

South Korea
confirms first
spy satellite in
orbit

AFP, Seoul

South Korea confirmed yesterday its first military spy satellite had reached orbit after a successful SpaceX rocket launch and that communication was established with ground control.

Seoul's reconnaissance satellite, carried by one of Elon Musk's SpaceX Falcon 9 rockets, intensifies a space race on the Korean peninsula after the North launched its own first military eye in the sky last week.

South Korea's defence ministry said yesterday its satellite reached orbit soon after the "KOREA"-emblazoned SpaceX rocket lifted off from the Vandenberg US Space Force Base in California at 10:19 am local time (1819 GMT) Friday.

"The satellite was launched 0319 Seoul time," the ministry said in a statement.

Respiratory disease due to known pathogens

Claims Chinese official

REUTERS, Shenzhen

China's surge in respiratory illness is caused by known pathogens and there is no sign of new infectious diseases, a health official said on Saturday as the country faces its first full winter since lifting strict Covid-19 restrictions.

The spike in illness in the country where Covid emerged in late 2019 attracted the spotlight when the World Health Organization sought information last week, citing a report on clusters of undiagnosed pneumonia in children.

Chinese authorities will open more paediatric outpatient clinics, seek to ensure more elderly people and children receive flu vaccines and encourage people to wear masks and wash their hands, Mi Feng, an official with China's National Health Commission, told a press conference.

Doctors in China and experts abroad have not expressed alarm about China's outbreaks, given that many other countries saw similar increases in respiratory diseases after easing pandemic measures, which China did at the end of last year.



Residents of the Qatari-funded Hamad Town residential complex in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, carry some of their belongings as they flee their homes after an Israeli strike yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Nowhere to go

Say Palestinians in south Gaza under Israeli bombardment

REUTERS, Khan Younis

Under aerial bombardment from Israel, people sheltering in the south of the Gaza Strip after fleeing their homes earlier in the war said yesterday they had nowhere safe to go now.

The city of Khan Younis is the focus of Israeli air strikes and artillery fire after fighting resumed on Friday following the collapse of a week-long truce. Its population has swelled in recent weeks as several hundred thousand people from the northern Gaza Strip have fled south.

Some are camping in tents, others in schools. Some are sleeping in stairwells or outside the few hospitals operating in the city.

A World Health Organisation official said on Friday that one of the hospitals was "like a horror movie" as hundreds of wounded children and adults waited for treatment.

Abu Wael Nasrallah, 80, scoffed at the Israeli army's latest order to move further south to Rafah, bordering Egypt. Children were injured in Israeli strikes in the town on Friday.

The message was delivered via leaflets dropped from the sky over several districts in Khan Younis.

"This is nonsense," Nasrallah told Reuters. He had heeded Israeli evacuation orders and moved from the northern Gaza Strip earlier in the war that broke out on October 7 when Hamas crossed into Israel and killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, according to Israeli authorities.

He and his family would stay put because they had already lost everything.

"There is nothing left to fear. Our homes are gone, our property is gone, our money is gone, our sons have been killed, some are handicapped. What is left to cry for?"

A mother of four, who gave her name as Samira, said she had fled south from Gaza City with her children after Israel began



bombing there last month. They now shelter with friends in a home west of Khan Younis.

She said Friday night had been one of the most terrifying since she arrived: "A night of horror."

She and other residents said they feared the intensity of the bombing in Khan Younis and the nearby city of Deir al-Balah meant Israel's ground invasion of the south was imminent.

Another man, who gave his name as Yamen, said he and his wife and six children had fled the north weeks ago and were sleeping in a school.

"Where to after Deir al-Balah, after Khan Younis?" he said. "I don't know where to take my family."

The UN estimates that up to 1.8 million

people in the Gaza Strip - or nearly 80 percent of the population - have been forced to flee during Israel's devastating bombing campaign.

Israel says it is making efforts to prevent civilian casualties as the fighting moves south.

