

Kremlin denies call between Putin and Trump

AFP – The Kremlin on Monday denied a US media report that Russian President Vladimir Putin and US president-elect Donald Trump shared a call about the Ukraine conflict.

The Washington Post reported Sunday that Trump had urged the Russian leader not to escalate the war in Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists that the report was “simply false information”, denying any phone call took place.

The Post, citing several people familiar with the call who spoke on the basis of anonymity, reported that Trump had reminded Putin of the sizable US military presence in Europe.

They said Trump also expressed an interest in further conversations to discuss “the resolution of Ukraine’s war soon.”

Steven Cheung, Trump’s communications director, did not confirm the exchange, telling AFP in a written statement that “we do not comment on private calls between President Trump and other world leaders.”

Trump’s election is set to have a major bearing on the almost three-year Ukraine conflict, as he insists on a quick end to the fighting and casts doubt on Washington’s multi-billion dollar support for Kyiv.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky spoke with Trump on Wednesday, with the Republican’s billionaire backer Elon Musk also notably joining them on the call.

Trump also spoke by phone with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Sunday and the pair “agreed to work together towards a return to peace in Europe,” according to Scholz’s spokesman.

– Cash for Ukraine –

The outgoing Democratic administration of President Joe Biden has confirmed that it will send as much aid as possible to Ukraine before Trump's inauguration on January 20.

On Sunday, Biden's National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said the White House aims "to put Ukraine in the strongest possible position on the battlefield so that it is ultimately in the strongest possible position at the negotiating table."

This would include using the remaining \$6 billion of funding for Ukraine available, Sullivan said.

The Russian government has given a cautious but mostly positive response to Trump's return.

"The signals are positive... At least he's talking about peace, and not about confrontation," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Sunday.

During his campaign, Trump repeatedly vowed to quickly end the Ukraine war – even before he is sworn into office – but without detailing his thinking.

Trump and his allies have railed against US funding for Ukraine, while insinuating that it helps fund a corrupt pro-war nexus of defence companies and foreign policy hawks.

Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., shared a clip Saturday on Instagram which showed Zelensky standing next to the president-elect with a caption reading: "POV (point of view): You're 38 days from losing your allowance."

Any quick deal in Ukraine is expected to require Kyiv to cede some of the territory it has lost to Russian invaders in Ukraine's south and east.

Kyiv, though facing a manpower shortage and uncertainty over US support, has steadfastly opposed giving up territory and

its European allies and weapons suppliers such as Britain and France are known to be nervous about unilateral moves by Trump.

Zelensky has said that giving up land or meeting other demands from the Kremlin would only embolden Putin and provoke more aggression, a view shared by many European allies.

In recent months, both sides in the war have made moves seen as possible efforts to gain leverage ahead of eventual negotiations, with Ukraine seizing a chunk of Russian territory and Moscow's troops making advances in Ukraine.

This weekend brought the biggest drone attacks yet from both sides.

Russia launched 145 drones at Ukraine overnight Saturday into Sunday, Zelensky said, while Russia said it had downed 34 Ukrainian drones targeting Moscow on Sunday.

Reports: AFP