

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: EPA

Donald Trump said his administration would “de-escalate a little bit” its immigration crackdown in **Minnesota**. The president called the [killing of Alex Pretti](#) by Border Patrol officers an “unfortunate incident”, promising an “honest investigation”. Meanwhile a federal judge in Minnesota ordered Todd Lyons, Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s acting director, to appear in court on Friday, warning that he may be held in contempt for ignoring court orders constraining the agency.

Mr Trump insisted that the **dollar** is “doing great” despite its recent slide. Shortly before his comments, an index measuring the greenback’s value against six big trading partners plunged to a four-year low. [Investors](#) have been offloading American assets amid concerns over Mr Trump’s foreign-policy agenda. Consumer confidence in America also dropped to its lowest level in more than a decade in January.

Claudia Sheinbaum, **Mexico’s** president, claimed her country’s cancellation of an oil shipment to **Cuba** was a “sovereign decision” and not a response to American threats. Mexico has become Cuba’s biggest source of fuel since [America ousted Nicolás Maduro](#),

Venezuela's leader, earlier this month. Ms Sheinbaum insisted that Mexico would "continue to show solidarity" with Cuba.

The Centre for Strategic and International Studies estimated that nearly 1.2m Russian soldiers have been killed, wounded or have gone missing since the **war in Ukraine** began four years ago. The American think-tank reckons as many as 325,000 Russian troops have been killed compared with 100,000-140,000 for Ukraine. Meanwhile [Ukraine](#) accused Russia of terrorism after it struck after a passenger train, killing five.

Saudi Arabia said it would not allow its air space to be used for any military action against **Iran**. The announcement followed a meeting between Muhammad bin Salman, the Saudi crown prince, and Masoud Pezeshkian, [Iran's president](#). *USS Abraham Lincoln*, an American aircraft-carrier, arrived in the Middle East earlier this week, sparking speculation that America is planning a strike on Iran.

Spain will offer legal residency to **undocumented immigrants** who have lived in the country for at least five months, an estimated 500,000 people. The country's [economic growth](#) has outpaced the euro-area average in recent years, [thanks in part](#) to its relative openness to immigrants, many of whom are from Latin America. The expedited-residency decree does not need parliamentary approval.

Shares in **UnitedHealth** and **Humana**, two American [health-insurance providers](#), fell by around 20%. The plunge came after the Trump administration proposed that spending on companies that provide coverage for Medicare, a health programme for the elderly, would increase by less than 0.1% next year, down from 5% in 2026. Health insurers receive around \$500bn from Medicare Advantage plans.

Figure of the day: 460 tonnes, the amount of gold held by Asian exchange-traded funds—triple the amount they held two years ago.
[Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: EPA

America's plan for post-Maduro Venezuela

Less than four weeks ago American special forces captured Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela's dictator. But the regime is moving on. Delcy Rodríguez, Mr Maduro's deputy, has taken over with Donald Trump's backing. He insists she is doing a good job of running the country on his behalf. Ms Rodríguez has announced [economic reforms](#), including changes to a hydrocarbons law aimed at boosting oil production, a priority for Mr Trump.

Under American pressure, the authorities have released around 260 political prisoners. Yet more than 600 remain behind bars and there is no sign of genuine political liberalisation. On Wednesday Marco Rubio, America's secretary of state, will testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the administration's plans for Venezuela. So far, officials have offered little beyond vague talk of a transition. María Corina Machado, Venezuela's opposition leader and winner of the Nobel peace prize, will be hoping Mr Rubio talks not only about oil—but about a real plan for democracy. So will many Venezuelans.



Photograph: Getty Images

Gaza waits for its crossing to Egypt to reopen

The Rafah border crossing—the only one between Gaza and Egypt—has been mostly shut since May 2024, when Israeli troops seized the Palestinian side. It was meant to be reopened under a ceasefire agreement brokered in October, but Israel demanded Hamas return all of the hostages being held in Gaza first. That finally happened on Monday when the body of Ran Gvili, a police officer, was recovered. American officials expect Rafah to reopen within days.

Thousands of Gazans are waiting to cross the border for [medical treatment](#); more than a thousand died waiting to be evacuated during the war. Others will leave to escape the miserable conditions. Three months into the ceasefire, almost nothing has been rebuilt. Half of the enclave is still occupied by Israeli troops and will probably remain that way until Hamas disarms, which it is refusing to do. More than 100,000 Gazans already fled during the war; few will want to return. The traffic at Rafah will be almost entirely one way.



