

world

Historic first all-female spacewalk

● The spacewalk comes as NASA plans to return to the Moon by 2024

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Washington

US astronauts Christina Koch and Jessica Meir became the first all-female pairing to carry out a spacewalk Friday, following a spacesuit flub earlier this year that caused the historic mission to be aborted.

“Christina, you may egress the airlock,” spacecraft communicator Stephanie Wilson told the pair shortly after they set out to replace a power controller on the International Space Station at 1138 GMT.

They began their mission making standard safety checks on their suits and tethers, before making their way to the repair site.

In a call to reporters a few minutes earlier, NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine emphasized its symbolic importance.

“We want to make sure that space is available to all people, and this is another milestone in that evolution.

“I have an 11 year old daughter,



Spacewalkers Christina Koch (foreground, suit with no stripes) and Andrew Morgan (suit with red stripes) of NASA work to replace older hydrogen-nickel batteries with newer, more powerful lithium-ion batteries during the six-hour and 45-minute spacewalk. (Courtesy of NASA)

ter, I want her to see herself as having all the same opportunities that I found myself as having when I was growing up.”

The first such mission was supposed to take place in March but was canceled because the space agency had only one medium-sized suit, with a male-female combination performing the required task at a later date.

Traditionally male-dominated NASA’s failure to be adequately prepared was denounced in some quarters as evidence of

implicit sexism.

Koch, an electrical engineer, was leading Meir, who holds a doctorate in marine biology and is making her first ever spacewalk.

The two were working to replace a faulty battery charge/discharge unit, known as a BCDU.

The station relies on solar power but is out of direct sunlight for much of its orbit and therefore needs batteries, and the BCDUs regulate the amount of charge that goes into them.

The current task was announced Monday and is part of a wider mission of replacing aging nickel-hydrogen batteries with higher capacity lithium-ion units.

The US sent its first female astronaut into space in 1983, when Sally Ride took part in the seventh Space Shuttle mission, and has now had more women astronauts than any other country.

But the first woman in space was Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova in 1963, followed by compatriot Svetlana Savitskaya in 1982, who was also the first woman spacewalker two years later.

The spacewalk comes as NASA plans to return to the Moon by 2024 under the Artemis mission, named for the twin sister of Apollo in Greek mythology.

The mission will see the first woman to set foot on the lunar surface, possibly as part of an all-woman team.



Christina Koch (left) is leading Jessica Meir, who is making her first ever spacewalk

General strike grips Catalonia



Barcelona

Spain’s protest-hit north-east was gripped by a general strike yesterday as thousands of “freedom marchers” converged on Barcelona for a mass show of dissent over the jailing of nine Catalan separatist leaders.

With the angry demonstrations entering their fifth day, activists blocked a string of roads in the wealthy northeastern region, cutting off the main cross-border highway with France.

Workers were also downing tools against Monday’s Supreme Court verdict in which the separatist leaders were handed long jail terms over a banned referendum and an abortive independence declaration two years ago.

As well as the strike, tens of thousands of people streamed into Barcelona after a three-day march from five Catalan towns in a bid to cause chaos on the roads in a region that accounts for about a fifth of Spain’s economic output.

Murderer who triggered Hong Kong protests will go to Taiwan

Hong Kong

A man who inadvertently triggered Hong Kong’s huge protests after he murdered his girlfriend in Taiwan has agreed to return to the island to face justice, a clergyman who has visited him in prison said on Friday.

Chan Tong-kai, 20, is wanted in Taiwan for the murder of his pregnant girlfriend during a holiday the two Hong Kongers took there in February last year.

He fled back to the southern Chinese city where Taiwanese police were unable to

apprehend him because there is no extradition agreement between the two territories.

The case sparked an ill-fated proposal by Hong Kong’s pro-Beijing government to ram through a sweeping extradition bill which would have allowed the city to extradite suspects to any territory, including the authoritarian mainland.

The proposal sparked a massive public backlash with record-breaking crowds hitting the streets. The protests have since snow-balled as the movement seeks greater democracy and police accountability.

Cartel gunmen chase away forces, free El Chapo’s son

Reuters | Mexico City

Heavily armed cartel fighters surrounded security forces and made them free one of drug lord Joaquin ‘El Chapo’ Guzman’s sons, whose brief apprehension triggered intense gunbattles across the city of Culiacan.

Security Minister Alfonso Durazo said a patrol by National Guard militarised police first came under attack from within a house in the city, 600 km (370 miles) northwest of Mexico City.

After entering the house, they found four men including Ovidio Guzman, who is accused of



Cartel gunmen are seen outside during clashes with federal forces following the detention of Ovidio Guzman, son of drug kingpin Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman, in Culiacan, Sinaloa state, Mexico

drug trafficking in the United States.

The patrol was quickly overpowered by cartel gunmen, however, and the decision was taken to withdraw to protect the lives of the National Guard and restore calm in the city, where gangsters had set up roadblocks and were unleashing heavy automatic gunfire, Durazo said.

“The decision was taken to retreat from the house, without Guzman to try to avoid more violence in the area and preserve the lives of our personnel and recover calm in the city,” Durazo said.

Prince William, Kate land in Islamabad after aborted flight

Agencies | Islamabad

Britain’s Prince William and his wife Kate landed in Pakistan’s capital Islamabad on Friday, after turbulence forced the couple to stay overnight in Lahore in a change to their tightly-choreographed itinerary.

On Thursday an RAF Voyager carrying the royals, who are on a four-day official visit to Pakistan, aborted landings in Islamabad and nearby Rawalpindi due to severe turbulence.

The couple stayed at Lahore’s



Britain’s Prince William and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, depart from Lahore airport, Pakistan

Pearl Continental Hotel on Thursday evening, along with journalists, Kensington Palace staff and foreign ministry officials.

Thursday’s aborted flight was described by a photographer on board as one of the most turbulent he had experienced in 25 years of regular flying, although the couple told reporters after returning to Lahore they were “fine”. Friday’s flight passed off without incident.

A planned visit to a Pakistan military post in the west of the country on Friday morning was

cancelled, but the couple will visit an army canine training school in Islamabad before departing from the country later in the day.

Kensington Palace had called the trip, the Cambridges’ first official visit to Pakistan, their “most complex” tour to date as the royals seek to boost ties between Britain and the second largest country in the Commonwealth.

They have spent their five-day tour promoting causes such as girls’ education, conservation and climate change awareness.

‘Most overrated general’

New York

Former US defense secretary James Mattis said he was honored to be the “world’s most overrated general” in a swipe at his former boss Donald Trump.

“I’m not just an overrated general. I am the greatest, the world’s most overrated,” he said.

“I’m honored to be considered that by Donald Trump because he also called Meryl Streep an overrated actress,” he said.