

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

**Iran** said it was keeping communication channels with **America** open after Donald Trump promised that countries “doing business” with it would face immediate new tariffs of 25%. His Truth Social post followed the White House’s announcement that it was [considering strikes](#) on Iran, should diplomacy not suffice. Iran’s regime has reportedly killed more than 600 [anti-government protesters](#) since late December.

All three living former heads of the **Federal Reserve** criticised the Trump administration’s [criminal investigation](#) into Jerome Powell, the Fed’s chair. They described America’s rule of law as its “greatest strength” and the “foundation of our economic success”. Mr Powell said the investigation, relating to a renovation of the Fed’s headquarters, was a pretext to curb the central bank’s independence. Several members of the Republican Party also criticised the probe.

Google’s parent company, **Alphabet**, hit a market valuation of \$4trn, becoming the fourth tech company after Nvidia, Apple and Microsoft to do so. Investors’ confidence has been boosted by the performance of its latest [AI model](#), Gemini 3, which was chosen to run an AI version of Siri, Apple’s digital assistant.

**Paramount** said it would nominate directors to the board of **Warner Bros Discovery** to persuade investors to thwart the latter's \$83bn merger with **Netflix** in favour of Paramount's own all-cash [bid](#). Paramount also sued Warner for more information about [the deal with its streaming rival](#). Last week Warner rejected Paramount's latest offer to buy it for \$108.4bn.

**Minnesota** sued the Trump administration to block its mass deployment of immigration-enforcement officials to the state. The lawsuit describes the operation as "a federal invasion" of its cities. Last week an ICE agent shot and [killed a woman in Minneapolis](#). Separately, the administration was sued by Illinois and Chicago over its [immigration crackdowns](#) there.

**Greenland** said it "cannot under any circumstances accept" [American control](#), while its politicians prepared to meet Marco Rubio, America's secretary of state, on Wednesday. Andrius Kubilius, the European commissioner for defence, warned an American invasion of the self-governing island, which is part of Denmark, would spell the end of NATO. Meanwhile NATO's secretary-general, Mark Rutte, said his organisation was mulling ways to bolster Greenland's security.

Sir Keir Starmer, **Britain's** prime minister, called sexualised images of people—including children—on **Grok** "disgusting and shameful". On Monday the country's media regulator launched an investigation into the generation of such images on the AI tool, which is operated by x. The social-media site, owned by [Elon Musk](#), faces a fine of around £18m (\$24m). Mr Musk accused Britain of seeking "any excuse for censorship".

**Figure of the day:** \$600bn, the value of the global space economy, up from \$300bn a decade ago and expected to triple by 2035. [Read the full story](#).

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Photograph: Getty Images

## Marine Le Pen fights for her political future

Marine Le Pen returns to court in Paris on Tuesday for the start of an appeal hearing that will decide her political fate. The leader of France's populist-right National Rally (RN), along with 11 other party figures, is appealing against her conviction last year for misuse of European Union funds. The court [barred](#) her from running for public office for five years, with immediate effect.

If the appeal court upholds the ruling, Ms Le Pen will be banned from [running](#) in the presidential election in 2027. She could yet take her case to the Court of Cassation, the highest court of appeal, but the timing would be tight. Ms Le Pen and Jordan Bardella—the RN's 30-year-old leader—have agreed that he will be the party's candidate if she cannot stand. A poll in November suggested that Mr Bardella would beat the four likeliest rivals in second-round voting. The hearing will run until February 12th.



Photograph: AP

## SCOTUS weighs transgender sports bans

On Tuesday America’s Supreme Court will hear challenges to laws in Idaho and West Virginia that prohibit transgender girls and women from joining female sports teams. Twenty-five other states have enacted similar bans. The hearing comes seven months after SCOTUS decided that states may bar [transgender minors](#) from receiving puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones.

Idaho argues that female athletes “deserve sex-specific teams” in order to “compete safely and excel”. West Virginia says its law protects “hard-won equal athletic opportunities for both sexes”.

The plaintiffs counter that the bans violate the equal-protection clause of the 14th Amendment and Title IX of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits sex discrimination in educational programmes that receive federal funding. Lawyers representing Becky Pepper-Jackson, who challenged West Virginia’s law as a trans middle-schooler, say she simply wants “to have fun and make friends as part of a team”. The court’s ruling will also shape disputes over military service and access to single-sex toilets.



Photograph: Getty Images

## The Federal Reserve faces a new crisis

Inflation may be cooling, but Donald Trump's war on the Federal Reserve is heating up. On Sunday Jerome Powell, the Fed's chairman, said that the Department of Justice had [subpoenaed](#) the central bank in connection with a row over the cost of renovating its headquarters. Mr Powell, who had sought to diffuse the Fed's clashes with the president by staying quiet, sharply accused Mr Trump of political interference. "The threat of criminal charges is a consequence of the Federal Reserve setting interest rates based on our best assessment of what will serve the public, rather than following the preferences of the president," he said.

The bizarre quarrel is overshadowing the latest inflation data, due on Tuesday. Economists expect to be told that the core consumer price index was 2.7% in December—up from 2.6% in November. The Fed's next rate decision comes at the end of January. Mr Powell insists that the data, not political pressure, will dictate its next move.



Photograph: Getty Images

## America's biggest bank delivers an economic health-check

JPMorgan Chase kicks off fourth-quarter results for the finance sector on Tuesday. The company's earnings are a bellwether for America's banks and the broader economy. For now, Wall Street is cashing in on a [surge in the number of mergers and acquisitions](#) and a 40% rise in deal values globally last year, to almost \$5trn. With a market capitalisation of around \$900bn, JPMorgan is on the cusp of becoming the first bank with a \$1trn valuation.

But investors are on the lookout for weaknesses. Interest-rate cuts by the Federal Reserve are reducing the interest margins that powered big banks' earnings before the [deals bonanza](#). JPMorgan's shares dipped in December when its retail-banking chief, Marianne Lake, warned that American consumers looked "a little bit more fragile". A pullback by America's high-spending households could hurt not just the bank, but the wider market, too.

## **Chasing a trillion**

JPMorgan Chase, market capitalisation, \$bn



Source: LSEG Workspace



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:[email protected]). We'll pick three winners at random and crown them on Saturday.

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

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



Illustration: The Economist

## The winners of last week's crossword

Thank you to everyone who took part in our crossword, published on Friday. The winners, chosen at random, were:

**Tom Kestner**, Tokyo, Japan

**Ozlem Sumnu**, Barcelona Spain

**Patrick allen**, Iver, Britain

They all gave the correct answers of **Nicolas Maduro**, Nelson, Shiraz and occult.

*For there is nothing lost, that may  
be found, if sought.*

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*Edmund Spenser*