

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: POOL/AFP via Getty Images

In a bellicose speech to his defence ministry, **Vladimir Putin** said the goals of the [war in Ukraine](#) “will undoubtedly be achieved”, whether through diplomacy or “military means”. [Russia’s president](#) said he welcomed “substantive talks” with America, but called Europe’s leaders, who are discussing proposals to fund Ukraine, “little pigs”. Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine’s president, is expected to join EU leaders in Brussels on Thursday.

America’s Senate overwhelmingly approved the **National Defence Authorisation Act**, which sets out the country’s defence-spending priorities. It will now head to Donald Trump’s desk. The defence bonanza permits \$901bn-worth of spending in fiscal year 2026. The legislation also reauthorises \$400m in aid for Ukraine, despite the release of a [National Security Strategy](#) earlier this month that proposed appeasement of Russia.

In a televised address to the country, **Mr Trump** boasted of his accomplishments in 2025 and insisted he was “fixing” **America**. The president also criticised Joe Biden, his predecessor, and covered other MAGA talking points. Earlier Pete Hegseth, the defence secretary, said that America had carried out a strike in the

eastern Pacific targeting [narco-trafficking operations](#), which killed four people.

Tech stocks fell over fears about rising spending on [AI data centres](#). The tech-heavy NASDAQ index closed at its lowest level since late November. Declines followed a report by the *Financial Times* that Blue Owl Capital, which is partnering with Oracle to build data centres, pulled out of a \$10bn project, which [the software giant](#) disputes. Shares in Oracle fell by 5.4%.

BP replaced its boss, Murray Auchincloss, after less than two years in the role. The British oil giant said Meg O'Neill, boss of Woodside Energy, an Australian oil producer, would take the top job from April, becoming its third leader in five years and the first female chief executive in big oil. BP's share price has risen by 5.6% this year, despite falling oil prices. But it is [under pressure](#) following unsuccessful ventures into green areas.

Australia's prime minister, Anthony Albanese, vowed to crack down on hate speech as a ten-year-old, the youngest victim of the [mass shooting](#) in Sydney, was laid to rest. On Sunday two gunmen—believed to be a father and son—attacked a Hanukkah celebration on Bondi Beach, killing 15 people. On Wednesday police charged the surviving suspect with 59 offences, including terrorism.

The **Oscars** will [stream](#) on **YouTube** beginning in 2029, when the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences ends its decades-long deal with ABC, a broadcaster. The academy said the move would help the film-awards ceremony reach “the largest worldwide audience possible”. [Viewership has declined](#) since peaking in the 1990s, when “Best Picture” winners tended to also be commercial hits.

Figure of the day: 8,000–9,000, the average number of soldiers added to Russia's army each month during the first half of 2025.

[Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: EPA

EU leaders struggle to fund Ukraine

Leaders from the European Union's 27 member states meet in Brussels on Thursday to try to agree on more than €100bn (\$118bn) in aid for Ukraine over the next two years. A proposal backed by Friedrich Merz, Germany's chancellor, to use returns from Russian assets frozen in EU financial institutions looks unlikely to win swift approval. Belgium, where most of those assets are held, has firmly opposed the idea. If the plan stalls, leaders may find themselves in Brussels for days, searching for another way to raise the money—such as issuing jointly guaranteed EU debt.

Meanwhile, [talk of a possible ceasefire](#) continues. But large gaps remain. After talks in Berlin this week, European, Ukrainian and American officials spoke of progress towards security guarantees for Ukraine once the fighting stops. Russia, however, has yet to be presented with the proposals, and there is little sign that Vladimir Putin is willing to compromise on territory—casting doubt on hopes of a Christmas truce.



