

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: AP

**America's** Senate passed a bill to end the longest-ever [federal shutdown](#). The measure, approved by 60-40 with support from most Republicans and eight Democrats, now heads to the House, where a vote could take place as early as Wednesday. The measure will restore funding for federal agencies until January 30th and provide back pay to furloughed workers. Global markets rallied in anticipation on Monday.

**Donald Trump** threatened to sue the [BBC](#) for \$1bn in damages unless it retracted a “defamatory” documentary that [appeared to selectively edit](#) one of his speeches, as well as apologise and pay compensation. Earlier the British public broadcaster’s chair apologised for an “error of judgment” over the documentary, which was about the Capitol insurrection. The [BBC](#)’s director-general resigned on Sunday.

**Narendra Modi**, India’s prime minister, blamed “conspirators” for a car explosion that killed eight people and injured 20 near the Red Fort, a historic landmark in [Delhi](#), [India’s](#) capital. The city’s north district deputy police commissioner said that the blast was being investigated under the country’s anti-terror act. Government buildings, train stations and a nearby airport are on high alert.

**Syria's** president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, signed his country up to the American-led **anti-Islamic State coalition**, following a meeting with Mr Trump at the White House. The alliance of over 80 members has obliterated IS targets in Syria, but the country's former dictator, Bashar al-Assad, was more interested in waging war against his own people. Mr al-Sharaa took power in December, but some within his ranks retain jihadist sympathies.

The **European Union** agreed to simplify its **common agricultural policy**, which provides [cash to European farmers](#). The reform would cut bureaucracy by easing environmental rules and reducing the number of inspections farmers undergo, among other things. The European Commission estimates this could save farmers up to €1.6bn (\$1.9bn) a year. The agreement still needs formal approval.

**Ukraine's** anti-corruption bureau launched a probe into an alleged \$100m kickback scheme in the energy sector. Senior government officials and a businessman linked to Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, are among those under scrutiny. The investigation comes as Russia continued to attack Ukraine's [energy infrastructure](#), complicating efforts to secure the power supply as winter arrives.

“Flesh” by **David Szalay**, a Hungarian-British writer, won the **Booker prize**. The novel chronicles the life of István, a lonely Hungarian man who grows up in poverty and becomes wealthy as an adult. The prize's organisers described the book as “a meditation on class, power, intimacy, migration and masculinity”.

**Figure of the day:** 45%, the share of oil that Georgia imports from Russia, more than five times the amount imported in 2012. [Read the full story here](#)



Photograph: Getty Images

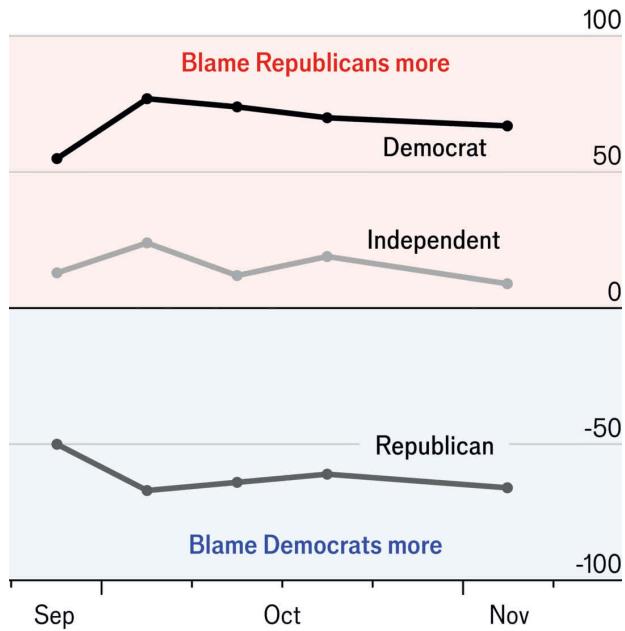
## The Democrats yield the field

The [longest shutdown](#) of America's government on record appears to be nearing its end after eight Senate Democrats broke ranks late on Sunday to support a short-term funding deal. This would keep the government going until January 30th, reinstate federal workers laid off during the shutdown and guarantee back pay for furloughed employees. Reopening the government will still take time. The Senate passed the deal on Monday; it is now heading to the House of Representatives for another vote.

The retreat by a handful of Democratic senators has caused consternation within their party. Hakeem Jeffries, its leader in the House, said he would refuse to back the stopgap bill. The deal fails to address the Democrats' key demand: an extension of health-care tax credits that expire at the end of the year. Republicans have pledged to hold a vote on extending them. After 40 days of fighting and despite [favourable public opinion](#), Democrats may be about to throw in the towel.

