

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: AFP via Getty Images

Volodymyr Zelensky left for Mar-a-Lago, where he will meet **Donald Trump** on Sunday to discuss ending the war between Russia and [Ukraine](#). Earlier Russia launched a large aerial attack on Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital, killing at least two people, wounding at least 46, and leaving thousands without power. Ukraine’s president said that the attacks showed the “true attitude of Putin” ahead of peace negotiations.

Cambodia and **Thailand** agreed to an immediate ceasefire after 20 days of fighting that killed at least 101 people and displaced hundreds of thousands of others. The neighbouring countries said they would not advance their troops beyond current positions. [The recent clashes](#) followed the breakdown of a previous ceasefire agreement that had been brokered by Mr Trump.

Ukraine’s **anti-corruption agency** said that state security guards had obstructed its agents during a probe into an alleged bribery scheme, in which lawmakers purportedly accepted money for voting in certain ways. A separate corruption probe into Ukraine’s energy sector recently [toppled](#) several officials close to the president. Rooting out corruption is seen as vital to the country’s bid to join the European Union.

China proposed regulations on **artificial-intelligence** services that simulate human personalities. New rules would require providers to monitor users' emotional states, to prevent excessive use, and to prohibit any content that might threaten national security. China has seen a surge in the use of AI companion bots this year. Some worry that **the technology** is harmful, and could worsen the country's declining birth rate.

A **bombing** at a mosque in Homs, a city in **Syria**, killed at least eight people and injured 18 more. Syria's government said the attack, which took place in a predominantly **Alawite** neighbourhood, was a "terror crime" aimed at destabilising the country. A militant group called Saraya Ansar al-Sunna has claimed responsibility for it.

A **winter storm** delivered heavy snow, high winds, ice and freezing rain to New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Massachusetts. The severe weather has grounded over 2,000 flights since Friday, leaving many holiday travellers stranded. New York City expects snowfall to peak at a rate of two or more inches per hour—the most snow the city has seen since 2022.

The **Bayeux Tapestry**, an 11th-century **embroidery** depicting the Norman conquest of England—including the legendary moment that Harold Godwinson, the English king, was struck through the eye with an arrow—will be insured by Britain's treasury for an eye-watering £800m (\$1.08bn) as it travels from Normandy to the British Museum, ready for display in September next year.

Word of the week: *Denisovans*, an elusive human species with origins in Siberia. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Eyevine

2026 in preview: A second helping of weight-loss drugs

Until January 2nd we are looking ahead to next year's big stories. Today, what will shape science and culture?

The appetite for weight-loss drugs is insatiable. Not only do they promise trimmer waistlines; they also seem to reduce the risks of cardiovascular disease, kidney failure and other obesity-related conditions. In 2026 [watch out for new options](#) emerging—some easier to take, some more effective, and some that may curb unwanted side-effects.

Novo Nordisk, the Danish company behind Wegovy and Ozempic, as well as Eli Lilly, its American rival are developing weight-loss pills which are more convenient to take than jabs. Improved versions of injectable drugs are being developed. Eli Lilly is also working on retatrutide, a “triple agonist” injectable that has been dubbed the “Godzilla” of weight-loss medicines. A longer-acting GLP-1 jab that can be administered monthly, rather than weekly, is in trials.

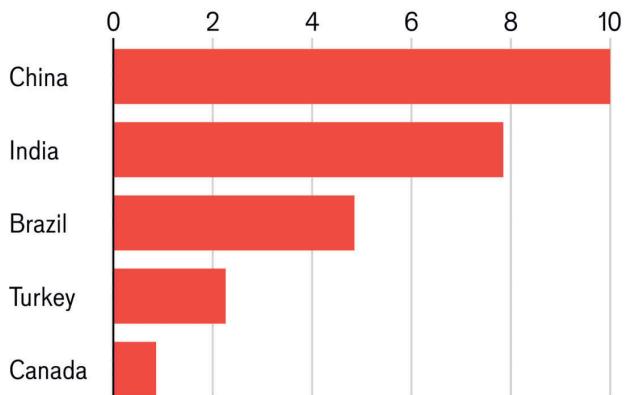
In early 2026 key patents for semaglutide, the active ingredient in Wegovy and Ozempic, will expire in several large emerging markets including Brazil, China, India and Turkey. Increased competition could make the weight-loss drugs go truly global.

