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CHANGSHA: This aerial photograph taken on April 29, 2022 shows rescuers working after a six-storey building collapsed in Changsha, in China's central Hunan province. —AFP

# Dozens trapped in China building collapse

## Situation of the missing persons is being further assessed

**BEIJING, China:** Dozens of people were trapped under a building which collapsed in central China, officials said Saturday, as rescuers clawed through the rubble and used buzzsaws to pull several survivors free. The building, which housed a hotel, apartments and cinema, caved in on Friday afternoon in Changsha city, Hunan province. At least 23 people remained trapped late Saturday, while 39 others were uncontactable after the incident, the mayor of Changsha told reporters.

"The situation of the missing persons is being further assessed," mayor Zheng Jianxin said, as rescue workers in orange hard hats swarmed the scene. No casualties have been reported so far and city authorities said five people were rescued from the collapsed structure overnight.

Officials also confirmed the building was eight storeys high, correcting earlier reports that it was six. State media showed firefighters cutting through

a morass of metal and concrete slabs, while rescuers shouted into the tower of debris to communicate with survivors.

Some of the injured were rushed on gurneys through a narrow alleyway, while sniffer dogs combed the area for further signs of life. There was no immediate cause for the disaster given by authorities, although speculation turned to possible overwork on the property. "Tenants had made structural changes to the premises to varying degrees," CCTV said, adding that the reason for the collapse was under investigation.

### Search 'at all cost'

President Xi Jinping has called for a search for victims "at all cost," state media reported, adding he had ordered a thorough investigation into the cause of the collapse. A top Communist Party official was earlier dispatched to the scene—an indication of the

severity of the disaster.

State Councillor Wang Yong-appointed by the central government—was sent to lead a team to "guide the rescue and emergency response work", an official statement said Saturday. Building collapses are not uncommon in China, due to weak safety standards and corruption among officials tasked with enforcement of construction quality standards.

In January, an explosion triggered by a suspected gas leak brought down a building in the city of Chongqing, killing more than a dozen people. Twenty-five people also lost their lives in June 2021 when a gas blast hit a residential compound in the city of Shiyang.

The same month, 18 people were killed and more injured when a fire broke out at a martial arts school, with state media reporting that all the victims were boarding school pupils. — AFP

## 'Beatle' Kotey sentenced to life in jail by US court

**WASHINGTON:** Alexandra Kotey, part of the Islamic State kidnap-and-murder cell known as the "Beatles," was sentenced to life in prison Friday, with relatives of victims addressing him and another member directly in the US court.

Kotey, a 38-year-old former British national, pleaded guilty in September, admitting his role in the deaths of four American hostages in Syria as well as the kidnapping and torture of other journalists and relief workers.

He was captured along with another former "Beatle," El Shafee Elsheikh, by a Kurdish militia in Syria in January 2018 and handed over to US forces in Iraq before being flown to the United States in 2020 to face trial. Elsheikh was found guilty of all charges earlier this month, and will be sentenced on August 19.

Both men on Friday appeared in the court in Alexandria, near Washington, where the relatives of their victims were given an opportunity to speak.

"You abducted, tortured, and even participated in the murder of good and innocent people and now you have to live with that for the rest of your lives," Bethany Haines, daughter of one of the victims, told the men.

"You both have lost," added the young British woman, whose father David Haines, a relief worker, was beheaded by the third "Beatle," Mohammed Emwazi, who was killed in a 2015 drone strike. The nickname was given to the hostage-takers—who grew up and were radicalized in London—by their captives because of their British accents.

Active in Syria from 2012 to 2015, the "Beatles" are accused of abducting at least 27 other journalists and relief workers from the United States, Britain, Europe, New Zealand, Russia and Japan. Some were executed, their deaths filmed for Islamic State (IS) propaganda videos that shocked the world, while others were released for ransoms.

Among the victims was American journalist Steven Sotloff, whose mother Shirley on Friday repeatedly urged the two men to "open your eyes please and look at me." "How do you begin to describe the unimaginable impact of the loss of a child, taken in the prime of his young adult life, and how it affects you as a parent, sibling, nephew, cousin, friend, lover?" she said.

"Steven's death was like a global worldwide horror movie that was witnessed live and continues to be replayed with the click of a button for millions to see." The mother of aid worker Kayla Mueller, who was initially held by the "Beatles" but was later turned over to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who reportedly raped her repeatedly, also spoke in court. —AFP



Alexandra Kotey

## Los Angeles marks 30 years since Rodney King riots

**LOS ANGELES:** Black and Asian community leaders gathered in Los Angeles on Friday to mark 30 years since the US city was engulfed in violence in the wake of the acquittal of four police officers for the brutal beating of Rodney King.

Dozens died and a billion dollars of damage were wrought as anger flared across the multi-ethnic city following the verdicts, which came despite graphic footage of the assault on the Black motorist. "My late father, Rodney King, became synonymous with police brutality to some people. But our family remembers him as a human being—not a symbol," Lora King, CEO of the Rodney King Foundation told a crowd.

"He never advocated for hatred or violence and pleaded for peace as the city burned by asking, 'Can we all get along?' That's my father's legacy." Many of the businesses that were ransacked in the violence belonged to Korean-Americans.

Sprawling Los Angeles has long prided itself on being one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse cities on Earth. But racial groups have often clustered in divided communities, from wealthy white Bel-Air to

Black Baldwin Hills and Latino East Los Angeles—all just a few miles apart.

On April 29, 1992, the closely watched trial of the four cops charged with King's beating ended with verdicts of "not guilty." Hours later, violence broke out in then-predominantly Black South Los Angeles, where many mom-and-pop stores were run by Korean immigrants.

Koreatown itself was soon ablaze, with gun-wielding residents standing on shop roofs to defend their property in images beamed around the world.

### 'Trauma' in communities

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said Friday the passage of three decades had not healed all wounds from the days-long rampage. "To the families that lost someone, to the children of business owners who still haven't slept a single good night since then, to the communities that have moved on without being moved up, the anger and the grief that exploded 30 years ago are still very real and present in trauma here today," he said.

The violence in 1992 was "both a trauma and a turning point for our city—a moment of pain and destruction from which we emerged stronger and more resilient." "On this 30th anniversary, let's remember the lessons from 1992 to forge a better and more prosperous Los Angeles for everyone who calls this city home," he added. The calls for unity came as an annual survey revealed two-thirds of respondents

toughened British rhetoric as she called on the West to "ramp up" military production including tanks and planes to help Ukraine. She also said that Russia must be pushed out of "the whole of Ukraine", implying that Britain backed Ukraine re-taking the province of Crimea which was annexed by Moscow in 2014.

Having been reluctant to deliver heavy weapons to Ukraine in the early stages of the conflict, Britain, France, the United States and even Germany are now delivering increasingly sophisticated firepower. US President Joe Biden announced a huge \$33 billion package on Thursday for arming and supporting Ukraine, with the equivalent of 10 anti-tank weapons being supplied for every Russian tank.

### 'Second phase'

"We've moved into a second phase of the war," said Florent Parmentier, an expert on international relations at Sciences-Po university in Paris. "There was a first stage where we simply wondered about the Ukrainians' capacity to resist Russia... (now) there's more and more talk of encouraging Ukraine



LOS ANGELES: Lora King, daughter of the late Rodney King, addresses the crowd gathered near the intersection of Florence and Normandie in Los Angeles, California, on April 29, 2022 to mark the 30th anniversary of the 1992 LA Riots. — AFP

thought it likely that similar riots could happen in the next five years. The proportion is the highest in the 25 years that Loyola Marymount University has been running the poll.

Karen Bass, a Black candidate for mayor, said she was shocked by the results. "We absolutely cannot allow things to get so bad for people to be so despondent and so desperate that they tear up the city. We can't have that happen again," she said. —AFP

on the road to victory," he added.

Marie Dumoulin, an expert at the European Council for Foreign Relations, believes "the West has come to terms with the idea that the war is going to last." Jean-Sylvestre Mongrenier, from the Franco-Belgian think-tank Thomas More, says the new stance is a result of shifting understanding of Russian President Vladimir Putin's objectives.

The West "appears to have understood that the future of the continent ... will play out in the Donbas" region of eastern Ukraine, he said, with Russia hoping to regain influence lost after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

The danger is that the more the West steps up its backing, the closer it becomes to being considered as a "co-belligerent" in the conflict, rather than a simple ally of Ukraine. Russia "considers that as soon as you start delivering heavier and heavier arms, the difference between being a belligerent and not intervening becomes smaller and smaller," said Parmentier. Biden stressed on Thursday that "we're not attacking Russia. We are helping Ukraine defend itself against Russian aggression." —AFP

## Tensions rise as West shifts decisively behind Ukraine

**PARIS:** Less cautious about its military support and more explicit in its war aims, the West shifted gears in its support for Ukraine this week despite the risk of a direct conflict with Russia. "We want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine," US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Monday.

The remark underlined Washington's widening objectives in the conflict beyond simply enabling Ukraine to defend its territory from Russian attack. On Tuesday, the United States convened talks on increasing support for Kyiv with around 40 countries—including all NATO members—at the Ramstein military base used by US forces in Germany.

On Wednesday, UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss