

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

China's trade surplus in goods exceeded \$1trn for the first time. According to new customs data, the country passed the milestone in the first 11 months of this year. The full-year figure for 2024 was just short of \$1trn. Donald Trump's tariffs have decreased [exports to America](#), but increased shipments to other countries have more than made up for that.

Thailand launched air strikes on “military targets” in **Cambodia** following border clashes. The Royal Thai Army accused Cambodia of shooting Thai troops and deploying tanks near Thailand. The violence is the latest flare-up in a [long-running dispute](#). In July Mr Trump helped broker a ceasefire following a five-day conflict, but Thailand suspended it last month after a landmine blast.

Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin's spokesman, said that America's new **National Security Strategy** is “largely consistent with our vision”. He called it “positive” that [the document](#) does not mention **Russia** as a “direct threat”. Earlier talks between American and Ukrainian officials on ending the Russia-Ukraine war made little progress. Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, will visit London on Monday to meet western European leaders.

Binyamin Netanyahu said the second phase of America's plan for peace in **Gaza** would begin soon, but that some issues still need to be ironed out. Israel's prime minister said he would discuss plans with Mr Trump at the end of December. He spoke to reporters in Jerusalem alongside Friedrich Merz, Germany's chancellor, who reaffirmed [his country's support](#) for Israel.

Mr Trump warned that **Netflix**'s potential purchase of **Warner Bros Discovery** "could be a problem". The streaming giant is seeking regulatory approval to [acquire the media behemoth](#) in a deal worth \$83bn. Mr Trump expressed concern about Netflix's "market share" and said he "would be involved" in the decision about the transaction.

Patrice Talon, **Benin**'s president, said everything was "under control" after his government thwarted an attempted coup. Earlier soldiers took control of the state television channel and claimed to have overthrown Mr Talon. The president vowed to punish the group. Nigeria, Benin's neighbour, said it had deployed fighter jets to "dislodge the coup plotters" from a military camp.

Lando Norris, a British driver for McLaren, won his first **Formula One** title after finishing third in the Abu Dhabi grand prix. He finished the season ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen, the winner of the last four F1 championships, who came first in the race. Mr Norris is the first Briton to win the title since Sir Lewis Hamilton in 2020.

Figure of the day: 3bn tonnes, the amount of iron ore at the Simandou mine in Guinea. [Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: Reuters

Ukraine shores up its allies' support

Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's leader, will travel to London on Monday to meet [Britain's Sir Keir Starmer](#), [France's Emmanuel Macron](#) and [Germany's Friedrich Merz](#). Top of the agenda is their plan to unlock around €165bn (\$192bn) in frozen Russian assets, mostly held in a Belgian clearing-house, for a reparations loan. Few things are more important for helping Ukraine resist American pressure to agree to a peace deal that favours Russia. Ukraine's finances are weakening and it needs to buy more weapons.

But Europe is divided. On Friday Mr Merz and Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, met Bart De Wever, the Belgian prime minister, in [Brussels](#) to convince him to agree to the scheme. He worries that unfreezing the assets could expose Belgium to legal action. It should become clearer over the next few days whether Belgium's concerns can be addressed in time for the plan to be finalised at the European Union's summit on December 18th.



Photograph: Getty Images

Can Donald Trump fire at will?

On Monday America's [Supreme Court](#) will consider whether Donald Trump can remove Rebecca Slaughter from her seat on the Federal Trade Commission. By statute, members of the FTC may be sacked only for "inefficiency, neglect of duty or malfeasance". The president cited none of these when notifying Ms Slaughter of her dismissal in March. She must go, he wrote, because her work did not align with his "administration's priorities".

A precedent from 1935, *Humphrey's Executor*, supports Ms Slaughter. In that case, the court upheld removal limits, reversing Franklin Roosevelt's dismissal of an FTC commissioner. But Mr Trump's lawyers argue that Article II of the constitution "concentrates 'the executive power' in one person", giving him the authority to oversee and remove "those who execute federal law".

A ruling for Mr Trump could grant presidents sweeping control over dozens of executive agencies. The court will probably make an exception for the Federal Reserve, preserving its independence while subjecting all other agency heads to presidential whim.



Photograph: ROPI

China's exporters bolster its economy

One mystery of 2025 is why China's government did not try harder to rescue the [property market](#), which has entered its fifth year of decline. According to Larry Hu of Macquarie, a bank, the government held back because it could. Despite plummeting investment in new housing, China's economy will probably meet its official growth target of "around 5%" this year. Partly, that is thanks to surprisingly strong demand for Chinese goods abroad.

Figures on Monday showed that China's exports grew by 5.9% in November, compared with a year earlier. China's leaders hope this strength can continue in 2026. But if America suffers a tech bust, the world economy will stumble. China will then be forced to bolster domestic demand. That might include doing whatever it takes to revive the property market, argues Mr Hu. In that sense, China's housing policy is made in America.



Photograph: Getty Images

Nicolas Sarkozy's prison notebooks

Nicolas Sarkozy spent just 20 days in solitary confinement in jail after being convicted of “criminal conspiracy” in a trial over illicit campaign funding. But this week, a month after being released, the former French president will publish his diary about the experience. “In prison there is nothing to see, and nothing to do,” he writes, according to an extract from “A Prisoner’s Diary” published in the French press. Other insights include: “The noise is alas constant. But, just like the desert, inner life is fortified in prison.”

Unusually, judges sentenced Mr Sarkozy to immediate imprisonment even while awaiting his appeal. His lawyers secured his release after making the case that the ex-president, who says he is innocent, was not at risk of flight, nor of recidivism. He has been forbidden from leaving France, and from contact with Gérald Darmanin, the justice minister, pending his appeal, which is due to be heard in the spring.



Illustration: The Economist

Daily quiz

We will serve you a new question each weekday. On Friday your challenge is to give us all five answers and tell us the theme. Email your responses (and your home city and country) by 1700 GMT on Friday to [\[email protected\]](mailto:). We'll pick three winners at random and crown them on Saturday.

Monday: The experiences of the marooned Alexander Selkirk were the reported inspiration for which famous novel?

The great aim of education is not knowledge but action.

Herbert Spencer