

News in brief

◆ **French President**

Emmanuel Macron yesterday proposed to give a form of autonomy to the Mediterranean island of Corsica, a region that often chafes at rule from Paris. "We should have the courage to establish a form of autonomy for Corsica within France," Macron told the island's parliament in Ajaccio, which is currently controlled by nationalists. "We would all be failing if we left things as they are," he added. Corsica shot to the top of the French political agenda last year when widespread violence broke out over the killing in a mainland prison of Yvan Colonna.



France's Macron proposes 'autonomy' for island of Corsica

The independence fighter -- jailed for life over the 1998 murder of the region's prefect Claude Erignac -- was stabbed to death by another inmate. Colonna's killing triggered "unbelievable violence that brought Corsica to the brink of widespread conflict", the island's executive Gilles Simeoni told the president. Corsicans have long wanted more say on their own affairs, as well as official status for their language and protection from outsiders buying up land -- two thorny requests that Paris is reluctant to grant.

◆ **Karabakh separatists to disband after surrender to Azerbaijan**



rounds of talks. But it also raised the levels of anger in Yerevan.

◆ **Ethnic Armenian separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh** on Thursday agreed to dissolve their government by the end of the year and become a full part of Azerbaijan in the wake of Baku's lightning offensive. The dramatic announcement came moments after it became clear that more than half of the rebel region's population had fled the advancing Azerbaijani forces. It drew the curtain on one of the world's longest and seemingly most irreconcilable "frozen conflicts" -- one that successive administrations in Washington and leaders across Europe had failed to resolve in ceaseless

◆ **UK's Sunak eyes election as ruling Tories meet**



◆ **Britain's ruling Conservatives** gather this weekend for their annual conference, with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak bidding to revive the party's flagging fortunes with an apparent reset. The four-day event from Sunday in Manchester, northwest England, comes with a general election expected next year that Sunak's Tories -- in power since 2010 -- look set to lose to the main Labour opposition. The UK leader, whose keynote speech next Wednesday will close the conference, appears to be shifting his beleaguered party onto an election footing by trying to refocus attention onto a broader policy agenda.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

One of Britain's most famous trees 'deliberately felled'



Pictures of the tree before and after London, United Kingdom



One of the UK's most photographed trees, located next to the Roman-era Hadrian's Wall in northeast England, has been "deliberately felled," the authority responsible for the local National Park said yesterday. "Northumberland National Park Authority can confirm that sadly, the famous tree at Sycamore Gap has come down overnight," it said in a statement. "We have reason to believe it has been deliberately felled. We are working with the relevant agencies and partners with an interest in this iconic North East landmark and will issue more details once they are known."

The tree was notable not only for being next to the ancient wall, but also for its

cinematic setting -- standing alone in a dramatic dip -- and featured in Kevin Costner's 1991 blockbuster film "Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves". Pictures posted on social media show the sycamore, which won the Woodland Trust's Tree of the Year in 2016, reduced to a short stump, with the rest of the tree dumped on the wall. Northumbria Police said they had launched an investigation and that they were trying to establish if a criminal offence had occurred.

Local MP Mary Foy called it "a heartbreaking act of mindless vandalism of a much loved, famous landmark in the North East. A very sad day for the iconic Sycamore Gap, which will upset so many people around the country -- and even across the world," she added.

Soldier back in US after release by North Korea

AFP | Washington, United States

American soldier Travis King has returned to the United States after being freed by North Korea, a Defense Department official said yesterday. "I can confirm that he has landed in the US," the official told AFP, without providing further details.



Travis King

A US official previously said King would be taken to the Brooke Army Medical Center in Texas upon his return to the United States -- the same place that American basketball star Brittney Griner was evaluated after being released by Russia. After a drunken pub fight, an incident with police and a stay in South Korean jail, Private Second Class King was being taken to the airport in July to fly back to Texas.

But instead of travelling to Fort Bliss for disciplinary hearings, he snuck away, joined a Demilitarized Zone sightseeing trip and slipped over the border. Last month, Pyongyang confirmed it was holding him, saying King had defected to North Korea to escape "mistreatment and racial discrimination in the US Army."

But after completing its investigation, Pyongyang has "decided to expel Travis King, a soldier of the US Army who illegally intruded into the territory of the DPRK, under the law of the Republic," the Korean Central News Agency said Wednesday, using the North's formal acronym.

