

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter

Britain's economy went into a **recession** in the second half of 2023. Revised figures released by the Office for National Statistics revealed that GDP fell by 0.3% quarter on quarter in the last three months of 2023, following a 0.1% [contraction](#) in the previous quarter. The data will be a blow to [Rishi Sunak](#). The embattled prime minister had promised to “grow the economy” last year.

Israel asked **America** to reschedule a meeting about plans to attack the southern city of Rafah in **Gaza**. Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, had cancelled the meeting after America allowed the UN to pass a resolution calling for a ceasefire. It could be a sign that Israel is trying to reduce tensions with America, which have grown over the [humanitarian crisis](#) in Gaza.

Colombia ordered the expulsion of **Argentine** diplomats, worsening a spat between the leaders of the two countries. In a recent interview with CNN Javier Milei, Argentina's libertarian president, called [Gustavo Petro](#), his Colombian counterpart, a “terrorist”. Mr Petro was once in a left-wing guerilla group and is now mired in scandal. In January Colombia pulled its own ambassador out of Argentina.

China said it would [scrap tariffs](#) on **Australian wine** on Friday in a sign of thawing relations between the two countries. The “anti-dumping duties” of between 116% and 218% were introduced during a geopolitical fall-out in 2020. They dried up Australia's exports to China—once one of its largest overseas wine markets. China has also rolled back other penalties, including on barley, timber and coal.

Amazon said it would invest a further \$2.75bn in **Anthropic**, an AI startup, on top of the \$1.25bn investment it announced in September. Anthropic's AI model, Claude 3, competes with rivals such as ChatGPT. The firm's valuation has [risen](#) from \$3.4bn in April 2022 to \$18bn. Despite being short of a full takeover, Amazon's deal may well prompt [scrutiny from trustbusters](#).

The White House warned of a lengthy disruption to **Baltimore's port** following the collapse of the [Francis Scott Key Bridge](#). Pete Buttigieg, America's transportation secretary, said the effects of the disaster would "ripple out" beyond the region and rebuilding the bridge would not "be quick or easy or cheap". Divers recovered the bodies of two of the six workers presumed dead from the accident.

Japan's [Moon lander](#) survived a second lunar night and transmitted new images to Earth. The Smart Lander for Investigating Moon, or SLIM, landed in January and was put to sleep for a second time in early March after freezing temperatures made it impossible for it to function. Odysseus, the first private spacecraft to reach the Moon, had less luck. Last week Intuitive Machines, its American operator, said the lander had "permanently faded".

Figure of the day: 60%, China's share of the global market for wind turbines as of 2022, according to the Global Wind Energy Council. [Read the full story](#).



Photo: AP

Crypto's fallen king is sentenced

Late last year Sam Bankman-Fried, once the golden boy of crypto, was [convicted](#) on seven counts of fraud. The trial lasted 15 days, during which he saw his friends and former girlfriend give a damning account of how his actions led to the collapse of FTX, his [cryptocurrency](#) exchange. On Thursday a judge in Manhattan will hand down his sentence.

As the head of FTX, Mr Bankman-Fried mixed with the powerful and famous in Washington. But in November 2022 it emerged that Alameda—FTX's sister hedge fund, also founded by Mr Bankman-Fried—held few assets apart from a handful of illiquid tokens. Spooked customers began to pull holdings from the exchange; within days FTX stopped meeting withdrawal requests.

Mr Bankman-Fried now faces decades in prison—the maximum is 110 years. Federal prosecutors said he should receive up to 50 years for “orchestrating one of the largest financial frauds in history”.



Photo: Reuters

Macron's tricky talks with Lula

Emmanuel Macron began the official leg of his state visit to Brazil on Thursday, after spending two days in the country. The French president is meeting his Brazilian counterpart, [Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva](#), at the presidential palace in Brasília, the capital. The pair, one a former investment banker and the other a one-time metalworker, have already met twice this week: once in the Amazon, to discuss protection of the rainforest; and once near Rio de Janeiro to launch a naval submarine that used French technology.

The pair will probably confront some thorny topics. One is Mr Macron's refusal to support the [Mercosur](#) trade deal between the European Union and Latin American countries—a position Lula has blamed on French farmers. The other is Mr Macron's hope to secure [support for Ukraine](#) against Russia's war. Like many leaders in the global south, Lula has so far refused to condemn Russia's aggression.



