

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter

**Donald Trump** said his phone call with **Vladimir Putin** went “very well” and claimed that ceasefire negotiations between Russia and Ukraine would begin “immediately”. Mr Putin meanwhile said that Russia was willing to work on a “possible future peace agreement”. On Friday Ukrainian and Russian delegations met for the first direct [peace talks](#) since the war began; they did not reach a deal.

**Britain** and the EU announced a deal to “reset” [post-Brexit relations](#). The agreement included a defence and security pact, allowing British firms to participate in a European arms-procurement fund. Officials also agreed to ease trade for farm products and to continue talks over a youth-mobility scheme. Sir Keir Starmer, Britain’s prime minister, said the country was moving on “from stale old debates” over Brexit.

**Israel’s** prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, said the country would take control of Gaza as its military operations there continued to escalate. Israel’s armed forces told residents of Khan Younis, a city in southern Gaza, to evacuate ahead of an “unprecedented attack”. Earlier **Israel** said it would allow a basic level of humanitarian aid, including some food, into the strip, ending a [three-month blockade](#).

America’s **Supreme Court** ruled that the Trump administration could cancel [deportation protections](#) for **Venezuelans**. Almost 350,000 Venezuelans have temporary legal status in America under a programme that the Biden administration extended until 2026. Kristi Noem, the homeland-security secretary, rescinded the extension in February, claiming that they posed a national-security

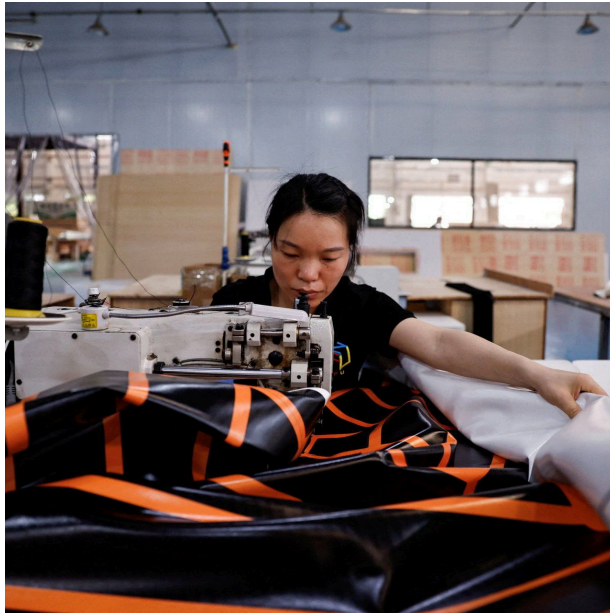
threat. Lower courts blocked Ms Noem's move while litigation played out.

**Regeneron**, an American pharmaceutical company, agreed to buy **23andMe**, a [bankrupt genetic-testing firm](#), for \$256m. Waning demand for 23andMe's genetic-analysis kits led the company to file for bankruptcy in March. That sparked concerns about how users' data would be treated in the event of a sale. Regeneron said it would comply with 23andMe's existing privacy policies and share its data plans with a court-appointed ombudsman.

**Qatar Airways** released what it called the "strongest set of financial results in its history". Profits at the state-owned carrier were 7.85bn riyals (\$2.15bn) in the 2024 financial year, a rise of 28% from the previous one. Healthy demand in the Gulf has bolstered the region's airlines. Last week Qatar Airways ordered 160 jets from Boeing during [Mr Trump's tour of the Gulf](#).

**Japan's** agriculture minister, Eto Taku, apologised for saying he didn't need to buy his own rice because of supporters' donations. The comments provoked public ire as the country grapples with a shortage of the staple grain, which has caused prices to rise. A recent poll put the government's approval rating at just 27.4%, the lowest since [Ishiba Shigeru](#) became prime minister in October.

**Figure of the day:** 45, the number of homicides in Baltimore so far this year, down by a third from the same period last year. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Reuters

## China puts off economic pain

In 2025 China's economic rhythm will be muddled by “front-loading” and “payback”. The country's exports have been surprisingly strong this year because manufacturers shipped as much as possible to America before Donald Trump's tariffs took effect on April 9th. That boosted industrial production, which grew by 6.1% last month compared with a year earlier, according to figures released on Monday. Now that [America and China have agreed to suspend](#) their highest levies on each other until mid-August, the export rush will resume.

Shoppers have also benefited from the government's trade-in schemes, which give people an incentive to upgrade their cars, white goods and electronic gadgets. Purchases of household appliances leapt by 38.8% in April, compared with a year earlier, helping to prop up China's otherwise lacklustre retail sales. But the same product cannot be exported or traded-in twice. So the early purchases and shipments that have flattered China's economic data so far in 2025 will be missing from the figures later in the year. That is the problem with front-loading: it leads to painful economic payback.