Poland says missile that killed two in 2022 was Ukrainian

◆ **Two workers at a grain drying facility died in the blast in Przewodow**

AFP | Warsaw, Poland

A missile that killed two people in a Polish village in November, raising fears of a dangerous spike in the Ukraine conflict, belonged to Kyiv's forces, Warsaw said yesterday. Two workers at a grain drying facility died in the blast in Przewodow, some six kilometres (four miles) from the Ukrainian border, raising fears of an escalation in the war between Moscow and Kyiv.

But Warsaw and the NATO military alliance, of which Poland is member, later said the explosion was likely caused by a Ukrainian air-defence missile launched to intercept a Russian barrage. Polish Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro on Thursday said an "investigation carried out by Polish prosecutors led to ... an unequivocal opinion... that this missile was Ukrainian".

He said the finding was based on the "place where the missile was fired from", adding that the projectile was of Soviet-era production. Ziobro also said he regretted that "for months, there was no cooperation" from Ukraine over the probe.

Poland's far-right Confederation party has said Kyiv should pay compensation for the incident.

Taiwan unveils first domestically built submarine

AFP | Kaohsiung, Taiwan

Taiwan unveiled its first domestically built submarine yesterday as the massively out-gunned island seeks to bolster defences against China, which slammed the strategy as "idiotic nonsense".



Taiwan's first locally built submarine "Narwhal" is seen before Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen unveils it at the CSBC Corporation shipbuilding company in Kaohsiung

China claims self-ruled Taiwan as its territory, and has in the past year stepped up military and political pressure, ramping up the number of warplane incursions around the island while diplomatically isolating it. Taiwan has increased defence spending -- allotting a record \$19 billion for 2024 -- to acquire military equipment, particularly from its key ally the United States, but its quest to obtain a submarine has faced obstacles. President Tsai Ing-wen -- strongly opposed by Beijing

for her refusal to accept China's authority over the island -- launched a submarine programme in 2016 with the aim of delivering a fleet of eight vessels. The first prototype, named

China, Saudi Arabia to hold joint naval drills next month: Beijing



China's defence ministry spokesperson Wu Qian

AFP | Beijing, China

China and Saudi Arabia will hold their second-ever joint naval drills next month, Beijing's defence ministry announced yesterday, as China forges deeper ties with the Middle Eastern power.

The drills, dubbed "Blue Sword 2023", will take place in China's southern province of Guangdong in October, Beijing said. "This joint training focuses on overseas maritime counter-terrorism operations, conducting exercises on sniper tactics, boat driving, helicopter landing, and joint rescue," defence ministry spokesperson Wu Qian told a press briefing.

The two countries previously held joint naval drills in 2019, according to the official Saudi Press Agency. They are "aiming to deepen practical and friendly cooperation between the two militaries and improve the level of practical training for the troops", Wu said.

The exercises come as Beijing forges deeper ties with Riyadh and plays peacemaker in the Middle East. This year, China brokered a deal that saw longtime regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran agree to restore ties and reopen their respective embassies.

Spain stabs

◆ **The boy, who has not been named, allegedly stabbed them repeatedly shortly after classes started at the school**

AFP | Madrid, Spain

A 14-year-old stabbed three teachers and two students in a school in Spain yesterday, sparking soul-searching in a country where violent crime is fairly rare.

The boy, who has not been named, allegedly stabbed them repeatedly shortly after classes started at the school in Jerez de la Frontera in the southern Andalusia region, police spokesman Adrian Dominguez told reporters at the scene. "Police located the suspect on the third floor. He had in his pos-

Farm scientist bel

◆ **Time Magazine ranked him as one of the three most influential Indians of the 20th century,**

AFP | New Delhi, India

India yesterday mourned the death of scientist Monkombu Sambasivan Swaminathan, the architect of the 1960s "green revolution" that brought an end to the chronic food shortages then plaguing the country.

The plant geneticist died at the age of 98 in Chennai after an illustrious academic career that garnered him 84 honorary doctorates from some of the world's top universities.

His work breeding wheat and rice strains with improved yields, and training farmers to cultivate them, helped transform India from a starving nation into a food exporter.

"At a very critical period in our nation's history, his groundbreaking work in agriculture transformed the lives of millions and ensured food security for our nation," Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote on X, formerly Twitter. "His passion to see India pro-

Two 'catastro

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

Two consecutive years of extreme warming in the Alps have obliterated 10% of Swiss glacier volume -- the amount lost in the three decades prior, a report revealed yesterday.

Amid growing concerns over the toll of climate change, the study by the Cryospheric Commission (CC) of the Swiss Academy of Sciences show