

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: AFP

The **Trump administration** increased pressure on Nicolás Maduro, **Venezuela**'s autocratic leader, by imposing sanctions on three of his family members and six firms operating in Venezuela's oil sector. The White House also said it would follow a "legal process" to seize the oil from the [tanker it captured](#) off the coast of Venezuela. According to Reuters, a news agency, America is planning to intercept more vessels as part of its [campaign](#) against Mr Maduro's regime.

Volodymyr Zelensky said that the peace plan America is proposing would turn the parts of the Donetsk region still controlled by **Ukraine** into a demilitarised "special economic zone". Ukraine's president asked what would then stop Russian troops from taking it over. Mr Zelensky added that ceding territory would require a referendum.

Saying he was "returning power to the people", **Thailand**'s prime minister dissolved parliament, paving the way for [elections](#) within two months. Anutin Charnvirakul has led a minority government for less than 100 days. He insisted that the dissolution would not affect Thai armed forces' ability to act in an [ongoing conflict](#) with Cambodia.

Reddit filed a lawsuit challenging **Australia's** decision to ban **social media** for children. The firm said the law, which came into effect on Wednesday, “infringes the implied freedom of political communication”. Australia’s government has insisted it will fight any legal challenge. Earlier a Danish minister said that Denmark could [implement a similar law](#) by the end of next year.

England's [National Health Service](#) warned that a wave of “super flu” was overwhelming the country’s hospitals. It said that last week an average of 2,660 patients a day were in hospital with the disease, and that case numbers are rising. Flu infections in the rest of Britain are also increasing. A planned strike next week by resident (ie, junior) doctors may make it harder for the [NHS](#) to cope.

Disney and [OpenAI](#) struck a \$1bn licensing agreement—the largest deal yet between a media group and an artificial-intelligence company. In exchange for [Disney](#) taking a stake, [OpenAI](#) will be allowed to feature more than 200 Disney characters from franchises such as Star Wars and Frozen in its products, including Sora, a short-video platform.

Football-supporters groups expressed dismay at ticket prices for next year’s **World Cup** in North America. The cheapest ticket for the final in New York could be \$4,185—a 600% increase on prices for the previous one in Qatar. Football Supporters Europe called for sales to be halted. Gianni Infantino, the [divisive president](#) of [FIFA](#), which runs the global game, is usually unmoved by controversy.

Figure of the day: \$1trn, China’s net exports of goods in the first 11 months of the year, more than any previous surplus. [Read the full story.](#)

When did Saddam Hussein’s “mother of battles” begin? Test your knowledge with [Dateline](#), *The Economist*’s history quiz.



Photograph: AP

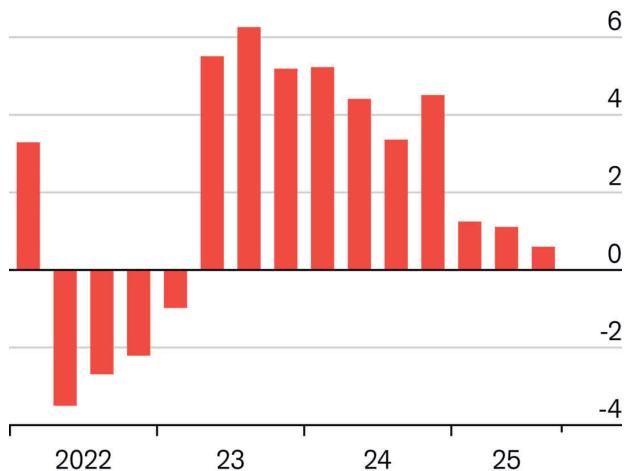
Slipping away: Russia's economy

In 2023 and 2024 Russia's economy boomed. Despite the implementation of Western sanctions after Russia invaded Ukraine, the country sold plenty of hydrocarbons to willing buyers, including China and India. The government massively boosted spending on welfare, infrastructure and the armed forces. In 2024 the economy grew by more than 4%, a fantastic performance by the standards of most big economies.

Figures published on Friday will show a different picture. They are expected to confirm growth of a mere 0.6% in the third quarter of 2025. Data on net exports will also look unimpressive. Why [the turnaround](#)? Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, has taken his foot off the accelerator when it comes to spending. High interest rates, which the central bank implemented to ward off inflation, are biting. Western sanctions may be starting to hurt too. The Russian economy is not in crisis. But the party days are over.

Lights out

Russia, GDP, % change on a year earlier



Source: Haver Analytics



Photograph: Getty Images

The highs and lows of India's economy

In countries such as America and Britain inflation is stubbornly high. Not so in India, where central bankers have the opposite problem. Inflation figures for November, released on Friday, showed that the annual rate was 0.71%. That is up from October's record low of 0.25%, but far below the Reserve Bank of India's target of 4%. Last week the central bank cut its benchmark interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point, to 5.25%.

Still, [India's economy grew](#) by 8.2% year on year in the third quarter of 2025. The government has gone on a reform spree, simplifying tax codes and relaxing labour laws. It hopes that boosting domestic demand might protect the economy from global shocks, including the wrath of Donald Trump. Since America's president slapped a 50% tariff on Indian goods in August, the prime minister, Narendra Modi, has been exhorting patriots to buy Indian.



Photograph: Getty Images

America's race for strategic minerals

On Friday American officials will meet peers from eight other rich countries to discuss efforts to exploit deposits of minerals needed to build AI-infrastructure. The initiative aims to help countries diversify away from China, which dominates the mining and refining of critical materials. Recently China has restricted its exports of some of the most vital. America has signed non-binding agreements with Australia and [Japan](#), which are represented at the meeting, to pursue joint projects.

But other allies will be conspicuously absent. America invited neither Canada, which has so far led efforts within the G7 to co-ordinate new mining projects, nor the EU, though one member state, the Netherlands, will attend. Meanwhile, American companies have been snapping up whatever rare-earth supplies are available outside of China at the expense of European importers. And the Trump administration is scrambling to seal deals with resource-rich countries, including Congo, Indonesia, Kazakhstan and Malaysia. Sharing does not come naturally to the America First president.



Photograph: Getty Images

250 years of Jane Austen

Jane Austen loved a good time. Her novels are full of balls, as are her letters. In 1798 she gave an account of an evening's festivities, noting that "there were 20 dances, and I danced them all, and without any fatigue." She might be pleased, then, about the extravaganza that is being hosted in honour of [her 250th birthday](#).

The anniversary year has been marked by books, TV shows, exhibitions, festivals and even a new statue of the author. At her house in Chawton, Hampshire, there will be talks, workshops and performances this weekend. In Bath, where Austen also lived, there will be wine and readings from her books. On her actual birthday, December 16th, the BBC is hosting programmes featuring the author's famous fans. It seems appropriate for the writer of masterpieces such as "Pride and Prejudice" and "Emma". As one of her characters observes in the latter novel: "One cannot have too large a party."



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.

Friday: In which card game are “Blackwood” and “Stayman” two of the best-known conventions used by players to co-operate?

Thursday: What do people in many countries observe at 11am on November 11 (or the nearest Sunday to that date) to mark the casualties of two world wars?

Be regular and orderly in your life, so that you may be violent and original in your work.

Gustave Flaubert