

19TH NATIONAL CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA

Xi hailed as great leader

Officials heap praise on his political ideology for 'core leader a year'

REUTERS, Beijing

incorporated into the party's constitution. Whether the theory is actually bearing his name will be a key measure of his status, analysts have said.

and great "lingxiu", or leader, a reverent honorific bestowed on only two others: Mao and his short-lived successor Hua Guofeng - another sign that Xi has accumulated more

the party leadership in 2012, locking out rivals for corruption, tightening controls on civil society, revamping the military and asserting China's rising might on the global stage.

HOW SPAIN COULD SUSPEND AUTONOMY IN CATALUNYA

Spain's vow to take over at least part of Catalonia's regional powers due to its drive for independence would involve triggering the never before used Article 155 of Spain's constitution. Here are five points about this so-called "nuclear option", which opens the way for Madrid to suspend some or all of the region's autonomy in Spain's worst political crisis in decades.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Catalonia's separatist regional government held a referendum on independence on October 1 despite Spain's Constitutional Court ruling it illegal that 98.9 percent of people who voted backed independence, but turnout was only 43 percent. After Catalonia's regional president Carles Puigdemont defied various warnings and deadlines from Madrid, the national government yesterday said it would push forward with Article 155.



Under its constitution adopted in 1978, Spain is one of the Western world's most decentralised nations. Its 17 regions have varying degrees of control over issues such as education and healthcare. Catalonia is among those with the most autonomy. Article 155 says that if a region's government breaches its constitutional obligations or "acts in a way that seriously threatens the general interest of Spain", Madrid can "take necessary measures to oblige it forcibly to comply or to protect said general interest".

HOW DOES THE PROCESS WORK?

The central government called a crisis cabinet meeting for tomorrow to discuss the procedure. It will then have to send to the Senate a list of specific actions it plans to take under Article 155. The steps will be debated by a Senate committee before a final majority vote, said Antonio Barroso, analyst at think tank Icteo Intelligence. Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's conservative Popular Party holds a majority in the Senate, meaning the proposals will almost certainly be approved. The whole procedure would take about a week.

WHAT ACTION COULD MADRID TAKE?

Article 155 would allow the central government to "take control of political and administrative institutions of the rebel region", Teresa Freixas at the Autonomous University of Barcelona told AFP. Javier Perez Royo of the University of Seville said measures could include "suspending the regional government, placing the Catalan police force Mossos d'Esquadra under the orders of the interior ministry" and even "closing the regional parliament". Madrid has also proposed regional elections in Catalonia to overcome the political impasse. Puigdemont did not respond to that suggestion yesterday.

ANY OTHER OPTIONS?

Article 155 is just one of several options Rajoy has in seeking to head off Catalonia's separatists. The government could declare a state of emergency with limits on freedom of movement and assembly, said Jose Carlos Cano Montenegro, a law expert at Madrid's Complutense University. Other legislation signed in 2015 could allow Madrid to declare a national security crisis and claim powers such as passing laws by decree. The government can also lead a series of criminal cases which have been opened against Catalan leaders in their official cases. SOURCE: AFP

Some ruling Communist Party officials were yesterday moved to song, dance and tears in adulation of Xi, a day after he opened the twice-a-decade conclave pledging to build a prosperous "modern socialist country" for a "new era".

Three outgoing members of the elite seven-member Politburo Standing Committee that Xi heads lauded Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

Such statements indicate that Xi could cement his power with his new eponymous slogan being



Xi could have new slogan included in party constitution. Xi widely seen as strongest leader since Mao Zedong. Congress to unveil new Politburo Standing Committee.

No other leader has had an eponymous ideology included in the document, while in office since Mao Zedong, the founder of modern China. Xi is poised to begin a second five-year term next week. Party officials hailed Xi as a wise

power than his immediate predecessors and could revive a party chairmanship as a precursor to staying on in some capacity beyond the end of his six-year term in 2022. The 64-year-old Xi has consolidated power swiftly since assuming

Palestinian gov't must recognise Israel, disarm Hamas: US

AFP, Jerusalem

An Israeli US President Donald Trump yesterday said that an emerging Palestinian unity government must recognise Israel and disarm Hamas, Washington's first detailed response to a landmark reconciliation deal signed last week.

A Hamas official immediately rejected the comments as "blatant interference" in Palestinian affairs, but did not say directly whether the Islamist group planned to comply with any of the demands.

Trump's special representative for international negotiations John Greenblatt, who has repeatedly visited the region to seek ways to restart peace talks, laid out a series of conditions.

"Any Palestinian government must be unambiguously and unequivocally committed to recognising Israel, accept previous agreements and obligations - and commit to disarm terrorists - and commit to peaceful negotiations," Greenblatt said in a statement.

The US conditions were roughly in line with principles previously set out by the Quartet for Middle East peace - the United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations.

"If Hamas is to play any role in a Palestinian government, it must accept these basic requirements," Greenblatt said.

The statement was also similar to the Israeli government's response to the week in which it vowed not to negotiate with the Palestinian unity government that includes Hamas unless the Islamist group agrees to a list of demands.

The demands included recognising Israel and renouncing violence, but also returning the remains of 100 Israeli soldiers killed in Gaza, among other conditions.

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas's February government signed a reconciliation deal with Hamas in Cairo a week ago aimed at ending a bitter 10-year split.

The Abbas-led Palestine Liberation Organisation has recognised Israel, but Hamas has not and is blacklisted as a terrorist organisation by the United States and the European Union.



