

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: AFP via Getty Images

**Israel** launched a wave of air attacks across **Gaza** on Saturday, killing at least 30 people, [Gaza](#) health officials said. The strikes hit a Hamas-run police site as well as apartments and tents sheltering displaced civilians. Israel said the raids followed an incident in which its troops spotted Hamas gunmen emerging from a tunnel in southern Gaza, which it called a violation of the ceasefire.

**Iran's** president, Masoud Pezeshkian, accused **America**, Israel and Europe of exploiting his country's economic woes to stoke unrest. Earlier Mr Trump said that Iran "want to make a deal" rather than face an American attack. The president has sent a naval "Armada" to the Middle East and has threatened force if [Iran](#) does not abandon its nuclear programme.

**Venezuela's** acting president, [Delcy Rodríguez](#), said she would propose an "amnesty law" covering the period since 1999—when Hugo Chávez, self-styled leader of the "Bolivarian revolution", came to power. Ms Rodríguez also announced the closure of El Helicoide prison, where political prisoners have been tortured. Her government has released around 300 political prisoners since American forces seized Nicolás Maduro, Chávez's successor, this month. But most remain behind bars.

The Baloch Liberation Army, an insurgent group, said it carried out attacks across [Balochistan](#), a south-western province of **Pakistan** bordering Iran and Afghanistan. The BLA said it killed 84 Pakistani security personnel. Pakistani officials disputed that figure, telling Reuters that 10 security personnel and 11 civilians were killed, while their forces killed at least 67 militants in the clashes.

At least 200 people were killed on Wednesday when heavy rains triggered a landslide at the Rubaya coltan mines in eastern **Democratic Republic of Congo**, authorities said on Saturday. The site is controlled by the [Rwanda-backed](#) M23 rebels. Officials have ordered nearby residents to relocate after years of deadly tunnel collapses.

America's **Senate** passed a spending package to fund most of the government, but not in time to prevent a partial shutdown over the weekend. The House of Representatives must still approve the agreement and will not be in session until Monday. Senators also voted to keep the Department of Homeland Security running for two weeks while Democrats and the White House negotiate over [immigration enforcement](#).

A **Pokémon** card-game event, due to be held at the Yasukuni shrine in **Tokyo** on Saturday, was cancelled after a backlash in [China](#). The *Global Times*, a nationalist tabloid, said it had enraged "Chinese netizens". The shrine honours Japan's military dead, including several convicted of war crimes after the second world war, making it especially sensitive in China. The Pokémon Company apologised for advertising the event.

**Word of the week:** *Marine-cloud brightening*, a form of solar geoengineering that would add tiny particles of sea salt to the lower part of the atmosphere. [Read the full story](#).

*In which year did Mao Zedong die? Test your knowledge with our [latest history quiz](#).*



Photograph: ROPI

## Ukraine and Russia put off the hard questions

Trilateral talks in Abu Dhabi between America, Russia and Ukraine are tentatively set to resume on Sunday. They have some momentum behind them: Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, appears so far to have honoured Donald Trump's plea for a one-week pause in [missile attacks](#) on freezing Kyiv "and other towns". And all sides declared the first round of talks, held last weekend, "constructive".

But those talks focused narrowly on how various ceasefire scenarios could be monitored. The big question of whether Ukraine will give up land in exchange for American security guarantees was left for later. Few Ukrainians would accept giving up the country's "fortress belt"—four well-defended cities in eastern Donetsk—in return for a commitment from a president as unpredictable as Mr Trump. [Steve Witkoff](#), Mr Trump's envoy, recently said that a deal was "90% done". With Russia holding firm to its maximalist claims and still talking about regime change in Kyiv, that is wishful thinking.



Photograph: Reuters

## Venezuela divides Latin America's literary elite

Colombia's intellectuals will rub linen-clad shoulders at the Hay Festival, a literary and arts celebration, in Cartagena this weekend. Geopolitics threatens to spoil the mood. Several Latin American writers are boycotting the event in protest at the organisers' decision to invite María Corina Machado, [Venezuela's](#) opposition leader and Nobel peace laureate. They detest her support for Donald Trump's military intervention in her country, and see her as a traitor.

