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News conference following visit to Uzbekistan

25-31 minutes



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In conclusion of his visit to Uzbekistan, Vladimir Putin answered journalists' questions. Photo: Sergei Bobylev, TASS

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Good evening,

I am listening.

Question: Now that the SCO summit is over, summing it up, can you tell us how you regard the SCO's development prospects and what the most important thing is for Russia in the SCO?

Vladimir Putin: The most important thing always and everywhere is economic development. And the SCO, cooperation with the SCO countries, creates conditions for the development of the Russian economy, and thus for the social sphere and for resolving the tasks related to improving the living standards of our citizens.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation includes countries whose population, as has been said many times, comprises almost or even slightly more than half of humanity. It is 25 percent of world GDP. And, most importantly, the national economies in the region, those of the SCO member states, are developing much faster than others in the world.

Now we had a separate meeting. I sat next to the Prime Minister of India at the working dinner. India's GDP grew by 7 percent, China's by more than 5 percent. China was in the lead for quite a time and its potential is tremendous. Our trade with these countries is growing fast. If these rates are preserved, and they are bound to be for many objective reasons, we will be one of these countries, next to them, ensuring our interests. This is what we are doing and this is the main point.

Question: This question is certainly worrying very many people in our country. People have already developed certain concerns over the course of the special military operation in Ukraine. We are increasingly seeing strikes, raids and acts of terror even on Russian territory. We are hearing all the time very aggressive statements that the final goal of Kiev and the West is Russia's disintegration. Meanwhile, many think that Russia's response to all of this is very restrained. Why is that?

Vladimir Putin: There is nothing new about this. Frankly, I find it even a bit strange to hear your question because Western countries have cultivated the idea of the collapse of the Soviet Union and historical Russia and Russia as such, its nucleus.

I have already cited these statements and studies by some figures in Great Britain during World War I and after it. I cited excerpts from Mr Brzezinski's writings in which he divided the entire territory of our country into specific parts. True, later he changed his position a bit in the belief that it was better to keep Russia in opposition to China and use it as a tool to combat China. It will never happen. Let them address their own challenges as they see fit. But we are seeing how they are handling them and, most likely, they are doing harm to themselves in the process. Their tools are no good.

But they have always been seeking the dissolution of our country – this is very true. It is unfortunate that at some point they decided to use Ukraine for these purposes. In effect – I am answering your question now and the conclusion suggests itself – we launched our special military operation to prevent events from taking this turn. This is what some US-led Western countries have always been seeking – to create an anti-Russia enclave and rock the boat, threaten Russia from this direction. In essence, our main goal is to prevent such developments.

With regard to our restrained response, I would not say it was restrained, even though, after all, a special military operation is not just another warning, but a military operation. In the course of this, we are seeing attempts to perpetrate terrorist attacks and damage our civilian infrastructure.

Indeed, we were quite restrained in our response, but that will not last forever. Recently, Russian Armed Forces delivered a couple of sensitive blows to that area. Let's call them warning shots. If the situation continues like that, our response will be more impactful

Terrorist attacks are a serious matter. In fact, it is about using terrorist methods. We see this in the killing of officials in the liberated territories, we even see attempts at perpetrating terrorist attacks in the Russian Federation, including – I am not sure if this was made public – attempts to carry out terrorist attacks near our nuclear facilities, nuclear power plants in the Russian Federation. I am not even talking about the Zaporozhye Nuclear Power Plant.

We are monitoring the situation and will do our best to prevent a negative scenario from unfolding. We will respond if they fail to realise that these approaches are unacceptable. They are, in fact, no different than terrorist attacks.

Remark: Good afternoon, Mr President.

Kiev presented draft security guarantees for Ukraine the other day...

Vladimir Putin: Wait a second. I have something to add to my answer to the first question. You said that we are seeing activity here and there. But Kiev has announced that it has launched an active counter-offensive operation. Let's see how it unfolds and how it ends.

Please go ahead.

Question: Kiev recently published draft security guarantees for Ukraine. What can you tell us about this, and what is your assessment of this project?

