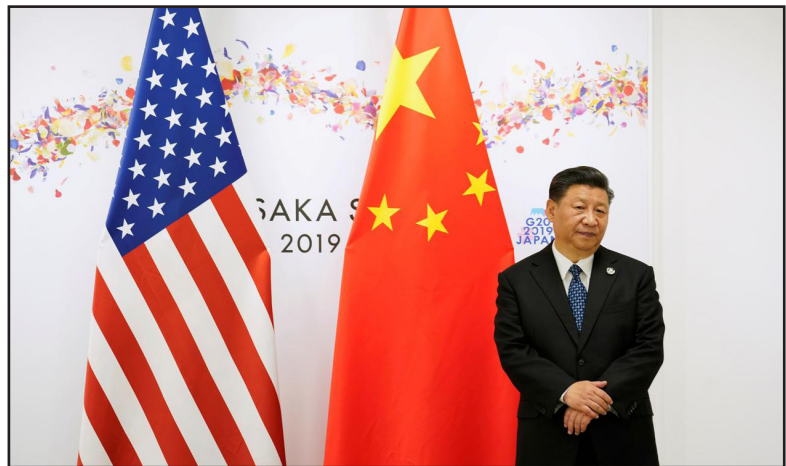


President Xi: China Facing ‘Concentrated Risks’



China’s President Xi Jinping waits ahead of their bilateral meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump during the G20 leaders summit in Osaka, Japan, June 29, 2019.

BEIJING (Reuters) -- China is entering a period where it faces “concentrated risks” - economically, politically and diplomatically - and the country must be able to fight and win against those who challenge China’s bottom lines, President Xi Jinping said on Tuesday.

Xi is gearing up to mark the highly sensitive anniversary of 70 years since the founding of Communist China on Oct. 1 with a massive military parade in Beijing, and will want to leave nothing to chance to overshadow the festivities.

But Xi and his ruling Communist

Party, which values stability above all else, are facing a series of difficulties and setbacks, from a slowing economy amid a bruising trade war with the United States, to violent protests in Hong Kong.

Speaking at the Central Party School, which trains rising officials destined for higher office, Xi said there must be a “resolute struggle” against any risks and challenges to the party’s leadership, the country’s sovereignty and security and anything that threatens the country’s core interests.

“As long as it comes, we must carry

out a resolute struggle, and we must achieve victory,” state media cited Xi as saying.

“At present and in the future, China’s development has entered into a period where risks and challenges continue to increase or are becoming concentrated. The major struggles to be faced will not become less,” he added.

Xi said those struggles covered the economy, politics, culture, society, the environment, defense, Hong Kong, Taiwan and diplomacy. “They will become even more complex,” he added.

Party officials must be clear headed about where the risks are and how to recognize them, Xi said. “Cadres in leadership positions must be warriors who dare to struggle and are good at struggle,” he added.

Chinese Vice Premier Liu He also said that China firmly opposes a trade war as it is not good for it, the United States and the world, the state news agency Xinhua reported.

Liu, China’s top trade negotiator, made his comment when he met U.S. Senator Steve Daines, co-chairman of the U.S. House of Senate U.S.-China Working Group, and Senator David Perdue.

China hoped the two sides seek common ground while setting aside difference and that they can appropriately resolve the issue on the basis of equality and mutual respect, Xinhua quoted Liu as saying.

Hong Kong Leader Vows to Stay on Despite Unrest



Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam

HONG KONG (Dispatches) -- Hong Kong’s leader insisted Tuesday she had no intention of stepping down after an audio recording emerged of her saying she wanted to quit over three months of unrest in the southern Chinese city.

Hong Kong has endured dozens of sometimes violent protests triggered by mutiny against Chief Executive Carrie Lam’s bid to push through a law allowing extraditions to mainland China.

“I told myself repeatedly in the

last three months that I and my team should stay on to help Hong Kong,” Lam told a press conference on Tuesday morning.

Lam said she had “not even contemplated” discussing her resignation with the Chinese government, which gives Hong Kong a restricted form of autonomy.

“The conflict that I myself want to quit but cannot quit does not exist,” she said.

On Tuesday afternoon Beijing repeated its support for the chief ex-

ecutive, but warned it would “never allow the situation in Hong Kong to continue unabated”.

“If the situation continues to deteriorate and moves into the turmoil that endangers national sovereignty and security, that is beyond the control of the (Hong Kong) government, the central government will never sit idly by,” said Xu Luying, spokeswoman for the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of China’s central government.

On Tuesday, hundreds of people filled a park in the heart of town in the latest unrest, as students also continued a two-week university boycott launched on Monday.

More than 1,100 people have been arrested since June when the unrest began.

Rallies over the weekend saw some of the worst violence of the crisis, with unruly rioters throwing bricks and petrol bombs at police, who responded with tear gas, water cannon and baton charges.

Chinese state media have released videos showing mainland security forces deployed just across the border.

An editorial by China’s state news agency on Sunday warned the protesters that “the end is coming”.

