

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 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. In a televised address, **President Vladimir Putin** did not mention the group's involvement. Instead, he promised to "punish everyone who stands behind the terrorists" and tried to connect the attackers to Ukraine.

Russia bombarded **Ukraine** for the fourth night in a row, striking Kyiv and the western city of Lviv. Air defences intercepted most of the missiles and drones, according to Ukrainian officials. **Poland** said that one missile entered its air space, 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.

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 being [elected 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.

America's **Federal Aviation Administration** is considering preventing **United Airlines** from adding new routes and taking paying passengers on new aircraft, Bloomberg reported. The regulator is said to be concerned about several recent incidents involving the carrier. One plane ran off a taxiway; another shed a tyre soon after takeoff.

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

Slovakia's high-stakes election

Slovaks choose their new president on Saturday. Ivan Korčok, a pro-Western former diplomat, and Peter Pellegrini, a close ally of the populist prime minister, Robert Fico, are expected to progress to the second round on April 6th. Since his [return to power](#) in October, Mr Fico has attacked independent institutions. The liberal outgoing president, Zuzana Caputova, managed to hold off his attempts to soften anti-corruption laws. But Mr Pellegrini, a former member of Mr Fico's Smer party, would be more amenable.

The election will also test Slovakia's support for Ukraine. Mr Fico ended military aid in October and has drawn closer to Russia. Earlier this month, the Czech Republic, historically Slovakia's ally, suspended intergovernmental consultations after the Slovak foreign minister met his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov. Only 40% of Slovaks believe that Russia is primarily responsible for the war; 34% blame the West. Unlike Hungary, though, Slovakia has not blocked EU or NATO decisions related to Ukraine—yet.



Photo: EPA

Pakistan's gloomy day

On Saturday the country celebrates Pakistan Day. It commemorates the Lahore Resolution of 1940, which called for a separate homeland for India's Muslims and laid the foundation for the country's creation. But this year there is little reason to cheer.

The country faces all sorts of problems. Inflation is running high. Public finances are precarious as the government awaits \$1.1bn in emergency funding from the IMF. Terrorism continues to plague the country. On Wednesday [Baloch-separatist militants](#) attacked the port of Gwadar, the centrepiece of the China-Pakistan Economic [Corridor](#).

Stability is badly needed. But the army-backed coalition government, which came to power last month in rigged elections, [looks wobbly](#). Despite the army's myriad ploys to discredit him, Imran Khan, a former prime minister who is in jail for multiple convictions, remains hugely popular. That has resulted in extreme measures to control dissent. Police have cracked down on protests and X (formerly Twitter) has been blocked in the country.



Photo: Getty Images

The green light at the end of the tunnel

On Saturday, between 8.30pm and 9.30pm local time around the world, lights will go out. That, at least, is the hope of the World Wildlife Fund, a charity which organises an annual “Earth Hour”. The action is more symbolic than practical: using figures for 2021, a crude calculation suggests that knocking out all of the world’s electricity for one hour would reduce consumption by about three terawatt-hours, cutting carbon emissions by at most 1.7 megatons (about 0.004% of the annual total). And emissions from global electricity use have grown steadily since the first Earth Hour in 2007, reaching their highest level in 2023.

But some things are heading in the right direction. The amount of new electricity demand met using renewable sources was almost 50% higher in 2023 than in 2022. The trend looks set to continue: in November governments at [COP28](#) pledged to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030 (from 2022 levels).



Photo: LMK

Ghostbusters returns from the grave

Ivan Reitman’s supernatural comedy, “Ghostbusters”, was among the highest-grossing films of 1984. Five years later, “Ghostbusters II” proved less successful and a reboot, also called “Ghostbusters”, suffered a painful death at the box office in 2016. Jason Reitman, the son of the director of the first two films, had a little more luck in 2021. In “Ghostbusters: Afterlife” the surviving original team members—played by Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd and Ernie Hudson—passed the proton packs to a younger group of paranormal investigators played by Paul Rudd, Carrie Coon and others.

Now Mr Reitman has co-written and produced another sequel, “Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire”. It captures the rowdy spirit of the 1984 classic but tries to squeeze in Ghostbusters both old and new, along with a crowd of supporting characters. That does not leave much room for laughs or scares—or ghosts. After 40 years, it might finally be time to let the franchise rest in peace.



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.



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:

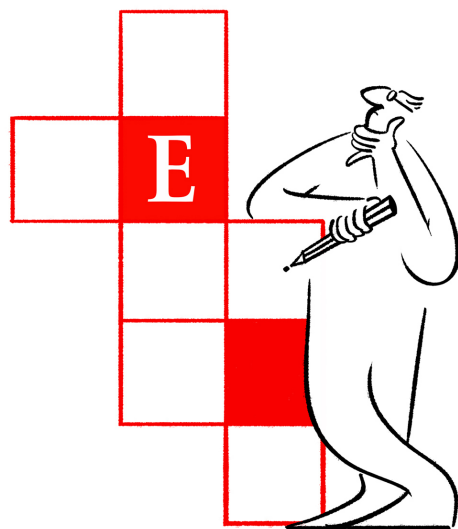
Monday: Rastafarians use the name of which ancient Mesopotamian city to refer to the white western world?

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



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*:

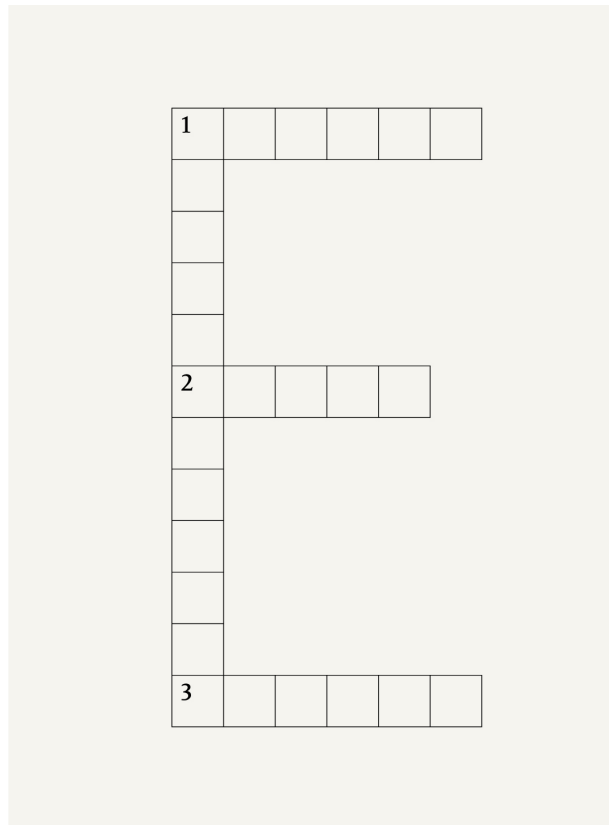
Cryptic clues

- 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.



Only great minds can afford a simple style.

Stendhal