

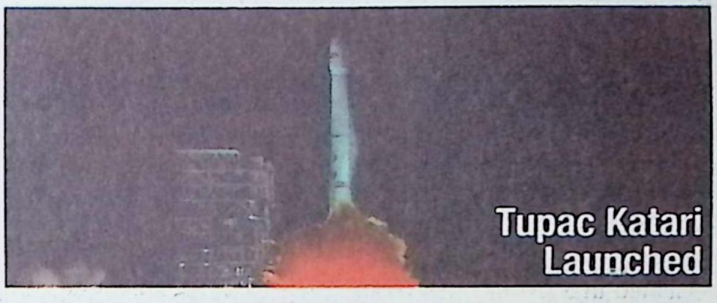
Putin Got Scared?

Moscow, Russia. Pussy Riot punk band member Maria Alyokhina walked free from jail on Monday, immediately dismissing the Kremlin's amnesty that granted her early release as a stunt that would not change her attitude to President Vladimir Putin. Alyokhina, 25, one of two women serving two-year sentences for a profanity-laced protest against Putin in a Russian Orthodox church in 2012, was released under the amnesty the president has said would show the Russian state is humane. The two women were convicted of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred for their "punk prayer" criticising Putin's ties to the Church, and had been due for release in March.

Decriminalising Sex Work



Toronto, Canada. The Canadian Supreme Court in Ottawa on December 20, 2013 struck down a key portion of a law that effectively criminalised prostitution by banning brothels and soliciting on the streets, declaring this disproportionate. However, it stayed its unanimous 9-0 ruling for a year to allow the parliament to consider whether or not to impose other limits on where and how prostitution may be conducted. This case was "not about whether prostitution should be legal or not," Chief Justice Beverly McLachlin said in the landmark decision. "They are about whether the laws Parliament has enacted on how prostitution may be carried out pass constitutional muster. I conclude that they do not."



La Paz, Bolivia. Bolivia launched a telecommunications satellite in China on December 20, an unprecedented event which the government in La Paz had encouraged citizens to follow via live broadcasts. President Evo Morales was in China for the Friday launch of the satellite of the Tupac Katari satellite, named after an indigenous leader who fought against Spanish colonial rule. The satellite, which is expected to be operational in March 2014, has cost $300 million and has been 85 percent financed by a loan from the Chinese Development Bank. According to the space agency, it will deliver telecoms services to 30 percent of the 10 million Bolivians who live in rural areas, though the satellite's cost has been criticized in light of the country's high poverty rate.

Murder and an Apology



Sanaa, Yemen. Al-Qaeda's regional commander for the Arabian Peninsula, Qasim al-Rimi, has offered a rare public apology for an assault on a hospital that killed 52 people. "We rid ourselves of what our brother did," Qassim al-Rimi said in a videotaped message posted to militant websites on Saturday, December 21. He said that the target of the attack was a Defense Ministry compound in Sanaa, Yemen, and that a stray gunman had stormed into an adjacent hospital against his orders. "We accept full responsibility for what happened in the hospital and will pay blood money for the victims' families," al-Rimi said. Public outrage peaked when horrific surveillance videos of the attack aired on state television. However, al-Rimi said despite the group making a mistake, "we are continuing with our jihad."