

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

**Donald Trump** said he had not decided whether to launch land strikes in **Venezuela**, contradicting reports that such attacks were imminent. The *Miami Herald* and *Wall Street Journal* had said the administration was preparing to hit military sites allegedly tied to **drug trafficking**. A White House spokesperson said “unnamed sources don’t know what they’re talking about” and that any decision would come directly from the president.

The United Nations said more than 60,000 people had fled **El-Fasher**, the main city in **Sudan’s** Darfur region. On Friday the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group, **seized** the city, reportedly killing hundreds of civilians. Survivors described fighters rounding up men, hurling racial slurs and opening fire. The RSF has been at war with the national army since 2023.

Dutch media said that the Liberal D66 party had come first in **the Netherlands’ general election**, as the count drew to a close. Only 15,000 votes separate D66 from the hard-right Party for Freedom (PVV), led by Geert Wilders, but the ANP news agency said it was no longer possible for the PVV to close the gap.

A federal judge in Rhode Island ordered the **Trump administration** to tap emergency money set aside for **food**

**stamps**, saying “irreparable harm” could occur. On Saturday some 42m poor and disabled Americans are due to miss their monthly **food-assistance benefits** because of the **government shutdown**. On October 24th the agriculture department said the programme’s emergency reserves, totalling some \$5bn, were not “legally available”.

**Scott Bessent**, America’s treasury secretary, said China “made a real mistake” by threatening to restrict exports of **rare-earth minerals**. In comments to the *Financial Times* he suggested that America would secure supplies from elsewhere within two years. Meanwhile, Mr Trump suggested that he would lift fentanyl-related tariffs on China if the country cracks down on exports of the drug’s chemical ingredients.

**France**’s lower house voted down a wealth tax on the ultra-rich. Socialists had demanded the levy—a 2% tax on individuals’ assets worth over €100m—when they agreed to back the centrist prime minister, Sébastien Lecornu. The minority government is **struggling to put together a budget**. In another compromise the government suspended a pension reform that Emmanuel Macron, France’s president, **pushed through** in 2023.

**China** launched three astronauts—and four mice—on the Shenzhou-21 spaceship in the country’s latest mission to its **Tiangong space station**, state media said. Among the crew is Wu Fei, who at 32 is the country’s youngest astronaut to go to **space**. The “mice astronauts” will be “raised in orbit” for several days to study “the growth, development and reproduction of living organisms in space”.

**Figure of the day:** €53bn, the growth in market value achieved by Rheinmetall, a German defence company, since the start of this year. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

## America's government runs on empty

America's government [shutdown](#) has now slouched into its 30th day. If it drags on for another five days, it will set a record.

Republicans and Democrats do not seem close to an agreement. Three major funding deadlines are fast approaching. Will they break the impasse?

For starters, members of the armed forces are due their next pay cheque on Friday. The Trump administration will reportedly draw funds from the Department of War's other budgets, including those for housing, research and development and procurement, to cover the \$5.3bn wage bill. Second, funding for a federal food-aid programme that reaches 40m Americans will expire by November 1st. That day is also the start of the period when Americans can sign up for Obamacare, the health-care programme that is one of the issues [at the heart](#) of the shutdown. Without renewed subsidies, premiums will rise sharply for millions. That might finally focus minds in Washington.



Photograph: Getty Images

## Sudan's humanitarian crisis worsens

Fears are growing of a bloodbath in el-Fasher, the capital of Sudan's Darfur region. The city, which has endured an 18-month-long siege and a resulting [famine](#), fell to the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group, earlier this week. Some 26,000 panicked civilians fled in just 48 hours, according to the [UN](#). But that still leaves perhaps 177,000 trapped in the city.

Evidence of atrocities is already emerging. More than 2,000 civilians have been killed, according to allies of the national army. Survivors arriving in the nearby town of Tawila report young men being separated from their families and taken away in trucks. Across Darfur, places that have fallen to the RSF since Sudan's civil war began in 2023 have been ethnically cleansed; in January America accused the RSF of committing a [genocide](#) in the region. With every major city in Darfur now in the paramilitary group's hands, another frightening escalation could be imminent.





Photograph: Reuters

## Who will pay for Ukraine?

Europe faces a [steep bill](#) to keep Ukraine fighting. With America retreating under Donald Trump, European countries will have to finance almost all of Ukraine's war effort and recovery. Between 2026 and 2029 Ukraine will need about \$389bn in cash and arms—roughly twice what Europe has provided since Russia's invasion. Ukraine's annual budget deficit is around \$50bn, and it relies on \$40bn-worth of donated weapons each year.

EU leaders are scrambling to [fill the gap](#). They are weighing a new seven-year budget that could allocate \$30bn a year and debating how to unlock \$163bn in frozen Russian assets for a “reparations loan”. The latter faces resistance from Belgium (many of the assets are in Belgian accounts) and there is disagreement over whether the funds should buy weapons or cover Ukraine's budget shortfall. Meanwhile Nordic leaders have rejected calls for joint EU borrowing. Europe's unity—and Ukraine's survival—depend on a breakthrough soon.



Photograph: Getty Images

## APEC in Trump's shadow

China took centre-stage as America sat out at the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) summit on Friday. More than a dozen world leaders gathered in South Korea for the annual event, which took place in the shadow of Donald Trump's [gilded tour](#) of the region. From Malaysia to Japan and South Korea, leaders courted him with gold-dusted banquets, investment pledges and trade concessions in exchange for goodwill—and relief from his tariffs.

[Mr Trump](#)'s skipping of the main APEC leaders' forum reflects his disdain for multilateral talking shops. Created in 1989 to liberalise trade around the Pacific rim, APEC faltered in its mission during the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s and never recovered. In recent years it functioned mainly as a meeting point for its members.

Leaders are expected to endorse a statement that encourages a series of modest free-market reforms. But it will be non-binding—an indication of how hard it will be to sustain open [trade](#) in an era of transactional politics.



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 BST on Friday to [\[email protected\]](mailto:[email protected]). We'll pick three winners at random and crown them on Saturday.

**Friday:** Which breed of dog, used to find game, is often called a “bird dog” in the American South?

**Thursday:** Which human organ is contained within the pericardium?



Illustration: The Economist

## The winners of last week's crossword

Thank you to everyone who took part in our crossword, published on Saturday. The winners, chosen at random, were:

**Ailsa Green**, Choma, Zambia

**Catherine Oikonomou**, Altadena, America

**Patrick Allen**, Shanghai, China

They all gave the correct answers of **Nairobi**, **Senator**, **YouTube**, **Nicolas Sarkozy**.

*Scenery is fine - but human nature  
is finer.*

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***John Keats***