## Who do you blame the most for the shutdown of the federal government?\*

Net blame<sup>†</sup> by party, 2025, percentage points



\*Question asked in September: "If a government shutdown does happen in the next few weeks, who do you think will be most responsible?"

†% blaming Republicans minus % blaming Democrats

Source: YouGov/The Economist



Photograph: Getty Images

## Are China's singles too shy to shop?

On Tuesday shoppers will browse discounts for “Singles’ Day”—China’s bargain-hunting version of Valentine’s Day. Retailers, however, are feeling unloved. Consumers have been cautious because they have little confidence in the economy. Retail sales growth slowed to 3% in September year on year, while the economy has grown by about 5%. That made September the fourth straight month of declining growth and the weakest reading of the year so far. In response retailers began dropping prices five weeks before the holiday.

For policymakers, the shopping festival will be a chance to assess consumers’ mood. The government has vowed to lift consumer demand this year. It is counting on higher spending to fight deflation and lessen China’s reliance on exports. Major sellers, including Tencent, a tech company, and JD.com, an online store, will report earnings this week. They will be hoping for a change of heart.



Photograph: Getty Images

## SoftBank's AI gambit

Masayoshi Son, the chief executive of SoftBank Group, once said that he was “born to realise” artificial intelligence. On November 5th the Japanese tech investor announced a new venture with OpenAI, the American creator of ChatGPT. “SB OAI Japan”—owned equally by OpenAI and a SoftBank affiliate—will build “crystal intelligence”, or AI agents that could help Japanese businesses automate tasks such as paperwork and research.

The service, due to launch in 2026, is part of a broader push. Mr Son has pledged to invest over \$30bn in OpenAI this year. SoftBank is also part of Stargate, a \$500bn AI-infrastructure project that involves OpenAI and Oracle, another American firm. But market enthusiasm for AI may be faltering. Last week SoftBank’s shares plunged by a fifth as part of a global AI sell-off, reducing the company’s market value by \$48bn. But on Tuesday the group said its net profit nearly tripled to \$19bn in the first half of the fiscal year, compared with a year earlier, thanks mainly to its bet on OpenAI. For now, Mr Son will be pursuing his crystal vision despite investors’ concerns.



Photograph: EPA

## A test for Iraq's fragile calm

Iraqis head to the polls on Tuesday for the sixth parliamentary election since America's invasion of their country in 2003.

Muhammad Shia al-Sudani, the nationalist prime minister, is expected to come top. His first term has brought unprecedented stability and economic growth.

Yet the election's integrity is already under question. As early voting started at the weekend, dozens of people were arrested in Baghdad, the capital, and Basra over alleged vote-buying. Muqtada al-Sadr, a rival Shia firebrand, is encouraging millions of his loyalists to boycott the vote. Turnout is expected to fall below 40%, despite a strong showing in early voting.

Mr Sudani's return to office is not assured. Coalition talks are often protracted and fractious. Mr al-Sudani will [need to secure the backing](#) of some of the powerful Iran-backed militias, including one headed by Qais al-Khazali, who is designated as a terrorist by America, but serves as kingmaker in Iraq's parliament. Horse-trading over cabinet posts could drag on for months.



Photograph: Getty Images

## **Bob Ross paints to the rescue**

Few former air-force instructors would tell you to “go out and talk to a tree”. But Bob Ross, host of “The Joy of Painting” on America’s Public Broadcasting Service, was one of a kind. For 11 years he dashed off oil paintings in 30 minutes, issuing zen aphorisms in a voice as mellifluous as the lazy rivers that ran by his “happy little trees”. On Tuesday Bonhams will begin a series of auctions of 30 Ross works.

These sales are no “happy accident”—as the perennially cheery Ross called his unintended smudges. In July, under orders from Donald Trump, Congress cancelled \$1.1bn in funding to public broadcasting. The paintings are expected to fetch between \$850,000 and \$1.4m; the proceeds will go to the hundreds of PBS stations affected by the cuts. Ross’s paintings have been beating their pre-sale estimates this year. PBS stations will hope that the auction will keep them on air a little longer.



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

**Tuesday:** Which city was designed by Pierre Charles L'Enfant in 1791?

**Monday:** What city is home to the La Brea tar pits?



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:

**Eliot Corder-Gill**, Montevideo, Uruguay

**Phyllis Sise**, Foster Quebec, Canada

**Anne Davies**, Bellevue, Switzerland

They all gave the correct answers of defence, night, nuclear and decarbonisation.

*Talking nonsense is the sole  
privilege mankind possesses over  
the other organisms.*

---

*Fyodor Dostoevsky*