

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: UCG/Universal Images Group via G

Oil prices jumped by more than 1% after Donald Trump ordered a “complete blockade” of **oil tankers** under sanctions that enter or leave **Venezuela**. The country was surrounded by the “largest Armada” in South America’s history, America’s president wrote. A blockade could be **devastating** for the autocratic regime of Nicolás Maduro, which is propped up by gangsters reliant on money from oil exports.

Patients in **England** were warned of disruption to non-urgent care, as a five-day strike by **resident doctors** (who are qualified but still in training) looks set to begin on Wednesday. It will be the 14th walkout of a long-running pay dispute. Resident doctors account for nearly half of all doctors in **the National Health Service**. A nasty flu virus is already straining hospitals.

Warner Bros Discovery will reportedly advise its shareholders as early as Wednesday to reject a \$108bn takeover bid from **Paramount**. **Paramount is battling with Netflix** to see which of the streaming firms will control the old-fashioned moviemaker. On Tuesday Affinity Partners, an investment firm which is backing Paramount’s offer (and which is run by Jared Kushner, Mr Trump’s son-in-law) pulled out.

The leader of New South Wales, in **Australia**, said the state would recall parliament next week to pass sweeping **gun reforms**. On Sunday two gunmen, thought to be a father and son, [attacked](#) a Hanukkah celebration on Sydney's Bondi Beach, killing 15 people. Earlier Anthony Albanese, the prime minister, said the surviving suspect would be charged soon.

The **Trump administration** expanded its [travel ban](#), barring citizens from seven more countries, on top of the original 12, from entering America. People from Burkina Faso, Laos, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Syria—along with those using Palestinian documents—will no longer be allowed in. Fifteen other countries face new restrictions. The White House cited risks including terrorism and visa-overstay rates.

The **European Union** rolled back rules that would have in effect banned [new petrol and diesel cars](#) by 2035. Facing pressure from the **auto industry**, it will instead require carmakers to reduce tailpipe emissions by 90% compared with 2021 levels. The announcement comes a day after Ford, an American carmaker, said it was scaling back its [electric-vehicle plans](#).

China cut [tariffs](#) on pork imports from the EU, easing duties first imposed in September after an 18-month anti-dumping probe. The investigation was widely seen as retaliation for the EU's levies on Chinese electric vehicles. The final rates will be about two-thirds lower than originally threatened. Europe exports about \$2bn-worth of pork to China each year.

Figure of the day: DKr1.4trn (\$220bn), Novo Nordisk's market value, down by roughly two-thirds from its peak in June 2024.
[Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: Getty Images

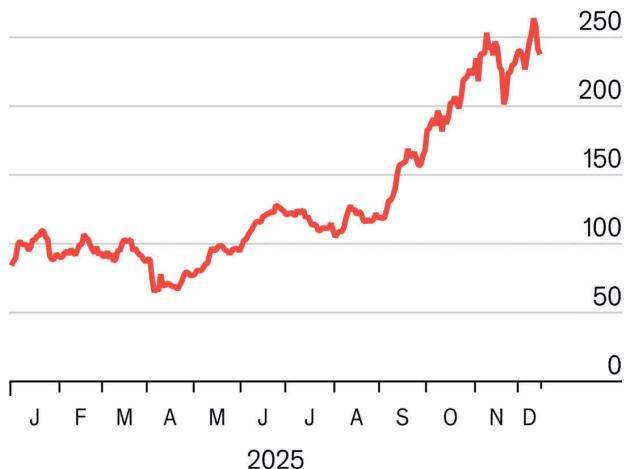
An AI boom with side effects

Micron, an American maker of memory chips, will report earnings on Wednesday for the three months to November. The boom in [artificial intelligence](#) has sent demand soaring for high-bandwidth memory (HBM), specialised chips used in powerful AI processors. Micron and its South Korean rivals, SK Hynix and Samsung, have already sold out their advanced HBM stock for 2026. Micron's share price surged by 180% this year.

The success, however, has [side effects](#). Strong demand for HBM is squeezing supplies of memory chips for other uses. On December 3rd Micron said it would exit the consumer-electronics market altogether to concentrate on AI-related products. Bottlenecks could raise prices for consumer devices like smartphones and laptops and delay product launches. The memory business is notoriously cyclical: periods of heavy investment often end in gluts and price wars. The market is forecast to grow by 40% next year, far faster than the wider semiconductor industry. Investors will be hoping this cycle proves an exception.

