

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

The **Federal Reserve** lowered the central bank's headline interest-rate range by a quarter of a percentage point, to 3.5-3.75%. It was the third consecutive meeting at which the rate-setting board opted for a cut. Three members, however, dissented from the majority vote: one wanted to lower rates by a half point; two preferred no cut.

Donald Trump confirmed that American forces seized a “very large” **oil tanker** off the coast of **Venezuela**. The vessel was reportedly under sanctions. Since September the Trump administration has waged a pressure campaign against Nicolas Maduro, Venezuela’s leader, whom Mr Trump [accuses of narco-terrorism](#). The United States has struck [boats](#) off South America and [threatened military action](#) inside Venezuela.

Volodymyr Zelensky said he held “productive” talks about **Ukraine’s** economic recovery with a group of American officials that included Scott Bessent, the treasury secretary. Meanwhile the leaders of Britain, France and Germany spoke to Mr Trump over the phone about the [peace-negotiation process](#). Mr Zelensky has promised to hold elections within three months if America and Europe “ensure security” for a vote.

Brazil's lower house passed a bill that could shorten **Jair Bolsonaro**'s sentence by as much as 25 years. The hard-right former president is serving 27 years in prison [for plotting a coup](#) against his left-wing successor, **Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva**. The bill will now go to the Senate; even if it passes, it could be struck down by the country's Supreme Court.

Regulators reportedly raided **Temu**'s European headquarters in Dublin as part of an investigation into whether the [Chinese e-commerce giant](#) unfairly gained a competitive advantage from foreign subsidies. The European Commission confirmed the “unannounced inspection”, which apparently happened last week, but did not name the company. In July the bloc accused Temu of not properly curbing the sale of illegal products on its platform.

America said **China**'s aiming of radars at **Japanese** planes in the South China Sea was “not conducive to regional peace”. It is the Trump administration's first criticism of China since the incident last week. Tensions between Japan and China [have escalated](#) over the past month. Earlier, Japan scrambled jets to observe two Russian bombers that joined Chinese planes on a “long-distance joint flight” that circumnavigated the country.

Archaeologists in Britain found evidence that **early humans learned to make fire** about 400,000 years ago—350,000 years earlier than previously thought. Their findings, published in *Nature*, include the discovery in eastern England of iron pyrite, which creates sparks when struck against flint. By mastering fire Neanderthals could cook food, which would have been crucial for brain evolution.

Figure of the day: Two-thirds, the rough share of consumers in rich countries who say they plan to use AI for holiday shopping this year. [Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: Alamy

A contentious time at the Federal Reserve

With only six months left as the chair of the Federal Reserve, Jerome Powell is presiding over an [increasingly divided](#) central bank. As markets largely expected, the bank cut interest rates by a quarter of a percentage point on Wednesday, bringing them down to 3.5-3.75%.

Those in favour of lower rates worry about a wobble in America's jobs market. Some lay-off data have jumped in recent months and the unemployment rate, while low in historical terms, has been rising. But some rate-setters are cautious. They argue stockmarkets are booming, growth looks solid and the annual inflation rate remains well above 2%, the bank's target.

The tally on Wednesday reflected both of those views. Three central bankers voted against the quarter-point cut—the first triple dissent in six years. One wanted to lower rates by a steeper half-point, and two wanted them left as is.



Photograph: Getty Images

The Ellisons take on the world

Larry Ellison, the 81-year-old founder of Oracle, a technology giant, has had a busy year. As well as being part of a group hoping to buy TikTok's American operations, he is helping to fund an attempt by his son's Hollywood studio, Paramount Skydance, [to buy Warner Bros Discovery](#), a bigger rival. Investors will hope he hasn't taken his all-seeing eye off Oracle, which reports results for the three months to November on Wednesday. The cloud-computing company has benefited from the artificial-intelligence boom. Revenue at its cloud-infrastructure division grew by 55% year on year in the previous quarter, to \$3.4bn. In September Oracle forecast annual cloud revenue of \$144bn by 2030—that briefly lifted its valuation to \$935bn.

It has since fallen by nearly a third. Investors are uneasy about colossal spending on data centres. Oracle's net debt has more than doubled over four years, to \$80bn. And they worry about the reliability of cloud revenue from customers such as OpenAI, which is burning through cash itself.

Head in the cloud

Oracle, market capitalisation, \$bn



Source: LSEG Workspace



Photograph: Getty Images

The return of war between Thailand and Cambodia

At a rally in Pennsylvania on Tuesday night, President Donald Trump said he would make a call on Wednesday to get Thailand and Cambodia to stop [shooting at each other](#). Hundreds of thousands of civilians have fled since fighting between the Thai and Cambodian armies spread along their shared border this week. The skirmishes have left at least 12 people dead. Each side blamed the other for firing the first shot.

Mr Trump brokered a truce to end five days of fighting earlier this year by threatening to hike tariffs on them to intolerable levels. But his efforts did little to resolve the underlying causes of the dispute. Now, neither side appears willing to back down. “If you want the fight to stop, go tell the aggressor,” Anutin Charnvirakul, Thailand’s prime minister, told reporters on Monday. Cambodia, for its part, says that it must respond to Thai attacks.



Photograph: Getty Images

Australia bans social media for teens

Parents may rejoice and teenagers groan on Wednesday as Australia introduces some of the world's [strictest limits on children's screen-time](#). Those under 16 will be forbidden from using social media, a category that includes video apps like YouTube and social networks like Instagram. The list does not include messaging platforms such as WhatsApp or social video games like Roblox, though it could be updated. Companies that fail to check ages face steep fines.

Other countries are watching, as fears grow everywhere about social media's harm to mental health. Australia's measures may help. But there are risks. Children will still be able to use the apps while logged out of their profiles, meaning a less personalised (and less age-appropriate) experience. And they may switch to less well policed apps too small to be covered by the ban. Some children's charities argue the solution is to make the internet safer, not rule it to be unsuitable for kids.



Photograph: Getty Images

A Nordic celebration for Venezuela's opposition

On Wednesday María Corina Machado's daughter will receive the Nobel peace prize on behalf of the Venezuelan opposition leader at a ceremony in Oslo. Organisers had hoped that Ms Machado would attend in person, but announced that would not be possible hours before the event. She has been in hiding for months. The regime of Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela's dictator, has said she would have been considered a "fugitive" from justice if she had travelled to Norway, and indicated she would have been arrested were she to return.

Ms Machado was banned from standing in last year's presidential election. She instead organised the campaign for Edmundo González, who was the real winner. She received the Nobel for "her struggle to achieve a just and peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy". The peace laureate has since become an unapologetic supporter of Donald Trump's use of military pressure to persuade Mr Maduro to stand down.

[Read María Corina Machado's guest essay](#) for The Economist on the future of Venezuela's opposition.



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.

Wednesday: A Chinese resistance movement against foreign powers between 1899 and 1901 is generally known by what name?

Tuesday: Roy Harold Scherer found fame as an actor under which stage name?

*We turn not older with years, but
newer every day.*

Emily Dickinson