

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

America's **Department of Justice** asked a federal judge to make public grand-jury testimony about **Jeffrey Epstein**, as controversy over the convicted paedophile [continues to engulf Donald Trump's](#) administration. Meanwhile Mr Trump sued the *Wall Street Journal's* publisher and its owner, Rupert Murdoch, for libel. On Thursday the newspaper published excerpts from a risqué birthday note Mr Trump allegedly wrote to Epstein (which the president denies).

**El Salvador** sent home over 250 **Venezuelans** [who had been detained there](#) after **America** deported them. In exchange, Venezuela released dozens of political prisoners, including ten Americans. Marco Rubio, the secretary of state, announced the Americans' homecoming. An earlier attempt to reach a deal was reportedly botched when Mr Trump's envoy to Venezuela conducted his own negotiations separately from Mr Rubio.

**ExxonMobil**, the world's biggest independent energy company, lost its bid to block its rival **Chevron** from acquiring **Hess**, an oil firm. An arbitration panel rejected Exxon's argument that it had a contractual right of first refusal to lucrative assets that Hess owns

in Guyana. The victory clears the way for Chevron to complete the \$53bn takeover deal it struck in 2023.

The **European Union** approved another sanctions package on **Russia** over its war on Ukraine. Slovakia dropped its veto on the measures after winning guarantees of support from the European Commission to help with the cost of [phasing out Russian gas](#). The package includes the lowering of the “price cap” on Russian oil and tightening restrictions on Russian banks.

**Brazil’s** Supreme Court ordered **Jair Bolsonaro**, the country’s former president, to wear an ankle monitor. The hard-right politician’s house was also searched by police. Mr Bolsonaro is currently on trial over his involvement [in an attempted coup](#). The order will likely draw the ire of Mr Trump, who has pressed for the charges against Mr Bolsonaro to be dropped.

**Meta** rejected signing the **European Union’s** code of practice for general-purpose AI, a voluntary set of rules instructing companies how to comply with the [bloc’s AI law](#). Joel Kaplan, Meta’s global-affairs boss, said that the code exceeded the law’s scope. Other firms, such as Airbus, have said they won’t sign the code, but Meta is the first tech giant to pass.

**Binyamin Netanyahu** called **Pope Leo** a day after **Israel** struck the only Catholic church in Gaza. The attack killed three Palestinians and wounded ten people, including the parish priest, whom the late Pope Francis had [phoned daily](#) during the war. On Thursday Mr Trump called the Israeli prime minister to convey his displeasure; Israel issued a rare apology.

**Figure of the day:** 600,000, the number of people killed by cancer in America each year. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

## **The world braces for Trump's tariff storm**

Trade talks between Japan and America are intensifying ahead of a tariff deadline on August 1st. Donald Trump has warned that, without a deal, America will probably keep tariffs of 25% on Japanese imports. On Friday Ishiba Shigeru, Japan's prime minister, will meet Scott Bessent, America's treasury secretary. Mr Trump wants Japan to buy more American weapons, food and cars. But Japan has ruled out any deal that might harm its farmers or carmakers. Japan has proposed a tariff formula based on how much countries invest in America's car industry, a sector in which Japanese companies invested a lot. America is yet to bite.

Japan is not alone. Over the past fortnight Mr Trump has sent letters to more than 20 countries threatening high tariffs. Some are exploring joint retaliation; others are paying up. Indonesia avoided steeper tariffs by pledging to buy more than \$19bn of American energy and farm products. The clock is ticking. Mr Trump shows [no signs of chickening out](#).



Photograph: Reuters

## Growing repression in El Salvador

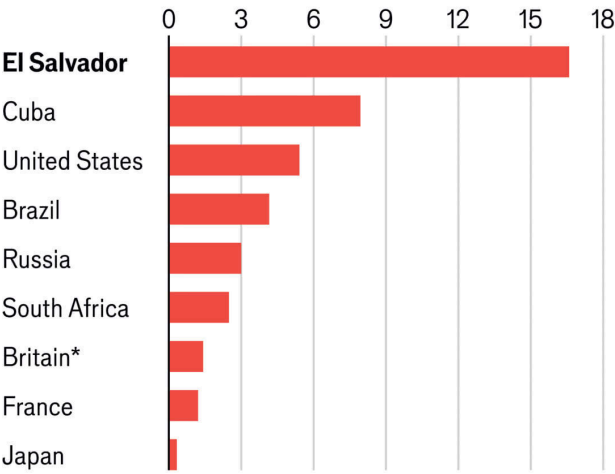
Cristosal, an NGO that promotes human rights in Central America, is shutting down its operations in El Salvador. The move comes as President Nayib Bukele [intensifies his crackdown on dissent](#). Ruth López, who led Cristosal's anti-corruption investigations, was arrested in May and remains in detention. She helped document abuses in the country's overcrowded prisons and had accused the government of misusing pandemic funds.

Mr Bukele remains popular, mainly because his government has greatly reduced gang violence. Human-rights defenders have criticised his method—mass incarceration without trial. Of late Mr Bukele has become more repressive. Ms López's arrest was a turning point: since it happened journalists, lawyers and activists, fearing similar treatment, have left the country.

Cristosal was one of the few independent organisations still monitoring the government. Its departure, and the exodus of journalists, will make it even harder to challenge El Salvador's authoritarian turn.

**Slammer crammer**

**Prison population per 1,000 people**  
Selected countries, 2024 or latest available



\*England and Wales  
Source: World Prison Brief



Photograph: AP

## **America's housebuilding slowdown**

America's economy is [growing despite Donald Trump's trade war](#). Even so, economists will scrutinise June's data on housing starts, released on Friday, for signs of weakness. In May new construction activity was at a five-year low. It recovered only slightly in June.

High borrowing costs are one reason for the slowdown. Thirty-year fixed mortgage rates are around their highest level in two decades, hurting demand for new homes. Mr Trump has pressed the Federal Reserve to lower interest rates. But the president's tariffs have made the housing slowdown worse; America imports lots of construction materials. Deportations of workers who entered America illegally could also raise labour costs. Many housebuilders are not starting developments because of the uncertainty. Mr Trump will be hoping that the housebuilding slowdown is temporary—and not a sign of rot in the economy's foundations.



Photograph: Alamy

## Peak migration politics in Bavaria

As a site for what is billed as a “summit”, it is hard to beat: on Friday the interior ministers of France, Poland, Austria, the Czech Republic and [Denmark](#) are convening on the Zugspitze in Bavaria, Germany’s highest mountain, at the invitation of their German counterpart, Alexander Dobrindt (pictured). The ministers’ “Zugspitze declaration” will propose reforms to the European Union’s rules on irregular migration, including easing the deportation of failed asylum-seekers.

Happily for the ministers, Europe’s asylum problem has become less acute. After a post-pandemic spike, asylum claims in the EU have been falling for almost two years. A toughened-up EU asylum pact is anyway due to take effect next year. Meanwhile, Mr Dobrindt may have some explaining to do: controls he has implemented at Germany’s borders have undermined the EU’s passport-free Schengen zone, and potentially violated domestic law. The Poles in particular are angry. Placating them may be an uphill struggle—even at 3,000 metres.



Illustration: The Economist

## 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 BST on Friday to [\[email protected\]](#). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

**Friday:** Which detective first appeared in the story “The Mysterious Affair At Styles”?

**Thursday:** Which martial arts star appears in “Bloodsport”, “Universal Soldier” and “Timecop”?





Illustration: The Economist

## The winners of this 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:

**Brenda Boere**, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

**Jaime Jean**, Mexico City, Mexico

**Andrew Narracott**, London, Britain

They all gave the correct answers of junta, Anglo, Earth and [JPMorgan Chase](#).

*There are times when a leader  
must move ahead of his flock.*

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***Nelson Mandela***