

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

**Elon Musk** said that **SpaceX**, his rocket company, would acquire **xAI**, his [artificial-intelligence startup](#). The billionaire suggested that the merger—estimated to be worth \$1.3trn—would enable the construction of “space-based data centres” to train AI models. SpaceX is [considering an initial public offering](#) this year.

**Russia** struck **Ukraine’s** energy infrastructure, ending a pause on such attacks requested by Donald Trump because of freezing temperatures. Ukrainian authorities said the strikes hit power facilities in the capital, Kyiv, as well as several other regions. The bombardment came as American, Russian and Ukrainian officials prepare to [meet for talks](#) this week in Abu Dhabi.

**Spain’s** prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, said his government would seek to ban **social media** for under-16s. He called social networks a “failed state in which laws are ignored” and pledged to force platforms to introduce “effective age-verification systems”. Governments in Europe and Asia are considering introducing such measures [after Australia did so in December](#).

**Palantir** reported revenue of \$1.4bn for the fourth quarter of 2025, up 70% on the previous year. Revenue from American-government contracts rose by 66% over the period. The data-surveillance firm

has drawn criticism from anti-ICE protesters for helping the Trump administration to crack down on immigration. [Alex Karp](#), Palantir's boss, said the firm has safeguards to prevent the government from intruding into citizens' private lives.

**Bill Clinton**, America's president between 1993 and 2001, and his wife **Hillary**, a former secretary of state, agreed to testify in a congressional investigation into the **Jeffrey Epstein** affair.

Lawmakers had planned to vote on holding the couple in contempt of Congress—a criminal offence—after they initially refused to answer questions on [the government's handling of cases](#) involving the dead sex offender.

NASA's bid to return humans to the **Moon** hit a snag. America's space agency aborted a “wet dress rehearsal” of its Artemis II mission, a test of the launch system's fuelling equipment, because of a liquid-hydrogen leak. NASA said the problem would delay the launch of Artemis II, which aims to send four astronauts around the Moon, until at least March.

China's foreign ministry called the **Dalai Lama's** Grammy award for best audiobook “a tool for anti-China political manipulation”. Tibet's spiritual leader won for “Meditations: The Reflections of His Holiness the Dalai Lama”, beating (among other nominees) one half of Milli Vanilli, a German R&B duo. China described the Nobel peace laureate as a Tibetan “separatist”. It wants to choose his successor; by Tibetan tradition he is either [re-incarnated](#) or [“emanates”](#).

**Figure of the day:** \$30bn, the approximate amount that America's government was taking a month in tariffs, plus related taxes and fees, by October. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

## Can Colombia keep Donald Trump happy?

On Tuesday Donald Trump and Gustavo Petro will meet for the first time in Washington, DC. America and Colombia are allies, but the left-wing Colombian president is ideologically opposed to Mr Trump, who in turn appears to despise him. Mr Trump has called Mr Petro an “illegal drug leader” and threatened military action against the country [similar to his operation in Venezuela](#) in January. So far he has held off on such an attack.

Drugs and security will dominate their conversation. Mr Trump wants a crackdown on the coca fields used by armed groups to produce record amounts of cocaine. He may also demand the end of Mr Petro’s peace negotiations with so-called “narco-terrorists”, perhaps in exchange for lifting the sanctions he imposed on Mr Petro last year. For things to go smoothly, Colombia’s leader needs to refrain from provoking his unpredictable counterpart on topics such as the fate of Venezuela’s dictator. It is a tall order.



Photograph: Getty Images

## Turkey's strongman visits Saudi Arabia

On Tuesday Turkey's president, [Recep Tayyip Erdogan](#), will meet Muhammad bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's crown prince, in Riyadh. The pair are expected to discuss trade, defence co-operation and Syria. Turkey has been in talks with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia about a possible defence agreement.

Mr Erdogan and the crown prince have come a long way. Less than a decade ago, they were barely on speaking terms. Saudi Arabia and Turkey fell out over [the murder in Istanbul of Jamal Khashoggi](#), a journalist, on orders of the Saudi regime in 2018. They also clashed over the war in Libya, where they backed rival factions.

But regional upheaval has brought them together. Both support Ahmed al-Sharaa, Syria's president, and are investing in his country. Fears that [America could strike Iran](#) will loom over the talks. Both leaders will hope that America can seal a deal with the Iranian regime—and avoid a regional conflict.



Photograph: Reuters

## America's jobs conundrums

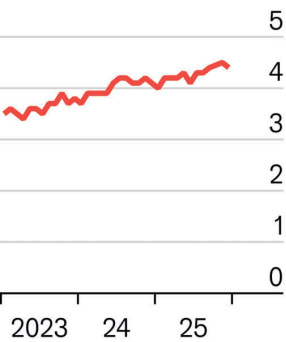
After a wobble last year, America's jobs market seems to be steadying. The unemployment rate is 4.4%, not high in historical terms. Jobless claims remain low, and have actually fallen a little over the past few months. Jerome Powell, the chair of the Federal Reserve, talked of a "stabilisation" in jobs while explaining the Fed's decision at the end of January to leave interest rates unchanged after months of cuts.

A mystery during the second half of 2025 was the divergence between economic growth (booming) and the [jobs market \(sagging\)](#). They usually move together. If the stabilisation that Mr Powell points to continues, it could help clear up the picture. But the partial government shutdown, which began on Saturday, will prolong the uncertainty. Labour-market data releases due out on Tuesday and Friday have been delayed. Congress will have to pass a funding package that covers the Bureau of Labour Statistics before those figures trickle out.

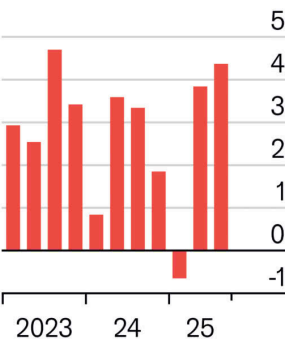
# Contrasting fortunes

United States

Unemployment rate, %



GDP, % change on previous quarter\*



Source: Haver Analytics

\*Annualised



Photograph: Reuters

## **An activist investor shakes up PepsiCo**

PepsiCo reports its fourth-quarter earnings on Tuesday. Analysts expect revenue for the quarter to rise to \$29bn, a year-on-year increase of 4.3%, but this is unlikely to ease pressure on the board. The firm's share price has fallen by more than 8% over the past two years, while that of its rival, Coca-Cola, has risen by 26%. In September Elliott Management, an activist hedge fund, revealed that it had slurped up about 2% of PepsiCo's shares, giving it leverage.

Elliott considers the firm bloated. While Coke focuses on drinks, [PepsiCo](#) is a vast food-and-beverage conglomerate, with products including Doritos chips in addition to its namesake cola. Elliott's demands include ditching the underperforming Quaker Oats brand and outsourcing bottling and distribution. For now, the board has agreed to trim the number of products by around 20% in 2026 to cut costs—enough to mollify the fund and spare itself a time-consuming fight. But Elliott's activism will persist, even if some at PepsiCo would rather they can it.



Illustration: Sandra Navarro

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

**Tuesday:** Which African country is by far the most populous?

**Monday:** Mokha, the port that gave its name to mocha coffee, lies within the borders of which modern country?



*Prejudice is more violent the  
blinder it is.*

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***Elizabeth Blackwell***