

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: AFP

Iran said that it would respond to any **American** attacks by striking American bases in the Middle East. The foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, said any retaliation should not be considered as attacking the bases' host countries. On Friday he had adopted a different tone when saying that **Iran and America** had made a “good start” in talks about the future of his country’s nuclear programme.

Donald Trump deleted a video from his social-media account that depicted **Barack Obama**, a former president, and his wife, Michelle, as apes. Many Republicans joined Democrats in condemning the post as racist. The clip, uploaded on Thursday night, questioned the legitimacy of the 2020 election results. The White House initially defended the video as “an internet meme” and accused critics of “fake outrage”.

America and **India** unveiled an interim **trade framework**—the precursor to a **broader deal** to be signed in March. According to the White House, India has promised to “eliminate or reduce tariffs” on American industrial goods. It has also agreed to spend \$500bn on buying various American products over the next five years. America, meanwhile, will apply a tariff of 18% on Indian imports.

America has demanded that **Ukraine** and **Russia** reach a peace agreement by June, said the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky. America will “probably put pressure on both sides” to meet the deadline, he said, and “will do everything to end the war”. To that end it has offered to host trilateral talks next week, possibly in Miami. Ukraine has confirmed it would join.

China’s highest court overturned the death sentence of Robert Lloyd Schellenberg, a **Canadian** who was charged with drug trafficking in 2014. Mr Schellenberg, who denies any wrongdoing, will now be retried by a people’s court. The decision is seen as further evidence that ties between [Canada and China](#) are thawing. Earlier this year the two countries agreed to a “new strategic partnership”.

America’s **stockmarkets** enjoyed their best day in months as shares in tech firms **rebounded** after a run of sell-offs. The tech-heavy NASDAQ index climbed by around 2% on Friday, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average hit a new high, surpassing 50,000. Bitcoin also surged. Investors had been spooked this week by a model released by Anthropic, an AI firm, that could challenge some [software companies](#).

The **Winter Olympics** officially began with a ceremony in Milan that linked up with three alpine venues. Crowds lapped up Andrea Bocelli’s performance of “Nessun Dorma” and a (slightly robotic) rendition of “Volare” by Mariah Carey, but booed when J.D. Vance, America’s vice-president, appeared on screen. America’s decision to bring immigration and customs agents to the games as part of its security operation has prompted protests in Italy.

Word of the week: *Comandos Jungla* (Jungle Commandos), an elite unit of Colombia’s anti-narcotics police. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Alamy

Sir Keir Starmer's shaky premiership

In September Sir Keir Starmer, Britain's prime minister, sacked Peter Mandelson as ambassador to America over his friendship with Jeffrey Epstein. But files released last week [revealed more details](#) about Lord Mandelson's ties to the dead sex offender. The most serious allegation is that he leaked sensitive information to Epstein during the global financial crisis. Sir Keir has apologised for believing Lord Mandelson's "lies". His Labour party is furious. The prime minister could be forced to fire Morgan McSweeney, his chief of staff, who pushed for Lord Mandelson's appointment. But even that may not satisfy his MPs.

[He has no obvious successor.](#) Angela Rayner, the bookies' favourite, is under investigation by tax authorities. Wes Streeting, the health secretary, was once an ally of Lord Mandelson. After a revolt led by Ms Rayner, the government has agreed to release documents relating to Lord Mandelson's appointment. Another bevy of incriminating details could destroy Sir Keir's premiership.



Photograph: AP

A tense countdown in Haiti

Haiti's nine-member Presidential Transition Council was supposed to steer the country to elections to replace President Jovenel Moïse, who was [assassinated in his bedroom](#) in 2021. But this experiment in rotating presidents has failed: the transitional arrangement is set to end on Saturday and there is no president in waiting, elected or not. The council's members have bickered over which of them should take the job.

While politicians squabble, living conditions are getting worse. Hunger and the threat of violence have displaced more than 1.4m Haitians, and gangs still control most of Port-au-Prince, the capital. There is [a sliver of hope](#). Last year the UN authorised a Gang Suppression Force that will eventually number 5,500; reinforcements are due to arrive in April. Meanwhile, a task-force made up of Haitian police, the GSF and a small number of foreign mercenaries is putting gangs on the defensive for the first time. The question is whether they can continue with no one in charge of the country.



Photograph: Bridgeman Images

A pioneer of fascism

The Marquis de Morès had a habit of blaming his business failures on others. Born in 1858 into a French-Italian aristocratic family, Morès stumbled first as a gunslinging cattle rancher in the Dakota badlands, and then as a would-be railway tycoon in Indochina. Morès grew convinced that Jews were somehow responsible for his tribulations.

In “The First Fascist”, a book published this week, Sergio Luzzatto traces the “sensational life and dark legacy” of the Marquis, who was practising populist politics decades before [Benito Mussolini](#) marched on Rome. Morès exploited French antisemitism, leading violent militias and challenging prominent Jews to duels. Forced to leave France in the mid-1890s after a financial scandal, he went to French North Africa to recruit Muslim Arabs in his anti-Jewish crusade. He met his end at the hands of Tuareg nomads, following a quarrel about a camel, but his ideas lived on. Mr Luzzatto’s fascinating biography makes a good argument that Morès is the father of fascism.



