

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

The eight **European** countries threatened with more tariffs by Donald Trump if they obstruct him over **Greenland** issued a strongly-worded joint statement. They warned that such threats “undermine transatlantic relations” and “risk a dangerous downward spiral”. Ambassadors from the European Union held an emergency meeting. Earlier, Emmanuel Macron, France’s president, condemned the tariff threat as “intimidation”; Sir Keir Starmer, Britain’s prime minister, called it “completely wrong”.

**Iran**’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, accused America and Israel of orchestrating unrest across the country, as he acknowledged the high death toll following nationwide protests. More than 3,000 people have died in **Iran**’s deadliest [unrest](#) in decades, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran, an advocacy group. Mr Khamenei said Mr Trump was responsible for “deaths, damage, and accusations he has inflicted on the Iranian people”.

**Portugal** voted in a presidential election on Sunday. Pre-election polls suggest that André Ventura, from the [populist-right Chega](#) (Enough) party, could go through to a run-off on February 8th. He faces António José Seguro, an independent-minded Socialist, and

João Cotrim de Figueiredo, from a liberal centre party, both of whom have polled strongly. About 11m people are eligible to vote.

**Syria**'s army advanced quickly to the east of Aleppo, in the country's north, taking towns held by [the Syrian Democratic Forces](#), a Kurdish-led coalition of ethnic militias. Last week clashes broke out in Aleppo between the sides, forcing tens of thousands to flee. On Friday Ahmed al-Sharaa, Syria's president, formally recognised Kurdish as a "national language" and restored citizenship to Kurdish Syrians.

**Russia** attacked **Ukraine** with hundreds of drones, killing two people and injuring dozens. Strikes on energy infrastructure caused power failures in several regions amid freezing temperatures. Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, said that this week alone the country had been targeted by 1,300 drones and over 1,000 guided missiles.

Tensions rose further in **Minneapolis**. Protesters against a surge in Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents chased off a group of far-right demonstrators who had planned to march in a neighbourhood popular with immigrants on Saturday. On Friday a judge restricted agents' actions towards protesters. The city has been gripped by demonstrations since an ICE officer killed [Renee Good](#) on January 7th.

A **fire** at a big shopping mall in the Pakistani city of **Karachi** killed at least six people and injured about 20 more. Part of the mall (with about 1,200 shops) collapsed, raising concerns that more people might be trapped in the rubble. It is thought that a short circuit in one of the shops might have started the blaze.

**Word of the week:** Frottage. Something female snow monkeys enjoy doing. [Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: Getty Images

## London mega-embassy fuels Chinese spy concerns

Rarely does the site of a foreign embassy excite much domestic political interest. But Britain's Labour government has attracted plenty of ire for its drawn-out deliberations over whether to [approve plans](#) for a massive Chinese embassy. A decision is expected early next week.

Critics insist that the proposed complex, covering 20,000 square metres in the heart of London's financial district, could be used to conduct espionage. Blueprints show a 208-room basement with a secret chamber in close proximity to cables transmitting sensitive information to the City. British security officials, however, say such challenges are manageable.

If a decision is postponed (for a fourth time), it could make a meeting between British and Chinese leaders in Beijing later this month rather frosty. Yet a go-ahead will generate still more concern that the government is being [soft on China](#).



Photograph: Reuters

## Portugal's challenge from the populist right

Last year André Ventura—a populist right-winger—and his Chega (Enough!) party became the second-biggest in [Portugal's](#) parliament. Now Mr Ventura is running in the presidential election on Sunday. He faces António José Seguro, an independent-minded Socialist, and João Cotrim de Figueiredo for a liberal centre party, both of whom have polled strongly; voting is almost certain to go to a run-off on February 8th. Mr Ventura is unlikely to win the presidency, which has the power to dissolve parliament, veto laws and command the armed forces, despite Portugal's parliamentary government.

