



‘CCP CC’s 4<sup>th</sup> Plenum could suggest a dilution in Xi Jinping’s authority’

by Jayadeva Ranade

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) held the long overdue 4<sup>th</sup> plenary session of its 19<sup>th</sup> Central Committee (CC) from October 28 – 31, 2019. Held after a delay of nearly 20 months, the 4<sup>th</sup> Plenum took place at a time of some uncertainty in China, indicated also by speculative reports suggesting that the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) could be expanded with the addition of a couple of new members. This speculation, which claimed that the induction of new members would signal a political setback for Xi Jinping, proved erroneous. However, while the Plenum communique unequivocally emphasised the Party’s importance in all spheres it, along with the Plenum Resolution issued on November 5 evening, did contain a hint that possibly Xi Jinping’s power has been slightly diluted.

The 6153-character communique issued promptly after the Plenum concluded on October 31, mentioned that 202 full members and 169 alternate members attended. Also attending the Plenum were members of the Standing Committee of the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC), senior officials of relevant departments, a number of delegates to the 19th Party Congress who work at the grass-roots level, as well as experts and scholars. The state-owned CCTV showed Chinese Vice President Wang Qishan arriving for the Plenum meeting at the Great Hall of the People along with the members of the PBSC. The 271 Full and Alternate Members of the CCP CC were accommodated, as usual, in the Jingxi Hotel managed by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) for greater security.

Some Chinese commentators have observed that the prompt issue of the Plenum communique by the official Chinese media the same day as the plenary session ended showed that it had been finalised prior to the start of the Plenum. This showed also that differences had been ironed out before the start of the plenary meeting. Noticeable too is that after publication of the communique, no local officials have yet made statements in their local media.

The plenum filled the two vacancies occasioned by, the dismissal in January of Liu Shiyu from the post of Chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission and the death of Zheng Xiaosong, China’s former top official in Macau who fell to his death in 2018, from among the alternate members of the CC. Those elevated are Ma Zhengwu, Chairman of state-owned

investment conglomerate Chengtong Group, and PLA Navy engineer Rear Admiral Ma Weiming, who received the PLA's highest award last year.

An unfortunate incident on the last day of the plenary session was the suicide of 54-year old alternate CC member Ren Xuefeng, Deputy Party Secretary of the centrally controlled Chongqing Municipality, on October 31. Rumours circulating in China claim that he was being investigated and preferred to commit suicide by jumping from the Jingxi Hotel in Beijing instead of serving jail time. Adding to these rumours was that his remains were cremated at the Changping District Crematorium in Beijing instead of Beijing's Babaoshan Revolutionary Cemetery. Coincidentally, the now disgraced former PBSC member Bo Xilai was also formerly Party Secretary of Chongqing.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Plenum normally concerns itself with Party issues and, at times, personnel appointments. This Plenum followed past practice. The Plenum communique was devoted mainly to the subject of the Party's control as was the work report delivered at the Plenum by CCP CC General Secretary Xi Jinping. According to the communique, the plenum approved the "Decisions on Some Major Issues Concerning Upholding and Improving the System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Advancing the National Governance System and Modernization of Governance Capacity." It discussed 13 "outstanding strengths" of Chinese governance of which five were devoted entirely to maintaining the Party's leadership and socialism. Pertinent among the others were: (i) 'upholding equality of all ethnic groups, creating a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, realizing a common united struggle and common prosperity and development'; (ii) 'selecting officials based on integrity and ability and on the basis of merit to cultivate more talented individuals'; (iii) 'keeping the armed forces under the Party's command and ensuring that the people's armed forces are completely loyal to the Party and the people so as to safeguard China's sovereignty, security and development interests'; (iv) 'upholding the principle of "one country, two systems," maintaining lasting prosperity and stability in Hong Kong and Macao, and promoting the peaceful reunification of the motherland'; and (v) 'adhering to the unity of independence and self-reliance and opening up to the rest of the world, actively participating in global governance, and continuing to contribute to the building of a community with a shared future'.

