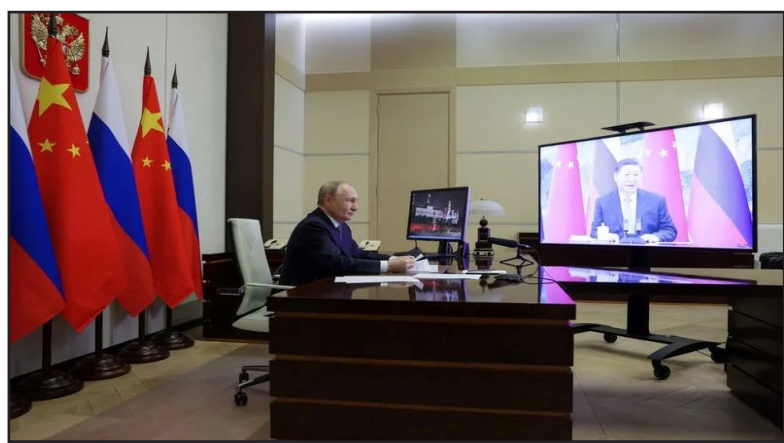


Putin, Xi Discuss How to Deal With Trump



Russian President Vladimir Putin holds a video conference meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, outside Moscow.

MOSCOW/BEIJING (Reuters) -- Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed on Tuesday how to build ties with Donald Trump, prospects for a peace deal to end the war in Ukraine and Moscow's firm support for Beijing's position on Taiwan.

Xi and Putin, who spoke for an hour and 35 minutes by video call after Trump was sworn in as U.S. president, proposed a further deepening of the strategic partnership between their countries which worries the West.

China and Russia declared a "no limits" partnership in February 2022 when Putin visited Beijing, days before he sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine. Putin has in re-

cent months described China as an "ally".

Putin, 72, speaking from his Novo-Ogarevo residency outside Moscow and Xi, 71, speaking from the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, called each other "dear friends", and Xi told Putin about a call with Trump on Friday on TikTok, trade and Taiwan.

Xi and Putin "have indicated a willingness to build relations with the United States on a mutually beneficial, mutually respectful basis, if the Trump team really shows interest in this," Kremlin foreign policy aide Yuri Ushakov told reporters in Moscow. "It was also noted from our side that we are ready for dialogue with the new U.S. administration on the Ukrainian conflict."

Ushakov said Putin wanted long-

term peace in Ukraine, not a short-term ceasefire, but any deal must take into account Russia's interests. No specific proposals for a call with Trump have been received, he said.

Trump has said he will be tough on China and speak to Putin about ending the war in Ukraine. In remarks to reporters after his inauguration, Trump said Putin should make a deal to end the war because the conflict was destroying Russia.

Russia and China have increasingly found common geopolitical cause. Xi has called for talks to end the war in Ukraine and has accused the U.S. of stoking the war with weapons supplies to Kyiv, which also says it is ready to seek a negotiated solution that respects its interests.

Trump told The Wall Street Journal in October that Xi was "a good poker player" and that he got along "great" with Putin, but that during his first term he had warned Putin that the U.S. could strike back if Russia went further in Ukraine.

Putin and Xi share a broad world view, which portrays the West as decadent and in decline as China challenges U.S. supremacy in many areas.

"We jointly advocate building a more just multipolar world order, and we are working in the interests of ensuring indivisible security in the Eurasian space and in the world as a whole," Putin said.

New Fires Break Out as Winds Pick Up in California



This photo shows the Palisades Fire as it approaches homes in Los Angeles, Jan. 7, 2025.

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Winds picked up on Tuesday in Southern California and at least a couple of new wildfires broke out as firefighters remained on alert in extreme fire weather two weeks after two major blazes started that are still burning in the Los Angeles area.

Gusts could peak at 70 mph (113 kph) along the coast and 100 mph (160 kph) in the mountains and foothills during extreme fire weather that is expected to last through Tuesday morning. Wind speeds ranged from 35 mph (56 kph) along the coast to 63 mph (101 kph) in the mountains overnight, according to National

Weather Service reports.

The weather service issued a warning of a "particularly dangerous situation" for parts of Los Angeles, Ventura and San Diego counties from Monday afternoon through Tuesday morning due to low humidity and damaging Santa Ana winds.

"The conditions are ripe for explosive fire growth should a fire start," said Andrew Rorke, a meteorologist with the weather service in Oxnard.

At least two small fires started in San Diego County. Evacuation orders were issued for the Lilac Fire, which had burned about 50 acres (20 hectares). It was growing

"with a moderate rate of spread and structures are threatened," the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection posted. Firefighters made progress on the Pala Fire and it was reported as stopped, the agency said.

On Monday, Los Angeles fire crews quickly put out a small brush fire that broke out south of the iconic triple-domed Griffith Observatory. A man suspected of starting the fire was taken into custody, said David Cuellar, a Los Angeles Police Department spokesman. Firefighters also quickly extinguished a brush fire along Interstate 405 in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Granada Hills that temporarily closed the northbound lanes.

Fire crews aggressively fought a blaze that also sparked Monday afternoon in the city of Poway, in San Diego County, and stopped its forward progress.

The low humidity, bone-dry vegetation and strong Santa Ana winds come as firefighters continue to battle two major blazes in the Los Angeles area, the Palisades and Eaton fires, which have killed at least 27 people and destroyed more than 14,000 structures since they broke out during fierce winds on Jan. 7. The Palisades fire was 61% contained early Tuesday and the Eaton fire 87% contained, according to fire officials.

Indian State Protests Light Sentence for Rapist Murderer

KOLKATA (Reuters) -- India's West Bengal state launched an appeal on Tuesday to overturn a life sentence in favor of the death penalty for a police volunteer convicted of the rape and murder of a junior doctor, a senior lawyer aware of the development said.

The brutal killing sparked national outrage over the lack of safety for women and protests around the country by medics to demand justice and better security at public hospitals.

The state government run by the regional Trinamool Congress party filed the appeal at the Calcutta High Court, the lawyer said, declining to be identified because he was not au-

thorized to speak to the media.

The woman's body was found in August in a classroom at the state-run R G Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata, where she worked.

In convicting Sanjay Roy, Judge Anirban Das turned down a plea by prosecutor for the death penalty, saying he did not consider it a rare crime that might warrant capital punishment. He sentenced Roy on Monday to life in jail on counts of rape and murder.

Mamata Banerjee, chief minister of West Bengal, of which Kolkata is the capital, said late on Monday that she was "shocked" by the judgment.

"I am convinced that it is indeed

a rarest of rare case which demands capital punishment. How could the judgment come to the conclusion that it is not a rarest of rare case?" Banerjee said in a post on the social media platform X.

Addressing a public rally about 350 km (215 miles) from Kolkata on Tuesday, Banerjee said her government was seeking the highest punishment in the case.

Roy has denied the charges and said he was framed. His lawyer said the defense would appeal against the conviction.

The parents of the junior doctor have said they are not satisfied with the investigation and suspected more people were involved in the crime.

Zelensky Questions Trump's Commitment to Europe



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky touches his forehead as he reacts during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos on January 21, 2025.

DAVOS (Dispatches) -- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky questioned whether his U.S. counterpart Donald Trump was committed to NATO and European security in an address to the World Economic Forum in Davos on Tuesday.

"Will President Trump even notice Europe? Does he see NATO as necessary? And will he respect EU institutions?" Zelensky asked in the speech, which called for Europe to become more self-reliant.

Zelensky also said Europe should develop a joint defense policy and be willing to increase spending to ensure it can guarantee its own security. "We need a united European security and defense policy," the Ukrainian leader said, adding that, "all European countries must be willing to spend as much on security as is truly needed" and that "Europe must be able to guarantee peace and security for itself."

Zelensky said Europe must be "loud" when discussing the war in Ukraine with Trump so that he "un-

derstands the details and risks" of negotiating peace with Russia. He acknowledged there are "voices around Trump delivering pro-Russian information" but repeated that Kiev has a "good relationship" with him.

While campaigning, Trump repeatedly threatened to slash aid for Ukraine and claimed he would end the war quickly, seemingly alluding to a negotiated peace with Moscow — something Kyiv has rejected unless it rules out giving up territory to Russia.

Zelensky said Ukraine no longer fully depends on foreign weapons and equipment, estimating that around 40% of its military supplies come from domestic production.

However, he said, Russia also increased its military production and that Europe is not scaling its defense industry up at the same pace.

He repeated his warnings that Ukraine needs more support, united allies in Europe and the United States, and clear security guarantees, without which Russia will go on to invade other European states.

Yoon Denies Ordering Military to Drag Out Lawmakers



Impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, top left, sits at his impeachment trial at the Constitutional Court in Seoul, Jan 21, 2025.

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's impeached president denied Tuesday that he ordered the military to drag lawmakers out of the National Assembly to prevent them from voting to reject his martial law decree last month, as he appeared for the first time before the Constitutional Court that will determine his fate.

Yoon Suk Yeol's presence at the court was his first public appearance since becoming South Korea's first sitting president to be detained over his short-lived declaration of martial law, which plunged the country into political turmoil.

After abruptly imposing martial law on Dec. 3, Yoon sent troops and police officers to encircle the National Assembly, but enough lawmakers managed to enter to vote unanimously to reject his decree, forcing Yoon's Cabinet to lift the measure early the following morning.

