

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Reuters

American officials said that Donald Trump’s special envoy, **Steve Witkoff**, and the president’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, had held “constructive discussions” with a Ukrainian negotiator, Rustem Umerov, in Miami. The two sides called on **Russia** to show a “serious commitment to long-term peace”. Messrs Witkoff and Kushner met Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, in Moscow this week but [failed](#) to reach a breakthrough. Their talks with the Ukrainians will continue on Saturday.

Mr Putin pledged closer co-operation on trade and energy with **Narendra Modi**, India’s prime minister, during a two-day trip to India. The **Russian president** promised “uninterrupted” fuel shipments to India, [despite pressure](#) from America on Mr Modi to stop Russian imports. The leaders also discussed the war in Ukraine; Mr Modi said India was on “the side of peace”.

America’s **Supreme Court** said it would rule on the legality of Mr Trump’s attempt to end **birthright citizenship**, a contentious part of the president’s anti-immigration agenda. In January he signed an executive order seeking to block children born to undocumented immigrants or temporary visitors in America from being [entitled to](#)

[citizenship](#). Lower federal courts temporarily blocked the order, citing the 14th Amendment.

**Warner Bros Discovery** agreed to sell its streaming platform, <sup>hbo</sup> Max, and film studios to **Netflix** for \$83bn. The tie-up between an old Hollywood studio and a streaming platform—the latest in a [wave of big mergers](#) this year—promises to create a media behemoth. Netflix outbid Paramount, a studio owned by David Ellison, son of Larry Ellison, a tech billionaire, and Comcast, another media company. Warner’s cable-television channels will be hived off into a separate company.

Officials in **Afghanistan** said four people had been killed in a clash with **Pakistan** along the two countries’ border. Each side blamed the other for provoking the fighting. In October Qatar and Turkey mediated a ceasefire after [earlier skirmishes](#). Relations have soured since the Taliban returned to power in 2021. Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of sheltering hostile armed groups.

American officials reacted angrily to a decision by the **European Commission** to fine **X**, Elon Musk’s social-media platform, €120m (\$140m). The EU’s executive body said the site had breached the bloc’s transparency and data rules. Separately, the commission opened an anti-trust probe into Meta over the tech giant’s integration of its AI assistant, “Meta AI”, into its messaging app, WhatsApp.

Four people were arrested after apple crumble and custard were smeared on a display case containing Britain’s crown jewels at the **Tower of London**. A previously unknown group, Take Back Power, claimed responsibility. On X the group declared that “Democracy has crumbled”, demanded a permanent citizens’ assembly—a “House of the People to tax the rich”—and solicited donations.

**Word of the week:** Mega-merger. Large corporate deals, already worth \$700bn in 2025. [Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: Getty Images

## American foreign policy in the spotlight

When Pete Hegseth, America's secretary of war, summoned [the country's top brass](#) to a base near Washington, DC in September, he stood as the accuser. Some generals were too fat, too woke and too cautious. On Saturday he will look more like the accused.

Attendees at the Reagan National Defence Forum, a security jamboree in California, will be listening for his latest account of a [strike on an alleged drug-running boat](#) on September 2nd. A vessel carrying 11 people was subjected to a “double tap”, in which a second volley of missiles killed survivors clinging to the wreckage of their destroyed vessel—an apparent war crime.

Attendees will also want to know the implications of America's [new National Security Strategy](#), released on Thursday. It proclaims a return to the Monroe Doctrine in Latin America, excoriates European allies, calls a halt to NATO expansion, seeks “strategic stability” with Russia, and fudges past notions of China as America's biggest rival.



Photograph: dpa

## Friedrich Merz heads to Israel

On Saturday [Friedrich Merz](#), Germany's chancellor, will make his first official visit to Israel since his election in May. He will meet [Binyamin Netanyahu](#), Israel's prime minister, to discuss relations between the two countries as well as the Gaza ceasefire deal.

Mr Merz's arrival comes weeks after his government lifted a partial suspension of arms sales to Israel. The short-lived embargo, introduced in August, was a deviation from Germany's long-standing support for Israel. Both countries will be anxious to put it behind them. Israel has three new submarines on order from German shipyards. Germany now spends more than €6bn (\$7bn) on Israeli weapons systems as part of its rapid re-armament programme. In 2023 Israel signed a \$4bn contract to supply Germany with [Arrow 3 interceptor batteries](#), which down incoming ballistic missiles while they are still outside the atmosphere. Germany began deploying the system this week.



Photograph: Getty Images

## Can AI chatbots change voters' minds?

Politicians like to splurge on [advertising](#). In America, online ad spending alone on last year's election cycle reached a record \$11bn, according to AdImpact, a media-tracker. ai chatbots could more cheaply personalise campaigns, although some fear they might influence opinions in harmful ways. A study in *Nature* has put ai's persuasiveness to the test.

During elections last year researchers recruited around 6,000 voters in America, Canada and Poland to message ai chatbots backing rival candidates. For those who did so, political preferences in Canada and Poland shifted by around ten percentage points. The bots were most effective at state level. In Massachusetts 501 residents chatted to one bot about a ballot proposal to legalise psychedelic drugs, which boosted support for the measure by nearly 23 percentage points among voters with "non-extreme" opinions on it.

The bots were most convincing when using facts, rather than emotional pleas. But there were risks: the researchers said statements about right-wing candidates were more likely to be inaccurate than their left-wing counterparts.



Photograph: Alamy

## Messi's shot at the MLS Cup

Lionel Messi, one of the world's [best footballers](#), has won almost every top award there is in his sport, including eight Ballon d'Or trophies and the FIFA World Cup with Argentina. He is yet to win one prize: America's Major League Soccer Cup. That may change on Saturday, when his Inter Miami team plays the Vancouver Whitecaps in the MLS Cup final in Florida.

