

News in brief

◆ **China yesterday** denied US allegations it had conducted secret nuclear explosive tests, calling them “outright lies” and accusing Washington of making excuses to start up its own trials. At the UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on Friday, Thomas DiNanno, US under secretary of state for arms control, accused China of conducting the tests, including one on 22 June 2020, and of preparing for more tests with massive yields. “The US allegations are completely groundless and are outright lies. China firmly opposes the US attempt to fabricate excuses for its own restarting of nuclear tests,” China’s ministry of foreign affairs said in a statement to AFP on Monday. It also urged the United States to “immediately stop its irresponsible actions”. US President Donald Trump said in October that Washington would start testing nuclear weapons “on an equal basis” with Moscow and Beijing, but without elaborating or explaining what kind of nuclear testing he wanted to resume.



China rejects US claims of secret nuclear tests

Sydney police pepper spray protesters during rallies against Israeli president’s visit

in the wake of the December shooting at Sydney’s Bondi Beach that killed 15 people at a Hanukkah festival. But he was met with protests in Australia’s two largest cities on Monday evening, with a Sydney rally turning violent as police hit protesters and members of the media, including AFP, with pepper spray. An AFP journalist said they saw at least 15 protesters being arrested as members of the rally scuffled with the police. Palestine Action Group spokesman Josh Lees said on Instagram the police had “repeatedly charged us with horses and pepper spray”. New South Wales police declined to comment when contacted by AFP.

◆ **A Lebanese Islamist group** accused Israel yesterday of abducting one of its members during a cross-border raid in the country’s south, as Israel dubbed the suspect a “senior terrorist”. Israel frequently carries out military operations in southern Lebanon despite a November 2024 ceasefire aimed at ending more than a year of hostilities with militant group Hezbollah. It launches air strikes and occupies five points on Lebanese territory that it deems strategic. On Monday, the Jamaa Islamiya group, an ally of Palestinian Hamas, accused Israel of seizing one of its officials, Atwi Atwi, from his home in the Hasbaya district and taking him to an unknown location. Jamaa Islamiya, which has claimed responsibility for multiple attacks against Israel during the war with Hezbollah, condemned “the Israeli occupation forces’ infiltration”.

Israel seizes member of Lebanese Islamist group in raid



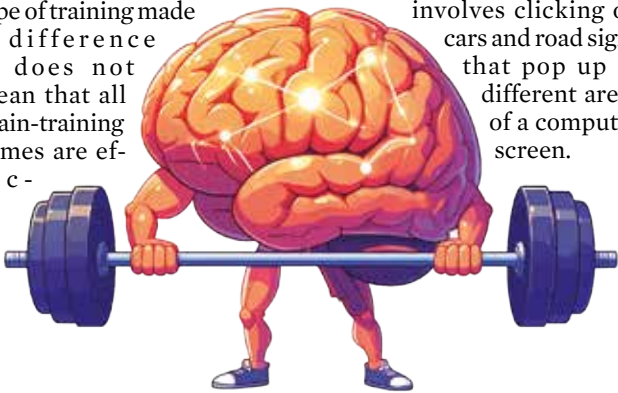
SPOTLIGHT

Brain training reduces dementia risk by 25%, study finds

AFP | Paris, France

Researchers announced on Monday that a randomised controlled trial -- considered the gold standard for medical research -- has finally identified something capable of significantly lowering people’s risk of developing dementia. And rather than an expensive drug, it was a cheap and simple brain-training exercise that was found to decrease dementia rates by a quarter, according to the study. “For the first time, this is a gold-standard study that’s given us an idea of what we can do to reduce risk for developing dementia,” study co-author Marilyn Albert of Johns Hopkins University in the United States told AFP. Although there are a vast amount of brain-training games and apps which claim to fight off cognitive decline, there has been little high-quality, long-term research proving their effectiveness. The US team of researchers warned that their study -- which only found one specific type of training made a difference -- does not mean that all brain-training games are effective.

their trial, called ACTIVE, began in the late 1990s. More than 2,800 participants aged 65 or older were randomly assigned one of three different types of brain training -- speed, memory, or reasoning -- or were part of a control group. First, the participants did an hour-long training session twice a week for five weeks. One and three years later, they did four booster sessions. In total, there were fewer than 24 hours of training. During follow ups after five, 10 and most recently 20 years, the speed training was always “disproportionately beneficial”, Albert said. After two decades, Medicare records showed that the people who did the speed-training and booster sessions had a 25-percent reduced risk of getting dementia. The researchers were surprised to find that the other two types of training did not make a statistically significant difference. The speed training exercise involves clicking on cars and road signs that pop up in different areas of a computer screen.



Eight countries condemn Israel’s ‘illegal’ West Bank control measures

New measures allow Jewish Israelis to buy West Bank land

● **Envisages transferring authority in parts of Palestinian cities over building permits to Israel**

● **More than 500,000 Israelis live in settlements and outposts in the West Bank**

AFP | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia and seven other Muslim-majority countries yesterday condemned new Israeli measures to tighten control of the West Bank and pave the way for more settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Israel approved the measures, announced by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Defence Minister Israel Katz, on Sunday. They include allowing Jewish Israelis to buy West Bank land, a joint statement from the ministers said.

The foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the UAE, Qatar, Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt and Turkey “condemned in the strongest terms the illegal Israeli



This picture taken from the “E1 corridor” northeast of Jerusalem in the occupied West Bank shows vehicles moving along a highway near the Israeli settlement of Maale Adumim (top)

decisions and measures aimed at imposing unlawful Israeli sovereignty”, a Saudi statement said.

They are an attempt at “entrenching settlement activity, and enforcing a new legal and administrative reality in the occupied West Bank, thereby accelerating attempts at its illegal annexation and the displacement of the Palestinian people”, the foreign ministry statement added.

The Israeli measures also envisage transferring authority

over building permits for settlements in parts of Palestinian cities, including Hebron, from the Palestinian Authority’s municipalities to Israel.

Smotrich said the move was aimed at “deepening our roots in all regions of the Land of Israel and burying the idea of a Palestinian state”.

The Palestinian presidency in Ramallah, which exercises limited control over some discontinuous areas of the West Bank, also condemned the decision, saying

it was aimed at “deepening attempts to annex the occupied West Bank”.

The announcement comes days ahead of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s visit to the United States, where he is due to meet President Donald Trump, who has upheld US opposition to Israeli annexation of the West Bank.



More than 500,000 Israelis live in settlements and outposts in the West Bank, which are illegal under international law. Around three million Palestinians live in the territory. Another 200,000 Israelis live in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, which the UN says is part of the Palestinian territories.

Norway launches probe of diplomat and husband over Epstein links

AFP | Oslo, Norway

Norwegian police said yesterday they had launched a corruption investigation into a high-profile diplomat, Mona Juul, and her husband Terje Rod-Larsen as an accomplice, over the couple’s links to late US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The police economic crime



unit Okokrim said in statement the probe began last week and that an Oslo residence was searched on Monday, as well as a residence belonging to a witness.

“We have launched an investigation to determine whether any criminal offences have been committed. We are facing a comprehensive and by all accounts

lengthy investigation,” Okokrim chief Pal Lonseth, said. Juul was head of section at Norway’s foreign ministry before becoming Norway’s ambassador to the UK during the 2010s. Juul, 66, and Rod-Larsen, 78, played key roles in the secret Israeli-Palestinian negotiations which led to the Oslo Accords of the early 1990s.

Prince William, Kate ‘deeply concerned’ by latest Epstein revelations: spokesman

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Prince William and his wife Catherine have been “deeply concerned” by the latest revelations linking William’s uncle Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor to late US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, Kensington Palace said yesterday.

“I can confirm that the Prince and Princess of Wales have been deeply concerned by the continued revelations,” the palace said in a statement.

It added that “their thoughts remain focused on the victims” of Epstein, who died in prison awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges in 2019.

The statement was the first public comment from the heir to the throne and his wife on the scandal since the latest release of Epstein files more than a week ago and as the monarchy faces scrutiny over the scandal.

It follows a renewed furore



Britain’s Catherine (L), Princess of Wales and Britain’s Prince William, Prince of Wales travel in the Ascot Landau carriage

over Andrew’s close links to Epstein, with King Charles III’s brother under pressure to further explain them.

Andrew stepped back from royal duties in 2019 over the ties and following claims by Epstein accuser Virginia Giuffre that

she was trafficked to have sex with the disgraced royal three times, including twice when she was 17.

King Charles III stripped his brother of his royal titles and honours late last year after Giuffre recounted the claims in

shocking detail in a posthumous memoir.

Last week it emerged a second alleged Epstein victim has claimed through her lawyer that the late US financier had sent her to Britain in 2010 to have sex with Andrew.

The ex-prince, who has strenuously denied any wrongdoing, was ousted from his Windsor mansion home, just west of London, earlier than planned last week in the wake of the latest revelations.

The files released in the US included newly-damaging evidence, including a lawyer’s letter alleging that Andrew and Epstein pressured a woman hired as an exotic dancer for sex as part of a threesome in 2006.

They also contained embarrassing photos of Andrew kneeling over a clothed woman lying on the ground, and emails inviting Epstein to Buckingham Palace to talk in “private”.