

'Stalker' quizzes Sharapova at Aussie Open

MELBOURNE, Jan 22 (AFP) - Russian ace Maria Sharapova accused a New Zealand journalist of "stalking" her after he asked if she spent time with Anna Kournikova and frequented a club for "hot Russians".

"You're the guy from New Zealand, huh?" Sharapova said, when she recognised the male journalist from this month's Auckland Classic. "Oh God, you're stalking me!"

"It's not stalking if you love someone," the journalist said jokingly, to which Sharapova replied: "It can be slightly, trust me." The 23-year-old also fended off the reporter's next question, asking whether there was a "hot Russians club where you get together".

"No, I didn't know I was part of it. But no," she said.



German towns head to court over naming rights

BERLIN, Jan 22 (Reuters) - Two German towns that straddle the former Iron Curtain are locked in a dispute over their nearly identical names.

The western German town of Oberharz ("Upper Harz") has brought suit against the eastern city of Oberharz am Brocken ("Upper Harz on Brocken") to change its name, arguing it is neither at a higher elevation nor on the mountain Brocken.

So far, three attempts to mediate the dispute between the two municipalities that lie just 20 km apart have failed, judge Heinrich Risse told Reuters. He added the

case will now be heard in an administrative court in Magdeburg.

The dispute reflects lingering tensions between the formerly Communist east with western Germany that flare up from time to time — more than 20 years after the country reunited in 1990.

The eastern municipality Oberharz am Brocken in the state of Saxony-Anhalt was formed only last year when a group of villages incorporated into a city and picked the name, which was similar to the name of the village in the western state of Lower Saxony.



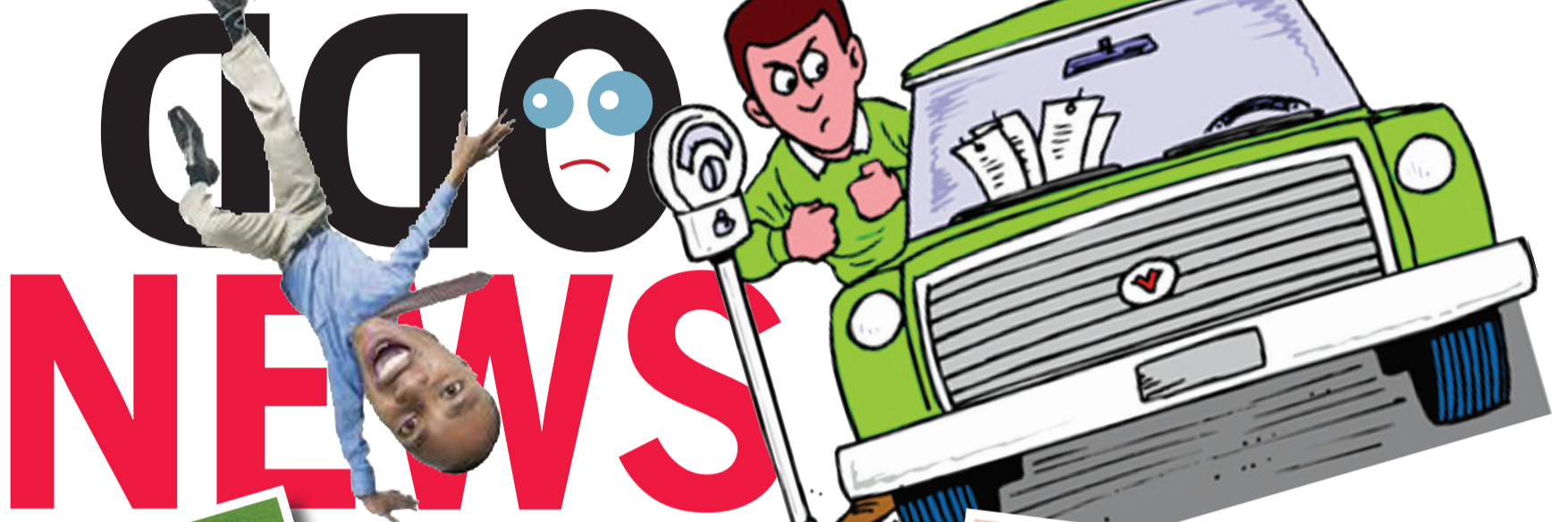
"We chose the name 'Oberharz am Brocken' to differentiate our town from Oberharz," said Hans Henning Friedrichs, a senior official in the eastern city told Reuters. "It will be a long and expensive court process for both municipali-

ties." Rival Oberharz first filed suit in autumn 2009 after the eastern city settled on the new name, saying that it had rights to the name and that the similar names would confuse tourists.

