



Meloni sworn in as Italy PM

AFP, Rome

Far-right leader Giorgia Meloni was sworn in as Italian prime minister yesterday, to become the first woman to head a government in Italy.

Meloni took the oath before President Sergio Mattarella at the Quirinal Palace in Rome.

Her post-fascist Brothers of Italy party -- Eurosceptic and anti-immigration -- won the September 25 legislative polls but needed outside support to form a government.

Meloni's list of 24 ministers, including six women, revealed a desire to reassure Italy's partners.

Hungarian PM Viktor Orban tweeted: "Congratulations @GiorgiaMeloni on the formation of your government! Big day for the European Right!"



China's President Xi Jinping (R) sits beside Premier Li Keqiang (2L) as former president Hu Jintao (2R) is assisted to leave the closing ceremony of the 20th China's Communist Party's Congress at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Questions swirl as Hu Jintao escorted out of Great Hall

AFP, Beijing

Former Chinese president Hu Jintao was unexpectedly led out of the closing ceremony of the Communist Party Congress in a dramatic moment that disrupted the highly choreographed event.

Hu's departure was left unexplained, and the nation's censors appeared to quickly scrub any recent references to him from the internet.

The frail-looking 79-year-old seemed reluctant to leave the front row of proceedings at Beijing's Great Hall of the People, where he was sitting next to President Xi Jinping.

A steward attempted to take a sitting Hu by the arm before being shaken off. The steward then tried to lift Hu up with both hands from under the armpits.

After an exchange of about a minute, in which Hu spoke briefly with Xi and Premier Li Keqiang, he was led out of the hall.

A seated Xi was filmed holding papers down on the desk as Hu tried to grab them.

Hu patted Li's shoulder as he left with most of his colleagues stared firmly ahead.

China's state media later said the former leader was "not feeling well".

The week-long Congress took place mostly behind closed doors, but Hu's departure occurred shortly after journalists were allowed in to cover the closing ceremony.

"We still don't know what caused Hu's actions, such as whether it was opposition to Xi's power or simply an unfortunately timed senior moment," said Neil Thomas, a senior China analyst at the Eurasia Group consultancy.

"Whether it was deliberate, or he was unwell, the effect is the same. Complete humiliation for the last generation of pre-Xi leadership," tweeted analyst Alex White.



CHINA COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

AGENCIES

China's Communist Party wrapped up its twice-a-decade congress on Saturday, approving amendments cementing Xi Jinping's iron grip on the party and revealing a new Central Committee missing two key officials lacking close ties to the leader.

KEY OUTCOMES

Xi is poised to clinch his third five-year stint in charge -- a mandate that would secure his place as the country's most powerful ruler since founding leader Mao Zedong.

The party's new 205 member Central Committee did not include outgoing Premier Li Keqiang or former Guangdong party boss Wang Yang, who had been seen as a potential replacement as premier.

The big reveal -- who will be on seven-member Politburo Standing Committee -- will be on Sunday when Xi walks into a room of journalists at Beijing's Great Hall of the People, followed by the other members in descending order of rank.

Little is known about who will be promoted into which key roles on the PSC or the broader Politburo -- although the number of women is likely to remain very small, and there has never been a woman on the Standing Committee.



CHANGES TO CONSTITUTION

Xi's 'core position': China's Communist Party endorsed Xi's "core position" on the Party Central Committee -- a group of 205 senior officials -- as well as his rarefied status "in the Party as a whole". All party members will have to "acquire a deep understanding" of Xi's unassailable role and work to uphold it, the document says. While the 69-year-old has long been referred to as the "core" of the party, the resolution uses the designation more often and in more reverent terms than the previous charter.

No 'Xi Jinping Thought': Many analysts were waiting to see whether the party would enshrine the term "Xi Jinping Thought" as its guiding doctrine, a move that would have placed Xi on a par with the likes of the country's founding leader Mao Zedong. The lengthier "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" was first woven into the charter in 2017,

and argues that the party must take a commanding role in Chinese society while pushing further reform, national security and internal discipline. The resolution yesterday referred to the ideology by its longer name, indicating that its status had not been significantly elevated. However, it lauded the creed as "the Marxism of contemporary China and of the 21st century". It "embodies the best Chinese culture and ethos of this era", the resolution said.

Taiwan inclusion: For the first time, the party's charter will say explicitly that it opposes Taiwanese independence, according to the resolution. The constitution will be changed to include "statements on... resolutely opposing and deterring separatists seeking 'Taiwan independence'". The existing charter says only that the party will "work continuously to strengthen the unity of all the Chinese people, including compatriots... in Taiwan" as part of efforts to achieve the "reunification of the motherland".

