

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: AP

America's navy shot down an **Iranian drone** that it said “aggressively approached” the *uss Abraham Lincoln*, an aircraft-carrier in the Arabian Sea, with “unclear intent”. Last week Donald Trump [sent an armada](#) to the Middle East, and has repeatedly threatened to [strike Iran](#) if it does not agree to new limits on its nuclear programme and cutting ties with regional proxy groups.

Tech stocks fell in Asia after a similar sell-off in America. It began after **Anthropic**, an artificial-intelligence firm, launched an [AI](#) tool that can automate some legal work. Legal- and data-services companies suffered first: shares in Thomson Reuters, for example, sank by nearly 16%. Then [software stocks](#) more broadly fell. The tech-heavy NASDAQ index closed down by 1.4%.

Mr Trump signed a bill to end the partial government shutdown, after it narrowly passed the **House of Representatives** by 217-214 votes. The measure will fund several agencies until September and the Department of Homeland Security until February 13th, allowing lawmakers to continue negotiating restrictions on [immigration-enforcement agents](#).

Seif al-Islam Qaddafi, the son of **Libya's** former dictator Muammar, was reportedly killed. The circumstances are unclear,

but his lawyer said he was assassinated at home by “unknown assailants”. Mr Qaddafi *fils* was once seen as the most influential person in [Libya](#) after his father, and his heir apparent, before the regime collapsed. He ran for president in 2021 but the elections were derailed.

Disney named Josh D’Amaro as its new chief executive, starting in March. Mr D’Amaro currently runs the company’s theme parks. He will replace Bob Iger, who has been in his second stint in the top job since 2022. Theme parks are now the firm’s most profitable division, but the creative engine on which they rely [seems to be sputtering](#).

Walmart’s market value rose above \$1trn for the first time. Investors have been impressed by the [retail giant’s efforts](#) to develop new technology to take on e-commerce firms such as Amazon. Walmart recently signed deals with Alphabet and OpenAI that allow its customers to use AI to buy goods.

Spain’s prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, said his government would seek to ban **social media** for under-16s. He called social networks a “failed state in which laws are ignored”, pledging to force platforms to introduce effective age-verification systems. Governments across Europe and Asia are considering introducing such measures. [Australia did so in December](#). Elon Musk, X’s owner, called Mr Sánchez a “fascist totalitarian”.

Figure of the day: \$500bn, the value of additional energy and agricultural products that Donald Trump claimed India would buy from America. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

Taiwan's opposition cosies up to the CCP

Members of the Kuomintang (KMT), Taiwan's main opposition party, are in China this week for a think-tank forum with bigwigs from China's Communist Party. That marks a rapprochement: such forums were once routine, but they were paused after cross-strait relations became strained in 2016. The KMT's vice-chairman is leading this week's delegation. His trip may pave the way for a meeting between Xi Jinping, China's leader, and [Cheng Li-wun](#), the KMT's new chair, who thinks that getting closer to China will help avert an attack on Taiwan.

The forum was supposed to focus on co-operation regarding matters such as tourism. But both sides have been using the opportunity to advocate for "rejuvenating the Chinese nation". Such remarks will no doubt draw criticism from Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party, which supports independence. Opinion polls show that a majority of Taiwan's people have little appetite for unification. But the KMT will see the forum as a step towards achieving their goal of reconciliation with China.



Photograph: Reuters

America pitches a critical-minerals “alliance”

On Wednesday America’s State Department convenes a meeting in Washington, DC, aimed at building supply chains for [critical metals](#) that do not rely on China. The stated goal is to form an alliance with like-minded countries, which may involve guaranteeing a minimum price for the commodities.

Some will be sceptical about America’s new-found zeal for co-operation on this issue. In recent months the Trump administration has largely acted unilaterally, pledging billions of dollars for projects and stockpiles at home, and signing deals with countries such as Australia and Saudi Arabia. America’s efforts are led by David Copley, a former gold miner who sits on the National Security Council. The administration has mostly ignored the European Union, [which has been slow to act](#).

However, ministers from G7 countries (and a dozen others) are expected to attend on Wednesday. They will find out if America is really interested in embracing a more multilateral approach. Mining’s new great game is just getting started.



