

Catch up: America strikes Houthis; Starmer convenes “coalition of the willing”



America launched dozens of air and naval strikes on the **Houthis**, an Iran-backed militia, in Yemen. Donald Trump said that the strikes were aimed at [securing shipping routes in the Red Sea](#) and vowed that America would “use overwhelming lethal force until we have achieved our objective”. The Houthis have been attacking commercial vessels in the Red Sea since late 2023.

Sir Keir Starmer, **Britain’s** prime minister, chaired a virtual meeting of European leaders and other allies of Ukraine. [Sir Keir](#) accused Russia of “dithering and delay” over Mr Trump’s ceasefire proposal and stated that Ukraine must be able to “deter future Russian aggression”. He said that a “coalition of the willing” would send officials from their armed forces to London on Thursday to discuss operational details of how to secure an eventual peace deal.

Earlier, **Mr Trump** had called talks between Vladimir Putin and Steve Witkoff, America’s envoy to the Middle East, “good and

productive”. Mr Witkoff met Russia’s president in Moscow on Thursday to discuss a [ceasefire](#) in Ukraine. Mr Putin later issued a long list of conditions for Russia to agree to the 30-day truce.

Tens of thousands protested in Belgrade, **Serbia’s** capital. Clashes broke out between protesters, riot police and supporters of Aleksandar Vucic, the country’s president. Anti-corruption protests began in [Serbia](#) last year after the collapse of a railway-station roof in Novi Sad, the country’s second-largest city, killing 15 people. Mr Vucic has defied the protesters, saying: “You will have to kill me if you want to replace me.”

America declared **South Africa’s** ambassador in Washington to be persona non grata, in effect expelling him. Marco Rubio, America’s secretary of state, accused Ebrahim Rasool of “race baiting” and [hating Donald Trump](#) and America. Mr Rasool recently attributed MAGA’s popularity to the prospect of whites becoming a minority in America, and criticised Elon Musk’s support for hard-right parties in Europe.

The **Al-Khair Foundation**, a charity based in Turkey and Britain, said that eight people—its workers and journalists covering their activities—were killed in an Israeli air strike in northern Gaza. Israel said it had targeted terrorists posing a threat to its soldiers. Hamas called the incident a “blatant violation” of its ceasefire with [Israel](#). Its talks with America on extending the ceasefire have not reached agreement.

Fitch maintained **France’s** credit rating as AA- and affirmed a negative outlook for the country’s public finances. The ratings agency also forecast that [France’s sovereign debt](#) would grow to more than 120% of GDP by the end of 2028. Fitch lowered France’s credit rating from AA in 2023 when political opposition stymied the government’s efforts to reduce the country’s deficit.

Word of the week: *Fulul*, a term used by Syrians to refer to the remnants of the Assad regime. [Read the full story.](#)

Trump targets student protesters



Mahmoud Khalil was returning home from dinner with his pregnant wife last Saturday when he was arrested by immigration enforcement. Mr Khalil, a legal permanent resident of the United States, recently graduated from Columbia University, where he had helped lead [campus protests](#) against Israel and the war in Gaza. He has not been charged with a crime, but Marco Rubio, the secretary of state, revoked his green card, and Donald Trump, who called him “a Radical Foreign Pro-Hamas Student”, is trying to deport him anyway.

The administration’s attempt may prove legal, even if it never establishes that he protested in ways unprotected by free speech, or otherwise broke the law. That sets [an alarming precedent](#) of a president’s power to constrain speech. Mr Trump warned it was “the first arrest of many to come” of students “who have engaged in pro-terrorist, anti-Semitic, anti-American activity”. His administration has yet to describe at what point Mr Khalil crossed those lines—or where anyone else might.

Bolsonaro rallies supporters



Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil's president from 2019 to 2022, will hold a rally in Rio de Janeiro on Sunday against the country's government. The hard-right politician is expected to receive a [jail sentence](#) this year—he has been charged with trying to stage a coup after he lost the presidential election of 2022. On January 8th 2023 his supporters stormed government buildings. Months later, Brazil's electoral tribunal banned him from office for eight years.

