

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Alamy

Tesla lost its spot as the world's largest [electric-vehicle](#) maker to BYD, a Chinese rival. Tesla delivered 1.64m EVs in 2025, 8.6% fewer than in 2024 and its second consecutive annual decline. BYD said it shipped 2.26m EVs last year, up by more than a quarter from the prior year.

Swiss authorities said new findings pointed to sparklers on champagne bottles as the likely cause of a fire on New Year's Eve at a bar in a ski resort, in which at least 40 people died. Investigators said flames spread rapidly after sparks reached the ceiling, and warned that identifying victims would take time. Dozens of injured revellers were transferred to hospitals across Europe.

Donald Trump warned that America would intervene if Iran "violently kills" peaceful protesters, saying his country was "ready to go". His warning came as protests over Iran's [weak economy](#) entered a sixth day and turned deadly, with clashes reported nationwide. Masoud Pezeshkian, Iran's president, said his government would take action to "resolve the issue of people's livelihoods".

Yemen's Southern Transitional Council, a [separatist group](#) supported by the **United Arab Emirates**, said it intended to hold a referendum on independence within two years. The announcement came after Yemen's government said it would begin a “peaceful operation” to reclaim military positions in the Hadhramaut province from the STC. The conflict has deepened a rift between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which support rival sides.

Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, appointed Kyrylo Budanov, the country's intelligence chief, to run the presidential office, replacing Andriy Yermak, who resigned in November amid a [corruption scandal](#). Meanwhile Russian missiles struck a residential building in Kharkiv, in north-eastern Ukraine, injuring at least 25 people, Ukrainian officials said. Russia denied responsibility, blaming the blast on detonating Ukrainian ammunition.

Europe's manufacturing sector ended 2025 on a weak note. S&P Global's purchasing-managers' index for the [euro zone](#) fell to 48.8 in December from 49.6 in November (anything below 50 signals contraction). Factory output across the bloc fell for the first time in ten months. Germany, the region's largest economy, recorded the deepest contraction.

A night-time attack killed at least 15 people in Lubero, in **eastern Congo's** North Kivu province, according to Reuters, a news agency. Fighters also burned homes. Officials blamed the Allied Democratic Forces, a group with links to **Islamic State**. Its attacks on civilians have continued despite joint Congolese and Ugandan military deployments in the region aimed at containing the group.

Figure of the day: \$2.8bn, the estimated cost of the three Saab-built submarines that Poland agreed to buy in November to defend the Baltic. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: AP

Vladimir Putin's hold on Donald Trump

This weekend representatives from the “coalition of the willing”, a group of Ukraine’s allies, will gather in Kyiv. Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelensky, will brief them on his recent talks with Donald Trump to discuss the 20-point peace plan that has emerged from a month of shuttle diplomacy between Ukraine, Europe and America. By praising the plan, Mr Zelensky is trying to keep America’s president as much onside as possible. His main focus was on the duration and strength of the security guarantees Ukraine would need.

But on either side of those talks, Mr Trump had long telephone calls with Vladimir Putin. In the second, Mr Trump seemingly believed the Russian president’s claim that Ukraine had tried to assassinate him by launching a drone attack on one of his residences. No evidence of the attack, which Ukraine strongly denies, has emerged. What is not in doubt is Mr Putin’s ability to get inside Mr Trump’s head.



Photograph: AP

America's affordability trap

Zohran Mamdani was sworn in as mayor of New York City early on New Year's Day. The democratic socialist's rise was swift: less than a year ago, he was a little-known assemblyman trying to gain attention with punchy social-media videos. An early viral one focused on the rising price of a street-cart meal of chicken over rice. He blamed "halalflation" on higher ingredient costs and bureaucratic barriers.

Mr Mamdani hammered cost-of-living issues before other Democrats did. But "affordability" has become a galvanising political message. Voters seem to agree that America is suffering from an affordability crisis. But the notion that Americans can afford less than they used to is [essentially false](#). In cities like New York and San Francisco, housing is genuinely unaffordable, because supply is too low. But wages have long been rising faster than prices across the income spectrum. As politicians race to bring down costs, they [could resort](#) to damaging ideas.