Fighters of Syrian Democratic Forces gesture the "V" sign while onboard a pickup truck in Raqa, Syria. US-backed forces who captured Raqa from the Islamic State group yesterday prepared to hand the Syrian city over to a civilian authority, with some of their fighters already headed to the next battle. The capture of Raqa was announced on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

TALIBAN ATTACK ON AFGHAN MILITARY BASE

At least 43 troops killed

REUTERS, Kabul

The Afghan Taliban yesterday stormed a military base in the south of the country killing at least 43 troops, the Defence Ministry said, with the militants saying they had killed 60.

Of 60 soldiers manning the base in the province of Kandahar, 43 were killed, nine were wounded and six were missing after the militants attacked in a morning.

At least 10 Taliban were also reported killed in the district that neighbours volatile Helmand province.

The attack will underscore worries about the ability of the Afghan security forces to deal with a relentless insurgency which they have struggled to contain since most troops left at the end of 2014.

The attack began when a suicide bomber drove an explosives-laden American-made Humvee armoured vehicle, likely captured from Afghan security forces, into the gate of the base, an army official told Reuters.

That began an hours-long assault by Taliban gunmen, which

was interrupted by a second Humvee breaking all the way into the base and detonating inside, he said.

The base itself was left in ruins, officials said. The Taliban have been waging an insurgency for a decade and a half in an attempt to overthrow the Western-backed government in Kabul and re-establish an Islamic regime.

The United States and its allies maintain thousands of troops across Afghanistan, including in Kandahar, to advise and assist Afghan forces as well as conduct strikes against suspected militants.

When asked whether US forces provided any support for the besieged Afghan base, a spokesman for the coalition military command in Kabul said: "We can confirm that US forces conducted an air strike during an operation in the Maiwand district of Kandahar province, October 19, under counter-terror authorities."

On Tuesday, at least 60 people were killed and scores wounded in Taliban attacks on government compounds in Paktia and Ghazni provinces.

Among the dead in those attacks were at least 36 members of the Afghan security forces, including a senior provincial police commander.

Militants were once again attacking a police base in Ghazni yesterday, but officials did not have information on casualties.



Dozens killed in Taliban attack on military base, Oct 19

UK PM woos EU with 'fair' citizenship offer

Urges leaders of the block to break deadlock in Brexit talks

AFP, Brussels

British Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday urged EU leaders to urgently set out plans to move forward with Brexit negotiations, in particular on the rights of European nationals, as they prepared to delay key trade talks until at least December.

Arriving for the two-day summit, May accepted that her 27 European Union counterparts were unlikely to agree that there has been enough progress on divorce issues to move on to a second phase, saying the meeting was intended to "shake steel".

In a move to sway EU leaders on what is a key topic for them, May yesterday published an open letter to the three million EU citizens living in Britain promising they would not be asked to leave after Brexit in March 2019.

The EU agrees that of the three key separation issues at stake, citizens rights is the most advanced, but sticking points remain. Discussions on the bill Britain must pay to

leave meanwhile are deadlocked and discussions on Northern Ireland still have far to go.

EU President Donald Tusk warned he did "not expect any kind of breakthrough", saying that while he was "promising progress", London needed to come up with more concrete proposals.

EU leaders will discuss Brexit without their holiday mourning.

The bloc blacklisted the North Korean army on Monday as part of a new round of sanctions that European powers hope will help force Kim Jong-un to consider stepping up measures aimed at punishing North Korea for its nuclear and ballistic weapons programmes, according to a summit agreement seen by AFP yesterday.

The bloc blacklisted the North Korean army on Monday as part of a new round of sanctions that European powers hope will help force Kim Jong-un to consider stepping up measures aimed at punishing North Korea for its nuclear and ballistic weapons programmes, according to a summit agreement seen by AFP yesterday.



EU SUMMIT

Obama's love letters to be made public

AP, Washington

A young Barack Obama questioned his place in the world and his racial identity, agonized over whether he'd made enough money as a community organizer, and lamented his incompatibility with his ex-girlfriend in 30 pages of letters he wrote to her that are now being archived by Emory University in Atlanta.

The nine full letters, sent by Obama to his college girlfriend, Alexandria McNair, are being made public to researchers through Emory University's Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library.

My letters aren't as crystallized as they were while in school, but they have an immediacy and weight that may be more useful if and when I'm less observant and more participant," Obama wrote in 1984 to McNair, who was a student at a California college attended by Obama before he moved to Columbia.

The "very real, very poetic" letters will be useful to researchers trying to craft a picture of Obama the college student and recent graduate, Emory officials said.



Anti-G7 protesters march in the port of Italian island Ischia, yesterday before the start of the G7 summit of Interior Ministers with European Union representatives and members of the private sector as Google, Facebook, Microsoft and Twitter. The discussion will focus on two key topics: prevention of the terrorist use of the Internet and collaboration in the fight against the so-called "foreign fighters" through information exchange and activities to halt the extremists.



Iraqi Kurds say open to talks with Baghdad

AFP, Erbil

The Iraqi Kurdistan regional government yesterday said it was open to talks with Baghdad after central government forces seized a swath of disputed territory from Kurdish fighters.

The cabinet welcomes the initiative of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on starting negotiations with the regional government to solve pending issues according to the constitution and principles of partnership," it said in a statement.

On Monday night, Tuesday, federal troops and allied militia ousted Kurdish forces from the northern province of Kirkuk and its lucrative oil fields, as well as former Kurdish-held areas of Nineveh and Diyala provinces.