

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Bloomberg via Getty Images

Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the **European Commission**, said she will meet **Donald Trump** on Sunday in Scotland to discuss trade. A draft deal between America and the European Union would reportedly set tariffs of 15% on the bloc's exports. That is down from the 30% that Mr Trump threatened to impose if the sides failed to reach a deal by August 1st.

Aid agencies and charities sounded the alarm about **starvation in Gaza**. Médecins Sans Frontières, which runs clinics in the **besieged territory**, said that a quarter of children and pregnant women screened at its facilities were malnourished. It accused Israel of using starvation as a “deliberate” weapon. The UN's World Food Programme said a third of Gazans are “not eating for days”.

Lai Ching-te, **Taiwan's** independence-minded president, suffered a setback when recall votes of 24 opposition Kuomintang lawmakers all failed. Successful recalls could have helped Mr Lai's Democratic Progressive Party claw back its legislative majority at subsequent by-elections. The island's political gridlock, which has seen the China-friendly KMT push through cuts and freezes to Mr Lai's defence budget, is set to remain.

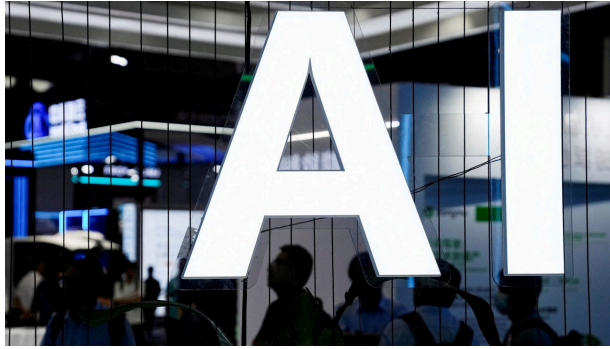
Cambodia called for an immediate ceasefire in its border skirmish with **Thailand**. Earlier Thailand's acting prime minister warned the [clashes](#), which are now in their third day, could “move towards war”. A foreign-ministry spokesman signalled an openness to dialogue. Despite the de-escalatory talk, fighting continued. More than 30 people, including civilians, have been killed so far.

Marco Rubio said America “strongly rejects” the plan of **France's** president, Emmanuel Macron, [to recognise Palestine](#) as a state. America's secretary of state called it “a slap in the face” to the victims of Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7th 2023. Israel's prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, also condemned France's decision, saying such a move “rewards terror and risks creating another Iranian proxy”.

Australia and **Britain** signed a 50-year partnership to design, build and operate submarines. The two countries signed the [AUKUS pact](#) four years ago with America, to share defence technology and help Australia build nuclear-powered subs. But with the Pentagon now reviewing whether the pact is “America First”, Australia and Britain have decided to strengthen their own relationship.

Meta said it would stop running political advertising in the **European Union** from October. The decision comes before the bloc introduces measures to regulate how online platforms deliver political content, part of a broader push to protect democratic processes and limit disinformation online. Meta, whose platforms include Facebook and Instagram, has been increasingly critical of such regulations.

Word of the week: *Tongzhi*, the Chinese word for “comrade” (which is now used as slang for a gay man). [Read the whole story.](#)



Photograph: Reuters

China's AI expo

Which superpower is winning the artificial-intelligence race? America is generally thought to be slightly ahead, but China is [catching up quickly](#). One way of gauging how fast a country's AI sector is growing is by looking at imports of semiconductors and related equipment. China is hoovering them up. It spent nearly \$4.5bn on such gear in June, an increase of 12% from a year ago.

Talent is another metric. On Saturday China has a chance to show off its prowess when it hosts the World AI Conference in Shanghai. The event will admit an estimated 300,000 visitors to a massive exhibition hall. Some senior government officials will no doubt give dull speeches but the main attraction will be China's army of talented AI specialists. America has been able to limit China's AI chip imports but it is harder to stop it from training AI engineers.



