

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: AFP

Donald Trump said he had “the makings of a deal” to end the war in **Ukraine**, as **Volodymyr Zelensky**, **Ukraine’s** president, met him in Florida. Mr Zelensky said that “us-Ukraine security guarantees” were “100% agreed”. But the talks still did not yield a breakthrough. Mr Trump also said he planned to convene a meeting in January with Ukraine’s president and European leaders.

China launched military drills around **Taiwan**. The “Justice Mission 2025” exercises are a “serious warning to Taiwan independence separatist forces and external interference forces”, said a spokesperson for China’s army. The drills will involve live-fire exercises and test China’s combat readiness. The manoeuvres began 11 days after America announced an \$11.1bn arms sale to **Taiwan**.

Three people were killed and dozens were injured in **Syria** when members of the country’s **Alawite** minority clashed with counter-demonstrators at a protest. The attackers have not been identified. The sect—from which Syria’s deposed dictator, Bashar al-Assad, originates—has **been in tension** with the government since it came to power. Days earlier a bomb at an Alawite mosque killed eight people.

Kosovo's ruling Vetevendosje party won around 49% of votes in parliamentary elections, possibly ending months of political deadlock. In February Vetevendosje won 42% of votes in another election, but coalition talks with opposition parties failed, prompting another poll. Though Vetevendosje will still need the support of coalition partners, the party is expected to get it this time.

Voter turnout was lower than expected for the first phase of **Myanmar's** [sham general election](#). All credible opposition to the country's junta, which seized power in 2021, has been banned. Voting will also be impossible in large parts of the country where rebel forces continue to fight the army. Final results will be announced in February.

A **winter storm** killed three people in **Sweden**. Storm Johannes, which struck on Saturday, knocked out power in tens of thousands of homes in Sweden, Norway and Finland. It disrupted travel services across the region; authorities closed several roads.

Brigitte Bardot, a French screen icon and sex symbol, died aged 91. Ms Bardot appeared in a string of films in the 1950s that were internationally popular but often shocked audiences with their unabashed portrayal of female sexuality. Tiring of her acting career, she abruptly retired in 1973, devoting herself to animal-rights activism.

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



Photograph: Getty Images

A year discussing 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

Could Brazil's mega-election herald the end of 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 [\[email protected\]](mailto:). 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.

Jimmy Carter