made HIMARS rocket launchers, Patriot air-defense systems, German-made Marder armored vehicles, and American Abrams main battle tanks.

Rubio offers Cubans 'new path' in special video address

AFP | Washington, United States

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio offered Cubans a "new path" in a special video address Wednesday hours before Washington was expected to criminally indict the island's influential former leader Raul Castro.

Addressing the Cuban people directly in Spanish, Rubio accused the country's communist leadership of theft, corruption and oppression.

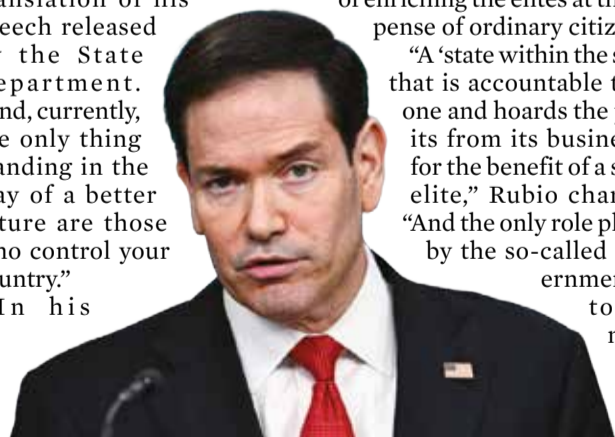
"President (Donald) Trump is offering a new path between the US and a new Cuba," said Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants.

"A new Cuba where you have a real opportunity to choose who governs your country and

vote to replace them if they are not doing a good job."

"In the US, we are ready to open a new chapter in the relationship between our people and our countries," Rubio said, according to an official English translation of his speech released by the State Department. "And, currently, the only thing standing in the way of a better future are those who control your country."

In his



speech on the day when the Cuban community in the United States marks the island's independence, Rubio accused Gaesa, the military-backed conglomerate estimated to control 70 percent of the Cuban economy, of enriching the elites at the expense of ordinary citizens.

"A 'state within the state' that is accountable to no one and hoards the profits from its businesses for the benefit of a small elite," Rubio charged. "And the only role played by the so-called 'government' is

to demand that you

US Justice Department indicts former Cuban president Raul Castro
Miami, United States

The US Justice Department yesterday indicted 94-year-old former Cuban president Raul Castro over the 1996 downing of civilian planes manned by critics of the communist state.

An unsealed indictment accused Castro and others of a conspiracy to kill Americans and other charges.

continue making 'sacrifices' and repressing anyone who dares to complain."

EU agrees to implement US trade pact after Trump threats

Strasbourg, France

The EU reached a deal yesterday to implement its side of a nearly year-old trade pact with the United States, a major step towards ending a roller coaster of transatlantic tariff battles with President Donald Trump.

Hailing the "good news", German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said it showed the bloc was "delivering on its commitments" and bringing "security and stability" for European businesses, which faced a new Trump tariff threat unless the deal kicks in by July 4.

The 27-nation bloc struck an accord with Washington last July setting levies on most European goods at 15 percent, but to Trump's frustration it had yet to make good on its pledge to scrap levies on most US imports in return.

Negotiators from the EU's parliament and capitals wrangled late into the night in Strasbourg, finally emerging long after midnight with news of an agreement to move forward.

"This means we will soon deliver on our part," EU chief

Ursula von der Leyen said on social media, calling for the implementation process to be quickly finalised as Trump's deadline looms.

"Together, we can ensure stable, predictable, balanced, and mutually beneficial transatlantic trade," she said.

The EU agreement puts the bloc on track for ratification by July 4 -- short of which Trump has threatened "much higher" tariffs. He has already vowed to raise duties on European cars and trucks from 15 to 25 percent.



Among the safeguards built into the final text, the European Commission can move to suspend the accord if the United States fails to meet its commitments or disrupts trade and investment, including by "discriminating against or targeting EU economic operators".

DR Congo Ebola risk high regionally, low worldwide: WHO

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

The risk from a deadly Ebola outbreak high in central Africa but remains low globally, the World Health Organization said Wednesday, adding that the virus had likely been spreading for months.

The outbreak of the highly contagious haemorrhagic fever was declared in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo last Friday.

Ebola has killed more than 15,000 people in Africa in the past half-century, and the UN health agency has declared the

latest surge an international health emergency.

The 17th Ebola outbreak to hit the DRC is already suspected of having caused 139 deaths from around 600 probable cases.

"We expect those numbers to keep increasing, given the amount of time the virus was

circulating before the outbreak was detected," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters.

Ebola is a deadly viral disease spread through direct contact with bodily fluids. It can cause severe bleeding and organ failure.