



**SEOUL/TOKYO (Reuters)** -- South Korea's foreign ministry summoned a Japanese diplomat on Tuesday to protest against a claim in Japan's annual diplomatic policy Bluebook on a group of islands at the centre of a long-standing territorial dispute, a ministry spokesman said. Ties between the two countries have improved in recent years, but the neighbours are at odds over the sovereignty of the islands - called Dokdo in South Korea and Takeshima in Japan - that lie about halfway between them. South Korea's foreign ministry earlier said it "strongly protests" against the Japanese claim on the islands that were historically and geographically its sovereign territory. Japan said in the Bluebook that the islands are its territory based on historical facts and under international law. Tokyo had told Seoul its position on the islands was unacceptable, Japan's top government spokesperson, Yoshiyama Hayashi, said.

**UNITED NATIONS (AFP)** -- The UN Security Council urged Venezuela and Guyana to avoid escalating tensions over an oil-rich region that they both claim. The dispute over Essequibo - which makes up about two-thirds of Guyana's territory and has been administered by Guyana for more than a century -- intensified in 2015 after the discovery of oil deposits by U.S.-based energy giant ExxonMobil. "The members of the Security Council expressed their concern about the possible escalation of tensions between Venezuela and Guyana," the council said in a statement. "They urged the parties to exercise maximum restraint, reminding them of their obligations to comply with the Order of Provisional Measures issued by the International Court of Justice on 1 December 2023." That UN court ordered Venezuela not to do anything to change the status quo regarding Essequibo. But days later Venezuela went ahead and held a controversial, non-binding referendum that approved the creation of a Venezuelan province in the disputed region, sparking fears of a military conflict. Its congress has enacted a law setting out the defense of this alleged Venezuelan territory.

**MANILA (AFP)** -- The Philippines has seized 1.8 tonnes of crystal methamphetamine, President Ferdinand Marcos said Tuesday, describing the bust as a record and the "right approach" to the drug war. Police found the illegal drugs, estimated to be worth more than \$230 million, on Monday during a search of a van in Batangas province, south of Manila. The driver was arrested. Marcos inspected the drug haul on Tuesday and said it was the "biggest shipment of shabu ever caught" in the Philippines. Shabu is the local name for cheap and highly addictive crystal meth. It was not clear if it was a record value or quantity of drugs. Police were tracing the source of the drugs, but Marcos said they were not made locally. Thousands of people were killed in anti-drug operations under former president Rodrigo Duterte, sparking an international investigation into alleged human rights abuses.

**COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP)** -- A fire raged through one of Copenhagen's oldest buildings on Tuesday, causing the collapse of the iconic spire from the 17th-century Old Stock Exchange as passersby rushed to help emergency services save priceless paintings and other valuables. Danish Culture Minister Jakob Engel-Schmidt said it was "touching" to see how many people lent their hand "to save art treasures and iconic images from the burning building." One man jumped off his bicycle on his way to work to help in the effort. The fire began Tuesday morning in the copper roof of the Old Stock Exchange, or Boersen, spread to much of the building and the roof, parts of which also collapsed, and destroyed the building's interior, said firefighters spokesman Jakob Vedsted Andersen. "What is left when it has been put out is too early to say now," Engel-Schmidt told Danish broadcaster DR. The cause of the fire was not immediately known. The building, which is situated next to the Christiansborg Palace where the parliament sits, is a popular tourist attraction and has been photographed millions of times. Its distinctive spire, in the shape of the tails of four dragons twisted together, reached a height of 56 meters (184 feet).

**NEW DELHI (Reuters)** -- Popular Indian yoga guru Baba Ramdev said on Tuesday he made a mistake and apologized to a court for defying its orders to stop misleading advertisements that claim his traditional ayurvedic medicines can cure chronic diseases like diabetes. Ramdev, dressed in a saffron-colored robe, pleaded before two Supreme Court judges with folded hands and said he felt provoked to react after his firm Patanjali Ayurved's hugely popular medicines were called "pseudo-science" by critics, but added he was not justifying his action. The Supreme Court has previously refused to accept two formal apologies from Ramdev and his firm's co-founder Acharya Balkrishna, made through their lawyers, in the contempt case and also admonished the head of a state drugs regulator for not taking legal action against the firm. Ramdev has a huge following in India and performs yoga on TV shows. He repeated claims about his traditional medicines at a press briefing last year, a day after the court barred Patanjali from publishing such ads.

## On China Visit, German Chancellor Says No 'Decoupling'



Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany meets with Xi Jinping, China's leader, in Beijing on Tuesday.

