

## Catch up: Putin's warning to the West; America's new trade rules



**Vladimir Putin** warned Western countries that they would be at “war” with Russia were they to allow **Ukraine** to use their weapons to strike targets in Russia. The Russian president's remarks came after **Antony Blinken**, America's secretary of state, hinted earlier this week that such approval might be forthcoming. Meanwhile, Russia expelled six British diplomats over spying accusations. The move, which comes as Sir Keir Starmer, Britain's prime minister, landed in Washington for talks with President Joe Biden, is another warning by Mr Putin.

**America** said it will close a loophole in its trade rules, which allows packages worth less than \$800 to enter the country without facing duties. The government says that the rule gives a chance to **Chinese companies** to bypass tariffs, hurting American manufacturers. More than 1.4bn packages, worth at least \$66bn, are expected to arrive under the exemption this year.

**China** said it will raise the retirement age for the first time since 1978. For all men it will go from 60 to 63. For female white-collar workers the age will increase from 55 to 58; for blue-collar women from 50 to 55. The average age of **retirement** in China is among the lowest in the world, and the pension costs are squeezing government budgets.

**OpenAI** released a new series of [AI models](#) which it claims are capable of human-like reasoning. In a blog post the startup said the new series, called o1, spends more time “thinking” before it responds and delivers results similar to PhD students on mathematical and science tasks. OpenAI has put a version on ChatGPT, its chatbot.

Workers at **Boeing** on America’s west coast voted to go on strike. The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, which represents some 33,000 Boeing workers in the west coast, said 96% of its members backed the walkout. The planemaker offered workers a pay rise of 25%; the union is seeking 40%. The strike comes as Boeing grapples with manufacturing delays and concerns over its safety record.

**Donald Trump** said he will not sell his shares in his [loss-making social-media firm](#) when a lock-up period ends next week. He owns a majority of the company that operates **Truth Social**, but he has been prevented from offloading that stake since its listing in March. The stock price is down by about 70% and would probably fall further if he were to divest.

**Pope Francis** voiced dismay at America’s presidential candidates, saying that both stand “against life”: Donald Trump because he would restrict immigration and Kamala Harris because she supports abortion access. “Who is the lesser evil?” he asked reporters. “I don’t know. Everyone has to think and make this decision according to their conscience.” America’s 52m Catholics lean slightly Republican.

**Word of the week:** Ilish, a bony freshwater fish, which is not just a staple of Bangladeshis’ diet but an integral part of their identity. Read the full story.

# China's worrying forecast



China had its hottest August in over 60 years. The north of the country suffered damaging rainstorms; the south endured persistent heatwaves. The bad weather helped to push up vegetable prices by nearly 22% compared with a year earlier. But despite this, inflation remained subdued: consumer prices overall rose by just 0.6%. The hot weather was offset by [cool demand](#).

That weakness will probably appear in other economic indicators released on Saturday, including industrial production and retail sales. China's government still hopes to reach this year's official growth target of 5% with the help of exports, which have remained surprisingly strong. But exports and price cuts are flattering the official growth figures, removing the sense of urgency officialdom should feel. The government needs to do more to revive homegrown demand, especially by stabilising the property market. Not even China's leaders can control the weather. But they share some of the blame for the country's subdued economic climate.

# Futsal heads to Central Asia



FIFA, football's governing body, has done an impressive job taking football around the world, having hosted World Cups on six continents. But it has never put on a tournament in Uzbekistan. That honour goes to another sport—futsal—a form of five-a-side football popular in Portugal, Spain and Latin America. Its smaller ball and pitch rewards players with a deft touch, clever tricks and serious sprinting ability. Its popularity is growing: this year four teams (Afghanistan, France, New Zealand and Tajikistan) are making their World Cup futsal debut.

FIFA has previously hosted the tournament in Guatemala and Lithuania, as well as in traditional powerhouses such as Spain and Brazil. For Uzbekistan, hosting is a coup. The country's futsal team qualified for the two previous World Cups, but it won just one of its six matches. Until now, Uzbek football has been better known for its corruption scandals than competitive triumphs. A successful tournament would help its standing in global football.

## A British institution tries out America



American television executives are fond of importing British television shows and giving them a stateside flavour. The results have been mixed. For every hit American adaptation, such as “The Office”, there have been umpteen flops (see “Fawlty Towers” and “The Inbetweeners”). Some things, it seems, are quintessentially British.

The producers of “Have I Got News For You”, which launches on CNN on Saturday, will be hoping the satirical news show is not one of them. There are some differences between the iterations. One is the host: a different celebrity presents each instalment of the British show, but Roy Wood junior (pictured), a stand-up comedian, will front every episode of the American version.

Another is competition. The run-up to a presidential election seems the ideal time to launch a topical panel show, but America already has a wealth of late-night talk shows covering current affairs. CNN has news for viewers, but they may well prefer to hear about it elsewhere.



# Dissonance at the Proms finale



Crowds fill the Royal Albert Hall in London, waving Union Jacks and singing along to patriotic hymns. That is how the Last Night of the Proms, the conclusion of an eight-week classical festival that takes place on Saturday, is usually celebrated. But recently the grand finale has struck a discordant note. Last year the sight of EU flags waving along to the rhythmic march of “Rule Britannia” sparked a backlash from Brexit supporters. This year, organisers warned vaguely that flags related to “protest” or “hatred” would be prohibited; some have speculated that this directive is aimed at Palestinian flags.

“Rule Britannia” itself is a point of contention. Critics point to its associations with colonialism and slavery. Before the Proms in 2020 the BBC announced it would [cut the lyrics](#), before reversing the decision after a fierce backlash. Angel Blue is the soprano set to sing the anthem’s high notes this year, promising both musical and political drama.

## Weekend profile: Ginni Thomas, battle-hardened conservative



Ginni Thomas is well-bred and speaks with a sunny, Midwestern lilt. She wears a twinset and pearls, a blonde bob and a broad smile. She hates communism but loves liberty, free enterprise and small government. You would not guess that someone so genteel could be so perennially aggrieved.

Mrs Thomas, whose ultra-conservative husband, [Clarence Thomas](#), sits on America's Supreme Court, once described her younger self as "shy and reticent and retiring". Now, in her upbeat way, she speaks of herself as a warrior. She wages her war against bureaucrats, Democrats, welfare recipients, lobbyists, the mainstream media and the Black Lives Matter movement. She also wages it against anyone who would clip her husband's wings, or her own. Such fighting spirit has landed Mrs Thomas at the centre of a row over judicial ethics.

Last week ProPublica, an investigative outlet, reported that Mrs Thomas had praised the lobbying of a conservative-Christian legal group against a proposed stricter code of conduct for Supreme

Court justices. On September 9th Dick Durbin, a Democratic senator who supports the proposed code, demanded that Justice Thomas recuse himself from cases involving those Christian lawyers. It is hardly the first suggestion that Mrs Thomas's activism presents a conflict of interest for her husband.

In 1986 Ginni met Clarence at a conference. Their upbringings could hardly have been more different. Mrs Thomas was born to a well-off family in Nebraska, and raised among white-picket fences and overwhelmingly white faces. Justice Thomas grew up dirt poor in Georgia speaking Geechee, the language of the black Gullah people. Yet their shared convictions—intensely sceptical of government intervention and anti-discrimination programmes—made for a match.

The couple's crucible came during Justice Thomas's confirmation hearing in 1991. Anita Hill, a former subordinate, accused him of sexual harassment. On national television she recounted how he spoke to her about his sex life and about a porn star named Long Dong Silver. He denied it all; his wife shepherded him through the ordeal.

Her activism expanded during the presidency of Barack Obama. But after Donald Trump lost the 2020 election, Mrs Thomas's activity grew [unhinged](#). She attended the pro-Trump rally in Washington that preceded the Capitol insurrection, though she left before the violence. Yet by text she fulminated to Mark Meadows, then Mr Trump's chief of staff, about the "greatest Heist of our History". "Release the Kraken," she wrote, "and save us from the left taking America down".

Earlier this year Justice Thomas refused to recuse himself from a case about whether Mr Trump should be immune from prosecution over his attempts to overturn the election result. That was true to form: the justice has long denied that his wife's activism is in conflict with his judicial role. He claims that they discuss neither



her politics nor his court work—a restraint on Mrs Thomas’s part that is absent from her public life.

# Weekly 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 down* Musician remedies song after remix (6,6)

*1 across* Pilfered fruit bread, we hear (6)

*2 across* In Koran, geranium bears fruit (6)

*3 across* Vegetable, n. Found in northern Europe (6)

## Factual clues

*1 down* Grammy-winning Brazilian bandleader (6,6)

*1 across* How Donald Trump describes the 2020 election (6)

*2 across* Increasingly expensive fruit blighted by disease and drought (6)

*3 across* Scandinavian country whose prime minister has adopted three Chinese children (6)

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am GMT on Monday to [crossword@economist.com](mailto:crossword@economist.com). We will pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners in next week's edition.

## The winners of this week's quiz



*The Economist*

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

**Meredith Angwin**, Melbourne, Australia

**Alistair Nicklin**, Naivasha Kenya

**Ignacio and Carolina Guerrero**, Santiago de Chile, Chile

They all gave the correct answers of: Humphrey Bogart, Charles Barkley, Wallace, James Garner and Robert Harris. The theme is US vice-presidents: Hubert Humphrey, Alben Barkley, Henry Wallace, John Nance Garner and Kamala Harris.

The questions were:

**Monday:** Which Hollywood legend won the best actor Oscar for his performance in "The African Queen"? **Tuesday:** Which former basketball player was nicknamed "the Bread Truck" and "the Round Mound of Rebound"?

**Wednesday:** Which cheese-eating animated character appeared in the Oscar-winning short films "The Wrong Trousers" and "A Close Shave"?

**Thursday:** Which actor played Jim Rockford in the detective series “The Rockford Files”?

**Friday:** Which novelist wrote “Imperium”, “Lustrum” and “Dictator”, a trio of novels about the Roman orator, Cicero?



# Ilish

*A bony freshwater fish, which is not just a staple of Bangladeshis' diet but an integral part of their identity.*

*Read the full story.*



**All greatness of character is dependent on individuality.**

*James Fenimore Cooper*