Photograph: EPA

A big opportunity for Taiwan's pro-independence party

Since early 2024, when Lai Ching-te was elected Taiwan's president, he has been at loggerheads with the opposition parties that hold a majority in the island's parliament. The independence-minded Mr Lai is pro-America; his opponents are friendlier to China, though still support American military ties. Their squabbling has led to political gridlock. And earlier this year, they implemented cuts and freezes to his defence budget, causing some American politicians to question whether Taiwan was [serious about its security](#).

But prospects for Mr Lai's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) could improve on Saturday, when 24 opposition Kuomintang (KMT) lawmakers face recall votes. If those are successful, by-elections, due in a few months, could help the DPP claw back its legislative majority.

The recall elections were easy enough to trigger. Anti-China activists gathered the requisite signatures: 10% of registered voters in a lawmaker's constituency. Whether KMT's opponents have the wider support to vote them out is to be seen.

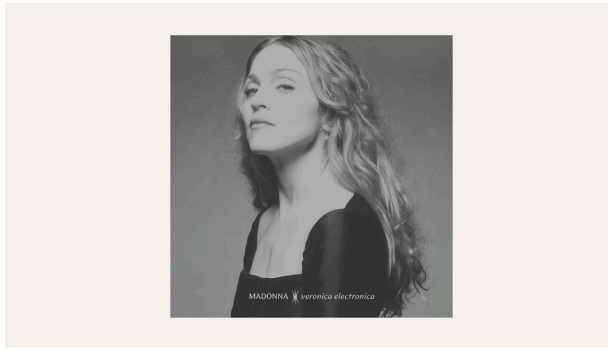


Photograph: Getty Images

Tadej Pogacar's Tour de France

Jonas Vingegaard, a two-time winner of the [Tour de France](#), is a formidable cyclist. In this year's race, which concludes this weekend, the Dane set the second-fastest time ever ascending Mont Ventoux, the most daunting climb on the Tour. The problem for Mr Vingegaard is that, during the same stage, Tadej Pogacar cycled up the Giant of Provence two seconds quicker.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that in any other circumstance, Mr Vingegaard and his team would be celebrating a third Tour victory. But his Slovenian nemesis, having again ridden flawlessly, instead looks certain to enjoy his fourth Tour win. He appeared to clinch it during Stage 12, on July 17th, when he shrugged off the effects of a crash the previous day and attacked on the climb up Hautacam in the Pyrenees. Mr Vingegaard, like the rest of the field, simply could not keep pace with him.



Photograph: Warner Records via AP

Is Madonna “Frozen”?

Madonna has not released a new studio album in six years. So her fans will welcome “Veronica Electronica”, a collection of remixes from her 1998 “Ray Of Light”, which will be released this weekend. “Ray of Light” sold 16m copies, spent 78 weeks on the Billboard 200 and won four Grammy awards. Producers will hope this new release can capitalise on that success.

“Ray of Light” was a pioneering album: it introduced electronica to the masses, and influenced artists such as Addison Rae and FKA Twigs. And Madonna is a pioneering star. She created the template for female pop superstardom: craft a distinct persona for each album, stage highly choreographed stadium tours and produce carefully controlled documentaries purporting to reveal the “real” artist. But like many ageing popstars before her, as new ideas dry up she [seems content](#) to live off the back catalogue.



Photograph: Getty Images

Weekend profile: Vladimir Medinsky, Russia's uncompromising negotiator

With a wiry frame, wispy grey hair and rimless spectacles, Vladimir Medinsky cuts an unassuming figure. Yet he is leading Russia's delegation at so-far fruitless peace talks with Ukraine, the third round of which took place in Istanbul on Wednesday. Mr Medinsky has served as an aide to Vladimir Putin since 2020. His role at the negotiating table is less about ending the fighting than pursuing the Russian president's war aims. More than three years into the conflict, those still amount to making Ukraine a country under Russia's thumb.

For Mr Medinsky, spreading that message comes naturally. He has spent decades peddling a nationalist ideology that casts Russia as a great power, maligned and mistreated by the West. The 55-year-old was born in Smila, a town in Soviet Ukraine, but moved to Moscow as a child. He studied journalism at a prestigious foreign-policy institute in Russia's capital and went on to set up a public-relations firm. Its clients included tobacco companies and a notorious Ponzi scheme.

