

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter

Russia carried out a major bombing campaign against **Ukraine**, launching a total of 151 missiles and drones overnight. The strikes targeted [energy infrastructure](#) located in and around the cities of Kharkiv, Zaporizhia and Kryvyi Rih. Ukraine's energy minister, German Galuschenko, said the attacks were intended "to cause a large-scale failure in the operation of the country's energy system". On Wednesday Vladimir Putin had threatened to target the country's infrastructure in retaliation against recent Ukrainian drone attacks on refineries deep inside Russia.

Catherine, Princess of Wales, said that she is undergoing early stages of treatment for cancer. The princess underwent [abdominal surgery](#) in January. At the time, it was thought that her condition was non-cancerous, but tests after the operation found cancer to be present. She said that she and her husband, William, the Prince of Wales, have maintained privacy "for the sake of our young family".

Maersk, a container-shipping giant, said it would not resume sending vessels through the Red Sea due to continuing risks of attack by [the Houthis](#), an Iran-backed group of Yemeni militants. The announcement will disappoint the European Union, whose members began a naval mission last month in an attempt to secure the route. [Air strikes](#) by British and American forces have not deterred the rebels, either.

China and **Russia** vetoed a draft resolution for an immediate ceasefire in [Gaza](#) at the UN Security Council. There were eleven votes in favour of the resolution, which was put forward by America; only Algeria, of the non-permanent members, joined

China and Russia to vote against the text. The resolution tied a ceasefire deal to the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas.

Investors gave **Javier Milei**, [Argentina's firebrand president](#), a vote of confidence as the country's dollar-denominated bonds rose to a record high. Bonds due to mature in 2030 rose to slightly above 51 cents on the dollar, their highest-ever price, up from 18 cents in mid-2022. Argentina's "country risk" for bond traders is now the lowest since 2021, according to JP Morgan, a bank.

The **European Commission** proposed applying a tariff on grain imports from **Russia** and **Belarus**. The measure is designed to prevent the two countries from distorting European markets, as well as to counter Russia's efforts to sell grain stolen from [occupied territories](#) in Ukraine. Russia exported around €1.3bn (\$1.4bn) worth of grain products to the EU last year.

Germany's economy minister, Robert Habeck, lambasted the German Football Association for inking a deal with [Nike](#), an American brand, and dropping its partnership with Adidas, a homegrown champion. He said the brand's three stripes are a "piece of German identity". Meanwhile Nike's kit designers dropped the ball in **Britain**: [Sir Keir Starmer](#), the leader of the opposition, took a shot at the company's new England jersey, featuring an unfamiliar, multicoloured St George's cross.

Figure of the day: 2.4%. The percentage of Dutch adults who said they had used cocaine in the last year, according to a 2022 study. [Read the full story.](#)

Correction: In yesterday's edition of The World in Brief, we said that "Surgeons in New York transplanted a pig's kidney into the body of Richard Slayman". In fact, the procedure took place in Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. Sorry.



Photo: AP

Trump's paper windfall

After he was booted off Twitter (now X) and Facebook after the Capitol riot of January 6th 2021, Donald Trump started his own [social-media platform](#). Truth Social was to be a home for “censored” voices, although it never took off beyond the MAGA crowd. It also loses money hand over fist. Regardless, it is now poised to go public. On Friday investors in a special-purpose acquisition company—essentially a listed pot of capital—voted on whether to merge with Truth Social's parent company. The combined entity will have a market capitalisation of about \$6.3bn.

Wonderful news for Mr Trump, whose stake will be worth \$4.1bn. The paper windfall will be of no help in his current predicament, however, since he cannot sell his shares for six months. By March 25th he must secure a bond for half-a-billion dollars to satisfy a judgment in his civil-fraud trial. No bond company will step up since he lacks enough cash as collateral. So he is begging an appeals court to reduce the bond.

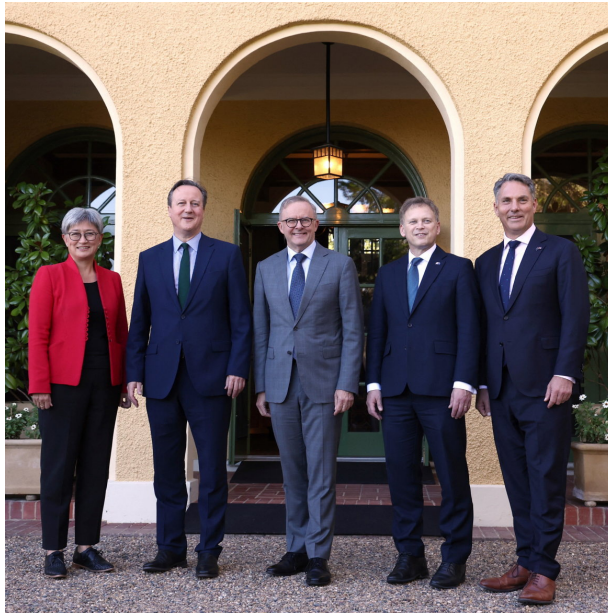


Photo: Getty Images

Britain and Australia boost their defence ties

David Cameron and Grant Shapps, Britain's foreign and defence secretaries, met their Australian counterparts, Penny Wong and Richard Marles, in Adelaide on Friday for security talks. On Thursday the two nations signed a defence co-operation agreement that makes it easier for their forces to operate in each other's countries.

Australia announced a huge investment in [AUKUS](#), a trilateral security pact with America. Under the pact Britain and Australia aim to manufacture nuclear-propelled submarines for Australia. Australia will pump A\$4.6bn (\$3bn) into a British factory that will produce the subs' nuclear reactors.