FIGHTING IN SUDAN'S SOUTH Fresh violence kills at least 200

AFP, Khartoum

At least 200 people were killed in two days of ethnic clashes in Sudan's southern Blue Nile state, official media said yesterday, up from an earlier toll of 150.

Clashes in Blue Nile, which borders Ethiopia and South Sudan, broke out last week after reported disputes over land between members of the Hausa people and rival groups, with residents reporting hundreds fleeing intense gunfire and homes and shops set ablaze.

Fighting peaked on Wednesday and Thursday to some of the worst in recent months, prompting the provincial governor to declare a state of emergency on Friday.

"Two hundred people were killed" in three villages in the Wad al-Mahi area, some 500 kilometres south of the capital Khartoum, said a local official said.

Governor Ahmed al-Omda Badi had ordered a "state of emergency... in the whole Blue Nile state for 30 days", according to a Friday provincial decree seen by AFP.

Abbas Moussa, the head of the Wad al-Mahi hospital, told AFP on Thursday that "women, children and elderly" people were among the dead.

The Hausa have mobilised across Sudan, claiming they are discriminated against by tribal law which forbids them to own land in Blue Nile because they were the last group to arrive there. The issue of access to land is highly sensitive in impoverished Sudan, where agriculture and livestock account for 43 percent of employment and 30 percent of GDP, according to UN and World Bank statistics.

Sudan has been grappling with deepening political unrest and a spiralling economic crisis since last year's military coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

FAITF blacklists Myanmar

AFP, Paris

Myanmar was added on Friday to a global financial blacklist while Russia was sidelined by the international money-laundering watchdog FAITF. The move by the Financial Action Task Force puts Myanmar alongside North Korea and Iran as outcasts of the global financial system. Citing a "continued lack of progress" and the fact the majority of the actions Myanmar had promised to take had not been completed more than a year after a deadline, the FAITF put the country on the so-called blacklist. Other nations are required to apply enhanced measures to screen transactions with countries on the blacklist to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing. Those measures can act as an impediment to trade and investment.

Japan, Australia ink security pact

AFP, Perth

Australia and Japan agreed to share sensitive intelligence and deepen defence cooperation yesterday, signing a security pact to counter China's military rise. Prime ministers Fumio Kishida and Anthony Albanese inked the accord in the Western Australian city of Perth, revamping a dusty 15-year-old statement drafted when terrorism and weapons proliferation were the overriding concerns. Kishida said the agreement was a response to an "increasingly harsh strategic environment", without citing China or North Korea by name. Some see the accord as another step toward Japan joining the powerful Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance between Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the United States.



Biden 'intends' to run for US president in 2024

Says would 'make sense' for Trump to comply with subpoena to testify before Capitol riot committee

AFP, Washington

Joe Biden, the oldest person ever in the US presidency, said Friday it's his "intention" to run again in 2024 and that his wife Jill thinks he should not "walk away."

Biden's comments in an interview with MSNBC addressed a question fascinating Washington watchers as Biden approaches his 80th birthday next month.

"I have not made that formal decision but it's my intention, my intention to run again, and we have time to make that decision," Biden told MSNBC.

Asked what the first lady, who is widely judged to be a powerful voice behind the scenes in the White House, thinks of him seeking a second term, Biden indicated she was in favor.

"Dr Biden, my wife, thinks that we're doing something very important and that I shouldn't walk away from it," he said.

Biden has previously said he wants to run, but at times has also sown doubts. In an interview in September with CBS, he said it was "much too early" and his decision "remains to be seen."

In Friday's comments, Biden went further than before in explaining his reasoning about what would be a mold-breaking candidacy. If re-elected, he would be 86 by the time he finished his second term.

Biden hinted -- as he has before -- that an attempt by Donald Trump to return to the White House might be his motivation to seek the grueling job again.

Pressure will grow on Biden to clarify his plans after the midterm elections on November 8, where his Democratic party is currently expected to lose control of Congress to the Republicans.

Biden said it would "make sense" for Trump to comply with a subpoena to testify before the committee investigating his supporters' assault on Congress last year.

Trump received a summons from the House of Representatives committee which has concluded that the Republican leader stoked the January 6, 2021 attack by a mob in an effort to subvert his 2020 election loss to Biden and not give up power.



People protest following the death of Mahsa Amini in Iran, in London, Britain, yesterday. Shopkeepers and factory workers went on strike in provinces in Iran yesterday as nationwide protests sparked by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini entered a sixth week. The death of 22-year-old Amini, after her arrest for allegedly breaching Iran's strict dress code for women, has fuelled the biggest protests seen in the Islamic republic for years.

PHOTO: REUTERS