

News in brief

Two police officers killed in Moscow explosion: Investigators



Two police officers were killed in an overnight explosion in Moscow that occurred when they tried to stop a suspicious person, Russia's Investigative Committee said in a statement yesterday. "An explosive device was triggered" as the officers approached the suspect who was near their service vehicle, the statement said. The blast occurred close to the site where a Russian general was killed earlier this week.

Turkish authorities found the cockpit voice recorder and black box from a private jet that crashed yesterday killing the head of Libya's armed forces and his four aides. The Falcon 50 aircraft requested an emergency landing because of electrical failure minutes after it took off from the Turkish capital Ankara, but contact was lost, Turkish officials said. The plane was returning to Tripoli. The wreckage was located by Turkish security personnel in the Haymana district near Ankara.

Black box recovered from Libyan general's crashed plane



El Salvador defends mega-prison key to Trump deportations



El Salvador's leader Nayib Bukele on Tuesday defended a huge prison that has become key to deportations from the United States under President Donald Trump, after drawing criticism for alleged rights abuses. The Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT) is a maximum security facility lauded by Bukele as part of his attempts to rid the Central American country of prolific narco-gangs. US broadcaster CBS News had been due to air an investigation Sunday about alleged abuses at CECOT on its flagship "60 Minutes" program, but it was pulled at the last minute, leading to accusations of political meddling.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

North Korean POWs in Ukraine seeking 'new life' in South



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un welcoming soldiers from the Korean People's Army's 528th Regiment of Engineers, which returned from an overseas deployment in Russia's Kursk region  
AFP | Seoul

South Korean estimates.

Two North Korean prisoners of war held by Ukraine have said they hope to start a "new life" in South Korea, according to a letter yesterday.

Previous reports have indicated that the two men, held captive by Kyiv since January after sustaining injuries on the battlefield, were seeking to defect to the South.

But the letter represents the first time the two of them have said so in their own words.

"Thanks to the support of the South Korean people, new dreams and aspirations have begun to take root," the two soldiers wrote in a letter dated late October to a Seoul-based rights group which shared it with AFP this week.

North Korea has sent thousands of troops to support Russia's nearly four-year invasion of Ukraine, according to South Korean and Western intelligence agencies.

At least 600 have died and thousands more have sustained injuries, according to

Analysts say North Korea is receiving financial aid, military technology and food and energy supplies from Russia in return.

North Korean soldiers are instructed to kill themselves rather than be taken prisoner, according to South Korea's intelligence service.

In the letter, the two prisoners thanked those working on their behalf "for encouraging us and seeing this situation not as a tragedy but as the beginning of a new life".

"We firmly believe that we are never alone, and we think of those in South Korea as our own parents and siblings and have decided to go into their embrace," they wrote.

The letter is signed by the two soldiers, whose names were asked to withhold to protect their safety.

Under South Korea's constitution, all Koreans -- including those in the North -- are considered citizens, and Seoul has said this applies to any troops captured in Ukraine.

# ISRO's record launch boosts space ambitions

Heavy-lift mission underlines India's growing role in global satellite markets

Heaviest payload launched from India

US-built satellite deployed successfully

Modified LVM3 rocket used

AFP | New Delhi

India's space agency launched its heaviest ever payload yesterday, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi calling the deployment "a significant stride" for the space sector.

The LVM3-M6 rocket launched the US-built AST SpaceMobile communications satellite into low-Earth orbit.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said it was the "heaviest payload to be launched from Indian soil".

The launch is a boost for India's ambitious space programme, with plans for an uncrewed orbital mission and human spaceflight in the coming years.

The satellite, weighing 6,100 kilograms (13,448 pounds), was launched on a modified version of a rocket that India plans to use for its future space missions.

India is vying for a larger slice of the booming commercial satellite business as phone, internet and other companies seek expanded and more high-end communications.

Modi said the launch marked "a proud milestone in India's space journey".

"It strengthens India's heavy-



ISRO's launch vehicle LVM3-M6 lifting off from the launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota



A proud milestone in India's space journey. It strengthens India's heavy-lift launch capability and reinforces our growing role in the global commercial launch market

NARENDRA MODI

lift launch capability and reinforces our growing role in the global commercial launch market," he said in a statement.

Earlier this year, ISRO launched the CMS-03 communication satellite, which weighs about 4,410



The 6,100-kilogram AST SpaceMobile satellite is the heaviest ever launched from Indian soil, significantly surpassing the 4,410-kilogram record set by the CMS-03 satellite earlier this year

kilograms.

For these heavy launches, India has deployed an upgraded version of the rocket it used to send an unmanned craft to the Moon in August 2023.

The world's most populous nation has flexed its spacefaring ambitions in the last decade with its space programme growing considerably, and rivalling the achievements of established powers at a much cheaper price tag.

It has said it plans to launch an uncrewed orbital mission before its first human spaceflight in 2027.

Modi has also announced plans to send an astronaut to the Moon by 2040.

## Bethlehem celebrates first festive Christmas since Gaza war

AFP | Bethlehem

Scouts marched under a clear blue sky in Bethlehem yesterday, as the Palestinian city emerged from the shadow of the war in Gaza to celebrate its first festive Christmas in more than two years.

Throughout the Gaza war that began with Hamas's attack on Israel in October 2023, a sombre tone marked Christmases in Bethlehem, the biblical birthplace of Jesus Christ.

But yesterday, celebrations were in full swing again in the occupied West Bank city, as a fragile truce held in the Gaza Strip where hundreds of thousands of people face the winter living in makeshift tents.

In the Vatican, Pope Leo XIV was due to deliver his first Christmas Mass at 2030 GMT at Saint Peter's Basilica, after he called for "24 hours of peace in the whole world".

The US pontiff was elected by fellow cardinals in May following



Members of the scouting movement march during Christmas eve celebrations at the Manger Square outside the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem

the death of Pope Francis.

He has a more discreet and conciliatory style than his charismatic predecessor, but Leo has followed in Francis's footsteps on key issues like immigration and social justice.

Across the world, families be-

gan gathering to mark Christmas Eve and millions of children everywhere waited eagerly for their gifts to be delivered.

'Full of joy'

In Bethlehem, the sound of drums and bagpipes playing

renditions of popular Christmas carols filled the air, as Christians young and old made their way down to the city's central Manger Square.

"Today is full of joy because we haven't been able to celebrate because of the war," said Milagros Anstas, 17, dressed in the yellow and blue uniforms of Bethlehem's Salesian scout group.

Hundreds of people took part in the parade down Bethlehem's narrow Star Street.

A dense crowd massed in Manger Square, while a handful of spectators peered from the balconies of the municipality building to get a view of the festivities below.

A towering Christmas tree covered with red and gold baubles sparkled next to the Church of the Nativity.

The basilica dates back to the fourth Century and was built on top of a grotto where Christians believe Jesus was born more than 2,000 years ago.