

INDIA MOON MISSION

It's a model for aspiring space powers: Modi

AFP, New Delhi

India's budget Moon landing is a model for other countries aspiring to develop their own space programmes, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday while praising the scientists behind the successful mission.

Chandrayaan-3 -- "Mooncraft" in Sanskrit -- touched down on the lunar surface on Wednesday, making India the first nation to land an unmanned craft near the largely unexplored lunar south pole.

It also became only the fourth country behind the United States, Russia and China to achieve a soft landing on the Moon.

The success marked the latest milestone in India's ambitious but cut-price space programme, sparking celebrations across the world's most populous country.

"The region that our mission will explore will help open new avenues for moon missions of other countries," Modi told mission staff at the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) premises in Bengaluru.

"This will not only unravel the mysteries of the Moon but also help in resolving the challenges of the Earth."



This week's mission comes four years after the previous Indian lunar mission failed during its final descent, in what was seen at the time as a huge setback for the country's space programme.

Modi praised the scientists for learning from that failure and being unrelenting in their pursuit of the Moon mission.

"I salute your hard work, patience, perseverance and passion," he said.

India has a comparatively low-budget space programme, but one that has grown considerably in size and momentum since it first sent a probe to orbit the Moon in 2008.

Chandrayaan-3 has a cost of \$74.6 million -- far lower than many missions from other countries and a testament to India's frugal space engineering.

Experts say India can keep costs low by copying and adapting existing technology, and thanks to an abundance of highly skilled engineers who earn a fraction of their foreign counterparts' wages.

ISRO is slated to launch a three-day crewed mission into Earth's orbit by next year. It also plans a joint mission with Japan to send another probe to the Moon by 2025 and an orbital mission to Venus within the next two years.



Women take part in a candlelight protest at a street in Imphal yesterday, to condemn the sexual violence against women and for peace in the ongoing ethnic violence in India's north-eastern state of Manipur. At least 120 people have been killed since May in armed clashes in Manipur, a remote state in northeast India with a history of ethnic conflict.

PHOTO: AFP

FUKUSHIMA CRISIS
Japan says no radioactivity found in fish

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japan's fisheries agency yesterday said fish tested in waters around the wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant did not contain detectable levels of the radioactive isotope tritium, Kyodo news service reported.

Nets were set up on Thursday when plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) 9501.T began releasing treated radioactive water into the Pacific, angering fishermen and many others in Japan, alarming consumers in neighbouring countries and prompting China to ban Japanese aquatic products.

The agency plans to announce test results daily. Tepco said on Friday seawater near the plant contained less than 10 becquerels of tritium per litre, below its self-imposed limit of 700 becquerels and far below the World Health Organization's limit of 10,000 becquerels for drinking water.

After lengthy debate, the government decided on Tuesday to allow the release of 1.3 million tonnes of treated water from the Fukushima plant, destroyed by a 2011 tsunami, because Tepco was running out of storage space.

The utility filters most radioactive elements out of the water, but it dilutes tritium, an isotope of hydrogen, which is difficult to separate from water.

Yesterday, protesters gathered in the capital of South Korea to demand that the government take steps to avoid what they fear is a looming disaster from Japan's release of treated radioactive water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant.

Russia 'foils' more drone attacks
Says three drones downed; second ship since grain deal expiry leaves Ukraine's Odesa

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday said that it shot down two drones over its Belgorod region and one headed for Moscow, as it reported Ukrainian shelling wounded six people in a border town.

Russia and the Moscow-annexed Crimean peninsula have been hit by a wave of attacks in the past month, after Kyiv warned in July it aimed to "return" the conflict to Russian territory.

The Russian defence ministry said one drone was destroyed close to the border in Belgorod region at 09:00 (0600 GMT), while another was intercepted over the region at 14:15 (1115 GMT).

A separate drone headed for Moscow in the early hours of the morning was also thwarted, the defence ministry said.

Moscow, which was rarely attacked during the early stages of the conflict, is now being targeted by almost daily drone strikes.

"Tonight, air defence forces destroyed a drone on approach to Moscow in the Istrinskii district," the capital's mayor Sergei Sobyanin wrote on Telegram.

"Preliminarily, there were no casualties or damage. Emergency services are working on the site," he added.

The drone attacks came as the governor of Russia's Belgorod region said Kyiv shelled the town of Urazovo, about 10 kilometres (six miles) from the Ukrainian border, injuring six people.

Russian regions bordering Ukraine have regularly accused Kyiv's armed forces of indiscriminate shelling and occasional cross-border incursions by Ukrainian-backed



militants.

Meanwhile, two people were killed and one wounded yesterday after Russian forces shelled a village near the town of Kupiansk in Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region, hitting a cafe, officials said.

In another development, the second ship to leave Ukraine's port city of Odesa since Moscow's withdrawal from the Black Sea grain deal set sail for Bulgaria yesterday, Ukrainian lawmaker Oleksiy Honcharenko said on the Telegram app.

Honcharenko posted a photograph of what he said was the ship leaving the port.

The Liberia-flagged bulk carrier Primus is moving from Odesa to the port of Varna in Bulgaria, news agency Interfax Ukraine reported citing the MarineTraffic database.