Photograph: Alamy

Tesla steers away from EVs

Tesla broke with convention this week. In a pre-emptive move the electric-vehicle maker published a pessimistic external estimate of its deliveries for 2025. On Friday Tesla announced that it delivered 418,227 cars in the fourth quarter, down 16% from a year earlier and lower than analyst projections. Annual ev sales dropped by roughly 8.6%, to 1.64m, the company said. This would be the first time Tesla has suffered two years of declining sales.

Elon Musk's firm may be selling fewer evs, dragged down by falling demand and rising competition from rivals such as China's BYD. But Mr Musk appears less interested in making cars and more in developing [robotaxis](#) and humanoid robots. Tests of self-driving cabs are expanding in America and a dedicated vehicle is expected to go on sale later in 2026. But Mr Musk's grandiose plans often come with significant delays.



Photograph: Getty Images

A new era in audio streaming

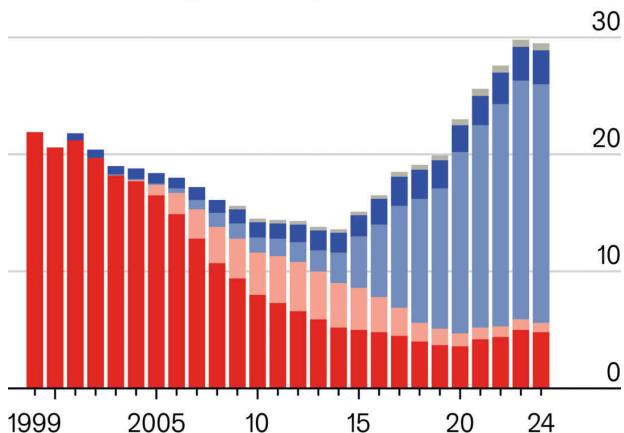
Daniel Ek, who co-founded Spotify nearly 20 years ago, stepped aside as chief executive of the streaming service this week. Few people have had as big an influence on the music industry as the 42-year-old Swede. When Spotify arrived in 2006, CD sales were collapsing as listeners downloaded tracks from pirate platforms such as Napster. Spotify's subscription model—\$10 or so per month to rent almost all the world's music—quickly caught on, raising industry revenue to record levels.

Spotify remains the leading audio streamer. But it faces competition from Apple, Amazon and YouTube, a video platform which also streams music and has become listeners' favourite place for podcasts. Spotify is retaliating by moving onto YouTube's turf, showing music videos and video-podcasts in its app. The streamer's new co-CEOs, Gustav Soderstrom and Alex Norstrom, will handle this transition. But Mr Ek will stay on as executive chairman to help navigate an era when audio and visual media are converging.

Ditching the disc

Global recorded-music-industry revenues, \$bn

■ Physical ■ Downloads ■ Streaming
■ Performance rights ■ Synchronisation



Source: International Federation of the Phonographic Industry



Photograph: Netflix

The neverending world of “Stranger Things”

It is one of the biggest TV hits of the 21st century. “[Stranger Things](#)” has racked up billions of streaming hours since it debuted on Netflix in 2016; the show has brought in more than \$1bn in subscription revenue in the past five years alone. It has spawned internet memes, music trends and even a play, “The First Shadow”. This week the eclectic group of small-town residents (including one with psychokinetic powers) went into battle for the final time against Vecna, a terrifying monster.

But the show is hardly dead. Fans can look forward to new worlds in what the Duffer Brothers, its creators, have jokingly called the “Strangerverse”. It will start with an animated spin-off show, “Tales from ’85”, which is expected to land on Netflix in 2026. The Duffers have also confirmed plans for another related programme with new characters. As anyone who has ever watched a monster movie knows, it takes a lot to slay a behemoth.



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

Friday: Who plays Jenny, the doomed member of a romantic couple, in the 1970 film “Love Story”?

Thursday: Which sitcom title character moved back from Seattle to Boston when the show was revived in 2023?

It is only afterward that a new idea seems reasonable.

Isaac Asimov