

# King Charles III makes unannounced visit to N. Ireland

AFP | Belfast, United Kingdom

Britain's King Charles III and Queen Camilla yesterday arrived in Northern Ireland on an unannounced visit, Buckingham Palace said.

The royal couple began their visit at Thompson Dock, one of the city's main tourist attractions and the last place that the Titanic stood on dry ground before her doomed maiden voyage in 1912.

The ship was built at the Harland & Wolff shipyard in the city before being finished at Thompson Dock.

Braving the rain and unseasonal spring temperatures, Charles and Camilla enjoyed a performance of traditional Irish music and dance and tried out some of the instruments.

They met organisers and performers of the all-Ireland Fleadh, the world's largest festival of traditional Irish music.

Belfast is due to host the festival for the first time in August.

Charles, 77, who is still undergoing treatment for an undisclosed cancer, has made numerous trips to Northern Ireland over the years both as king and heir to the throne before the



Britain's King Charles III and Britain's Queen Camilla play bodhran drums, traditional Irish drums, as they watch dancers perform to mark Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann coming to Belfast this August, at Thompson Dock in Belfast, Northern Ireland

death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in 2022.

The visit comes a day after Irish President Catherine Connolly said Charles had "graciously" accepted an invitation

to Ireland after the two heads of state met at Buckingham Palace.

That trip is expected to take place next year and would only be the second such visit by a British monarch since Ireland's

independence in 1921.

The late queen paid a state visit to Ireland in 2011.

Connolly met Charles on Monday on the first day of an official visit to England.

## Europe-China spacecraft launches to study Earth's 'invisible armour'

AFP | Kourou

A joint European-Chinese spacecraft blasted into orbit yesterday to investigate what happens when extreme winds and giant explosions of plasma shot out from the Sun slam into Earth's magnetic shield.

Particularly fierce solar storms can knock out satellites and threaten astronauts -- and create dazzling auroras in the skies known as the northern or southern lights.

To find out more about this little-understood space weather, the van-sized SMILE spacecraft is tasked with making the first X-ray observations of the Earth's magnetic field.

The spacecraft achieved lift-off on a Vega-C rocket at 0352 GMT on Tuesday from Europe's spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana, on the northeastern coast of South America.

A little under an hour later, SMILE detached at 700 kilometres (435 miles) of altitude to make its own way toward an



The Smile spacecraft, in gold, fixed to a Vega-C rocket adaptor at the launch site in Kourou, French Guiana

extremely elliptical orbit thousands of kilometres above the surface of the planet.

SMILE will be at an altitude of 5,000 kilometres when it flies over the South Pole, allowing it to transmit data to the Bernardo O'Higgins research station in

Antarctica.

But the spacecraft will be 121,000 kilometres above the Earth when it swings over the North Pole -- an orbit the European Space Agency (ESA) says will allow the

mission to "observe the northern lights non-stop for 45 hours at a time for the first time ever".

SMILE -- or the Solar Wind Magnetosphere Ionosphere Link Explorer -- is a joint mission between the ESA and the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

"We are about to witness something we've never seen before -- Earth's invisible armour in action," ESA director-general Josef Aschbacher said in a statement.

Project manager David Agnolon said SMILE "marks the first time that ESA and China have jointly selected, designed, implemented, launched and operated a mission together".



## WHO worried about 'scale and speed' of deadly Ebola outbreak

AFP | Kinshasa, DR Congo

The World Health Organization on Tuesday voiced concern about the "scale and speed" of an Ebola outbreak that has killed an estimated 131 people in the Democratic Republic of Congo and warned it could be lengthy.

The UN health agency has declared the surge of the highly contagious haemorrhagic fever an international health emergency and called an urgent meeting on the crisis.

No vaccine or therapeutic treatment exists for the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola which is responsible for the outbreak declared in the east late last week.

Ebola has killed more than 15,000 people in Africa in the past half-century.

