

## Catch up: Putin's warning to the West; America's new trade rules



**Vladimir Putin** warned Western countries that they would be at “war” with Russia were they to allow [Ukraine](#) to use their weapons to strike targets in Russia. The Russian president’s remarks came after **Antony Blinken**, America’s secretary of state, hinted earlier this week that such approval might be forthcoming. Meanwhile, Russia expelled six British diplomats over spying accusations. The move, which comes as Sir Keir Starmer, Britain’s prime minister, landed in Washington for talks with President Joe Biden, is another warning by Mr Putin.

**America** said it will close a [loophole](#) in its trade rules, which allows packages worth less than \$800 to enter the country without facing duties. The government says that the rule gives a chance to **Chinese companies** to bypass tariffs, hurting American manufacturers. More than 1.4bn packages, worth at least \$66bn, are expected to arrive under the exemption this year.

**America’s** consumer-sentiment index rose to its highest level in four months in September. The University of Michigan’s consumer

sentiment index rose to 69, from 67.9 in August. The figures reflect [falling inflation](#) and expectations that the **Federal Reserve** will cut interest rates at its meeting next week. However, consumers were worried about a weakening jobs market.

**China** said it will raise the retirement age for the first time since 1978. For all men it will go from 60 to 63. For female white-collar workers the age will increase from 55 to 58; for blue-collar women from 50 to 55. The average age of [retirement](#) in China is among the lowest in the world, and the pension costs are squeezing government budgets.

Workers at **Boeing** on America's west coast voted to go on strike. The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, which represents some 33,000 Boeing workers in the west coast, said 96% of its members backed the walkout. The planemaker offered workers a pay rise of 25%; the union is seeking 40%. The strike comes as [Boeing](#) grapples with manufacturing delays and concerns over its safety record.

**OpenAI** released a new series of [AI models](#) which it claims are capable of human-like reasoning. In a blog post the startup said the new series, called o1, spends more time "thinking" before it responds and delivers results similar to PhD students on mathematical and science tasks. OpenAI has put a version on ChatGPT, its chatbot.

**North Korea** revealed images of its hidden **uranium-enrichment facility** for the first time. The photos were released by state media following a visit by Kim Jong Un to the unnamed site. The dictator urged workers to produce more materials for [nuclear weapons](#) as they are needed for "self-defence and the capability for a pre-emptive attack". North Korea's nuclear programme has been banned by the UN.

**Figure of the day:** 25%, the approximate share of American babies who are exclusively breastfed for their first six months. [Read the full story.](#)

## Is a decision on long-range missiles imminent?



A meeting of NATO's military chiefs in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, on Friday will focus on two issues. The first is assessing the progress of the alliance's "deter and defend" strategy—regional plans aimed at making NATO more assertive in the face of growing threats. The second will be NATO's support for Ukraine.

A command has recently been established to plan and co-ordinate the delivery of weapons and training for Ukraine's armed forces. The chiefs will probably also discuss Ukraine's urgent pleas to be allowed to use [Western missiles](#) against military targets in Russia. However, that is a political decision. Following a visit to Kyiv on Wednesday by America's top diplomat, Antony Blinken, and his British opposite number, David Lammy, there were hints of a change in policy coming soon. The final say will rest with the notoriously cautious President Joe Biden. That could come when he meets Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, in Washington later this month.

# The pope wraps up his Asia tour



This week around 600,000 people in Timor-Leste gathered for a special guest. Almost half the country, where nearly everyone is Catholic, watched the pope deliver an open-air mass. It was one of many events conducted by His Holiness across Asia in recent days. In his only foreign trip this year, and the longest of his papacy, he has visited remote jungles in Papua New Guinea and mosques in Indonesia, the world's biggest Muslim-majority country.