Vladimir Putin: Frankly, I am not familiar with what they have come up with this time. We, in fact, started with this when we were negotiating with the incumbent Kiev authorities and, in fact, completed this negotiating process in Istanbul with the well-known Istanbul agreement, after which we withdrew our troops from Kiev in order to create the proper conditions for concluding this agreement. Instead of concluding an agreement, Kiev immediately turned down all agreements, shoved them into a box and said they would not seek any agreement with Russia, but instead would pursue victory on the battlefield. Let them try. They are just now trying to do this with the counteroffensive. Let's see how it ends.

As for security guarantees, and these were fairly tough security guarantees, they were required from our side, from the main NATO countries and regional states, including Turkiye. Overall, we agreed with this – to a large extent. There were some things that required minor adjustments but overall we agreed and these were quite serious requirements. However, the Kiev authorities shelved them.

What have they come up with? I don't know because they change their position on every issue almost every day. I must have a look.

I would like to recall in this connection that before the start of the special military operation, we talked about security principles and measures on ensuring the security of Russia itself but nobody deemed it necessary to respond to this.

Unfortunately.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr President.

Could you please share your opinion on the course of the special military operation? Is it necessary to adjust the plan?

Vladimir Putin: No, the plan will not be adjusted. The General Staff takes real-time decisions in the course of the operation and some are considered a key, the main goal. The main goal is to liberate the entire territory of Donbass.

This work continues despite the attempts of the Ukrainian army to launch a counter-offensive. We are not stopping our offensive operations in Donbass itself. They continue. They continue at a slow pace but consistently and gradually, the Russian army is taking more and more new territory.

I must emphasise that we are fighting not with a full army but only with part, with contracted forces. But, of course, this is linked with certain personnel parameters and so on. This is why we are not in a rush in this respect. But essentially, there have been no changes. The General Staff considers some objectives important and others secondary but the main task remains the same and it is being carried out.

Question: Did President of Turkiye Erdogan make proposals on your meeting with Zelensky at this meeting?

Vladimir Putin: He always suggests meeting with Zelensky. He has been doing this for a long time and there is nothing bad about it. The President of Turkiye is making a substantial contribution to normalising the situation, including resolution of the food problem. The export of Ukrainian grain via Odessa is largely the result of his work. So, he is really making a tangible

contribution to resolving a number of serious issues that are arising in connection with this crisis. And, of course, it is only natural that he also suggests meeting with President Zelensky, thinking that it may produce some positive result. He did not raise it at this meeting.

Question: On what conditions could there be dialogue with Ukraine now, if it is possible at all?

Vladimir Putin: But they refuse. The first condition is that they agree to it. But they do not want it. Mr Zelensky has publicly announced – I do not know where exactly, but he said it publicly – that he is not ready and does not want to talk to Russia. Well, if he is not ready, fine.

Question: You have spoken a bit about your meeting with Mr Erdogan. Could you elaborate on the things you discussed with him regarding the grain deal? Is it still in effect? Will grain and our fertiliser be delivered to the poorest countries?

Vladimir Putin: Well, what we just said at the summit, and the things I said – did journalists hear them?

Remark: Yes.

Vladimir Putin: Then I will have to say it again. Firstly, President Erdogan was one of the initiators of this deal, plus obviously the UN, but he was also one of the leaders to have organised the implementation of this idea.

As of today – as of yesterday or the day before – 121 ships left Ukrainian ports. Only three of the 120 ships headed for the poorest countries under the UN food programme. Some 35 percent, maybe a bit more, of the grain exported from Ukraine went to European countries, to non-poor countries, and definitely not to the world's poorest countries. And only 4.5

percent of the shipments were sent to the poorest countries under the UN programme.

At our bilateral meeting, President Erdogan also raised the issue of sending the bulk of these grain exports to the poorest countries under the UN food programme, but it is not up to us. We only took on the obligation to organise the grain exports. We are doing this, but the United Nations, as well as all other participants in this process, should ultimately achieve the goal for which this process was organised. But I know that the Secretary-General [UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres] – and I say this with absolute sincerity – is taking necessary efforts, he is really doing his best, but so far he has not succeeded either.

