

News in brief

China accuses US of distorting facts after aircraft clash

◆ A US military plane involved in a confrontation



with Chinese aircraft in disputed southern waters last week had violated international law and put the safety of Chinese pilots at risk, a defence ministry spokesman said. The US military said on Thursday that a Chinese Navy J-11 fighter jet had come within 10 feet (3 metres) of a US air force RC-135 aircraft on Dec 21, forcing

it to take evasive manoeuvres to avoid a collision. But Tian Junli, spokesman for China's Southern Theatre Command, said in a statement late on Saturday that the United States had misled the public about the incident near the disputed Parcel Islands in the South China Sea. He said the US plane violated international law, disregarded repeated warnings by China and made dangerous approaches that threatened the safety of China's aircraft..

◆ Colombia's government has agreed to a six-month ceasefire

Colombia strikes ceasefire deal with main armed groups

with the five largest armed groups operating in the country, President Gustavo Petro announced on New Year's Eve. The truce was the main objective of Petro's "total peace" policy, which aims to end the country's armed conflict, which has persisted despite the dissolution of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2017. The armed groups still operating in Colombia, the world's largest cocaine producer, are locked in deadly disputes over drug trafficking revenues and other illegal businesses, according to the Institute for Development and Peace Studies (Indepaz), an independent think tank.



Worker killed on ramp at Alabama airport in airplane incident

◆ A worker was fatally injured on the ramp at Montgomery



Regional Airport in Alabama where an American Airlines regional carrier flight was parked, the Federal Aviation Administration said Saturday. The FAA and the National Transportation Safety Board will investigate the incident that occurred where American Airlines Flight 3408, an Embraer E175, was parked at the

gate after arriving from Dallas. The FAA said the airport was closed after the incident. Two people briefed on the matter said the initial investigation indicates the employee was killed in an accident involving one of the airplane's engines that was running. The flight was operated by Envoy Air, a wholly owned subsidiary of American Airlines Group.

Panther rescued in Ukraine, finds refuge in France



A young female black panther named Kiara is seen in a shelter for wild animals at the zoo in Saint-Martin-la-Plaine near Lyon, France

Reuters | Paris

Kiara, a six-month-old black panther born in war-torn Ukraine and victim of exotic animal trafficking, has found a new home at a wildlife refuge in France.

The panther with striking green eyes and shining black fur "escaped a tragic path in life," veterinarian Jean-Christophe Gerard told AFP.

She was just a few weeks old when the "private individual" who illegally owned her fled under bombing and abandoned the panther cub, Gerard said.

Soon after, the Wild Animal Rescue Center in Kyiv took custody of Kiara and contacted the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) which helped her get out of Ukraine and into a zoo in western Poland.

Kiara stayed at the zoo for a few weeks, receiving care and recovering from her long journey.

The panther later arrived at Tonga Terre d'Accueil, a shelter for rescued or abandoned wild animals within the Saint-Martin-la-Plaine zoo in France.

Kim calls for 'explosion' of North Korea's nuclear arsenal

Kim's comments came as North Korea fired a short-range ballistic missile

Kim Jong Un orders new ICBM, bigger nuclear arsenal

Reuters | Washington

AFP | Seoul

North Korea's Kim Jong Un has called for a major increase in the country's nuclear arsenal, including mass producing tactical nuclear weapons and developing new missiles for nuclear counterstrikes, state media said yesterday.

In a report at the end of a key party meeting in Pyongyang, Kim called "for an exponential increase of the country's nuclear arsenal", the official KCNA reported.

Citing what it called US and South Korean hostility, the report said the North needed "mass-producing of tactical nuclear weapons" and to "develop another ICBM (intercontinental



a ceremony of donating 600mm super-large multiple launch rocket system at a garden of the Workers' Party of Korea headquarters in Pyongyang

ballistic missile) system whose main mission is quick nuclear counterstrike".

Military tensions on the Korean peninsula rose sharply in 2022 as the North conducted sanctions-busting weapons tests nearly every month, including firing its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile ever.

It capped its record-breaking year of launches by firing three short range ballistic missiles early

Saturday, and conducting a rare late-night launch at 2 (1750 GMT Saturday) yest Seoul's military said.

