

# Spain takes step to Catalan direct rule

Spain's Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy attends a cabinet meeting at the Moncloa Palace in Madrid



## Madrid

**S**panish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy took the first step yesterday toward suspending Catalonia's political autonomy and ruling the region directly to thwart a push for independence.

He demanded that the regional government clarify whether it now considered itself independent following a speech by Catalan president Carles Puigdemont on Tuesday night.

This requirement is a necessary step before triggering Article 155 of the constitution, which would allow Madrid to suspend the region's political autonomy.

Rajoy's move could deepen the confrontation between Madrid and Catalonia but it also signals a way out of Spain's biggest political crisis since a failed military coup in 1981.

The prime minister would be likely to call a snap regional

## France says declaration "illegal"

### Paris

**F**rance will not recognize Catalonia if it unilaterally declared independence, which it described as "illegal," the country's foreign ministry said yesterday.

"Any unilateral declaration of independence by the Catalan authorities would

election after activating the constitutional mechanism allowing him to do so.

Puigdemont made a symbolic declaration of independence from Spain on Tuesday night but then immediately suspended it and called for talks with the Madrid government.

"The cabinet has agreed this morning to formally request the Catalan government to confirm whether it has declared the independence of Catalonia, regardless of the deliberate

be illegal and couldn't in any case be recognized," the ministry said.

Expressing concerns about the situation in the Spanish region, the ministry stressed "any solution to this internal crisis must be found within the Spanish constitutional framework." (*Xinhua*)

confusion created over its implementation," Rajoy said in a televised address after a cabinet meeting to consider the government's response.

Without giving a specific deadline for the Catalan government to reply, Rajoy said: "The answer from the Catalan president will determine future events, in the next few days."

It is not yet clear if and when the Catalan government would answer the requirement but it now faces a conundrum, political analysts say. (*Reuters*)

## #PollToday



With recent developments do you think Spain is ready to approve Catalonia's independence?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Cant Say



"Puigdemont's doing what he's always done, going down a path that will lead to situations we don't want to see in Catalonia in terms of economic and social clashes."

Alfonso Dastis  
Spain's Foreign Minister

## Rest in sight

Deadly storms hits South Africa's coastal city



At least eight people were killed and a number of others were unaccounted for when a severe storm hit the coastal city of Durban

## Trump, top officials discuss DPRK options

The White House said that U.S. military leaders had briefed President Donald Trump on options regarding the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) nuclear issue.

## Sex with minor wife is rape: Indian SC

India's Supreme Court ruled that sex with a wife below 18 years of age amounts to rape, a landmark judgment aimed at stopping child marriages.

## Afghan airstrikes kill 15 insurgents

Up to 15 Taliban fighters have been confirmed dead as Afghan aircrafts targeted militants' hideouts in parts of the eastern Paktia province

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## Israeli spies 'watched Russian US hack'

### Washington

**I**sraeli spies looked on as Russian hackers breached Kaspersky cyber-security software two years ago, US media report.

The Russians were allegedly attempting to gather data on US intelligence programs, according to the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.

Israeli agents made the discovery after breaching the software themselves.

Kaspersky has said it was neither involved in nor aware of the situation and denies collusion with authorities.

Last month, the US

government decided to stop using the Russian firm's software on its computers.

The Israelis are said to have notified the US, which led to the ban on Kaspersky programs.

*The New York Times* said that the situation had been described by "multiple people who have been briefed on the matter".

Classified documents are reported to have been stolen from the home computer of a US National Security Agency (NSA) employee who installed Kaspersky's antivirus software. (*BBC*)

## More homes evacuated as California fires grow



Wildfire is visible from a vineyard near Kenwood, California.

### Los Angeles

**T**he largest fires in Sonoma and Napa counties continued to grow overnight yesterday, threatening more homes and prompting new evacuations, authorities said.

Already, the fires have scorched more than 100,000 acres and left at least 17 people dead. Increased winds threatened to make containment of the fires even more difficult yesterday.

Fire officials anticipate northeast winds of 10 to 15 miles per hour, with gusts up to 35 to 40 miles per hour,

throughout Mendocino, Napa and Sonoma counties on Wednesday, said Cal Fire spokeswoman Lynne Tolmachoff.

Tuesday evening, the Tubbs fire that levelled much of Santa Rosa in Sonoma County had exceeded 28,000 acres with no containment. The Atlas fire in Napa County had grown to 26,000 acres and was 3 per cent contained, Tolmachoff said. Other fires ranging in size from 1,800 to 21,000 acres burned throughout the area and in surrounding counties. (*LATimes*)

## Astronauts take a spacewalk to lubricate robotic arm

### Washington

**T**wo astronauts aboard the International Space Station (ISS) have completed a spacewalk lasting about 6.5 hours to lubricate components of the new latching end effector they installed in the previous spacewalk on the Canadarm2 robotic arm.

Expedition 53 Commander Randy Bresnik and Flight Engineer Mark Vande Hei of NASA also replaced a faulty camera system during the spacewalk on Tuesday.

The astronauts also completed a variety of



NASA astronauts outside the International Space Station to grease the robot arm's new hand.

additional tasks, including replacing a smudged lens cover and removing two handrails from outside the tranquillity

module in preparation for a future wireless antenna installation, NASA scientists wrote in a blog post. (*IANS*)

## Challenging Tillerson to IQ test a "joke" from Trump

### Washington

**T**he White House said Tuesday that an earlier comment by U.S. President Donald Trump about challenging Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to an "IQ test" was "a joke."

"The President certainly never implied that the secretary of state was not incredibly intelligent, he made a joke, nothing more than that," White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders told a press briefing.

"He has full confidence in the secretary of state, they had a great visit earlier today and they are working hand-in-hand to move the president's agenda forward," she said.

The remark was a response to a Forbes interview with Trump released earlier Tuesday, in which Trump commented on a recent revelation that Tillerson had privately called his boss a "moron." (*Xinhua*)