The same applies to our fertiliser exports. This is something unprecedented. I would say this has been an outrageous and shameful decision by the European Commission to lift the ban on the purchase of Russian fertilisers – but solely for their countries, for EU member states. But what about the world's poorest countries?

So what about the rhetoric claiming that “all our joint efforts should be aimed at preventing famine in these poorest countries”? Is it all bluff? Is it done solely to solve their selfish tasks and problems they created themselves, with their own hands, both in the food and energy sectors?

And now they are trying to resolve their self-inflicted problems at someone else's expense. This is just outrageous. But I hope that our colleagues in the European Commission will let common sense prevail to correct this mistake – and let's consider it a mistake, a misunderstanding – and make the right decisions.

The same applies to the export of Russian fertilisers.

And it would be good to consider the opportunities provided by Belarus, one of the world's largest potassium fertiliser producers.

So they have lifted sanctions on our fertilisers. The Americans were actually the first to lift them, since they are generally pragmatic people. Speaking of Ukrainian grain exports, do you know who actually exports it? It is done by American companies, which are the owners of this grain for the most part. It appeared to be that land in Ukraine was sold to US companies long ago – and they are simply exporting their own grain. That is apparently the reason behind so much talk about it. But I digress.

What is important is that sanctions have been lifted on our fertiliser exports – but there are still issues as regards freight and insurance plus the existing ban on entering our ports where our fertilisers are exported from, as well as on financial transfers and settlements. They are aware of this all and keep saying this problem will be solved, but no one is actually doing anything about it.

To be fair, the UN Secretary-General is taking efforts to solve these issues. He has regular contact with all participants in this process. So far, not everything has worked out. Hopefully, the Secretary-General's negotiations will be successful.

We have no doubt that we will sell our goods; we sell them now and will continue to sell them in the future as there is great demand for them in the markets. The point is that if things continue this way, they will not reach the poorest countries. You have probably heard about 300,000 tonnes of Russian fertiliser stuck in European ports; our companies are saying they are

ready to provide it for free – just unblock and release it, and we will donate it to the poorest countries and to developing markets. But they are still holding it, and this is absolutely astonishing.

They do not want Russia to earn money – but we are not making a profit by giving away fertiliser. I just do not get what they are doing. What is the purpose of all this? There has been so much talk about providing help to the poorest countries, but exactly the opposite is actually happening.

I have the impression – and this is particularly true for European countries – that these former colonial powers are still living in the paradigm of colonial philosophy, and they are used to living at the expense of others. They still fail to get rid of this paradigm in their daily policies. But it is time to draw certain conclusions and act differently, in a more civilised manner.

Question: Your most important bilateral meeting has taken place with the leader of China. This was a very important meeting, given the tense atmosphere across the globe, and the whole world was following it. What are the most important outcomes of the meeting?

Vladimir Putin: As strange as it may sound, there was nothing of paramount importance. This was actually a routine meeting between us. We have not met in person for a while, since my trip to Beijing for the opening of the Olympics, and we simply stated a significant increase in bilateral trade.

Our trade stood at US\$140 billion last year, as I mentioned earlier, and we had set the goal of reaching US\$200 billion, but we considered it to be a long-term task. This year's mutual trade is expected to reach some US\$180 or even US\$190 billion, meaning that the goal of US\$200 billion is about to be achieved, and I believe this is the bottom line.

We spoke about additional efforts required to expand bilateral trade, and what needs to be done in the current conditions to efficiently resist the illegal restrictions and all sorts of trade wars being unleashed here and there by our so-called trade partners, who apply various illegitimate restrictions.

Nevertheless, we have to take action to respond to this in some way. We are aware of what is happening.

We also spoke about the need to expand trade and settlements in national currencies, which are gradually increasing – not as fast as we would like it to, but there is progress, nonetheless. We talked about major projects we are implementing and mentioned infrastructure projects that would allow us to unblock growing commodity flows. These were the topics of discussion.

But we also mentioned some crisis-related issues and we spoke about them in a friendly yet principled manner.

Let us wind thus up, shall we? I have yet to finish speaking there. They are still waiting for me.

Go ahead, please.

Question: The US Department of the Treasury has not only increased the number of people under sanctions but also made changes as to their occupation and age limits.