With the recent cases largely concentrated in difficult-to-access areas hit by long-running conflicts, few samples have been laboratory-tested and figures are based mostly on suspected case.

"We have recorded roughly 131 deaths in total and we have around 513 suspected cases," Congolese Health Minister Samuel Roger Kamba said on national television early Tuesday.

"The deaths we are reporting are all the deaths we have identified in the community, without necessarily saying that they are all linked to Ebola," he added.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he was "deeply concerned about the scale and speed of the epidemic".

Speaking from the DRC, Anne Ancia, the WHO's representative, told reporters in Geneva that a vaccine candidate called Ervebo was among those being looked at but it was likely to take at least "two months for it to be available".

It could still be useful, she added, since "I don't think that



The DRC's deadliest Ebola outbreak, between 2018 and 2020, claimed nearly 2,300 lives from 3,500 cases.

## Germany to admit and treat US Ebola patient from DR Congo

Berlin, Germany

Germany is preparing to admit and treat a US doctor who contracted Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo during the current deadly outbreak, the German health ministry told AFP on Tuesday.

The patient was named as medical missionary Dr Peter Stafford, who lives in DRC with his wife Rebekah, also a doctor, and their four young children, by the Christian missionary organisation Serge.

"US authorities have requested assistance from the German government in treating a US citizen who contracted Ebola in Congo," a German health ministry spokesperson said.

"Preparations are currently underway to admit and treat the patient in Germany," the spokesperson added, without saying where and when the patient would be treated.

in two months we will be done with this outbreak".

## NATO jet shoots down stray Ukrainian drone in Estonia

AFP | Warsaw, Poland

A NATO fighter jet shot down a Ukrainian drone in Estonian airspace on Tuesday, after it was reportedly diverted from its course by a Russian jamming system, Estonia's defence minister announced.

It was the first interception of a foreign drone in the airspace of a Baltic state by NATO since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Estonia's Defence Minister

Hanno Pevkur said the drone was first detected by Latvia before it was shot down by a Romanian F-16 stationed in Lithuania.

Debris from the drone was reported near Poltsamaa in central Estonia.

Pevkur said he had been in contact with his Ukrainian counterpart, Mykhailo Fedorov, who "apologised" after the incident, which happened as NATO "Spring Storm 2026" exercises are being held in Estonia this week.

## Seabird habitats shrink as ocean heats up: study

AFP | Paris, France

Climate change could push seabirds into smaller habitats and force them to fly farther to survive, a new study said yesterday.

While warmer oceans have historically caused fish and other marine species to shrink in size, seabirds such as albatrosses, shearwaters and petrels have seen their geographic range contract, the study said.

The researchers used statistical models to look at how seabirds coped with climate change across millions of years and project what their future could look like.

"In both of the scenarios we saw the same answer: Every time, when the climate changed faster... the range of distribution (of seabirds) started to decrease,

to contract, to be smaller," Jorge Avaria-Llatureo, lead author of the study in the journal Nature Climate Change, told AFP.

Driven by planet-heating fossil fuel emissions, climate change is raising global temperatures and disrupting marine ecosystems as oceans get warmer.

Avaria-Llatureo, a postdoctoral researcher at the Univer-

In a worst-case warming scenario, 70 percent of species will reduce their range by 2100, with four of them most at risk of extinction -- the Galapagos petrel, the Jouanin petrel, the Newell's shearwater and the white-vented storm petrel.

sity of Reading in Britain, and his colleagues studied more than 120 species of Procellariiformes.

As climate change accelerates, the suitable habitat for these

seabirds shrinks and their mortality rate increases, Avaria-Llatureo said.

Survivors will emigrate to find a "new liveable habitat that of-

fers optimal conditions for survival and reproduction", he said.

"The crucial factor is that seabirds differ in their dispersal ability," the researcher added.

"The farther these suitable habitats are located in the future, the less likely it is that birds with limited flying capacity will successfully reach them, increasing their extinction risk under projected scenarios of rapid global warming," he said.