On Thursday he presided over mass in Singapore's national stadium, a venue that Taylor Swift recently headlined. On Friday, the last of the tour, he hosted an "interreligious dialogue" with people from the city-state, one of the world's most religiously diverse countries. He hopes to stress two messages. The first is Asia's importance for the Catholic church, as believers dwindle in the West. The second is promoting religious harmony. As the pope put it in Indonesia, "we are all brothers and sisters, all pilgrims, all on our way to God".



# Bear market: Russia's economic boom



The world's most sanction-hit economy continues to defy expectations. GDP data released on Friday is expected to show that Russia's economy grew by about 4% year on year in the second quarter of 2024. That is extremely fast. Inflation remains far too high, at an annual rate of close to 9%, but Russians are nonetheless doing very well. Household incomes are growing rapidly in real terms. Consumer confidence, plumbing depths across the rich world, is close to all-time highs in Russia.

This wasn't the plan when Western governments implemented unprecedented sanctions on Russia in 2022. But Vladimir Putin has found workarounds. Russia's president has redirected hydrocarbon exports from Europe to Asia and drawn on Russia's huge accumulated cash reserves to [juice the economy](#). If Russia ever comes to the negotiating table to find an end to the war in Ukraine, it will not be for economic reasons.

# Starmer and Biden meet at the White House



Britain's prime minister, [Sir Keir Starmer](#), will meet Joe Biden in Washington on Friday. It is Sir Keir's second call at the White House; he visited America's president shortly after entering office in July. Their talks will focus on the Israel-Hamas conflict and Ukraine.

On Gaza, the two have their differences. Mr Biden did not endorse Britain's recent decision to [suspend](#) 30 of its 350 licences for exporting weapons to Israel. But they largely see eye-to-eye on Ukraine, particularly on recent reports of Iran's supply of ballistic missiles to Russia. Echoing George W. Bush's warning in 2002 of an "axis of evil", David Lammy, Britain's foreign secretary, said this week: "We see a new axis of Russia, Iran and North Korea." Sir Keir's Labour Party has built strong ties to the Democrats. But the prime minister is not expected to meet Kamala Harris, the vice-president and Democratic nominee in November's election, or her opponent, Donald Trump.

# The belligerence of Nicki Minaj



“Pink Friday 2”, released in December 2023, made Nicki Minaj the first female rapper to achieve three number-one albums on the Billboard charts. Her accompanying tour, which resumes this month across America, is the most lucrative ever staged by such an artist. On Friday the album is relaunched in a “deluxe edition”, with new tracks and remixes, which is sure to be received with glee by the Barbz, Ms Minaj’s notoriously fervent fandom.

The Barbz’s pugnacity mirrors Ms Minaj’s own. The fights she delights in picking with fellow woman MCs (most notably Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion) come with the added threat of her cyber-footsoldiers. Her beefs recall the performative hostility of rival boxers ahead of a title fight. The antagonism may often be real enough. Still, one might reasonably wonder if a new row will flare up just in time to promote this latest product.



## Daily quiz



*The Economist*

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 [QuizEspresso@economist.com](mailto:QuizEspresso@economist.com). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

**Friday:** Which novelist wrote “Imperium”, “Lustrum” and “Dictator”, a trio of novels about the Roman orator, Cicero?

**Thursday:** Which actor played Jim Rockford in the detective series “The Rockford Files”?

# The winners of last week's crossword



Thank you to everyone who took part in our weekly crossword, published in the weekend edition of Espresso. The winners, chosen at random, were:

**Melissa Leung**, Utrecht, the Netherlands

**Frank Cantoni**, Thornbury, Canada

**Suresh Ramachandran**, Bangalore, India

They all gave the correct answers of [price gouging](#), [papers](#), [Greens](#) and [Google](#). Check back tomorrow for this week's crossword.

**25%**

*The approximate share of American babies who are exclusively breastfed for their first six months.*

*Read the full story.*

**Art attracts us only by what it reveals of  
our most secret self.**

*Jean-Luc Godard*