

IN BRIEF

**Amid Ukraine crisis, Pope, Putin hold talks**

VATICAN CITY
Russian President Vladimir Putin thanked Pope Francis for "very substantive" talks on Thursday, a day before Ukraine's Catholic leaders were due at the Vatican. "It was a very substantive, interesting discussion," he said. A statement from the Vatican stated that the talks concentrated on the situations in Syria, Ukraine and Venezuela. **REUTERS**

Tehran fumes as Britain seizes Iranian oil tanker

LONDON/DUBAI
British Royal Marines seized a giant Iranian oil tanker in Gibraltar on Thursday for trying to take oil to Syria in violation of EU sanctions, a dramatic step that drew Tehran's fury. Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned the British ambassador to voice "its very strong objection to the illegal and unacceptable seizure" of its ship. The diplomatic gesture lifted any doubt over Iran's ownership of the vessel. **REUTERS**

U.S. is hell-bent on sanctions, says N. Korea

UNITED NATIONS
North Korea has accused the U.S. of being "hell-bent on hostile acts" days after the countries' leaders agreed to resume denuclearisation talks. Pyongyang's delegation to the UN on Wednesday said the U.S. continues to be "obsessed with sanctions". It complained that while Mr. Trump invited Mr. Kim Jong-un to hold talks, the U.S. had also sent a letter to all UN members urging them to send back North Korean workers. **AFP**

China signals Xi won't bow to Hong Kong protesters' demands

Storming of legislature has prompted the sharpest denunciations in Beijing so far

STEVEN LEE MYERS
BEIJING

When protesters in Hong Kong became more forceful on Monday, the *People's Daily* reprised a recent speech of China's leader, Xi Jinping, calling on party cadres to carry forward the struggle of the communist revolution fought 70 years ago.

"We must overcome all kinds of difficulties, risks and challenges," he said.

It was the latest signal that Mr. Xi has no intention of bowing to the protesters' demands for greater rights. On the contrary, the storming of Hong Kong's legislature on Monday night seems to have given ammunition to hardliners and prompted the sharpest denunciations in Beijing so far, suggesting the ruling Communist Party's patience was wearing thin.

"I think they have realised it is time to take measures" to restore order, Song Xiaozhuang, a professor in the Center for Basic Laws of Hong Kong and Macao at Shenzhen University, said in a telephone interview, referring to authorities in Beijing. "This does not mean there is no patience, or that they want to get it done promptly, but it does mean that they cannot wait for long."

Mr. Xi has not publicly addressed the political tumult in Hong Kong. Nor have officials disclosed any options they might be considering. But there is little doubt about Mr. Xi's convictions, which are shaped by history and a deeply felt sense of the perils of popular uprisings.



Writing on the wall: A July 3 photo of the Hong Kong Legislative Council lobby, which was damaged by protesters. **AP**

"I have heard him talk at length, and passionately, about the challenges of governing China, and the need to maintain order in order to keep the country together," said Ryan L. Hass, who served in the Obama administration.

He noted that the mass protests that toppled authoritarian governments in North Africa and West Asia in 2011 coincided with Mr. Xi's ascent to the presidency and were "seared into his brain".

Sense of destiny

Mr. Xi's stance is not without risks, but he has governed with a millenarian sense of destiny, regularly exhorting the Communist Party to return to its original mission to transform the nation into the global power.

While the events in Hong Kong have generated considerable sympathy for the protesters, forcing the city's leader to back down and sus-

pend a deeply unpopular extradition Bill, Mr. Xi still has most of the advantages of power on his side.

Those include time and influence. The central government can still mobilise a vast network of supporters in Hong Kong, including civil servants and business people beholden to the central government, economically or politically.

In a last resort, there is also the Chinese military. Few analysts expect Mr. Xi intends to use force, but few doubt that he would if security significantly deteriorated in the city.

The People's Liberation Army disclosed on Tuesday that troops from its Hong Kong garrison had conducted training exercises last week.

One photograph accompanying an article in the official military newspaper showed soldiers aboard a gunboat in Victoria Harbor, weapons drawn, with the ci-

ty's skyline in the background.