Ukraine Lawmakers Strip Themselves of Immunity

KIEV (Reuters) -- Ukrainian lawmakers voted to strip themselves of immunity from prosecution on Tuesday, fulfilling an anti-corruption election promise by reformist President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

A former comedian with no prior political experience, Zelenskyy won the presidency by a landslide in April, tapping into voter anger over graft and low living standards.

Previously, lawmakers could only be stripped of immunity by a parliamentary vote on each individual case. But the new measure passed easily by 373 votes in the 450-seat parliament where Zelenskyy won a majority in a July snap election.

“We promised to remove immunity, we promised that there would be no people with a special status in Ukraine,” said Alexander Dubinsky, a lawmaker in Zelenskyy’s Servant of the People party.

“It is our duty to vote for this law and put people who are outside this hall on equal terms with those people in this hall.”

Before the vote, the president had said it was time to consign lawmakers’ immunity “to the dustbin of history”, arguing that 90% of Ukrainians wanted to see this happen.

Opponents, however, said removing lawmakers’ protection leaves them vulnerable to politically-motivated prosecutions.

Sviatoslav Vakarchuk, leader of the Voice party, said it

would vote for the measure because all people should be equal before the law, but said those in power should not succumb to the temptation to abuse the change.

The law, which signals Zelenskyy’s commitment to push through reforms, will take effect from the start of next year.

His party is the first in Ukraine’s independent history to command a majority on its own.

Zelenskyy called a parliamentary election in July to give his party control over parliament and to form a new government.

A pre-election survey by the National Democratic Institute in May said only 5% of Ukrainians thought political parties represented citizens’ interests and just 3% said politicians met their expectations. On the other hand, 87% believed political parties were engaged in corruption.

On Monday, Zelenskyy’s new government announced a legislative agenda aimed at bringing more investment into Ukraine, including lifting a longstanding ban on sale of farmland.

Zelenskyy grew to national fame playing the TV comedy role of a schoolteacher who unexpectedly becomes president after a pupil films him making a foul-mouthed tirade against corrupt politicians and posts the video online.

His presidential campaign exploited the parallels with that fictional narrative, portraying him as an everyman who would stand up to a crooked political class.

Italian Parties Agree Agenda to Form Government



Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte arrives at the Lower House of the Parliament in Rome, Italy, August 29, 2019.

ROME (Reuters) - Italy’s anti-establishment 5-Star Movement and center-left Democratic Party (PD) unveiled a shared policy program on Tuesday for their mooted coalition, putting an expansionary 2020 budget at the top of their agenda.

5-Star, created a decade ago out of opposition to the PD, has agreed to form a new administration with its former foes to head off a snap election after its previous coalition with the far-right League collapsed last month.

“This is a very delicate moment for the country. It must be tackled by focusing on the interests and needs of citizens, of the community that we all form together,” 5-Star said in a blog on Tuesday, calling on its supporters to back the deal.

Italian benchmark 10-year bond yields hit record lows on Tuesday in a sign that investors believed the new administration would take office, heading off the risk of an early election and prolonged political instability.

At the head of the 5-Star/PD policy list was a commitment to use the coming budget to help the stalled economy grow, but also a promise that they

would not endanger public finances.

Italy has the second-largest debt burden in the European Union as a proportion of economic output, and the pact called for greater flexibility from Brussels to overcome the “excessive rigidity” of existing budget rules.

Emphasizing social justice, the two parties pledged to introduce a minimum salary, avoid a VAT hike set for January and boost spending on education, research and welfare. The program also called for a web tax on multinationals and the creation of a public bank to help boost development in the poorer south.

5-Star and PD committed to re-writing Italy’s conflict of interest laws, a move that former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi has always sought to head off, fearing it could impact negatively on his Mediaset media empire.

The two parties also promised a “revision” of Italy’s motorway concessions. The vague wording left open the hope for Italy’s Atlantia that 5-Star would not press ahead with its demand that it lose its lucrative toll road concession in the wake of last year’s deadly bridge collapse in Genoa.

Myanmar Forcing Rohingya to Recant Citizenship: Group



Heavy police stand guard outside of Western District Court were eight people charged with financing terrorism will appear in Yangon, Myanmar, August 9, 2019.

YANGON (Reuters) -- Myanmar authorities are forcing members of the Rohingya Muslim minority at gunpoint to accept identity cards that categorize them as foreigners, stripping them of the chance to become citizens, a rights group said on Tuesday.

Myanmar has drawn global condemnation for its treatment of the Rohingya and the report by the group Fortify Rights on the campaign to make them accept National Verification Cards (NVCs) is likely to compound concerns about their treatment.

“The Myanmar government is trying to destroy the Rohingya people through an administrative process that effectively strips them of basic rights,” said Matthew Smith, the group’s chief executive officer.

The government has coerced Rohingya to accept the NVCs, “which effectively identify Rohingya as ‘foreigners,’” the group said.

“Myanmar authorities tortured Rohingya and imposed restrictions on Rohingya freedom of movement in the context of implementing the NVC process,” it said.

The government of predominantly Buddhist Myanmar has denied citizenship to most Rohingya, who are generally seen as illegal immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh, even though many trace their roots in Rakhine State in western Myanmar back for genera-

tions.

