

Japan successfully launches, lands reusable rocket



A prototype reusable rocket RV-X descending at the Noshiro Rocket Testing Center in Noshiro, Akita Prefecture.

AFP | Tokyo, Japan

Japan's space agency said yesterday its prototype reusable rocket successfully completed the first lift-off and landing test, marking a step forward in the cost-cutting technology dominated by SpaceX.

The prototype, launched from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA)'s test site in Noshiro, Akita region, reached a height of about 10 metres (33 feet), and then landed.

The flight lasted about 40 seconds, according to JAXA. "I feel we have put a great

deal of time and effort into this, and now that the prototype has taken off and landed without problem, I must say I feel a great sense of relief," JAXA's Takashi Ito, who led the launch, told reporters.

Ito said the agency will review data to fully determine the success of the test, but he is "confident" that it "obtained very useful data."

Most rockets are designed for single use, with components falling into the sea, burning up in the atmosphere or remaining in orbit as debris. The first launch stage is considered the most expensive component.

US-Canada bridge threatened by Trump to open July 27

Montreal, Canada

A long-awaited new bridge between Canada and the United States, threatened by President Donald Trump earlier this year, will open for public use in late July, officials said Friday.

"Today, Canada and Michigan have agreed to open the Gordie Howe International Bridge on July 27, with the support of the United States Government," Canada's Ministry of Infrastructure said in a statement, adding the bridge "will be a vital economic link between Canada and the US -- generating billions of dollars in economic activity for decades to come."

The CAN\$6.4 billion (\$4.5 billion) bridge, which connects



Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, has been under construction since 2018.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said last month the bridge's inauguration had been delayed indefinitely at the request of the United States due to "technical issues."

In February, Trump threatened to fully block the bridge, insisting that the United States had been treated unfairly in its construction and that it should be "at least half" US-owned.

Boeing unveils new 737 MAX production line

Everett, United States

Boeing marked another step in a marathon comeback Friday when it celebrated expanded production of the 737 MAX, now an aircraft in heavy demand after earlier disasters tarnished the company's reputation.

At a rousing ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by hundreds of Boeing employees, commercial airlines chief Stephanie Pope and Washington state elected officials char-

acterized the new \$1 billion "North Line" MAX production line investment in Everett, Washington as the appropriate next step for an industrial site that has been building Boeing's most storied aircraft for decades. "This investment is a vote of confidence in our workforce, in American manufacturing, and the future of aerospace in the city of Everett," said Everett Mayor Cassie Franklin. "This factory has repeatedly shown the world what is possible."cre

New Zealand, India strike 'milestone' strategic partnership

AFP | Auckland, New Zealand

New Zealand and India announced yesterday the creation of a strategic partnership encompassing defence and security, during a landmark visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon feted his guest with an indigenous Maori welcome and a guard of honour, seeking to expand relations after signing a free-trade pact in April that he has touted as an economic boon.

Modi's visit, at the tail end of a July 6-11 tour that has also taken him to Indonesia and Australia, came in the aftermath of China test-firing a ballistic missile into the Pacific Ocean on Monday, stirring unease in the region.

It was the first visit to New Zealand by an Indian prime minister in 40 years, a sign of Delhi's deeper engagement at a time of strengthened Chinese diplomatic and military presence in



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (L) is welcomed with a traditional Maori challenge at Government House in Auckland

the Pacific.

Modi described the strategic partnership as a "milestone" that would inspire greater energy and confidence, as he was hosted by the New Zealand leader for discussions at Government House in Auckland.

"Our firm belief in democratic values makes us natural part-

ners," he said.

The pact covers tighter defence cooperation, including with naval exercises, as well as stronger ties in trade, diplomacy, culture, sport and science, the two countries said in a joint statement.

The nations have a shared interest in a "free, open, peaceful

and prosperous Indo-Pacific", they said.

The two countries "quickly canvassed" the Chinese missile test, Luxon told reporters in a briefing after the talks.

He skirted a question about whether closer New Zealand-India ties would curb Beijing's ambitions in the region.

"We are a small trading nation. We are a maritime nation. We need to have as many relationships as we possibly can with partners around the world that are like-minded, and some of those are around defence, and some of those around trade, some around both."

In the evening, the two leaders fronted an estimated 10,000 or more cheering Modi fans from the country's 300,000-strong Indian diaspora who packed into Auckland's Spark Arena.

Luxon praised the Indian diaspora, declaring: "Without you we simply would not be the New Zealand we are today."

US delegation in Lebanon to discuss 'pilot zone' withdrawal

US Central Command will coordinate on the zones with both countries

● Lebanese military will take full control of two small areas dubbed pilot zones

● Israel will gradually withdraw from areas of southern Lebanon

● The talks precede Aoun's expected visit to Washington later this month at the invitation of his American counterpart Donald Trump

AFP | Beirut, Lebanon

A US military delegation met with Lebanon's army in Beirut to discuss the implementation of Israel's withdrawal from a "pilot zone" in occupied territory, a Lebanese military official said yesterday.

Under a framework agreement reached on June 26, Israel will gradually withdraw from areas of southern Lebanon where it has deployed troops to fight Hezbollah, the Iran-backed Shia movement.

As part of the agreement, the long-disempowered Lebanese military will take full control of two small areas dubbed pilot zones.

"The American military delegation arrived and began meet-



First responders inspect a vehicle that was reportedly damaged by an Israeli strike in the southern Lebanese village of Kfar Roummane

ings with the Lebanese army command to discuss the mechanisms for implementing the first pilot zone from which the Israelis will withdraw, allowing the Lebanese army to deploy," the official said, requesting anonymity. "This is the main objective the American military delegation is bringing to Lebanon... it is the translation and implementation of the framework agreement."

US ambassador Michel Issa told President Joseph Aoun on Thursday that the American delegation was coming to "determine the mechanism" for the

deal's implementation.

In Washington, a US official had said on condition of anonymity that "the first pilot zone will launch in a matter of days, and further pilot zones are being mapped out and planned".

US Central Command will coordinate on the zones with both countries, he said.

The agreement -- rejected by Hezbollah -- does not set a timetable for Israel's withdrawal, and Israeli officials have also vowed that their forces will remain in a "security zone" 10 kilometres (six miles) deep as long as Hez-

bollah remains armed.

On Saturday the agency said more than 732,000 people had now returned home, up from 640,000 a week before.

That leaves more than 430,000 still displaced, it added.

The latest talks between Lebanon and Israel, which have no formal relations but have met for five rounds of negotiations since the start of the war, will take place in Rome next Wednesday and Thursday.

Lebanon conditions its participation on Israel withdrawing from two pilot zones.