

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter

**Russia** began a day of mourning following Friday's [terror attack](#) on a concert venue near Moscow. The alleged perpetrators, now in custody, killed at least 133 people and wounded many more.

American officials believe the assault was carried out by **Islamic State**, which claimed responsibility and shared gruesome footage of the rampage on social media. But in a televised address on Saturday **President Vladimir Putin** tried to connect the attackers to Ukraine, and promised to “punish everyone who stands behind the terrorists”.

**Russia** [bombarded Ukraine](#) for the fourth night in a row, striking Kyiv and the western city of Lviv. Ukrainian officials said that most of the missiles and drones were intercepted. **Poland** said that one Russian missile entered its airspace, forcing the country to put its fighter jets on high alert. Earlier Ukrainian missiles struck the main communications centre of Russia's [Black Sea Fleet](#) in Sevastopol, in occupied Crimea. Ukraine also claimed to have destroyed two Russian landing ships.

**Ivan Korcok**, a pro-EU former diplomat, led the polls in the first round of **Slovakia's** presidential election. Mr Korcok took 43% of the vote with nearly all ballots counted, setting him up for a run-off against Peter Pellegrini next month. The speaker in Slovakia's parliament, Mr Pellegrini is an ally of the country's populist prime minister, Robert Fico, who has strengthened ties with Russia since winning [elections last year](#).

More than 200 children kidnapped from a school in northern **Nigeria** earlier this month were released unharmed, according to local officials. Bandits had demanded a 1bn naira (\$681m) ransom.

The government said it wouldn't pay; meeting ransom demands became a criminal offence in 2022. Mass kidnappings in Nigeria have become less common in recent years. However kidnapping-for-ransom remains an everyday problem—[largely ignored](#) by politicians.

Li Qiang, **China's** prime minister, said he would work to reduce the barriers foreign firms face doing business in the country. With China's economy [wobbly](#), Mr Li hinted at opening up market access for overseas companies—though he also claimed many problems had “been basically resolved”. Businesspeople are anxious, [among other things](#), about the growing assertiveness of China's secret police, which last year raided several foreign consulting firms.

**Sinopec**, the world's largest refining company, posted a 10% drop in net profits for last year as low oil prices weighed on margins. The results show an even worse performance than in 2022, when the Chinese business faced [lagging demand](#) due to lockdown restrictions. Last week Sinopec's boss said China's widespread adoption of [electric vehicles](#) would reduce the country's demand for fuel by 20m tonnes per year.

**India's** navy completed an anti-piracy mission east of the Red Sea and returned to Mumbai, where they handed over 35 [Somali pirates](#) to local police. The men face prosecution under an Indian law, passed in 2022, which allows the navy to apprehend pirates in international waters. Somali pirates have completed or attempted more than 20 hijackings since November.

**Figure of the day:** 30%. The fee collected by Apple, a tech giant, on most purchases made using the App Store. [Read the full story](#).



Photo: Getty Images

## **The IMF's advice to China**

On Sunday the head of the IMF, Kristalina Georgieva, who this month won crucial European backing for a second term, gave a speech to the China Development Forum, a gabfest for foreign investors and businessmen in Beijing. The fund and China agree on some things, including the dangers of trade wars and decoupling (which the IMF calls “geoeconomic fragmentation”).

Ms Georgieva and China's leaders also agree that the country needs to shift from fast growth to “high-quality” growth. But they may differ in what that transition requires. Ms Georgieva urged China to embrace a package of “pro-market reforms”, which include raising the retirement age to 65, levelling the playing field between state-owned enterprises and private firms, and boosting the country's social-security system to encourage consumption. The transformation will not be easy, she warned, especially for China's younger generations, “who have lived their whole lives in an environment of exceptionally high growth rates”.



Photo: Alamy

## Weekend profile: María Corina Machado, Venezuela's opposition leader

Long dismissed as too radical, too outspoken and way too posh to get anywhere in Venezuelan politics, María Corina Machado has spent the past year proving her critics wrong. She won an opposition primary last October by a landslide and [would roundly defeat](#) Nicolás Maduro, the country's authoritarian president, in a fair election. So would almost anyone, of course—but for Ms Machado the revenge would be especially sweet.

For decades she has been one of the fiercest critics of *chavismo*, the leftist populist movement set up by the late Hugo Chávez. His corruption and cronyism spawned the disastrous collapse of the Venezuelan economy under Mr Maduro, his chosen successor. In 2012 Ms Machado achieved iconic status among conservatives by calling out *chavismo*'s failings on live television, to Chávez's face. In the national assembly, Ms Machado, then a congresswoman, interrupted an interminable speech by Chávez to suggest that his policy of expropriating private businesses would be better described as "theft". The president's boorish response was that debating her was entirely beneath him. The interaction aged

appallingly for *chavismo*, while Ms Machado has been proved right.

A qualified industrial engineer, mother of three and daughter of a wealthy industrialist—whose steel factories were expropriated (and then mismanaged to destruction) by the Chávez government—Ms Machado is a firm believer in free markets. Most of the 56-year-old's economic policies could be described as centre-right.

The Maduro regime portrays her as a merciless extremist, citing her support for American sanctions and falsely claiming that she backed American military intervention against Venezuela. In June 2023 it banned her from politics for 15 years, and upheld that decision after she won the primary in October. Since then, it has also begun persecuting those who work with her. So far nine of her party workers have been arrested for allegedly planning to organise street violence. Ms Machado, whose political slogan is “hasta el final”—until the end—has promised that none of the regime's intimidation tactics will ever faze her.



