

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

**European leaders** may meet on Monday, as they seek a coherent response to Donald Trump’s increasingly forceful attempt to acquire **Greenland**. Over the weekend the eight European countries that Mr Trump has threatened with increased tariffs issued a strongly worded statement, warning of the threat to transatlantic relations. Europe’s [options](#) include retaliatory tariffs, shutting American military bases and dumping Treasuries. All are [problematic](#).

A **crash** between two high-speed **trains** in southern **Spain** killed at least 39 people and injured 150 others. The incident occurred when a service travelling from Malaga to Madrid derailed and collided with an oncoming train. The cause is not yet known. Pedro Sánchez, Spain’s prime minister, described it as a “night of deep pain”.

**China’s economy** grew by 5% in 2025, meeting the government’s target, according to official figures. A record trade surplus helped. The news wasn’t entirely rosy: GDP growth slowed in the fourth quarter, to 4.5%, the lowest rate in three years and down from 4.8% in the third quarter. [China’s](#) nominal growth was also slower than the inflation-adjusted figure because of falling prices.

**Syria's** government announced a truce with the Kurdish-led [Syrian Democratic Forces](#). The ceasefire follows more than a week of fighting. The deal will allow the central government to take control of three provinces in the north and east that have been under SDF control. Kurdish militia will also be integrated into the national army.

António José Seguro, an independent-minded socialist, won the first round of **Portugal's** presidential election. He will face André Ventura, from the populist-right Chega (Enough) party, in a run-off on February 8th. It is the first time since 1986 that a Portuguese presidential election has gone to a run-off; the country's politics have become more fragmented with Chega's rise.

Masoud Pezeshkian, **Iran's** president, warned that an attack on the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, would be tantamount to declaring "a full-scale war". Mr Pezeshkian also blamed sanctions by America and its allies for the hardships faced by [Iranians](#). On Saturday Mr Trump said Mr Khamenei was a "sick man" and that it was "time to look for new leadership in Iran".

A **fire** at a big shopping mall in the Pakistani city of **Karachi** killed at least 11 people; more than 60 are still missing. Part of the mall (with about 1,200 shops) collapsed, raising concerns that more people might be trapped in the rubble. It is thought that a short circuit in one of the shops might have started the blaze.

**Figure of the day:** 47%, the proposed cut to NASA's science funding. [Read the full story.](#)

*In which year did American forces snatch another Latin American dictator, Manuel Noriega of Panama? Test your knowledge with our [latest history quiz](#).*



Photograph: AP

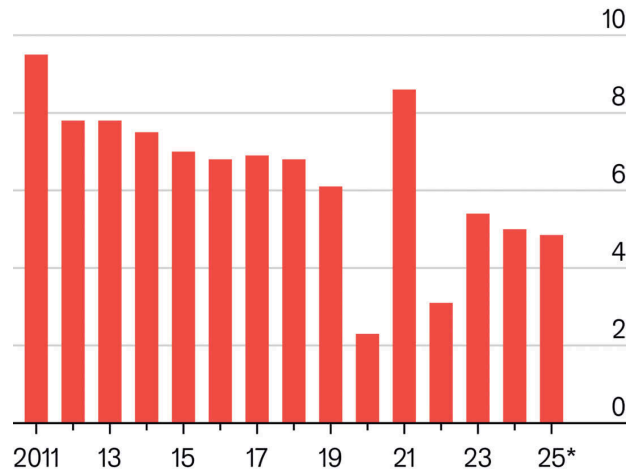
## **China's economy hits the (official) bullseye**

Figures published on Monday showed that China's economy met its official GDP growth target for 2025 of 5%, even as the country's population fell for the fourth year in a row. Economic growth was boosted by a record trade surplus, which reached almost \$1.2trn despite the tariff war with America. China's government is expected to approve a similar growth target for 2026 when its legislature meets in March.

Beneath the headlines, however, a more troubling picture emerges. Fixed-asset investment shrank last year for the first time since 1989. And thanks to falling prices, China's nominal growth was slower than the real (inflation-adjusted) figure. Indeed, some economists think the weaker, nominal data is the more reliable guide to the true state of China's economy. Some also think the awful investment figures have been distorted by past statistical shenanigans. China's official figures may be simultaneously too good and too bad to be true.

