

Catch up: two dead in Los Angeles fires; Trump's designs on Greenland



The fire chief of **Los Angeles County** said that two people had been killed and more than 1,000 buildings destroyed by wildfires. The [blazes](#), fed by fierce winds, devastated the hillside neighbourhood of Pacific Palisades and advanced into other residential areas around Los Angeles, forcing tens of thousands of people to evacuate. Joe Biden, who was already in Los Angeles on a previously scheduled trip, pledged federal help.

Denmark's foreign minister, Lars Lokke Rasmussen, downplayed **Donald Trump's** refusal to rule out using military or economic coercion to make [Greenland](#) a part of America. Mr Lokke Rasmussen said that [Mr Trump's comments](#) about the self-governing island, which is a part of Denmark, had not sparked "any foreign-policy crisis". Mr Trump has repeatedly voiced his wish to acquire the island, which is a self-governing part of Denmark, as well as the Panama Canal.

Russia bombed a residential building in the **Ukrainian** city of [Zaporizhia](#), killing at least 13 people and injuring 18 more.

President Volodymyr Zelensky described the attack as “cruel” and urged [Ukraine’s allies](#) to put Russia “under pressure for its terror”. Earlier Ukraine said it had struck a strategic fuel depot in Russia’s Saratov region.

British borrowing costs rose as investors [sold off government bonds](#). The yield on the ten-year gilt rose to its highest level since 2008, while the yield on the 30-year gilt, which hit its highest level since 1998 on Tuesday, also continued to climb. British borrowing costs have risen quickly this year as concerns over the level of government borrowing and weak economic growth have mounted.

The **Israel Defence Forces** said it had recovered from Gaza the body of Youssef Ziyadne, a 53-year-old **hostage**, and had “serious concerns” for the life of his son, who was also abducted in October 2023. [Ceasefire talks](#) resumed between Israel and Hamas last week and reportedly concern the release of 34 [hostages](#). It is unclear how many of the remaining captives are alive.

Christian Stocker, the interim leader of **Austria’s** centre-right People’s Party, explained the assurances his party would require before joining a coalition with the [hard-right Freedom Party](#). Those include “no dependence on the Russian Federation” and that government institutions remain “above party interests”. Austria’s president asked Herbert Kickl, the FPÖ’s leader, to form a government on Monday.

Indonesia said that Apple’s offer to invest \$1bn in the country was insufficient for it to lift a ban on sales of the American tech giant’s latest iPhone, first imposed in October. Apple’s offer included a promise to manufacture tracking devices (called AirTags) in the country. [Indonesia](#) requires a number of components in phones and other goods to be produced locally.

Figure of the day: 43, the number of “critical minerals” of which Greenland is believed to have supplies. [Read the full story.](#)

Why does Donald Trump want the Panama Canal?



Donald Trump has recently asserted that the United States is being “ripped off” by administrators of the Panama Canal and that “Chinese soldiers” are operating the waterway. He has threatened to “demand that the Panama Canal be returned” to the United States. On December 23rd José Raúl Mulino, Panama’s president, retorted that “every square metre of the Panama Canal” belongs to the country. Opposition parties agree.

Mr Trump’s real goals may be less outlandish. But nobody knows what they are. Among them might be tighter controls of [migration](#) through the Darien Gap, a reduction in Chinese influence in Panama or improved investment conditions for American firms there.

Mr Mulino says he will not make any moves until Mr Trump is inaugurated. But Panama could in the meantime use its seat on the UN Security Council to push for a special resolution to reaffirm its sovereignty over the Canal.

Will Lebanon finally have a new president?



Perhaps the 13th time will be the charm. On Thursday the [Lebanese parliament](#) is due to select a new president. The post has been vacant since October 2022, when Michel Aoun finished his six-year term. In a dozen meetings lawmakers have been unable to agree on his successor. Hizbullah, the Shia militia and political party, wanted to install Suleiman Frangieh, an undistinguished former MP (and the grandson of a former president). Its opponents support General Joseph Aoun, the army chief.

There is reason to think MPs will break the deadlock. Hizbullah was badly weakened by its war against Israel, which ended in November, and diminished even further by the fall of the Assad regime in Syria. It may be too weak to block General Aoun, who has the support of America and Saudi Arabia. Mr Frangieh dropped out of the race on Wednesday night. As ever in Lebanon, external events have reshaped internal politics.

The threat to India's IT success



Since Donald Trump won America's presidential election in November, shares in [Indian IT](#) outsourcing firms have risen. Bosses in the sector, for which America is the biggest market, believed that Mr Trump's pro-business approach will help them. There are other reasons to be bullish. After being dragged down by global economic uncertainty in 2023, earnings have in the past year picked up, driven by the AI boom.

There could be more good news on Thursday when TCS, India's biggest such firm, reports earnings from the last quarter of 2024. Analysts are optimistic, but that could be derailed by Mr Trump. Over the past month, his supporters have railed against H1-Bs, a category of visa for skilled workers that Indian IT firms rely on to send staff to America to understand client needs. Should Mr Trump succumb to the demands of his base, any recovery could be stalled.

An opposition firebrand returns to Mozambique



More than two months ago [Venâncio Mondlane](#) fled Mozambique, fearing for his life. He had run as an opposition candidate in October's election, which he says he won. The process was so [flawed](#) that it is impossible to know the truth. He says he will fly back to Maputo, the capital, on Thursday. Many Mozambicans will see it as the return of their rightful president.

That view is not shared by the Frelimo party, which has ruled for 50 years. Its candidate, Daniel Chapo, was officially declared the winner with 65% of the vote. But its control is slipping. Furious protesters have attacked Frelimo offices and police stations, raided factories, and shut down mines. If and when Mr Mondlane touches down, the state will be in a quandary. Let Mr Mondlane go free, and he might lead people in the streets. Arrest him, and popular anger will flare.

America mourns Jimmy Carter



On Thursday a national funeral service will be held in Washington, DC for [Jimmy Carter](#), who died on December 29th, aged 100. All of America's living presidents are expected to attend, with Joe Biden among those delivering eulogies. Throughout the week thousands of Americans have paid tribute to their 39th president, whose coffin has travelled by motorcade from [his home town](#) in Plains, Georgia. A private ceremony in Plains will conclude proceedings.

Mr Carter, once a peanut farmer, was perhaps the most virtuous of all America's presidents. His foreign-policy achievements, including the Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel in 1978, were typical of a man intent on peace for its own sake. But his single term in the White House was rocky. After his presidency he set up the Carter Center, where he became an advocate for peace and democracy; he won the Nobel Prize for peace in 2002.

Daily quiz



The Economist

We will serve you a new question each day this week. On Friday your challenge is to give us all five answers and, as important, tell us the connecting theme. Email your responses (and include mention of your home city and country) by 1700 GMT on Friday to QuizEspresso@economist.com. We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Thursday: Which concert venue is based at 881 Seventh Avenue in New York?

Wednesday: What do the initials FTA stand for in economics?

**Shared pain is lessened; shared joy,
increased—thus do we refute entropy.**

Spider Robinson