

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Middle East Images/AFP via Getty

The speaker of **Iran's** parliament said that American troops and Israel would become legitimate targets for retaliation if Donald Trump orders military strikes over [anti-government protests](#). On Friday America's president said that "we'll be hitting them very hard" if Iran starts killing protesters; activists claim that almost 500 people have died. A government-imposed internet blackout hides the extent of protests.

Kristi Noem, America's homeland security secretary, said that she was dispatching "hundreds more" federal agents to Minneapolis, Minnesota. Thousands of residents took to the streets this weekend after an [immigration-enforcement officer](#) killed a woman, **Renee Nicole Good**, in her car on Wednesday. The Trump administration has cast her as a left-wing terrorist, seemingly without justification. Protests also broke out in other American cities.

America's armed forces said that it and its "partner forces" struck **Islamic State** targets inside [Syria](#). The attack was part of a larger operation against the jihadist group, launched in retaliation for an ambush on December 13th that killed two American soldiers and an American interpreter. Separately, Kurdish forces agreed to

withdraw from Aleppo, Syria's second city, where they had been fighting the government.

Google said that American users of Gemini, its AI offering, would soon be able to make purchases from retailers, including Walmart and Shopify, without leaving the app. AI companies have been racing to integrate **e-commerce** into their platforms to recoup some of the vast sums they have spent on developing and running them. OpenAI, which makes ChatGPT, reached a similar agreement with Walmart in October.

Mr Trump warned **Cuba** that it would no longer receive **Venezuelan** oil, telling it to make a deal with America "BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE". Scott Bessent, America's treasury secretary, suggested on Saturday that American sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry may end next week. Separately, America advised its citizens to leave Venezuela immediately, amid reports that militias were setting up roadblocks to snare anyone supporting the United States.

Burmese in 100 townships voted in the second of three stages of a sham parliamentary election set up by **Myanmar's** military junta. Critics complain that the elections are neither free nor fair; no matter the result the armed forces will automatically control 25% of the seats in both chambers. Recently [the regime has been gaining ground](#) in its five-year fight against rebel groups.

Erich von Däniken, a convicted fraudster, conspiracy theorist and amusement park owner, died, aged 90. Von Däniken's belief that **aliens** helped humans achieve all of their greatest endeavours, from the pyramids at Giza to Nazca Lines in Peru, made him a luminary of "alternative archeology", a pseudoscientific lack of discipline. The almost 70m books he sold may in part be responsible for the History Channel constantly broadcasting "Ancient Aliens".

Word of the week: Mafia monks. Misbehaving members of Thailand's monastic order who rocked Thai Buddhism in 2025.
[Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: Getty Images

Venezuela and America grope towards a new relationship

Since the seizure of Nicolás Maduro on January 3rd America and Venezuela have been figuring out what their new relationship will be. The Trump administration is trying to work with [the despot's replacement, Delcy Rodríguez](#). The acting president has described the commando raid that arrested her former boss as a “stain” on relations, but it may be one that she will overlook.

Talks are understood to be progressing on restoring diplomatic ties and re-opening the sprawling American embassy in Caracas, though the latter could take months. America will probably partly lift sanctions so it can buy and transport the [glut of oil](#) that has built up in Venezuela, a consequence of its blockade of the shadow tankers that ship the oil. Ms Rodríguez's [obedience to Mr Trump](#) may anger members of the more “anti-imperialist” wing of the ruling party, but they are mostly quiet. For now.



Photograph: Anadolu via Getty Images

Fear in the Asian hemisphere

Donald Trump has shown, dramatically, that he intends to dominate the western hemisphere. He snatched Venezuela's strongman, Nicolás Maduro, and has vowed to take Greenland from Denmark "whether they like it or not". But what about the other national-security priority, deterring China?

Admiral Samuel Paparo, head of America's Indo-Pacific Command, will want to reassure Asian friends and allies that America remains committed to protecting them when he opens the Honolulu Defence Forum, a security talkfest, on Sunday.

