

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.

Israel said it would partially reopen **Gaza's** Rafah border crossing with Egypt, a vital entry point for aid, after the body of the final Israeli hostage in the enclave is located. Israel's army has launched a “large-scale operation” to retrieve the remains of Ran Gvili. The crossing was supposed to have reopened during the first phase of [a ceasefire](#) that was agreed in October.

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 tri-lateral talks between America, Russia and Ukraine in Abu Dhabi over the weekend had not been entirely fruitless. Talks are expected to continue this weekend.

Britain's ruling Labour Party barred Andy Burnham, the mayor of Greater Manchester, from standing as its candidate in a forthcoming by-election, saying it would be too costly to run a mayoral campaign to replace him. Figures on the party’s left strongly criticised the decision. Mr Burnham is widely seen as a contender to [challenge](#) Sir Keir Starmer, the unpopular prime minister, for the party’s leadership.

In **Melbourne** anti-immigration demonstrators clashed with marchers protesting against [Australia Day](#), which marks the landing of the First Fleet of British convicts in Sydney Cove in 1788. Riot police were reportedly deployed. Every year Australians get tangled in an argument over the event, which is seen by many indigenous Australians as celebrating colonisation.

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

Germany's economy shows signs of hope

The IFO Institute, a German economic think-tank, will publish its monthly business-climate index on Monday. In November and December the index found that German bosses were increasingly gloomy after years of stagnant growth, trade tensions with America and competition from China.

There is a chance that it improved in January. Earlier this month Destatis, Germany's statistics agency, said that the economy grew by 0.2% in 2025. But the economy is still battling high and unpredictable American tariffs, as well as [Chinese competition](#) and the high cost of labour and energy. Such headwinds mean any improvements will be modest. 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.

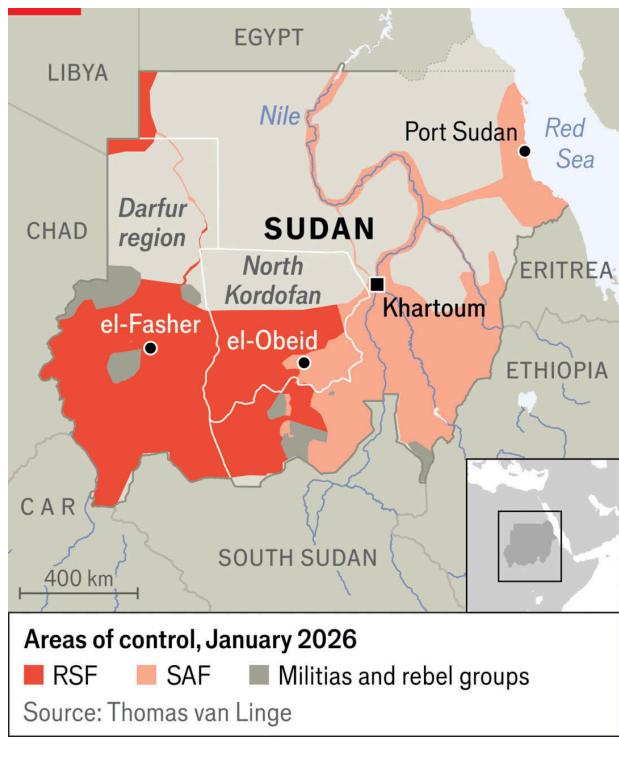


Photograph: Reuters

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