

WORLD

Putin begins 5th term as Russia leader

Moscow open to dialogue with the West but only on equal terms, president says

By REN QI in Moscow
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Russian President Vladimir Putin, who took the oath for a fifth six-year term on Tuesday, said Russia does not rule out dialogue with the West but it needs to be on equal terms.

In a short speech at the gilded Grand Kremlin Palace, Putin said Russia is open to developing relations with other countries, and is potentially open to holding nuclear talks with the West.

At the inauguration ceremony, Constitutional Court Chairman Valery Zorkin handed Putin, 71, the symbols of presidential power, including the presidential insignia — the golden cross of St. George — depicting the Russian coat of arms and a gold chain with the words “Virtue, Honesty and Glory”.

The Russian leader was greeted with applause when he entered the hall with more than 2,500 people who had been invited to the ceremony.

They included senior members of the Russian government and celebrities, including US actor Steven Seagal.

“We are a united and great people and together we will overcome all obstacles, realize all our plans, together we will win,” Putin said after being sworn in.

“I am confident that Russia will adequately go through the current difficult, milestone period with dignity, and become even stronger and will definitely implement long-term plans and large-scale projects aimed at achieving development goals.”

He said the West would have to make its own choice about how to engage with his country, adding that talks on strategic nuclear stability with the West were also possible, but only on equal terms.

“We are not giving up dialogue with Western states,” he said. “The choice is up to them: whether they intend to continue trying to restrain Russia’s development, continue the policy of aggression, incessant pres-



Russian President Vladimir Putin walks into the Grand Kremlin Palace before his inauguration ceremony in Moscow on Tuesday. SERGEY BOBYLEV VIA REUTERS

sure on our country for years, or seek a path to cooperation and peace.”

Putin said a conversation, including on security and strategic stability issues, is possible. “But not from a position of strength, without any arrogance, arrogance and one’s own exclusivity, but only on equal terms, respecting each other’s interests.”

He also thanked the Russian citizens for their trust and support, and said the new administration would prioritize improving people’s lives and preserving traditions.

After the inauguration, the government was dissolved in accordance with the constitution. The formation of the new government will start

with the president proposing the name of the next prime minister for approval by the State Duma, the lower house of parliament.

In his address, Putin did not directly mention the special military operation in Ukraine. Some Western countries boycotted the inauguration ceremony in light of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The United States and the United Kingdom were among those that refused to send their diplomats to the event.

Russia’s relations with the US and its allies are at their lowest point since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, when the world came to the brink of a nuclear war.

The West has provided Ukraine with artillery, tanks and long-range missiles, but NATO troops have not joined the conflict directly, something that both Putin and US President Joe Biden have warned could lead to World War III.

Noting the rise in nuclear tensions, Russia said on Monday it would practice the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons as part of its military exercise, following what it said were threats from the UK and the US.

“We hope that this event will cool down the ‘hotheads’ in Western capitals,” Russia’s Foreign Ministry said.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Briefly

JAPAN
Toxic water discharge continues despite flak

Tokyo Electric Power Company said on Tuesday it has completed the fifth round of discharge of nuclear-contaminated water from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant into the ocean, amid strong protests and criticisms. About 7,800 metric tons of radioactive water was dumped in this round, the first in fiscal year 2024, it said. The operator plans to discharge a total of 54,600 tons of nuclear-contaminated water over seven rounds in the fiscal year ending March 2025, despite opposition from residents and the international community.

INDIA
Modi votes as giant election heats up

India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi cast his ballot in his home state of Gujarat on Tuesday in the third phase of a massive general election. The world’s most populous country began voting on April 19 in a seven-phase election in which nearly 1 billion people are eligible to vote, with ballots set to be counted on June 4. Turnout so far has dropped significantly compared with the last national poll in 2019, with analysts blaming widespread expectations that Modi will easily win a third term and hotter-than-average temperatures heading into the summer.

CHINA DAILY—AGENCIES

Rafah attack despite Hamas nod for truce sparks concern

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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After Hamas accepted cease-fire proposals brokered by Egypt and Qatar, Israel’s latest attack on Rafah has again dampened hopes of a long-awaited truce and raised concerns of even more suffering in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli Army Radio announced its forces had taken control of the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing on Tuesday morning and army footage showed tanks rolling through the complex and the Israeli flag raised on the Gaza side, Reuters reported.

This could cripple the already narrow flow and slow pace of essential humanitarian aid reaching Gaza, as the Rafah border crossing is shared between Egypt and Gaza, experts warned.