After weeks of relative restraint, officials in Beijing have also begun to warn of grave repercussions. A spokesman for the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office warned that the defacing of the legislature was "a blatant challenge" to Beijing's red line: its sovereignty over the territory. The *Global Times*, a nationalist tabloid controlled by the Communist Party, called for "a zero-tolerance policy", warning that more violence could open a Pandora's box.

That the protests in Hong Kong took place shortly following the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests and other cities in China has only hardened official views. This year is also the anniversary of the popular movements that swept Eastern Europe in 1989, toppling not only the Berlin Wall but also, ultimately, the Soviet Union itself two years later.

"There has also been a tendency to present these struggles — and Tiananmen was presented this way — as not being spontaneous expressions of the popular will," Jeffrey Wasserstrom, a professor of history at the University of California, Irvine, wrote in an email, "even in cases when that is clearly what they are." Rather, he wrote, Beijing describes such protests as "illegitimate efforts by small sets of malcontents spurred on by mysterious foreign forces." **NY TIMES**

STF, police personnel acquitted over Lanka students' murder

Five persons were shot dead at Trincomalee in 2006

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

A magistrate court in Sri Lanka has acquitted Special Task Force (STF) and police personnel accused of killing five students in Trincomalee in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province, in 2006.

According to the State-run *Daily News*, the Trincomalee Chief Magistrate on Wednesday released 13 suspects, including 12 STF members allegedly linked to the gruesome killings, after clearing them of "all charges".

Local human rights organisations and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights cite the students' killings as an "emblematic case" raising difficult questions about war crimes and accountability in Sri Lanka. Even as the STF's possible role in the murder was widely speculated by those familiar with the developments

in the island's eastern district, a U.S. State Department cable from October 2006, which was later released by WikiLeaks, quotes Basil Rajapaksa, brother and advisor of then President Mahinda Rajapaksa, as telling the then U.S. Ambassador Robert Blake: "We know the STF did it, but the bullet and gun evidence shows that they did not. They must have separate guns when they want to kill someone. We need forensic experts. We know who did it, but we can't proceed in prosecuting them."

Charged for murder

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) probing the case charged the STF suspects for murder, for "shooting the students", who had gathered to meet near the Gandhi roundabout in Trincomalee. While the

CID had named 36 witnesses, eight of them failed to appear in court and who had migrated abroad were absent, according to local media reports.

University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), a group of academics that documented rights violations committed by state forces, the LTTE, and the IPKF, in 2007 published a report on the incident, pointing to "lapses" in investigations.

"It was a shocking case in which the State has operated with blatant impunity; its disregard for the rule of law has been offensive and insidious. Numerous exposes and statements by human rights agencies have been released on the subject that provide overwhelming evidence of state complicity, but as usual the case has stalled," the UTHR said in the report.

New EU chief seeks 'smart advice'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BRUSSELS

European Union President-elect Ursula von der Leyen on Thursday made her first trip to Brussels since being nominated as senior officials sought to shore up support for her appointment in the European Parliament.

After talks with Jean-Claude Juncker, the man she is to replace as European Commission President, current German Defence Minister von der Leyen tweeted she had come to seek "smart advice" as she prepares her



Ursula von der Leyen

cooked up by EU national leaders over three days of tortuous summit wrangling.

"My priorities will be to seek smart advice, listen to all parliamentary groups and together work out the best plan for the future of Europe," she tweeted, a day after talks with MEPs at the Parliament in Strasbourg, eastern France. The multilingual von der Leyen sent out the message in English, French and German after a warm welcome from Mr. Juncker at Commission headquarters in Brussels.

plan for the next five years.

She must win the approval of the highly fragmented European Parliament, where there have been grumblings about the deal to appoint her, which was

China says U.S. tariffs must be lifted for a trade deal

Talks to break deadlock to begin next week, says Washington

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

U.S. tariffs against China must be lifted for the two sides to reach a deal to end the trade war, the Chinese Commerce Ministry said on Thursday.

Trade teams from the world's top two economies "have maintained communication", Ministry spokesman Gao Feng said, days after Presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping agreed at the G20 in Japan to revive negotiations.

