

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Reuters

The chair of America's Federal Reserve, **Jerome Powell**, sent a strong signal that the central bank could cut interest rates in September. In a speech in Wyoming, **Mr Powell** noted that, with the labour market cooling and inflation contained, "the shifting balance of risks may warrant adjusting our policy stance". Markets reacted immediately. The s&p 500 rose by more than 1.5%, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average rose by nearly 2%.

Famine has been confirmed in **Gaza city** for the first time, according to the IPC, a group backed by the United Nations. **Israel** says it "firmly rejects" the findings. The report comes as Binyamin Netanyahu, **Israel's** prime minister, approved a plan for Israeli forces to take over Gaza city. He also said Israel would begin negotiating with Hamas to secure the release of hostages.

Donald Trump said that America's federal government would **take a 10% stake** in **Intel**, a struggling domestic chip manufacturer. The arrangement could involve converting federal grants issued to Intel under the CHIPS Act into an equity stake. Earlier this week the Trump administration confirmed talks were ongoing, adding that the government would not sit on the firm's board.

Mr Trump once again threatened **Russia** with “massive sanctions or massive tariffs or both” if it does not make progress towards peace in **Ukraine** within two weeks. He also voiced his unhappiness with a Russian strike on western Ukraine that hit an American factory. Earlier the European Union’s top diplomat warned that Ukraine should not be pushed to give up territory to Russia.

The **FBI** raided the home of **John Bolton**, reportedly in connection to an investigation into the handling of secret documents. Mr Bolton was Mr Trump’s national security adviser from 2018 to 2019, during the president’s first term. He has since become a vocal critic of Mr Trump. [Kash Patel](#), the **FBI**’s director, posted on X: “NO ONE is above the law.”

Mark Carney, **Canada**’s prime minister, said his country will drop **retaliatory tariffs** on American goods covered by the [us-Mexico-Canada Agreement](#), which includes certain drinks and appliances. A 25% levy will remain in place on steel, automobiles and aluminium. Canada and America failed to reach a trade agreement by August 1st; on Thursday Mr Carney and Mr Trump spoke for the first time since.

America’s Department of Justice released a transcript of an interview conducted in July with **Ghislaine Maxwell**, who is serving a 20-year jail term for procuring minors and other offences connected to Jeffrey Epstein, a paedophile. In it Ms Maxwell says Epstein’s “[client list](#)” does not exist and that she never saw Mr Trump behaving inappropriately. She is seeking a presidential pardon.

Word of the week: *Aussenkanzler*, meaning “foreign chancellor”, a nickname given to Friedrich Merz, Germany’s head of government, as a result of his many foreign trips since becoming leader, even as he struggles at home. [Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: Getty Images

South Korea charts a new course with Japan

Relations between Japan and South Korea are strained by the past. During its colonial rule in 1910-45, Japan forced hundreds of thousands of Koreans into forced labour or sexual slavery.

Observers worried that relations would chill further after South Korea elected [Lee Jae-myung](#)—a leftist known for his hard line on Japan—as president in June. But things appear to be warming up. Mr Lee recently said he wanted to build “future-oriented” ties with Japan.

His stance will become clearer on Saturday, when he lands in Japan for a two-day summit with Ishiba Shigeru, the country’s prime minister. It will be Mr Lee’s first overseas visit as president (South Korean leaders typically visit America first). The two leaders are expected to discuss Donald Trump’s tariffs, regional security and military co-operation. All of which seem good reasons for South Korea to put historical grudges aside.



Photograph: Getty Images

The future of treating chronic pain

Chronic pain wrecks the lives of more than 600m people around the world. What causes it is often a mystery. The prevailing hypothesis is that, after an injury, something goes wrong with pain receptors, meaning that the alarm system that reports injuries to the brain keeps ringing long after the body has finished healing. Even when there is a clear underlying cause, it is not known exactly how those conditions produce pain. Treatments, therefore, often bring little relief.

In a paper published in *Nature* this week, scientists report [a discovery that could turn things around](#). They have identified a protein involved in transporting molecules related to pain across nerve cells, which they believe could be responsible for long-lasting pain. Drugs targeting this protein, or even avoiding certain foods that interact with its function, could make for potent new treatments. More research needs to be done, but the findings are promising. With luck, a more comfortable future awaits.



Photograph: Getty Images

Taiwan's president faces a nuclear test

Lai Ching-te, Taiwan's president (pictured), is avowedly anti-nuclear. In May he closed the island's last remaining nuclear power plant, fulfilling a pledge to go nuclear-free. But on Saturday voters will decide whether to restart the facility, in a referendum backed by opposition parties.

Many business leaders, worried about power shortages, support nuclear energy. Even a minor electricity disruption can hamper production of advanced semiconductors, worth almost \$200bn a year to Taiwan. (TSMC, the world's biggest chipmaker, [consumes](#) 8% of the island's electricity alone.) Relying on natural-gas imports, critics argue, increases vulnerability to a Chinese blockade.

A "yes" vote would deal a further blow to Mr Lai. He is already languishing in the polls following a botched attempt last month to recall dozens of pro-China opposition MPs, which his party said was needed to safeguard democracy. The result of the referendum could be close. But if the plant is to be reopened, it must first be deemed safe. Inspections could take at least a year.