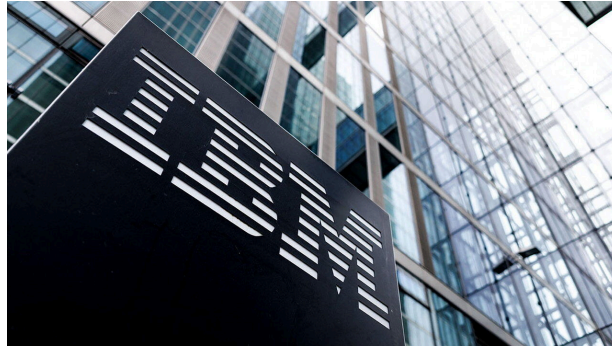
Photograph: Alamy

What to watch at the Federal Reserve

The Federal Reserve had a dramatic start to 2026. Earlier this month the Department of Justice [opened a criminal probe](#) into Jerome Powell, the central bank's chair, over building renovations. Donald Trump has continued to demand bigger, faster interest-rate cuts. And speculation looms over whom he will choose to succeed Mr Powell, whose term expires in May.

Nevertheless, the Fed's rate-setting meeting on Wednesday will be staid. Markets expect the Fed will hold its headline interest-rate range at 3.5–3.75%, after several cuts last year. The Fed faces a tricky balancing-act. Inflation is slightly above its 2% target. Meanwhile the jobs market is weakening, though not collapsing.

Fed-watchers will keep an eye on how many rate-setters dissent by calling for a cut (complaints from Stephen Miran, a Trump loyalist, are all but guaranteed). They will also be looking for any hints about whether Mr Powell plans to stay on as a Fed governor after his term concludes.



Photograph: Alamy

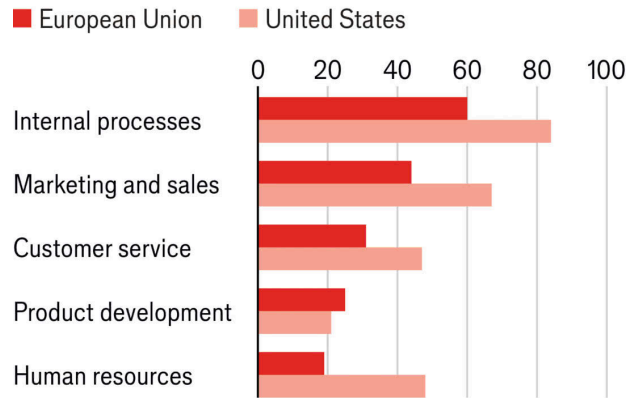
A surprise winner in the AI boom

IBM reports fourth-quarter results on Wednesday. Having lagged behind the producers of cutting-edge technology, the American computing giant has repositioned itself as a problem-solver. Its consulting arm offers bespoke advice to businesses that want to work out how to [integrate artificial intelligence into their existing systems](#). Investors seem convinced. IBM's share price is up by 27% since August, outperforming both Microsoft and Oracle.

Sensible acquisitions, enabled by IBM's ample amounts of cash, have helped. In December the company said it would buy Confluent, a data-streaming service provider, for \$11bn. Earlier last year it bought HashiCorp, a cloud-software company, for \$6.4bn. Both bolster IBM's offering to firms trying to manage how data is fed to AI systems across different platforms. When it reports its results, analysts will be looking for whether revenues in its high-margin software business are continuing to grow. That would be further evidence that Big Blue is not the relic it is sometimes thought to be.

Think again

Use of generative AI by business area*, 2025, %



*Survey of 213 US and 3,984 EU companies.

Excludes companies that do not use generative AI

Source: European Investment Bank



Illustration: Sandra Navarro

Daily quiz

We will serve you a new question each weekday. On Friday your challenge is to give us all five answers and tell us the theme. Email your responses (and your home city and country) by 1700 GMT on **Friday** to [\[email protected\]](#). We'll pick three winners at random and crown them on Saturday.

Tuesday: What is supposedly the James Bond family motto, and comprises the title of a film starring Pierce Brosnan?

Wednesday: Which nature documentary series, presented by David Attenborough, and first shown in 1979, traced the story of evolution?

*There is nothing on this earth
more to be prized than true
friendship.*

Thomas Aquinas