

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter

An air strike destroyed the **Iranian consulate** in **Damascus**. A Lebanese security source told Reuters that Mohammad Reza Zahedi, a commander in the [Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps](#), was among several people killed in the attack. State media in Iran and Syria blamed the strike on Israel's armed forces, which refused to comment. Israel has stepped up strikes on IRGC troops and Iran-backed militants in Syria since Hamas launched its attack on Israel on October 7th.

Binyamin Netanyahu said he would “act immediately” to shut down **Al Jazeera**, a satellite news channel based in Qatar, in Israel. The country's parliament passed a law authorising the prime minister to close foreign media on national-security grounds. Earlier Israel's armed forces announced that they had concluded a two-week operation around [al-Shifa](#) hospital. Much of the hospital, which was Gaza city's largest, has been destroyed.

Google pledged to destroy millions of users' [web-browsing data](#) after being accused of misleading its customers. The move will help settle a lawsuit, filed in 2020, that accused the tech giant of tracking users of “Incognito” mode in its Chrome browser, which was marketed as a means for private browsing. Google will also update disclosures surrounding the information it collects during private browsing.

Florida will hold an [abortion referendum](#) in November, after the state's Supreme Court approved a ballot measure that would codify a constitutional right to the procedure. The court also allowed a **six-week abortion ban** to come into effect. If the proposed ballot

initiative were to pass, however, it would establish a state right to abortion until viability (generally around 23 weeks).

Ma Ying-jeou, a former president of **Taiwan**, began an 11-day visit to **China**, during which he is widely expected to meet with the country's president, Xi Jinping. Mr Ma's party, the Kuomintang, favours [closer relations](#) with China's government. The trip marks his second visit to the mainland: last year, he became the first former leader of Taiwan to travel there.

OpenAI is reportedly planning to open its first **Asian** office in Japan later this month. According to Bloomberg, [the artificial-intelligence startup](#) will also launch Japanese-language services. Last week reports emerged that OpenAI and Microsoft, its biggest investor, are working to launch a data-centre project that would cost \$100bn and host a supercomputer called "Stargate".

Donald Trump marked Easter Sunday by lashing out against his legal and political opponents in all-caps on Truth Social, his social-media platform. The [former president](#) said "crooked and corrupt prosecutors" were "doing everything possible to interfere with the presidential election". Joe Biden struck a more temperate tone, vowing to "work for peace, security, and dignity for all people".

Fact of the day: 7%, the percentage of British jobs that are in manufacturing. [Read the full story.](#)

Earlier we wrongly wrote that Xi Jinping was China's premier. We should have written that he is China's president. Sorry.



Photo: Getty Images

Europe's changing drug policies

No joke: as of April 1st, carrying cannabis in small amounts (up to 25 grams) is no longer a crime for adults in Germany. Germans can also store up to 50 grams of dried marijuana, and grow up to three plants at home. There are no plans yet for legal weed shops, but from July 1st clubs with up to 500 members can grow it for their own use.

Germany hopes the changes will let police focus on more important crimes. It will be welcomed by the neighbouring Netherlands, which has been plagued by drug tourism from Germany and elsewhere since it started tolerating marijuana use nearly 50 years ago. But most European countries, including the Dutch, have [grown less enthusiastic](#) about such policies lately. Amsterdam has cut the number of cannabis cafés; other cities let only Dutch citizens buy. And anyone who thinks European countries are about to decriminalise harder drugs like cocaine might be smoking something.



Photo: Alamy

Higher wages for California's fast-food workers

On Monday hourly pay for more than 500,000 fast-food employees in [California](#) jumped from \$16 to \$20, America's highest minimum wage. Governor Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, has praised the landmark law as a step forward for "inclusion". Jubilant unions aim to push additional states to follow suit. But with unemployment in California notably higher than the national average, the law could become a political liability.

In anticipation of pricier labour, California's fast-food industry has been shedding jobs. More layoffs are expected, especially in restaurant delivery services. Items that take longer to make are being dropped from some menus. Initiatives to automate food prep and service are multiplying. Popular chains such as Chipotle, Jack in the Box and McDonald's are raising prices. And Mr Newsom has denied allegations that he pushed for an exemption in the new rules for Panera Bread, a bakery chain owned by one of his donors. The firm has said it will pay at least the \$20 rate.



Photo: Getty Images

Nepal moves closer to China

Nepal's [foreign policy](#) has long been defined by its relationship with India. The two countries share an open border and a similar culture. But over the past decade, that bond has weakened as Nepal has been wooed by another giant neighbour: China.

Monday marks the end of the latest round of the courtship. Narayan Kaji Shrestha, Nepal's deputy prime minister and foreign minister, completes a week-long visit to China. The trip has included talks on kickstarting the [Belt and Road Initiative](#) in the Himalayan country. Nepal signed up to China's foreign-policy infrastructure programme in 2017, but projects have yet to get started.

Tellingly the trip is Mr Shrestha's first foreign visit since being appointed in a government reshuffle last month. The destination was no doubt influenced by the new ruling coalition's leftist parties, which favour China over India. Ties between those two heavyweights are already cold; Nepal could make them even frostier.



Photo: PLANET PHOTOS

Post-revolutionary poshness on television

“A Gentleman in Moscow” by Amor Towles, an American writer, was published in 2016. The [novel](#) follows a fictional aristocrat, Count Alexander Rostov, in post-revolutionary Russia. The Bolsheviks consider the count’s privileged background a crime and sentence him to indefinite house arrest in the Hotel Metropol in central Moscow. The bestselling book details his attempts to adjust to Soviet life, albeit within the hotel’s relative luxury. A television adaptation is now streaming on Paramount+.

Count Rostov is played by Ewan McGregor, a Scottish actor. He adopts a plummy English accent to denote the character’s gentlemanly status. That sometimes makes the series feel less like a story set in Russia than a British costume drama. Still, the show explores how the revolution upturned lives and how a climate of fear took hold with the rise to power of Josef Stalin. It is also worth watching for a glimpse of Mr McGregor’s magnificent moustache.



Photo: Getty Images

The race to replace TikTok

If TikTok is [banned in America](#) on national-security grounds, an upstart will be waiting to take advantage. Monday sees the launch of a social-media platform, inspired by a popular meme revealing that men spend improbable amounts of time thinking about the [Roman empire](#). Paying users of HicHoc will be known as senators; those who opt for the ad-funded version will be called plebs. HicHoc's Rome screen will show a feed of user-generated content, according to its chief executive, Max Imus.

Mr Imus says that he hopes the platform will be a place for serious-minded debate about the Gracchi brothers' land reforms. But he admits that, in testing, the most-viewed video on the platform was a young woman lip-syncing to the tune of "No Roman No Cry". HicHoc will not have the field to itself for long. On April 1st next year another classically themed social-media service will launch: look out for TenCenturion.



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.

Monday: Thomas Aquinas, the medieval theologian, was a member of which order of friars?

There are opportunities even in the most difficult moments.

Wangari Maathai