

News in brief

◆ European Commission

head Ursula von der Leyen will visit Kyiv today for talks with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, an EU spokesman said. "The visit will focus on all the dimensions of our relations with Ukraine," spokesman Eric Mamer told reporters on Monday, reaffirming "the EU's unwavering support towards the country". The trip will mark the fifth time von der Leyen has visited the Ukrainian capital since Russia's all out invasion of the country in February last year. Such visits, to a city that comes under frequent Russian missile strikes, are conducted amid tight security and Mamer would reveal no precise details of the programme. "You will, of course have noticed as well this visit will take place on Europe Day," Mamer said, referring the annual celebration of European unity timed to mark the end of World War II on the continent. "In this context, we warmly welcome the announcement by President Zelensky that May 9 will from now on also be celebrated as Europe Day in Ukraine."



EU chief Ursula to visit Kyiv today

◆ Two people died after a MiG-21 military aircraft

Two dead after MiG jet crashes in India: police



crashed onto a house in India on Monday, police said. "Pilot has been rescued safely. The MiG crashed on a house. Two people have died. Three people have been injured," police officer Sudhir Chaudhary told AFP after the crash in the western state of Rajasthan. The Indian Air Force (IAF) confirmed the accident and that the pilot ejected. "A MiG-21 aircraft of the IAF crashed near Suratgarh during a routine training sortie today morning," the IAF tweeted. "The pilot ejected safely, sustaining minor injuries. An inquiry has been constituted to ascertain the cause of the accident." Russian-made MiG-21 jets first entered Indian service in the 1960s and for decades served as the backbone of the country's air force.

◆ At least seven people were killed Sunday

in south Texas and several others injured when a car plowed through a group waiting at a bus stop outside a migrant aid center, police said. Law enforcement said they were treating the incident as an accident for now, though a witness told AFP the driver had yelled insults at the group before accelerating. The gray sport utility vehicle "went through a red light and ran over several people" at around 8:30 am (1330 GMT) in Brownsville, a border city at the southernmost tip of the state, local police spokesman Martin Sandoval said. He said seven people died and "nearly 10" other people were injured.

At least 7 killed in car ramming outside Texas migrant center



CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Mysterious Chinese spacecraft returns after spending 276 days in space



Representative picture Agencies

An experimental Chinese spacecraft landed on Earth yesterday after spending 276 days in space completing a landmark mission to test the country's reusable space technologies.

Chinese state media reported that the mission marked a key milestone in the country's push into reusable spacecraft technology research, and "provides technological support for the peaceful use of space," CGTN reported.

The uncrewed spacecraft returned to the Jiuquan launch center in northwest China on Monday as scheduled, according to state media. Commentators on Chinese social media have speculated that Beijing has been developing a spacecraft like the U.S. Air Force's X-37B, an autonomous spaceplane that can remain in orbit for years. No details were

given on what the spacecraft was, what technologies were tested, how high it flew, and where its orbits had taken it since its launch in early August 2022. Images of the craft have also yet to be released to the public. The test marks an "important" breakthrough in China's research into reusable spacecraft technology that will provide a more convenient and inexpensive way to mount future space missions, state media reported.

In 2021, what may have been a similar spacecraft flew to the edge of space and returned to Earth on the same day in a mission that was also kept largely under wraps. It landed on Earth "horizontally," according to China's main space contractor at the time.

The uncrewed and reusable X-37B returned to Earth in November last year in its sixth and latest mission, after more than 900 days in orbit.

Second blast near Sikh shrine in India

AFP | Amritsar

A second blast in 36 hours rocked the area around the Sikh holy site of the Golden Temple in India's Amritsar city yesterday, police said.

Authorities said that one person was injured.

The previous blast late Saturday night, which police said they were still investigating, also left at least one person wounded in the city, in the Sikh-majority northern state of Punjab.

Punjab's director general of police said a terrorism angle had not been ruled out, and preliminary investigations suggested a crude device had been used.

"Blast occurred when a thread was pulled accidentally by a passerby," said Gaurav Yadav. "The container fell down and it went off."

