

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: AFP via Getty Images

Donald Trump reportedly interrupted his [White House meeting](#) with **Volodymyr Zelensky** and other European leaders to phone **Vladimir Putin**. Earlier Mr Trump expressed confidence he could organise a trilateral meeting with the Russian and Ukrainian presidents. Mr Zelensky thanked Mr Trump for his efforts to end the war and for hosting the “best” talks yet. European leaders emphasised the importance of security guarantees for Ukraine; Germany’s chancellor, Friedrich Merz, said that there were “complicated” negotiations ahead

Germany said **America** must lower tariffs on cars before a trade deal with the European Union can be finalised. The [EU and America agreed to a framework deal in late July](#), but many details remain unclear. The proposal would reduce America’s duties on car imports from Europe from 25% to 15%. The German car industry estimates even those lower tariffs could cost the sector billions of euros annually.

American homebuilder sentiment fell unexpectedly to its lowest level since 2022. The monthly index of housing conditions published by the National Association of Home Builders and Wells Fargo dropped to 32 in August from 33 in July. Two-thirds of

builders said they had used incentives to boost sales; over one-third cut prices to tempt buyers [discouraged by high mortgage rates](#).

Myanmar will hold its first general election since a military coup in 2021. The vote will be held in stages, beginning on December 28th. Critics fear that the junta will use a sham poll to entrench its power. Many people will not be allowed to vote in parts of the country where [rebel groups are fighting](#) the government. Starvation is widespread in those areas.

Novo Nordisk will slash the monthly price of Ozempic, a diabetes jab, from \$1,000 to \$499 for **Americans** who buy it without health insurance. The Danish pharmaceutical company has already cut the price of Wegovy, a weight-loss drug that far more people buy without a prescription. Mr Trump has [demanded](#) that drugmakers lower prices for Americans and raise them for Europeans.

The Movement to Socialism suffered a huge defeat in **Bolivia's** presidential election, which will end nearly 20 years of rule by the left-wing party. According to preliminary results, two candidates from right-leaning parties were the top vote-winners. They will compete in a run-off in October. [The election](#) took place amid surging inflation and fuel shortages.

Thailand will allow foreign visitors to convert **cryptocurrencies** into baht, its national currency. The country's authorities want to boost tourism, as foreign arrivals have recently slumped. (On Monday the country lowered its forecast for 2025 by a tenth, to 33m visitors.) The crypto scheme will initially run as an 18-month pilot with conversions capped at 550,000 baht (\$17,000).

Figure of the day: \$7trn, the amount of mortgage debt Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac have on their balance sheets. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

EU exports under pressure

Last month America and the EU struck a [tariff deal](#), cooling tensions and shelving retaliatory measures. America cut most levies on EU goods, including pharmaceuticals and cars, to 15% but kept 50% tariffs on steel and aluminium (just 1.5% of EU-US trade). In return the EU scrapped most tariffs on American goods and pledged vast purchases of American energy and weapons. Donald Trump called it “probably the biggest deal ever reached in any capacity”.

The pact will not yet appear in the EU’s June trade data, due on Monday. But the broader trade war will. American imports slumped in the second quarter after surging earlier in the year as companies rushed to beat tariff hikes. The EU was a large source of that stockpiling, particularly in pharmaceuticals, but shipments since April have fallen well below 2024 levels. With average tariffs on EU goods now 15.3%—up from 1.3% before Mr Trump—the bloc’s \$200bn plus trade surplus in goods with America may start to shrink.



Photograph: Shutterstock

Alligator Alcatraz goes to court

On Monday a judge in Miami will hear arguments in a legal challenge to the so-called [Alligator Alcatraz](#), an immigrant-detention centre in the Florida Everglades that opened in July. Detainees claim that the state is violating their constitutional rights by holding them without charge and without access to lawyers.