Addressing reporters in Tel Aviv yesterday, a senior adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said humanitarian groups were informed of what he described as the "safer areas".

"We've not asked the whole population of the south to relocate, we've not even asked the whole population of Khan Younis to relocate. But those neighbourhoods, those specific areas where we know there is going to be heavy combat, we've asked people there to relocate," Mark Regev said.

Imran Khan replaced as PTI head

AFP, Islamabad

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan, currently in jail facing myriad charges he says are rigged to keep him from contesting elections next year, was replaced yesterday as head of the party he founded, officials said. Khan launched the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party in 1996. He was replaced as party chairman by Ghohar Khan, a barrister not related to Imran, a party official said. The change was forced after the Election Commission of Pakistan warned PTI last month they risked losing their emblem - a cricket bat - unless an internal ballot was held for party officers. Election symbols are crucial in a country where the adult literacy rate is just 58 percent, according to World Bank data. Khan, a former international cricketer, who captained Pakistan to World Cup victory in 1992, was barred from standing in the party poll while in prison. "This is a temporary arrangement," said Syed Zulfiqar Bukhari, PTI's media spokesman. PTI is struggling against a widespread crackdown, with leading party figures either jailed or forced to leave the party. Politicians in the South Asian country are often tangled in legal proceedings that rights monitors say are orchestrated by the powerful military, which has ruled the country directly for more than half of its history and continues to enjoy immense power. "A PTI supporter will vote for the election symbol, for Imran Khan," political analyst Hasan Askari Rizvi told AFP yesterday. "He (Khan) remains the moral leader of the PTI."

Rescue Rohingya refugees adrift at sea

UN calls on nearby countries

AFP, Bangkok

The United Nations called yesterday for nations to rescue hundreds of Rohingya it said were trapped onboard two unseaworthy vessels adrift in the Andaman Sea. Thousands of the mostly Muslim Rohingya, heavily persecuted in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, risk their lives each year in long, expensive sea journeys - often in boats in poor condition - trying to reach Malaysia or Indonesia. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) yesterday called on nearby countries "to swiftly deploy their full search and rescue capacities in response to reported vessels in distress with hundreds of Rohingya at risk of perishing". The two overcrowded boats carrying about 400 passengers had experienced engine failures, and people were now "drifting in unseaworthy vessels in the Andaman Sea", the agency said, citing "various sources". Food and water may be running out, it said, adding "there is a significant risk of fatalities in the coming days if people are not rescued and disembarked to safety". The vessels' precise location is unknown and it is unclear when, or exactly from where, they departed. Meanwhile, over 100 Rohingya refugees, including women and children, landed in Indonesia's westernmost province yesterday, officials said, but locals threatened to push them back to sea. The UNHCR's call comes during a spike in journeys to Indonesia's westernmost province of Aceh -- a voyage of about 1,800 kilometres (1,120 miles) -- with more than 1,000 arrivals in the biggest such wave since the 2017 crackdown.



Russian shelling kills 1 in Ukraine

AFP, Kyiv

Russian shelling killed one civilian and destroyed two houses in the eastern Ukrainian town of Chasiv Yar yesterday, the interior ministry said.

Chasiv Yar is less than five kilometres (three miles) west of the frontline city of Bakhmut, which Russia claimed to have captured in May after a devastating, months-long assault.

"A civilian was killed and two houses were destroyed in Chasiv Yar during the enemy shelling," Ukraine's interior ministry said on social media.

The Ukrainian army said fighting also continued around the industrial town of Avdiivka further south, where Kyiv's army has been clinging on despite a renewed Russian offensive.

Although the frontlines have barely shifted in over a year, fighting has remained intense, with both sides hurrying to gain ground as temperatures plunge below freezing.

Ukrainian intelligence said that a "resistance movement" in the occupied city of Melitopol damaged an enemy fuel tanker and "killed several Russian occupiers" on Friday.



A man clears the snow covered sidewalk after heavy snowfall hit Bavaria and its capital Munich, Germany yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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