

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

American forces captured Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela’s leader, and his wife, and flew them out of the country. Mr Maduro’s removal followed a series of explosions in and near **Caracas**, the result of American strikes. Venezuela’s government declared a state of emergency, accusing America of imperialism and an attempt to steal the country’s oil and minerals. The capture marks the culmination of a [long-simmering conflict](#) which has recently included the seizure of several oil tankers leaving Venezuela, and the targeting of boats allegedly trafficking drugs from the country.

International responses to the news from **Venezuela** were notably mixed. Javier Milei, the president of Argentina and a close ally of Donald Trump, wrote on social media, “Freedom is advancing. Long live freedom, damn it!”. Kaja Kallas, the EU’s top diplomat, was more circumspect, noting that Mr Maduro lacked legitimacy as a leader, but calling for restraint. Russia’s foreign ministry said the Americans’ “act of armed aggression” was “deeply concerning and condemnable”.

**Iran’s** foreign minister said his country’s army was on standby because of **Mr Trump’s** “reckless and dangerous” statement. The American president had threatened to intervene in Iran if its

government killed more protesters. [Demonstrations](#) over Iran's ailing economy continued for a sixth consecutive day on Friday. At least seven people have died in clashes between protesters and security forces.

**Yemen's** Southern Transitional Council, a [separatist group](#) supported by the **United Arab Emirates**, said it intended to hold a referendum on independence within two years. The announcement came after Yemen's government said it would begin a "peaceful operation" to reclaim military positions in the Hadhramaut province from the STC. The conflict has deepened a rift between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which support rival sides.

**Volodymyr Zelensky**, Ukraine's president, appointed Kyrylo Budanov, the country's intelligence chief, to run the presidential office, replacing Andriy Yermak, who resigned in November amid a [corruption scandal](#). Meanwhile Russian missiles struck a residential building in Kharkiv, in north-eastern Ukraine, injuring at least 25 people, Ukrainian officials said. Russia denied responsibility, blaming the blast on detonating Ukrainian ammunition.

**Swiss authorities** said new findings pointed to sparklers on champagne bottles as the likely cause of a fire on New Year's Eve at a bar in a ski resort, in which at least 40 people died. Investigators said flames spread rapidly after sparks reached the ceiling, and warned that identifying victims would take time. Dozens of injured revellers were transferred to hospitals across Europe.

Ministers in France reported "sexual" content generated by **Grok**, the AI chatbot developed by the social-media platform x, to the country's media regulator. Several users have also flagged sexual images of children and women in recent days. x has not yet responded to the allegations, but Grok has been designed to have

fewer [guardrails](#). Elon Musk, x's owner, has called it a “maximally truth-seeking AI”.

**Word of the week:** Brutalism, an architectural style characterised by hulking, exposed concrete, now in Donald Trump's crosshairs. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: AP

## Gaza's long road to reconstruction

Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, returned home on Friday after meeting [Donald Trump](#) in Florida. The pair agreed to move towards the next stage of [Gaza's reconstruction](#). In the coming days Israel is expected to reopen the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza for the first time since the war began in October 2023—a step that should allow more humanitarian aid into the devastated territory. American officials say further measures are imminent, including the formation of a technocratic administration in Gaza and the building of “planned communities” for displaced residents.

Big obstacles remain. How and whether Hamas will be disarmed is unclear. The militant group still controls much of the strip. Mr Netanyahu reiterated in America that large-scale reconstruction cannot proceed until the group lays down its arms. Israel has also announced that 37 international non-governmental organisations will be barred from operating in Gaza for failing to comply with new regulations—a decision that will probably complicate rebuilding efforts.



Photograph: Getty Images

## The euro zone's newest member

Bulgarians are wrestling with change. On January 1st the country officially adopted the euro, becoming the euro zone's 21st member. The old currency, the lev, can still be used until the end of the month. Though the economy has been performing well, Bulgaria is poor. The average monthly wage is about €1,300 (\$1,530). Some fear that adopting the euro will cause a painful bump in inflation. Still, studies of other countries that have joined the single currency show no persistent inflationary effect.

