

News in brief

‘Populists can be beaten’: Dutch centrist Jetten claims election win



◆ Dutch centrist leader Rob Jetten yesterday claimed victory in a knife-edge election over far-right head Geert Wilders, saying his surprise success showed populist movements could be beaten in Europe. The 38-year-old head of the D66 centrist party is now on track to become the youngest and first openly gay prime minister of the European Union's fifth-largest economy. With far-right parties on the march in France, Germany, and Britain, the Dutch vote was seen as a bellwether for the strength of populists in Europe..

UN decries ‘horrendous’ atrocities in Sudan’s El Fasher



◆ The United Nations voiced alarm yesterday at emerging details of executions, gang rapes and abductions as Sudan’s western city of El-Fasher fell to the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. At war with the regular army since April 2023, the RSF seized El-Fasher on Sunday, dislodging the army’s last stronghold in Darfur after an 18-month siege marked by bombardment and starvation. El-Fasher has been cut off from all communications since its fall, but the UN rights office said it had heard of atrocities from “terrified” people who reached the nearby town of Tawila.

Japan PM says raised ‘serious concerns’ with Xi on South China Sea, Xinjiang



◆ Japan’s new Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said yesterday she raised “serious concerns” about the South China Sea, Hong Kong and Xinjiang in a “candid” first meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Xi in turn told Japan’s first woman prime minister, long seen as a China hawk, at the talks in South Korea that he hopes her government will have a “correct understanding” of his country, according to state media. Takaichi has been a regular visitor to the Yasukuni shrine that honours Japan’s war dead and is an outspoken backer of Taiwan, advocating security ties with the self-ruled island that China claims as its territory..

SPOTLIGHT

China sends youngest astronaut, mice to space station



A Long March-2F carrier rocket, carrying the Shenzhou-21 spacecraft and a crew of three astronauts, lifts off from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre

AFP | Beijing

A new crew took off for China’s space station on Friday, including the country’s youngest ever astronaut and four lab mice.

The Long March-2F rocket carrying the Shenzhou-21 mission crew lifted off at 11:44 pm (1544 GMT) from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwest China, AFP journalists saw.

The Tiangong space station -- crewed by teams of three astronauts that are exchanged every six months -- is the crown jewel of China’s space programme, into which billions of dollars have been poured in a bid to catch up with the United States and Russia.

China has bold plans to send a crewed mission to the Moon by the end of the decade and eventually to build a base on the lunar surface.

Mission commander and veteran space pilot Zhang Lu is accompanied by 32-year-

old flight engineer Wu Fei, China’s youngest astronaut to undertake a space mission, and payload specialist Zhang Hongzhang, 39.

The three astronauts waved goodbye to colleagues and family members at the remote launch base in the Gobi Desert as a band played a patriotic song.

Zhang Lu told reporters on Thursday he was confident his team would “report back to our motherland and its people with complete success”.

Space first-timer Wu told a news conference on Thursday that he felt “incomparably lucky”.

Four mice -- two male and two female -- join them as the subjects of China’s first in-orbit experiments on rodents.

Shenzhou-21 is expected to dock with Tiangong around three-and-a-half hours after takeoff.

Beijing’s space programme is the third to put humans in orbit, after the United States and the former Soviet Union.

King Charles ousts brother

Prince Andrew stripped of his royal titles and evicted from Windsor

- Faces fallout from Epstein-linked scandal
- Palace cites sympathy for abuse survivors
- Public anger mounts across UK

AFP | Washington

King Charles III is stripping his younger brother Andrew of his royal titles and ousting him from his long-term residence on the Windsor estate, the palace said on Thursday, the latest fallout to hit the scandal-plagued royal over the Jeffrey Epstein affair.

“Prince Andrew will now be known as Andrew Mountbatten Windsor,” Buckingham Palace said, adding Charles had begun the formal process to remove all his brother’s titles.

Andrew has also been told to move out of his long-time home on Windsor Castle’s sprawling grounds, and he will move “to alternative private accommodation” as soon as possible.

The announcement followed a torrent of outrage at renewed accusations of sexual assault made by one of Jeffrey Epstein’s main accusers against the 65-year-old, who has denied the charges.

“These censures are deemed necessary, notwithstanding the fact that he continues to deny the allegations against him,” the palace said.

“Their Majesties wish to make clear that their thoughts and utmost sympathies have been, and



Britain’s Prince Andrew, Duke of York (L) and Britain’s Prince Charles, Prince of Wales attend the Most Noble Order of the Garter Ceremony at Windsor Castle in southern England, on June 15, 2015

will remain with, the victims and survivors of any and all forms of abuse,” it added.

It comes days after the post-humous publication of Virginia Giuffre’s memoir, in which the victim of US sex offender Epstein reiterated in shocking detail allegations that she was trafficked to have sex with Andrew three times, including twice when she was only 17.

It is understood that Andrew did not object to the king’s decision, and that the UK government has been consulted.

Giuffre took her own life in April, aged 41, while Epstein died by suicide in 2019 in prison awaiting trial on sex-trafficking

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Andrew will now be known simply as Andrew Mountbatten Windsor and is expected to move to the king’s private Sandringham estate, funded by Charles

charges.

Giuffre’s family, which had pushed for Andrew’s title of prince to be removed, hailed the move Thursday, saying in a statement to the BBC that “today, she declares a victory”.

“Today, an ordinary American girl from an ordinary American family brought down a British prince with her truth and extraordinary courage,” they said.

“Virginia Roberts Giuffre, our sister, a child when she was sexually assaulted by Andrew, never stopped fighting for accountability for what had happened to her and countless other survivors like her.”

Nearly 50 dead after Hurricane Melissa thrashes Caribbean

AFP | Santiago de Cuba

Hurricane Melissa was “moving quickly away” from Bermuda early yesterday after the death toll rose to nearly 50 people, officials said.

The ferocious storm has devastated Caribbean islands and is expected to become an “extratropical cyclone” later in the day, reaching the northeastern United States and eastern Canada, the National Hurricane Center (NHC) said in its latest advisory.

“After Melissa becomes post-tropical, a brief period of heavy rain and gusty winds is possible over the southern Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland tonight,” the NHC added.

Flooding was expected to subside in the Bahamas although high water could persist in Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti and neighboring Dominican Republic, the agency said.

The storm, one of the most powerful ever recorded, was made four times more likely because of human-caused climate change, according to a study by Imperial College London.

Melissa smashed into both Jamaica and Cuba with enormous force, and residents were assessing their losses and the long road to recovery.

In Jamaica, “the confirmed



An aerial view of destroyed buildings following the passage of Hurricane Melissa, in Black River, St. Elizabeth, Jamaica

death toll from Hurricane Melissa is now at 19,” including nine in Westmoreland and eight in St. Elizabeth, both parishes in the Caribbean island’s hard-hit west, Information Minister Dana Morris Dixon told local news outlets including the Jamaica Gleaner.

Communications and transportation access remains largely down in Jamaica and Cuba, and comprehensive assessment of the damage could take days.

In impoverished Haiti, the country’s civil defense agency said Thursday that the death toll

had risen to 30, with 20 people injured and another 20 missing.

It said more than 1,000 homes have been flooded, with some 16,000 people in shelters.

In the east of the communist island of Cuba, battling its worst economic crisis in decades, people struggled through inundated streets lined with flooded and collapsed homes.

The storm smashed windows, downed power cables and mobile communications, and tore off roofs and tree branches.

Melissa “killed us, because it

left us destroyed,” Felicia Correa, who lives in the La Trampa community near El Cobre, told AFP.

“We were already going through tremendous hardship. Now, of course, we are much worse off.”

Cuban authorities said about 735,000 people had been evacuated -- mainly in the provinces of Santiago de Cuba, Holguin and Guantanamo.

‘Disaster area’

The United States meanwhile has mobilized disaster assistance response teams and urban search and rescue personnel, and the teams were currently on the ground in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and the Bahamas, according to a State Department official.

Teams were en route to Haiti too.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio also included ideological foe Havana, saying the United States is “prepared to offer immediate humanitarian aid to the people of Cuba affected by the Hurricane.”

The UK government announced £2.5 million (about \$3.3 million) in emergency funding for the region, and also said it was chartering “limited” flights to help British nationals leave.