## The dragon decelerates

China, GDP, % increase on a year earlier



Sources: IMF; Trading Economics

\*Estimate



Photograph: Reuters

## Greenland casts a shadow over Davos

The world's bigwigs descend on the Swiss mountain resort of Davos on Monday for the annual World Economic Forum. One man, though, will dominate the conversation: Donald Trump. The theme of this year's gathering is "A Spirit of Dialogue", but it seems America's president didn't get the memo. Accompanied by a big team, he will arrive to give a speech on Wednesday fresh from threatening his closest European and NATO allies with more tariffs if they [don't let him purchase \(or worse\) Greenland](#).

On Sunday those leaders responded with an unprecedented joint statement condemning the threats and warning of a "dangerous downward spiral" in relations. The rest of the 65 or so national leaders at Davos will also be plotting their own responses. Meanwhile, the 850 chief executives and chairmen of global firms coming to the confab are reeling from the Trump administration's various other recent actions aside from tariffs, including [attacks on the Federal Reserve](#) and caps on credit-card interest. Expect some interesting "dialogue".



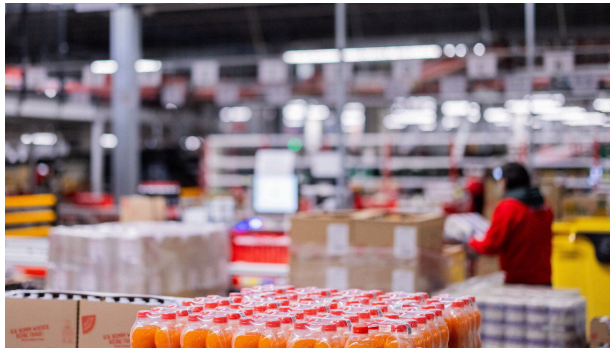
Photograph: Getty Images

## The prospect of American strikes on Iran

Even Ali Khamenei [cannot ignore the horror](#). On Saturday Iran's supreme leader admitted that thousands of people had been killed in the regime's ruthless crackdown on protests earlier this month. Human-rights groups have confirmed more than 3,000 deaths; an unnamed Iranian official told Reuters on Sunday that the toll was above 5,000. The massacre left some Iranians afraid to venture outside; it has quelled the protests, at least for now.

However, it has not stopped a looming showdown between America and Iran. Donald Trump backed down from his threat of military strikes last week, claiming (with no evidence) that Iran had agreed to halt the planned executions of hundreds of protesters. But the *USS Abraham Lincoln*, an aircraft carrier, is sailing toward the Middle East. The president on Saturday called the ayatollah a "sick man" and said it was "time to look for new leadership in Iran". A strike still seems likely once the carrier and other American assets arrive in the region.





Photograph: dpa

## European inflation is stabilising

Governments in Europe have to invest a lot in defence, infrastructure and green energy these days. And they are running large deficits to do so: France's is about 5% of GDP, Poland's is roughly 6.5%, and even stingy Germany's is projected to reach 4% this year. Good news, then, that inflation is stabilising, [allowing central banks to keep interest rates low](#). Data released on Monday will provide a detailed breakdown of euro-zone inflation for December.

The overall figure of 2%, likely to be confirmed in this new release, is precisely the target for the European Central Bank. The only worry is that, once energy prices stop falling, the still above-target services inflation of roughly 3.5% will push the index higher. Another rate cut at the ECB remains unlikely. In non-euro-zone Poland, meanwhile, inflation has dipped slightly below the central bank's target of 2.5%, allowing it to resume cutting rates in the coming months.



Illustration: Sandra Navarro

## Daily quiz

We will serve you a new question each day this week. On Friday your challenge is to give us all five answers and, as important, tell us the connecting theme. Email your responses (and include mention of your home city and country) by 1700 GMT on Friday to [\[email protected\]](#). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

**Monday:** Which actor, who appeared in many Hammer horror movies, called his autobiography “Tall, Dark and Gruesome”?



*Power, like love, is easier to  
experience than to define or  
measure*

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***Joseph Nye***