

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: AFP via Getty Images

**Israel** launched a wave of air attacks across **Gaza** on Saturday, killing at least 30 people, **Gaza** health officials said. The strikes hit a Hamas-run police site as well as apartments and tents sheltering displaced civilians. Israel said the raids followed an incident in which its troops spotted Hamas gunmen emerging from a tunnel in southern Gaza, which it called a violation of the ceasefire.

**Iran's** president, Masoud Pezeshkian, accused **America**, Israel and Europe of exploiting his country's economic woes to stoke unrest. Earlier Donald Trump said that Iran "want to make a deal" rather than face an American attack. The president has sent a naval "Armada" to the Middle East and has threatened force if **Iran** does not abandon its nuclear programme.

**Venezuela's** acting president, **Delcy Rodríguez**, said she would propose an "amnesty law" covering the period since 1999—when Hugo Chávez, self-styled leader of the "Bolivarian revolution", came to power. Ms Rodríguez also announced the closure of El Helicoide prison, where political prisoners have been tortured. Her government has released around 300 political prisoners since American forces seized Nicolás Maduro, Chávez's successor, this month. But most remain behind bars.

The Baloch Liberation Army, an insurgent group, said it carried out attacks across [Balochistan](#), a south-western province of **Pakistan** bordering Iran and Afghanistan. The BLA said it killed 84 Pakistani security personnel. Pakistani officials disputed that figure, saying that 15 security personnel and 18 civilians were killed, while their forces killed at least 92 militants in the clashes.

The price of **Bitcoin** dropped to below \$80,000 on Saturday, its lowest level since April 2025. Other cryptocurrencies also suffered. [Bitcoin](#) is now down nearly 13% since the start of this year. Though advocates have touted it as a safe-haven asset, investors seem to be treating it as a riskier one amid rising geopolitical tensions.

At least 200 people were killed on Wednesday when heavy rains triggered a landslide at the Rubaya coltan mines in eastern **Democratic Republic of Congo**, authorities said on Saturday. The site is controlled by the [Rwanda-backed](#) M23 rebels. Officials have ordered nearby residents to relocate after years of deadly tunnel collapses.

A **Pokémon** card-game event, due to be held at the Yasukuni shrine in **Tokyo** on Saturday, was cancelled after a backlash in [China](#). The *Global Times*, a nationalist tabloid, said it had enraged “Chinese netizens”. The shrine honours Japan’s military dead, including several convicted of war crimes after the second world war, making it especially sensitive in China. The Pokémon Company apologised for advertising the event.

**Word of the week:** *Marine-cloud brightening*, a form of solar geoengineering that would add tiny particles of sea salt to the lower part of the atmosphere. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

## Will Colombia join South America's rightward shift?

The election campaign for Colombia's next president officially begins this weekend. Voters face a crowded calendar: they must first elect a new Congress on March 8th, and then cast ballots in the first round of the presidential poll on May 31st. If no candidate wins a majority, a run-off will follow on June 21st.

The election will test the strength of [the wave of right-wing sentiment](#) sweeping South America. The current president, Gustavo Petro—a fiery leftist who has often clashed with Donald Trump—is constitutionally barred from running again. His coalition's new standard-bearer is Iván Cepeda, a senator and human-rights campaigner who shares Mr Petro's politics but not his heated rhetoric. Polling is patchy, but he often comes out on top. Mr Cepeda's closest rival is Abelardo de la Espriella, a combative right-winger who promises to crack down on crime like Nayib Bukele, the authoritarian leader of El Salvador. Sergio Fajardo, a centrist, is running third. A bruising three-way battle lies ahead.



Photograph: Getty Images

## India's new economic priorities

On Sunday Nirmala Sitharaman, India's finance minister, will present the latest budget to parliament. Indians paying income tax—a small sliver of the population—will be watching to learn what happens to their rates. Investors, meanwhile, will want to know if the government's recent spree of deregulation and other measures meant to boost manufacturing and exports will continue. Last week India finalised its [largest-ever trade deal with the EU](#) and Ms Sitharaman has hinted that she is looking to “clean up” its complicated customs regime.

The government is expected to say it has reduced its deficit substantially. Now it must work out how to boost investment which, as a share of GDP, has been stagnant for years despite India's decent growth. Foreign investors have pulled out of the country in recent years. Indian stocks are expensive and the country lacks the sort of artificial-intelligence companies that have attracted inflows into American and Chinese markets.