Mr Bolsonaro remains the most [popular figure](#) on the right. His allies in Congress are pushing a bill to pardon participants in the January 8th attacks, which could pave the way for his return to electoral politics. They are getting help from abroad. Hours after Mr Bolsonaro was charged with attempting a coup in February, Donald Trump's media group sued a Brazilian Supreme Court judge overseeing the case, arguing that he has violated free speech protections in America, showing that Mr Bolsonaro's camp is co-operating with the MAGA movement.

AI matches wits with animal doctors



When a cat has the sniffles or a dog is off her food, pet owners usually turn to a veterinarian. But their bills can be high, so some owners seek guidance from [artificial-intelligence](#) chatbots like ChatGPT. A new study by Bob Fischer of Texas State University and colleagues examines whether these chatbots, powered by large language models, give good advice.

The researchers asked 4,350 questions about animal health, two-fifths of which had been posed by real pet owners on Reddit, a popular online forum. The study found that most of the ten chatbots tested provided answers that were more helpful than harmful. The exception was Llama-3.3, an open-source AI model—the only one named after an animal. Still, experts caution that although AI can sometimes help, it is no substitute for a trained vet—especially in emergencies.

The appeal of Italian football



Europe's top football leagues can feel predictable. Bayern Munich won Germany's Bundesliga 11 times between 2013 and 2023; Manchester City have claimed the past four English Premier League titles (though they're [struggling this season](#)). In recent years Italy's Serie A has bucked the trend; the past three seasons have each had different champions.

This year's title race is particularly competitive. With around a quarter of the season to play, three teams have a strong chance of winning. On Sunday Inter Milan, the reigning champions and current league leaders, face Atalanta, a side from Bergamo just three points behind them in third place. Between the two is Napoli, whose manager, Antonio Conte, is known for his ruthless discipline. His experience could help the southern Italian club claim their fourth league title.

Spies, lies and dinner parties



Steven Soderbergh once made glossy Hollywood blockbusters such as “Ocean’s Eleven” and “Erin Brockovich”. But for the past decade the director has focused on smaller films. “Presence”, a film about a haunted house, came out in January. Now he’s back with “Black Bag”, a spy thriller set in London.

Cate Blanchett and Michael Fassbender star as Kathryn and George, married British agents whose relationship is tested when she is accused of stealing malware—and he is assigned to investigate. The cast includes Pierce Brosnan and Naomie Harris, veterans of the [James Bond franchise](#). But don’t expect stunts or explosions. The plot mostly unfolds in dinner-party exchanges about spies sleeping with spies.

The web of deception keeps “Black Bag” engaging and fun. Yet its characters feel underdeveloped, making it hard to care whether Kathryn is betraying her husband or her country. After a decade of modest experiments, perhaps it’s time for Mr Soderbergh to take on something flashy again.

Weekly crossword



We now publish an interactive edition of our crossword, allowing you to enter and check the answers, and see explanations, instantly. Try it [here](#). Or, if you prefer to do things the old-fashioned way, use the grid below.

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* Best contests are confusing for important secretary (5,7)
- 1 across* Country in the bottom left-hand corner of Paradise (6)
- 2 across* Move to the end of Egypt to save money (6)
- 3 across* Is the Financial Times fair about trade policy? (6)

Factual clues

- 1 down* Trump administration proponent of a strong dollar (5,7)
- 1 across* Where all eight parties in Parliament have agreed to raise defence spending (6)

2 across What South Africa's government failed to pass this week (6)

3 across Tax the Coalition for a Prosperous America favours (6)

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am GMT on Monday to 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:

Dave Halton, Wigan, England

Ella Rich, Peachtree Corners, Georgia, America

Nuno Ibérico, Lisbon, Portugal

They all gave the correct answers of swimming pool, Picnic at Hanging Rock, Uruguay round, kitchen debates and coffee. The theme is types of table: pool table, picnic table, round table, kitchen table and coffee table.

The questions were:

Monday: What must be at least 50 metres long and 25 metres wide to be used in the Olympics?

Tuesday: Which 1975 Australian film, directed by Peter Weir, concerns the disappearance of a group of schoolgirls?

Wednesday: What term, linked to a South American country, was used to describe the series of negotiations that led to the

establishment of the World Trade Organisation?

Thursday: What term was given to the series of discussions between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow in 1959?

Friday: Lungo and doppio are both types of which drink?

Fulul

A term used by Syrians to refer to the remnants of the Assad regime.

Read the full story.

Experience is the teacher of all things.

Julius Caesar