

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

**Friedrich Merz**, Germany's chancellor, said there was a “real chance” of [peace](#) in **Ukraine**, following a second day of negotiations in Berlin between officials from Ukraine, America and Europe. **Volodymyr Zelensky** said discussions about territory with America were “difficult”, and should be “settled fairly”. Germany also unveiled a 10-point defence plan to deepen co-operation with Ukraine, including joint weapons procurement and sharing battlefield data.

Meanwhile Ukraine's intelligence agency said it successfully used for the first time **underwater drones**. The apparent attack, with [Ukrainian-made](#) “Sub Sea Baby” drones, struck a **Russian submarine** in Novorossiysk, a Black Sea port. Ukraine claims the Varshavyanka-class submarine, which carries launchers for Kalibr cruise missiles, suffered critical damage. Russia, however, denied its Black Sea fleet was harmed.

Hong Kong's most famous media mogul and prisoner, **Jimmy Lai**, was [found guilty](#) of conspiracy to commit foreign collusion and sedition at the end of a national-security trial that lasted more than two years. He was accused of soliciting foreign support for the city's pro-democracy movement, including by calling for sanctions,

during widespread protests in 2019. A mitigation hearing will be held on January 12th.

Newly qualified **doctors in Britain** voted to begin a five-day strike on Wednesday, amid disputes over pay. The country's main [doctors' union](#) said members rejected a final round of proposals from the government, which included increasing the number of new speciality training posts. Britain's health secretary warned the action was "irresponsible and dangerous" while the country's hospitals grapple with rising flu cases.

The **European Union** imposed sanctions on oil traders—including **Etibar Eyyub** of Azerbaijan and **Murtaza Lakhani**, a Canadian-Pakistani businessman—as part of an effort to crack down on supporting Russia's so-called [shadow fleet](#). The EU accused them of helping Russia get around [Western sanctions](#) by controlling vessels that transport Russian oil and conceal the origin. Mr Lakhani and Mr Eyyub deny any wrongdoing.

**Korea Zinc**, the world's largest zinc smelter, said it was partnering with the Trump administration to build a \$7.4bn metals plant in Tennessee. The South Korean company said that the facility, which will begin producing zinc, copper and other materials by 2029, would help "diversify the global supply chain". America is trying to cut back its reliance on [China's rare earths industry](#).

Los Angeles' police chief said that a son of **Rob Reiner**, an American actor and director, was "booked for murder" and was being held on \$4m bail. Reiner and his wife, Michele, were found dead in their home on Sunday. Hollywood stars paid tribute to Reiner, who directed hits such as "When Harry Met Sally" and "The Princess Bride".

**Figure of the day:** 25m, the number of people that Jakarta and Dhaka will add between them by 2050. That is nearly as many as live in Australia. [Read the full story](#).





Photograph: Getty Images

## A verdict in Hong Kong's most famous trial

On Monday [Jimmy Lai](#), Hong Kong's most famous media mogul and prisoner, was found guilty of conspiracy to commit foreign collusion and sedition after a two-year-long national-security trial. Mr Lai's newspapers supported the millions who marched against the government in 2019; the tycoon himself took to the streets and courted American support. After a crackdown in 2020, he had every chance to flee. But he stayed. The 78-year-old has already spent five years [behind bars](#), mostly in solitary confinement. He faces life imprisonment (sentencing will take place at a later date).

The verdict comes at a sensitive time for Hong Kong, which is reeling from last month's devastating apartment-block fire that killed at least 160 people. Authorities arrested a petitioner who demanded accountability, and other critics. A territory-wide election on December 7th registered the second-lowest-ever turnout—many thought that a tacit rejection of a legislature that allows only pro-Beijingers. The verdict may not draw silenced Hong Kongers back on to the streets, but it may add to their anger.



Photograph: Getty Images

## Crunch talks for Ukraine in Berlin

The latest attempt to bring an end to the [war in Ukraine](#) will see President Volodymyr Zelensky resume talks with Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, two American negotiators, in Berlin on Monday. The talks, brokered by Friedrich Merz, the German chancellor, aim to unlock progress on a series of long-stalled issues, including the security guarantees Ukraine seeks from its allies against further Russian aggression, and the vexed question of territory. European and NATO leaders are expected to join the talks in the evening.

