

Catch up: Russia orders evacuations; American stocks bounce back



Russia declared a federal emergency in **Belgorod**, a Russian border region, as **Ukraine's army** continued its **offensive** in the neighbouring oblast of Kursk. Russian authorities also ordered more civilians to leave Kursk, where some 200,000 people have been evacuated since Ukraine's **incursion** began on August 6th. Ukraine reportedly **captured over 100 Russian soldiers** on Wednesday, adding to what Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, calls the country's "exchange fund".

The **S&P 500** hit its highest level since late July. The rally indicates that the prices of stocks in America's biggest companies are recovering from the **market rout** two weeks ago. Investors were heartened by strong economic data from America that showed jobless claims at a five-week low and retail sales in July beating economists' forecasts.

Narendra Modi, **India's** prime minister, said that perpetrators of **sexual violence** must face "the strictest punishment" after the rape and murder of a young doctor in Kolkata last week. Thousands of

women have taken to the streets in response to the crime. Figures from 2023 show that the number of [crimes against women](#) in India rose by 4% from 2021 to 2022.

America's government said it expects **Medicare**, a federal health agency, to save \$6bn in 2026 after negotiating [lower prices](#) for ten widely used drugs. The price of insulin products made by Novo Nordisk, a Danish firm, will fall by 76% from the start of that year. The price of januvia—another diabetes drug—will drop by 79%. Kamala Harris, America's vice-president, touted the achievement as she continued [her campaign for the presidency](#).

A Russian court sentenced **Ksenia Karelina**, a Russian-American citizen, to 12 years in prison. Ms Karelina was convicted of treason after donating \$51 to a pro-Ukraine charity while living in America in 2022. She was arrested while visiting her family in Russia earlier this year. Ms Karelina's lawyer said he hopes she could be freed in a future [prisoner swap](#) between Russia and the West.

Walmart reported that revenue in the three months to July grew by 4.8% year on year, despite fears that it would be bruised by a slowdown in consumer spending. The [American retail giant](#) also raised its forecast for profit growth this financial year from between 4% and 6% to between 6.5% and 8%. The firm said that sales are being buoyed by well-off consumers switching to its low-cost goods.

Thailand's ruling party, [Pheu Thai](#), nominated Paetongtarn Shinawatra as its candidate for prime minister. She is now all but certain to be sworn in after parliament votes on Friday. Ms Paetongtarn, who is the daughter of [Thaksin Shinawatra](#), a former prime minister, will take over from Srettha Thavisin, who was ousted on Wednesday after a court found that he had “grossly breached ethical standards”.

Figure of the day: 80%, the proportion of Japanese voters who did not want Kishida Fumio to continue as prime minister, according to polls. [Read the full story.](#)

As America prepares to vote in national elections in November, keep abreast of the political news by reading [The US in brief](#), our daily update. [Sign up](#) to receive it as a newsletter each weekday.

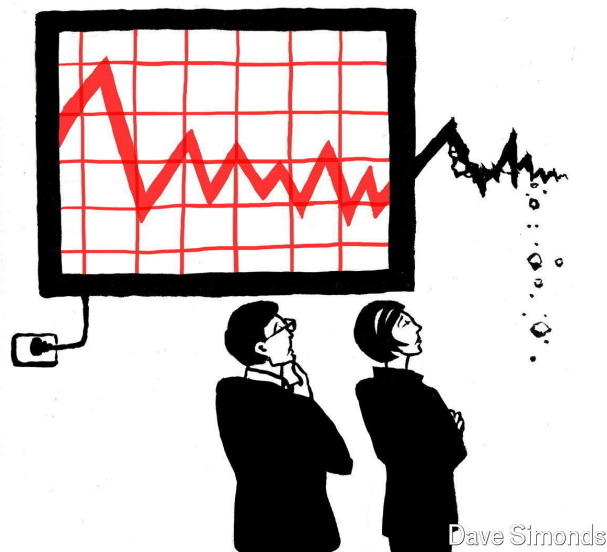
Another push for Gaza ceasefire



Mediators from America, Egypt and Qatar will gather in Doha on Thursday to discuss a [ceasefire in Gaza](#). Israel has said it will send a delegation. Hamas has not: it says there is nothing to discuss beyond the ceasefire proposal it offered in July. But the two sides still disagree on core issues, including whether Israeli troops would withdraw from Gaza completely. Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, has spent months trying to sabotage any possible deal to ensure his own political survival.

