

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

**European tech stocks** fell on Wednesday after sharp losses the previous day, as investors reassessed which companies may be hurt by artificial intelligence. Britain's RELX, an analytics firm, fell about 3%, after plunging more than 14% on Tuesday. Tech stocks also fell in Asia. The [sell-off](#) began after **Anthropic**, a privately-owned artificial-intelligence firm, launched an [AI](#) tool that can automate some legal work.

**Eli Lilly**, an American pharmaceutical giant, posted strong earnings for 2025 and forecast robust growth in 2026, buoyed by soaring demand for its [weight-loss drug](#), Zepbound, and diabetes treatment, Mounjaro. By contrast, its European rival, Novo Nordisk, warned sales and profits would fall this year as competition intensifies and American policymakers push down prices; its shares plunged almost 20%.

**America's navy** shot down an **Iranian drone** that it said had “aggressively approached” the *uss Abraham Lincoln*, an aircraft-carrier in the Arabian Sea, with “unclear intent”. Last week Donald Trump [sent an armada](#) to the Middle East. He has repeatedly threatened to [strike Iran](#) if it does not agree to new limits on its nuclear programme and to cut ties with regional militias.

At least 18 people, including four children, were killed in **Israeli** strikes across [Gaza](#), Palestinian officials said. Israel also halted the evacuation of patients through the **Rafah** crossing with Egypt just two days after it reopened. The Israel Defence Forces said it launched the strikes after a gunman shot and seriously wounded a reservist.

Mr Trump signed a bill to end the partial government shutdown, after it passed the **House of Representatives** by 217-214 votes. The measure will fund several agencies until September and the Department of Homeland Security until February 13th, allowing lawmakers to continue negotiating restrictions on [immigration-enforcement agents](#).

**Seif al-Islam Qaddafi**, the son of **Libya's** former dictator, Muammar, was reportedly killed. The circumstances are unclear, but his lawyer said “unknown assailants” assassinated him at home. Mr Qaddafi *fils* was his father’s heir-apparent before the regime collapsed in 2011 and was seen as second only to him in influence in [Libya](#). He ran for president in 2021 but the elections were derailed.

**Walmart's** market value rose above \$1trn for the first time. Investors have been impressed by the [retail giant's efforts](#) to develop new technology to take on e-commerce firms such as Amazon. Walmart recently signed deals with Alphabet and OpenAI that allow its customers to use AI to buy goods.

**Figure of the day:** \$500bn, the value of additional energy and agricultural products that Donald Trump claimed India would buy from America. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

## Taiwan's opposition cosies up to the CCP

Members of the Kuomintang (KMT), Taiwan's main opposition party, are in China this week for a think-tank forum with bigwigs from China's Communist Party. That marks a rapprochement: such forums were once routine, but they were paused after cross-strait relations became strained in 2016. The KMT's vice-chairman is leading this week's delegation. His trip may pave the way for a meeting between Xi Jinping, China's leader, and [Cheng Li-wun](#), the KMT's new chair, who thinks that getting closer to China will help avert an attack on Taiwan.

The forum was supposed to focus on co-operation regarding matters such as tourism. But both sides have been using the opportunity to advocate for "rejuvenating the Chinese nation". Such remarks will no doubt draw criticism from Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party, which supports independence. Opinion polls show that a majority of Taiwan's people have little appetite for unification. But the KMT will see the forum as a step towards achieving their goal of reconciliation with China.



Photograph: Reuters

## America pitches a critical-minerals “alliance”

On Wednesday America’s State Department convenes a meeting in Washington, DC, aimed at building supply chains for [critical metals](#) that do not rely on China. The stated goal is to form an alliance with like-minded countries, which may involve guaranteeing a minimum price for the commodities.

Some will be sceptical about America’s new-found zeal for co-operation on this issue. In recent months the Trump administration has largely acted unilaterally, pledging billions of dollars for projects and stockpiles at home, and signing deals with countries such as Australia and Saudi Arabia. America’s efforts are led by David Copley, a former gold miner who sits on the National Security Council. The administration has mostly ignored the European Union, [which has been slow to act](#).

