China's New Leadership Takes Shape

By CARLOS TEJADA And AARON BACK

BEIJING—The Chinese Communist Party unveiled the makeup of two of its leadership bodies, offering the first indications of what its top governing body will look like when revealed on Thursday.

The 18th Party Congress formally closed on Wednesday after appointing the members of its Central Committee and Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, according to the state-run Xinhua news agency.

The Central committee is scheduled to meet Thursday to endorse a new Politburo Standing Committee, the party's most powerful group of leaders. The Thursday selection is widely expected to result in Vice President Xi Jinping succeeding President Hu Jintao as party chief.

"We are convinced that all the decisions and plans adopted and all the achievements made at the congress, which are of major current and far-reaching historical significance, will play an important role in guiding the all-around development of the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the great new undertaking of party building," Mr. Hu said in a closing address to the congress in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, according to Xinhua.

The makeup of the party's new leadership to be unveiled Thursday could provide clues on how the world's No. 2 economy will approach challenges in coming years ranging from tackling political reform and corruption to answering pleas from both inside and outside the country to liberalize the economy and weaken the hold of power state-controlled enterprises.

The party provided a potential hint on Wednesday at a stepped-up fight against corruption. Chinese Vice Premier Wang Qishan, a economic and financial policy heavyweight, was appointed to the party's antigraft body, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. He is widely viewed as a competent troubleshooter and has frequently served as a key interlocutor with foreign officials in negotiations on matters of finance and economics.

Should Mr. Wang be appointed head the commission, it could be a disappointment to some market players who hoped that he would lead efforts for financial-system reforms under the new government, though it would put him in a position to lead efforts at fighting corruption within the party.

Mr. Wang is widely expected to be among the appointments announced Thursday to the party's Politburo Standing Committee along with Mr. Xi and Vice Premier Li Keqiang. Mr. Xi is widely expected to succeed Mr. Hu as China's president at the conclusion of the leadership change early next year, while Mr. Li is widely expected to succeed Premier Wen Jiabao at that same time.

Among potential changes in the Standing Committee, observers will be watching to see whether its membership is trimmed to seven from its current nine. Such a move could signal the party's new leaders wish to have an easier time forming consensus, though it could also constitute an effort to eliminate positions that the party believes have grown too powerful.