

Take H-bomb threat 'literally'

Warns N Korea; Trump says Russia US efforts on nuke issue

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A senior North Korean official issued a stern warning to the world that it should take "literally" his country's threat to test a nuclear weapon above ground as US President Donald Trump said that Russia was hurting US efforts to rid North Korea of nuclear weapons while China had been helpful.

The official, Ri Yong Pil, told CNN in an exclusive conversation in Pyongyang that the threat made by North Korea's foreign minister last month should not be dismissed.

North Korea "has always brought its words into action," Ri said, visibly angry.

Speaking on a visit to New York for the United Nations General Assembly last month, Ri Yong Ho, the foreign minister, raised the possibility that North Korea could test a powerful hydrogen bomb over the Pacific Ocean. The threat came hours after US President Donald Trump threatened to "totally decapitate" North Korea in a speech to the UN.

"The foreign minister is very well aware of the intentions of our supreme leader, so I think you should take his words literally," Ri told CNN in Pyongyang.

North Korea carried out the strongest of its six-ever nuclear tests in early September, claiming to have used a hydrogen bomb. The UN responded to the test by imposing fresh sanctions on the rogue state.

Ri also implied that diplomatic channels between the US

and North Korea were nonexistent, despite US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson reiterating over months that they are still open.

"His remarks came after Trump on Sunday boasted that the US was 'prepared for anything' when it came to the North Korean nuclear crisis."

"We'll see what happens... We are so prepared, like you would not believe," he said in an interview with Fox Business Network's Maria Bartiromo.

Trump said in a tweet that he spoke with Chinese President Xi Jinping after the latter's reelection and the conversation included North Korea.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un also wished Xi Jinping "great success" in a congratulatory but comparatively restrained message after the Chinese president centred his grip on power at a landmark Communist Party Congress.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of Defence Jim Mattis said Washington is seeking a "peaceful resolution" with North Korea despite the tough rhetoric.

Mattis, who arrived in Thailand yesterday following a meeting with his Asian counterparts in the Philippines, said the US was "prepared for anything" when it came to the North Korean nuclear crisis.

"We have military options in defence if we're attacked, our allies are attacked? Of course we do," Mattis said. "But everyone is open for a peaceful resolution."

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Independence bid falters

Catalonia leader backs down from calling polls; Madrid to decide today on direct rule

AFP, Cnn Online

The Catalan leader's high-wire bid for independence from Spain failed yesterday when he backed away from a plan to call new elections amid disagreement within his own party.

Catalonia, said he had considered the option of dissolving the regional parliament and calling new elections in an effort to shore up his position in the standoff with Madrid, reported CNN.

But in a public statement in Barcelona, the regional capital, Puigdemont rejected the idea, apparently because he could not

mandate to declare a split from the country.

Spain has scheduled a vote in the Spanish Senate for today, in which members will decide whether to suspend Catalonia's autonomy and put it under Madrid's control.

The measures would see Madrid taking control of Catalonia's government, police, purse and public broadcaster, until new elections are held.

Catalonia is one of 17 regions, with varying degrees of autonomy, that make

up Spain.

It was not clear whether the central government would back off after Puigdemont's address.

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy has threatened for weeks to impose direct rule on Catalonia as a way to quash Puigdemont's plan to declare independence.

He said Madrid had prepared all the documents to employ the never-before-used Article 155 of the country's Constitution.

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