However, ministers from G7 countries (and a dozen others) are expected to attend on Wednesday. They will find out if America is really interested in embracing a more multilateral approach. Mining’s new great game is just getting started.



Photograph: Getty Images

## The era of nuclear-arms control is over

New START, the last treaty limiting American and Russian nuclear arsenals, is about to expire. Though he has spoken of “denuclearisation”, Donald Trump has ignored calls by Russia to abide voluntarily by the treaty’s limits on “strategic” (ie, long-range) weapons for another year.

The [new nuclear age](#) will be more complex than that of the cold war. The two-power nuclear stand-off is becoming a three-way contest as China builds up its arsenal. It has grown from 240 warheads in 2012, when Xi Jinping came to power, to 600-plus, and is on track to exceed 1,000 by 2030, reckons the Pentagon.

That is well behind Russia and America, which have 5,000-odd warheads each, but big enough for America to worry that it lacks the weapons to deter both Russia and China. Short of a last-gasp deal, America is poised to deploy perhaps hundreds of warheads from its reserves in the coming months. A new arms race looms.



Photograph: Getty Images

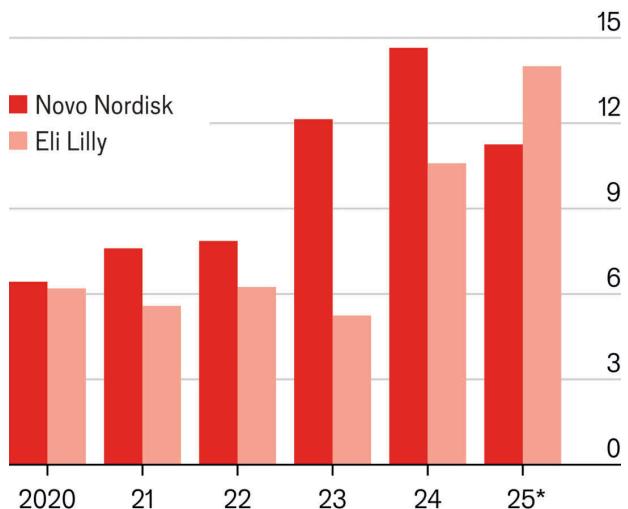
## Novo and Lilly battle for profits

Eli Lilly, an American drugmaker, reports quarterly results later on Wednesday; Novo Nordisk, its Danish rival, did so earlier in the day. Novo was first to market GLP-1s, a class of drugs that reduce their users' appetite, and thus weight. The firm announced sales of DKr309bn (\$49bn) in 2025, up 10% from the previous year at constant exchange rates. But Lilly has still taken the lead. In 2025 sales of Zepbound, its injectable drug, overtook those of Wegovy, Novo's equivalent.

Novo has been attempting a comeback. In January it introduced an oral version of Wegovy, which showed superior [weight-loss results](#) to Lilly's pill in clinical trials and is much cheaper than injectables. Lilly is expected to release its own pill later this year. Both companies are also developing drugs that promise fewer side-effects. But it could take a while for Novo's investments to pay off: on Tuesday the firm warned that sales in 2026 could decline by as much as 13%. Its shares dropped by nearly 20% on Wednesday.

## Weight-loss wars

Pharmaceutical companies, net profit, \$bn



\*To September 2025

Source: FactSet



Photograph: Getty Images

## The euro zone gets over inflation

Inflation in the euro zone is [back on target](#). Annual price increases for January slowed to 1.7%, according to data released on Wednesday, down from 2% for December. The figures all come in below the European Central Bank's 2% annual target.

Spain (from 2.9% year on year in December, down to 2.4% in January) and France (0.7% to 0.4%) reported steep drops in inflation, although Germany's rose. Adding to the downward pressure on inflation could be a stronger euro. Compared with the dollar, the euro has gained almost 15% since early February 2025, which will be felt in prices over time. The ECB, which meets on Thursday, lowered interest rates between June 2024 and June 2025, but has held them since. Low inflation will give it some room to consider a further cut.



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

**Wednesday:** The Pahlavi family ruled which Middle Eastern country?

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

*Knowing what must be done does  
away with fear.*

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**Rosa Parks**