

Putin: Russia fighting for its very existence

President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday that what was at stake in Ukraine was Russia's very existence as a state. Speaking at length to workers at an aviation factory in Buryatia, some 4,400 km (2,750 miles) east of Moscow, Putin expanded on his familiar argument that the West was bent on pulling Russia apart, Reuters reported. "So for us this is not a geopolitical task, but a task of the survival of Russian statehood, creating conditions for the future development of the country and our children," he said. Putin has accused the West of using Ukraine as a tool to wage war against Russia and inflict on it a "strategic defeat". The United States and its allies say they are helping

Ukraine to defend itself from an imperial-style invasion that has destroyed Ukrainian cities, killed thousands of civilians and forced millions to flee their homes. Putin said in a response to a question that he had been worried about the economy when the West imposed unprecedented waves of sanctions last year but it had proved stronger than expected. "We have increased our economic sovereignty many times over. After all, what did our enemy count on? That we would collapse in 2-3 weeks or in a month," he said. He said the enemy had been expecting that factories would grind to a halt, the financial system would collapse, unemployment would rise, pro-

testers would take to the streets, and Russia would "sway from within and collapse". "This did not happen," Putin said. "It turned out, for many of us, and even more so for Western countries, that the fundamental foundations of Russia's stability are much stronger than anyone thought." Meanwhile, the Kremlin said on Tuesday that Kyiv's position means Russia's goals in Ukraine can only be achieved by military force, Russian state news agencies quoted Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying. "We have to achieve our goals. Right now this is only possible by military means due to the current position of the Kyiv regime," Peskov said.



REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Cyclone Freddy kills over 200 in Malawi, Mozambique

AP - The devastating tropical cyclone Freddy which has devastated southern Africa in a rare second landfall has killed at least 216 people in Malawi and Mozambique since Saturday night, with the death toll expected to rise. Heavy rains that triggered floods and mudslides have killed 199 people in Malawi, authorities said Tuesday. Reports from Mozambique's disaster institute on Tuesday confirmed that 17 people have died in the country and 1,900 homes have been destroyed in the coastal Zambezia Province.

Mexican president: Mexico safer than U.S.



REUTERS

REUTERS - Mexico's president said on Monday his country is safer than the United States, pushing back against U.S. critics of his security record following a deadly kidnapping this month near the border that claimed the lives of two Americans. The March 3 attack on four Americans in the Mexican city of Matamoros and their subsequent abduction was covered closely by U.S. media and sparked recriminations from politicians in the U.S., particularly Republicans. By the time Mexican authorities found the Americans, two of them were dead. Five purported Mexican drug cartel members have since been arrested over the kidnapping.

Judicial law passes first vote in Israeli Knesset

Israel's parliament took another step Tuesday to push forward a judicial reform package that has sparked mass protests against the hard-right cabinet of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Lawmakers in a 3:00 am (0100 GMT) vote approved a bill in first reading that would, among other things, allow the Knesset to scrap Supreme Court rulings with a simple majority vote, ac-

ording to AFP. Netanyahu's cabinet has argued the reforms are needed to limit judicial overreach. Demonstrations have flared for 10 weeks, and activists staged another sit-in early Tuesday outside ministries in Al-Quds, briefly blocking access to staff. "Stop the rush toward a messianic dictatorship and start working toward democracy," the protest-

ers demanded before 10 of them were detained by police. The latest measure was adopted by a 61 to 52 vote but will still need to be approved in a committee and then in second and third plenum readings before becoming law. It would allow lawmakers to override Supreme Court decisions that strike down legislation with a majority of 61 of the 120-member

parliament, and then deny the court the right to review such a move. It would also make it harder for the Supreme Court to strike down legislation it deems to contravene Basic Laws, Israel's quasi constitution, by requiring the support of 12 out of 15 judges. In an earlier overnight vote, lawmakers also approved a bill in first reading that would considerably lim-

it the chances of a prime minister being declared incapacitated for any reason other than mental or physical impairments. The cabinet of Netanyahu, which includes ultra-Orthodox and extreme-right parties, introduced its judicial reform package in January. Ten consecutive weeks of demonstrations have followed, with critics also charging that the proposed changes aim to protect Net-

anyahu as he fights corruption charges in an ongoing court battle. The reforms would also grant the ruling coalition more powers in appointing judges. Israeli President Issac Herzog warned late Monday that the "constitutional and social crisis" was damaging the regime and "could have diplomatic, economic, social and security repercussions".

Beijing-brokered Tehran-Riyadh detente ...

