

The Asia-Pacific region must not return to the tensions of the Cold War era, Chinese President Xi Jinping said on Thursday, ahead of a virtual meeting with U.S. President Joe Biden expected as soon as next week.

Xi, in a recorded video message to a CEO forum on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit hosted by New Zealand, said attempts to draw ideological lines or form small circles on geopolitical grounds were bound to fail.

"The Asia-Pacific region cannot and should not relapse into the confrontation and division of the Cold War era," Xi said.

Xi's remarks were an apparent reference to U.S. efforts with regional allies and partners including the Quad grouping with India, Japan and Australia, to blunt what they see as China's growing coercive economic and military influence.

China's military said on Tuesday it conducted a combat readiness patrol in the direction of the Taiwan Strait, after its Defense Ministry condemned a visit by a U.S. congressional delegation to Taiwan, the democratically governed island claimed by Beijing.

Combative U.S. diplomatic exchanges with China early in the Biden administration unnerved allies, and U.S. officials believe direct engagement with Xi is the best way to prevent the relationship between the world's two biggest economies from spiraling toward conflict.

A date has not been announced for the Xi-Biden meeting, but a person briefed on the matter said it was expected to be as soon as next week.

The week-long annual forum, culminating in a meeting of leaders from all 21 APEC economies on Friday, is being conducted entirely online by hosts New Zealand, a country with hardline pandemic control measures that has kept its borders closed to almost all travellers for 18 months.

Xi has only appeared by video, and has not left China in about 21 months as the country pursues a zero-tolerance policy towards COVID-19. The Chinese president is also participating this week in a meeting of the ruling Communist Party that is expected to further cement his authority.

Xi said emerging from the shadow of the pandemic and achieving steady economic recovery was the most pressing task for the region, and that countries must close the COVID-19 immunisation gap.

"We should translate the consensus that vaccines are a global public good into concrete actions to ensure their fair and equitable distribution," Xi said.

APEC members pledged at a special meeting in June to expand sharing and manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccines and lift trade barriers for medicines.

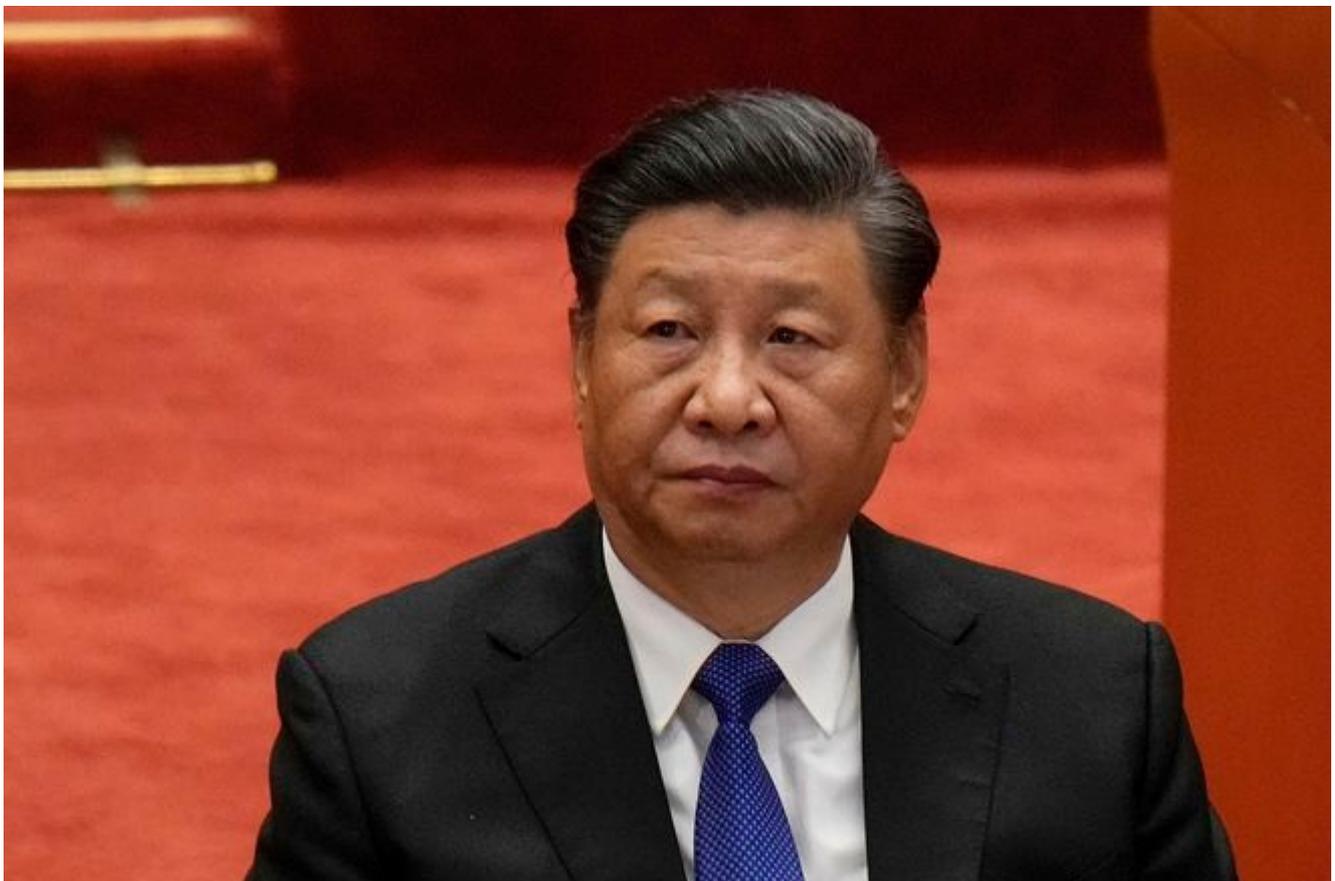


Image source: Japan Times

Trade deals

Taiwan's bid to join a regional trade pact, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), is expected raise tensions at the APEC leaders' meeting later in the week.

China, which has also applied to join CPTPP, opposes Taiwan's membership and has increased military activities near the island which Beijing claims. The United States pulled out of CPTPP under former President Donald Trump.

A 15-nation regional trade pact backed by China, the Regional Comprehensive Partnership Agreement (RCEP), will also take effect from Jan. 1.

Xi said in the lead-up to RCEP implementation and CPTPP negotiations that China would "shorten the negative list on foreign investment, promote all-round opening up of its agricultural and manufacturing sectors, expand the opening of the service sector and treat domestic and foreign businesses as equals in accordance with law."

The United States has offered to host APEC in 2023 for the first time in over a decade as President Joe Biden turns resources and attention to the Asia-Pacific following the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan.

However, no consensus has yet been reached among APEC members on the offer.

Climate change

Climate change has been a key item on the agenda at the summit, which is taking place in parallel with the United Nations' COP26 meeting in Glasgow.

Xi said China would achieve its carbon neutrality targets within the time frame it has set and its carbon reduction action would require massive investment.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said in her opening address that APEC had taken steps to wean the region's industries off fossil-fuel subsidies.

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