A memory boost

Micron, share price, \$



Source: LSEG Workspace



Photograph: Reuters

No gifts under the ECB's tree

The European Central Bank's top brass will get together for their Christmas dinner and some macroeconomic chit-chat on Wednesday, ahead of the final interest-rate decision of the year on Thursday. Nobody expects a cut. In fact, markets do not expect another in 2026. Wednesday release of inflation data will confirm an earlier flash estimate showing that price pressures have levelled off, while separate wage figures are expected to show that pay growth is slowing.

Greater uncertainty surrounds growth. On Tuesday the closely watched purchasing-managers' index showed economic sentiment in the euro zone weakening, in both manufacturing and services. The mild recovery of the past months might already be coming to an end, which could force the ECB to rethink in 2026. Worryingly, managers are also reporting rising input costs—a toxic mix for a central bank. Cutting rates to support growth becomes harder when price pressures are picking up. Next year may prove more of a puzzle than the ECB currently thinks.



Photograph: Elliott Franks/eyevine

Winter woes for Britain's health service

Recently Britons have fretted more about immigration and the economy than about their beleaguered [National Health Service](#). That may be about to change. Waiting lists remain stubbornly high, while a virulent strain of flu is filling hospital wards. And on Wednesday resident doctors (who are qualified but still in training) across England will also return to the picket lines in a long-running dispute with the Labour government over pay.

The timing is awkward for Wes Streeting, the health secretary, who will face [MPs](#) that morning for a grilling on the state of the service he controls. It is uncomfortable, too, for the British Medical Association, which has felt the need to reassure the public that the strikes will not put patients' lives at risk. Even if they do not, the disruption will still be felt: tens of thousands of appointments are set to be cancelled in the run-up to Christmas. The [NHS](#) looks poised to climb back up the political agenda.



Photograph: Getty Images

Tennis courts younger audiences

For a glimpse of the future of men's tennis, look to the Next Gen ATP Finals, which begin on Tuesday in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The tournament features eight players aged 20 or under who have earned the most ranking points on the main professional circuit for men's tennis over the past year.

The event has a strong track record. Former winners include Carlos Alcaraz (2021) and Jannik Sinner (2019), both now dominant forces in the sport. This year's field is led by Learner Tien, an American who already ranks among the world's top 30.

The tournament has over the years become a testing ground for rule changes for the ATP, the governing body of men's tennis. Sets have been shortened from six games to four. A shot clock limits the time between a first and second serve. The effort echoes a [wider shift](#) in elite sport, as organisers try to increase dynamism to compete for the eyeballs of younger audiences who they think have shorter attention spans.



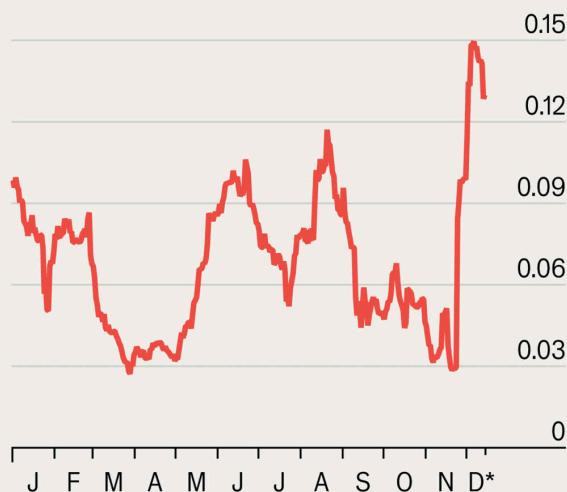
Photograph:

Data bite: Russia's slow grind in Ukraine

Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, in recent days visited the edges of Kupyansk, a front-line city that Russia claimed to have captured entirely nearly a month ago. In fact Ukraine clings on to parts of it. Negotiations over ending the war will be influenced by perceptions of how it is going. Russia has in recent months quickened the pace at which it is seizing Ukrainian land. But it is still [advancing slowly](#) (see chart), and it is not clear that Russia can press on longer than Ukraine can hold on. Even at recent rates of advance, occupying what remains of Ukraine's eastern regions would take years.

Inching forward

Change in Russian-controlled area
as % of Ukraine, past 30 days, 2025



*To December 14th

Sources: Institute for the Study of War;
AEI's Critical Threats Project; *The Economist*



Illustration: The Economist

Daily quiz

We will serve you a new question each weekday. On Friday your challenge is to give us all five answers and tell us the theme. Email your responses (and your home city and country) by 1700 GMT on Friday to [\[email protected\]](mailto:). We'll pick three winners at random and crown them on Saturday.

Wednesday: What means of killing a werewolf is also used as a term for an apparently simple method for solving a complex problem?

Tuesday: Hyakutake and Hale-Bopp are two examples of which heavenly phenomena?

Only when we know what we truly believe can we decide whether it is comforting.

Dorothy L. Sayers