Firstly, the reduction of the U.S. regional influence will be beneficial for the Middle East powers if they are able to manage the regional trends and processes. Secondly, concurrent with the swiftly unfolding international changes, separatist movements in the region have seen a rise, which fails to be in any of the regional powers' interests. Thirdly, although the signing of the Abraham Accords has led to the normalization of some Arab countries' relations with Israel, it has also presented challenges to them, among which is the question raised by the Arab public opinion that why such a normalization does not take place between the Muslim Arab states and Iran. Fourthly, China's increased role in the Middle East has changed the regional countries' calculations about the redistribution of power, which, per se, has changed the atmosphere of the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. And finally, in general, it seems that, regardless of

their differences, Tehran and Riyadh agree that the region should not be a center of conflicts and crises. Nevertheless, owing to the existence of numerous historical cases and issues between Iran and Saudi Arabia, preparing the ground for an agreement on the resumption of normal ties between the two sides required a stronger catalyst. While Iraq had laid the groundwork for the dialogue and agreement between Tehran and Riyadh, China had greater weight for helping the diplomatic process come to fruition owing to its favorable relations with both sides and high international status.

Differences between Middle East approaches of China, U.S.

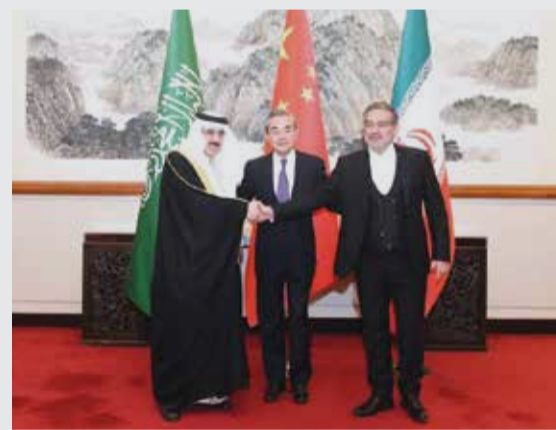
The premise that China would repeat the same costly and wrong policy of the United States toward the Middle East in the past four decades is fundamentally wrong. The U.S. costly financial and humanitarian interventions in the Middle East, although having led to the accumulation of money in the bank ac-

counts of a limited number of the American capitalist arms producers, have weakened Washington's international position. The Middle East is known as a region with complex interests, woes and challenges. Although using conflicts, gaps and differences among governments may bring about swift but short-term political benefits, it will be accompanied by increased economic and political costs. China does not appear to be willing to try a policy already proven wrong. China's simultaneous cooperation with Iran and Saudi Arabia, or even the country's potential to bring the two sides closer to each other, may even bring to mind the recurrence of the Nixon Doctrine of viewing Saudi Arabia and Iran as "twin pillars" of regional stability, during the Cold War period. There is no utilitarian motivation and purpose for China in the Middle East. Basically, under the present circumstances, positive balancing looks to be a prominent political motivation behind China's behavioral pattern

toward the Middle East. This comes as, the United States seeks to, having adopted a competitive approach toward China, portray Beijing as a common enemy of and threat to not only the Middle East, but also the West. This is the same strategy Washington has already implemented toward other states, such as Iran and Russia.

China's credibility in Middle East

As a matter of fact, the tension in the Middle East is not something that would serve China's interests. The Middle East, as an important strategic intersection of trade routes and sea lanes that connects Asia to Europe and Africa, is considered important for the future of China's Belt and Road Initiative. According to estimates, China's trade with the Middle East in recent years has far surpassed that of the United States with the region. In 2021, the value of China's imports from the Middle East stood at 130 billion U.S. dollars, while the U.S. purchases from the region reached 34 billion dollars.



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Moreover, China's exports to the region in the same year amounted to 129 billion dollars, up by 81 billion dollars compared to the figure pertaining to the U.S. overseas sales destined for the Middle East, which was of 48 billion dollars. Thanks to Beijing's economy-oriented approach, the value of China's investments in the Middle Eastern states also reached the impressive figure of 330 billion dollars in 2021. In fact, it can be said that avoiding any rise in tensions is China's behavioral pattern vis-à-vis the Middle East and the country has the necessary tools and credibility to this end. China has growing economic relations with all regional players, which has also led to Beijing's

increased political influence in these countries, although it does not use this political influence to a great extent. For instance, in terms of the relationship between Iran and other regional countries, Beijing has a good relationship with both sides and, unlike the United States, instead of investing in the existing gaps and turning the game into a zero-sum one, can help expand cooperation among the countries and make the game a positive-sum one. At present, China, without seeking interference, is proving to be the true manifestation of a "stabilizing power," the image the United States sought to present of itself through waging wars and intervention for decades.

Further U.S. involvement in Ukraine is not vital national interest: Florida governor

REUTERS - Becoming "further entangled in a territorial dispute between Ukraine and Russia" is not a vital U.S. national interest, said Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who is eyeing running for president, in comments released on Monday. "The Biden administration's virtual 'blank check' funding of this conflict for 'as long as it takes,' without any defined objectives or accountability, distracts from our country's most pressing challenges," he said.