The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter

Israel said it would allow a basic level of humanitarian aid, including some food, into **Gaza**, ending a three-month blockade. Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, said he worried that a "starvation crisis" would endanger the success of an extensive ground offensive that Israel launched over the weekend. Renewed ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas in Qatar have so far made little progress.

Joe Biden has an "aggressive form" of prostate cancer, his office said, although it "appears to be hormone-sensitive, which allows effective management". America's former president is reviewing treatment options. The 82-year-old left office in January. He dropped out of the 2024 presidential race under pressure from Democrats worried about his acuity and fitness.

Rafal Trzaskowski, the liberal candidate supported by **Poland**'s ruling Civic Coalition, and Karol Nawrocki, the candidate of the populist right, face a presidential run-off after elections over the weekend. With nearly all districts counted, Mr Trzaskowski is on 31.2% in the first round of voting, just ahead of Mr Nawrocki on 29.7%. The run-off will take place on June 1st.

Nicusor Dan, the liberal mayor of Bucharest, won a shock victory in the second round of **Romania's** presidential election. Tallies from almost all polling stations suggest that Mr Dan has won about 54% of votes, compared with 46% for his hard-right opponent, George Simion. Mr Simion, an admirer of Donald Trump, had hoped that votes from the diaspora would give him victory.

The ruling **Democratic Alliance** increased its number of seats in Portugal's third election in three years, but again fell short of a

majority. The election was called after Prime Minister Luís Montenegro lost a confidence vote amidst a corruption scandal (he denies wrongdoing). Pedro Nuno Santos, the leader of the opposition Socialists, resigned following his party's disastrous showing. It ended up level with the hard-right Chega.

A research group affiliated with **India's** defence ministry claimed that **China** helped **Pakistan** with air defence and satellite coverage during their recent conflict. Beyond supplying its ally with hardware, China has remained mostly quiet on any involvement in the military spat. Pakistan claims it used Chinese J-10C fighters to shoot down Indian jets—a claim India has neither confirmed nor denied.

Scott Bessent warned **America's** trading partners that they must negotiate deals in "good faith" or face the imposition of previously threatened high tariffs. The treasury secretary did not explain what would constitute bad faith. The Trump administration set itself the task of closing 90 trade deals in 90 days after putting swingeing "reciprocal" tariffs on hold in April. Progress has so far been slow.

Figure of the day: 45, the number of homicides in Baltimore so far this year, down by a third from the same period last year. Read the full story.

Trump's call with Putin

The American and Russian presidents will talk by phone on Monday to try to end the war in Ukraine. European leaders hope Donald Trump will at last get tough with Vladimir Putin. The danger is that he will offer more concessions.

Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, has worked hard to win back Mr Trump's favour after their bust-up in the Oval Office in February. Ukraine has signed a minerals deal with America, agreed in principle to a 30-day ceasefire and attended the first direct talks with Russia in nearly three years. Mr Putin snubbed Mr Zelensky's offer to meet him, and insists on maximalist demands, including control of Ukrainian territory he has not captured.

The EU will enact a new sanctions package against Russia this week. America's Congress has readied a powerful bill to impose "secondary" penalties on countries buying Russian oil. Even Mr Trump warns it is "turkey time". Mr Putin, though, thinks he will chicken out of confronting Russia.
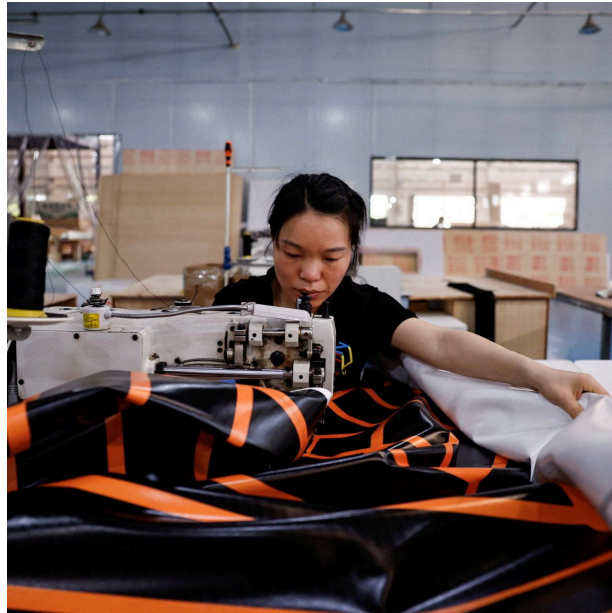
Photograph: Reuters

China puts off economic pain

In 2025 China's economic rhythm will be muddled by "front-loading" and "payback". The country's exports have been surprisingly strong this year because manufacturers shipped as much as possible to America before Donald Trump's tariffs took effect on April 9th. That boosted industrial production, which grew by 6.1% last month compared with a year earlier, according to figures released on Monday. Now that America and China have agreed to suspend their highest levies on each other until mid-August, the export rush will resume.

