

News in brief

◆ **The UN nuclear watchdog** yesterday called on Iran to allow it to verify its inventories of enriched uranium, especially its sensitive stockpile of highly enriched uranium, according to two confidential reports seen by AFP. Tensions between Iran and the UN nuclear watchdog have repeatedly flared in recent years, with relations being further strained in the wake of a 12-day war in June that saw Israeli and US strikes on key Iranian nuclear facilities. In its latest report, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said it “has lost continuity of knowledge in relation to previously declared inventories of nuclear material in Iran at the affected facilities”, including its stockpile of near-weapons-grade uranium. According to the IAEA, Iran had an estimated 440.9 kilograms enriched to up to 60 percent as of June 13 but has been unable to verify it.



UN watchdog calls on Iran to allow nuclear verifications ‘as soon as possible’

◆ **The United Nations** said yesterday that 42 migrants were missing and presumed dead after a boat capsized off the Libyan coast last week. It was the latest in a series of similar disasters in a stretch of the Mediterranean Sea that have claimed the lives of more than a thousand people so far this year. Seven survivors were rescued after six days adrift, the UN’s International Organization for Migration said in a statement. “According to survivors, some individuals were wearing life jackets while others held onto the overturned boat,” an IOM spokesman told AFP. The vessel, carrying 47 men and two women, left Zuwara, west of Tripoli, on November 3 before high waves caused the engine to fail around six hours later, the IOM said. The boat capsized, throwing all passengers overboard, the statement added.

42 feared dead in migrant shipwreck off Libya: UN

◆ **The United Nations** said yesterday that around 13,500 square kilometres (5,000 square miles) of Ukraine’s lakes, rivers and coastlines are potentially contaminated with mines and explosives after the nearly four-year Russian invasion. Even as the war is mostly fought on the ground, both sides have mined large areas near coastlines, and some undetonated projectiles from Russia’s daily aerial barrages end up in bodies of water. “An estimated 13,500 square kilometres of Ukraine’s aquatic areas -- including the Dnipro River, lakes, and Black Sea coastlines -- are potentially contaminated with explosive remnants of war,” the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Ukraine said in a statement. Only 1.4 percent of the contaminated waters -- roughly equivalent to the size of Puerto Rico -- has been de-mined, with the removal of around 2,800 explosive devices.

UN says 13,500 square km of Ukrainian waterways need de-mining



SPOTLIGHT

Astronomers spot storm on another star for first time

Paris, France

Astronomers revealed yesterday they have detected a storm on a star other than our Sun for the first time, discovering an explosion so violent it could have stripped away the atmosphere of any planets unlucky enough to be nearby.



Solar storms on the Sun sometimes shoot out huge eruptions known as coronal mass ejections, which can disrupt satellites when they arrive at Earth -- and create colourful auroras that dance across the sky. In fact, a particularly powerful solar storm caused auroras as far south as the US city of Tennessee on Wednesday, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Auroras were also visible in the skies above New Zealand, AFP images showed, with more expected into Wednesday night.

However, observing such a storm on a distant star had proven difficult for astronomers.

New research, published in the journal Nature on Wednesday, revealed that an international team of researchers has finally achieved the feat.

The discovery used data from a European network of telescopes called LOFAR.

The team of astronomers has been using LOFAR since 2016 to detect the most extreme and

violent events in the universe -- such as black holes -- which emit relatively stable radio signals over time.

“We always have stars in the telescope’s field of view but generally we’re not interested in them,” Cyril Tasse, a Paris Observatory astronomer and the study’s co-author, told AFP. However, the researchers have set up a data processing system that also records what is going on with the stars behind the behemoths they are chasing.

In 2022, the team decided to find out “what had been caught in this net”, Tasse said.

They found that there was a huge explosion which only lasted a minute on May 16, 2016. It came from a red dwarf star called StKM 1-1262 more than 133 light years away.

The team then determined it was a coronal mass ejection -- a stellar storm.

“It’s the first time we have detected one” on a star other than our own, Tasse said.

