

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: EPA

At least 31 people were killed in a **suicide-bomb attack** on a Shia mosque in Islamabad, **Pakistan's** capital. Officials said nearly 170 people were injured. The minority Shia Muslim sect in Pakistan has been the target of violence in the past. **Militant violence** has risen there recently; a suicide bombing in Islamabad in November—the first attack on civilians there in a decade—killed twelve people.

America's **stock market** rebounded on Friday after a run of sell-offs. The S&P 500 and the tech-heavy NASDAQ index both climbed by more than 1.5%, but remain lower than they were on Monday. Investors have been spooked by big tech's vast artificial-intelligence spending plans and a model released by Anthropic, an AI firm, that could challenge some **software companies**.

The EU proposed a ban on all services provided to **Russian** oil tankers, to force the Kremlin back to negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. If backed by all EU member states and G7 countries, the sanctions would **squeeze Russia's energy sector** further by cutting off access to ports and insurance services, for example.

Stellantis booked a €22.2bn (\$26.5bn) charge in its second-half earnings for 2025 to reflect an unwinding of investments in its electric-vehicle business due to lacklustre demand. The European

carmaker (whose largest shareholder part-owns *The Economist*'s parent company) has forecast a net loss of up to €21bn for the period as a result. Its shares fell by more than 20% today.

American and **Iranian** officials met for talks in Oman amid rising tensions. Abbas Araghchi, Iran's foreign minister, said the talks were "positive" but neither side offered further details. America has sent warships to the Middle East and demanded **Iran** pause its nuclear programme after the Iranian government violently repressed protests last month.

Sergei Lavrov, **Russia**'s foreign minister, blamed Ukraine for the shooting of **Vladimir Alexeyev**, a senior Russian general. Mr Lavrov did not provide any evidence. Lieutenant General Alexeyev was hospitalised after the shooting in Moscow. It was the latest of several attacks on high-ranking Russian officers. Three lieutenant generals **have been killed** in or near the capital since December 2024.

Police confiscated more than 25 tonnes of **cannabis** in a raid in Skopje, **North Macedonia**'s capital, the biggest-ever seizure in the country. Officers targeted two operations that were suspected of pretending to cultivate the drug for medicinal purposes, which is legal. Last month police in neighbouring Serbia weeded out a group that was smuggling cannabis thought to have originated in North Macedonia.

Figure of the day: \$1.25trn, the value of the tie-up of Elon Musk's companies SpaceX and XAI. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

Chinese AI companies begin their race to the bottom

America and China have strikingly different business models for generative artificial intelligence. In America, where the overall AI market is estimated to have earned almost twice as much as China in 2025, most companies charge for the use of chatbots and image generators. And (enough) customers are willing to pay: individual subscriptions make up more than half of the revenue of the market leader by earnings, OpenAI.

In China, such apps have generally been free. From Friday Alibaba, a Chinese tech giant, will start paying people to use its Qwen app. The company plans to give out dining and entertainment coupons around Chinese New Year alongside the traditional “red envelopes” (cash handouts). Tencent and Baidu, two rival firms, have announced similar incentives.

This shows two things. First, that Chinese companies have not yet managed to convince consumers that their products are essential, despite an AI craze. Second, that they cannot escape the hyper-competitive mentality of Chinese industry. Oversupply has crushed margins everywhere. AI will not be immune.



Photograph: Getty Images

America and Iran try to stave off war

The stakes could barely be higher when American and Iranian negotiators meet in Oman on Friday. The Pentagon has amassed warships and other weapons in the Middle East. Donald Trump wants Iran to accept a comprehensive deal that would curtail its nuclear-weapons programme, its arsenal of ballistic missiles and its support for [Arab militias such as Hizballah](#). If Iran does not agree, Mr Trump is likely to order a strike—as he threatened last month, when Iran’s regime massacred thousands of protesters.

Abbas Araghchi, the foreign minister, says a nuclear deal is possible but insists the other issues are not up for discussion. America wanted to invite several of its Arab allies to the negotiations. They probably would have given Mr Araghchi an earful about missiles and militias. Iran nixed that idea.

The last time the two countries tried talking, it ended with America bombing Iran’s nuclear facilities. This round of diplomacy is not off to a more promising start.



Photograph: Getty Images

France's pied-à-terre in Greenland

On Friday France will open a consulate in Nuuk, the capital of Greenland. President Emmanuel Macron announced the decision while on a visit to the territory, part of the Danish realm, in June last year. France considers the presence of a consul-general based in the small city of just 20,000 people to be a “political signal”, at a time when Donald Trump still has his sights on the strategically located island.

France has stepped up diplomatic efforts [to stand up to Mr Trump over these ambitions](#). After the American president declared that he would place higher tariffs on goods from countries, including France, which had sent small military contingents to Greenland, Mr Macron retorted that he would call for the European Union to employ its most powerful retaliatory trade measures. Mr Trump has since retreated. But France, and fellow Europeans, continue to take the threat seriously.



Photograph: Alamy

Finally, a tailwind for Orsted

The world's biggest wind-power developer, Orsted, presented its report for 2025 on Friday. The Danish giant has been through a tempestuous time. Its market capitalisation plunged 70% since its peak in 2021 because of supply-chain disruptions, increases in the cost of construction of wind farms and the cancellation of high-profile projects.

The [aversion to wind power of Donald Trump](#), America's president, has added to Orsted's troubles. Last year his government ordered a stop on the construction of five of the company's offshore projects, citing concerns about national security. But Orsted will hope the winds of fate are shifting. On February 2nd a federal judge ruled that Orsted could resume construction off New York's coast, after another judge allowed the firm to restart work off Rhode Island. And on Tuesday Orsted sold its European business for \$1.7bn to Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners, a Danish investment firm, to free up funds for a restructuring that involves shedding 25% of the workforce.

A proper buffeting

Orsted, market capitalisation, \$bn



Source: LSEG Workspace



Photograph: Reuters

Too much ICE, and snow, at the Olympics

The Winter Olympics officially open on Friday with lavish ceremonies in the San Siro stadium in Milan and elsewhere. Geopolitics will provide as much intrigue as the curling or luge competitions.

Will Russia, whose teams are banned, sabotage the inaugural festivities, as it did when South Korea hosted the games in 2018? On Wednesday Russian-aligned hackers mounted attacks on various Italian websites, including “foreign-ministry offices”. Can plucky little Denmark take revenge on Donald Trump for menacing Greenland by beating America in an ice-hockey match on February 14th? For some Italians the American offence is too much ICE: the deployment to Milan of a handful of [Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents](#), to provide security to the American team, has prompted protests. Then there’s the weather. So much snow has fallen in the Dolomites that the first official women’s downhill-skiing training session on Thursday was scrapped.



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

Friday: Between 1958 and 1961, which country was briefly joined with Egypt in the United Arab Republic?

Thursday: Which mainland African country has the longest coastline?

He who walks in the middle of the road gets hit from both sides.

George Shultz