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Iran threatens to seize British ship
LONDON/DUBAI
An Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander threatened on Friday to seize a British ship in retaliation for the capture of an Iranian supertanker in Gibraltar by the Royal Marines. "If Britain does not release the Iranian oil tanker, it is the authorities duty to seize a British oil tanker," Mohsen Rezaei said on Twitter.

\$6 bn from IMF will help secure more loans: Pak.
ISLAMABAD
The IMF's decision to provide a \$6 billion bailout package to Pakistan has improved the cash-strapped country's standing and it would attract \$38 billion more from other lenders, Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, Prime Minister Imran Khan's adviser, on finance, has claimed. PTI

Charges filed against Hong Kong protester
HONG KONG
A Hong Kong street artist was charged on Friday with assaulting a police officer and criminal damage, the first prosecution against an anti-government protester since the city was rocked by unprecedented demonstrations. AFP

Trump celebrates U.S. might, avoids politics in July 4 speech

For Americans, nothing is impossible, President tells cheering crowd

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE WASHINGTON
President Donald Trump sang the praises of the U.S. military and American heroes of the past two-and-a-half centuries on Thursday, skirting politics in a rousing Independence Day speech in Washington.

"What a great country," Mr. Trump exclaimed in an address saturated with patriotism and exceptionalism, after critics accused him of hijacking the annual celebration.

"For Americans, nothing is impossible," he said.

Combat aircraft, including the rarely-seen B2 stealth bomber, flew overhead as Mr. Trump scrolled through myriad events of U.S. history, from groundbreaking inventions to battlefield victories. He drew cheers of "USA! USA!" from an enthusiastic rain-soaked audience of tens of thousands on the National Mall in Washington.

'Future belongs to us'
Mr. Trump promised the U.S. would soon again send men to the moon, and go beyond to "plant the American flag on Mars."

"We will always be the people who defeated a tyrant, crossed a continent, harnessed science, took to the



Hailing the heroes: U.S. President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. on Friday. *REUTERS

skies, and soared into the heavens, because we will never forget that we are Americans, and the future belongs to us."

Mr. Trump spoke in front of a massive statue of a seated Abraham Lincoln, the heroic 19th century President, where civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr. gave his "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963.

Mr. Trump used the traditionally politics-free holiday to deliver shoutouts to each arm of the military, as well as singling out first responders and the controversial Border Patrol and Immigration and

Customs Enforcement agencies that have been criticised for their treatment of migrants.

'Disappointed critics'
But he disappointed critics who had warned that Mr. Trump, the first President in decades to make a keynote speech on the July 4 holiday, was hijacking the celebration to bolster his own political standing and attack Democratic rivals.

Instead, in a trickling rain, he uncharacteristically avoided talking about himself and his political detractors. He repeatedly ascribed

a singular greatness to the country, declaring it "the most exceptional nation in the history of the world."

The July 4 celebrations usually draw hundreds of thousands of people to the National Mall.

"I think it's awesome, I think it shows courage and patriotic enthusiasm. He is not afraid," Dee Ranson, 55, said before Mr. Trump's speech.

But April Smith, 43, said she had "no interest" in hearing Mr. Trump's speech, and thought the military "show of power and strength" was unnecessary.

Rule of law in Venezuela eroded: UN

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE GENEVA

The UN human rights chief lamented on Friday the erosion of rule of law in Venezuela, pointing to attacks on political opponents and activists, including using torture and killings.

"Essential institutions and the rule of law in Venezuela have been eroded," Michelle Bachelet told the UN Human Rights Council.

She was presenting a damning report published late on Thursday, following her visit to the troubled South American Country last month.

The report pointed out that, according to a count by Caracas, nearly 7,000 people have been killed during security operations in Venezuela in the past year and a half. "Many could constitute extrajudicial killings, and should be fully investigated with accountability of perpetrators, and guarantees of non-recurrence," she told the council.

Ms. Bachelet pointed a finger at Venezuela's police special forces, and urged the authorities to "dissolve" the unit.

She welcomed the release of 62 detainees during her recent visit to the country, and 22 more this Thursday, including journalist Braulio Jatar and the judge Lourdes Afiuni.

Sudan's protesters hail deal with ruling military

It raises hopes for an end to stand-off

ASSOCIATED PRESS KHARTOUM

Leaders of Sudan's pro-democracy movement welcomed on Friday the power-sharing agreement with the ruling military council as a victory for their "revolution," raising hopes for an end to the three-month stand-off with the generals and deadly violence.

"Today, our revolution has won and our victory shines," read a post on the Facebook page of Sudanese Professionals' Association, which has spearheaded the protests.

The emerging deal could break the political impasse that has gripped the country since the military ousted longtime President Omar al-Bashir in April. Since then, protesters stayed on the streets demanding that the generals handover power to

a civilian leadership. Talks collapsed when security forces razed a protest camp in Khartoum on June 3 leaving more than a hundred killed, according to protesters.

The African Union and Ethiopia made intensive efforts to bring the generals and the protesters back to the negotiating table. Negotiations resumed earlier this week, after protest broke out across major cities.

The two parties agreed to form a joint sovereign council to lead the country during a transitional period of three years and three months.

The council will include five civilians representing the protest movement and five military members. An eleventh seat will go to a civilian chosen by both parties.

Sri Lanka SC stays execution of drug offence convicts

Sirisena had signed death warrants for four persons in June

MEERA SRINIVASAN COLOMBO

The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka on Friday stayed the death penalty for four persons convicted on drug-related offences until October 30, temporarily preventing the country's first hanging in 43 years.

In June, President Maithripala Sirisena had signed death warrants for four persons, effectively ending a 43-year-old moratorium on capital punishment. Amid concern voiced by local and international rights groups,

President Sirisena has defended his stance, while criticising those opposed to his move.

Appearing for one of the convicts, Tamil National Alliance MP M.A. Sumanthiran argued that around the time Sri Lanka's current Constitution was adopted in 1978, the country's policy had been that in a "Dharmishta" (righteous) society, the State shall not put an end to any person's life.

The last time the country executed someone was in 1976.

"Several governments and presidents have maintained the moratorium since then," said Mr. Sumanthiran on behalf all petitioners.

Politicians, including Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and Leader of Opposition Mahinda Rajapaksa, have opposed Mr. Sirisena's decision.

Mr. Wickremesinghe's United National Party has opposed the move, while the Tamil National Alliance at its recent party convention passed a resolution against capital punishment.