Photograph: Reuters

## Is Japan heading towards a fiscal crisis?

The Japanese economy faces a paradox. As inflation has risen, the Bank of Japan has raised interest rates from -0.1% to 0.75% over the past two years. Normally, that would strengthen a currency, especially as the Federal Reserve has cut rates over the same period. Yet the yen remains close to its mid-2024 lows against the dollar, prompting speculation that the government will intervene to prop up the exchange rate. Some economists say the weak yen shows that Japan, which has large public debts, is facing a [slow-burning fiscal crisis](#).

Are they right? On the one hand, inflation has recently helped the public finances. It has lifted tax revenues and kept down real (inflation-adjusted) interest rates, helping debt to shrink relative to GDP. On the other hand, if inflation falls, real interest rates could rise, putting debt back on an increasing path. And the prime minister, Sanae Takaichi, is fighting a campaign for re-election promising to increase spending and cut taxes. A bigger budget deficit would add to debts and increase inflation, making further interest-rate rises more likely. It is a strange time to loosen the purse strings.

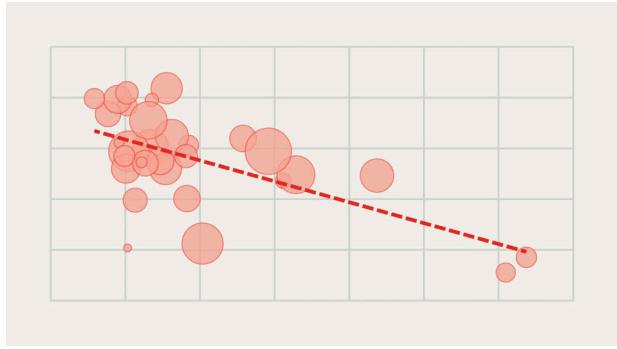


Photograph: Getty Images

## Termites offer clues on how “superorganisms” evolved

Termites are among the most successful animals on Earth. Each colony is really a “superorganism”, in which millions of individuals operate interdependently. They thrive in harsh environments and proliferate rapidly. Some queens can lay more than 20,000 eggs per day, despite consuming only wood. A new study, published in *Science*, helps explain how these extraordinary insects came to be.

Researchers compared the genomes of termites to those of cockroaches and woodroaches (which live in much smaller groups). They found that both had simpler genomes than cockroaches, their common ancestor. They also discovered that termites have no genes for sperm tails, meaning that at some point the kings and queens became monogamous and lost the need for competitive sperm. All worker termites are, in fact, full siblings. Scientists have long debated whether the kind of low genetic variability caused by inbreeding was needed for the evolution of the most socially complex insects, like bees or ants. For termites, it seems to have been crucial.



Photograph:

## Data bite: Chinese spending

China's government wants to boost domestic consumption. But where it should direct their efforts is not obvious—[spending habits vary widely across regions](#). In Heilongjiang, a frigid northern province, disposable income per person is about 31,000 yuan, and roughly three-quarters of it is spent. But in Tibet, where incomes are similar, only three-fifths is. The chart plots disposable income per person against the share of that income spent in each province. Richer provinces tend to spend a smaller proportion. But policymakers could pay closer attention to regions that buck that trend, and spend unusually freely, or unusually little, given how well-off they are. That is where interventions might be most effective.

## Hey big spenders

Chinese provinces\*, 2024



\*Includes province-level administrative divisions

Source: National Bureau of Statistics



Illustration: Sandra Navarro

## The winners of this week's quiz

Thank you to everyone who took part in this week's quiz. The winners, chosen at random, were:

**Samuel Onyoso**, Nairobi, Kenya

**Borislav Stefanov**, Sofia, Bulgaria

**Jorge Ferrando**, Puerto Villamil, Ecuador

They all gave the correct answers of: the fourth estate, The World is Not Enough, Life on Earth, The Number of the Beast and Madrid. The theme is terms that start with real: real estate, real world, real life, real number and Real Madrid, the football team.

The questions were:

**Monday:** The press are sometimes referred to by which term, dating back to when the three main classes of society were the nobility, clergy and commoners?

**Tuesday:** What is supposedly the James Bond family motto, and comprises the title of a film starring Pierce Brosnan?

**Wednesday:** Which nature documentary series, presented by David Attenborough, and first shown in 1979, traced the story of evolution?

**Thursday:** Which phrase from Revelation, associated with the Antichrist, was the name of a song and album by Iron Maiden?

**Friday:** The Museo Nacional del Prado is located in which European city?

*No one feels another's grief, no  
one understands another's joy.*

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***Franz Schubert***