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Tech Decoded

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Hello. Jared Isaacman has finally been sworn in as the new chief of Nasa after a tumultuous confirmation process. But his battles at the space agency may only just be beginning. Below, I analyse what lies ahead for the man tasked with returning humans to the Moon in 2026. We also look at TikTok's long-awaited deal to avoid a US ban, check out the world's biggest heat pumps, and meet the scientists using drones to collect samples of whales' breath.

THE DOWNLOAD

Can Nasa chief win the next space race?



Isaacman has commanded several commercial space missions. Credit: Getty Images

Jared Isaacman's journey to **becoming the new boss of Nasa** was almost derailed in May when Donald Trump abruptly withdrew his nomination for the billionaire entrepreneur.

The president cited his donations to the Democratic Party, but the U-turn came in the middle of a high-profile feud with Elon Musk, an ally of Isaacman.

On paper, the New Jersey-born businessman seems like a good fit to lead America's space agency. He's launched and run a successful tech firm and aerospace business, and led two **commercial space missions** on rockets built by SpaceX, Musk's company.

But there have been questions about Isaacman's ties to the South African-born billionaire. Nasa is SpaceX's top client, and Musk has argued strongly that the space agency should **prioritise reaching Mars**.

Many in the US Congress, which sets Nasa's funding, consider returning humans to the Moon to be the priority, as China prepares to do the same by 2030.

Nasa's Artemis programme to revisit the Moon has faced **significant delays**. Some believe the lunar surface **could be mined** for water (to create fuel and support life), various metals and helium-3, an element that has theoretical uses for supercomputing and nuclear fusion.

Isaacman has denied being influenced by Musk, and promised to give equal priority to Moon and Mars missions. Casey Dreier, chief of space policy at the Planetary Society, told Tech Decoded that he brought "energy" and big ideas for making Nasa more nimble and effective.

But he said Isaacman would also have to deal with historic cuts to the agency's funding that seem at odds with his bigger plans, such as developing **in-space nuclear power**.

More importantly, perhaps, he will have to keep the president and a divided Congress on side if Nasa is to succeed - a mission that will take skill to pull off.

The download: Isaacman is well equipped to lead America's space agency, but has his work cut out for him amid a new "space race" with China.

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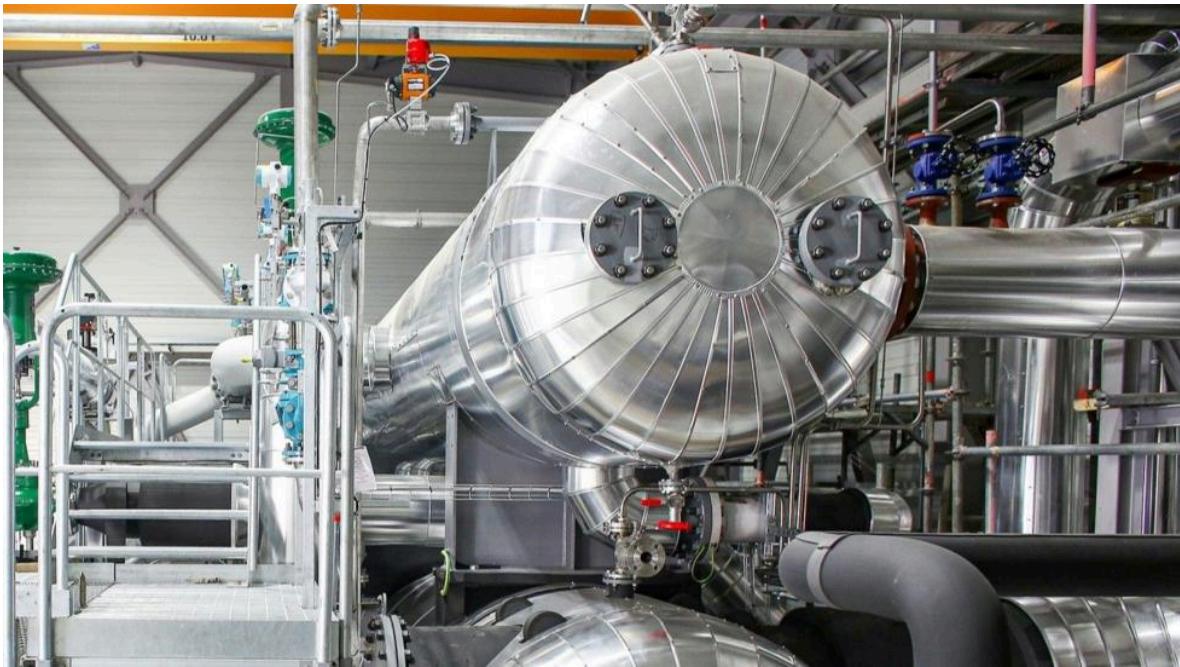
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SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Meet the biggest heat pumps in the world