Photo: Alamy

An Indian opposition leader in court

On Thursday a court in Delhi will decide if [Arvind Kejriwal](#), the capital's chief minister, will be released from custody or remain in jail. Mr Kejriwal, the leader of the Aam Aadmi Party—and a prominent opponent of Narendra Modi, the prime minister—was arrested on March 21st in a corruption probe (he denies wrongdoing). His release would be a setback for Mr Modi's government, which has been accused of using India's anti-corruption agencies to harass political opponents and other critics.

Yet it looks unlikely that Mr Kejriwal will walk free. Two other AAP leaders, detained as part of the same probe, have continually had their pre-trial custody extended by the courts (one for the past 13 months, one for six). Neither has been put on trial. The start of an election that Mr Modi is widely expected to win is just three weeks away. Mr Kejriwal seems certain to be missing from the campaign trail.

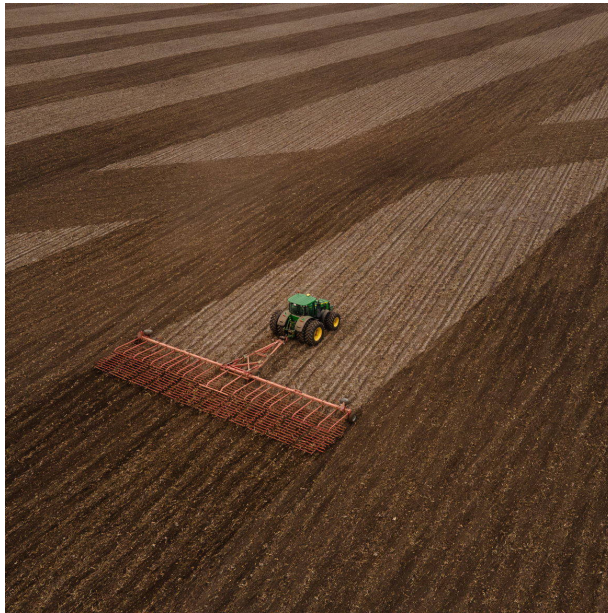


Photo: Getty Images

Ukraine's grain pain with Poland

In February relations between [Poland and Ukraine](#) reached a low point. Polish farmers—furious about what they view as unfair competition—blocked several crossings on the Polish-Ukraine border and destroyed mounds of Ukrainian grain. Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, called for an emergency meeting. A day later Denys Shmyhal, his prime minister, arrived at the border to negotiate. No one turned up to meet him.

But relations seem to be improving. On Thursday Mr Shmyhal received a warmer welcome as he visited Donald Tusk, Poland's prime minister, in Warsaw for a long-awaited discussion about agricultural imports. The EU wants to bolster Ukraine's economy by extending trade liberalisation for some Ukrainian farm goods, first granted in 2022, until mid-2025. Poland insists on measures to protect its own producers. Last week the EU said it was preparing "safeguards" to stop [cheap produce](#) flooding in. "We are close to a solution," said Mr Tusk following the meeting.



Photo: Getty Images

How ABBA took it all

There's a show-business adage that overnight success takes years to achieve. ABBA's triumph in the Eurovision Song Contest at the Brighton Dome attests to it. In April 1974 four veterans of the Swedish music industry, hitherto unknown outside their home country, were launched to a global fame so enduring that today their so-called "ABBAtar" [holograms](#) can fill a purpose-built arena in London on a daily basis.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the band's breakthrough, the Brighton Museum is launching an exhibition on Thursday. "ABBA: One Week in Brighton", underlines how the outlandish outfits chosen for the performance, and the euphoric glam-rock of "Waterloo", the chosen song, were no mere nods to fashion. Instead they were an against-the-odds bid to seize and hold the world's attention. These outstanding artists, once sniffed at as ephemeral kitsch, have managed to do that ever since, and without changing their essential appeal.



Daily quiz

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 [\[email protected\]](#). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Thursday: What was the name of the luxury train service that ran from Paris to Istanbul?

Wednesday: What was the name of the first prequel in the Star Wars movie series, released in 1999?

Books are the mirrors of the soul.

Virginia Woolf