Photograph: Getty Images

The era of nuclear-arms control is over

New START, the last treaty limiting American and Russian nuclear arsenals, is about to expire. Though he has spoken of “denuclearisation”, Donald Trump has ignored calls by Russia to abide voluntarily by the treaty’s limits on “strategic” (ie, long-range) weapons for another year.

The [new nuclear age](#) will be more complex than that of the cold war. The two-power nuclear stand-off is becoming a three-way contest as China builds up its arsenal. It has grown from 240 warheads in 2012, when Xi Jinping came to power, to 600-plus, and is on track to exceed 1,000 by 2030, reckons the Pentagon.

That is well behind Russia and America, which have 5,000-odd warheads each, but big enough for America to worry that it lacks the weapons to deter both Russia and China. Short of a last-gasp deal, America is poised to deploy perhaps hundreds of warheads from its reserves in the coming months. A new arms race looms.



Photograph: Getty Images

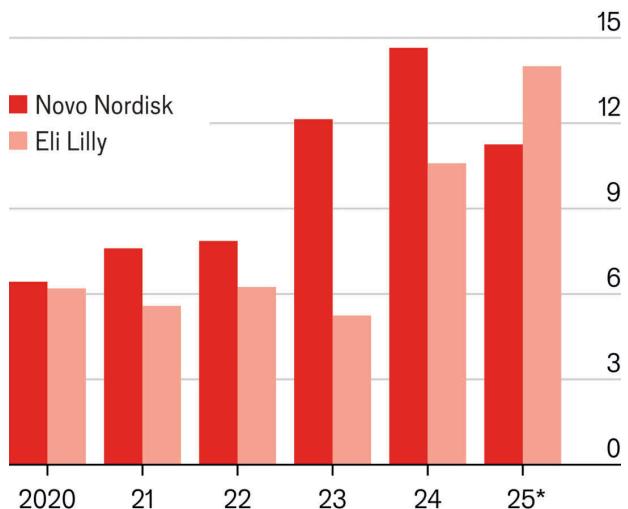
Novo and Lilly battle for fat profits

Eli Lilly, an American drugmaker, reports quarterly results later on Wednesday; Novo Nordisk, its Danish rival, did so earlier in the day. Novo was first to market GLP-1s, a class of drugs that reduce their users' appetite, and thus weight. The firm announced sales of DKr309bn (\$48.9bn) in 2025, up 10% from the previous year at constant exchange rates. But Lilly has still taken the lead. In 2025 sales of Zepbound, its injectable drug, overtook those of Wegovy, Novo's equivalent.

Novo has been attempting a comeback. In January it introduced an oral version of Wegovy, which showed superior weight-loss results to Lilly's pill in clinical trials and is much cheaper than injectables. Lilly is expected to release its own pill later this year. Both companies are also developing drugs that promise fewer side-effects. But it could take a while for Novo's investments to pay off: on Tuesday the firm warned that sales in 2026 could decline by as much as 13%. Its shares dropped by nearly 20% on Wednesday.

Weight-loss wars

Pharmaceutical companies, net profit, \$bn



*To September 2025

Source: FactSet



Photograph: Getty Images

The euro zone gets over inflation

Inflation in the euro zone is [back on target](#). Price increases in December were 1.9% compared with a year ago, and just 0.1% compared to November. Data for January, released on Wednesday, should confirm this trend. National figures for the month suggest that euro-zone inflation will come in below the European Central Bank's 2% annual target.

Spain (from 2.9% year on year in December, down to 2.4% in January) and France (0.7% to 0.4%) have reported steep drops in inflation, although Germany's rose. Adding to the downward pressure on inflation could be a stronger euro. Compared with the dollar, the euro has gained almost 15% since early February 2025, which will be felt in prices over time. The ECB, which meets on Thursday, lowered interest rates between June 2024 and June 2025, but has held them since. Low inflation will give it some room to consider a further cut.



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 [\[email protected\]](mailto:). We'll pick three winners at random and crown them on Saturday.

Wednesday: The Pahlavi family ruled which Middle Eastern country?

Tuesday: Which African country is by far the most populous?

*Knowing what must be done does
away with fear.*

Rosa Parks