

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: AFP via Getty Images

Donald Trump again defended the actions of **Immigration and Customs Enforcement** in Minneapolis. The president said that [ICE agents' killings](#) of Alex Pretti and Renee Good were caused by “Democrat ensued chaos”. Braving freezing temperatures, anti-ICE protesters took to the streets across America. Tim Walz, **Minnesota’s** governor, urged Mr Trump to withdraw federal agents from the state “before they kill another American in the street”.

The price of an ounce of **gold** broke the \$5,000 barrier for the first time. Demand for the metal—which cost \$2,770 an ounce a year ago—shows no sign of slowing as investors [dump bonds and currencies](#) in the face of Mr Trump’s erratic attitude towards international trade. A weakening dollar has also made gold more affordable for those outside America.

Taiwan said it was monitoring “abnormal” changes to [China’s top military brass](#). On Saturday Zhang Youxia, China’s top general, was put under investigation, reportedly for leaking nuclear secrets to America. General Liu Zhenli, the army’s chief of staff, is also being investigated. President Xi Jinping has set a deadline of next year for the People’s Liberation Army to be capable of taking Taiwan.

The **yen** strengthened to around ¥154 to the dollar as investors bet that the Bank of Japan would intervene to support the currency. It had weakened earlier this month amid fears that the [big spending plans of Takaichi Sanae](#), Japan's prime minister, would increase inflation. Ms Takaichi has called a [snap election](#) for February 8th.

The **European Union** opened an investigation into **xAI** after Grok, its chatbot, [generated nude deepfakes](#) of women and children. The artificial-intelligence company, which is owned by Elon Musk, could face fines of as much as 6% of its annual revenue if it is found to have breached the bloc's rules. The company is already under investigation by Ofcom, Britain's media regulator.

Volodymyr Zelensky claimed that American security guarantees for [post-war Ukraine](#) were “100% ready”, with documents waiting to be signed and sent to American and Ukrainian lawmakers for ratification. The Ukrainian president's comments suggest that trilateral talks between America, Russia and Ukraine in Abu Dhabi over the weekend had not been entirely fruitless. Talks are expected to continue this weekend.

Suella Braverman, a former home secretary for Britain's Conservative party, defected to **Reform UK**, the hard-right party of Nigel Farage. Ms Braverman will become the party's eighth MP. She is the latest high-profile Tory to defect. On January 15th [Robert Jenrick](#), the shadow justice secretary, joined Reform. [According to our poll tracker](#), Reform is Britain's most popular party, with the support of nearly 30% of Britons.

Figure of the day: 180m, the number of users that Strava, an exercise app, said it had last month—up from 135m a year earlier. [Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: dpa

Slight signs of hope for Germany's economy

Years of stagnant growth, trade tensions with America and competition from China have made German bosses increasingly gloomy of late, according to the IFO Institute, a German economic think-tank. The IFO's latest monthly business-climate index, published on Monday, showed morale has not yet improved: January's figure was the same as December's.

That is despite Destatis, Germany's statistics agency, saying recently that the economy grew by 0.2% in 2025. Given that the economy is still battling many of the same headwinds, it is a (slightly) positive sign that the IFO's index didn't actually fall, as it had in November and December. Germany's central bank expects the recovery to gain momentum in the second quarter of this year thanks to the government's fiscal stimulus. And looking ahead to 2027, it forecasts that growth will accelerate. Perhaps the controversial decision by Germany's chancellor, Friedrich Merz, to loosen super-strict fiscal rules for investment in defence and infrastructure will at last have the desired results.