MVV Energie is building the world's most powerful heat pump systems. Credit: MVV Energie

As towns and cities around the world seek to decarbonise, many are deciding to purchase large heat pumps that attach to district heating networks. The scale of these contraptions is eye-opening. MVV Energie, a German manufacturer, is building a model that draws 10,000 litres of water per second from the Rhine River and has the capacity to supply around 40,000 homes. [Here's how it will work](#).

PODCAST PICK



Chatbots changing minds

A major UK study has found that AI chatbots can persuade us with fake facts. What does it mean for politics?

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And finally...

It's very hard to assess the health of whales in the wild - but scientists from the UK and Norway may have found a solution. They flew drones equipped with special kit above whales as they surfaced for air, and collected droplets exhaled from their blowholes. The team detected a highly infectious virus linked to mass strandings of whales worldwide. [See the drones in action.](#)



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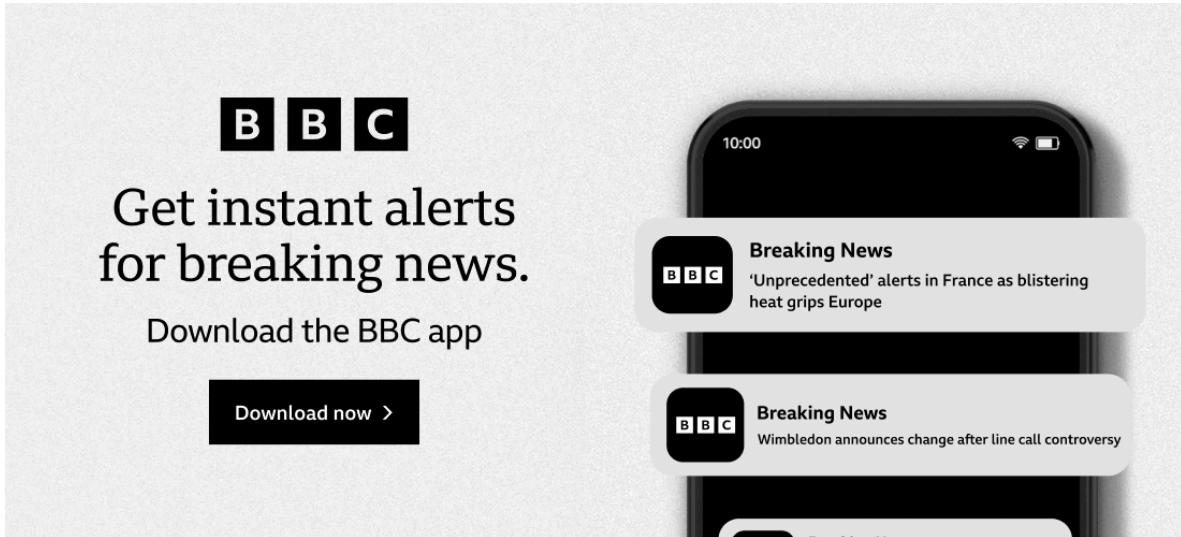
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