

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: The Asahi Shimbun via Getty Imag

Voting ended in national elections in **Japan** and **Thailand**. In Japan exit polls suggest that the Liberal Democratic Party of [Takaichi Sanae](#), who became prime minister a few months ago, had [won a large majority](#) in the lower house. The contest is expected to be [much tighter in Thailand](#)'s snap vote. Polls show the reformist People's Party edging ahead of the prime minister's Bhumjaithai Party.

**Morgan McSweeney** resigned as **Sir Keir Starmer**'s chief of staff. He had encouraged the prime minister to appoint Peter Mandelson as Britain's ambassador to America despite Lord Mandelson's links to Jeffrey Epstein. Mr McSweeney was an architect of Labour's resounding electoral victory in 2024. His resignation is unlikely to quell [speculation](#) that another Labour politician will challenge Sir Keir's leadership.

**Iran** said that it would respond to any **American** attacks by striking American bases in the Middle East. The foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, said any retaliation should not be considered as attacking the bases' host countries. On Friday he had adopted a different tone when saying that [Iran and America](#) had made a "good start" in talks about the future of his country's nuclear programme.

The man who shot one of **Russia**'s most senior military officials on Friday was reportedly captured in Dubai and extradited to Russia. **Vladimir Alexeyev** survived the attack outside his apartment in Moscow. Russian state media also reported that one of the attacker's two accomplices had been captured in Russia.

Will Lewis resigned as chief executive of the ***Washington Post*** days after the newspaper laid off nearly a third of its staff across the newsroom and other departments. Mr Lewis said it was “the right time for me to step aside”, but did not provide details about his decision. Jeff D'Onofrio, the firm's chief financial officer, will take over.

**Saudi Arabia** and **Syria** agreed to work together to create a low-cost airline and a new airport in Aleppo in northern Syria. The investment package is believed to be the biggest since America and other Western countries lifted sanctions on Syria, which is still [recovering](#) from a years-long civil war.

**Lindsey Vonn** crashed in her highly anticipated comeback in the women's downhill race at the Winter Olympics in Cortina d'Ampezzo. The American skier lost control after catching a gate 13 seconds into the race and was airlifted off the piste. Nine days earlier she had ruptured a ligament in her left knee. The 41-year-old had retired in 2019 after winning three Olympic gold medals. Breezy Johnson, another American, won today's race.

**Word of the week:** *Comandos Jungla* (Jungle Commandos), an elite unit of Colombia's anti-narcotics police. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: EPA

## Japan goes to the polls

On Sunday Japan held a snap general election. Takaichi Sanae, [the country's first female prime minister](#), called it last month, three months into her job. She hopes her high approval ratings will deliver a landslide. [Exit polls](#) suggest her Liberal Democratic Party and its coalition partner is set to win more than 300 out of the 465 in the lower house.

Ms Takaichi is not without her vulnerabilities. She was recently criticised for talking up the benefits of a cheap yen at the same time as the currency's historic weakness is squeezing household budgets. Indeed, Ms Takaichi's triumph will owe much to the weakness of her opponents. Ahead of the election, the main centre-left opposition formed a coalition, the Centrist Reform Alliance. It is flailing; polls suggest its constituent parties may lose half their seats. Voters who spurn the LDP are scattering to new parties of the far left and the far right. Japan is entering an era of multi-party politics, but one party, Japan's postwar behemoth, still looms above them all.



Photograph: EPA/Shutterstock

## Thailand goes to the polls, too

Thai voters cast their ballots on Sunday to elect a new lower house of parliament. The general election is a three-way race between liberals, populists and conservatives. Move Forward, a liberal party, [won the previous election in 2023](#), but the military-appointed senate blocked it from forming a government. Move Forward and its leaders were later banned from politics. A court found that their proposed reforms to Thailand's strict *lèse-majesté* laws, which forbid insulting the monarchy, breached the constitution. Most of Move Forward's members [have regrouped into the new People's Party](#), which has been leading in the polls.

