

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Reuters

Consumer confidence in America fell to the lowest level since June 2022 in November, according to closely watched data from the University of Michigan. The [government shutdown](#) and gloomy projections for unemployment and personal finances fed the bleak outlook. The slump was broadly consistent across respondents, irrespective of income, age and political views. A notable exception was consumers with significant stock holdings, whose mood improved.

China's exports unexpectedly fell by 1.1% year on year in October, the first such contraction since February. The drop followed months of growth driven by sales to Europe and South-East Asia, which compensated for plummeting American demand driven by Donald Trump's [trade war](#). Analysts say China's aggressive "front-loading" of exports in anticipation of a tariff surge has ended.

Inter IKEA, which supplies the [Swedish furniture franchise's](#) stores, suffered a 26% drop in annual operating profit. It fell to €1.7bn (\$2bn) in the 12 months to August 31st, from €2.3bn the previous year. The company blamed the drop on rising commodity prices

linked to Mr Trump's tariffs and price cuts it made to counter falling demand.

As many as 20% of **flights** could be cancelled over Thanksgiving if **America's government shutdown** continues, warned Sean Duffy, the transport secretary. Air-traffic controllers are currently working without pay. Hundreds of [flights](#) were cancelled on Friday after regulators ordered 40 big airports to cut routes. Neither Republicans nor Democrats yet seem ready to back down in negotiations to agree on a government-spending bill.

First Brands, an American car-parts firm that managed to borrow \$10bn before [collapsing in September](#), won approval from a bankruptcy court to fully tap a \$1.1bn rescue loan. A bankruptcy judge in Texas said that the financing, which some creditors had previously opposed, "allows the parties to continue to work" to eventually sell the business and allow creditors to be repaid.

America lifted terrorism sanctions against [Ahmed al-Sharaa](#), **Syria's** president, as well as the country's interior minister. The United Nations and Britain removed similar sanctions on both men this week; the European Union will, too. Mr Sharaa is due to meet Mr Trump in Washington on Monday. America's president [removed sanctions against Syria](#) in May to give the country "a chance at greatness".

James Watson, a Nobel Laureate who co-discovered the structure of DNA, died aged 97. The biologist was 25 when he published his findings with [Francis Crick](#), earning the reputation of a pioneer. But his offensive views about race later [ended his career](#); fellow scientists condemned his belief that black people are less intelligent than white because of their genetics.

Figure of the day: Almost \$450bn, the market value of Palantir, equivalent to 137 times its sales over the past 12 months. [Read the full story.](#)

*When did Ernest Shackleton launch his great Antarctic expedition?
Answer this and ponder other past events in our [weekly history quiz](#).*

Correction: *Previously, we said Zohran Mamdani was New York City's youngest ever mayor. This was incorrect. Hugh J. Grant was the youngest. Sorry.*



Photograph: Getty Images

The agony of Sudan

What could stop the slaughter in Darfur? [Thousands may have died](#) since el-Fasher, the besieged capital of Sudan's westernmost region, fell to the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, one party to the country's civil war, last month. Those who escaped tell of mass rape, abductions and streets lined with corpses. Many of the city's roughly 260,000 residents remain unaccounted for. The RSF appears to have now moved its focus towards Khartoum, Sudan's capital, where explosions were heard on Friday.

Still, peace talks are underway. On Thursday the RSF said that it accepted an American proposal of a "humanitarian ceasefire". This is progress, although the army is yet to respond. Furthermore, both sides have agreed to various ceasefire proposals during the conflict, but none have stuck. With the dry season ahead, both sides may still think they have more to gain from fighting than talking. It will probably require much more outside pressure to change their calculations.





Photograph: AP

The foggy bottom of the American economy

[America's government shutdown](#) has now stretched into its second month. So, too, has the drought of official data about the economy. The Federal Reserve chair, Jerome Powell, reached for an appropriate metaphor as he suggested that the uncertainty might merit caution about interest rate cuts. "If you're driving in the fog, you slow down," he said. (Chris Waller, a more dovish Fed governor and contender to replace Mr Powell, disagreed: "The fog might tell you to slow down. It doesn't tell you to pull over to the side of the road.")

Amid the fog, private-sector economic figures are getting more attention than normal. Payroll figures from ADP, an employment-technology company, released on Wednesday, showed that 42,000 private-sector jobs were added in October. Purchasing-managers surveys, a proxy for growth, were much stronger than expected for services, but weaker for manufacturing. On Friday the University of Michigan's consumer-confidence index showed another month of downbeat data: sentiment declined to its lowest since June 2022.



Photograph: AP

MAGA's best friend visits the White House

On October 21st Donald Trump cancelled a planned meeting with Vladimir Putin in Budapest, after Russian diplomats reportedly made hard-line demands about the war in Ukraine. That was a disappointment for Viktor Orban, Hungary's Russia-friendly prime minister, who had been working towards such a summit for months. But on Friday Mr Orban met Mr Trump at the White House, where he finally got a chance to air his views on Ukraine, and much else.

Mr Orban wants America to exempt his country from new sanctions on Russian oil exports; Hungary got 86% of its oil via pipeline from Russia last year. Mr Orban's illiberal populism [has been a model for MAGA conservatives](#), and he wants to show his voters that his relationship with Mr Trump helps them. With elections due next spring, his party is trailing that of his main opponent, Peter Magyar.



Photograph: Shutterstock

Turkey's rates of wrath

Turkey's annual inflation rate dipped to 32.9% last month, following a scare in September when it edged up for the first time in over a year. Even so, Turkey's central bank had no choice but to revise its forecast for inflation this year, from 25-29% to 31-33%, when it released its quarterly inflation report on Friday.

Having raised interest rates by more than 40 percentage points between 2022 and 2024, the bank has reduced them cautiously over the past year. It expects inflation to fall to 16% in 2026, and to 9% the following year. That may be too optimistic, but at least inflation is going down. The bank's previous leadership, under pressure from Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, had slashed borrowing rates even though prices were rocketing. That led to the worst inflation crisis in a generation. Turks are still paying the price.



Illustration: The Economist

Daily quiz

We will serve you a new question each weekday. On Friday your challenge is to give us all five answers and tell us the theme. Email your responses (and your home city and country) by 1700 BST on Friday to [\[email protected\]](#). We'll pick three winners at random and crown them on Saturday.

Friday: What word, with Norse origins, is the Scottish term for a church?

Thursday: Which British explorer died in 1912 after leading an expedition that failed to be the first to reach the South Pole?

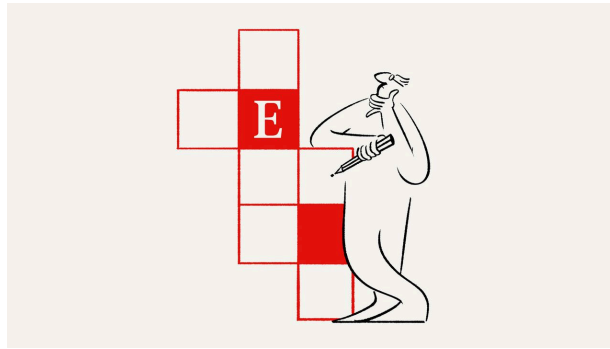


Illustration: The Economist

The winners of last week's crossword

Thank you to everyone who took part in our crossword, published on Saturday. The winners, chosen at random, were:

Monika Saue, Vancouver, Canada

Jane Ferreira, São Paulo Brazil

Dermot Yuille, Reading, United Kingdom

They all gave the correct answers of alarm, video, mayor, antivenom.

*Be less curious about people and
more curious about ideas.*

Marie Curie