

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Bloomberg via Getty Images

Big tech stocks sold off as investors reacted to [the sector's](#) plans to spend a combined \$660bn this year on artificial intelligence. On Thursday the tech-heavy [Nasdaq](#) index slid by 1.59%; the [s&p 500](#) fell by 1.23%. Software stocks extended their fall after Anthropic launched an updated version of its Claude model that is designed to carry out financial research.

Novo Nordisk said it would take legal action against **Hims & Hers**, a telehealth company, for selling a “knock-off” version of its Wegovy [weight-loss pill](#). The Danish drugmaker claims Hims’s pill contains an “untested” compound version of Wegovy’s active ingredient. A partnership between the two companies collapsed last year. Meanwhile Donald Trump launched a government website, [TrumpRx](#), that will point customers to discounted medicines.

Senior **American** and **Iranian** officials will meet in Oman on Friday in a bid to de-escalate rising tensions. America has ramped up its military presence in the Middle East and demanded [Iran](#) pause its nuclear programme after the Iranian government violently repressed protests last month. Ahead of the talks Mr Trump told [NBC News](#) that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran’s supreme leader, “should be very worried”.

Rio Tinto and **Glencore** abandoned plans for [a merger](#) that would have created the world's largest mining company, valued at more than \$260bn. Rio said the two sides failed to reach a deal that would deliver enough value to its shareholders. Glencore said Rio's offer "significantly undervalued" its business. Glencore's share price has fallen by more than 7%, while Rio's has dropped by more than 4%.

America said it had killed two suspected **drug smugglers** in a strike on a boat in the eastern Pacific, bringing the death toll of its [campaign](#) to at least 128. The Trump administration says it is tackling "narco-terrorists" operating out of Venezuela, though it has provided no conclusive evidence that targeted boats are involved in drug trafficking.

Mr Trump endorsed Takaichi Sanae, **Japan's** prime minister, who is hoping to secure a thumping mandate in a snap [election](#) on Sunday. American presidents do not usually publicly weigh in on foreign elections, though Mr Trump has done so before for polls in Argentina and Hungary. He wrote on Truth Social, his social-media platform, that Ms Takaichi "will not let the people of Japan down!"

Norway's police launched a corruption investigation into Thorbjorn Jagland, a former prime minister and chair of the Nobel committee, over his alleged links to **Jeffrey Epstein**. Mr Jagland's lawyer said they would fully co-operate. The release of documents related to Epstein, a dead sex offender, is [tarnishing the reputations](#) of many from the global elite.

Figure of the day: 10,000, the estimated number of Colombians fighting in foreign conflicts. [Read the full story.](#)



Illustration: David Simonds

Russia tries to freeze Ukraine into submission

Russia's massive missile and drone attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure amid freezing temperatures, aimed at breaking the country's will to resist, mean that the [American-sponsored peace negotiations](#) under way in Abu Dhabi are mostly for show. On a visit to Ukraine this week NATO's secretary-general, Mark Rutte, said: "Russian attacks like those last night do not signal seriousness about peace." The bombardment makes Donald Trump—who had bragged about persuading Vladimir Putin to suspend such attacks—look either foolish or complicit.

Russia used the brief pause during the negotiations to save missiles for the next onslaught. One positive sign for the talks is that Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, says that he is satisfied with the security guarantees that America and his European allies have given. But the Kremlin continues to insist that a ceasefire is conditional on Russia assuming control of the [highly fortified territory](#) in the eastern region of Donetsk, which it has been unable to take by force. That would be unacceptable to Ukraine.

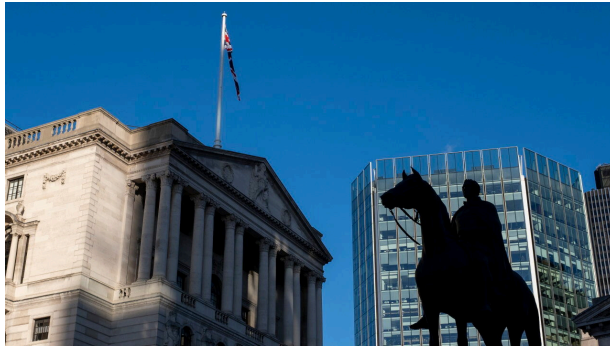


Photograph: Reuters

Scott Bessent defends Donald Trump's Fed nominee

Scott Bessent, the treasury secretary, is testifying to Congress on Wednesday and Thursday. Mr Bessent has spent months auditioning candidates to chair the Federal Reserve. Last week [Donald Trump picked Kevin Warsh](#). Now Mr Bessent will need to give Mr Warsh's nomination a big push in the Senate. His confirmation, normally a formality, has hit a snag, called Thom Tillis.

The Republican, a member of the Senate Banking Committee who has often sparred with Mr Trump, has vowed to block all Fed nominations until the Department of Justice ends its dubious criminal investigation of renovation work at the Fed. This, the Fed says, is part of a campaign by the president to press it to lower interest rates. Assuming Mr Tillis and the White House find common ground, the spotlight will soon shift from Jerome Powell, the current chair, to Mr Warsh.



Photograph: Getty Images

The Bank of England stops for breath

The Bank of England kept its main interest rate unchanged at 3.75% on Thursday, marking a pause in easing. In December the Monetary Policy Committee voted 5-4 for a quarter-point cut, pointing to falling inflation and a weak labour market. But as interest rates edge closer to neutral (the level at which they neither stimulate nor constrain the economy), rate-setters are becoming more cautious.

Their hesitancy reflects lingering concerns about robust wage-growth projections and public perceptions that inflation will remain high, which sit uneasily with the bank's 2% inflation target. A Citi/Yougov survey released last week provided little reassurance, showing a rise in short-term household inflation expectations from 3.6% to 3.8% in January. Even so, with headline inflation expected to return to target in the first half of the year, at least one further reduction in rates over the coming months remains likely.



Photograph: The Pokémon Company International

Pokémon opens its first theme park

PokéPark Kanto, the first permanent outdoor Pokémon theme park, opened in Tokyo on Thursday. Tickets have been sold out for months. Its launch comes just ahead of the franchise's 30th [anniversary](#). Pokémon is the world's highest-grossing entertainment brand. One reason for its success is its “media-mix” strategy—releasing games, anime, trading cards and merchandise in tandem.

PokéPark Kanto adds shops, restaurants and fairground-style games to the mix. Visitors will enjoy rides like “Pika Pika Paradise” and shows in which life-sized versions of the furry duellists wage battle in a forest. Pokémon's bosses need cheering up: a card game due to be hosted on January 31st at a Japanese war shrine was cancelled when China complained about the venue. Pokémon hopes that the park will attract youngsters who are eager for more off-screen experiences. When it comes to fans, Pokémon wants to catch 'em all.



Illustration: Sandra Navarro

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.

Thursday: Which mainland African country has the longest coastline?

Wednesday: The Pahlavi family ruled which Middle Eastern country?

*It is a poor head that cannot find
plausible reason for doing what
the heart wants to do*

Richard Hofstadter