Photograph: Getty Images

## **Britain’s “hard” Brexit gets slightly softer**

On Monday Sir Keir Starmer, Britain’s prime minister, hosts Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, in London. The pair will present the outlines of an agreement to “[reset](#)” the relationship between Britain and the bloc, which had been disrupted by Brexit.

The centrepiece will be an agreement on defence and security, which will allow British firms to benefit from a new EU security fund. Checks on British agricultural exports will be eased; in exchange Britain will harmonise its veterinary standards with those of the bloc. A youth-mobility agreement will liberalise migration rules for young people. Most eye-catchingly, it is expected that British travellers will be able to use e-gates at European passport-control points, enabling them to avoid queues. The economic damage of Brexit will largely remain—but for holidaymakers, at least, the divorce may feel less painful.



## **Trump's call with Putin**

The American and Russian presidents spoke by phone on Monday to try to end the war in Ukraine. Donald Trump said ceasefire negotiations would begin “immediately”. Vladimir Putin says Russia is willing to work on a “possible future peace agreement”.

Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, has worked hard to win back Mr Trump's favour after their bust-up in the Oval Office in February. Ukraine has signed a minerals deal with America, agreed in principle to a 30-day ceasefire and attended the first [direct talks](#) with Russia in nearly three years. Mr Putin snubbed Mr Zelensky's offer to meet him, and insists on maximalist demands, including control of Ukrainian territory he has not captured.

The EU will enact a new sanctions package against Russia this week. America's Congress has readied a powerful bill to impose “secondary” penalties on countries buying Russian oil. Even Mr Trump warns it is “turkey time”. Mr Putin, though, thinks he will chicken out of confronting Russia.



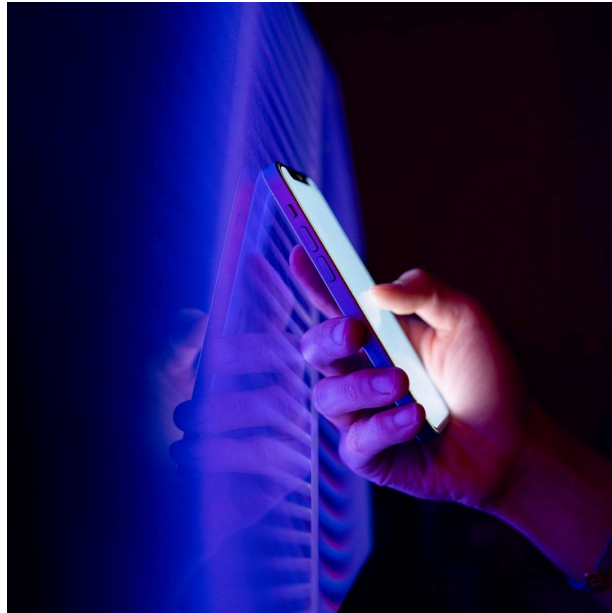


Photograph: Getty Images

## The WHO's funding crunch

The World Health Assembly begins this week in Geneva. Delegates from the World Health Organisation's nearly 200 member states will formally adopt an agreement on fighting pandemics, the second ever global-health treaty. (A tobacco-control accord was the first.) The new treaty establishes rules for sharing of pandemic-related tests, drugs and vaccines. It states that 10% of supplies will go to the WHO for global distribution; another 10% will be supplied at "affordable prices" to help poor countries.

But the WHO's capacity to respond to a crisis may be diminished. [America's departure from the organisation](#), announced in January, has caused a big funding gap. It provided 16% of WHO's funding in 2022-23. Some other countries have cut foreign aid, too. The assembly will set the organisation's funding for the next two years. WHO's director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has cut his proposed budget by a fifth, to \$4.2bn. That, he notes, is equivalent to the budget of Geneva's main hospital.



Photograph: Getty Images

## The toxic side of AI chatbots

AI [chatbots](#) sometimes blurt out inappropriate responses to users' queries. Grok, a chatbot developed by xAI, Elon Musk's AI firm, recently ranted about a supposed genocide against white South Africans in answer to questions about the weather, professional wrestling and cars. The company blamed an "unauthorised modification" of the software that violated the firm's "internal policies and core values".

Yet chatbots often give controversial answers to innocuous questions. Researchers from Microsoft recently studied how often large language models generate "harmful content". This includes political and scientific disinformation as well as the promotion of violence or racial hatred, self-harm, criminal activity and sexual exploitation. They found that almost 27% of responses were harmful, regardless of users' input. That is because of the data on which LLMs are trained: the researchers found widespread toxic content in the vast datasets used to develop popular AI models. "Guardrails" designed to keep out such material, such as keyword-based moderation, have their limits.





Illustration: The Economist

## 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 BST on **Friday** to [\[email protected\]](#). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

**Monday:** Which character did George Clooney play in ER?

*All the changes in the world, for  
good or evil, were first brought  
about by words.*

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***Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis***