

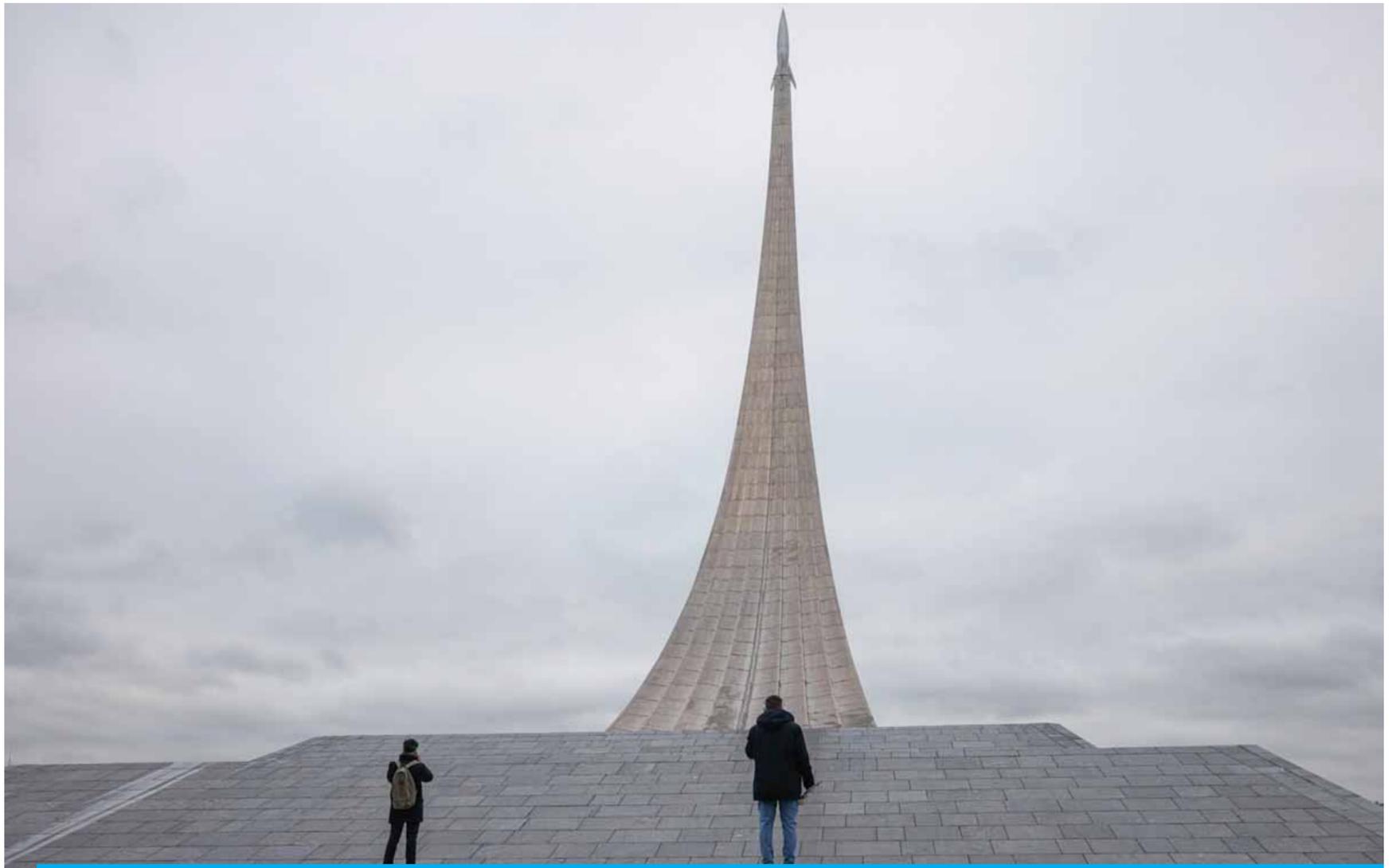


Wikipedia's editor 'warriors' fight lies, bigotry and Nazis

Justice delayed as Taleban build their legal system

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MOSCOW: People stand at the Monument to the Conquerors of Space, bearing the model of a rocket, on top of the National Cosmonautics museum in Moscow. Russia has admitted to destroying one of its satellites during a missile test, but rejected US accusations that it had endangered the International Space Station. —AFP