Vladimir Putin: What limits exactly?

Remark: Age limits. I will explain: along with your aide Maxim Oreshkin and the general director of the Mir payment system, they now include Maria Lvova-Belova...

Vladimir Putin: I do not understand, what about Maxim Oreshkin?

Remark: They have become sanctioned by US Department of the Treasury.

Vladimir Putin: Maxim Oreshkin? Under sanctions?

Reply: Yes.

Vladimir Putin: Apparently, [he has been sanctioned] for his meeting with Mr Erdogan; he went to Turkiye and met with Mr Erdogan, and they immediately sanctioned him afterwards.

Reply: As regards age, they also included Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova, who was sanctioned for "organising the capture of children from Ukraine," as the Americans have worded it. Those targeted by sanctions also include Ramzan Kadyrov and his underage children, three of his 14 children.

Vladimir Putin: Underage, right? This is the first time I have heard about this.

Remark: This has just happened.

Vladimir Putin: I was busy with other issues; I do not know about that.

Question: What do you think about these sanctions?

Vladimir Putin: I believe this sounds like schizophrenia, because imposing sanctions on underage children is simply outrageous. It seems that they have simply lost track of what they are doing.

As for our Commissioner for Children's Rights, as we know, she has been involved in bringing our children from areas of hostilities: from Syria and Iraq, those children who have remained there due to various circumstances against their will, and I hope she will continue to do this, God bless her.

This is a noble mission; she risks her life and health. It is only natural that she helps to bring children from areas of hostilities or danger zones in Donbass. What's wrong with that? We must thank her and bow our heads. Why impose sanctions against her? This is the first time I have heard about it, and it is outrageous.

Question: I have a question on the developments around Armenia and Azerbaijan. Do you think any attempts are being made by other countries to have an effect on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh while Moscow is conducting the special military operation in Ukraine? And does Russia now have enough resources to continue extending its influence on our colleagues to secure peace?

Vladimir Putin: As you can see, there are enough resources. The latest border incident has nothing to do with Nagorno-Karabakh at all: it took place in a totally different region on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Indeed, we regret these events and the casualties. Russia has been a major influence in containing this conflict, and I hope this continues to be so. So, answering your question, there are sufficient resources so far, thankfully.

Question: One final question regarding the G20. The SCO summit will conclude today, but its leaders will soon meet as part of the G20. Is there any certainty about your visit to Indonesia, and what could interfere with your plans to visit Bali?

Vladimir Putin: I will see, I have visited Bali, and it is a beautiful place, but this is actually not about beauty. We will see how the situation develops in our economy and other areas.

I have an invitation to visit the G20 summit; the President

of the hosting nation [Indonesia] personally informed me about it when he visited Moscow, and then he telephoned me and said once again, “Bear in mind that there is certain pressure, but my stance is firm and we would like to see you at this summit.” I will see and then we will make a decision. Russia will take part in the event.

Now one concluding question, alright? There are many of you, and just one of me.

Please go ahead.

Question: Good evening, Mr President, and thank you very much. I will be quick. You just mentioned ships with grain that left for Europe, although it is not experiencing a food crisis but an energy one, and this is what my question is about. Recently, the president of the European Commission and a number of other top European officials...

Vladimir Putin: The Chairman of the European Commission.

Question: Yes. In the heat of their efforts to find a solution to the energy crisis, they offered their citizens to send skyrocketing electricity bills not just to anyone, but personally to you. What will be your response to this? Are you going to pay these bills in case you suddenly start receiving them? Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: I have not heard anything about this either, I know nothing about it. This is yet another attempt to shift the blame onto someone else, as they say.

The energy crisis in Europe did not begin with the start of Russia’s special military operation in Ukraine, in Donbass; it actually started much earlier, a year before or even earlier. As strange as it may seem, it started with the green agenda.

The green agenda is definitely important, and we need to take climate action and avoid reaching the point of no return when climate change becomes irreversible, with the Earth becoming a planet in the solar system that once had the atmosphere, according to scientists, but no longer has one, and the temperatures are now +500°C. Of course, no one wants this to happen, but everything must be done carefully and gradually.

