

Sacramento, California

Six-state solution: A leading Silicon Valley investor is trying to have California – the US's largest state by population and third-largest geographically – broken up into six smaller states. “California, as it is, is ungovernable,” says Tim Draper, citing long-standing problems in the state’s prisons, schools, transport and other state-run infrastructure. “With six Californias, people will be closer to their state governments and states can get a refresh.” The move would also give Californians a greater say in Washington, with ten new senators to represent the five extra states. Last week Draper secured formal permission to collect signatures in support of a ballot measure (a form of local referendum). If he can attract more than 807,000 by 18 July, the vote could be held as early as November. However, it would still need to be passed by Congress, which is considered highly improbable.

**Mazatlán, Mexico**

Got Shorty: One of the world’s most-wanted drug barons, Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, has been captured in a joint Mexican-US operation. El Chapo (“Shorty”) is the head of the world’s biggest drugs cartel, the Sinaloa, which controls much of the flow of cocaine, marijuana and methamphetamine into the US. Guzmán (left) had been on the run since 2001 when he escaped from a supposedly high-security Mexican jail in a laundry basket by paying \$2.5m in bribes. The US now wants to extradite him, believing its facilities can do a better job.

Washington DC

Obama angers China: President Obama met the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama at the White House last Friday – a meeting at once condemned by China as a “gross interference in China’s domestic politics” which would “inflict grave damages on the China-US relationship”. A White House spokesman said that the US wasn’t in favour of Tibetan independence, but that it “strongly supports human rights and religious freedom in China”. When Obama met the Buddhist leader in 2011, Beijing issued similarly vitriolic warnings, but did not follow up with concrete measures. By contrast, after David Cameron met him in 2012, China cut off high-level diplomatic ties with the UK for about a year.

Caracas

Protests swell: Violent anti-government protests continued in several Venezuelan cities this week amid reports of police and military repression, and worsening food shortages. Several streets in suburban Caracas were barricaded, and there were reports that even in poorer areas (where support for the socialist government has been strong), some residents have joined in the demonstrations. To add to the pressure on President Nicolás Maduro, the governor of Táchira, a fellow *chavista* socialist, condemned what he described as the government’s use of excessive force, and expressed sympathy with some of the marchers’ complaints.



The unrest began in early February, when students in the Andean city of San Cristóbal took to the streets to protest against a crime wave on their university campus, and the tanking economy. When the government reacted with a police crackdown, the protest spread and its demands widened. So far 13 people have been killed in protest-related violence, and more than 500 have been arrested, including opposition leader Leopoldo López. Maduro has denounced the protests as acts of terrorism by US-sponsored “fascists”. But he has called for a national peace conference to address the protesters’ concerns.

Washington DC

Smallest army for decades: US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel has unveiled plans to shrink the country’s army to its smallest size since before the Second World War to meet budget cuts. The proposal involves reducing the number of active-duty soldiers from 522,000 to 450,000, and closing some domestic army bases (a move that is likely to be rejected by Congress). Hagel also wants to scrap the air force’s Cold War-era A-10 attack jets and U-2 spy planes, and put half of the navy’s 22 cruisers on limited deployments. Although US military spending remains by far the largest in the world, the Pentagon’s reduced budget of \$496bn represents a major retrenchment after 12 costly years of fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. The shrinking of the army reflects shifts in defence strategy, away from lengthy ground wars and towards the use of special operations forces, cyberwarfare and drones.

**Itu, Brazil**

Devastating drought: More than 140 cities in 11 states across Brazil are rationing water because their reservoirs have dried up during the worst drought in decades. Brazil is experiencing one of its driest summers on record, and in many towns the local authorities are turning off the water supply every other day in order to conserve water. In at least one city, Itu, running water is only available for half a day every three days. The drought has devastated crops, and global prices for coffee, soybeans and sugar – all major Brazilian exports – are already rising as a result. The record heat has also produced an immense slick of algae off the Brazilian coast which stretches for 500 miles and is visible from space.