Photograph: Getty Images

A milestone for women's rugby

The [Women's Rugby](#) World Cup, which begins this weekend in Sunderland, England, will be the biggest edition of the tournament so far. Sixteen teams will take part, up from 12 at the last competition in 2021. At least 375,000 tickets have been sold, compared with 140,000 four years ago. Sponsorship income is expected to breeze past the \$18.5m generated last time.

But for all its growth, the sport needs to demonstrate a deeper pool of talent. New Zealand and England have won eight of the nine tournaments so far. France have come third seven times. It may be too much to expect any of the next tier of teams, which include Ireland, Australia and Italy, to win the competition for the first time. But some group-stage upsets and close knock-out games would highlight the evolution of the game on the field, as well as off it.



Photograph: Getty Images

Weekend profile: Rajinikanth, the 74-year-old actor who drives fans into a frenzy

For fans of Rajinikanth, or Rajini, it is not enough to simply buy a ticket to one of his movies and turn up at the right time and place. No; preparations begin days in advance. Ahead of his recent film, “Coolie”, some fans prostrated themselves in front of shrines, seeking a divine blessing for the [Indian](#) actor. (The film’s title is not considered offensive in South Asia, unlike in the West.) Others bathed giant cardboard cutouts of him in milk, a sign of reverence usually reserved for Hindu gods.

Rajinikanth—whose real name is Shivaji Rao Gaekwad—is one of the biggest movie stars in the world, inspiring the kind of devotion that most Hollywood actors can only dream of. “Coolie”, a Tamil gangster flick, marks his 50th year on screen. Rajini plays a dockyard worker and union leader who investigates the death of a friend, which draws him into a criminal underworld.

The role hints at Rajinikanth’s humble beginnings. Born to a poor family in Bangalore, he discovered a love of acting at school and would perform folk tales for rapt classmates. As a young adult, he did manual jobs—hauling rice sacks for ten paise apiece (equivalent to 1.3 cents in 1970, and 0.12 cents today)—and worked as a bus conductor. Later he studied acting at the Madras Film Institute.

At first he got only bit parts and often played baddies. But in “Bairavi” (1978) he portrayed an honourable servant who avenges his sister’s murder. In the blockbusters that followed he starred as the swashbuckling hero. Rajini is not a method actor, nor a [Bollywood beefcake](#). At 74, his lustrous hair has become tonsured and flecked with grey.

What, then, explains fans’ fervour? One reason is his everyman appeal. He dresses plainly and shuns big-brand endorsements. He has a self-deprecating sense of humour. Another, somewhat paradoxical, reason is Rajini’s superhero-like qualities. He is known for his physics-defying antics: in one film, he catches a knife between his teeth.

Like all the biggest stars, [Rajini has a certain magnetism](#). One punter says the actor’s “aura is unmatched”. For a time he hoped to use that charisma in the political arena. Rajini tried to launch a new party in 2020, but withdrew after a health scare he called a “warning given to me by the Lord”.

Importantly, Rajinikanth’s work is suitable for all ages. Three generations filled a cinema in Mumbai to watch “Coolie”. People across India and in the diaspora have grown up watching him as he has made films in Tamil, Telugu, Hindi and Kannada.

Most actors fear their powers diminishing with time. If anything, Rajinikanth’s are increasing, even after 170 films. “Coolie” took \$17m at the global box office on its first day, setting a new record for Tamil cinema. Rajini still packs a punch.



Illustration: The Economist

Mini crossword

Our crossword has two sets of clues, one for seasoned cruciverbalists and the other for less experienced solvers. Both give the same answers, all of which feature in articles in this week's edition of *The Economist*:

Cryptic clues

1 across - One hundred rooms for top executives (1-5)

2 across - Alarm father with a little noise (5)

3 across - Look briefly upon defaced rubbish heap, and accept better offer (6)

1 down - Coddle genius about way to make it rain (5-7)

Straight clues

1 across - Who normally sits below a company's board (1-5)

2 across - A mythical danger for unwary sailors (5)

3 across - An act frowned upon when selling property (6)

1 down - What definitely wasn't to blame for the Texas floods (5-7)

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am BST on Monday to [\[email protected\]](#). We will pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners in next week's edition.

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Image: The Economist



Illustration: The Economist

The winners of this week's quiz

Thank you to everyone who took part in this week's quiz. The winners, chosen at random, were:

Stefano and Chinghan Wong, Bishan, Singapore

Donna Singmaster, Pebble Beach, California, America

Richard Small, Johannesburg, South Africa

They all gave the correct answers of: a pod, exaltation, Murder at the Vicarage, parliament and Pride month. The theme is collective nouns for animals: a pod of whales or dolphins, an exaltation of larks, a murder of crows, a Parliament of owls and a pride of lions

The questions were:

Monday: String beans, garden peas and okra are found in what kind of natural container?

Tuesday: What word for happiness also means “the raising of someone to an important position”?

Wednesday: What was the first Agatha Christie novel to feature Miss Marple?

Thursday: The Althing is the oldest-known example (still in existence) of what type of institution?

Friday: An extended celebration of LGBTQ people in June is generally known under what title?

*They sicken of the calm, who
knew the storm.*

Dorothy Parker