

Indian Prime Minister Begins Two-Day Visit to Russia



Russian President Vladimir Putin, left, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi greet each other before their meeting in New Delhi on Dec. 6, 2021.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- **India's prime minister began a two-day visit to Russia on Monday, his first since the start of the Ukraine war, a conflict that has complicated the relationship between the longtime allies and pushed Russia closer to India's rival China.**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit included a meeting with President Vladimir Putin, whom he last saw in Russia in 2019, in the far eastern port of Vladivostok. The two leaders also met in person in September 2022 in Uzbekistan, at a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization bloc. Russia has had strong ties with India since the Cold War, and New

Delhi's importance as a key trading partner for Moscow has grown since the Kremlin sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022. China and India have become key buyers of Russian oil following sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies that shut most Western markets off to Russian exports.

Under Modi's leadership, India has avoided condemning the war in Ukraine while emphasizing the need for a peaceful settlement.

A confrontation in June 2020 along the disputed China-India border dramatically altered their already touchy relationship as the rival troops fought with rocks, clubs and fists. At least 20 Indian soldiers and

four Chinese soldiers were killed. Tensions have since persisted despite talks.

Since Western sanctions blocked Russian oil exports after the start of the Ukraine war, India has become a key buyer of Russian oil. It now gets more than 40% of its oil imports from Russia, according to analysts.

India is also strongly dependent on Russia for military supplies, but with Moscow's supply line hit by the fighting in Ukraine, India has been diversifying its defense procurements, buying more from the U.S., Israel, France and Italy.

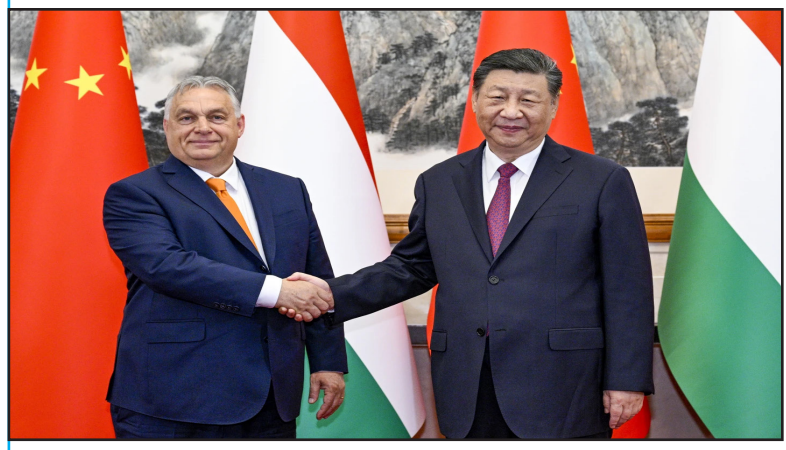
"Defense cooperation will clearly be a priority area," Bajpae said, adding that 60% of India's military equipment and systems is "still of Russian origin."

Trade development also will figure strongly in the talks, particularly intentions to develop a maritime corridor between India's major port of Chennai and Vladivostok, the gateway to Russia's Far East.

India-Russia trade has seen a sharp increase, touching close to \$65 billion in the 2023-24 financial year, due to strong energy cooperation, Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra told reporters Friday.

Imports from Russia touched \$60 billion and exports from India \$4 billion in the 2023-24 financial year, Kwatra said. India's financial year runs from April to March.

Xi Receives Hungarian PM, Calls for Direct Russia-Ukraine Talks



A Tupolev Tu-22M3 bomber performs during the International Army Games 2016, in Dubrovichi outside Ryazan, Russia, August 5, 2016.

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — **Chinese President Xi Jinping called on world powers to help Russia and Ukraine resume direct dialogue during a meeting Monday with Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, state broadcaster reported.**

Orbán made a surprise visit to China after similar trips last week to Russia and Ukraine to discuss prospects for a peaceful settlement of more than the two-year war. Hungary assumed the rotating presidency of the European Union this month and Orbán has since embarked on a peace mission, which, however, lacks the endorsement of other European leaders.

"China is a key power in creating

the conditions for peace in the Russia-Ukraine war," Orbán wrote on the social media platform X. "This is why I came to meet with President Xi in Beijing, just two months after his official visit to Budapest."

"Peace mission 3.0" is how the prime minister captioned a picture posted on X as he touched down in Beijing.

During his meeting with Xi, Orbán described China as a stabilizing force amid global turbulence and praised its "constructive and important" peace initiatives.

China has been promoting its own six-point peace plan, which it issued with Brazil in May. Beijing says it is neutral

in the conflict, though in practice it supports Moscow through frequent state visits, growing trade and joint military drills.

While hosting Orbán, Xi called on Russia and Ukraine to ceasefire and on other major powers to create an environment conducive to talks. Only when all major powers project "positive energy rather than negative energy" can a ceasefire occur, Xi said, according to CCTV.

Orbán hosted the Chinese leader in Hungary only two months ago as part of a three-country European tour that also included stops in France and Serbia, which unlike the other two is not a member of the EU or NATO.

During the trip, China upgraded its ties with Hungary to an "all-weather, comprehensive strategic partnership," one of its highest designations for foreign relations that in addition to Hungary applies only to Belarus, Pakistan and Venezuela.

Hungary under Orbán has built substantial political and economic ties with China. The European nation hosts a number of Chinese electric vehicle battery facilities, and in December it announced that Chinese EV manufacturing giant BYD will open its first European EV production factory in the south of the country.

Orbán is widely seen as having the warmest relations with Xi and Russian President Vladimir Putin among European leaders. His visit to Moscow last week drew condemnation from Kyiv and EU officials.

North Korea: South's Live-Fire Drills 'Suicidal Hysteria'

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — **The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called South Korea's recent front-line live-fire drills "suicidal hysteria" as she threatened unspecified military steps Monday if further provoked.**

The warning by Kim Yo Jong came after South Korea resumed firing exercises near its tense land and sea borders with North Korea in the past two weeks. The exercises were the first of their kind since South Korea suspended a 2018 agreement with the North aimed at easing front-line military tensions in June.

"The question is why the enemy kicked off such war drills near the border, suicidal hysteria, for which they will have to sustain terrible disaster," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by state media. She accused South Korea's conservative government of deliberately es-

calating tensions as a way to escape a domestic political crisis. She said the riskiness of the South Korean drills is clear to everyone as they happened amid "a touch-and-go situation" established after the U.S., South Korea and Japan recently held a new trilateral military exercise that North Korea views as a security threat.

"In case it is judged according to our criteria that they violated the sovereignty of (North Korea) and committed an act tantamount to a declaration of war, our armed forces will immediately carry out its mission and duty assigned by the (North Korean) constitution," she said, without elaborating.

Later Monday, Koo Byoungsam, a spokesperson at South Korea's Unification Ministry, described Kim's statement as an attempt to trigger an internal divide in South Korea. South Korea's Defense Ministry

separately said it will continue its live-fire drills as scheduled but didn't say when and where new exercises are planned.

In early June, South Korea fully suspended the 2018 inter-Korean military pact after North Korea flew balloons carrying manure, cigarette butts and wastepaper across the border to protest South Korean activists scattering political leaflets in the North via their own balloons.

The military agreement — reached during a short-lived era of reconciliation between the Koreans — required the two countries to cease all hostile acts at border areas, such as live-firing drills, aerial surveillance and psychological warfare. The deal had already been in the danger of collapse, with both Koreas taking steps in breach of it amid animosities over North Korea's spy satellite launch last November.

France Faces Political Deadlock Following Snap Election



People raise their arms and hands as they gather at the Place de la Republique after partial results in the second round of the early French parliamentary elections, in Paris, July 7, 2024.