Many on the left share this view. They think Ms Machado is willing to sacrifice the continent's sovereignty in exchange for wealth that is unlikely to end up in Venezuelan pockets. Ms Machado promotes the "subjugation of our peoples", wrote Laura Restrepo, a Colombian author, to Hay's organisers. Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Chile and Uruguay, all run by left-leaning leaders, also condemned the kidnapping of Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela's former autocrat, as "an extremely dangerous precedent". Yet by shunning Hay, Ms Restrepo and her peers squander the opportunity to convince audiences why Ms Machado's stance endangers the region.



Photograph: Anadolu via Getty Images

## **Rybakina claims Australian Open title**

Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan won her first Australian Open title on Saturday, beating the world's number one, Belarus's Aryna Sabalenka, 6–4, 4–6, 6–4, in a tense final. The Kazakh recovered from a shaky start in the deciding set to close out the match and claim her second Grand Slam.

The victory marked a reversal of the final in Melbourne in 2023, which Ms Sabalenka won before going on to retain the title in 2024 and then to lose in last year's final. Ms Sabalenka entered her fourth consecutive final as the favourite, chasing another title to add to her status as the tour's leading force.

For Ms Rybakina, the win caps a striking comeback. After her triumph in Wimbledon in 2022, injuries stalled her progress. Late last year, however, she showed signs of revival by beating Ms Sabalenka at the WTA Finals. Carrying that momentum into Melbourne, she has now re-established herself among the sport's elite.



Photograph: Reuters

## **Weekend profile: Cheng Li-wun, the Taiwanese opposition leader who wants to reconcile with China**

Risk comes naturally to Cheng Li-wun, [Taiwan's](#) opposition leader. As a fiery student activist in the 1990s, she sought independence for her homeland and castigated the Kuomintang (KMT), the ruling party at the time. Then, to the astonishment of many, she joined the very party she once railed against.

Now, as [the KMT's new leader](#), Ms Cheng is making her biggest gamble yet. As China [steps up military drills](#) around Taiwan, which it sees as its territory, she is blocking efforts to boost defence spending. She thinks Taiwan's people should accept that they are Chinese. And she hopes to bring her party back to power by pursuing reconciliation with China's leader, Xi Jinping.

Ms Cheng was born into a middle-class family in western Taiwan. But she calls herself a “daughter of Yunnan”. Her father hailed from the Chinese province but, as a soldier in the defeated Nationalist army, fled to Taiwan in 1949. The family settled in a village housing military families from the mainland. Ms Cheng's childhood was steeped in stories of a lost mother country. She describes her parents as “taro and sweet potatoes”—symbols of integration between the mainland and Taiwan.

At National Taiwan University's law school Ms Cheng honed her combative oratory as a participant in the Wild Lily, a pro-democracy student movement. She joined the Democratic Progressive Party, or DPP, which views Taiwan as a separate country. But she grew disillusioned and resigned over what she saw as corruption and intolerance of dissent within its ranks. She joined the KMT three years later. She was considered an outsider going into the party's leadership election in October. But after losing the past three presidential elections, KMT members appear to have decided that they needed a more aggressive, outspoken kind of leader.

Since then Ms Cheng has caused controversy even with some KMT members who worry that her remarks on national identity and calls for closer engagement with the mainland are too closely aligned with China's position and could alienate younger voters. Some also fear that the DPP is managing to portray the KMT as undermining Taiwan's national security by blocking defence spending. But Ms Cheng says she supports "reasonable" military expenditure and is confident she can win over voters by pursuing dialogue with Mr Xi.

Whether Ms Cheng will be the KMT's presidential candidate in 2028 is unclear: she says she is focusing on her current job. But already, she is shaking up Taiwan's politics in ways that could alter the precarious balance of relations between Taiwan, China and America. The stakes have never been higher. And Ms Cheng is all in.



*No one feels another's grief, no  
one understands another's joy.*

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***Franz Schubert***