

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

Donald Trump warned Delcy Rodríguez, **Venezuela's** interim leader, that she would pay “a very big price” if she did not meet [America's policy demands](#). Mr Trump insisted that America was “in charge” despite Ms Rodríguez's appointment following the capture of Nicolás Maduro, the Venezuelan president. Mr Trump also hinted at a possible intervention in Colombia, accusing its leader of being a “sick man” for shipping drugs to America.

Meanwhile Ms Rodríguez called on **America** to work with her government on an “agenda of co-operation oriented towards shared development”. The statement appeared to be a reversal of her earlier stance following America's intervention in Venezuela, which she had described as an “atrocity”. Ms Rodríguez also convened her first cabinet meeting on Sunday, which included loyalists to Mr Maduro.

Oil prices fluctuated as investors considered the [impact](#) of America's operation in Venezuela, which sits on a fifth of the world's oil reserves. Brent crude, the international benchmark, initially fell by around 1% before rising again during early trading in Asia. Regional stockmarkets also rose. The benchmark indices in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan all climbed by more than 2%.

Mette Frederiksen, **Denmark's** prime minister, urged Mr Trump to “stop the threats” about America annexing **Greenland**. Ms Frederiksen's remarks came after Mr Trump reiterated his interest in taking over the [self-governing Danish territory](#), saying that America needed it “for defence”. Last month the Trump administration appointed a “special envoy to Greenland”, infuriating Denmark.

Russia accused **Ukraine** of targeting Moscow with drones for four consecutive days since the new year. Ukraine did not comment on the claim. So far its [attacks](#) on the Russian capital have tended to be sporadic. On Sunday the Kremlin shut three of the city's four airports. Meanwhile Ukrainian officials said Russian strikes on Kyiv had killed at least two people.

Botswana invited **Russia** to invest in its rare earths and diamonds, according to Russian state media citing Botswana's foreign minister. The country, which [stands out for its political stability](#) in southern Africa, is also set to open an embassy in Russia. Diamond-mining heavily contributes to Botswana's GDP, though the country was [overtaken by Russia](#) as the world's biggest producer in 2014.

Police in **Germany** said they suspected a far-left group of a “politically motivated” arson attack that left more than 45,000 homes in Berlin without power on Saturday. The capital's mayor, Kai Wegner, condemned “extremists” for putting “lives at risk” after Vulkangruppe (Volcano Group) claimed responsibility for the “sabotage” that the group said targeted “the fossil-fuel economy”. Tens of thousands of homes remain without electricity.

Word of the week: Brutalism, an architectural style characterised by hulking, exposed concrete, now in Donald Trump's crosshairs. [Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: Getty Images

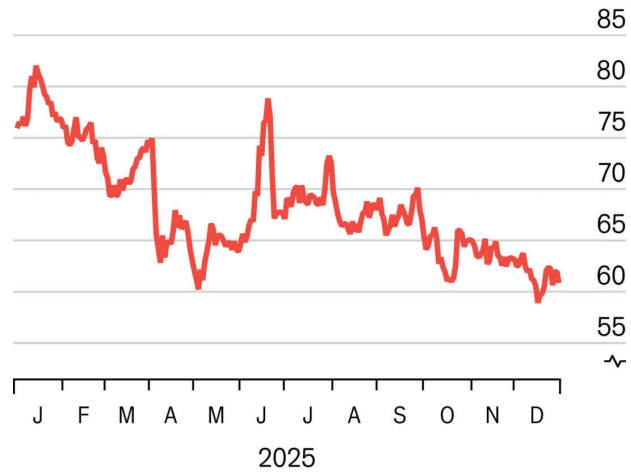
OPEC meets amid geopolitical turmoil

Eight members of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, which includes Venezuela, and their allies held up their November decision to not increase oil production in the first quarter of 2026 during a meeting on Sunday. The group, which produces [40% of the world's crude oil](#), wants to prevent a price crash. The [oil market](#) faces a glut as exporters outside the cartel, notably America and Guyana, are pumping at record rates. The International Energy Agency, an official forecaster, expects supply to exceed demand by 3.8m barrels per day during 2026. Benchmark crude prices, which are around \$61, already fell by roughly 18% in 2025, the steepest annual drop since covid-affected 2020.

Geopolitical tensions are nonetheless making it more difficult for the cartel to act in concert. After toppling the regime in Venezuela, Donald Trump said his administration will [run the country's oil industry](#). Meanwhile, the rift between Saudi Arabia, the group's leader, and its neighbour, the United Arab Emirates, over the [conflict in Yemen](#) is deepening. Such profound fractures could unsettle oil diplomacy.