Thinning out

Selected countries where semaglutide

patent loses protection in 2026

Obese adult population as % of world total



Sources: World Obesity Federation; UN; *The Economist*



Photograph: Enhanced Games

2026 in preview: Get ready for the “doping Olympics”

How about this for a bold and controversial idea: a sporting event where the use of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) is not just permitted, but encouraged? That is exactly the point of [the Enhanced Games](#), which take place for the first time [in Las Vegas](#) in May. Its organiser claims the event takes a stand for freedom and choice. Not everyone is convinced: derided as the “[doping Olympics](#)”, the idea has drawn intense criticism from some sporting bodies.

The programme will feature swimming, track events and weightlifting, with prize money of \$500,000 per event. There is a \$1m bonus for anyone who breaks a world record for the 50m freestyle and 100m sprint. Athletes do not have to use PEDs to compete. Those who do enhance will have to do so under close medical supervision. Organisers say that makes it the “safest” sporting event in history. For sports fans, it will also be among the most divisive.



Photograph: Getty Images

2026 in preview: Peak wine

For the first time in modern history, wine is undergoing a decline unrelated to broader financial conditions. The volume sold in major markets in 2024 was around 9% lower than at its height in 2014, according to IWSR, an alcohol-data firm. Both the global volume and value of wine sold will fall next year.

Demography and culture are [driving the trend](#). Health-conscious drinkers are indulging less often and opting for lower-alcohol alternatives. Younger consumers are not devoted wine-drinkers. In big markets, including America and western Europe, population growth has slowed or reversed, while fast-growing Muslim countries have fewer oenophiles.

In 2026 watch demand (and pricing) for [Bordeaux](#), as well as [the fate of vineyards](#). Look for more consolidation, too, as some shrinking wine businesses trade hands. But it is not all sour grapes: expect [premium wines](#) to fare better, as people drink fewer but higher-quality bottles.



Photograph: Eyevine

2026 in preview: Podcasting is celebrated at the Golden Globes

About 40% of Americans tune in to podcasts. More millennials say they would prefer to meet their favourite podcast host than a beloved film or TV star. Hollywood is listening: in January the Golden Globes will become the first major film and television award ceremony [to recognise the best podcast of the year](#).

The world has more than 4.5m podcasts, so choosing a winner will not be easy. The Globes have drafted in Luminate, an analytics firm, to narrow down the top 25 podcasts using measures such as audience size and market presence. Bookies' favourites include “The Joe Rogan Experience”, [America’s most popular](#), and “Call Her Daddy”, a show about sex and relationships.

The new category also reflects the link between podcasts and the screen. Hosts post videos of their shows to reach a wider audience; hit TV shows now offer companion podcasts. Regardless of who prevails, the award demonstrates the rapid rise of the medium.



Illustration: The Economist

The answers to this week's quiz

Thank you to everyone who took part in this week's quiz. We will not crown winners this week. As our holiday gift, consider yourself to be one if you got all of the following answers correct:

The North pole, Sleigh Ride, reindeer, chimney sweep and Silk Stockings. The theme is Father Christmas or Santa Claus, who lives at the North Pole and travels in a sleigh pulled by reindeer to come down the chimney and put presents into Christmas stockings.

The questions were:

Monday: Robert Peary claimed to reach which point in 1909, although the first group to manage the feat, and show verifiable evidence, was a Soviet expedition of 1948?

Tuesday: Which orchestral piece, composed by Leroy Anderson, was turned into a hit song by the Ronettes in 1963?

Wednesday: Rangifer tarandus, an animal sometimes referred to as a caribou, is more generally known by what name?

Thursday: Bert, played by Dick van Dyke in the film "Mary Poppins", was a member of which profession?

Friday: After which 1957 film, also featuring Cyd Charisse, did Fred Astaire announce his retirement from movie musicals?

*The time is always right to do
what is right*

Martin Luther King junior