Mr Ventura, who has campaigned against immigrants and Roma communities, has become a force in Portuguese politics. Support for Chega, which he founded in 2019, has grown fast. Luís Montenegro, the centre-right prime minister, has sought his party's support on new immigration laws. In the presidential election Mr Ventura will at least hope to match the 23% his party won last year. Others will be looking for signs that his momentum has peaked.



Photograph: AP

## The Gaza peace plan remains an enigma

When Donald Trump's special envoy, [Steve Witkoff](#), announced on Wednesday that the second phase of the American president's peace plan for Gaza had begun, he left more questions than answers. The main news was the unveiling of a fifteen-member technocratic government which is supposed to take over civilian affairs in the enclave. However, it is unclear what powers the so-called National Committee for the Administration of Gaza will have and how it will enforce its rule with half of the coastal strip under the iron-grip of Hamas, and the other half occupied by the Israeli army.

Furthermore, not one country has yet to announce it is contributing troops to the International Stabilisation Force mooted in the Trump plan. Neither is there a plan for the disarming of Hamas and the withdrawal of Israeli troops. It is hard to see how the new administration can effectively run Gaza, and begin the arduous process of rebuilding the [war-ravaged](#) strip, before these questions are answered.



Photograph: Alamy

## The Australian Open's break point

Tennis Australia is nothing if not ambitious. “We want to own January,” the governing body’s chief executive, Craig Tiley, said ahead of this year’s Australian Open. Tennis Australia added a third 5,000-seat show court in 2022 and has since focused on broadening the event from a two-week tournament to a three-week festival. The main singles and doubles competitions, which began on Sunday, are still held over 15 days, but Mr Tiley wants to turn the less well-attended qualifying rounds into an integral part of the occasion.

Attending Opening Week, as the qualifiers have been rebranded, used to be free, but now costs A\$20 (\$13) for a day. Even so, Melbournians are lapping them up. On the first day 29,000 turned up—nearly quadruple the record amount in 2025. The Australian Open’s growth will put pressure on other Grand Slams to keep up. [Wimbledon](#), for instance, remains locked in a legal battle to expand its site.



Photograph: Steffan Hill/HBO

## A Tall Story: “A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms”

“Game of Thrones” heralded a new era in big-budget fantasy television. Adapted from “A Song of Ice and Fire”, novels written by George R.R. Martin, it was a sprawling, no-expense-spared epic with countless characters and locations, armies of extras, and CGI dragons. The second drama to be based on Mr Martin’s work, “House of the Dragon”, aimed for the same blockbuster grandeur. The third, “A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms”, hasn’t set its sights so high.

The new series comprises six episodes. Each features the odd-couple interplay between two lovable men of the people: Peter Claffey, an ex-rugby player, co-stars as the towering Ser Duncan the Tall (also known as “Dunk”) with 11-year-old Dexter Sol Ansell as his tiny, bald squire, Egg. As the broke, bumbling and none-too-bright Dunk fights for his life in a tournament, what unfolds isn’t a highfalutin dynastic saga but a down-to-earth buddy comedy: short and sweet, but with big laughs.



Illustration: Sandra Navarro

## The winners of the week's quiz

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

**Dwight Huntington**, Pennsylvania, America **Gabriela Jiménez**, Mexico City, Mexico **Marco Gonçalves Dias**, Geneva, Switzerland

They all gave the correct answers of: Papa Doc, The Lord's Prayer, Ray of Light, Virgin and Vogue. The theme is hits by Madonna: Papa Don't Preach, Like A Prayer, Ray of Light, Like a Virgin and Vogue.

The questions were:

**Monday:** François Duvalier, the dictator of Haiti from 1957 to 1971, was known by what nickname?

**Tuesday:** Which religious text begins “Our father, who art in heaven”?

**Wednesday:** What form of radiation has a wavelength between 400 and 700 nanometres?

**Thursday:** Richard Branson is associated with which brand name, which has been used in industries such as music, hotels and airlines?

**Friday:** Anna Wintour was the long-serving editor of which fashion magazine?

*Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing.*

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***Benjamin Franklin***