

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: AP

At least 36 people were shot dead by the Israeli army near a [food-distribution centre](#) in **southern Gaza**, according to the Hamas-run health ministry. The army admitted that soldiers had fired “warning shots” after locals failed to stop when ordered. In the past two months the centres have been scenes of deadly chaos, the result of disorder among a desperate crowd and Israeli fire.

Gunfire and shelling escalated on Saturday in the **Syrian province of Suwayda** as the government struggled to enforce a ceasefire it had agreed to with **Israel**. On Wednesday Israel struck Damascus, Syria’s capital, and began attacking government forces in the south-west following [an outbreak](#) of sectarian violence in the predominantly Druze province. On Friday Israel said it would allow Syrian forces limited access to the area for two days so they could try to restore stability there.

**Hong Kong** hoisted its highest signal, number 10, for the first time in two years as typhoon Wipha approached, bringing winds of more than 167kph (103mph). More than 200 flights were cancelled, public transport was suspended and people were ordered to stay indoors. Such storms are becoming [stronger, slower, wetter and wilder](#) because of climate change.

**Japanese** voters went to the polls for a tight election in which half of the parliament's upper-house seats were up for grabs. Opinion polls suggested the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its coalition partner, Komeito, might not reach the 50 seats they need to retain a majority. The LDP-led government [lost its majority](#) in the more powerful lower house in October.

America's **Department of Justice** asked a federal judge to unseal grand-jury testimony about **Jeffrey Epstein**, as controversy over the convicted paedophile [continued to engulf Donald Trump's](#) administration. Such material is usually kept secret. Meanwhile Mr Trump sued the ***Wall Street Journal*** and Rupert Murdoch, as well as the paper's parent companies, a senior executive and two journalists, for libel over a story claiming he wrote a risqué birthday note to Epstein in 2003 (which the president denies).

At least 34 people died when **a tourist boat capsized** in bad weather in Ha Long Bay, a popular and picturesque holiday destination in northern **Vietnam**. Most of those on board were Vietnamese visitors from the capital, Hanoi. Rescue efforts have been hampered by heavy rain, and several passengers remain missing.

Andy Byron, the boss of **Astronomer**, an American tech company, resigned after a clip of a couple embracing at a Coldplay concert went viral. The pair abruptly hid after they appeared on a giant screen at the Boston gig. Internet sleuths quickly claimed to have identified them as Mr Byron and one of his senior executives—both of whom are believed to be married to other people.

**Word of the week:** *Erinnerungskultur*, Germany's "memory culture" which has built up over decades. [Read the full story.](#)

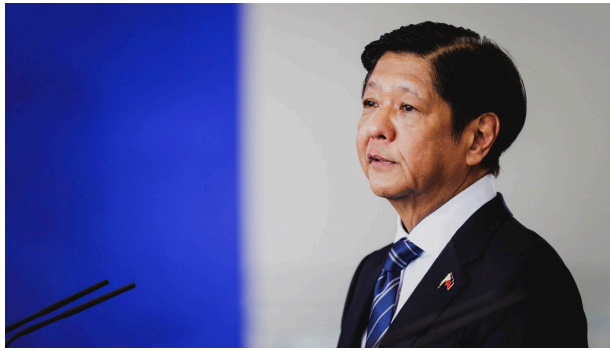


Photograph: Alamy

## Chaotic times in Japanese politics

Japan's Liberal Democratic Party has been in power almost continuously for seven decades. Yet in recent years it has been beset by crises. Its ties to the Unification Church, a cult, emerged after the killing of Abe Shinzo, a former prime minister, in 2022. Later a tax-evasion scandal led many of the party's [internal factions to disband](#). Then last year the LDP and its junior partner Komeito lost their majority in the lower house of parliament. On Sunday voters [returned to the polls for an upper-house election](#). The parties may lose control there, too.

The campaign's dominant issue was supposed to be inflation. Politicians have offered tax cuts and fiscal giveaways, unnerving the bond markets. A darker trend has also emerged. The Do It Yourself Party, a hard-right upstart founded just five years ago, is surging on a "Japan First" platform. Japan was long seen as immune to populism. That may no longer be so.



Photograph: Getty Images

## **The Philippines tries to keep Trump sweet**

On Sunday President Ferdinand Marcos junior of the Philippines (pictured) began a visit to Washington, for talks with Donald Trump. [America and the Philippines are allies](#). They work together to deter China from using armed force to impose its will on those parts of the western Pacific that it covets: democratically governed Taiwan, and waters to which the Philippines has rights in international law.

American and Philippine warships mounted a joint patrol of contested waters as recently as Wednesday. Such operations indicate that their partnership holds firm, despite Mr Trump's sometimes cavalier attitude towards America's allies. Still, uncertainty persists. Philippine resilience in the face of Chinese expansion depends on America being a solid economic partner as well as a military one. Mr Trump has threatened tariffs of 20% on Philippine exports to America. Mr Marcos will no doubt try to persuade his host to ditch them.