"The name Oberharz dates to 1642," Helmut Martin, an official in the western town, told Reuters. "We want the name to stay with us. We have the oldest claim to name — nothing like this has ever happened in Germany before." The court has yet to schedule hearings for the case and a decision could take as long as a year, Martin said.

Huge parking fines inspired parking watch app

SUNDAY OBSERVER



Monk caught with nun's skeleton at airport



ATHENS, Jan 22 (Reuters) - A Cypriot monk caught at a Greek airport with the skeletal remains of a nun in his baggage on the weekend told authorities he was taking the relics of a saint back to his monastery.

The 56-year-old Cypriot was detained at Athens airport on Sunday after security staff discovered a skull wrapped in cloth and skeletal remains in a sheet inside his baggage.

"They maintained it was a woman who was a saint," a Greek police official who declined to be named told Reuters on Tuesday, adding that the monk told authorities

he was transferring her remains to a monastery in Cyprus. The remains were those of a nun who died four years ago. She was not a saint in the Greek or Cypriot Orthodox Churches, but had once been a nun at a Cypriot convent, police said.

Revering the skeletal remains of saints is common in the Greek Orthodox tradition. A sect within the church may have venerated the nun even though she was not an official saint.

In many churches, venerated relics are put on display for the faithful to touch or kiss and a box for collecting donations from the faithful placed nearby.

"It appears to be the work of charlatans with a financial interest that is what I suspect," Cyprus's Archbishop Chrysostomos told journalists on Tuesday when asked about the monk's tale. The monk was freed after being charged with theft and desecrating the dead, a misdemeanor in Greece. He was also suspended from his monastic duties for three months for going away without leave, Cypriot police said.

SYDNEY Jan 22 (Reuters) - Massive parking fines inspired one Australian man to create an iPhone app that lets users warn each other when parking officers are spotted lurking near their cars.

"The idea was pretty much born out of frustration," said Joseph Darling of "ParkPatrol," the app developed by his Sydney-based firm to help users avoid tickets that cost what he said was at least \$82 Australian (\$81) a shot — and often more.

"I could show you a list of maybe 20 to 30 parking tickets that I had last year, in my town, just by being a normal driver. I must have spent thousands of dollars." The final straw came when he was ticketed in his own neighborhood despite a parking permit that he pays hundreds of dollars for each year.

The app lets users "sign in" and report sightings of parking officers with a single push of a button. Cartoon faces wearing a police cap then appear plotted on a map of the area, along with a notice thanking them. The app will also alert users if a parking officer is spotted in their area and how close. Notification options for 500 meters (1,640 ft), 200 meters and 100 meters are available. The free app is available in English, German, Spanish, Portuguese and French. Roughly 80 percent of users are in Australia, but it is also used in England, Spain, France and Germany, Darling said. "With an active community, it's pretty accurate. We reckon around 90 percent," he added.

Future versions, currently being finished, will include an alert function for when parking time has expired. The company is also finalizing an Android version.

Next on the drawing board? A similar app that allows women to report sightings of handsome men.

Burglars snort man's ashes, thought it was cocaine

MIAMI, Jan 22 (Reuters) - Burglars snorted the cremated remains of a man and two dogs in the mistaken belief that they had stolen illegal drugs, Florida sheriff's deputies said on Wednesday.

The ashes were taken from a woman's home in the central Florida town of Silver Springs Shores on December 15. The thieves took an urn containing the ashes of her father and another container with the ashes of her two Great Danes, along with electronic equipment and jewelry, the Marion County Sheriff's Office said.

Investigators learned what happened to the ashes after they arrested five teens in connection with another burglary attempt at a nearby home last week.

"The suspects mistook the ashes for either cocaine or heroin. It was soon discovered that the suspects snorted some of the ashes believing they were snorting cocaine," the sheriff's report said.

