

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

**Volodymyr Zelensky** joined **European leaders** at a summit in Brussels. Ukraine's president is expected to give a speech ahead of discussions over the use of frozen Russian assets. Earlier Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, said the goals of its [war](#) in Ukraine "will undoubtedly be achieved", whether through diplomacy or "military means". He welcomed talks with America, but called Europe's leaders, "little pigs".

**America's** Senate overwhelmingly approved the **National Defence Authorisation Act**, which sets out the country's defence-spending priorities. It will now head to Donald Trump's desk. The defence bonanza permits \$901bn-worth of spending in fiscal year 2026. The legislation also reauthorises \$400m in aid for Ukraine, despite the release of a [National Security Strategy](#) earlier this month that proposed appeasement of Russia.

The **Bank of England** cut interest rates by a quarter of a percentage point, bringing them to 3.75%, the lowest for almost three years. Although the bank's rate-setters were divided, voting 5-4 for a cut, the decision was expected. It follows a fall in Britain's annual inflation rate to 3.2% in November. Unemployment remains at its highest level in nearly five years.

**Asian stockmarkets** fell following a sell-off in America driven by fears about rising spending on **AI data centres**. Japan's Nikkei 225 dropped by 1% while South Korea's Kospi index fell by 1.5%. The tech-heavy NASDAQ closed at its lowest level since November, after Blue Owl Capital, which is partnering with [Oracle](#) to build data centres, reportedly pulled out of a \$10bn project.

After months of negotiations **Israel** agreed to export \$35bn worth of gas to **Egypt**. The deal follows lobbying from America, acting on behalf of Chevron, [an oil giant](#). Most of the gas will come from Israel's Leviathan offshore gasfield, which is part owned by the American firm. Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, claimed it would raise around \$18bn in taxes.

**BP** replaced its boss, Murray Auchincloss, after less than two years in the role. The British oil giant said Meg O'Neill, boss of Woodside Energy, an Australian oil producer, would take the top job from April, becoming its third leader in five years and the first female chief executive in big oil. BP's share price has risen by 5.6% this year, despite falling oil prices. But it is [under pressure](#) following unsuccessful ventures into green areas.

**Pope Leo XIV** appointed **Bishop Ronald A Hicks** to be Archbishop of New York, a diocese of around 2.5m Catholics. The appointment is one of Pope Leo's most significant yet, and is another sign that the [new pontiff](#) aims to maintain the liberal reforms of his predecessor, Francis. Bishop Hicks, a progressive, will replace Timothy Dolan, a conservative cardinal and ally of Donald Trump.

**Figure of the day:** 8,000–9,000, the average number of soldiers added to Russia's army each month during the first half of 2025. [Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: EPA

## EU leaders struggle to fund Ukraine

Leaders from the European Union's 27 member states meet in Brussels on Thursday to try to agree on more than €100bn (\$118bn) in aid for Ukraine over the next two years. A proposal backed by Friedrich Merz, Germany's chancellor, to use returns from Russian assets frozen in EU financial institutions looks unlikely to win swift approval. Belgium, where most of those assets are held, has firmly opposed the idea. If the plan stalls, leaders may find themselves in Brussels for days, searching for another way to raise the money—such as issuing jointly guaranteed EU debt.

Meanwhile, [talk of a possible ceasefire](#) continues. But large gaps remain. After talks in Berlin this week, European, Ukrainian and American officials spoke of progress towards security guarantees for Ukraine once the fighting stops. Russia, however, has yet to be presented with the proposals, and there is little sign that Vladimir Putin is willing to compromise on territory—casting doubt on hopes of a Christmas truce.



Photograph: Reuters

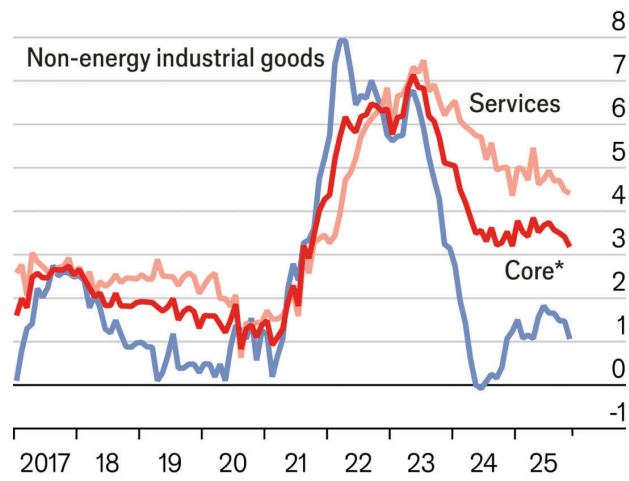
## **The Bank of England's Christmas trimmings**

The Bank of England cut its main interest rate from 4% to 3.75% on Thursday. Inflation data released on Wednesday had strengthened the case. Consumer prices increased by 3.2% in the year to November, 0.2 percentage points below the bank's forecast and well down from the recent peak of 3.8% over the summer. With unemployment also edging up, the doves on the Monetary Policy Committee had enough support to push through a cut, with rate-setters voting 5-4 in favour.