The talks in Qatar's capital are not only meant to end the ten-month war in Gaza. Mediators also want to prevent Iran and its allies from retaliating against Israel for assassinations in Beirut and Tehran last month. President Joe Biden thinks [Iran](#) will hold back if there is a ceasefire in Gaza. Some Iranian officials have made similar comments. If the talks fail, the fear is that a bigger regional war may follow.

Tremulous times in Japan



It has been a rollercoaster of a year for Japan. On Wednesday the prime minister, Kishida Fumio, said that he would step down next month, amid dismal polling numbers. On August 5th the stockmarket suffered its **biggest fall** since 1987. And the Bank of Japan, which abandoned its longstanding negative interest-rate policy in March, raised its benchmark interest rate to 0.25% in July.

The economy has had a shaky post-pandemic recovery. It shrank by an annualised 2.9% in the first quarter of 2024, mainly because of sluggish private consumption. But on Thursday figures showed annualised growth of 3.1% in the second quarter, much faster than was expected.

It is not just economic and political tremors that Japan fears: warnings of a mega-earthquake on its Pacific coast, even if it does not come, may put off tourists and drag down consumption. The government may end its week-long earthquake alert on Thursday. If it does, the country will breathe a sigh of relief.

Britain's university conundrum



Pupils in England, Northern Ireland and Wales receive their A-level exam grades on Thursday. If Scottish grades, released last week, are any indication, many will be disappointed: pass rates in that country have returned roughly to pre-covid levels after several years of lenient marking.

But the deepest frowns will be on the faces of [university leaders](#). Foreign students, who pay higher fees than natives, seem to have cooled on Britain: the number of applications for study visas was 15% lower in July than a year earlier. The government has frozen tuition fees paid by British students, so incomes to universities are falling in real terms. The new Labour government seems disinclined to raise fees. That would anger students and could increase the cost to the state, since most students pay for tuition by taking out subsidised loans, and not all of the money is paid back. Expect loud, eloquent grumbles.

A new bridge and old problems in Kashmir



Kashmir has long stood apart from the rest of India. That is partly down to geography: its valley, where most of its residents live, lies deep in the Himalaya mountains. It is inaccessible to India's vast railway network.

That will change on Thursday, when the first train will enter Kashmir via the Chenab Bridge, timed to mark India's 78th independence day. Opened earlier this year by Narendra Modi, India's infrastructure-obsessed prime minister, the structure, which stands 359 metres above the Chenab river, is the world's highest rail bridge. It is meant to attract greater trade and tourism to the region.

Locals, however, have more pressing concerns. Militancy in the region has surged in the past month. Three soldiers were killed in attacks this week. In 2019 Mr Modi's government controversially took over the administration of the erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir, partly to promote [peace and stability](#) there. Recent events suggest that might be a bridge too far even for Mr Modi.

Brussels in biennial bloom



For just four days starting on Thursday something remarkable will sprout in the Belgian capital. Close to a million fresh blooms will be laid out in the city centre to form the Brussels Flower Carpet. Created every two years since 1986, the brightly-coloured display of dahlias and begonias celebrates Belgian traditions of flower cultivation and decorative design.

Viewed from the tower of the Gothic town hall that dominates the city's main square, the 70-metre-long floral arrangement looks like a lush carpet. Previous editions have featured designs that evoked African tribal art, pre-Columbian Mexico and Turkish kilims. This year's pattern, created by Océane Cornille, a Belgian street artist, is a tribute to Brussels itself. Titled "Rhizome", it references Art Nouveau, the playful, swirling and plant-like decorative style that first flourished in the city before taking hold in fin-de-siècle Paris and [Edwardian London](#).

Daily Quiz



The Economist

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 BST on Friday to QuizEspresso@economist.com. We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Thursday: *Primum movens*, a Latin term sometimes used to argue for the existence of God, has what meaning in English?

Wednesday: Which character played by Samuel Jackson, is the director of SHIELD in the Marvel movies?

80%

The proportion of Japanese voters who did not want Kishida Fumio to continue as prime minister, according to polls.

Read the full story.

**There is a thin line between politics and
theatricals.**

Julian Bond