Once they realized their error, the suspects discussed returning the remaining ashes but threw them in a lake instead because they thought their fingerprints were on the containers, sheriff's spokesman Judge Cochran said.

Police divers were trying to recover the ashes. The suspects were jailed on numerous burglary and other charges.



'Obama' robs Austrian bank

VIENNA, Jan 22 (AFP) - A man who robs banks wearing a rubber mask of US President Barack Obama has struck again, Austrian police said Friday.

The disguised thief robbed a bank in the town of Handenberg in Upper Austria just before the bank closed at 6:00 pm (1700 GMT), police said in statement.

Police believe the same man, disguised by his Obama mask, has been carrying out such bank raids for the past two years. He threatened the bank's employee with a gun, shouting: "This is a hold-up. Give me the money." The robber — who apparently spoke with a local dialect — initially fled by foot with the money in a black shoulder bag.

Witnesses said they then sped off in a dark car with a Salzburg region number plate. No one was hurt during the hold-up, police said. The statement did not say how much money the robber made off with, but the daily Kronenzeitung, in its online edition, put the amount at 10,000 euros (13,500 dollars).

Fights, vodka at classic tennis press showdowns

MELBOURNE, Jan 22 (AFP) - Top seed Caroline Wozniacki's table-turning press conference stole the show at the Australian Open, but bizarre scenes are nothing new at post-match tennis interviews.

Emotions can run high after a difficult match, leading to some run-ins with media. By comparison, "boring" Wozniacki's performance — where she predicted a list of questions and rattled off the answers — was relatively tame.

Probably the most infamous tennis press conference, featuring none other than John McEnroe at Wimbledon in 1981, ended in a fist fight between journalists.

Rising tensions between English and American reporters, sparked by McEnroe's on-court histrionics, spilled over when a British journalist asked the American about his girlfriend.

The "Superbrat" unleashed a verbal volley and stormed out, and punches subsequently flew among the press corp. English reporter Nigel Clarke later

recalled tackling US journalist Charlie Steiner.

"I had the presence of mind to stand on a chair and punch downwards," Clarke said.

Sisters Serena and Venus Williams would rather talk about their fashion designs than their opponents, and Serena once raised eyebrows when she turned up with a T-shirt which read "Can you see my titles?" Other players, like Lleyton Hewitt and Andy Roddick, don't suffer media gladly, especially after a loss, and monosyllabic answers can be the order of the day, or night.

"(2002) Wimbledon final wasn't too close," Hewitt snapped this week when asked about his battles with David Nalbandian, after losing to the Argentine in five sets.

On the other hand, Roger Federer is a journalist's dream, giving press conferences in English, Swiss-German and French, often spending close to an hour fronting the media after a match.

Frenchwoman Camille Pin went out in style at the French Open last year,

announcing her retirement with a flourish as she turned up drunk to the press conference.

"I'm sorry. I've drunk two glasses of champagne on a bare stomach. I wanted to be totally drunk here. I thought it would be funny," Pin said. Russian Nikolay Davydenko also became the talk of the press room with his offbeat interviews at the Australian Open last year.

Revering in the media attention, Davydenko waxed lyrical about drinking vodka, having children, life after tennis, his relationship with his wife, and why money is so important to Russians.

Some conferences draw huge crowds, and at other times the biggest names will find themselves being quizzed by just one or two reporters.

On some occasions, the media tire of waiting for players to arrive.

American star Chris Evert was once an hour late turning up for a press conference and as soon as she walked in, the assorted media pack walked out in protest.

But when it comes to memorable

press conferences, surely no player can hold a candle to recently retired Marat Safin. The supremely talented but hard-living Russian turned up to his press conference after winning the 2000 US Open with a tray of vodka. In 2009, he fronted media with a huge black eye at the Hopman Cup. "I won the fight, I'm good, I'm okay," he grinned, adding that the "other guy" looked much worse.

At the 2004 French Open, Safin dropped his shorts on court to celebrate winning a spectacular point and was docked a point by the umpire. "I felt it was a great point for me," he told journalists after the match. "I felt like pulling my pants down. What's bad about it?" Unfortunately, most of the hundreds of press conferences at Grand Slam tournaments are not so entertaining.

