

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter

**Russia** charged four men with carrying out the [terrorist attack](#) in **Moscow** that killed 137 people. The men were identified as citizens of Tajikistan. Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the rampage, but Russian officials have tried to put some of the blame on Ukraine. Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, called Russian leaders "scum" for linking the attack to his country. Meanwhile, France raised its terrorism alert to its highest level.

The UN's agency for Palestinian refugees said **Israel** had barred it from delivering aid to northern Gaza, where a famine looms. According to the **UNRWA**, [Israeli military officials](#) relayed the decision without explanation. The head of the agency called it "outrageous". Meanwhile, Israeli forces continued their assault in southern Gaza, surrounding two hospitals, according to a Palestinian NGO.

Prosecutors filed eight new corruption charges against **Singapore's** former transport minister. S. Iswaran, who denies any wrongdoing, was arrested last year and now faces a total of 35 charges. The new allegations accuse him of receiving kickbacks worth around \$14,000. The case has shocked the usually [scandal-free city-state](#). A minister was last charged with corruption there in 1986.

Bassirou Diomaye Faye took an early lead as votes were counted in **Senegal's** presidential election. Amadou Ba, the ruling coalition's candidate, warned him not to celebrate prematurely. The vote, which was [constitutionally required](#) to take place last month, was delayed by the president, Macky Sall, prompting violent protests. Mr Sall is not standing this time. Senegal has been a rare beacon of [stability and democracy](#) in west Africa.

**Nissan** said it would cut its **electric vehicle** manufacturing cost by 30% to be more competitive against Chinese rivals. The Japanese carmaker has struggled to build **affordable EVs** and has lost ground in the Chinese market. As part of a new business plan, the firm will launch 30 models over the next three years, including eight “new energy” vehicles in China.

**China** announced procurement rules that would phase out the use of American microprocessors built by Intel and AMD from government computers. According to the *Financial Times*, state agencies have been instructed to purchase “safe and reliable” chips —all from Chinese firms. The guidelines are part of a campaign to replace foreign technology with **homegrown products**, mirroring efforts by America to reduce reliance on Chinese companies.

In **Ecuador** Brigitte García, the 27-year-old mayor of the town of San Vicente, was found shot dead in her car, alongside her communications director. Ms García was from the left-wing Citizen Revolution Movement party. The country has been plagued by a **drugs war**. Last August Fernando Villavicencio, a presidential candidate and outspoken critic of organised crime, was assassinated.

**Figure of the day:** 30%. The fee collected by Apple, a tech giant, on most purchases made using the App Store. [Read the full story.](#)



Photo: Getty Images

## Guatemala's president visits the White House

On Monday America's vice-president Kamala Harris will welcome Bernardo Arévalo, Guatemala's newly inaugurated president, to the White House to talk about Central American migration. The Arévalo administration is trying to re-engage in international diplomacy and work with officials in the United States to improve economic conditions at home so fewer feel compelled to leave.

When Ms Harris was tapped to be Joe Biden's border czar three years ago she was tasked with tackling the "root causes" of migration in the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras. But as the number of border crossings has since swelled to record highs, she has consequently garnered immense criticism for that narrow focus. Migrants from the Northern Triangle make up a much smaller share of arrivals than they used to. In December the US border patrols intercepted roughly 60,000 migrants coming from there—from elsewhere the number was up to 190,000. The changing nature of America's [border crisis](#) makes the Biden administration's job of defending its policies on the campaign trail even harder.



Photo: Getty Images

## Singapore's fragile recovery

In February Lawrence Wong, Singapore's deputy prime minister, warned that inflation in the city-state remains high. He announced a package of handouts to help Singaporeans cope with rising prices, after the country raised its goods and services tax to 9% in January. Data released on Monday justified the assistance. The core inflation rate, which strips out volatile food and energy prices, rose by 3.6% year on year in February, up from 3.1% in January and the fastest pace in seven months. The jump was partly caused by an increase in consumer spending over the lunar new year.

Singapore expects output to grow by 1-3% this year, but the government warns of “significant” global risks. An important one for the trade-dependent city-state is further disruption to supply chains, given the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. Nonetheless, experts surveyed by Singapore’s central bank have raised their GDP forecasts for the year, mostly because of faster-than-expected growth in manufacturing and construction.