PARIS (Reuters) -- **France faced a hung parliament and difficult negotiations starting Monday to form a government, after a surprise left-wing surge blocked Marine Le Pen's quest to bring the far right to power.**

The leftist New Popular Front (NFP) emerged as the dominant force in the National Assembly after Sunday's election, but with no single group securing a working majority the possibilities include the NFP forming a minority government or the building of a broad, unwieldy coalition.

The result delivered a blow to President Emmanuel Macron and leaves the euro zone's second largest economy in limbo, heralding a period of political instability just weeks before Paris hosts the Olympic Games.

Macron ended up with a fragmented parliament, in what is set to weaken France's role in the European Union and further afield, and make it hard for anyone to push through a domestic agenda.

The left won 182 seats, Macron's centrist alliance 168 and Le Pen's National Rally (RN) and allies 143, Interior Ministry data cited by Le Monde newspaper showed.

Prime Minister Gabriel Attal said he would tender his resignation on Monday, but it was not clear whether the president would accept it immediately, given the daunting task ahead to form a government. Attal said he would be willing to stay on in a caretaker role.

Leaders from the NFP met overnight for first talks on how to proceed, but in media interviews on Monday they gave little sense of direction.

Green leader Marine Tondelier, one of a number of NFP figures seen as potential candidates for the post, said on France Inter radio the prime minister could be someone from the hard-left France Unbowed party, the Greens or the Socialists, the three largest parties in the alliance.

Olivier Faure, the Socialist leader, said on France Info radio that he expected the parties to agree on a plan this week, but sidestepped a question on whether the NFP would be prepared to negotiate a deal with Macron's centrist camp.

Raphael Glucksmann, a prominent moderate who led the leftist ticket in last month's European elections, said on Sunday that a hung parliament required openness for dialogue.

But France Unbowed's firebrand leader Jean-Luc Melancon, one of the most divisive figures in French politics, explicitly ruled out any deal with centrists on Sunday, and on Monday his ally Eric Bompard was sounding uncompromising.

Russia Says Blocked Ukraine Attempt to Hijack Strategic Bomber



A Tupolev Tu-22M3 bomber performs during the International Army Games 2016, in Dubrovichi outside Ryazan, Russia, August 5, 2016.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- **Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) blocked an attempt by Ukraine to organize the hijacking of a Russian Tu-22M3 strategic bomber and fly it to Ukraine, the FSB said on Monday.**

"Ukrainian intelligence intended to recruit a Russian military pilot for a monetary reward and the provision of Italian citizenship, to persuade him to fly and land a missile carrier in Ukraine," the FSB, the main successor to the Soviet-era KGB, said on its website.

Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) has not immediately responded to Reuters' request for a comment.

During the operation, Russia received information that helped its forces to strike the Ozerne airfield in northwestern Ukraine, the FSB added in its statement.

The timings of the operation and the alleged strikes on the Ozerne airfield in Ukraine's Zhytomyr were both unclear.

The Zhytomyr region was under air raid alerts in the early hours on Monday. Unofficial reports on social

media, including on the Telegram messaging app which is heavily used by officials and military in both countries for disseminating information, said there were explosions in Zhytomyr.

Russia launched missiles at a children's hospital in Kyiv, in a barrage that killed at least 20 people in a number of cities.

Explosions rang out and black smoke could be seen rising from the centre of Kyiv, according to reports.

Pictures distributed by officials from the children's medical facility in Kyiv showed people digging through mounds of rubble, black smoke billowing over a gutted building and medical staff wearing blood-stained scrubs.

The rare daytime Russian barrage came as Volodymyr Zelensky was due in Warsaw before he flies to the NATO summit in Washington.

Zelensky said that there were an unknown number of people trapped under the rubble of the Okhmatdyt children's hospital and it was not immediately clear how many had been killed.