International humanitarian organizations have for weeks warned that famine was imminent. World Food Programme Executive Director Cindy McCain had said she believes “full-blown famine” has already happened in northern Gaza.

Palestinian news agency WAFA reported of the Israeli army carpet-bombing areas east of Rafah amid fears of a looming ground invasion of the densely populated region.

Despite international appeals for Israel to hold off an assault on Rafah, Israeli tanks and planes attacked several areas and houses



Palestinians displaced from Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip following an evacuation order by the Israeli army arrive in Khan Younis on Monday. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

there overnight. The Gaza Health Ministry said Israeli strikes across the enclave had killed 54 Palestinians and wounded 96 others in the past 24 hours.

Dennis Francis, president of the United Nations General Assembly, said on social media platform X that Israel’s attack on Rafah was “inconsiderate” and “nothing can justify it.” It meant “more humanitarian catastrophe,” he said, noting that this is a “critical moment to take decisive steps toward a permanent cease-fire”.

On Monday, media reported that Ismail Haniyeh, the supreme leader of Hamas, had confirmed the group’s acceptance of what it said were Israel’s cease-fire terms.

However, a statement released by the Israeli Prime Minister’s Office said, “While the Hamas proposal is far from meeting Israel’s core demands, Israel will dispatch a ranking delegation to Egypt in an effort to maximize the possibility of reaching an agreement on terms acceptable to Israel.”

The statement added that Israel’s

war cabinet unanimously decided to continue its operation in Rafah, to apply military pressure on Hamas to advance the release of hostages and achieve the other objectives of the war.

Haydar Oruc, a former researcher at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies in Turkey, told China Daily that when Hamas accepted the plan presented by Egypt and Qatar, “all eyes turned to Israel”.

“But Israel, as expected, rejected the cease-fire agreement accepted by Hamas, showing once again that it is the party that wants the war to continue,” Oruc said.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas welcomed Egyptian-Qatari efforts to reach a truce in Gaza, as he called on the international community to also exert pressure on Israel to abide by this agreement, Wafa reported.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk warned that civilian deaths, suffering and destruction “were set to increase beyond already unbearable levels” following Israel’s orders to Palestinians to evacuate parts of Rafah.

He called the latest development “inhumane” and “runs contrary to the basic principles of international humanitarian and human rights laws”, which have the effective protection of civilians as their overriding concern.

Agencies contributed to this story.

China, Malaysia eye booming cooperation

By YANG HAN in Kuala Lumpur
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There are huge opportunities for Malaysia and China to enhance cooperation as the two countries celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties this year, officials and experts said at a forum in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday.

“In our nation-building journey for shared prosperity, we recognize China as a reliable friend and partner,” Malaysia’s Deputy Minister of Energy Transition and Water Transformation Akmal Nasrullah Mohd Nasir said at the Malaysia-China Commemorative Forum.

Akmal, as a representative of Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Padillah Yusof, noted the ample opportunities for both sides to consolidate and further expand the time-honored bilateral relationship.

The Malaysia Madani economic framework, introduced last year to promote inclusive and sustainable development, shares the same common values and attributes of China’s concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, Akmal said.

The forum, themed “Malaysia and China: Celebrating 50 Years of Friendship and Cooperation, toward a Better Future Together”, was co-organized by China Daily, Kuala Lumpur-based think tank KSI Strategic Institute for

Asia Pacific, and the Malaysia-China Business Council.

As 2024 also marks the Year of China-Malaysia Friendship, Chinese Ambassador to Malaysia Ouyang Yujing said relations between the two countries are always at the forefront of China’s relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Malaysia became the first founding member of ASEAN to establish diplomatic ties with China on May 31, 1974.

“In 1974, the China-Malaysia bilateral trade volume was less than \$0.2 billion and last year’s figure surpassed \$190 billion, which is 950 times more than that of 1974,” Ouyang said.

Comprehensive and practical cooperation is the driving force for upgrading bilateral relations in all fields, Ouyang said, noting that the mutual visa-free entry policy since the end of last year has seen the number of Chinese tourists to Malaysia rise to more than 270,000 per month.

Goh Tian Chuan, executive chairman of the Malaysia-China Business Council, said the consensus on building a China-Malaysia community with a shared future has created new momentum for developing bilateral ties.

Michael Yeoh, president of the KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific, said the rise of the Chinese economy will benefit the countries of Southeast Asia and the Global South.

International Education Column

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