

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: EPA/Shutterstock

**Ukraine's** president, **Volodymyr Zelensky**, unveiled a revised version of a [peace proposal](#) drawn up by his country and America. The 20-point plan envisages a withdrawal of Russian forces from some occupied territory to create a demilitarised zone in eastern Ukraine; Mr Zelensky said Ukraine would be willing to pull back troops. Russia has so far been unwilling to soften its position.

A car-bomb killed three people, including two traffic police officers, in **Moscow**. Russian investigators said that an explosive device detonated when officers approached a “suspicious person”. The blast occurred near the site in the [Russian capital](#) where **Fanil Sarvarov**, a senior general, died in another car-bombing earlier this week. Investigators are examining possible links. Officials blamed Ukraine, which did not comment.

America's **stockmarkets** went into Christmas in good heart: the S&P 500 index rose by 0.3%, closing for the holiday on a record high. Investors were cheered by data showing that fewer people than expected filed for unemployment benefits last week. Not all stocks joined the festive mood. **Intel's** shares fell after [Nvidia](#) paused trials of its chipmaking technology, denting expectations that Intel could secure an important new customer.

**America's** Department of Justice said it uncovered more than 1m additional documents potentially linked to **Jeffrey Epstein**, a dead sex offender. The discovery will delay the full release of the [Epstein files](#) required under a law passed by Congress last month. Officials said they need weeks to review the material and make redactions to protect victims. Lawmakers have criticised the slow release and extensive redactions.

Authorities in **Honduras** declared **Nasry Asfura**, of the right-wing National Party, the winner of the country's presidential election. Mr Asfura edged out Salvador Nasralla of the centre-right Liberals. Donald Trump had [threatened](#) to cut off aid to Honduras if Mr Asfura was not elected—and recently pardoned Juan Orlando Hernández, an ex-president from Mr Asfara's party imprisoned in America for conspiring with drug gangs.

**Democratic senators** warned **Mr Trump** that his recent decision to recall nearly 30 ambassadors risks hollowing out American diplomacy. The administration says the move is meant to ensure that embassies follow the president's policy agenda. Democrats say the mass recalls are unprecedented and could help rivals such as Russia and China to deepen their influence.

**BP** agreed to sell a 65% stake in **Castrol**, which makes lubricants for cars and industrial machinery, to Stonepeak, an American investment firm. The deal values Castrol at about \$10bn. The British oil giant said it would use the proceeds to cut debt. The sale reflects a shift back towards BP's core oil-and-gas business after years of weak share-price performance and [disappointing returns](#) from renewables.

**Figure of the day:** 1,499 yuan (\$212), the price per bottle of *baijiu*, China's favourite firewater, as set by Kweichow Moutai, a state-owned giant. [Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: Reuters

## The unsinkable world economy

*We are looking back on 2025. Today, finance and economics.*

As President Donald Trump announced a trade war of unprecedented ferocity in April, firms and investors braced for a slump. Movements in financial markets pointed to a recession. American consumers' confidence nosedived. So did some real-time measures of economic growth. Yet "Liberation Day" has had less effect on business activity and economic growth than had been feared.

Global economic growth has held up in part because Mr Trump's tariff war has turned out to be less brutal than expected. And gung-ho fiscal policy, especially in America, has stoked demand. On top of this, economic worries related to artificial intelligence have not materialised: unemployment has not shot up since the release of ChatGPT, and concerns that growth is over-reliant on artificial-intelligence investment appear to have been overblown.

Still, economic-policy uncertainty has hurt consumer confidence around the world. Economists typically believe that gloominess portends a slowdown. But the global economy appears to have become remarkably resilient to turmoil.



Photograph: Getty Images

## Who is winning the trade war?

At the start of 2025 Donald Trump thought he would bring [China's economy](#) to its knees by ratcheting up tariffs on its exports. But as the year went on it became clear that, unlike in Mr Trump's first term, China was ready to hit back with even more ferocity. In April and again in October, China unveiled export controls on rare earths that, if sustained, would have brought much of the global auto industry to a standstill.