Rakhine State drew global attention after about 730,000 Rohingya Muslims fled to neighboring Bangladesh in 2017, following a military crackdown in response to militant attacks.

Myanmar government spokesman Zaw Htay was not immediately available for comment.

Military spokesman Major General Tun Tun Nyi dismissed accusations that anyone was being forced to accept the cards at gunpoint or through torture.

“It is not true and so I have nothing else to say,” he told Reuters by telephone.

The issue could have implications for prospects for the repatriation of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

Many say they will not go back unless their security can be guaranteed and they can be sure of being granted citizenship.

Last year, a UN fact-finding mission said the 2017 military campaign in Rakhine State was orchestrated with “genocidal intent”, and recommended charging the military’s Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing and five other generals with the “gravest crimes under international law”.

Myanmar has denied the accusations, although Min Aung Hlaing said last month a number of security men may have been involved.

News in Brief

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. (AP) — At least 25 people were confirmed dead and nine others still missing after a tragic boat fire early Monday near an island off the Southern California coast. The dive-boat Conception, far out to sea in the middle of the night, became fully engulfed in flames as 30 passengers on a recreational scuba diving trip slept below deck. “You couldn’t ask for a worse situation,” Santa Barbara County Sheriff Bill Brown said at a Monday news conference. Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Matthew Kroll says at least 25 people on a recreational scuba-diving trip died and the search will continue through the night for the nine others still missing. He says five others have been found but not recovered due to unsafe conditions under the boat, which sank in about 60 feet (18 meters) of water. Kroll that says these numbers are based on initial reports and authorities are awaiting final counts from the autopsies.

LONDON (Reuters) -- British lawmakers were about on Tuesday to try to stop Boris Johnson from pursuing what they cast as a calamitous no-deal Brexit, a challenge a senior government source said would prompt the prime minister to call for a snap election on Oct. 14. More than three years since the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union in a referendum, the outcome of the Brexit crisis remains uncertain with a range of options from a turbulent no-deal exit to abandoning the entire endeavor. Johnson implicitly warned lawmakers on Monday that he would seek an election if they tied his hands, ruling out ever countenancing a further delay to Brexit, scheduled for Oct. 31. That sets up an historic Brexit showdown between prime minister and parliament in a country once touted as a confident pillar of Western economic and political stability. Sterling flirted with some of the lowest levels since 1985.

BRUSSELS (Reuters) -- An explosion destroyed a number of houses on the outskirts of the Belgian port city of Antwerp on Tuesday, emergency services said. Emergency crews freed one person from the debris, but others might still be trapped in the southern suburb of Wilrijk, the city’s fire service said. It was still unclear what caused the explosion, the fire service said.

TOKYO (Reuters) -- A letter threatening to hunt Koreans and containing what appeared to be a bullet has been sent to the South Korean embassy in Japan amid worsening ties between the Asian neighbors, Japanese media said on Tuesday. Relations between the two countries have been overshadowed by Japan’s 1910-1945 colonization of the Korean peninsula, and recently a dispute over Korean forced laborers spilled into trade and then into security when South Korea scrapped an intelligence sharing pact last month. “I’ve got a rifle and I’m hunting Koreans,” said the letter that was delivered to the South Korean embassy in Tokyo last week, the Kyodo news agency reported. It contained what appeared to be a bullet, the news agency said, adding that police were investigating. Police declined to comment. A member of staff at the embassy confirmed that the letter had been delivered but declined to give any details.

SHANNON, Ireland (Reuters) -- U.S. Vice President Mike Pence drew fire from Democrats on Tuesday when he met with Irish leaders in the capital, Dublin, but stayed at a hotel owned by President Donald Trump almost 300 kilometers (180 miles) away, at Trump’s urging. Pence flew to Dublin on Tuesday after spending the night at the Trump International Golf Club in Doonbeg on the west coast of Ireland. The hotel also hosted the Trump family during a brief trip to Ireland by the president in June. Asked if Trump had suggested that Pence stay at the property, the vice president’s chief of staff, Marc Short, told journalists, “I think that it was a suggestion.” California Democratic Congressman Ted Lieu accused Pence in a post on Twitter of “funneling taxpayer money” to Trump by staying at the hotel. “You took an oath to the Constitution, not to @realDonaldTrump,” Lieu said. The Democratic National Committee also chimed in, saying in a post on its DNC War Room Twitter feed that Pence’s choice of hotel meant “your tax dollars: making the Trump family richer.”

MADRID (Reuters) -- Spanish Socialist leader Pedro Sanchez said on Tuesday there were too many disagreements with far-left Unidas Podemos to form a coalition government but offered an option that would see the parties agree on policies and give non-cabinet positions to Podemos. However, Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias said that a coalition government was the only option. Sanchez, acting prime minister since an inconclusive election in April, said repeatedly in a speech that he was rejecting Podemos’ demand for a coalition government, but proposed the alternative deal. The Socialists won April’s vote but failed to win enough seats to govern without the support of other parties. Pressure is building for a deal to be reached on a government - if no agreement is reached by Sept. 23, a repeat election will be held on Nov. 10.