

Catch up: more wildfires ravage Los Angeles; Lebanon's parliament elects president



Joe Biden declared an emergency in California and promised federal support as **wildfires** scorched large parts of **Los Angeles** County. At least five people have been killed so far, while more than 100,000 have been ordered to evacuate. The [first blaze](#) broke out on Tuesday in the hillside neighbourhood of Pacific Palisades, after which extreme winds helped cause five more.

Lebanon's parliament elected **General Joseph Aoun** as president. He will be the first person to hold the office in more than two years, during which lawmakers failed to agree on a candidate. The election of General Aoun, whose bid was supported by America, reflects the waning influence of [Hizbullah](#), an Iran-backed Lebanese militia, which has been weakened by its war with Israel.

Argentina's government paid \$4.3bn to its bondholders. It made the payment with dollars purchased using the fiscal surplus that [Javier Milei](#), the country's libertarian president, delivered last year

by making swingeing cuts to public spending. The payment—Argentina’s largest since it restructured its debt in 2020—will be a boost to Mr Milei, who wants to secure investors’ confidence in the economy.

Giorgia Meloni, **Italy’s** prime minister, warned that **Russia** may strengthen its presence in Libya after the Kremlin-backed Assad regime in Syria [collapsed](#) last year. The Libyan National Army, based in the country’s east, has been building closer ties with Russia. Ms Meloni said that NATO’s defence of its eastern flank could leave it “exposed” in the Mediterranean.

Norway sold 124bcm of [natural gas](#) in 2024, breaking a previous record of 122.8bcm sold in 2022. The Norwegian Offshore Directorate, a government body, said that businesses will drill around 40 wells this year, compared to 42 in 2024. Norway became Europe’s biggest supplier of gas in 2022, overtaking Russia, which cut supplies after the war in Ukraine.

A sell-off in **government bonds** caused borrowing costs to rise around the world. In **Britain**, the yield on the ten-year gilt climbed to its highest level since 2008. Yields on **America’s** ten-year treasury bonds jumped above 4.7% for the first time in nearly nine months. German and Japanese borrowing costs also rose. Investors are growing more concerned about increasing levels of [government debt](#).

Security forces in **Chad** foiled an attack on the president’s office in N’Djamena, the capital. A government spokesperson said that the 24 assailants, who were armed with machetes, were drunk and disorganised. He also said that it was “probably not” a [terrorist attack](#). Six of the attackers were arrested and 18 killed, while one Chadian soldier died in the fighting.

Figure of the day: 43, the number of “critical minerals” of which Greenland is believed to have supplies. [Read the full story.](#)

Why does Donald Trump want the Panama Canal?



Donald Trump has recently asserted that the United States is being “ripped off” by administrators of the Panama Canal and that “Chinese soldiers” are operating the waterway. He has threatened to “demand that the Panama Canal be returned” to the United States. On December 23rd José Raúl Mulino, Panama’s president, retorted that “every square metre of the Panama Canal” belongs to the country. Opposition parties agree.

Mr Trump’s real goals may be less outlandish. But nobody knows what they are. Among them might be tighter controls of [migration](#) through the Darien Gap, a reduction in Chinese influence in Panama or improved investment conditions for American firms there.

Mr Mulino says he will not make any moves until Mr Trump is inaugurated. But Panama could in the meantime use its seat on the UN Security Council to push for a special resolution to reaffirm its sovereignty over the Canal.

Will Lebanon finally have a new president?



On Thursday the Lebanese parliament met to select a new president. The post has been vacant since October 2022, when Michel Aoun finished his six-year term. In a dozen meetings lawmakers were unable to agree on his successor. Hizbullah, the Shia militia and political party, wanted to install Suleiman Frangieh, an undistinguished former MP (and the grandson of a former president). But Mr Frangieh dropped out of the race on Wednesday night.

On their 13th attempt, MPs elected General Joseph Aoun, the army chief. He had the support of the opposition, as well as America and Saudi Arabia. The deadlock was finally broken in part because Hizbullah was badly weakened by its war against Israel, which ended in November, and diminished even further by the fall of the Assad regime in Syria. As ever in Lebanon, external events have reshaped internal politics.

The threat to India's IT success



Since Donald Trump won America's presidential election in November, shares in [Indian IT](#) outsourcing firms have risen. Bosses in the sector, for which America is the biggest market, believed that Mr Trump's pro-business approach will help them. There are other reasons to be bullish. After being dragged down by global economic uncertainty in 2023, earnings have in the past year picked up, driven by the AI boom.

But recovery may not be straightforward. On Thursday TCS, India's biggest IT firm, reported lower-than-expected revenues for the last quarter of 2024. And analysts' cautious optimism about the sector could be derailed by Mr Trump. Over the past month, his supporters have railed against H1-Bs, a category of visa for skilled workers that Indian IT firms rely on to send staff to America to understand client needs. Should Mr Trump succumb to the demands of his base, any recovery could be stalled.

An opposition firebrand returns to Mozambique



More than two months ago [Venâncio Mondlane](#) fled Mozambique, fearing for his life. He had run as an opposition candidate in October's election, which he says he won. The process was so [flawed](#) that it is impossible to know the truth. He flew back to Maputo, the capital, on Thursday. Many Mozambicans consider it the return of their rightful president.

That view is not shared by the Frelimo party, which has ruled for 50 years. Its candidate, Daniel Chapo, was officially declared the winner with 65% of the vote. But its control is slipping. Furious protesters have attacked Frelimo offices and police stations, raided factories, and shut down mines. After touching down Mr Mondlane said that he is open to talks with the government and was greeted by jubilant crowds. The next few days will be very tense.

America mourns Jimmy Carter



On Thursday a national funeral service will be held in Washington, DC for [Jimmy Carter](#), who died on December 29th, aged 100. All of America's living presidents are expected to attend, with Joe Biden among those delivering eulogies. Throughout the week thousands of Americans have paid tribute to their 39th president. His coffin will return to his home town in [Plains, Georgia](#), for a ceremony that will conclude proceedings.

Mr Carter, once a peanut farmer, was perhaps the most virtuous of all America's presidents. His foreign-policy achievements, including the Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel in 1978, were typical of a man intent on peace for its own sake. But his single term in the White House was rocky. After his presidency he set up the Carter Center, where he became an advocate for peace and democracy; he won the Nobel Prize for peace in 2002.

Daily quiz



The Economist

We will serve you a new question each day this week. On Friday your challenge is to give us all five answers and, as important, tell us the connecting theme. Email your responses (and include mention of your home city and country) by 1700 GMT on Friday to QuizEspresso@economist.com. We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Thursday: Which concert venue is based at 881 Seventh Avenue in New York?

Wednesday: What do the initials FTA stand for in economics?

**Shared pain is lessened; shared joy,
increased—thus do we refute entropy.**

Spider Robinson