Hawks, however, will remain worried. Much of the fall in inflation was driven by volatile food, alcohol and clothing prices. Meanwhile services inflation remains stubbornly high at 4.4% and households expect prices to rise by 3.5% over the next year. Both indicators are well above the bank's 2% inflation target. Loosening monetary policy too quickly might require costly corrections in the future.

## A bumpy descent

Britain, consumer prices  
% change on a year earlier



\*Excludes food, energy, alcohol and tobacco

Sources: ONS; Haver Analytics



Photograph: Kenny Holston/The New York Times/Redux/eyevine

## A turning point for MAGA?

Every year around Christmas Turning Point USA, a conservative youth organisation, holds a big MAGA conference in Phoenix. This year's AmericaFest, which begins on Thursday, is the first since [Charlie Kirk](#), the organisation's charismatic and controversial founder, was murdered on a college campus in Utah in September.

After his death, Republicans hailed Kirk as a martyr and promised to unite against their [shared enemies](#). Instead, the movement appears more fractured. Turning Point will surely put on a good show. Yet offstage, MAGA's biggest influencers are fighting. Erika Kirk, Charlie's widow and the group's new leader (pictured), has spent weeks pushing back against conspiracy theories about her husband's death, some spread by former allies. Meanwhile Nick Fuentes, a white supremacist and Holocaust denier who long clashed with Kirk, is gaining ground among some in the movement. Conservatives hoped Kirk's death would mark a turning point—just not this one.

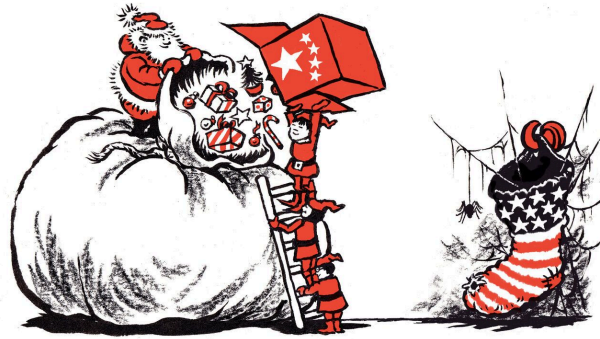


Illustration: David Simons

## How Chinese traders beat Lapland's elves

Yiwu, a city in eastern China, is the world's Christmas capital. The city's sprawling wholesale markets supply much of the world's Christmas paraphernalia, from baubles to Santa hats. China dominates global exports of Christmas decorations by value. But shipments are falling. In the first ten months of 2025 it exported \$5.1bn-worth of trinkets, down from \$5.8bn a year earlier. Sales to America are slowing because of tariffs on Chinese goods, now 20%. Stallholders and manufacturers complain that unpredictable levies make pricing—and planning—harder.

Still, Santa is nothing if not adaptable. Exports to Europe are rising. Some firms are also finding creative ways around American tariffs, shipping decorations in parts to South-East Asia for reassembly and relabelling. Others are switching to buyers from India and the Middle East.

Conflicts from Ukraine to the Middle East have disrupted demand, too. Even so, Yiwu's markets remain busy. When Christmas orders tail off, the city's merchants simply turn to the next festival on the calendar.





Photograph: Alamy

## **What your ads reveal about you**

In the run-up to Christmas, online adverts can feel uncannily well judged. Search once for a gift and your screen fills with jumpers, gadgets or toys that seem chosen just for you. That usually reflects how closely platforms track behaviour. But a new study suggests the logic also runs in reverse: the adverts people are shown can themselves reveal who they are.

Researchers at the University of New South Wales analysed more than 435,000 Facebook adverts seen by 891 users. They fed each person's ad diet into an AI model and asked it to infer aspects of their private lives. From ads alone, the system inferred users' gender, education level and political leanings more accurately than human analysts could.

The findings have awkward implications. Regulators have pushed technology firms to stop advertisers from explicitly targeting sensitive traits such as political views or health. But if those traits can be inferred indirectly from the ads people see, such safeguards may offer less protection than intended.





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.

**Thursday:** Which Irish-set film won the Golden Globe for best musical or comedy film in January 2023?

**Wednesday:** What means of killing a werewolf is also used as a term for an apparently simple method for solving a complex problem?

*Keep the company of those who  
seek the truth—run from those  
who have found it.*

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***Vaclav Havel***