But this coronal mass ejection was “at least 10,000 times more violent than known solar storms” on the Sun, he added.

UK minister denies plotting against PM Starmer as rumours swirl

Rumours say some ministers are plotting to challenge Starmer

AFP | London, United Kingdom

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer insisted yesterday he runs a “united team” after a senior minister was forced to repeatedly deny that he planned to oust the embattled premier.

Starmer’s comments came after Downing Street sources said Britain’s leader would fight off any leadership challenge, as a briefing war exposed tensions at the heart of the beleaguered government.

Rumours are swirling in the UK parliament that some ministers are plotting to challenge Starmer following a budget due later this month, in which Labour is expected to break manifesto promises.

“This is a united team,” he told parliament, adding that he was focused on “rebuilding the country”.

Earlier, health minister Wes Streeting told Sky News that he was “not going” to demand Starmer’s resignation, adding: “I support the prime minister. I have done since he was elected leader of the Labour Party.”

The 42-year-old is considered one of Labour’s better performers and has long been touted as a potential replacement for Starmer, among others including interior minister Shabana Mahmood.

Streeting’s

denial, repeated to other broadcasters, followed anonymous briefings by Starmer allies who told journalists he would fight any bid to replace him, in what appeared to be an attempt to warn them off.

Starmer told parliament that attacks on any of his cabinet members were “completely unacceptable” and said Streeting was doing a “great job”.

“The government has descended into civil war,” said opposition Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch.



Ukraine ministers resign in outcry over major graft scandal

AFP | Kyiv, Ukraine

Ukraine’s energy and justice ministers offered their resignations yesterday, shortly after President Volodymyr Zelensky said both should go over their alleged involvement in a sweeping corruption scandal in the country’s energy sector.

Investigators earlier alleged a key Zelensky ally orchestrated a \$100-million kickback scheme to siphon funds, triggering public anger at a time of widespread power outages caused by Russian attacks.

Ukraine has long been plagued by corruption and cracking down on graft is seen as a key requirement of its bid to join the European Union.

Zelensky said his Justice Minister German Galushchenko, whom investigators allege was involved in the scheme and received “personal benefits”, as well as Energy Minister Svitlana Grynchuk, should tender their resignations.

Neither is known to have been charged and Grynchuk has not been mentioned as having profited from the scheme.

“The minister of justice and the



Ukrainian minister of energy German Galushchenko (L) and Chief State Inspector for Nuclear and Radiation Safety of Ukraine Oleh Korikov speak during the IAEA’s Board of Governors meeting at the agency’s headquarters in Vienna, Austria

minister of energy cannot remain in their positions,” Zelensky said in a video posted on social media.

Shortly after, both submitted letters of resignation, Ukraine’s Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said.

The scandal has triggered outcry among Ukrainians, who are suffering frequent heating and electricity outages from the Russian bombings.

“It’s disgusting,” Davyd, a

24-year-old content creator, told AFP, declining to give his surname. “They’re destroying us, our reputation, and our future. We won’t have a future if we have crooks like that,” he said, expressing concern over how the scandal would play among Kyiv’s crucial backers in the EU.

People “raise as much money as possible to help the (army), and they are just hiding the money in their basements”, he added.

India capital car blast death toll rises to 12

AFP | New Delhi, India

India’s anti-terrorism agency spearheaded yesterday the third day of investigations into a car blast in the capital, as a hospital official said the death toll had increased to 12.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called the explosion on Monday evening a “conspiracy”, and

has vowed that those responsible will face justice.

Police are yet to give exact details of what caused the intense explosion near the historic Red Fort in the crowded Old Delhi quarter of the city, one of India’s most well-known landmarks, and the site of the annual prime minister’s Independence Day speech.

It was the most significant security incident since April 22, when 26 mainly Hindu civilians were killed at the tourist site of Pahalgam in Indian-administered Kashmir, triggering clashes with Pakistan.

“Twelve people have died and more than 30 are injured,” Ritu Saxena, the chief medical officer of Delhi’s LNJ hospital, told AFP.