**BEIJING (Dispatches)** -- Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Tuesday said Germany did not want to "decouple" from China but called for progress on structural issues and improving the quality of cooperation. Scholz is on a three-day visit to China, pressing his case for better market access and a level playing field for German companies to compete in the world's second-largest economy. He did however thank China for helping to resolve individual cases where companies have faced issues, including the carmaker BMW. The chancellor arrived in China on Sunday, accompanied by a large delegation of ministers and business executives on his second visit to the country since taking office. His whistlestop tour took him to the southwestern megacity of Chongqing, economic powerhouse Shanghai and Beijing, but he faced a tough balancing act as he aimed to shore up economic ties with Berlin's biggest trading partner. Chinese state media said Xi had highlighted the importance of ties in

the face of "increasing risks and challenges". "China and Germany are the second and third largest economies in the world," state broadcaster CCTV quoted Xi as having said. Scholz's visit comes as many of Germany's Western allies confront China on a range of trade issues. A slew of probes into state aid for Chinese solar panels, electric cars and wind turbines are ongoing in Brussels. The United States, meanwhile, is investigating what it views as national security risks posed by Chinese technology in cars. "Derisking" has also emerged as a core theme of the EU's economic policy towards China, after Russia's war in Ukraine exposed the bloc's energy dependence on Moscow. But speaking to Scholz Tuesday, Xi said, "Mutually beneficial cooperation between China and Germany is not a 'risk', but a guarantee for the stability of bilateral relations and an opportunity to create a future."

## Oldest Living Conjoined Twins Die Aged 62



Conjoined twins Lori and George Schappell, who pursued separate careers, interests and relationships during lives that defied medical expectations, died this month in Pennsylvania, according to funeral home officials.

**READING, Pa. (AP)** -- Conjoined twins Lori and George Schappell, who pursued separate careers, interests and relationships during lives that defied medical expectations, died this month in Pennsylvania, according to funeral home officials. They were 62. The twins, listed by Guinness World Records as the oldest living conjoined twins, died April 7 at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, according to obituaries posted by Leibensperger Funeral Homes of Hamburg. The cause of death was not detailed. "When we were born, the doctors didn't think we'd make 30, but we proved them wrong," Lori said in an interview when they turned 50, The Philadelphia Inquirer reported. George came out as transgender in 2007. The twins, born Sept. 18, 1961, in West Reading, Pennsylvania, had distinct brains but were joined at the skull. George, who had spina bifida and was 4 inches shorter, was wheeled around by Lori on an adaptive wheeled stool. Despite each having to go where the other went, it was "very important" to both "to live as independently as possible," the obituary said. Both graduated from a public high school and took college classes. George went along for six years as Lori worked in a hospital laundry.

Lori -- "a trophy-winning bowler," according to the obituary notice -- gave up the job in 1996 so her sibling could launch a country music career. "Since the age of 24, they have maintained their own residence and have traveled extensively," the obituary notice said. Over the years, they appeared in many documentaries and talk shows, as well as in an episode of the FX medical drama "Nip/Tuck." The Philadelphia Inquirer reported that Lori was once engaged to be married but that her fiancé died in an automobile accident. "When I went on dates," Lori said, "George would bring along books to read." The twins said in a 1997 documentary that they had different bathing schedules and showered one at a time. George spoke of giving someone you love and respect "the privacy and compromise in situations that you would want them to give you." Lori said compromise meant "you don't get everything you want right when you want it." Conjoined twins occur once in every 50,000 to 60,000 births when identical twins from a single embryo fail to separate. About 70% are female, and most are stillborn. Only a small percentage are joined at the head, with nearly three-quarters joined at the chest and others at the abdomen or pelvis.

# NATO Commander: Undersea Warfare Threatens 1bn in West



Damage is seen to the Balticconnector gas pipeline that connects Finland and Estonia across the Baltic Sea.

**STOCKHOLM (Guardian)** -- The security of nearly 1 billion people across Europe and North America is under threat from Russian attempts to target the extensive vulnerabilities of underwater infrastructure including windfarms, pipelines and power cables, a NATO commander has warned. Vice-Admiral Didier Malettre, the deputy commander of NATO's Allied Maritime Command (Marcom), said the network of underwater cables and pipes on which Europe's power and communications depend were not built to withstand the "hybrid warfare" being pursued by Moscow and other NATO adversaries. "We know the Russians have devel-

oped a lot of hybrid warfare under the sea to disrupt the European economy, through cables, internet cables, pipelines. All of our economy under the sea is under threat," he said. "And, to be very clear, we know what Russians have developed as far as nuclear submarines to operate under the sea. So we are not naive and we are working together." The comments come after two incidents of suspected sabotage on gas pipelines in the Baltic in the last 18 months -- first on Nord Stream 1 and 2 in September 2022, followed by the Balticconnector in October last year. Despite extensive investigations by multiple states both remain unsolved, although Finland said in December

that "everything indicated" a Chinese ship had purposely damaged the Balticconnector with its anchor. Malettre, a submariner who said he had himself spent "more than 1,000 days under the sea", said the environment had changed dramatically since much of the current infrastructure was first developed by the private sector, leaving it extremely vulnerable. "All our links between the U.S., Canada and Europe are transmitting under the sea, so there are a lot of vulnerabilities." Despite the increasing role of offshore wind power to meet climate goals, the infrastructure still has "system vulnerabilities," he said. Offshore wind will need to increase by 25% by 2050 to meet EU wind energy capacity targets, according to industry association WindEurope, while the Biden administration wants to deploy 30,000 megawatts of offshore wind along the coastlines of the U.S. by 2030. At any one time Malettre said that Marcom had "more than 100 ships, nuclear submarines and conventional submarines" patrolling waters including the Arctic, Black Sea, Atlantic, Baltic and the Mediterranean. But even with a significant presence it was impossible for NATO to guard every piece of undersea infrastructure, he said, with primary responsibility lying with nations to protect their own infrastructure.

