

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter

Local media in **Israel** reported that four people, including two relatives of Israelis held hostage in **Gaza**, were arrested at [a protest in Tel Aviv](#). The protestors had gathered outside a military headquarters after ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas broke down on Tuesday. Negotiators had been trying to reach a deal that would free 40 of the remaining 130 hostages captured by Hamas during the October 7th attacks.

**American** officials retrieved the black box from the *Dali*, a container ship which [struck the Francis Scott Key Bridge](#) in **Baltimore** harbour. Rescuers continued to search the wreckage of the bridge for the remains of six people who are believed to have been killed in the accident. Disruption is expected following the disaster: Baltimore's port handled around \$80bn of foreign cargo last year.

**Germany's** leading economic research groups revised their growth forecasts for this year. They slashed their prediction for the country's GDP growth to 0.1%, down from a figure of 1.3% forecast six months ago. Germany was [the world's worst-performing major economy](#) last year, shrinking by 0.3% owing to weak domestic demand and an ailing export sector.

The lower chamber of **Thailand's** parliament passed a bill that paves the way for it to [legalise same-sex marriage](#). The country would be the first in South-East Asia to do so. The bill must still pass through the country's upper chamber and receive royal assent. But it is widely expected to become law by the end of the year.

**UBS** signed a deal with **Apollo**, an American asset-management firm, to sell \$8bn worth of unwanted loans. The deal concludes an

older agreement whereby Apollo agreed to purchase the assets from Credit Suisse—now owned by UBS—in 2022. UBS has tried hard to renegotiate that earlier deal, arguing that the fees agreed by Credit Suisse were too high.

Xi Jinping, **China's** president, met several **American** business leaders in Beijing in an attempt to assuage their fears about [investing in his country](#). Foreign direct investment into China shrank in 2023 amid concerns over new regulations and government interference. Representatives from 20 firms met Mr Xi, including the bosses of Blackstone, a private-equity firm, and Qualcomm, a chipmaker.

A **second** may need to be subtracted from the year 2029, according to a paper published in *Nature*, a science journal. The rotation of the earth had previously been gradually slowing down. But the study explains that its movement is now speeding up—and has been doing so since the late 2010s. The change could necessitate the introduction of a “negative leap second” in order for clocks to remain accurate.

**Figure of the day:** 45,000, the headcount at McKinsey, which has been growing faster than the consulting firm's revenues. [Read the full story](#).



## Israel lashes out at America

An Israeli delegation was scheduled to visit the White House on Wednesday to resolve disagreements over [the war in Gaza](#). But Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, told his envoys to stay home after America refused to veto a UN Security Council resolution that calls for an "immediate ceasefire" in Gaza. Mr Netanyahu called America's decision a "clear retreat" from its "consistent position"—a reaction that reflects his fear that it will undermine his already weak political standing at home.

Worsening hunger in Gaza is one of America's main concerns. The UN says that 1.1m people, half of the population, face "catastrophic" food shortages. Aid workers reckon that Gaza needs at least 300 lorry-loads of supplies each day, double the current number. Air drops cannot fill the gap, and deliveries by sea are still small. After months of American pleading, Israeli officials promised to "flood" the enclave with aid. Yet the flow remains only a trickle.



Photo: Dave Simonds

## India and the Philippines resist China

India's foreign minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, completed a three-day visit to the Philippines on Wednesday. He spent his time in Manila, the capital, in talks aimed at strengthening Indo-Philippine co-operation to deter China. The countries' partnership is part of a network that links Australia, India, Japan, the Philippines, the United States and Vietnam. All of these countries want to stop China from pushing its borders outwards into southern Asia and the western Pacific.

India and the Philippines are both having run-ins with China. Chinese forces clash with the Indian army in the Himalayas and with the Philippine navy in the [South China Sea](#), almost all of which China claims as its own. India wants to help the Philippines counter the threat from China. It is soon expected to deliver "BrahMos" supersonic anti-ship missiles to the Philippines.



Photo: Rex Shutterstock

## **Argentines' confidence in their economy**

The results of Argentina's latest consumer-confidence survey were published on Wednesday. The index asks respondents about their own economic situation, that of the country and their expectations. It rose by 1.8% in March, compared with February.

President Javier Milei, a self-described “anarcho-capitalist”, will have been hoping for a much bigger rise. That would have nicely capped a string of economic successes from his [first 100 days](#) in office. The government has achieved monthly fiscal surpluses. Inflation, though still extremely high at 13% a month, is falling.

Mr Milei’s economic progress has come at a heavy price: slashing government spending and temporarily driving inflation up. Many Argentines suffered. The consumer-confidence index plunged sharply in the first two months of Mr Milei’s presidency before creeping up in February. This second slight rise suggests that, despite a deepening recession, the public are cautiously gaining faith in the president’s reforms—though probably much slower than he would like.



Photo: Getty Images

## **Desperate times for Myanmar’s army**

Wednesday is Armed Forces Day in Myanmar. It’s an excuse for the army to hit the tarmac in Naypyidaw, the capital, awing the population with parades, tanks and fiery speeches. This year, however, the generals should be feeling less arrogant than at any time since February 2021, when they [deposed](#) the civilian government and provoked a civil war. Since October the army has



suffered humiliating [reversals](#) against rebel militias in the north of the country. Thousands of troops, including six generals surrendered.

One sign of the army's weakness—and desperation for more troops—is a conscription law that comes into effect in April. It stipulates that all men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27 must serve at least two years. The draft is unpopular: thousands of Burmese have fled the country to avoid it. Officials attempting to identify eligible citizens have reportedly been killed. Most Burmese, it seems, do not wish to kill their countrymen or risk being killed by them.



Photo: PETER MOUNTAIN/NETFLIX

## **The Prince and the producer in “Scoop”**

In November 2019 Emily Maitlis [interviewed](#) Prince Andrew for the BBC's “Newsnight” about his friendship with Jeffrey Epstein, a convicted paedophile who had recently died. Andrew denied an accusation by one of Epstein's victims that he had sex with her when she was 17. His arrogant defence of his association with Epstein was widely mocked.

Now the negotiations behind the interview have been turned into a film. “Scoop” has its world premiere in London on Wednesday. It

streams on Netflix from April 5th. The cast includes Gillian Anderson (Ms Maitlis) and Rufus Sewell (Andrew). The drama is adapted from a memoir by Sam McAlister, a former “Newsnight” producer.

The same story is the subject of “A Very Royal Scandal”, a forthcoming three-part series by Amazon starring Ruth Wilson and Michael Sheen. Both will cater to the public’s curiosity about what goes on behind closed palace doors—and both will struggle to match the high drama of the interview itself.



## 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.

**Wednesday:** What was the name of the first prequel in the Star Wars movie series, released in 1999?

**Tuesday:** What is the usual term for a provision in a bill that provides for a law to expire after a certain date?

*For progressive people the present is the beginning of the future. For conservative people the present is the end of the past.*

*Karl Mannheim*