Shoppers have also benefited from the government's trade-in schemes, which give people an incentive to upgrade their cars, white goods and electronic gadgets. Purchases of household appliances leapt by 38.8% in April, compared with a year earlier, helping to prop up China's otherwise lacklustre retail sales. But the same product cannot be exported or traded-in twice. So the early purchases and shipments that have flattered China's economic data so far in 2025 will be missing from the figures later in the year. That is the problem with front-loading: it leads to painful economic payback.

Photograph: Getty Images

Britain's "hard" Brexit gets slightly softer

On Monday Sir Keir Starmer, Britain's prime minister, hosts Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, in London. The pair will present the outlines of an agreement to "reset" the relationship between Britain and the bloc, which had been disrupted by Brexit.

The centrepiece will be an agreement on defence and security, which will allow British firms to benefit from a new EU security fund. Checks on British agricultural exports will be eased; in exchange Britain will harmonise its veterinary standards with those of the bloc. A youth-mobility agreement will liberalise migration rules for young people. Most eye-catchingly, it is expected that British travellers will be able to use e-gates at European passport-control points, enabling them to avoid queues. The economic damage of Brexit will largely remain—but for holidaymakers, at least, the divorce may feel less painful.
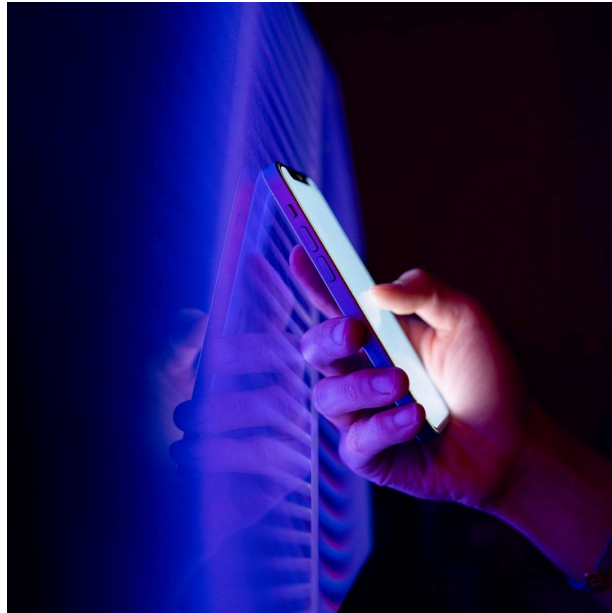
Photograph: Getty Images

The WHO's funding crunch

The World Health Assembly begins this week in Geneva. Delegates from the World Health Organisation's nearly 200 member states will formally adopt an agreement on fighting pandemics, the second ever global-health treaty. (A tobacco-control accord was the first.) The new treaty establishes rules for sharing of pandemic-related tests, drugs and vaccines. It states that 10% of supplies will go to the WHO for global distribution; another 10% will be supplied at "affordable prices" to help poor countries.

But the WHO's capacity to respond to a crisis may be diminished. America's departure from the organisation, announced in January, has caused a big funding gap. It provided 16% of WHO's funding in 2022-23. Some other countries have cut foreign aid, too. The assembly will set the organisation's funding for the next two years. WHO's director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has cut his proposed budget by a fifth, to $4.2bn. That, he notes, is equivalent to the budget of Geneva's main hospital.

Photograph: Getty Images

The toxic side of AI chatbots

AI chatbots sometimes blurt out inappropriate responses to users' queries. Grok, a chatbot developed by xAI, Elon Musk's AI firm, recently ranted about a supposed genocide against white South Africans in answer to questions about the weather, professional wrestling and cars. The company blamed an "unauthorised modification" of the software that violated the firm's "internal policies and core values".

Yet chatbots often give controversial answers to innocuous questions. Researchers from Microsoft recently studied how often large language models generate "harmful content". This includes political and scientific disinformation as well as the promotion of violence or racial hatred, self-harm, criminal activity and sexual exploitation. They found that almost 27% of responses were harmful, regardless of users' input. That is because of the data on which LLMs are trained: the researchers found widespread toxic content in the vast datasets used to develop popular AI models. "Guardrails" designed to keep out such material, such as keyword-based moderation, have their limits.

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 . We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Monday: Which character did George Clooney play in ER?

All the changes in the world, for good or evil, were first brought about by words.

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis