

## Too many show for Sri Lanka twins record bid



A Sri Lankan attempt to set a world record for the largest gathering of twins may have failed Monday after an unexpectedly large turnout overwhelmed organisers who vowed to try again.

## No joke: Denmark to cut kids off from laughing gas

Copenhagen

Denmark plans to ban sales of laughing gas to minors to prevent them from using the substance -- which is used for making whipped cream or filling balloons -- to get high, officials said Tuesday.

"We're going to end too-easy access to laughing gas and prevent the abuse of gas cartridges by young people," Industry Minister Simon Kollerup said in a statement.

With nearly universal support among lawmakers, the parliament is expected to pass the legislation that would see sales restricted from May, with adults also to be limited to purchasing two cartridges at a time to discourage abuse.

Nitrous oxide, or laughing gas, was once widely used as an anaesthetic to reduce pain, but its euphoric effects have also long made it popular as a recreational drug.

Health officials worry that regular use of nitrous oxide



Canisters of nitrous oxide, commonly known as laughing gas

can cause nervous system and heart rhythm problems and a loss of memory.

A survey found nearly one in six Danish boys aged 15-25 had tried laughing gas, and nearly one in 10 girls. Three deaths linked to inhalation of nitrous oxide have been recorded in the country since 2016.

Nitrous oxide is widely used as a propellant for aerosols, in particular for whipped cream and cooking oils.

Denmark would become the first European Union country to restrict sales of nitrous oxide to youths if the legislation is adopted as expected.

# 2.229 billion years

Scientists date world's oldest meteor crater

Tokyo

A crater in western Australia was formed by a meteor strike more than 2.2 billion years ago and is the world's oldest known impact site, new research published Wednesday shows.

The study marks the first time that the Yarrabubba crater has been precisely dated, at 2.229 billion years old, and means it is 200 million years older than any similar site known on Earth.

The revelation also raises the intriguing possibility that the massive impact could have significantly altered the Earth's climate, helping end a period of global "deep freeze".

Scientists had long suspected that Yarrabubba, in a remote part of the outback, dated back several billion years.

But dating ancient craters is not easy: the sites tend to be poorly preserved because erosion and tectonic events such as earthquakes have "progressively erased into the geologic past", the researchers wrote in their paper, published in the journal *Nature Communications* on Wednesday.

And even where craters are still present, determining their age is complex. To date Yarrabubba precisely, the team hunted for evidence of "shock recrystallisation" in minerals at the site -- essentially where the massive impact of the meteor had altered the structure of materials including zircon and monazite.

"SHRIMP dating" - But finding that record in the



Meteor craters, such as this one in Arizona are difficult to age precisely because the sites tend to be poorly preserved because erosion and tectonic events such as earthquakes erase the geologic past

minerals involved searching for microscopic grains, using a high-tech scanning process known as Sensitive High Resolution Ion Micro Probe or SHRIMP dating.

Once identified, uranium in the grains helped the scientists determine a precise date, which they found coincided with a period when the planet emerged from a global deep freeze known as "Snowball Earth".

"Glacial deposits are absent from the rock record for around 400 million years after the Yarrabubba impact," Chris Kirkland, a professor at Curtin University's School of Earth and Planetary Sciences who was involved in the study, told AFP.

"The impact fits within the context of Earth moving out of frigid conditions."

The researchers theorise that when the meteor hit Yarrabubba, the site was covered with ice, like much of the rest of the Earth at the time.

The massive strike, which created a crater around 70 kilometres (45 miles) in diameter, may have sent up to half a trillion tons of vaporised ice into the atmosphere, according to models run by the team.

"If the impact occurred into an ice sheet then it would release lots of water vapour, which is an even more efficient greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide," lead author Timmons Erickson, of NASA's Johnson Space Center and Curtin's School of Earth and Planetary Sciences, told AFP.

"That, in turn, may result in warming of the planet."

## WWII bomb made safe in Germany city of Cologne



Stefan Höreth of the bomb disposal unit next to the WWII bomb.

Frankfurt am Main

German experts defused a World War II bomb in Cologne yesterday that had forced the evacuation of thousands of office workers and disrupted rail and ship traffic.

The 500-kilogramme (1,100-pound) US bomb -- dropped during a heavy bombardment of the western German city -- "no longer poses a danger", the city said in a statement shortly before midday (1100 GMT).

Construction workers found the bomb on the right bank of the Rhine river on Monday evening, prompting the evacuation of nearby offices including those of broadcaster RTL and the Cologne Opera.

Very few people live in the area, which is primarily a business district.

"The roughly 10,000 employees of the affected companies and the 15 residents may return to their buildings," said the city's statement.

After the bomb was deactivated in an operation that took less than an hour, German rail operator Deutsche Bahn announced that the bridge had reopened, as had Cologne's smaller Messe/Deutz station.

# Dutch farm dad 'beat bad spirits out of kids'

● One child was tied up by his hands and feet as punishment, while another child was forced to spend an entire summer in a doghouse at the farm

The Hague

A Dutchman isolated six of his children in a remote farmhouse from birth and beat them to drive out "bad spirits," prosecutors told a court yesterday.

Gerrit Jan van D., 67, subjected the youngsters who were found on the farm in the village of Ruinerwold in October to "very serious physical punishment" when he thought they had been made "unclean".

One child was tied up by his hands and feet as punishment, while another child was forced to spend an entire summer in a doghouse at the farm in northern Drenthe province.

"The children all speak of very serious physical punishment if their father thought there was a 'bad spirit' in them. That happened from a very young age, four or five years," prosecutors said during a procedural hearing in the case.

Prosecutors said the youngest six of the man's nine children "lived in seclusion from birth,



An image taken from a drone on 30 October 2019 shows Dutch judges visiting the farmhouse in Ruinerwold where a family was allegedly held captive.

were kept indoors and had to be quiet so that no one would notice that they existed."

They were not registered with Dutch authorities and had never been to school, they said.

The family was first discovered in October when the oldest son still living on the farm walked into a local bar in a confused state and raised concern about the welfare of his other siblings.

Police raided the farm and arrested Van D. and an Austrian man identified as Joseph B., 58.

'Unclean'

Van D. was absent for medical reasons from Tuesday's hearing in the town of Assen.

He is charged with depriving the children of their liberty from 2007 to 2019 and "punching, kicking and denying food and drink" to the six children. He is also charged with sexually abusing two of the older three children.

Joseph B. is also charged with depriving the children of their liberty and was in court.

"I feel like this is a witch hunt," Joseph B. told the court. "I have a clear conscience... I have not robbed anyone of his freedom."

Prosecutors said the three oldest children were not allowed to talk about the existence of their brothers and sisters.

Citing diaries kept by the children, prosecutors said they had all spoken of their "conviction that contact with the outside world makes you 'unclean' and about 'bad spirits' that come into bodies. The father determined when a child had a 'bad spirit'.



Gerrit Jan van D

”  
The children all speak of very serious physical punishment if their father thought there was a 'bad spirit' in them. That happened from a very young age, four or five years

PROSECUTORS SAID DURING A PROCEDURAL HEARING IN THE CASE

"This child was isolated, had to pray and the other family members were not allowed to have contact with this child,

sometimes not even for months."

One of the children was separated from the rest of the family at the age of 12 and made to stay in a caravan on another part of the farm, prosecutors said, adding that "after that he spent a whole summer in a doghouse in a shed."

The three oldest of the nine children were allowed to go to school and the "exterior doors were not locked all those years", prosecutors said.

But they said that there was still "unlawful deprivation of liberty for all these years -- classically locked up at times, but in a less classic way at other times."

Prosecutors said the abuse was a "figurative lock on the door", adding that "no physical lock is required on the door as evidence of unlawful deprivation of liberty or hostage-taking."