

Catch up: One of LA's blazes contained; US Steel deal gets more time

One of the four **fires** burning in **Los Angeles County** has been contained, according to California's fire department. However, [the fire](#) in Pacific Palisades has now grown to more than 96km² while the Eaton fire is now 57km². The winds that originally helped spread the blazes are expected to pick up again during the week, complicating firefighting efforts. At least 16 people have died.

Nippon Steel said that America's Committee on Foreign Investment extended the deadline for it to abandon its attempt to buy **US Steel**. The Japanese firm was to drop the deal, worth \$14bn, by February 2nd after President Joe Biden issued an executive order blocking it on January 3rd. Nippon filed an objection; [it will now have](#) until June 18th to save the takeover.

Tens of thousands took to the streets of Bucharest, the capital of **Romania**, to protest against the annulling of the country's presidential elections. On December 6th Romania's Constitutional Court [declared](#) the first round of the election void when Calin Georgescu, a long-shot pro-Russian candidate, unexpectedly came first. A do-over is currently scheduled for May 4th.

Sweden said it would send up to three vessels to join NATO's efforts to prevent the sabotage of undersea cables in the Baltic sea. The Scandinavian country, which joined the alliance in March, will also contribute surveillance planes. On Saturday Germany tugged a drifting Russian oil tanker—believed to be part of [Russia's "shadow fleet"](#) of old ships used to dodge sanctions—off its Baltic coast.

[Jack Smith](#), the special counsel who spent two years pursuing **Donald Trump**, resigned from America's Justice Department. Mr

Smith brought two criminal cases against Mr Trump but dropped them both after America's election, citing a longstanding rule against prosecuting sitting presidents. Separately, Mr Trump was sentenced for 34 counts of falsifying documents on Friday, but was not given prison time or a fine.

The **Sudanese** national army retook Wad Madani, the capital of Gezira state, from the Rapid Support Forces. The paramilitary group, which has been fighting against the Sudanese Armed Forces for nearly two years, had captured the city over a year earlier. Last week America said that the RSF had [committed genocide](#) in the western region of Darfur and imposed sanctions on Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, its leader.

Ukraine said it had captured two wounded **North Korean soldiers** in the Russian region of Kursk. President Volodymyr Zelensky claimed that this was a rare feat because wounded North Koreans would usually be killed by their own side “to erase any evidence” of the country's [involvement in the war](#)—a deployment that Ukrainian and Western sources estimate at 11,000 troops.

Figure of the day: More than \$50bn, the estimated economic damage of the LA fires. [Read the full story.](#)

The frugal European consumer



One indicator in Europe's troubled economy is doing well. Real incomes have grown by 3.8% over the past two years, according to calculations by the European Central Bank. That should be good news for consumption and growth. Yet Europeans are hesitant to spend. The household savings rate has grown consistently for two years. On Monday, fresh data will probably show that continuing in the third quarter of 2024.

The euro zone's household savings rate, which was 15.7% in the second quarter of 2024, is a lot higher than the 4.4% of disposable income that Americans set aside. And since Russia invaded Ukraine it has risen dramatically. One factor is a decline in net real wealth caused by inflation, reckons the ECB. Political anxiety and low confidence in Europe's economic outlook also contribute. A recent consumer survey found that households are deferring major purchases. Europeans see rainy days ahead, and are saving accordingly.

A massive holy gathering in India



On Monday Hindus will begin to descend on Prayagraj, a city in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, to take part in the Maha Kumbh Mela. It is the largest gathering of people in the world. Over 44 days more than 400m will take a dip in the chilly waters at the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna rivers (where they also meet the mythical Saraswati river, according to legend). Bathing, credants believe, grants salvation.

The state government, led by India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, hopes for more earthly rewards. It has poured around 64bn rupees (\$765m) into this year's event, building a temporary township with 150,000 tents and 3,000 kitchens. It expects the influx of visitors to spend 2trn rupees, approximately 8% of the state's GDP. But more than money, the state government is after political blessings. A successful mela could boost the BJP's credentials among its Hindu-nationalist base.

**Arguments hardly affect the faithful—
their beliefs have an entirely different
foundation.**

Paul Feyerabend