Mounting arms race in space

Satellite attack: Laser-shooting has moved from science fiction to reality

WASHINGTON: Last year a US general made an ominous revelation: two Russian satellites in orbit were stalking a US spy satellite high above the earth. It wasn't clear if the Cosmos satellites could attack USA-245, an American surveillance spacecraft. "It has the potential to create a dangerous situation in space," said General Jay Raymond, head of the Pentagon's Space Command.

The incident passed, but it marked a new stage in the mounting arms race in space, where potentially bomb-armed satellites, laser-shooting spacecraft and other technologies have moved from science fiction to reality. The stakes were made clear Monday when Russia launched a missile from Earth and blasted to pieces one of its satellites in a show of force. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg called the act "reckless." "It demonstrates that Russia is now developing new weapons systems that can shoot down satellites," he said at a meeting Tuesday with EU defense ministers.

Kamikaze satellites

The militarization of space is as old as the space race itself—as soon as Sputnik was launched into orbit in 1957, Washington and Moscow began exploring ways to both arm and destroy satellites. In the beginning, the biggest worry was nuclear weapons in

space. In 1967 the superpowers and other countries signed the Outer Space Treaty, banning weapons of mass destruction in orbit. Since then, Russia, the United States, China and even India have explored ways to fight in space outside of the treaty. That competition today focuses on destroying a rival's satellites, which are increasingly essential to every advanced military for communications, surveillance and navigation.

In 1970, Moscow successfully tested a satellite loaded with explosives that could destroy another satellite in orbit. The US answered back in 1983, when then-president Ronald Reagan announced his ambitious Strategic Defense Initiative—the "Star Wars" program promising precision-guided anti-missile missiles and satellites emitting laser beams or microwaves—to make the US militarily superior. Much of the technology envisioned was unfeasible. But in a landmark move, the Pentagon used a missile to destroy a failed satellite in a 1985 test.

Since then, rivals have sought to show they had the same targeting skills: China in 2007 and India in 2019. After trying for some time, Russia's successful shoot-down on Monday was unsurprising for many experts. "The Russians did not need to detonate the satellite to demonstrate that they had the ability to do so," said Isabelle Sourbes-Vergier, a space expert at France's National Centre for Scientific Research. It was a demonstration "that if necessary in asymmetric

responses, Russia will not permit the United States to be the only one in control of space," she said.

Space stalkers

Countries are intensely secretive about their military space activities, and because many of the technologies involved are dual-use—useful for both civilian and defense purposes—their capabilities are not fully clear. But the race is such that by 2019, the year the Pentagon established its Space Force, it believed that Russia and China had the potential to surpass the US. "Maintaining American dominance in that domain is now the mis-

sion of the United States Space Force," said then-Secretary of Defense Mark Esper. The race has evolved from the idea of killing satellites with missiles, or kamikaze satellites, to finding ways to damage them with laser or high-powered microwave weapons.

Both Russia and China have developed "space stalker" satellites that can be manipulated to physically interfere with others, according to Brian Chow, an independent space policy analyst who spent 25 years at the Rand Corp think tank. With robotic arms, "they can just stalk the opponent satellite and move it somewhere else, or bend an antenna" to render it useless, said Chow. Those satellites remain few, but Russia's deployment of two to menace the US satellite in 2020 shows the technology has arrived.

China and the United States both have ultra-secret programs of small, reusable, robotic, winged spacecraft which could potentially be used with weapons and damage a rival's satellites. Countries are also developing surface-based weapons to jam and spoof satellite signals, and to use directed energy to damage them. The US Defense Intelligence Agency said in 2019 that China had five bases with ground-based lasers that could be used to disable enemy satellites. "Every satellite that passes over China would be subject to attack," said Chow. —AFP

Creating a dangerous situation in space



No joke: Indian comedian under nationalist fire

NEW DELHI: An Indian comedian and actor has been forced to defend himself against online accusations of "insulting the country" after he performed a "two Indias" monologue in Washington. Vir Das, one of India's top satirical performers, is known for his willingness to critically observe his country. Critics say there has been rising intolerance against minority communities in India since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014, and that freedom of speech is under threat in the world's biggest democracy.

"I come from an India where we worship women during the day and gang rape them at night," Das told a packed Washington, DC venue during his current world tour. In an almost seven-minute long video posted Monday, he covered issues ranging from air pollution, journalism and Modi's coronavirus relief efforts to cricket. "I come from an India where we bleed blue every time we play green," he said, referring to the sporting uniforms of his country and arch-rival Pakistan. "But every time we lose to green, we turn orange all of a sudden."

Orange refers to muscular Hindu nationalism, often symbolized by the color saffron. "I come from an India that will watch this and know there is a gigantic joke. It



TAMPA: Bollywood actor Vir Das arrives for a rehearsal on stage at the Mid Florida Credit Union Amphitheater in this file photo. — AFP

just isn't funny," he said. Soon after Das released the video social media users accused him of insulting India on the global stage, and at least two police complaints were filed against him. Leading Indian actress Kangana Ranaut slammed Das, calling the video "soft terrorism" and writing on Instagram: "Strict action should be taken against such criminals." Das took to Twitter insisting the video was a "satire about the duality of two separate Indias that do different things." "Like any nation has light and dark, good and evil within it." The backlash against Das is not the first time an Indian comic has come under fire from right-wing Hindu groups and activists. —AFP

Zionist firm linked to Mideast cyberattacks

PARIS: Technology sold by Zionist spyware company Candiru appears to have been used for a campaign of cyberattacks targeting high-profile Middle Eastern websites, an analysis by cybersecurity firm Eset said. "We think it was a client of Candiru that carried out these attacks," Eset investigator Matthieu Faou told AFP. Eset did not name the client, but pointed to an investigation by researchers at the University of Toronto that suggested in June that Saudi Arabia may have used similar techniques. Based in Tel Aviv, Candiru sells sophisticated spyware to governments. It was blacklisted by the US government earlier this month.

The offensive revealed by Eset used what are known as "watering hole" attacks, which add malicious code to legitimate websites that the targeted user is likely to visit. Once the person visits the site, the code can then be used to infect their computer—potentially to spy on them or inflict harm in other ways. The websites targeted in this campaign included UK-based news site Middle East Eye as well as Yemeni media outlets like Almasirah linked to the Houthi rebels battling the Saudis, Eset said. Another victim was thesaudioireality.com, which Eset said was

likely a dissident media outlet in Saudi Arabia.

Internet service providers in Yemen and Syria were also targeted along with the Iranian foreign ministry, Syria's electricity ministry, and Yemen's interior and finance ministries. Other targets included sites run by the pro-Iranian militant group Hezbollah, Italian company Piaggio Aerospace and Denel, a state-owned South African aerospace and military technology conglomerate. "The attackers also created a website mimicking a medical trade fair in Germany," Eset noted in a press release, adding that the intrusions were recorded between July 2020 and August this year.

Candiru has earned comparisons with NSO, another Zionist company that was engulfed in scandal this year over accusations that governments used its Pegasus technology to spy on rights activists, politicians, journalists and business executives. The US government blacklisted NSO earlier this month, restricting exports from American firms. Faou said the Candiru campaign did not appear to be aimed at mass data collection, specifically targeting a "very, very small" number of people.

Meanwhile, the UN nuclear watchdog yesterday "categorically" denied its cameras played a part in a June attack on an Iranian nuclear facility, after Tehran said it was investigating the possibility. In a report seen by AFP, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said its "Director General categorically rejects the idea that Agency cameras played a role in assisting any third party to launch an attack on the TESA Karaj complex." —AFP