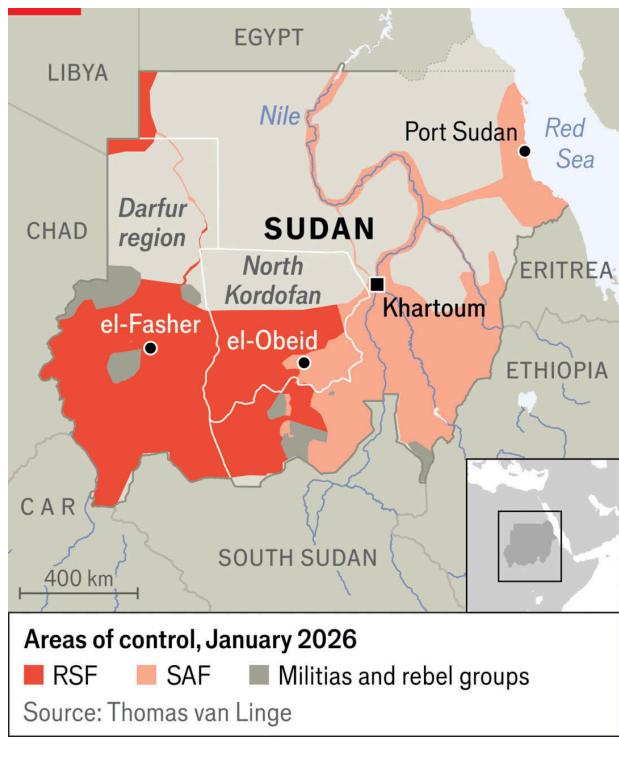


Photograph: Reuters

A Sudanese city under siege

For months the Rapid Support Forces have been trying to capture el-Obeid, the capital of Sudan's North Kordofan region. In recent days the paramilitary group, which has been accused of committing [genocide](#) in the western region of Darfur, has been closing in. On January 21st drone strikes reportedly killed a large number of civilians. Food and medical supplies are scarce. The Sudanese Armed Forces and its allies have assembled on the outskirts of the city, which is home to 1m people. They are preparing to defend it.

The situation has worrying echoes of the fall of el-Fasher, the capital of Darfur. Last year the RSF captured the city from the SAF after a months-long siege. What followed was one of the [worst massacres in recent history](#). So far the RSF has taken several towns and villages around el-Obeid. Should the paramilitary group take control of the city, the SAF's last stronghold in the region, even more bloodshed is likely.





Photograph: Alamy

Could Congress rein in Donald Trump's immigration agents?

The second fatal shooting of a protester in [Minneapolis](#) has inflamed tensions in that city—and in Washington. After the [killing of Alex Pretti](#), an American citizen, by an immigration officer on Saturday, the federal government is careening towards a partial shutdown, starting on Friday. Democratic senators said they would not fund the Department of Homeland Security, which is responsible for immigration enforcement. Assuming Rand Paul, a libertarian Republican from Kentucky, votes against the bill, Republicans will need eight Democratic votes for it to pass.

Democrats are demanding several concessions. They want immigration officers to obtain judicial warrants to enter a home when making an arrest. Reports suggest agents are defying longstanding practice by using warrants signed not by independent judges but by employees of the executive branch. And they want the federal government to investigate and prosecute officer misconduct—something it has shown no interest in doing. As abuses mount, public opinion is turning. About half of Americans believe that Immigration and Customs Enforcement should be abolished, up from around a quarter last summer.



Photograph: AFP

A space race in the Gulf hots up

On Monday the Middle East Space Conference, a three-day shindig hosted by Oman's government, kicked off in Muscat. Spending on space has soared in the region. In the United Arab Emirates, the Gulf's space leader, research and development spending in the sector has increased, by one estimate, ninefold since 2019. The UAE and the Gulf's space runner-ups, Saudi Arabia and Oman, have streamlined regulations in the hope of attracting more money and foreign partnerships.

Their goal is not just to reduce dependence on oil. Gulf states aim to cultivate engineering expertise in satellite systems for national-security reasons. The Ukrainian army's heavy reliance upon its allies' spacecraft for communications and targeting has underscored how important such capabilities are for defence. American and [European outfits](#) will probably sign some big contracts, but Westerners also have reason to be nervous. In the past, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have signed up for space projects with China and Russia. They may choose to continue hedging their bets.



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.

Monday: The press are sometimes referred to by which term, dating back to when the three main classes of society were the nobility, clergy and commoners?

*If you don't have enemies, you
don't have character.*

Paul Newman