Odesa's three seaports shipped tens of millions of tons of grain during Russia's invasion under a UN-brokered deal which collapsed in July after Moscow withdrew. Russian forces have since targeted Ukrainian ports with volleys of missiles and kamikaze drones.

Meanwhile, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov yesterday said Russia's military cooperation with Iran will not succumb to geopolitical pressure, following a report that Washington has asked Teheran to stop selling drones to Moscow.

"There are no changes, and cooperation with Iran will continue," Ryabkov said, according to a report on Saturday from Russian state news agency RIA. "We are independent states and do not succumb to the dictates of the United States and its satellites."

9 killed in Indian train coach fire

AFP, New Delhi

At least nine people were killed yesterday after a train coach parked in southern India caught fire when a passenger tried to make tea, officials said.

The coach, which had been detached from a train, was stationed at the Madurai railway yard in the southern state of Tamil Nadu when the fire broke out before dawn.

"It was a single, stationary coach booked by a private tourist operator. Somebody tried to make tea and it caused the fire," Madurai district spokesman Sali Thalapatthi told AFP.

"Nine people have died, three of them are women. Nine others are injured but their injuries are not life-threatening."

None of the bodies had been identified so far, he added.

Footage showed huge flames leaping out of the windows of the train carriage. Some passengers managed to escape the inferno in time.

Local media reports said the passengers had illegally smuggled aboard a gas cylinder which exploded when they tried to use it.

India has one of the world's largest rail networks and has seen several disasters over the years.

Bhutan cuts daily tourist fee by half

REUTERS, Kathmandu

The Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan is to halve the \$200 daily fee it charges tourists in an effort to boost a sector still struggling to recover a year after the end of Covid-19 restrictions. Bhutan raised its "Sustainable Development Fee" to \$200 per visitor per night, from \$65, when it ended two years of Covid restrictions in September last year saying the money would go to off-set the carbon generated by visitors. The new rate of \$100 per night would come into effect from September and last for four years, the government said in a statement late on Friday.

Disinformation 'first sin' of journalism: Pope

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Francis yesterday denounced "disinformation" and fake news spread in an effort to influence public opinion as journalism's principal offence.

"Disinformation is the first of the sins, the mistakes -- let's say -- of journalism," Francis told Italian journalists at a Vatican gathering to bestow a journalism prize.

Widely considered a savvy communicator himself, the pontiff returned to the term "sins" to list what he called the four misdeeds of the media, according to the Vatican's translated statement of his comments.

"Disinformation, when journalism does not inform or informs badly; slander (sometimes this is used); defamation, which is different from slander but destroys; and the fourth is... the love of scandal."

"I am concerned, for example, about the manipulations of those who interestingly propagate fake news to steer public opinion," he said, urging a "reawakening of responsibility" in particular as Europe grapples with the ongoing war in Ukraine.



A group of migrants try to climb over a barbed wire fence after crossing the Rio Grande into US from Mexico, in Eagle Pass, Texas on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Hunt for Loch Ness monster begins

AFP, Drumnadrochit

The biggest search for the Loch Ness Monster in five decades got underway in the Scottish Highlands yesterday, as researchers and enthusiasts from around the world braved pelting rain to try to track down the elusive Nessie.

The expedition deployed drones with thermal scanners, boats with infrared cameras and an underwater hydrophone to try to unravel a mystery that has captivated the world for generations.

"There's not a corner of the globe you can go to where people haven't heard of Nessie, but it is still one of our biggest questions -- what is the Loch Ness Monster," said Paul Nixon, general manager of the Loch Ness Centre told AFP.

The searchers believe the thermal scanners could prove crucial in identifying any strange anomalies in the murky depths.

The hydrophone will allow the searchers to listen for unusual Nessie-like underwater calls.

Stretching 23 miles (36 kilometres) and with a maximum depth of 788 feet (240 metres), the freshwater loch is the UK's largest lake by volume.

Reports of an aquatic monster lurking in Loch Ness date back to ancient times, with stone carvings in the area depicting a mysterious beast with flippers.

The earliest written record of the creature



dates back to AD 565 in a biography of the Irish monk, Saint Columba. According to the text, the monster attacked a swimmer and was about to strike again when Columba commanded it to retreat.

There are now more than 1,100 officially recorded Nessie sightings, according to The Loch Ness Centre in Drumnadrochit, near Inverness.

The monster brings in millions of pounds (dollars) in tourism revenue to the Scottish economy each year.

Over the years, scientists and amateur enthusiasts have tried to find evidence of a large fish such as a sturgeon living in the depths of the loch.

Some have suggested the monster could be a prehistoric marine reptile like a plesiosaur.

In 1972, the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau undertook the biggest search to date but returned empty-handed.

In 1987, Operation Deepscan deployed sonar equipment across the width of the loch and claimed to have found an "unidentified object of unusual size and strength".

In 2018, researchers conducted a DNA survey of Loch Ness to determine what organisms live in the waters.

No signs of a plesiosaur or other such large animal were found, though the results indicated the presence of numerous eels.