Photograph: Getty Images

The prehistoric act of playing pretend

Imagining things that do not exist has long been thought of as a uniquely human ability. But a new study in *Science*, a journal, finds that apes—or at least one—can play pretend, too.

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore carried out tests with a bonobo named Kanzi. Presented with cups “filled” with imaginary quantities of juice, as well as bowls containing real grapes, Kanzi followed along with the pretend tea party, but was still able to distinguish between the real and imaginary picnic items.

Kanzi, the researchers acknowledged, is a particularly intelligent ape. But the findings suggest that the common evolutionary ancestors of humans and apes, which lived 6m-9m years ago, may have possessed the ability to pretend. Next the researchers want to explore whether apes might share other aspects of human cognition, such as pondering the future and guessing what others are thinking. The inner lives of other creatures might be richer than we imagined.



Photograph: EPA

Weekend profile: Kamiya Sohei, the leader of Japan's hard-right populist movement

“Who’s the main character of Japan?” asks a campaign video for The Do It Yourself Party (Sanseito). Cue the cliché shots of rice farmers, fishermen and an office worker. “You’d stopped believing in change, hadn’t you?” asks Kamiya Sohei, the party’s 48-year-old leader. “It’s not too late.”

Mr Kamiya presents himself as the politician capable of channelling the spirit of ordinary Japanese people. His party went from holding one seat to 15 following upper-house elections last summer, running on a “Japanese First” platform. [An election on Sunday](#) for the more powerful lower house will test how far it can go. The party aims to win 30 seats in the 465-seat chamber.

Mr Kamiya is already reshaping the country’s politics. He established Sanseito in 2020 and won its first seat in parliament two years later by peddling anti-vaccine conspiracy theories and championing organic food. It has since broadened its appeal, in part by railing against global investors, foreign tourists and migrant workers.

Sanseito has right-wing social views: it calls the second world war the “Greater East Asian War”, adopting the nomenclature of the wartime regime, and has submitted a bill to criminalise desecration

of Japan's flag. It also proposes fiscally expansionist policies, such as the abolition of the country's 10% consumption tax.

Mr Kamiya was born in 1977 in a small town in Fukui, in the west of Japan. His party calls itself anti-globalist, but his political awakening came about while he was seeing the rest of the world. Backpacking across 18 countries as a student, Mr Kamiya felt a deep appreciation for Japan, including its safety and harmonious culture, but also growing alarm about its youth.

That experience motivated him to enter politics. He won a seat on a city council in 2007, then ran unsuccessfully for the national parliament as a candidate for the Liberal Democratic Party; he was drawn to the conservative nationalism of the party's then-leader, [Abe Shinzo](#). After his defeat, he established a media company and a YouTube channel, posting videos on history and politics that mostly featured conservative talking heads.

Mr Kamiya's embrace of provocative, fringe ideas appears to be a strategic calculation to gain attention, rather than a reflection of deeply held views. Sanseito supporters are far more likely to rely on social media for information than those who back mainstream parties.

The party's most successful line of attack has been calling migrants in Japan a "silent invasion", channelling economic anxieties over a weak yen and stagnant wages into anger at foreigners. In his speeches, Mr Kamiya references MAGA and Britain's Nigel Farage. The self-styled nationalist appears to be one character in a more global story: the rise of populism.

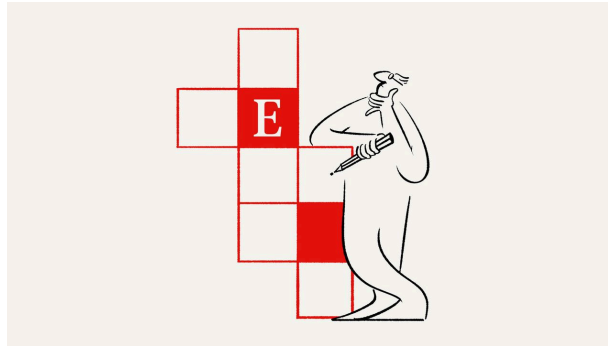


Illustration: The Economist

Mini crossword

We publish a new interactive edition of our crossword daily, allowing you to enter and check the answers and see explanations. Try it [here](#).

Cryptic clues

1 across - Quiet before the French get into central position (5)

2 across - Test the leading currency (5)

3 across - Serif letter contains comb (5)

1 down - Mixed in portion to get red (5,4)

Straight clues

1 across - Flower; factory (5)

2 across - Tribunal or assessment (5)

3 across - To rummage; a type of gun (5)

1 down - A light-to-medium-bodied red wine (5,4)

There are two sets of clues, one for seasoned cruciverbalists and

the other for less experienced solvers. Both give the same answers.

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am GMT on Monday to [\[email protected\]](#). We will pick three winners at random and crown them in Tuesday's edition.



Illustration: Sandra Navarro

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:

Linda Bonger, Zurich, Switzerland

Michel Simard, Gatineau, Canada

Kariem Abdellatif, Uebersyren, Luxembourg

They gave the correct answers of: Yemen, Nigeria, Iran, Somalia and Syria. The theme is countries in which the second Trump administration has launched military action.

*If honour were profitable,
everybody would be honourable.*

Sir Thomas More