

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

**Donald Trump** threatened to launch strikes against **Iran** should it rebuild its nuclear programme. The American president's warning came after a meeting with Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's leader. Mr Trump also said there would be "hell to pay" if Hamas did not disarm in Gaza. He said he wanted to move to the second phase of the [peace plan](#) in the territory, which has stalled in recent weeks.

Mr Trump admitted that **America** had hit a "dock area" in **Venezuela** earlier this month. The strike would be the first on a target within Venezuela since the Trump administration began its [pressure campaign on the country](#). According to [CNN](#), the attack was carried out by the [CIA](#) and aimed at a dock used by a prominent gang to ship drugs.

Volodymyr Zelensky said **Russia** was undermining peace talks after the Kremlin said that it had foiled a **Ukrainian** attack on Vladimir Putin's residence. Mr Zelensky dismissed the claim as "typical Russian lies". American officials said that Mr Trump held a "positive call" about Ukraine with Mr Putin. [Talks](#) between America's president and Mr Zelensky on Sunday did not yield a breakthrough.

**Khaleda Zia**, Bangladesh's first female prime minister, died aged 80. She led the country for two five-year terms in 1991 and 2001. Her longstanding rivalry with Sheikh Hasina, the autocratic leader who was ousted in 2024, defined the country's politics for a generation. Ms Zia's son, Tarique Rahman, now leads the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, which many expect to return to power in polls [scheduled for February](#).

**Meta** announced the purchase of **Manus**, an artificial-intelligence startup, for an undisclosed fee. The tech giant said it would "operate and sell" Manus's service, which is a general-purpose AI agent that performs several tasks, including "coding and data analysis". The acquisition is part of [Meta's big splurge](#) on AI. Mark Zuckerberg, the firm's boss, wants to be the first to develop "personal superintelligence".

Chip Wilson, the founder and a big shareholder of **Lululemon**, nominated three new directors to the board of the [struggling athleisure clothing brand](#). The company, whose shares plunged by 45% this year, announced its boss's exit earlier this month. Mr Wilson said shareholders had "no faith" in the current board's ability to pick a new CEO. Lululemon also faces pressure from Elliott Management, an activist investor.

Organisers of the **Munich Security Conference** said they would invite politicians from **Alternative for Germany** (AfD) to its next meeting in February, having blackballed the [populist-right party](#) for the past two years. The conference is Europe's most important defence gathering. America's vice-president, J.D. Vance, condemned the exclusion of the populist-right at a speech at this year's conference, before meeting the AfD's co-leader, Alice Weidel.

**Figure of the day:** £10, the Christmas bonus Britain's government gives to pensioners, unchanged since 1972. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

## Football and free trade in North America

*Until January 2nd we are looking ahead to next year's big stories. Today, what will shape the Americas?*

Countries in North America have good reasons to strengthen ties with each other. In June Mexico, the United States and Canada will co-host the men's football World Cup. Then, in July, the three will start a review of the [United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement](#), their free-trade deal. Much is at stake. It is the world's largest free-trade bloc by output, with a combined GDP of \$31trn, 28% of global GDP. Their economies are complementary: the United States provides capital, innovation and scale; Canada, natural resources and energy; Mexico, labour and manufacturing. Disruptions to supply chains would hurt. Mr Trump's tariffs already do.

Negotiations could be fraught. Mexico and Canada are taking different approaches. [Canada](#) has criticised the "rupture" that Mr Trump's tariffs are causing. Yet Mexico is conceding to his demands. America's president sees Mexico as a back door for Chinese firms entering regional supply chains; the government has created a body to vet Chinese investment. Hosting a bunch of men kicking a football will be child's play compared with decisions about USMCA.



Photograph: Getty Images

## **Might Brazil's mega-election overcome polarisation?**

Brazilians head to the polls in October to elect hundreds of officials, including the president. The presidential election could mark the return of moderation after years of polarisation and political chaos. In November [Jair Bolsonaro](#), a hard-right populist who styled himself “Trump of the tropics”, began a [27-year sentence](#) for launching a coup after losing his bid for re-election in 2022. This has taken him out of the running for 2026. Polls indicate the current president [Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva](#), a stalwart of the left, may not win outright in the first round.

This opens up space for Brazil's right to move towards the centre. Leading right-wing candidates, who are governors from well-run states, defend Mr Bolsonaro in public. But in private they insist that they are not his puppets and criticise his confrontational style. Right-of-centre candidates have swept recent mayoral races and Congress. Most signs point towards at least a partial respite from the hard-right populist fever.



Photograph: Reuters

## A good year for Javier Milei?

Much of 2025 was difficult for Javier Milei, Argentina's president. Corruption scandals hit his popularity, and his attempts to keep the [peso](#) artificially strong to pull down inflation led to heavy pressure on the currency. An extraordinary [bail-out from the Trump administration](#) helped calm markets and secure a thumping win in midterm elections. Mr Milei's third year as president will be defined by getting laws through Congress. He does not have a majority, so negotiation with the sensible parts of the opposition and powerful provincial governors will be crucial.

Argentina needs structural reforms and Mr Milei plans to introduce them. His priorities are the liberalisation of labour laws to reduce informality and passing a budget to lock in his fiscal surplus. He has already begun making progress on both. With concessions, Mr Milei is likely to get Congress to approve all his aims. If he makes those reforms, 2026 could be a very good year for Mr Milei.



Photograph: Getty Images

## Donald Trump's war on drugs threatens Nicolás Maduro

The Trump administration has heaped enormous pressure on [Nicolás Maduro](#), Venezuela's strongman. For months the United States has been striking alleged drug-trafficking boats near Venezuela, which is almost certainly illegal. In November the [USS Gerald R. Ford](#), the world's largest aircraft carrier, sailed into the Caribbean, joining the already formidable armada. In December the US military seized two oil tankers—one that was under sanctions, and another on the grounds that it carried sanctioned oil. Mr Trump also announced a wider blockade of all sanctioned tankers entering and leaving Venezuela.

The Trump administration claims Mr Maduro is a “narco-terrorist”, has openly discussed striking inside Venezuela and refused to rule out a ground invasion to force him out. Yet much remains uncertain. There have occasionally been secret talks between the administrations. In 2026 Mr Trump could declare the military build-up part of a wider pivot to the Western hemisphere, continue [hitting alleged drug boats](#) or even use it to threaten other countries like Colombia. Still, he will probably continue to tighten the net on Venezuela's oil. And he could yet strike.





Illustration: The Economist

## 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.

**Monday:** Which French King was the longest-reigning monarch in history?

*We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams.*

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***Jimmy Carter***