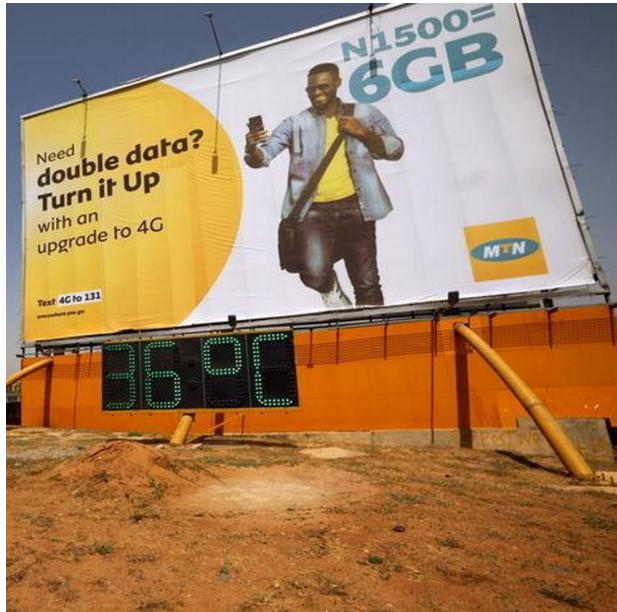


Photo: Reuters

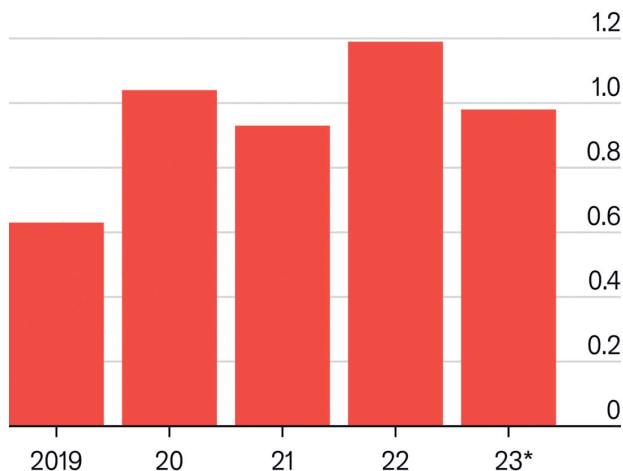
## MTN has a big Nigerian problem

As Africa's digital economy expands, the continent's network providers have been on a roll. Smartphone use continues to grow, and businesses and consumers demand faster mobile internet. All this has seen Africa's major telecoms providers enjoy sales growth of 29% over the past five years, despite pandemic-related setbacks, according to Bloomberg. The Johannesburg-based conglomerate MTN, Africa's biggest telecoms firm by revenues, reports its financial results on Monday.

They will be watched closely. For all its recent success, MTN has problems. Its largest user base is in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, which is in the grip of a [crippling currency crisis](#) after a series of devaluations. MTN's Nigerian subsidiary, which is responsible for up to a third of the company's earnings, has reported foreign-exchange-linked losses of \$570m. Group-wide headline earnings per share (a measure of profitability) are expected to fall by over 60%. It is a worrying signal.

## Calling Africa

MTN Group, net profit, \$bn



Source: Bloomberg

\*Estimate



Photo: Reuters

## Belarus's Freedom Day in name only

On Monday Belarusians mark Freedom Day. The unofficial holiday commemorates the day in 1918 when the first independent Belarusian state emerged from under 150 years of Russian occupation. It is rejected by President Alexander Lukashenko, a close ally of Vladimir Putin. Celebrating it has thus become a way for his critics to show defiance.

Few in the country will openly disobey him. The Belarusian strongman has clamped down on dissent and locked up some 1,500 political prisoners, according to Human Rights Watch. And with a presidential election coming next year, Mr Lukashenko is curbing civil society.

Instead, Freedom Day will be marked by the growing number of Belarusians who have fled the country—roughly a tenth of the population since Mr Lukashenko came to power in 1994. The opposition leader, [Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya](#), herself in exile, encourages them to write to political prisoners and fly Belarusian flags. That is no substitute for freedom itself.



Photo: AFP

## Europe's ever-closer union, by rail

German electronic-music giants Kraftwerk fantasised about a “Trans-Europe Express” as far back as 1977. On Monday Europe finally gets the real thing: a 15-and-a-half-hour overnight service linking Brussels to Prague. The 720km-journey is already covered by several daily flights, which take around 14 hours less than the train. But planes are out of favour with those mindful of their carbon footprints (and trains retain a romantic appeal for many).

Leaving in the early evening three times a week, the train will putt-putt its way through Antwerp, Rotterdam, Berlin, Dresden and a dozen other stops before arriving in Prague just before 11am.

Sleeper carriages, inevitably stuffed with snoring fellow travellers, are available.

Cheap air travel saw off once-common night trains in Europe. But they are enjoying something of a renaissance, thanks in part to public money. A Paris-Berlin service was launched last year, and a train linking Amsterdam and Barcelona is planned for 2025.



## 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 [\[email protected\]](mailto:[email protected]). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

**Monday:** Who was the founder of Mormonism? He published the Book of Mormon in 1830

*Conformity may give you a quiet life; it may even bring you to a University Chair. But all change in history, all advance, comes from the nonconformists.*

*A J P Taylor*