Bulgaria is experiencing [political upheaval](#), too. On December 11th the prime minister, Rosen Zhelyazkov, stepped down after widespread anti-corruption protests. Around 100,000 people had packed into a central square in Sofia, the capital, an impressive turnout for a country of just 6.4m people. If no new coalition can be formed, the president will appoint a caretaker government and call an election. It would be the eighth in just four years.



Photograph: BBC/Ink Factory/Des Willie

## **The return of the Night Manager**

A decade after he first hit TV screens, Jonathan Pine, otherwise known as “the Night Manager”, is back—on BBC iPlayer in Britain now and on Amazon Prime Video elsewhere from January 11th. In that first season, an adaptation of John le Carré’s novel, a night-shift manager in luxury hotels is drawn into a shadow world of arms-dealing and subterfuge. This time Pine oversees a nocturnal surveillance outfit in London before—you guessed it—being pulled into an undercover operation, again involving gun-runners and rogue spies.

Alas, two of the best characters—Roper, the suavely sinister villain, and his vituperative sidekick, Corkoran—have been bumped off. Untethered from the source material, the plotting and dialogue of the television show sometimes lack le Carré’s worldly bite. Still, in the title role Tom Hiddleston retains the feline stride, misleading smile and haunted conscience that beguiled viewers in 2016. Many will doubtless tune in to his lithe deceptions again.



Photograph: Getty Images

## **Rising rates of diabetes during pregnancy**

Rates of gestational diabetes, a metabolic condition that develops in women during pregnancy when glucose builds up in the blood, rose by 36% between 2016 and 2024 in America. That's according to a new study in *JAMA Internal Medicine*. Researchers analysed 12.6m first-time births and found that the condition rose almost every year across all racial and ethnic groups.

Native American and Alaska Native women, who are typically under-represented in health research, had the highest rates; black women had the lowest. Gestational diabetes occurs when a baby's placenta produces hormones that cause insulin resistance in the mother, for which her body cannot adequately compensate. It usually disappears after birth but can persist, increasing the likelihood of type-2 diabetes and heart disease later in life. It also raises the risk of premature birth and complications during delivery, and can lead to stillbirth. The data show that efforts to reduce the incidence of the condition have failed. Scientists blame bad diets and inactivity among young Americans.





Photograph: Getty Images

## Darts goes global

Darts may conjure up images of beer-soaked pubs. But it is fast becoming a serious sport. Its biggest event, the PDC World Darts Championship, concludes on Saturday at Alexandra Palace in London. The 2026 edition shows how far the sport has come. The tournament has featured 128 players from more than 30 countries. England and the Netherlands remain the best-represented, but contestants also came from India, Kenya, Argentina and Singapore. Darts has grown so popular in Germany that, according to the PDC, German fans bought a quarter of the tickets for the championship.

The final will feature familiar names. The defending champion, Luke Littler of England, will face Gian van Veen, the European champion. Mr Littler, still only 18, has been shattering records since bursting onto the scene. Already ranked the world's best, he could on Saturday become the seventh man to win the title twice.





Illustration: The Economist

## The winners of this week's quiz

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

**Jeannette Duplessis**, Calgary, Canada

**Bruce Fink**, Honolulu, Hawaii

**Roger Bailey**, Wadhurst, Britain

They all gave the correct answers of: Louis XIV, Lewis Carroll, Foreman, Frasier and Ali MacGraw. The theme is heavyweight boxing champions: Joe Louis, Lennox Lewis, George Foreman, Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali.

The questions were:

**Monday:** Which French King was the longest-reigning monarch in history?

**Tuesday:** What pen-name was assumed by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, author of a children's classic?

**Wednesday:** What title is used by both the supervisor of a team of workers in a factory and the spokesman of a jury?

**Thursday:** Which sitcom title character moved back from Seattle to Boston when the show was revived in 2023?

**Friday:** Who plays Jenny, the doomed member of a romantic couple, in the 1970 film “Love Story”?

*Wildlife is something which man cannot construct. Once it is gone, it is gone forever.*

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***Joy Adamson***