Photo: Getty Images

**Intermittent fasting may strain the heart**

Intermittent fasting is a broad church. Its practitioners range from occasional breakfast-skippers to committed clock-watchers, who proselytise the diet's weight-loss benefits. In fairness, some studies have backed these claims—but only with respect to short-term effects. Now, the first long-term study of intermittent fasting has cast doubt on its supposed health-giving qualities.

The study, by a Chinese team and presented at a conference of the American Heart Association, analysed data from 20,000 American adults over a median of eight years. It found that those who reported eating only within an eight-hour daily window had a 91% higher risk of death from cardiovascular disease.

The research, however, has not been peer reviewed and did not investigate why restricted mealtimes might contribute to worse heart health. This omission, among other limitations, means that the study is unlikely to bring any hardcore fasters to the breakfast table. For now then, intermittent fasting will remain the subject of (early) dinnertime debates.



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

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



**Sylvester Tan**, Dallas, Texas, America

**Jennifer Stapleton**, Cheltenham, Britain

**Willy Zimmer**, Casper, Wyoming, America

They all gave the correct answers of Babylon, Olympia Dukakis, Rhodes, Lighthouse Family and a pyramid scheme. The theme is the seven wonders of the ancient world: the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the statue of Zeus at Olympia, the Colossus of Rhodes, the lighthouse of Alexandria and the Great Pyramid of Giza.

The questions were:

**Monday:** Rastafarians use the name of which ancient Mesopotamian city to refer to the white western world?

**Tuesday:** Which actress, who won an Oscar for Moonstruck, was a cousin of a Democratic Presidential candidate?

**Wednesday:** Which Greek island, the largest in the Dodecanese, was ruled by the knights of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem from 1310 to 1522?

**Thursday:** Which pop act, which rose to fame in the mid-1990s, had hits such as “Ocean Drive” and “Lifted”?

**Friday:** Which fraudulent marketing scheme requires participant

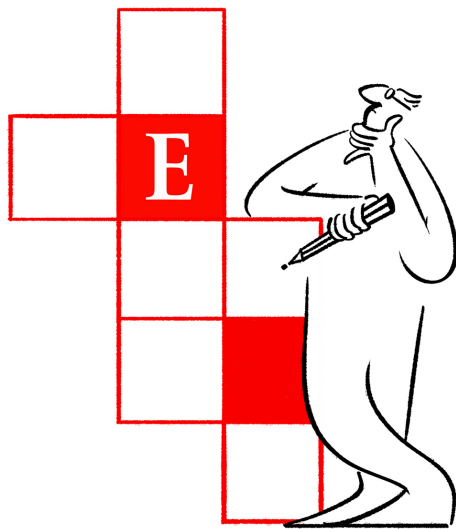


Photo: Reuters

## Senegal's long-awaited election

Little more than a month ago Senegal was in the midst of a [constitutional crisis](#). Macky Sall, the departing president, had tried to delay elections by ten months. His [most popular rival](#) was behind bars and disqualified from running. Security forces were beating and arresting protesters. Many feared that a country widely seen as a bulwark of stability in the region was now going the same way as all those others beset by bloody [coups and overstaying presidents](#).

So it is with relief that citizens of one of Africa's most vibrant democracies finally went to the polls on Sunday. Senegal's constitutional court slapped down Mr Sall's bid to postpone them, and his opponents have since been released from prison. Of the 19 contenders now on the ballot at least three are real contenders to succeed Mr Sall, who is not running. A vote many feared might not happen is instead set to be a nail-biter.



## Weekly crossword

Our crossword has two sets of clues, one for seasoned cruciverbalists and the other for less experienced solvers. Both give



the same answers, all of which feature in articles in this week's edition of *The Economist*:

### **Cryptic clues**

- 1 *down* Form of fighting animated far cry: "beware" (12)
- 1 *across* Office of National Statistics not needed in consensus count (6)
- 2 *across* Earnings years after last cashflow (5)
- 3 *across* Great flight book (6)

### **Factual clues**

- 1 *down* One type of aggression that Russia is inflicting on Ukraine (12)
- 1 *across* What reveals levels of migration (6)
- 2 *across* What Japan's biggest firms recently agreed to raise (5)
- 3 *across* What pandemic-era lockdowns triggered in Indian cities (6)

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am GMT on Monday to [\[email protected\]](#). We will pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners in next week's edition.

1					
2					
3					



Photo: Getty Images

## NFL franchises are too big to buy

NFL American football teams are the most valuable sports clubs on the planet. According to Sportico, a sports analysis company, 12 of the top 20 belong to the league. Their success in selling out stadiums and attracting the biggest sports broadcasting deal in

history has made NFL owners extraordinarily rich. But it has also created a big problem. So valuable are the NFL franchises that it has become very difficult to find anyone with deep enough pockets to buy them.

At the owners' latest pow-wow, which begins on Saturday in Florida, loosening the league's strict investment rules (the lead owner needs to control at least 30%, among other stipulations) could thus be up for discussion. In 2022 the National Basketball Association relaxed its rules to permit private-equity firms to buy up to 20% of a team and sovereign wealth funds to own up to 5%. The NFL is unlikely to go so far immediately, but the sale of passive stakes to local investors is increasingly likely in the long run.

*Only great minds can afford a simple style.*

*Stendhal*