The official KCNA reported that the launches had "a test-fire of the super-large tiple rocket launchers".

In a separate KCNA report said the weapons put South Korea "as a whole within the of strike and (were) capable carrying (a) tactical nuclear

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

First legal recreational marijuana shop opens in New York City



A person looking at the cannabis products on display at Housing Works Cannabis Co., New York's first legal cannabis dispensary

AFP | New York

New York's first legal recreational marijuana dispensary opened in the heart of Manhattan.

More than 100 people crowded into the dispensary in New York City's East Village, run by the nonprofit Housing Works, a group dedicated to fighting homelessness and AIDS.

"The first legal adult-use cannabis sales mark a historic milestone in New York's cannabis industry," said Governor Kathy Hochul, who oversees the fourth most populous US state.

Hochul said in a statement that she expects New York to serve "as a national model

The first legal adult-use cannabis sales mark a historic milestone in New York's cannabis industry

NEW YORK GOVERNOR KATHY HOCHUL

for the safe, equitable and inclusive industry we are now building."

Housing Works was among the first of 36 groups or individuals granted a retail marijuana license on November 21.

The stated goal of New York is to grant the first 150 licenses to traders convicted in the past for possession or sale of cannabis.

Stampede during New Year's event in Uganda kills at least nine

Reuters | Kampala

A stampede during New Year's celebrations at a popular mall in Uganda's capital, Kampala, left at least nine people dead, including children, police said yesterday.

The stampede happened at the Freedom City Mall in Namasuba suburb as revelers rushed to watch fireworks.



Fireworks light up the sky in Kampala

The Kampala Metropolitan deputy police spokesperson, Luke Owoyesigye, said the incident appeared to have occurred at midnight "when an event emcee encouraged attendees to go outside and watch a fireworks display."

The Katwe Territorial Police are "investigating an incident of rash (behaviour and neglect" according to an official statement.

South Korea's unannounced rocket launch causes UFO scare

Reuters | Seoul

South Korea's military confirmed it test-fired a solid-fueled rocket Friday after its unannounced launch triggered brief public scare of a suspected UFO appearance or a North Korean missile launch.

The Defence Ministry said in a statement that the rocket launch was part of its efforts to build a space-based surveillance capability and bolster its defence posture.

It said it didn't notify the general public of the launch in advance because it involved sensitive mil-



The light trail is seen in Goyang, after South Korea's military test-fired a rocket

itary security issues.

A twisty tendril of vapor in white-to-red ombre could be seen snaking behind a bright white light in parts of South Korea's sky Friday evening. South Korean social media and internet sites were abuzz with messages by citizens who said they saw a soaring object, rainbow-coloured vapour trail or other mysterious lights. Some also posted photos and videos.

"What is this? Is this a UFO? I'm scared," said one Twitter user. Another said they suspected it was a North Korean missile launch and worried about a war. Others suspected it was a drone light show or a supernatural phenomenon.

South Korean emergency offices and police received hundreds of citizens' reports of witnessing of a suspicious flying object and mysterious lights across the country, according to local media.

Russia's New Year assault on Ukraine

AFP | Kyiv

Russia's New Year assault on Ukraine left three people dead and wounded another as Moscow yesterday claim have thwarted Kyiv's "terrorist attacks" on the homeland.

The Ukrainian capital and cities came under fire from Russian missiles and Iranian-made drones.

The Ukrainian air force yesterday 45 Iranian-made drones had been destroyed overnight. Thirteen were shot down at the end of 2022 and another 32 at midnight, the air force said.

Andriy Nebitov, the head of Kyiv police, posted on Facebook a picture of wreckage of a drone that featured the words "Happy New Year" in Russian. "That is everything you need to know about the terror state of our army," he wrote.

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of President Volodymyr Zelensky's office, said two people died in Kyiv and the southern region of Kherson and 500 people, including children, were injured.

Brazil acting president

Reuters | Brasilia

Brazil's acting president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, on Monday criticized outgoing far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro for his "anti-democratic sentiment" that thrives in the wake of his election, in a veiled dig in his New Year speech.

While defending some aspects of Bolsonaro's four years in office, such as leaving behind a

YOU KNOW WHAT

South Korean officials said they plan to use a solid-fueled rocket to put the nation's first spy satellite into orbit