

## Catch up: Trump reacts to Washington crash; Israel releases Palestinian prisoners



**President Donald Trump** said that America was “in mourning” after officials confirmed that there were no survivors of a mid-air collision between a military helicopter and a passenger plane in **Washington, DC**. Sixty-seven people are believed to have died. Mr Trump said the cause of the crash was unknown, but attacked [diversity policies](#) at the Federal Aviation Administration.

**Israel** belatedly released 110 Palestinian prisoners as part of the ceasefire deal. The delay raised concerns over the fragile truce. Earlier, **Hamas** freed eight hostages—three Israelis and five Thais—in a chaotic handover. On Wednesday [Hamas](#) accused Israel of delaying aid deliveries, which Israel denied.

**America’s** economy grew at an annualised rate of 2.3% in the fourth quarter, slightly below analysts’ expectations. Growth was driven by strong consumer and government spending, but was partly offset by a decline in investment. The [economy](#) expanded by 2.8% in 2024. On Wednesday the Federal Reserve held interest rates, citing the strength of America’s economy.

A political leader of M23, a **Rwandan-backed** rebel group, vowed to march “all the way to Kinshasa”, the capital of **Congo**, to “take power, and lead the country”. On January 27th M23 [invaded Goma](#), a city in Congo’s mineral-rich east; it is more than 1,500km from Kinshasa. France’s foreign minister arrived in Kinshasa on Thursday to meet Congo’s president, Félix Tshisekedi.

**Norway’s** government collapsed after the Centre Party pulled out of a two-party coalition over a disagreement about implementing EU energy policy. Although Norway is not in the EU, it is a member of the European Economic Area, an agreement which the Centre Party opposes. The Labour Party, which pushed to implement three [energy](#) directives, will now govern the country alone until elections in September.

The **European Central Bank** cut interest rates by a quarter of a percentage point to 2.75%, the fifth such reduction since June. The euro-zone economy stagnated in the fourth quarter, raising concerns over sluggish growth. [Inflation](#) remains elevated, but in a statement on Thursday the ECB said it expected the inflation rate to fall to its 2% target in 2025.

Italy’s data privacy watchdog said it blocked **DeepSeek**, a [Chinese AI-model maker](#), from processing Italian users’ information “with immediate effect” and that it had opened an investigation. This week regulators in Italy and Ireland asked [DeepSeek](#) to clarify its data-collection practices amid concerns about its [Chinese origins](#). France’s watchdog also said it plans to question DeepSeek about data privacy.

**Figure of the day:** 73% , the proportion of voters for Germany’s centre-right Christian Democrats who reject collaboration with the hard-right Alternative for Germany. [Read the full story.](#)

## No Trump bump for Big Oil



Despite war in the Middle East, which threatened to reduce supply, and output cuts by OPEC, a cartel of oil exporters, global oil prices remained below \$80 a barrel for most of 2024. This was largely due to rising supply from non-OPEC producers and weaker-than-expected demand from China. Profit margins for refined products also slumped as new refineries came online and demand for diesel and petrol declined. Thus, when ExxonMobil and Chevron, America's two largest energy firms, post fourth-quarter earnings on Friday, they are expected to underwhelm.

This year may not bring much relief. Donald Trump has pledged to [boost American oil production](#), but OPEC is also expected to raise output, which could push crude prices even lower. In response, oil majors are shifting strategy. Chevron is investing in gas-powered plants to supply AI data centres. Mr Trump's efforts to dismantle green-energy policies may slow the transition to renewables—but they won't spark a fossil-fuel boom.

# Costco's battles over pay and politics



On Friday about 18,000 workers at [Costco](#), the world's third-largest retailer, are set to go on strike, demanding higher pay and better benefits. Though they make up a small fraction of the company's 320,000 employees, their action challenges the big-box retailer's reputation as a top employer. More than a third of Costco workers have been with the company for over a decade, and staff turnover is just 8%—far below the retail industry's average of 60%.

Costco is also under fire for its diversity, equity and inclusion policies: 19 Republican attorneys-general have urged it to scrap DEI programmes, echoing Donald Trump's attempt to end federal initiatives. On January 23rd Costco's shareholders rejected a proposal for an independent report on its DEI efforts. The company has defended its stance, stating its commitment to be an "enterprise rooted in respect and inclusion". Costco's position is in contrast to that of other retailers like Walmart and Target, which have reduced their DEI commitments.

# German industry in the doldrums



Germany is due to release preliminary figures on inflation in January and unemployment in December on Friday. Annual inflation is expected to stay at around 2.6%, while unemployment is likely to be unchanged at 6%. Neither figure will offer much comfort to German industry, which is in deep crisis. Peter Leibinger, the head of the Federation of German Industries (BDI), expects a third straight year of contraction in 2025—unprecedented in post-war history.

Industry leaders are looking to Friedrich Merz, the centre-right candidate for chancellor, to [revive growth](#). He has promised corporate-tax cuts, deregulation, reductions in social spending and the abolition of the solidarity tax—introduced after reunification to finance development in the former East. But even if he wins next month's [election](#), businesses will remain anxious about the threat of American tariffs. The BDI warns that such measures could deepen the expected contraction of GDP this year from 0.1% to 0.5%.



# Game over for POGOs in the Philippines



Friday marks the deadline for Philippine authorities to certify that POGOs—offshore gambling operators catering mainly to Chinese punters—have been eradicated from their regions. Gambling is illegal in mainland China, making POGOs a direct challenge to the ruling Communist Party’s authority.

The Philippine government initially tolerated the industry, tacitly dangling its potential shutdown as a bargaining chip in territorial disputes with China over the South China Sea. But as POGOs flourished, so did organised crime, including human trafficking and illicit financial networks linked to [Chinese gangs](#). At the same time, the influx of thousands of Chinese workers drove up rents, pricing out many Filipinos. In July Ferdinand Marcos junior, the president, lost patience and ordered a full shutdown of the lucrative industry. China has welcomed the move. It appears to have won a concession—without offering one in return.

# European rugby scrums down



Wales take on France to kick off the annual Six Nations rugby union tournament on Friday. In 13 of the 24 editions of the Six Nations so far, one team has won all of its five matches, a feat called a “grand slam”. France and Wales have won four grand slams each; Ireland have won three. Italy and Scotland are usually the weakest teams in the tournament.

England are the tournament’s great enigma. Over the lifetime of the Six Nations they have reached three World Cup finals and won one. That is by far the best record among European teams. But they have just two Six Nations grand slams. To win a third, they will have to start on Saturday by beating Ireland in Dublin—something they have not done since 2019. Odds are against them this year, too. Ireland are joint favourites with France to win the tournament.

## 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](mailto:QuizEspresso@economist.com). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

**Friday:** Which number is commonly used to denote an introductory course at an American university?

**Thursday:** What name is shared by a university in Indiana and a French cathedral?



# The winners of last week's crossword



Thank you to everyone who took part in our weekly crossword, published in the weekend edition of Espresso. The winners, chosen at random, were:

**Caron O'Hara**, Harare, Zimbabwe

**Tushar Patel**, Hillsborough, New Jersey, America

**Jane Cunha**, São Paulo, Brazil

They all gave the correct answers of [inauguration](#), [Islam](#), [Urdu](#) and [Nepal](#). Check back tomorrow for this week's crossword.

**Weeds are flowers, too, once you get to  
know them.**

*A.A. Milne*