



Russia PM says relations with China at an 'unprecedented high'

China says it is a neutral party between Russia and Ukraine

Page 1 > and wants to help broker an end to the conflict.

However, Beijing blames the West for provoking Moscow and has maintained strong diplomatic and trade ties with Russia in opposition to sanctions against it.

China's special envoy met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other government officials

during talks in Kyiv this month.

The visit followed a phone call last month between the Ukrainian leader and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping that Zelenskyy described as "long and meaningful" and which marked the first known contact between the two since the Ukraine conflict began.

Beijing released a peace plan in February but Ukraine's allies largely dismissed it, insisting that Putin must withdraw his

forces.

During the visit, Mishustin also emphasized Russia's role as a provider of oil and gas to China and their bonds formed as initial allies among communist nations.

"The peoples of Russia and China cherish their history, rich culture, and traditions. We support the further development of our culture, exchanges, and communication," Mishustin said. The memorandums of understanding signed during

the talks between the two prime ministers included an agreement to deepen investment cooperation in trade services, a pact on the export of agricultural products to China, and another on sports cooperation, according to Reuters. Russia's energy shipments to China are projected to rise 40% this year, and the two countries are discussing technological equipment supplies to Russia, Interfax news agency reported.

"With sanctions against Russia providing new opportunities for China, it is hardly surprising that China would be happy to engage actively, if not proactively with Russia economically, as long as whatever relationships they forge will not trigger secondary sanctions against China," said Steve Tsang, director of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) China Institute in London.



Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin and Chinese Premier Li Qiang arrive for a meeting at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, on May 24, 2023.

ALEXANDER ASTAFYEV/
SPUTNIK

Pakistan considers banning Imran Khan's party: **Minister**



Pakistan is considering banning former prime minister Imran Khan's party for attacking the state, the defence minister said on Wednesday, a decision likely to enrage his supporters and exacerbate his confrontation with the military establishment.

The former cricket star is embroiled in the latest, critical phase of a decades-old rivalry between civilian politicians and the powerful military, which has ruled directly or overseen governments through-

out Pakistan's history, Reuters wrote.

The face-off has brought widespread protests by Khan's supporters, raising new fears about the stability of the nuclear-armed country as it struggles with its worst economic crisis in decades.

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif told reporters that Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party had attacked the "very basis of state", which could not be tolerated. "It is under consideration to ban PTI," he said, adding the parliament would have to give final approval for a government decision to ban the party.

The minister referred to Khan's protesting supporters who this month attacked military installations including army headquarters and government buildings.

Khan, or a PTI spokesperson, was not immediately available for comment.

Khan became prime minister in 2018 with the tacit support of the military, though both sides denied it at the time. The military saw Khan, with his conservative, nationalist agenda, as likely to ensure the protection of its interests.

But Khan later fell out with the generals after being seen as having tried to interfere in key promotions in the security sphere, and he was ousted as prime minister after losing a confidence vote in 2022.

Khan, 70, has since then been campaigning for a snap general election, rallying supporters across the country, but the prime minister who replaced him, Shahbaz Sharif, has rejected the call for an election before one is due late this year.

Khan is also facing corruption charges that he has dismissed as being cooked in a bid to banish him from politics.

Drones shot down in border region after raid from Ukraine territory

Russian forces shot down "a large number" of drones in Russia's southern Belgorod region, a local official said Wednesday, a day after Moscow announced that its forces crushed a cross-border raid in the area from Ukraine.

The drones were intercepted overnight over the province, Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said in a Telegram post, AP reported.

He said that no one had been hurt, but unspecified administrative buildings, residential buildings, and cars were damaged.

Ukrainian officials made no immediate comment.

Russia said the previous day that it beat back one of the war's most serious cross-border attacks, with the Defense Ministry saying that more than 70 attackers were killed in a battle in Belgorod that lasted around 24 hours. It made no mention of any Russian casualties.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said that local troops, airstrikes, and artillery routed the attackers. Twelve local civilians were wounded in the attack, officials said, and an older woman died during an evacuation. Details of the incident in the rural region, lying about 80 kilometers (45 miles) north of the city of Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine and far from the front lines of the almost 15-month war, are unclear.

Moscow blamed the incursion that began Monday on Ukrainian military saboteurs. Kyiv described it as an uprising against the Kremlin by Russian partisans.

The region is a Russian military hub holding fuel and ammunition depots. The Belgorod region, like the neighboring Bryansk region and other border areas, has witnessed sporadic spillover from the war.

Elsewhere, the Ukrainian General Staff said Wednesday that "heavy fighting" is continuing inside Bakhmut, days after Russia said that it completely captured the devastated city. The head of the Russian private army Wagner says his force lost more than 20,000 fighters in the drawn-out battle for Bakhmut, with about 20% of the 50,000 Russian convicts he recruited to fight in the 15-month war dying in the eastern Ukrainian city.

Bakhmut lies in Donetsk province, one of four provinces Russia captured last fall. The nine-month battle for Bakhmut has killed tens of thousands of people as Ukraine pursues its strategy of grinding down the Kremlin's forces.



This handout photo released by Belgorod region Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov shows damaged houses in Russia's western Belgorod region on Tuesday, May 23, 2023.

AP

NEWS IN BRIEF

China does not welcome NATO's Japan office



REUTERS - The Asia-Pacific region does not welcome NATO's plan to open a liaison office in Japan, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning said at a press briefing on Wednesday, after Japan acknowledged NATO's plan.

"We want to say that the Asia-Pacific does not welcome group confrontation, does not welcome military confrontation," Mao said. She also said Japan should be "extra cautious on the issue of military security" given its "history of aggression".

Turkish anti-migrant party backs Kilicdaroglu



AP - A hard-line, anti-migrant party on Wednesday threw its weight behind the opposition candidate who is running against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in this weekend's runoff presidential race.

Umit Ozdag, the leader of the far-right Victory Party, announced his support for main opposition party leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who will be facing off against Erdogan on Sunday. He said he decided to back Kilicdaroglu after the two reached a consensus on the need to repatriate millions of migrants within a year.

Ron DeSantis to make 2024 U.S. presidential bid official



REUTERS

BBC - Florida Governor Ron DeSantis will announce his 2024 presidential bid in an online appearance with Twitter CEO Elon Musk on Wednesday.

An official launch video from the DeSantis campaign is expected later the same evening. DeSantis, 44, is viewed as former president Donald Trump's chief rival for the Republican Party's nomination.