But the People's Party will probably fall short of a majority. That would give the upper hand to Anutin Charnvirakul, the prime minister and leader of the Thai Pride Party. A dealmaker, he will find it easier to put together a majority from the conservative and populist camps.



Photograph: Getty Images

## A visit by Israel's president tests Australia

Isaac Herzog, Israel's president, will arrive in Australia on Sunday. He will visit Bondi Beach, the [site of a devastating antisemitic attack](#) in December. Many Australian Jews criticised the prime minister, Anthony Albanese, for failing to prevent the attack. The Israeli government linked the violence to [Australia's decision to recognise a Palestinian state](#). Mr Albanese will attempt to use Mr Herzog's visit to regain the trust of the Jewish community.

But Mr Herzog's arrival will test Australia's fraying social cohesion. Some on the left have raised concerns about the visit, citing the Israeli government's war in Gaza. On the right, a populist party, growing in popularity, is generally supportive. Authorities will try to keep a lid on any disquiet. New laws introduced after the Bondi attack enable the authorities to disband groups committing hate crimes and to ban protests. They are already being put to use. The New South Wales government has banned demonstrations in parts of Sydney during Mr Herzog's stay, although protesters say they will defy the order.



Photograph: Reuters

## Bunny boilers at the Super Bowl

The Seattle Seahawks and New England Patriots face off in the Super Bowl on Sunday. While the game itself offers several compelling storylines, much of the attention in the build-up has focused on the half-time performer, Bad Bunny. Born Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, he is [one of the most streamed artists in the world](#) and the king of Latin trap. Earlier this month he won three Grammy Awards, including album of the year. He has also infuriated supporters of President Donald Trump.

Conservatives object to his Spanish-language performances, his celebration of Latino culture and his criticism of the administration's anti-immigration policies. Mr Trump condemned his pick as half-time performer when it was announced, and Mr Bunny's remarks criticising Immigration and Customs Enforcement at the Grammys prompted a fresh backlash. One conservative group has advertised a rival "All-American" half-time broadcast featuring Kid Rock, a pro-Trump musician. Mr Bunny, for his part, was born in Puerto Rico—which is part of the United States.



Illustration: Sandra Navarro

## The winners of this week's quiz

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

**Linda Bonger**, Zurich, Switzerland

**Michel Simard**, Gatineau, Canada

**Kariem Abdellatif**, Uebersyren, Luxembourg

They all gave the correct answers of: Yemen, Nigeria, Iran, Somalia and Syria. The theme is that they are all countries in which the second Trump administration has launched military action.

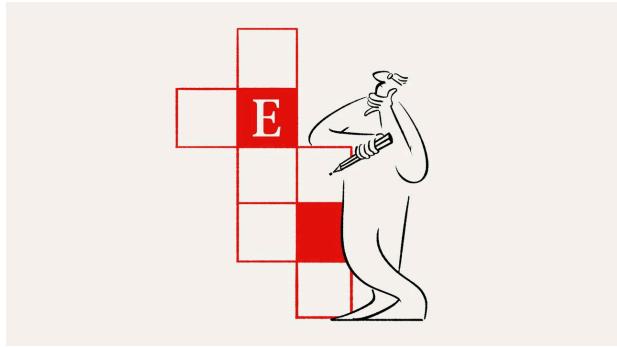


Illustration: The Economist

## 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](#).

### Cryptic clues

*1 across* - Quiet before the French get into central position (5)

*2 across* - Test the leading currency (5)

*3 across* - Serif letter contains comb (5)

*1 down* - Mixed in portion to get red (5,4)

### Straight clues

*1 across* - Flower; factory (5)

*2 across* - Tribunal or assessment (5)

*3 across* - To rummage; a type of gun (5)

*1 down* - A light-to-medium-bodied red wine (5,4)

There are two sets of clues, one for seasoned cruciverbalists and

the other for less experienced solvers. Both give the same answers.

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

*If honour were profitable,  
everybody would be honourable.*

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***Sir Thomas More***