The meeting kicks off what could be a crucial week for Ukraine. On Thursday the EU's leaders will convene in Brussels for a summit expected to agree on a mechanism to [fund Ukraine](#). One option, favoured by France and Germany, is a "reparations loan" backed by €210bn (\$246bn) of Russian assets frozen in the EU. But Belgium, where most of that money is held, is resisting. Leaders could therefore opt for another solution, such as jointly borrowing the money.



Photograph: Getty Images

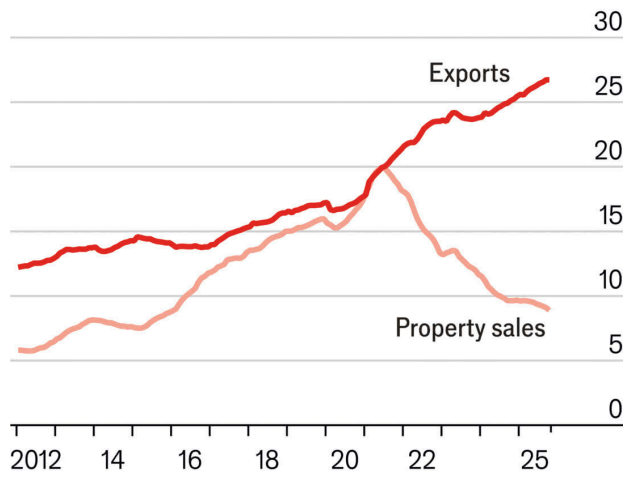
## China's housing hangover

At the recently concluded Central Economic Work Conference, which sets the direction of economic policy for the year ahead, China's leaders resolved to stabilise the country's vast [property market](#). That would be good news, except that China's leaders promised to do the same thing back in September 2024, with little to show for it.

Data released on Monday confirmed that property prices, sales and investment are still falling. Vanke, once one of the country's biggest developers, also faces a deadline to repay a bond worth 2bn yuan (\$280m) after creditors refused its plea for a delay. The intractable woes of the property sector have weighed on other parts of the economy. Retail sales, for example, grew by only 1.3% in nominal terms in November, compared with a year earlier, the slowest rate in 27 years outside of the pandemic. They say home is where the heart is. But when homes are losing value, it's easy for China's consumers to lose heart.

## Eye the bottom line

China, property sales and exports, yuan trn  
12-month moving total



Sources: Haver Analytics; Nomura





Photograph: Reuters

## Judgment day in Wisconsin

On Monday Hannah Dugan, a county judge in Wisconsin, will find herself somewhere she probably never expected to be: on the other side of the bench. Instead of presiding over a courtroom, she will face trial for allegedly helping an [undocumented migrant](#) try to evade immigration agents by ushering him through a jury door. She was arrested in April. If found guilty on two federal charges—obstructing a federal proceeding and concealing an individual to prevent arrest—she could face six years in prison.

Judge Dugan's case reveals two ways in which Donald Trump has shaken up immigration enforcement. First, courthouses used to be off-limits for immigration agents, along with schools and churches. No longer. Second, the Department of Homeland Security has arrested scores of people this year for allegedly impeding immigration arrests. Flimsy evidence has forced federal prosecutors to repeatedly drop charges against protesters in Los Angeles and Chicago. Judge Dugan will be hoping that trend continues.





Photograph: Reuters

## Trouble in the Louvre

Staff at the Louvre in Paris walked out on Monday in protest at working conditions in the world's [most popular museum](#). The union calling for the strike said that employees felt like “the last line of defence before the collapse”.

It has not been a good few months for the Louvre. In October [thieves](#) made off with eight pieces from the crown-jewel collection held in the Galerie d'Apollon. (The jewels have yet to be found.) One gallery had to be closed recently when inspectors found the floor beams to be flimsy. In November a water leak damaged over 300 documents from the Ancient Egypt library. Staff, according to the union, were being put in an “unsustainable position”.

Laurence des Cars, the Louvre's director, has said that the museum will install 100 extra surveillance cameras by the end of 2026, as well as a police station within the museum. “Everything is a priority,” she told parliament.



Illustration: The Economist

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

**Monday:** What do people in many countries observe at 11am on November 11 (or the nearest Sunday to that date) to mark the casualties of two world wars?

*The essence of the independent mind lies not in what it thinks, but in how it thinks.*

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***Christopher Hitchens***