Photograph: Reuters

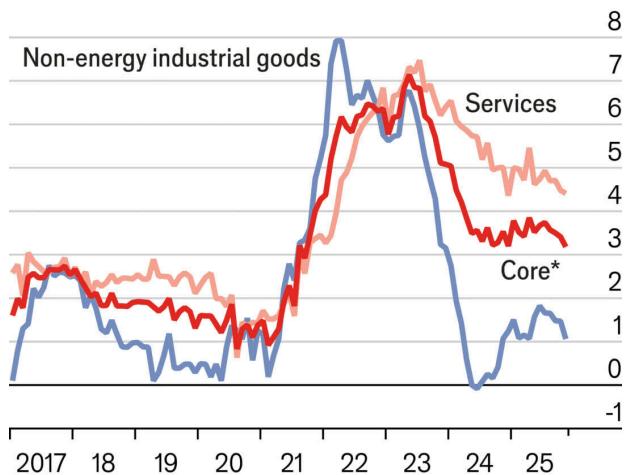
The Bank of England's Christmas trimmings

The Bank of England is expected to cut its main interest rate from 4% to 3.75% on Thursday. Inflation data released on Wednesday strengthened the case. Consumer prices increased by 3.2% in the year to November, 0.2 percentage points below the bank's forecast and well down from the recent peak of 3.8% over the summer. With [unemployment](#) also edging up, the doves on the Monetary Policy Committee should have enough support to push through a cut. At its meeting in November the committee voted 5-4 against easing.

Hawks, however, will remain worried. Much of the fall in [inflation](#) was driven by volatile food, alcohol and clothing prices. Meanwhile services inflation remains stubbornly high at 4.4% and households expect prices to rise by 3.5% over the next year. Both indicators are well above the bank's 2% inflation target. Loosening monetary policy too quickly might require costly corrections in the future.

A bumpy descent

Britain, consumer prices
% change on a year earlier



*Excludes food, energy, alcohol and tobacco

Sources: ONS; Haver Analytics



Photograph: Kenny Holston/The New York Times/Redux/eyevine

A turning point for MAGA?

Every year around Christmas Turning Point USA, a conservative youth organisation, holds a big MAGA conference in Phoenix. This year's AmericaFest, which begins on Thursday, is the first since [Charlie Kirk](#), the organisation's charismatic and controversial founder, was murdered on a college campus in Utah in September.

After his death, Republicans hailed Kirk as a martyr and promised to unite against their [shared enemies](#). Instead, the movement appears more fractured. Turning Point will surely put on a good show. Yet offstage, MAGA's biggest influencers are fighting. Erika Kirk, Charlie's widow and the group's new leader (pictured), has spent weeks pushing back against conspiracy theories about her husband's death, some spread by former allies. Meanwhile Nick Fuentes, a white supremacist and Holocaust denier who long clashed with Kirk, is gaining ground among some in the movement. Conservatives hoped Kirk's death would mark a turning point—just not this one.



Illustration: David Simons

How Chinese traders beat Lapland's elves

Yiwu, a city in eastern China, is the world's Christmas capital. The city's sprawling wholesale markets supply much of the world's Christmas paraphernalia, from baubles to Santa hats. China dominates global exports of Christmas decorations by value. But shipments are falling. In the first ten months of 2025 it exported \$5.1bn-worth of trinkets, down from \$5.8bn a year earlier. Sales to America are slowing because of tariffs on Chinese goods, now 20%. Stallholders and manufacturers complain that unpredictable levies make pricing—and planning—harder.

Still, Santa is nothing if not adaptable. Exports to Europe are rising. Some firms are also finding creative ways around American tariffs, shipping decorations in parts to South-East Asia for reassembly and relabelling. Others are switching to buyers from India and the Middle East.

Conflicts from Ukraine to the Middle East have disrupted demand, too. Even so, Yiwu's markets remain busy. When Christmas orders tail off, the city's merchants simply turn to the next festival on the calendar.



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.

Thursday: Which Irish-set film won the Golden Globe for best musical or comedy film in January 2023?

Wednesday: What means of killing a werewolf is also used as a term for an apparently simple method for solving a complex problem?

Keep the company of those who seek the truth—run from those who have found it.

Vaclav Havel