The Golden Temple -- a gleaming edifice in a large artificial pond -- is revered by Sikhs the world over.



Punjab Police Director General (DG) Gaurav Yadav (C) inspects the site of another blast at Heritage Street in Amritsar

But it has been the scene of violence in the past, most notably when Indian special forces stormed it in 1984 to remove Sikh militants.

Devotees told AFP that officials arrived soon after the early morning blast on Monday -- when hundreds of people would have been at the shrine -- to collect forensic samples. "Such happenings are creating panic," said worshipper Jasbir Singh Patti, who visits the temple daily. "It is time for the police administration to act swiftly to present the truth before the public."

Several windows cracked in the blast in the same area on Saturday -- a day when around 200,000 people typically visit the site.

Biden aide discusses Yemen peace push with Saudi crown prince

AFP | Taipei

US national security advisor Jake Sullivan discussed efforts to end Yemen's eight-year war during a meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the White House said in a statement.

Sullivan and Prince Mohammed, "reviewed significant progress in talks to further consolidate the now 15-month long truce in Yemen and welcomed ongoing UN-led efforts to bring the war to a close", the White House statement said.

Taiwan in talks for \$500 mn weapons package from US: defence minister

Taipei, Taiwan

Taiwan is expecting a fast-tracked \$500 million weapons package from Washington this year to make up for delays in arms procurements, the island's defence minister said yesterday. The United States in September approved the Taiwan Policy Act -- which would see new legislation provide billions in military aid to Taipei.

"The use of the \$500 million package is aimed at prioritising supplying us with spot goods (available for immediate delivery) over any delay or late delivery in our arms procurement," Chiu told lawmakers when questioned in parliament about the "military aid" package. He said the United States has for decades sold weapons to Taiwan.

No breakthrough yet Saudi-hosted Sudan

● Army and RSF representatives are participating

● UN's top humanitarian official arrived in Jeddah on Sunday

AFP | Riyadh

Ceasefire talks in Saudi Arabia between Sudan's warring generals have yielded "no major progress" so far, a Saudi official said yesterday, dampening hopes for a quick end to the fighting.

Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy turned rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who heads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), sent representatives to the Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah on Saturday for meetings that Washington and Riyadh have described as "pre-negotiation talks".

Goals include reaching "an effective short-term halt" to the



Saudi Royal Navy officer checks the luggage of evacuees in Port Sudan

fighting, facilitating aid delivery, restoring basic services and setting "a timetable for expanded negotiations to reach a permanent cessation of hostilities", the Saudi foreign ministry said in a statement Monday.

The two sides have "begun to discuss the security measures they should take in order to facilitate the delivery of urgent humanitarian aid and the restoration of

essential services", the statement said.

But a Saudi diplomat said yesterday that "no major progress is achieved so far".

"A permanent ceasefire isn't on the table. Every side believes it is capable of winning the battle," the diplomat added.

The UN's top humanitarian official, Martin Griffiths, arrived in Jeddah on Sunday intending

NASA launches two small satellites to track 1

AFP | Washington

NASA launched two small satellites designed to track tropical cyclones hour by hour from a base in New Zealand yesterday, in a project that could improve weather predictions on devastating storms.

The new storm trackers, sent into orbit on a rocket built by US company Rocket Lab, can fly over hurricanes (or typhoons in the Pacific) every hour, compared to every six hours with current satellites.

Researchers will be able to see storms evolve on an hourly basis, said NASA scientist Will McCarty at a press conference for the first launch of the TROPICS mission.

"We still need the large satellites," he added. "What we get from this is the ability to add more information to the flagship satellites that we already have."

A second Rocket Lab-built vessel is due to launch in about two weeks carrying two more satellites to complete a small constellation of four storm-tracking satellites.

The information gathered on rainfall, temperature and humidity could help scientists determine where a hurricane will make landfall and how intense it will be, helping people living in coastal areas be better prepared for possible evacuations.

"Many operational organizations like the National Hurricane Center and the Joint Typhoon Warning Center and many others are ready to receive tropical imagery to help inform their forecasters," said Ben Kim, a program executive at NASA.