Mr Medinsky was elected to the Russian Duma in 2003, representing Mr Putin's party, United Russia. But he became known to many Russians less for his politicking than his polemical writing about history. In 2006 he published the first book in a best-

selling series called “Myths about Russia”, which sought to dispel what Mr Medinsky saw as harmful stereotypes about his country propagated by Westerners. Some of his mythbusting was innocuous—no, he revealed, bears do not roam the streets of Moscow. Other reassessments were chilling. Mr Medinsky has argued, for instance, that Ivan the Terrible, a bellicose 16th-century Russian tyrant, was not so terrible after all.

Mr Putin saw something he liked. In 2012 he made Mr Medinsky culture minister, sparking outrage among historians. Several experts later alleged that Mr Medinsky plagiarised his doctorate in history, awarded in 2011. An academic committee initially recommended withdrawing the degree, though Mr Medinsky denied the allegations and kept his doctorate.

As culture minister, Mr Medinsky turned from self-proclaimed mythbuster to full-time mythmaker. He set up [military-history camps for teenagers](#), built war monuments and funded blockbusters about the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany. These films disregarded historical detail; truth mattered less than narrative. He became one of the drivers of using history for ideological purposes: the Kremlin increasingly manipulated memory of the second world war to justify Mr Putin’s grip on power and aggression against Ukraine.

In 2020 Mr Putin moved Mr Medinsky from the culture ministry to his presidential entourage. Yet the former PR man kept his special brief for politicising the past; Mr Medinsky’s paranoid, anti-Western view of history is the only acceptable narrative in today’s Russia. Mr Putin seems to trust his ability to deliver a message: he first gave him the job of leading negotiations with Ukraine at failed talks in 2022. By choosing him again, the president is signalling how unseriously he takes the negotiations.



Illustration: The Economist

Mini 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

1 across With some vinegar, lick a strong-smelling ingredient (6)

2 across City is only one, we're told (5)

3 across Scientist is unfamiliar with origins of time or numbers (6)

1 down Conqueror: he hangs king, violently (7,4)

Straight

1 across A species in the Allium genus (6)

2 across Where the Gangnam district can be found (5)

3 across Who discovered the force of gravity (6)

1 down Long ago leader of Mongolian horsemen (7,4)

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.

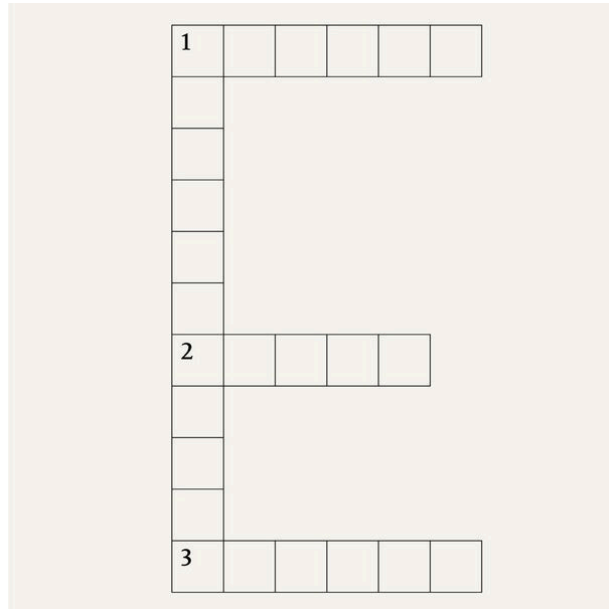


Image: The Economist



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:

Hélène Tremblay, Gatlineau, Canada

Felipe Silva Mendez, Santiago, Chile

Avinash Subramaniam, Chennai, India

They all gave the correct answers of: Brian Jones, Jimi Hendrix, Amy Winehouse, Jim Morrison and Kurt Cobain. The theme is that they are all members of the "27 club", the informal name for rock stars who died at that age

*I don't feel old. I don't feel
anything till noon. That's when it's
time for my nap.*

Bob Hope