China's bare-knuckle tactics paid off. At a meeting in late October, Mr Trump agreed to reduce tariffs so long as Xi Jinping, China's leader, froze the export controls. China also promised a bigger effort to stop the flow of precursor chemicals for fentanyl into America. This renewed co-operation sets the stage for a busy diplomatic calendar in 2026: the two leaders may meet as many as four times as they work towards a more ambitious trade deal.



Photograph: Getty Images

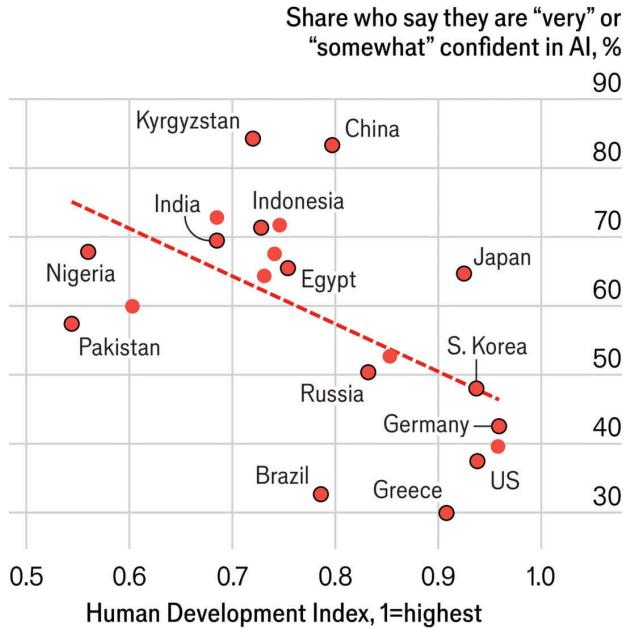
## AI could make the poor world richer

Three years after the launch of ChatGPT 800m people—a seventh of the world’s adults—use it each week. Many are in the developing world, where populations are young and tech-savvy. After America, India and Brazil are the biggest markets. Countries that have low scores in human-development indices tend to have more confidence in AI, a UN survey found (see chart).

Can AI **democratise knowledge** in such countries by putting a tutor, doctor or adviser in every pocket? AI could spread through cheap smartphones. But for that to happen, data needs to become cheaper and connectivity needs to expand. Even where people are connected, they need to learn the skills required to use AI productively. The World Bank estimates that 70% of ten-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries cannot read a simple text. To lift productivity across entire economies, schools and businesses will have to reorganise to exploit the technology.

## Model pupils

21 countries, 2025



Source: United Nations Development Programme



Photograph: Getty Images

## China's clean-energy revolution

The scale of China's renewables revolution is almost too vast to comprehend. The country can produce almost a terawatt of renewable-energy capacity in a year. That is more than the energy 300 big nuclear-power plants could supply. The forces that created all this generating capacity are far from exhausted. China's huge demand—it generates a third of the world's electricity—has spurred more efficient manufacturing that keeps pushing costs down. Many of the subsidies that started this virtuous circle are [ending](#) because they are no longer needed.

China has exceeded, or is on course to exceed, most of its international climate targets. The work it does to cut emissions at home—cheaper renewables, increased storage, more efficient electricity markets—will thus be increasingly sellable beyond its borders. Strikingly, this anti-emissions machine is powered by self-interest. China is making more money from exporting green technology than America does from exporting fossil fuels.



Illustration: The Economist

## Daily quiz

We will serve you a new question each weekday. All five have a common theme. We won't pick any winners this week, normal service will return next week.

**Thursday:** Bert, played by Dick van Dyke in the film “Mary Poppins”, was a member of which profession?

**Wednesday:** *Rangifer tarandus*, an animal sometimes referred to as a caribou, is more generally known by what name?

*You'll never find a rainbow if  
you're looking down.*

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***Charlie Chaplin***