To pursue momentary political considerations, they chose to completely close down the hydrocarbon energy programmes in their countries. Banks stopped extending loans, local authorities have stopped allocating land plots for future development, and implementation of plans for energy infrastructure construction was stopped as well, with huge cuts in investment in conventional energy. But this all started happening a few years back.

Now, we see that prices, say, for natural gas in the United States have risen and production is growing, but not as fast as they would like it to – and the reason is that banks are afraid to issue loans. Specialists and experts are perfectly aware of this, and all these populist statements claiming that someone is to blame for this elsewhere are made only to protect themselves from their citizens' indignation. This is what it's done for, and this is only the first part of this farce.

These are erroneous reference points in the green agenda, rushing things, and the green energy being unprepared to meet to the demand for huge energy resources to support economic and industrial growth. The economy is growing while the energy sector is shrinking. This is the first drastic mistake.

The second mistake concerns natural gas.

We made attempts to persuade the Europeans to focus on long-term contracts rather than solely on the market. Why? I said it before and will repeat it once again: Gazprom needs to invest billions in development but it must be confident that it will sell gas before making investments. This is what long-term contracts are about.

Mutual obligations are incurred by the sellers and the buyers. They said, “No, let the market regulate itself.” We kept telling them, “Don't do it or it will lead to drastic consequences.” But in fact, they forced us to include a significant share of the spot price in the contract price. They forced us to do this, and Gazprom had to include both the oil and oil product basket but also the spot price in the gas price. The spot price began to grow, causing the increase in the price envisaged even in long-term contracts. But what does it have to do with us? This is the first thing.

Second, I told them many times. “Gazprom is not supplying gas.” Look, are you normal people or what? Poland chose to impose sanctions against the Yamal-Europe gas pipeline and shut off the route. I told Mr [German Chancellor Olaf] Scholz: “Why are you calling me? Call Warsaw and ask them to reopen the route.” That is all there is to it. That's the first.

Second. Two lines of the gas pipeline run through Ukraine. Ukraine is being supplied with weapons, but it went ahead and closed one of the lines for them. They also shut off another line that supplied 25 billion cubic metres of gas – I will not talk about the exact amount, but they shut off the entire route. What for? Call Kiev and ask them to reopen the second line.

And finally, Nord Stream 1. One turbine goes out of order after another. Are we breaking them? As regards the latest turbine

breaking down and being taken out of service – what actually happened? There was supposed to be a routine inspection and maintenance works; they opened the unit in the presence of Siemens specialists and found an oil leak there, which created a danger of an explosion. They saw it, and they put their signatures under the document. The turbine has to be repaired and it is not operational, with a risk of fire and explosion. But what does it have to do with us? Go ahead and repair it.

We were told: look, they delivered a turbine from Canada but Gazprom will not accept it. But Gazprom is right in doing so. We said so many times: Gazprom's contract for servicing turbines is not with Siemens but with a UK-based Siemens subsidiary. That is what it is all about. And this UK-based subsidiary must provide documents that specify that sanctions have been lifted from the turbine as this is our property, and Gazprom must be sure of it because it may choose to sell it, say, to Iran, China or some other country. It means that the sanctions have been lifted and it is in a proper technical condition. The Siemens subsidiary must provide [guarantees] but has not provided anything but idle talks. That is what it is all about.

Also, it was necessary to make amendments in the logistics contract as the turbine was supposed to be delivered from Canada to St Petersburg, but it was delivered to Germany. This may seem unimportant at first glance but it has practical importance. Look, are we making all this up? And this is what led to Nord Stream 1 stopping operation.

After all, if they need it urgently, if things are so bad, just go ahead and lift sanctions against Nord Stream 2, with its 55 billion cubic metres per year – all they have to do is press the button and they will get it going. But they chose to shut it off themselves; they cannot repair one pipeline and imposed

sanctions against the new Nord Stream 2 and will not open it.

Are we to blame for this?

Let them think hard about who is to blame and let none of them blame us for their own mistakes. Gazprom and Russia have always fulfilled and will fulfil all obligations under our agreements and contracts, with no failures ever.

Thank you. All the best.

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