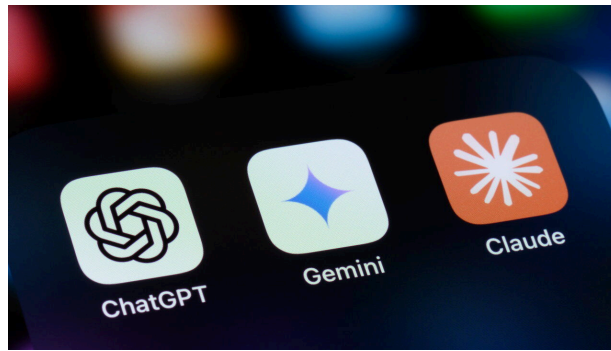


Photograph: Alamy

## Fiscal problems for Colombia's president

Colombia's left-wing president, Gustavo Petro (pictured), will present his economic plans to Congress on Sunday. He has said he will prioritise “social investments”, despite the government's high debt and slumping tax revenues. Tax collection fell by 18.5trn pesos (\$4.6bn) in 2024 compared with 2023, equivalent to 2.2% of GDP. The government has tried to alleviate its cashflow problem in part by raising levies on sectors that don't fit comfortably into Mr Petro's [ostensibly green agenda](#), such as hydrocarbons.

In June Germán Ávila—Mr Petro's fourth finance minister since he took office in 2022—removed a cap on state spending and borrowing for three years. The deficit is expected to surpass 7% of GDP this year. Mr Petro has said the country must reduce its debt; one fifth of Colombia's budget goes on servicing it. Yet the president also refuses to cut spending on social programmes, casting doubt on his commitment to fiscal responsibility.



Photograph: Getty Images

## The political persuasion of AI chatbots

Elon Musk's artificial-intelligence company, xAI, recently apologised after its chatbot, Grok, praised Adolf Hitler and made other antisemitic comments. The firm said Grok had become too reliant on posts from X, Mr Musk's social-media platform, that contained "extremist views". The incident was a reminder that large language models have their own political persuasions. In general, however, Grok seems to be an exception; if anything, LLMs skew slightly leftward, rather than to the far right.

Researchers at New York University and Dropbox, a file-storage platform, ran seven popular AI chatbots (not including Grok) through tests to measure their moral, political and cultural views. Most sat to the left of the average American. ChatGPT and Perplexity were most progressive, scoring -34% and -27% on a scale where -100% is "extremely liberal". The typical American adult, placed on the same spectrum, would score +3%. The researchers suggest factors such as liberal-leaning training data and human testers' cautious fine-tuning tweaks explain the phenomenon.

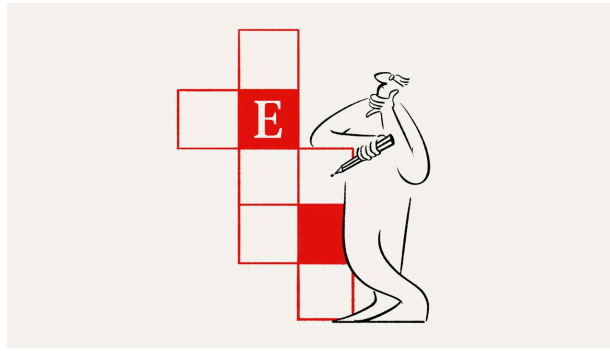


Illustration: The Economist

## Weekly crossword

We now publish an interactive edition of our crossword twice a week, 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 across* Bugle call creates an indelible impression (6)

*2 across* Uttered “alright” during initially strenuous exercise class (5)

*3 across* He had a light bulb moment when turning side on (6)

*1 down* Mix on stereo after experiment that puts hairs on your chest (12)

### Factual clues

*1 across* Signal for soldiers to return to their quarters (6)



2 across Helps give a bike wheel its strength (5)

3 across Inventor whom New York hotel is named after (6)

1 down More and more American men want to be injected with this hormone (12)

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am BST on Monday to [\[email protected\]](#). We will pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners in next week's edition.

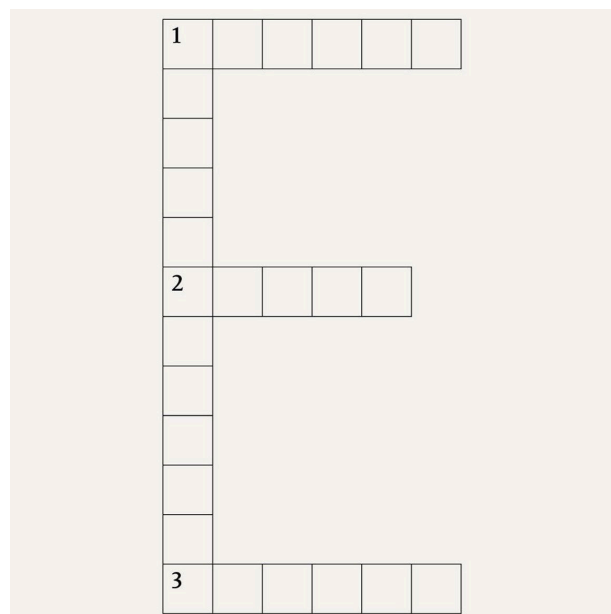


Image: The Economist





Illustration: The Economist

## The winners of this week's quiz

Thank you to everyone who took part in this week's quiz. The winners, chosen at random, were:

**James and Diane McGinnis**, Delaware, America

**Mike O'Sullivan**, London, Britain

**Hans Olsson**, Lund, Sweden

They all gave the correct answers of: Eddy Merckx, René Magritte, Hergé (Georges Remi), Jean-Claude van Damme and Hercule Poirot. The theme is that they are all Belgian.

*Genius will live and thrive  
without training, but it does not  
the less reward the watering pot  
and pruning knife.*

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***Margaret Fuller***