Yoon, a conservative, has argued that his dispatch of troops was not meant to block the assembly but instead was a warning to the main liberal opposition Democratic Party, which has used its legislature majority to obstruct Yoon's agenda, undermine his budget bill and impeach some of his top officials. In his announcement of martial law, Yoon called the assembly "a den of criminals" that was bogging down government affairs, and vowed to eliminate "shameless North Korea followers and anti-state forces."

The commanders of military units sent to the assembly have disagreed with Yoon's stance. Kwak Jong-keun, commander of a special forces unit, told an assembly hearing that Yoon had called him directly and asked that his troops "quickly destroy the door and drag out the lawmakers who are inside." Kwak said he didn't carry out the order.

Asked by acting Constitutional Court chief justice Moon Hyungbae whether he ordered the commanders to pull out the lawmakers, Yoon replied that he didn't do so.

Yoon said the lawmakers could have gathered somewhere later to overturn the decree. He also argued that there would have been a popular backlash if he had tried to physically prevent an assembly vote.

"If I had obstructed (the vote), I think I wouldn't have been able to handle the consequences," Yoon said.

Asked by Moon about reports that he gave a memo on establishing an emergency legislative body to a top official before imposing martial law, Yoon said he didn't do so. Whether Yoon plotted to launch such a body would help explain his true intentions for martial law.

The assembly impeached Yoon on Dec. 14, suspending his presidential powers. The Constitutional Court has until June to determine whether to formally dismiss him as president or reinstate him. Observers say a court ruling is expected to come sooner.

News in Brief

FRANKFURT (Reuters) -- The leader of Germany's conservative CDU, the party's candidate to run for chancellor, said on Tuesday that the nation should focus on efforts to reach existing NATO military spending targets before discussing any further increases. "For the next three to four years we will have to focus on reaching at least 2%, where we currently see a funding gap of 30 to 40 billion (euros) per year and that's what we need to work hard on," Friedrich Merz told radio station DLF. Germany, which is to hold general elections on Feb. 23, met NATO's target to spend 2% of its gross domestic product on defence in 2024, but only thanks to a 100 billion euro (\$104 billion) special fund that will run out in 2028. Incoming U.S. President Donald Trump has called for a new NATO spending target of as much as 5% of GDP.

CUMBERLAND, Maryland/WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- Donald Trump supporters who attacked the U.S. Capitol four years ago began to leave prison on Tuesday, after the newly installed president issued a sweeping pardon that signaled he intends to make aggressive use of his executive power. The Republican president's pardon of 1,500 defendants on Monday, Inauguration Day, drew outrage from lawmakers who were endangered in the attack on Jan. 6, 2021, when thousands of Trump supporters stormed the Capitol in an unsuccessful attempt to prevent Congress from certifying Democrat Joe Biden's 2020 victory. Trump's clemency extended from the hundreds of people who followed the crowd into the Capitol to the far smaller group who planned the assault on democracy, including some who assaulted and injured some 140 police officers that day.

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MADRID (Reuters) -- Spanish Labor Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Yolanda Diaz said on Tuesday she will withdraw from Elon Musk's social media platform X due in part to the billionaire's behavior during events linked to President Donald Trump's inauguration. "I made this decision, which I know is complicated, but I will not be part of a social network based on the use of algorithms that encourage xenophobic ideas, against human rights and encourage the extreme right in the world," she told state broadcaster TVE. She said the decision followed "Elon Musk's positioning yesterday, not only with his gestures, but with the absolutely convoluted speeches he is making". At an inauguration-related event on Monday, Musk raised his arm in a gesture that drew online comparisons to a Nazi salute. Earlier this month, the German Defense and Foreign Ministries said they would stop using X, with the Defense Ministry saying it had become increasingly "unhappy" with developments on the platform. They joined a growing number of German and UK universities, which have departed from X.

TOKYO (Reuters) -- A large fire broke out in a commercial building near a famous tourist landmark, Tsutenkaku Tower, in Osaka in western Japan, local TV footage showed on Tuesday. The fire broke out on the first floor of a five-story building and 26 emergency vehicles have been deployed to the site, public broadcaster NHK reported, citing local police and fire departments. Live images showed part of the building, on a shopping street in downtown Osaka, still burning and dark smoke billowing into the skyline. No other details including whether there were any casualties were available.

BOGOTA (Reuters) -- At least 20 Colombian fighters from rival rebel factions were killed in weekend clashes over control of a strategic jungle area for drug trafficking, military sources and the human rights ombudsman office reported. The clashes pitted opposing factions from what was once the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) against one another in the country's southeastern Guaviare jungle. The violence follows an offensive launched by another rebel group, the National Liberation Army (ELN), in northeastern Catatumbo region that left at least 80 people dead and 11,000 displaced. In a social-media post, President Gustavo Petro declared a state of "internal unrest and economic emergency" in the Catatumbo area and accused the warring factions of having "lost their heads." Armed conflict in Colombia has lasted more than six decades and is funded mainly by drug trafficking and illegal mining. It has left over 450,000 dead and millions displaced.