Yet his boss makes selling that message harder. American forces in the region keep being diverted, first to the Middle East and now to Latin America. Trumpian contempt for allies and international law may herald a world of spheres of influence. Might China's leader, Xi Jinping, try to seize Taiwan? "That's up to him," Mr Trump told the *New York Times*, adding: "I've expressed to him that I would be very unhappy." That will not hearten America's allies in the region.



Photograph: Getty Images

Ghana glitters

Thanks to a 2023 bail-out from the IMF, Ghana has recovered from a crippling debt crisis. And after two years of talks, on Wednesday the government agreed to a deal with bondholders to restructure \$118m of outstanding debt. One of many renegotiated packages since Ghana's default in 2022, it shows that investors are finally regaining confidence.

They have good reason. Buoyed by gold exports, the economy is growing strongly; the government predicts expansion of 4.8% this year. The annual inflation rate tumbled to a 23-year low of 5.4% last month, from 54% in 2023. Bond yields are falling. And the cedi went from the world's worst-performing currency in 2022 to the second-best in 2025, gaining 41% against the dollar.

Not all is glittery. Much of the gold is [irresponsibly mined](#). Last year Ghana set up an institution to buy gold from smaller mines to bolster government reserves. But critics argue that the legality of these operations is impossible to establish.



Photograph: Getty Images

Redemption of a snooker sinner

The Masters is strictly for snooker's elite. Only the top 16 players in the world rankings are invited. Seven of those taking part in this year's tournament, which begins on Sunday in London, are English. (The game has undergone a [strange recent revival](#) in Britain.) The next largest contingent comprises five Chinese players. Snooker has been popular in China for years, but the sport's reputation was set back by bans handed down to ten Chinese players in 2023 for match-fixing. The ringleaders, who put pressure on younger players to throw matches, were kicked out for life.

One of those youngsters, Zhao Xintong, who did not throw a match himself but did bet on the outcome of games, has managed to revive his career. He completed his suspension in September 2024 and, after dominating the amateur game, became China's first world champion in 2025. At the Masters Mr Zhao could write another chapter in an unlikely redemption story.



Photograph: AP

The Golden Globes honour podcasts

If the Oscars are known as “Hollywood’s biggest night”, then the Golden Globes are “Hollywood’s biggest party”. On Sunday celebrities and industry folk will gather for boozing and feasting, punctuated by a few prizegivings. Among those who may want to lay off the wine before the presentations and speeches are Jessie Buckley, who will probably win Best Actress in a Drama for “Hamnet” (pictured), and Timothée Chalamet, the star of “Marty Supreme”, who is the favourite for Best Actor in a Musical or Comedy.

This year, for the first time, [podcasters are joining](#) the revelry. Most of the nominees are Hollywood celebrities, too. Amy Poehler—who has co-hosted the Golden Globes four times—is shortlisted for “Good Hang”, in which she interviews her famous friends. Jason Bateman, who could pick up a gong as the co-host of “SmartLess”, has previously been nominated for five acting awards and won one. Perhaps the Globes’ judges figured that the best parties are made up of [people you already know](#).



Illustration: The Economist

The winners of the week's quiz

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

Ahmed Al Suwaidi, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Iskriyana Vasileva, Berlin, Germany

Himmat Kalsia, New Delhi India

They all gave the correct answers of: a candle, millionaire, Hot Chocolate, Joe DiMaggio and Arthur Miller. The theme is Marilyn Monroe, about whom Elton John wrote the song "Candle in the Wind", who starred in "How to Marry A Millionaire" and "Some Like It Hot" and who married both DiMaggio and Miller.

The questions were:

Monday: The si unit for luminous intensity is originally based on the light emitted by what object?

Tuesday: What term for a rich person was originally coined during France's Mississippi Bubble in the early 18th century?

Wednesday: Which band, which shares its name with a drink, had a hit with "You Sexy Thing", a song that featured in the film "The Full Monty"?

Thursday: Which baseball player is mentioned in the song "Mrs Robinson" by Simon & Garfunkel?

Friday: Who wrote the plays "All My Sons" and "The Crucible"?

*Success is often achieved by those
who don't know that failure is
inevitable.*

Coco Chanel