Britain shares Australia's concerns about China's military buildup, and in an "Indo-Pacific tilt" has tried to boost trade with the region. However, Britain's role in AUKUS gets barely a mention down under. Australia looks primarily to America for security. But with the possibility of a Trump presidency, Australians are increasingly concerned about the reliability of their main AUKUS partner.



Photo: dpa

Germany legalises cannabis

The Bundesrat, the upper house of Germany's parliament, voted on Friday to decriminalise marijuana. The more powerful lower house had already passed the bill, which comes into effect on April 1st. But the Bundesrat could have shunted it off to a “mediation” committee, ensuring a long delay.

Cheering millions of marijuana users, the three-party governing coalition promised to [legalise the drug](#) when it took power in 2021. The new law will allow adults to carry up to 25g of marijuana, cultivate three plants at home and join registered clubs to grow more for private use only. Psychologists had warned that strong new cannabis strains could damage mental health, just as judges had argued that thousands convicted under old laws will now claim amnesty. Parrying such concerns, the government promised to strengthen drug counselling and to give judges help to handle the extra cases. Welcoming the change, the health minister hailed “the beginning of the end for the black market.” He also advised people to use the “the new opportunity responsibly.”



Photo: Alamy

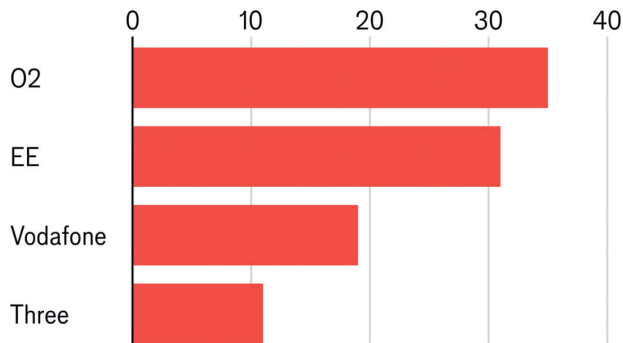
Vodafone's tie-up with Three under scrutiny

Britain's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), a watchdog, announced a full-blown investigation into a proposed tie-up between [Vodafone](#) and Three, two mobile networks. An initial probe found that the joint venture between the rival operators could lead to higher prices for consumers.

The blockbuster deal, which would combine two out of Britain's four major mobile operators to create Britain's largest network with 27m customers, tests regulators' appetite for relaxing rules around telecoms mergers. Operators argue such deals can help fund costly rollouts of superfast 5G networks. Europe lags behind other regions in 5G coverage: 80% of Europe's population had access to 5G at the end of 2023, compared with 89% in China and near-complete coverage in America, Japan and South Korea. As a sweetener, Vodafone says the combined business will invest £11bn (\$13.9bn) in Britain's 5G infrastructure over the next decade.

Network coverage

Britain, consumer mobile network operators*
by market share, 2023, %



*Includes virtual network operators

Source: Ofcom



Photo: Getty Images

The Indian Premier League returns

India's festival of democracy, as its elections are often called, begins on April 19th. But for some Indians the more important festival begins this Friday. That is when the Chennai Super Kings take on the Royal Challengers Bengaluru to start off the latest Indian Premier League season. The 17th edition of the world's most lucrative [domestic cricket contest](#) has had to adjust to voting dates, but that will not put fans off.

Last year's edition broke viewing records. This year Tata Group, a conglomerate, forked out a record 25bn rupees (\$300m) to renew its sponsorship. At an auction ahead of the tournament teams spent around 2.3bn rupees on player purchases. Kolkata Knight Riders paid a record 250m rupees for Mitchell Starc, an Australian fast bowler. Still, KKR are not the bookies' choice to win the league. They favour CSK, the defending champions, and the Mumbai Indians. But unlike the elections, which the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party will probably win with ease, the IPL will be a close contest.

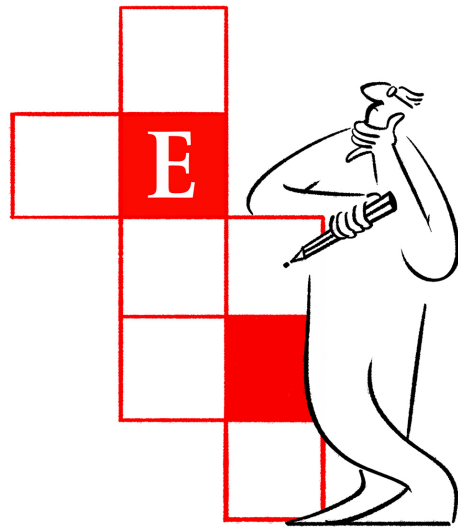


Daily quiz

We will serve you a new question each day this week. On Friday your challenge is to give us all five answers and, as important, tell us the connecting theme. Email your responses (and include mention of your home city and country) by 1700 GMT on Friday to [\[email protected\]](#). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Friday: Which fraudulent marketing scheme requires participants to recruit others to join the scheme, in potentially ever-increasing numbers?

Thursday: Which pop act, which rose to fame in the mid-1990s, had hits such as “Ocean Drive” and “Lifted”?



The winners of last week's crossword

Thank you to everyone who took part in our weekly crossword, published in the weekend edition of Espresso. The winners, chosen at random, were:

Kinjal Shah, London, Britain

Russ Porter, Ridgefield, CT, America

Tony Bernard, Brussels, Belgium

They all gave the correct answers of [Vladivostok](#), [voters](#), [Venus](#) and [Kuwait](#). Check back tomorrow for this week's crossword.

A man sees in the world what he carries in his heart.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe