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Putin Applauds 'Dear Friend' Xi on His 70th Birthday

By AFP

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Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping during a meeting in Moscow in March 2023 **kremlin.ru**

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday lauded his "dear friend" Xi Jinping in a message for the Chinese leader's 70th birthday.

Putin told Xi "it is difficult to overestimate the efforts you have been making to foster the comprehensive partnership" between Russia and China, which have ramped up cooperation in recent years.

The two leaders have grown even closer as Moscow, isolated in the West since launching the offensive in Ukraine, has increasingly looked toward Beijing.

Analysts say that China holds the upper hand in the relationship, and that its sway is growing as Moscow's international isolation deepens.

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Putin said he expected the "constructive dialogue... to continue for the sake of the Russian and Chinese people."

Xi was handed an unprecedented third term as president by China's rubber-stamp parliament in March.

The beginning of his term however comes as the world's second-largest economy faces major headwinds, from slowing growth and a troubled real estate sector to a declining birth rate.

The re-election "confirmed your high political authority, and the wide support for the path you have chosen," Putin said.

"Under your leadership, the People's Republic of China achieved impressive successes: the economy is showing steady growth, the well-being of citizens is increasing, and Beijing's position in the world is strengthening," Putin said.

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