Environmentalists have brought a separate lawsuit, arguing that building Alligator Alcatraz on wetlands without assessing the potential ecological damage violates federal law. Lawyers defending the facility say that, although it houses federal detainees, because the state is in charge of it federal environmental rules don't apply. The judge ordered a pause on further construction to hear witnesses testify.

The legal offensives may make it harder for the federal government to meet its detention target of 3,000 at Alligator Alcatraz. But Florida's Republican governor has already announced plans to build another facility on a military base near Jacksonville.



Photograph: AFP

Zelensky gets an escort in the Oval Office

Last time Volodmyr Zelensky was in the Oval office, in February, he was publicly humiliated by his host. When he visits on Monday, however, he will be escorted by a posse of sympathetic European leaders, including the presidents of France and Germany, and the head of NATO. This will doubtless reassure Mr Zelensky, but after Donald Trump's bromance with Vladimir Putin in Alaska, America's president is still likely to heap pressure on Ukraine to end the war—[largely on Russia's terms](#).

The Ukrainians insist that a ceasefire must come before a more general agreement to end the conflict. But Mr Trump, siding with Mr Putin, now says the immediate goal must be a comprehensive peace. At the summit Mr Putin again demanded that Ukraine retreat from the parts of Luhansk and Donetsk provinces that it still holds. These represent the most fortified sections of the front line, putting Mr Putin in a stronger position to attack again in the future. Ukrainians are tired of war, but they firmly oppose any further territorial concessions.



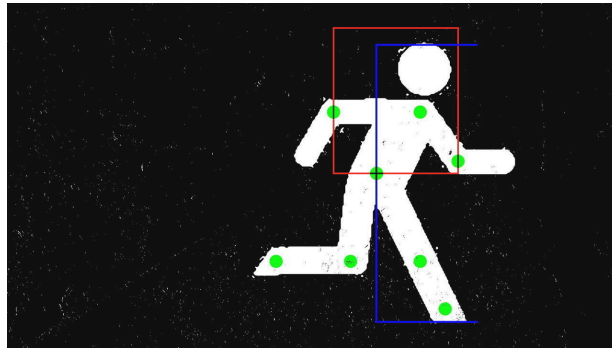
Photograph: Getty Images

South Sudan on the brink, again

On Monday the United Nations Security Council will discuss South Sudan. It is one of the world's most fragile states, yet its problems are often overshadowed by the magnitude of the [disaster in its northern neighbour](#). The main topic will be the country's rapidly deteriorating security. Earlier this year fighting erupted in the oil-producing Upper Nile state, the most serious flare-up since the last civil war ended in 2018. The UN says violence against civilians is more rampant than at any time since at least 2020.

South Sudan's government, led by President Salva Kiir, looks weak. It is kept in power by troops from neighbouring Uganda, which intervened in March in order to prevent a takeover by forces loyal to his vice-president and longtime rival, Riek Machar. The UN wants the two adversaries to return to the power-sharing deal. But talks have been repeatedly postponed. South Sudan's [prospects](#) have rarely been so bleak since independence from Sudan in 2011.





Photograph: Getty Images/The Economist

Drones could soon become even more intrusive

For all the tasks that drones can do, one remains beyond their power: facial recognition. Drones are much farther from their subjects than the kind of cameras, such as CCTVs, that are ordinarily used for biometrics. But new [technology](#) from a team at Michigan State University, called FarSight, could change all that.

It works through “whole-body biometric recognition”. Rather than trying to recognise a subject from their face alone, it uses a combination of biometric-recognition algorithms in parallel. One set discerns a person’s gait, another generates a 3D reconstruction of their body. A third runs the subject’s face through a model that seeks to undo the refractive effects of the choppy air on the light that comes into the camera, returning the image in an undistorted state. The three biometric markers are then fused into one profile. And all in about a third of a second. The system is still experimental, but the researcher says FarSight’s early results are impressive.



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

Monday: String beans, garden peas and okra are found in what kind of natural container?

*“You can do a lot with diplomacy,
but with diplomacy backed up by
force you can get a lot more
done.”*

Kofi Annan