Mr Messi's three years in America have been transformative for Inter Miami. Once languishing, the club has won two major trophies under his captaincy. In October, aged 38, he signed a contract extension that will keep him in Miami until he is 41—a period that encompasses next year's World Cup, which America is co-hosting. Mr Messi has refused to confirm whether he will play in the tournament. But when he does eventually hang up his boots he can retire to the boardroom, where he reportedly has an equity stake in Inter Miami.





Photograph: AP

## **Profile: Kevin Hassett, the front-runner to lead the Fed**

On paper Kevin Hassett, Donald Trump's trusted economic adviser, is a conventional option to lead [America's Federal Reserve](#). He has a PhD in economics, several top-tier publications to his name, decades in Washington and even a previous stint at the central bank. But if picked (Mr Trump says he will announce his choice early next year), his appointment would mark an abrupt shift in the relationship between the Fed and White House.

Before working with Mr Trump at the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) in the president's first term and the National Economic Council in his second, Mr Hassett spent decades as a policy economist at the American Enterprise Institute, a think-tank, advising Republican luminaries such as George W. Bush, John McCain and Mitt Romney. He was best known for a book published on the eve of the dotcom crash, which predicted that stock prices would quadruple. The Mr Hassett of yore might have been an odd choice—his expertise was in tax, not monetary policy—but far from a disastrous one.

Since then he has [undergone a transformation](#). While working for Mr Trump, Mr Hassett has behaved like a hack unconcerned with reality. He pushed out tenuous analysis to bolster the president's agenda. Recently he has become a reliable defender of tariffs and



deficit-busting tax cuts. He has bragged about Mr Trump having him on speed-dial.

Yet he was not always so close to Mr Trump. In his book, “The Drift: Stopping America’s Slide to Socialism”, published in 2021, Mr Hassett confesses to initially taking a “dim view” of the president’s “populist agenda and mercurial temperament”. That changed when, while working for Mr Trump at the CEA, he realised that “bureaucrats had undermined the American dream by inserting themselves into every aspect of the economy”. He claims to have helped Mr Trump bring about a “golden age of prosperity...until a virus from China killed it”. During the early weeks of the covid-19 pandemic he released a “cubic model”—the sort that can be generated with a few clicks on Excel—which projected that the disease would shortly subside.

Fed chairs often have partisan ties. Mr Hassett has said that “monetary policy needs to be fully independent of political influence”; bond and currency markets have reacted calmly to his front-runner status. He might prove to be a surprise. But he has also said “the American people could expect President Trump to pick somebody who’s going to help them...have cheaper car loans and easier access to mortgages.”

The question is how much sway Mr Hassett would have. Although he would push for interest-rate cuts, Federal Reserve chairs are not all-powerful; bringing down rates significantly would need the support of his fellow governors, which is unlikely to be forthcoming. Expect, at the very least, the unanimity of the Fed under its current chair, Jerome Powell, to disappear and the central bank to end up with the sort of vote-counting seen at the Supreme Court.



Illustration: The Economist

## **The winners of the week's quiz**

Thank you to everyone who took part in this week's quiz. The winners, chosen at random, were:

**Vladimir Stanisavljevic**, Belgrade, Serbia

**Sharon Neal**, London, Britain

**Bart Seesing**, Posterholt, Netherlands

They all gave the correct answers of: Baby, The Royal Tenenbaums, the electric blanket, Vanilla Sky and the navy. The theme is shades of blue: baby, royal, electric, sky and navy.

The questions were:

**Monday:** What was the nickname of Jennifer Grey's character in the movie "Dirty Dancing"?

**Tuesday:** Which Wes Anderson film stars Gene Hackman as the eccentric patriarch of a gifted family?

**Wednesday:** Dr Sidney Russell invented what night-time heating device in 1912?

**Thursday:** Which 2001 film starring Tom Cruise and Penélope Cruz is a remake of the Spanish film "Open Your Eyes"?

**Friday:** A commodore is a military rank in which branch of the armed services?

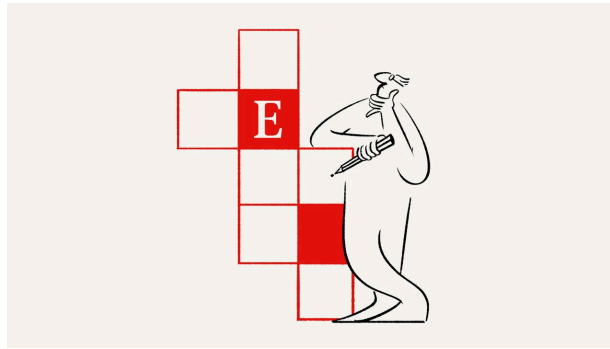


Illustration: The Economist

## Mini crossword

We publish a new interactive edition of our crossword daily, allowing you to enter and check the answers and see explanations. Try it [here](#).

There are two sets of clues, one for seasoned cruciverbalists and the other for less experienced solvers. Both give the same answers.

### Cryptic clues

*1 across* - I need cash or my estate, at first, gets tax (6)

*2 across* - Splits bits (6)

*3 across* - Before, in an unhappy mood, comes the price difference (6)

*1 down* - I, ne'er test star, turned to a central banker's responsibility (8,5)

### Straight clues

*1 across* - Britain's biggest source of tax revenue (6)

*2 across* - American assets that may be a bubble (6)

*3 across* - I can't believe it's not butter (6)

*1 down* - What the next Federal Reserve chair will face pressure to lower (8,5)

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am GMT on Monday to [\[email protected\]](#). We will pick three winners at random and crown them in Tuesday's edition.

*Curiosity is the lust of the mind.*

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***Thomas Hobbes***