## South Koreans Vent Anger at Gov't on Anniversary of Disaster



Visitors bow their heads in silence in front of the salvaged Sewol ferry at a port in Mokpo, South Jeolla Province, on April 16, 2024.

**SEOUL (AFP)** -- South Korea on Tuesday marked the 10th anniversary of the country's worst maritime disaster, when hundreds of schoolchildren died after the overloaded Sewol ferry capsized and sank. The disaster and botched rescue efforts dealt a crushing blow to then-president Park Geun-hye, who was eventually impeached in 2017, and the tragedy remains divisive and politically sensitive in South Korea even now. A Coast Guard vessel took some of the victims' families to the site of the sinking early Tuesday for a special ceremony. President Yoon Suk Yeol, whose party was dealt a crushing defeat in parliamentary elections last week, offered

his condolences to the families of victims at a Tuesday cabinet meeting. "Even though 10 years have passed, the events of April 16, 2014, remain vivid in my memory," he said. South Korea's rapid transformation from a war-torn country to Asia's fourth-largest economy and a global cultural powerhouse is a source of national pride. But a series of preventable disasters -- from the Sewol ferry to the 2022 Itaewon Halloween crowd crush, which killed more than 150 mostly young people -- has shaken public confidence in authorities. Last year, a 20-year-old marine died after he was swept away while doing relief work during major floods, with reports saying he had never been given

a life jacket by the authorities. Experts say that the current government's handling of the Itaewon disaster and the marine's death -- including the president's vetoing of a bill that would have allowed a special investigation into the Seoul crowd crush -- proved an electoral liability. The daily schedule for Tuesday released by President Yoon's office did not list attending any of the Sewol memorial services being held throughout the day. The decision sparked criticism from the public and political figures, with the minor Justice Party claiming that Yoon attending the memorial service would show the kind of "act of governmental renewal" which the public wished to see after the general elections. Opposition leader Lee Jae-myung slammed what he described as government failures leading to loss of life. "South Korea had to change after the Sewol ferry disaster. Unfortunately, a society of 'every man for himself' re-emerged, leading to the loss of precious lives in Itaewon... and the (late) marine," he said in a Facebook post on Tuesday. Kim Ga-won, 18, who attended the Mokpo memorial, told AFP that the Sewol and Itaewon tragedies made it hard for her to trust South Korean authorities. The two disasters "made (me) to realize the country doesn't prioritize citizens' safety and that I have to protect myself."

## U.S. Awards Lockheed Martin \$17bn Deal After Cutting F-35 Orders

**WASHINGTON (Dispatches)** -- Lockheed Martin has won a \$17 billion contract to develop the next generation of interceptors against intercontinental ballistic missiles, the U.S. Missile Defense Agency said. The award represents a shot in the arm for Lockheed after the United States said it wanted to reduce F-35 orders, and the Army in February abandoned development of a Future Attack Reconnaissance Aircraft, a next-generation helicopter for which Lockheed had submitted a design. The multi-year missile contract covers the development of the Next Generation Interceptor (NGI) to modernize the Ground-Based Midcourse Defense (GMD) program. The network of radars, interceptors and other equipment is designed to protect the United States from intercontinental ballistic missiles. The first interceptor is expected to be operational in 2028. The NGI is currently in the technology

development phase and will transition to product development in May, according to written testimony last week from the head of the Missile Defense Agency, Lieutenant General Heath Collins. The United States plans to buy 20 interceptors and deploy them at Fort Greely, Alaska. In 2019, the Pentagon scrapped work on a Boeing Co contract for a "kill vehicle," the tip of an interceptor that detaches in space and destroys the incoming warhead, due to technical design problems after spending \$1.2 billion on the project. The United States then decided to restart the contract process to gather bids for the whole interceptor. Boeing was knocked out of the competition in 2021. The next-generation interceptor program will be worth about \$17.7 billion over its lifetime, according to government estimates. The Biden administration has requested \$28.4 billion for missile defenses in its fiscal 2025 budget, Collins testified.

Work on GMD began in the late 1990s and after about \$40 billion in research and development costs, it was declared operational in 2004. Just over half of the system's interception tests have been successful, however, and the Pentagon's Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation, said in 2023 that GMD could defend against "a small number of ballistic missile threats." In January, Lockheed forecast its 2024 profit below Wall Street expectations, as the defense contractor's largest aeronautics segment - which makes the F-35 jets -- faces supply-chain snags. Lockheed would cut 1% of its jobs over the course of 2024 in a bid to cut costs and streamline operations. U.S. defense companies have benefited from robust demand for weapons amid heightened geopolitical tensions over the last two years. Sales of U.S. military equipment to foreign governments in 2023 rose 16% to a record \$238 billion.