Emphasis on the need to ensure that the Party keeps the PLA under its command and that they "are completely loyal to the Party and the people" suggests that the armed forces will continue to be subjected to strict ideological controls and education. Political reliability will remain the main criteria for promoting PLA officers.

The 18,441-character 4<sup>th</sup> Plenum Resolution issued on November 5 evening clearly revealed that Hongkong was discussed at some length at the plenary session. The annual summer meeting of senior CCP leaders and veteran cadres at the seaside resort of Beidaihe had earlier this year also discussed the troubles in Hongkong and, according to reports, unanimously described it as a 'colour revolution'. Special mention of this in the Plenum Resolution could suggest oblique criticism of Xi Jinping for the inaction in sorting out the Hongkong issue. Soon

after the 4<sup>th</sup> Plenum meeting it was disclosed that Chinese President Xi Jinping had a one-on-one meeting with Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Chief Executive Carrie Lam in Shanghai. China's Minister of Public Security Zhao Kezhi, who was recently added to the Party's Central Leading Small Group on Hong Kong, was also present. This was Xi Jinping's first meeting with Carrie Lam since the trouble in Hongkong began 5 months ago. Xinhua reported Xi Jinping as assuring her that *"The central government has high trust in you and fully affirms the work of you and the governance team of Hong Kong."* Carrie Lam is also scheduled to meet PBSC member Han Zheng, who is in charge of Hongkong affairs, on November 6 in Beijing.

Indication that Beijing will introduce tougher policies to govern Hongkong and Macau were evident in the 371-character paragraph in the 4<sup>th</sup> Plenum Resolution dealing specially with the two SARs. This resolved to 'improve the central system for appointing and mechanisms of the Special Administrative Region Chief Executive and principal officials', thus signalling that Hongkong will be brought more directly under Beijing's control. Promising a more robust and immediate response in future, it resolved to 'establish a sound legal system and enforcement mechanisms in the Special Administrative Region to safeguard national security', and 'strengthen the law enforcement forces'. More importantly, the Resolution asserted that Beijing will make 'efforts to solve deep-seated contradictions and problems that affect social stability and long-term development' in Hongkong, 'enhance the national consciousness and patriotism of the young people' and 'resolutely prevent and curb the external force to interfere in Hong Kong and Macao affairs and divide, subversion, infiltration, sabotage, ensure that Hong Kong and Macao have long-term stability'. It is apparent that as the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) is brought back to normalcy, Beijing will impose severe ideological and political education controls on HKSAR's education system, its youth and civil servants.

References in Xi Jinping's speeches and documents issued by the CCP over the past many months to Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao etc have decreased. More recently, the document jointly issued by the Party Central Committee and the PRC State Council on October 27, mentioned only 'Xi Jinping Thought' as the 'guiding principle' with no reference at all to Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin or Hu Jintao! The 4<sup>th</sup> Plenum communique, however, included two separate references asserting that "the Political Bureau of the Central Committee holds high the great banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics and adheres to Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the important thinking of the "Three Represents", and the scientific development concept. Guided by Xi Jinping's new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics".

The just concluded 4<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the 19<sup>th</sup> CC of the CCP has endorsed the political education campaigns launched by Xi Jinping and his endeavour to enhance the Party's authority and ensure it is present in virtually every sphere of government and military activity. It has also not overtly weakened Xi Jinping's position by inducting potential successors to the PBSC. However, its communique and the Resolution issued subsequently do suggest that the troubles in Hongkong were extensively discussed with some criticism for the delay in acting to resolve

it probably directed towards Xi Jinping and possibly PBSC member Han Zheng. The reference in the communique to “Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory” etc appear to reinforce this.

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(The author is former Additional Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India and is presently President of the Centre for China Analysis and Strategy)

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