

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Middle East Images/AFP via Getty

Iran's army swore it would protect public property in the face of ballooning anti-establishment [protests](#) throughout the country. Earlier Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei accused protesters of appeasing Donald Trump, while Mr Trump warned Iran's leaders not to start shooting or "we'll start shooting too". Rights groups estimate that authorities have killed at least three dozen people since protests began on December 28th.

Thousands of people protested in **Minneapolis** after an [immigration officer killed](#) a woman in her car on Wednesday. The Trump administration has excluded state investigators from the case, and cast the victim, **Renee Nicole Good**, as a left-wing terrorist. Footage of the incident showed the officer insulting Ms Good after he had shot her.

Elon Musk hit back at critics of his social-media platform **X**, saying they are looking for "any excuse for censorship" after the site's AI tool, Grok, sparked outrage for allowing users to [generate sexualised images](#) of people without their consent (including children). Earlier Indonesia became the first country to block Grok. In response to the criticism, X restricted Grok's image editing features to paying subscribers.

Meeting **oil executives** at the White House, Mr Trump said that he [expects](#) majors to spend at least \$100bn in **Venezuela**. Darren Woods, the boss of ExxonMobil, cautioned that the country was currently “uninvestable”. Earlier America seized another oil tanker in the Caribbean. Officials say the *Olina* was suspected of carrying oil due for Venezuela, breaching America’s embargo.

Following the meeting, Mr Trump again said that **America** must “own” **Greenland** to save its falling into Chinese or Russian hands. America would [take it](#) “the easy way” or “the more difficult way”, he added. Mr Trump thinks Greenland vital for America’s defence. It is also [home to the world’s most desired raw materials](#). Denmark, which owns the autonomous territory, has expressed horror at talk of annexation.

After 25 years of negotiations, a qualified majority of **EU** countries backed [a trade deal](#) with **Mercosur**, a South American bloc, to create a common market of over 700m people. The European Commission is now expected to ratify the agreement in Paraguay as early as next week. **France** opposed the deal, along with Austria, Hungary, Ireland and Poland, who fear that food imports from Latin America will undercut their farmers.

Macclesfield, an **English football** team in the sixth division, caused an upset by beating London’s Crystal Palace, the holders of the prestigious **FA Cup** (the country’s main knockout competition). The teams are separated by 117 ranking spots. After the 2-1 victory, stunned Macclesfield fans rushed the pitch to celebrate with players.

Word of the week: Mafia monks, misbehaving members of Thailand’s monastic order who rocked Thai Buddhism in 2025. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

A tense weekend in Minneapolis

Jonathan Ross, an Immigrations and Customs Enforcement agent, fatally shot [Renee Nicole Good](#) in Minneapolis on Wednesday. Although there is ample footage of the shooting, much about it remains unclear. Not that you'd know it from the Trump administration. The president immediately decided that Ms Good "viciously ran over" Mr Ross, who shot in self-defence. His lieutenants have been quick to parrot this line. Several have claimed ICE agents are immune to prosecution. That is not true, but it is difficult for state officials to charge federal officers. And the FBI has now excluded Minnesota's investigators from their probe, making it even harder.

Minnesotans, angered by the administration's response, have been protesting. Meanwhile more immigration agents are reportedly on their way to the city. Tim Walz, Minnesota's governor, seems concerned about a potential clash. He has put the National Guard on alert that they might be needed to protect Minnesotans' right to protest.



Photograph: Reuters

China's annual Africa tour

It is customary for China's top diplomat to kick off the year with a tour of Africa. It is also tradition for Africa watchers to parse the itinerary of Wang Yi, the foreign minister, for clues about the future of relations between African countries and their biggest trading partner. Between January 7th and 12th Mr Wang is visiting Ethiopia and Tanzania, two of the continent's fastest-growing economies, as well as Lesotho in southern Africa, which has been hit hard by American tariffs.

China appears to be doubling down on its attempts to [woo Africa](#) in the global trade war. But Mr Wang's trip to Somalia, the first by a Chinese foreign minister since the 1980s, is most noteworthy. Last month Israel became the first country to recognise the breakaway republic of Somaliland as a sovereign state. China, like Somalia's federal government, strongly criticised the move, seeing parallels with its own relationship with Taiwan. The question now is whether Mr Wang offers more than rhetorical support for Somalia's territorial claims.



Photograph: Reuters

A road block for India's reform express

In recent weeks India has boarded what Narendra Modi, the prime minister, calls a “reform express”. His government has unveiled a spate of measures to boost growth, including a new labour code and a simplified customs-duty regime. As ever, reform has provoked resistance. But the biggest backlash will begin on Saturday, when opposition parties launch nationwide protests against changes to MGNREGA, India’s flagship rural-jobs programme. It guarantees rural households up to 100 days of paid work annually and is popular: in 2024-25 around 160m households registered for it.

The government has now revamped the scheme. It has rechristened it G RAM G (a nod to the Hindu god Ram) and, more consequentially, altered its operating model, requiring state governments to bear a larger share of costs and tying disbursements to infrastructure projects. The government says that will modernise the scheme, but critics warn that cash-strapped states will struggle to comply, weakening its impact. The protests may not derail Mr Modi’s reform drive. But they could yet slow it down.



Photograph: Getty Images

More questions than answers for Ukraine

This week a group of Ukraine’s allies, the “coalition of the willing”, made big headlines when it gathered in Paris. Most notably, Britain and France agreed to provide a “reassurance force” of 15,000 troops in the event of a ceasefire. But this and other bold-sounding developments leave ample room for doubt.

Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine’s president, bullishly claims that a deal to end the war with Russia is “90% ready”. The remaining 10%, however, includes such vital issues as the fate of the quarter of the Donetsk region that Ukraine still holds but Russia wants. The European security agreement is equally questionable, given the [vagueness](#) of America’s commitment to back it with serious military support if Russia attacks again.

Progress in America is similarly iffy. Lindsey Graham, a Republican senator, claims that Donald Trump has “greenlit” his long-stalled bipartisan Russian sanctions bill. A vote could come within days. Whether Mr Trump has any genuine intention of enforcing it is another matter.



Photograph: Reuters

Weekend profile: Delcy Rodríguez, Venezuela's new dictator

Delcy Rodríguez was 19 when she swore she would leave Venezuela. It was 1988 and Carlos Andrés Pérez had been elected for a second term as president. She hated the country's political elite and its clubby two-party system. When she went to study in Europe, she told everyone that revolution was coming. In 1998, it arrived. Hugo Chávez, a fire-breathing socialist, won Venezuela's presidential election.

The fate of *chavismo*—and Venezuela's regime—now rests, at least in part, with her. On January 3rd American special forces [snatched Nicolás Maduro](#), Chávez's successor and the country's president since 2013, from his safehouse in Caracas, the capital. Two days later Ms Rodríguez, Mr Maduro's vice-president, was sworn in as acting leader. She is oscillating between an emollient tone, calling for a “co-operation agenda” with the United States, and raging against its “terrible military aggression” to assuage hardliners.

Ms Rodríguez's career has been defined by a professed ideological commitment to the “revolution” that Chávez began, combined with a ruthless pragmatism to ensure she and her cabal stay in power. She has some revolutionary pedigree. Her father, Jorge Antonio Rodríguez, was a Marxist guerilla who helped abduct an American businessman in 1976. He was arrested shortly after the kidnapping

and died under torture by the security services. His “martyrdom”, as Ms Rodríguez has called it, marked her and her brother, also called Jorge, who now leads the National Assembly.

In the 1980s she read law at university, in her telling, “to do justice in her father’s case”. After studying in Europe she returned to Venezuela to work for Chávez. Mr Maduro’s ascent to the presidency, after Chávez’s death, paved the way for her rise. He had been close to the Rodríguez siblings for decades. She served in several top posts before becoming vice-president in June 2018, after Mr Maduro flagrantly stole an election. She also became head of SEBIN, a state intelligence agency, and had a hand in a crackdown on protests. SEBIN’s grisly methods have earned Ms Rodríguez the moniker of “torturer-in-chief” in opposition circles.

But she also has a reputation as perhaps the regime’s top technocrat. As finance minister from 2020 to 2024 and then oil minister, Ms Rodríguez set aside a raft of socialist principles to rescue Venezuela’s cratering economy. Business figures say she responds to messages in the early hours or late at night; colleagues call her a workaholic.

Before the raid, American intelligence reportedly concluded that Ms Rodríguez was among those most capable of [stabilising Venezuela](#) were Mr Maduro to fall. Rumours stir that she may have helped their operation. Working with the Trump administration goes against her apparent revolutionary convictions. Still, Ms Rodríguez may hope that doing so will keep the regime, however weak, in power.



Illustration: The Economist

The winners of the week's quiz

Thank you to everyone who took part in this week's quiz. The winners, chosen at random, were:

Ahmed Al Suwaidi, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Iskriyana Vasileva, Berlin, Germany

Himmat Kalsia, New Delhi, India

They all gave the correct answers of: a candle, millionaire, Hot Chocolate, Joe DiMaggio and Arthur Miller. The theme is Marilyn Monroe, about whom Elton John wrote the song “Candle in the Wind”, who starred in “How to Marry A Millionaire” and “Some Like It Hot” and who married both DiMaggio and Miller.

The questions were:

Monday: The SI unit for luminous intensity is originally based on the light emitted by what object?

Tuesday: What term for a rich person was originally coined during France’s Mississippi Bubble in the early 18th century?

Wednesday: Which band, which shares its name with a drink, had a hit with “You Sexy Thing”, a song that featured in the firm “The Full Monty”?

Thursday: Which baseball player is mentioned in the song “Mrs Robinson” by Simon & Garfunkel?

Friday: Who wrote the plays “All My Sons” and “The Crucible”?

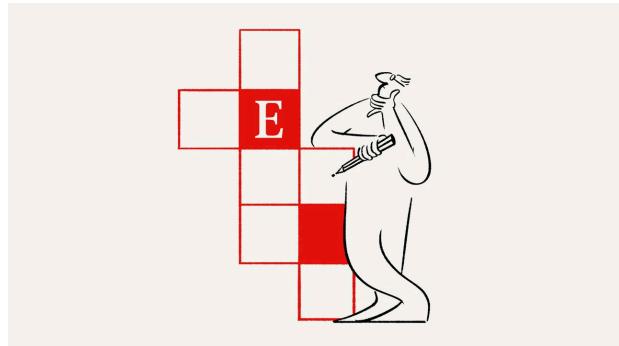


Illustration: The Economist

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](#).

There are two sets of clues, one for seasoned cruciverbalists and the other for less experienced solvers. Both give the same answers.

Cryptic clues

1 across - Admiral in the north with the Spanish boy (6)

2 across - Iranians' city tipple (6)

3 across - A southern Californian county gang is up to no good (6)

1 down - A clamorous din shook this captive (7, 6)

Straight clues

1 across - The surname of Admiral Horatio, who bested the French at Trafalgar (6)

2 across - The capital city of Fars, a southern Iranian province (6)

3 across - Another word for black magic (6)

1 down - The Venezuelan despot whisked from Caracas by Donald Trump's army (7, 6)

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

“Success is often achieved by those who don’t know that failure is inevitable.”

Coco Chanel