"The United States' unilateral tariff increase on China's exports to the United States is the starting point for the Sino-U.S. economic and trade frictions," Mr. Gao said at a weekly press briefing. "If the two sides can reach an agreement, the tariffs imposed must be completely eliminated. China's attitude toward this is clear



Donald Trump and Xi Jinping

and consistent," Mr. Gao said.

The countries have exchanged tariffs on \$360 billion in two-way trade and negotiations broke down in May after the United States accused China of reneging on its commitments.

The U.S. leader said he would not slap new tariffs on Chinese exports and suggested he could take a softer stance on Chinese telecom giant Huawei, which he has moved to blacklist.

On Wednesday, Trump administration officials said top representatives of the U.S. and China are organising a resumption of talks for next week to try to resolve the trade war. "Those talks will continue in earnest this coming week," White House Economic Adviser Larry Kudlow told reporters.

An official from the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative said later that the two sides were in the process of scheduling a principal-level phone call with Chinese officials for next week.

Mr. Kudlow was unclear about the timeline for relaunching face-to-face talks. "I don't know precisely when. They're on the phone. They're going to be on the phone this coming week and they'll be scheduling face-to-face meetings," he said.

(With Reuters inputs)

Imran Khan to visit U.S. on July 22

MEHMAL SARFRAZ
LAHORE

Prime Minister Imran Khan will travel to the U.S. to meet President Donald Trump on July 22, the Pakistani Foreign Ministry said on Thursday. This is Mr. Khan's first visit to the U.S. after he became the Prime Minister.

In his weekly media briefing in Islamabad, Mohammad Faisal, a spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry, said: "At the invitation of U.S. President Donald Trump, Prime Minister Imran Khan will visit Washington and hold a meeting with President Trump on July 22. The agenda of the meeting is being prepared through diplomatic channels... The focus will be to refresh the bilateral relationship."

The announcement comes at a time when the U.S. is seeking Pakistan's help in finding a way out of Afghanistan.

Submarine reactor safe, Putin told

REUTERS
MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin disclosed on Thursday for the first time that a secret military submarine hit by a fatal fire three days ago was nuclear-powered, prompting the Defence Minister to assure him its reactor had been safely contained.

Mr. Putin revealed that the submarine had been nuclear-powered by asking Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu during a Kremlin meeting about the reactor's condition after the fire.

"The nuclear reactor on the vessel is completely isolated," Mr. Shoigu told Mr. Putin, according to a Kremlin transcript. "All the necessary measures were taken by the crew to protect the reactor, which is in complete working order."

Trump, protesters gear up for an untraditional July Fourth

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

In a sweltering capital threatened by storms, the traditional Fourth of July parade on Thursday served as a warm-up act to a distinctly nontraditional evening event at the Lincoln Memorial, where President Donald Trump made plans to command the stage against the backdrop of a show of military muscle.

Protesters unimpressed by his "Salute to America" programme inflated a roly-poly balloon depicting Mr. Trump as an angry, diaper-clad baby.

With his decision to add his own production to the usual festivities, Mr. Trump set himself up to be the first President in nearly seven decades to address a crowd at the National Mall on Independence Day. "I will speak on behalf of our great Coun-



A girl taking part in Independence Day celebrations. **REUTERS**

try!" he said in a morning tweet. "Perhaps even Air Force One will do a low & loud sprint over the crowd."

But thunderstorms threatened, with periods of "torrential rain" forecast by the National Weather Service.

"We think that he is making this about himself and it's really a campaign rally," said Medea Benjamin, co-director of the anti-war organisation Codepink. "We think

that he's a big baby... He's erratic, he's prone to tantrums, he doesn't understand the consequences of his actions. And so this is a great symbol of how we feel about our President."

In a message marking the 243rd anniversary of the Founding Fathers' adoption of the Declaration of Independence, Mr. Trump called the document a milestone that "cast off the shackles of tyranny."

The Pentagon was arranging for an Air Force B-2 stealth bomber and other warplanes to conduct flyovers. There will be Navy F-35 and F-18 fighter jets, the Navy Blue Angels aerobatics team, Army and Coast Guard helicopters and Marine V-22 Ospreys. A small number of Army Abrams tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles were stationed in the zone.