News in Brief

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — **South Korea said Monday it'll withdraw its earlier plan to suspend licenses of striking doctors as part of its efforts to resolve the country's months-long medical impasse. It wasn't immediately known whether and how many of thousands of the striking doctors would return to work in the wake of the government's announcement. Also, the plan could invite criticism that it hurts the principle of fairness over the government's dealing with other previous labor strikes as well as doctors who already returned to work. Health Minister Cho KyooHong said Monday the government has decided not to suspend their licenses of the strikers, regardless of whether they return to their hospitals or not. More than 13,000 junior doctors, who are medical interns and residents, walked off the job in February in protest of the government's plan to sharply boost school admissions. Their walkouts have significantly burdened operations of university hospitals where they had worked while training.**

MANILA (Reuters) -- **The Philippines and Japan boosted their defense ties by signing a reciprocal access agreement (RAA) on Monday, saying they were seeking stability in the region, amid rising tensions with China. Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa described the pact, which eases the entry of equipment and troops for combat training and disaster response, as a "landmark achievement". The deal is the first of its kind to be signed by Japan in Asia and coincides with a rise in assertive actions Chinese vessels in the disputed South China Sea. Both the Philippines and Japan, two of the United States' closest Asian allies, have taken a strong line against what they see as an increasingly assertive China in the South China Sea, a region where Beijing's claims conflict with those of several Southeast Asian nations.**

ABUJA (Reuters) -- **The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) said the region risked disintegration and worsening insecurity after junta-led Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger made clear their intentions to leave the bloc by signing a confederation treaty. The Alliance of Sahel States treaty, signed on Saturday, underscored the three countries' determination to turn their backs on the 15-member ECOWAS, which has been urging them to return to democratic rule. ECOWAS commission president Omar Touray said freedom of movement and a common market of 400 million people were some of the major benefits of the near 50-year-old bloc, but that these were under threat if the three countries left. The three countries' withdrawal will be a major blow to security cooperation particularly in terms of intelligence sharing and participation in the fight against terrorism, he added. ECOWAS leaders gathered at the summit to discuss the implications of the treaty by the Alliance of Sahel States, whose juntas seized control in a series of coups in the three states in 2020-2023 and severed military and diplomatic ties with regional allies and Western powers.**

WASHINGTON (AP) — **Americans are about evenly split on whether former President Donald Trump should face prison time for his recent felony conviction on hush money charges, according to a new poll from the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Among U.S. adults, 48% say the former president and presumptive Republican nominee should serve time behind bars, and 50% say he should not. About 8 in 10 Democrats think Trump should face prison time, while independents are divided. About half, 49%, of independents say he should, and 46% say he should not. Most Republicans believe that Trump was mistreated by the legal system and say he should not face jail time. Democrats, conversely, are generally confident that the prosecutors, the judge and members of the jury treated Trump fairly as a defendant.**

MATAGORDA, Texas (AP) — **Beryl strengthened and again became a hurricane late Sunday as it heads toward southern Texas, where the storm's outer bands lashed the coast with rain and intensifying winds as residents prepared for the powerful storm that already cut a deadly path through parts of Mexico and the Caribbean. The National Hurricane Center issued an updated advisory at 3 a.m. Central Standard Time warning the storm was expected to make landfall within the next two hours. "Life-threatening storm surge, heavy rainfall, and strong winds are ongoing across portions of Texas," the hurricane center said. The center placed the storm about 15 miles (24.1 kilometers) southeast of Matagorda, Texas, and about 100 miles (160.9 kilometers) northeast of Corpus Christi.**

DEATH VALLEY, California (AP) — **After causing deaths and shattering records in the West over the weekend, a long-running heat wave again gripped the U.S. on Monday, with triple digit temperatures predicted for large parts of the East Coast. The dangerous temperatures caused the death of a motorcyclist in Death Valley. The U.S. heat wave came as the global temperature in June was record warm for the 13th straight month and it marked the 12th straight month that the world was 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than pre-industrial times, the European climate service Copernicus said in an early Monday announcement. An excessive heat warning, the National Weather Service's highest alert, was in effect for about 36 million people, or about 10% of the population, weather service meteorologist Bryan Jackson said. Dozens of locations in the West and Pacific Northwest tied or broke previous heat records.**