Crude reality

Brent crude oil, \$ per barrel



Source: LSEG Workspace



Photograph: Getty Images

A fragile ceasefire on the Thai-Cambodian border

A week has passed since Thailand and Cambodia agreed to another shaky ceasefire in a conflict over their [disputed border](#). This time, the truce seems to be holding. On New Year's Eve Thailand released 18 Cambodian prisoners who had been detained since fighting broke out in July after more than 13 years of peace. Since then the conflict has claimed more than 100 lives and displaced around half a million civilians.

The ceasefire put an end to 20 days of combat in which Thailand used F-16 jets to strike Cambodian military targets and what it claims are scam centres along the border. Thailand blames Cambodia for [igniting the conflict](#) in response to its crackdown on scam centres. Cambodia denies this, arguing that the Thai army is trying to stoke nationalist sentiment ahead of a general election on February 8th. Mutual suspicion runs deep, raising fears that the calm may prove temporary.



Photograph: Getty Images

Smartphone wars intensify

Roh Tae-moon, the head of Samsung's smartphone business, will unveil the division's plans for 2026 on Sunday, ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show which kicks off in Las Vegas next week. The South Korean electronics giant is expected to release its new Galaxy s26 smartphone line early this year. It has a hard act to follow: in September [Apple](#), its American rival, released the iPhone 17 to enormous global success. Counterpoint Research, a market analytics firm, believes Apple outsold Samsung on smartphones in 2025—the first time in 14 years.

Samsung also faces competition in the nascent folding-phone market, where upstart Chinese brands like [Huawei](#) are muscling in with strong alternatives. Apple plans to release a folding iPhone later this year. Whether “foldables” are the future of mainstream smartphones, or merely an expensive niche, remains to be seen. Either way, Samsung could have a big fight on its hands in the coming year.



Photograph: Eyevine

Saudi Arabia's racing mania

The Dakar rally is the biggest misnomer in motorsport. The event, which began in 1978 as a race from Paris to Dakar in [Senegal](#), moved to South America in the 2010s and since 2020 has taken place in Saudi Arabia. In this year's Dakar, which starts this weekend, more than 800 competitors in souped-up off-roaders or on knobbly-tyred motorbikes will tear across desert in stages for 13 days, covering almost 8,000km.

[Saudi Arabia](#) is keen to attract racing events (it hosted its first Formula 1 Grand Prix in 2021). But the Dakar doesn't offer much for spectators, unless you enjoy lungfuls of dust. Instead, manufacturers see it as the ultimate test of their mettle. This year Ford has entered v8-engine-powered trucks and Land Rover will debut a rugged version of its Defender 4x4. Failure is common. Last year two-thirds of the entrants went the distance.



Photograph: Getty Images

New understanding of megafires

The most destructive wildfires occur when many isolated fires merge. Though rare, these “multi-ignition fires” have accounted for 31% of [California’s burned area](#) and 59% of the Arctic’s since 2012, according to a new study in *Science Advances*. In 2023, during Canada’s worst-ever fire season, the figure was 76%. As many as 29 “megafires” helped raze some 15m hectares—an area larger than England.

Using satellite data from 2012 to 2023, scientists found that these fires, which begin when dry thunderstorms spark clustered ignitions that later merge—made more common by warmer, drier conditions—behave differently from others. They grow quicker, last longer and are likelier to generate *pyrocumulonimbus* events (fire thunderstorms) than are isolated fires with the same number of ignition points, despite burning in similar environments. Longer active fire lines overwhelm ground crews, making matters worse. Better deployment of resources to [prevent](#) clusters from merging may help. But with a warming climate, that is just firefighting.



Illustration: The Economist

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:

Jeannette Duplessis, Calgary, Canada

Bruce Fink, Honolulu, Hawaii

Roger Bailey, Wadhurst, Britain

They all gave the correct answers of: Louis XIV, Lewis Carroll, Foreman, Frasier and Ali MacGraw. The theme is heavyweight boxing champions: Joe Louis, Lennox Lewis, George Foreman, Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali.

The questions were:

Monday: Which French King was the longest-reigning monarch in history?

Tuesday: What pen-name was assumed by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, author of a children's classic?

Wednesday: What title is used by both the supervisor of a team of workers in a factory and the spokesman of a jury?

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

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

*If you aren't in over your head,
how do you know how tall you
are?*

T.S. Eliot