



SpaceX, NASA tight-lipped on cause of capsule incident



The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket with the unmanned Crew Dragon capsule
 Washington, United States

NASA and SpaceX remained tight-lipped yesterday about what caused a mysterious but apparently serious incident last weekend during engine tests on the Crew Dragon capsule designed to carry US astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS) later this year.

SpaceX said that an "anomaly" had occurred during Saturday's ground tests at Cape Canaveral in Florida.

A photo on the Florida Today website showed large amounts of smoke pouring out of the test site, prompting speculation about a possible explosion.

A video posted on Twitter showed an explosion. The video has not been authenticated, nor has SpaceX denied its veracity.

SpaceX has not issued any more details since its statement on Saturday, and NASA has referred any questions back to Elon Musk's company.

NASA's safety advisory panel did however mention the incident during a meeting on Thursday and confirmed it was the result of firing the space vehicle's SuperDraco engines.

Climate protests disrupt London's financial hub

London, United Kingdom

Environmentalists glued themselves to the London Stock Exchange entrance and staged impromptu concerts in the middle of traffic on the final day of a campaign that brought parts of the UK capital to a halt.

Activists from Extinction Rebellion -- a fast-growing movement founded last year by British academics -- have used 11 days of festive but highly disruptive rallies to focus global attention on climate change.

Their ultimate goal is to slash greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2025 and to end biodiversity loss.

But their immediate aim was



Police officers remove climate change activists from their road blockades around the Bank of England in the City of London

to get UK politicians to look past hot-button issues such as Brexit and come up with ways to save the planet from damage that younger generations think will hurt them most.

Extinction Rebellion members said their campaign drew plenty of public attention but failed to get the government to

budge. "The traffic disruptions have really, really brought the whole climate and environment out from being a niche issue," guitarist Nick Onley said while leading a group of 20 through a Beatles song performance in the middle of a busy street.

"But it hasn't been a complete success. We haven't got to that point where the government says 'yes, please talk to us'," Onley said as drivers stuck in the heart of London's bustling financial district furiously honked their horns.

An aide to UK Environment Secretary Michael Gove said no meeting had been scheduled with campaigners but that one might possibly happen next week.

The protest outside the London Stock Exchange building that stands in the shadow of St. Paul's Cathedral saw several glue themselves to the pavement in front of one of the glass entrance turnstiles.

One person wearing a gas mask also chained himself to one of the sleek building's stone columns.

"This institution literally trades in the devastation of our planet," the group said in a statement.

Extinction Rebellion estimated that top banks have poured \$1.9 trillion (1.7 billion euros) into "fossil fuel financing" since the Paris Agreement on dealing with greenhouse gases was signed in 2016.

UK rejects Iran offer

London, United Kingdom

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt yesterday dismissed the suggestion of a prisoner swap for a British-Iranian mother being held in Tehran as a "vile" diplomatic ploy, while her husband said the idea was "almost impossible".

In New York, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Wednesday suggested a swap between Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who is in jail in Tehran for alleged sedition, and Negar Ghodskani, an Iranian woman held in Australia on a US extradition warrant.

Hunt said there was a "huge difference" between the two women.

"The woman in jail in Australia is facing due process, a proper legal procedure, and she is alleged to have committed a very serious crime," he told reporters in London.

"Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is innocent -- she has done nothing wrong."

He added: "What is unacceptable about what Iran is doing is

that they are putting innocent people in prison and using it as leverage.

"I'm afraid that is what is happening with this Australian case. They're saying, we'll only release this innocent Brit if you'll do something that suits us diplomatically."

Richard Ratcliffe, Zaghari-Ratcliffe's husband who has been campaigning for her release, said he was "blindsided" by the offer as he followed Zarif's speech on Twitter and does not think it is the "way forward".

"It's clearly a hopeful thing that he was talking about her release explicitly," he said.

"At the same time, linking her in a public way to a big complicated deal that is almost impossible to do because it's been made public could easily be a displacement tactic."

Zaghari-Ratcliffe worked for the Thomson Reuters Foundation and was arrested in 2016 while visiting relatives for the Persian New Year.

Iranian authorities accused her of plotting against the gov-



Britain's Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt

ernment and handed her a five-year jail sentence for sedition.

Britain has taken the unusual step of granting her diplomatic protection in a bid to free her.

Ghodskani, a legal resident of Australia, was arrested in 2017 after US prosecutors said she sought US digital communications technology by presenting herself as an employee of a Malaysian company.

US prosecutors said she in fact was sending the technology to Iranian company Fanamaj, which works in public broadcasting.

Both women have been separated from their young children



Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, holding her daughter Gabriella (Courtesy of Free Nazanin campaign)

while being detained.

Ratcliffe has also been separated from his daughter Gabriella, who was with her mother when she was detained in Iran and has since remained in the country with her grandparents.

Ratcliffe said his wife was "lifted" by the British government's decision to grant her diplomatic protection in March. But he added: "generally, her spirits are gradually sinking now."

GLOBAL FOREST WATCH

Tropical forest the size of England destroyed in 2018: report

Paris, France

Last year humanity destroyed an expanse of tropical forest nearly the size of England, the third largest decline since global satellite data became available in 2001, researchers reported yesterday.

The pace of the loss is staggering -- the equivalent of 30 football fields disappearing every minute of every day, or 12 million hectares a year.

Almost a third of that area,

some 36,000 square kilometres (14,000 square miles), was pristine primary rainforest, according to the annual assessment from scientists at Global Forest Watch, based at the University of Maryland.

The main drivers are the livestock industry and large-scale commodity agriculture -- palm oil in Asia and Africa, soy beans and biofuel crops in South America.

A quarter of tropical tree cover loss in 2018 occurred in Bra-



Representative picture

zil, with the Democratic Republic of Congo and Indonesia each accounting for about 10 per cent.

Malaysia and Madagascar also saw high levels of deforestation last year.

Nearly a third of primary forest destruction took place in Brazil (13,500 km²), with the Democratic Republic of Congo (4,800 km²), Indonesia (3,400 km²), Colombia (1,800 km²) and Bolivia (1,500 km²) rounding out the top five. Madagascar lost 2pc in 2018.



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