

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter

Delegations from **Russia** and **Ukraine** sat down for their first direct peace talks in three years in [Turkey](#), after the meeting was delayed from Thursday. America's secretary of state, **Marco Rubio**, will mediate the talks. But expectations are low: the presidents of Ukraine and Russia will not attend. President Donald Trump has said that progress will be slow unless he meets Vladimir Putin.

Concluding his tour of the Gulf, Donald Trump unveiled deals totalling \$200bn with the **United Arab Emirates** (though many may prove [illusory](#)). They include Etihad Airways' \$14.5bn purchase of Boeing aircraft and GE engines. The countries also agreed to build the world's largest AI campus outside America, giving the UAE access to advanced chips—despite worries about [smuggling](#) to China.

Mr Trump said he would be “proud” to take control of **Gaza** and make it a “freedom zone”. Meanwhile Israeli air strikes reportedly killed more than 100 people on Thursday, a day after **Israel** issued an evacuation order for civilians in Gaza city and stepped up its campaign there. Under a new cabinet-approved plan, Israel aims to [reoccupy parts of the enclave](#).

Walmart said it would raise prices because of Mr Trump's tariffs. The [American supermarket](#) giant said that reduced tariff levels on Chinese imports are still “too high”. The firm reported a drop in first-quarter profit from the previous three months. It did not forecast income for the coming quarter, citing a “lack of clarity”.

A 21-year-old Ukrainian national was charged with arson to endanger life after allegedly setting fire to properties and a car

linked to **Sir Keir Starmer**, Britain's prime minister. Last week police in London responded to three blazes. One was at Sir Keir's family home, which is being rented out. Another was at a former address, according to the BBC.

The Red Cross said it evacuated nearly 1,400 disarmed soldiers and their families from Goma, a war-torn city in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**. Rwanda-backed M23 rebels [seized control](#) of Goma in January, [ravaging](#) much of it. Rwanda complains that Congo is sheltering a Hutu militia involved in the 1994 genocide. Congo's president says Rwanda covets the country's mineral wealth.

A baby became the [world's first patient](#) to be treated with a personalised **gene-editing therapy**. Doctors used CRISPR technology to design a drug specifically for KJ, who was born with a rare genetic disease in Philadelphia last year. The breakthrough, achieved within months, could allow such treatments to one day become routine for children with debilitating genetic diseases.

Figure of the day: 16%, the increase in the average weight of a slaughtered cow in Brazil since 1997. [Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: Alamy

Japan's taxation debate

[Japan's economy](#) is feeling the squeeze from the rising cost of living and the turmoil caused by Donald Trump's tariff threats. These pressures have reignited debates over the country's consumption tax of 10% for most goods and 8% for essentials such as [food](#). Cutting the tax was once a left-wing rallying cry, but the idea has more recently gained support from opposition parties across the political spectrum, ahead of an election this summer. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party has called such proposals fiscally reckless, saying the tax helps fund social programmes for Japan's ageing population.

Adding to the pressure, on Friday the country released lousy preliminary GDP figures for the first quarter of 2025. They suggest the economy shrank by an annualised 0.7%, the first contraction in a year. Private consumption—which makes up more than half of the country's GDP—rose only marginally. Household spending remained weak due to higher food prices. The controversy over Japan's consumption tax will continue.



Photograph: Reuters

Syria after sanctions

On Tuesday Donald Trump said that America would [lift sanctions on Syria](#) to give the country “a chance at greatness”. Western sanctions, imposed on the dictatorial regime of Bashar al-Assad, have isolated the country from the global economy. But Mr Assad was toppled in 2024 after 13 years of civil war. Syria’s new leader, [Ahmed al-Sharaa](#), a former jihadist, has made relief from sanctions a priority. Mr Trump’s decision will aid his attempts to rebuild the economy.

The removal of sanctions will restore access to international payments systems and increase aid and investment. Foreign firms may bid for reconstruction contracts. But the road ahead will be difficult. Mr Trump’s decision took many American officials by surprise, leaving them to work out just how to peel away layers of sanctions. It may also require congressional approval. Syrians celebrated Mr Trump’s message. But it may take some time for them to benefit from it.

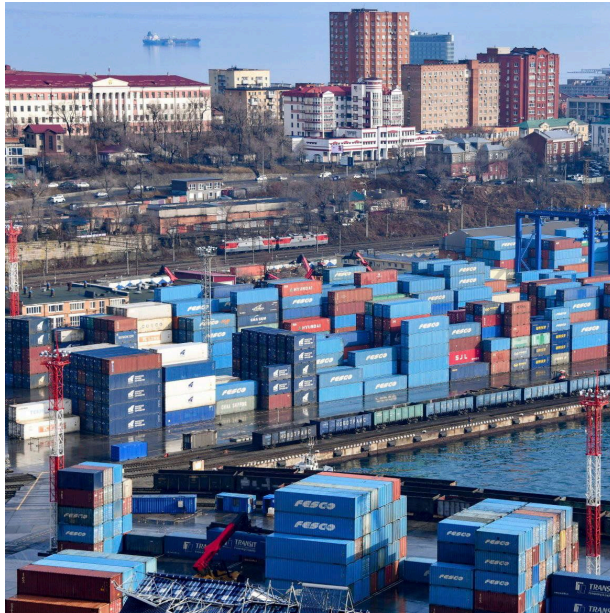


Photograph: Reuters

America's budget conundrum

Ordering a pizza for a crowd is tricky: everyone wants different toppings—and some don't belong on the same pie. Republicans on the Budget Committee of America's House of Representatives have a similar problem. The party is trying to [pass a bill](#) to fund Donald Trump's policy priorities and extend tax cuts that expire next year. Eleven House committees have begun drafting parts of the bill. The Budget Committee's job, which begins on Friday, is to make them all work together.

Unfortunately, like anchovies and pineapple, some don't pair well. Fiscal conservatives want to slash spending. Meanwhile some Republicans from high-tax blue states want to raise or remove a cap on how much taxpayers can deduct from their federal taxes to offset state and local taxes they have paid. That would be expensive. And Senate Republicans, who must also approve the bill, object to proposed cuts to Medicaid, a federal health-insurance scheme for the poor. Whatever the committee comes up with, some will find it hard to swallow.



Photograph: AP

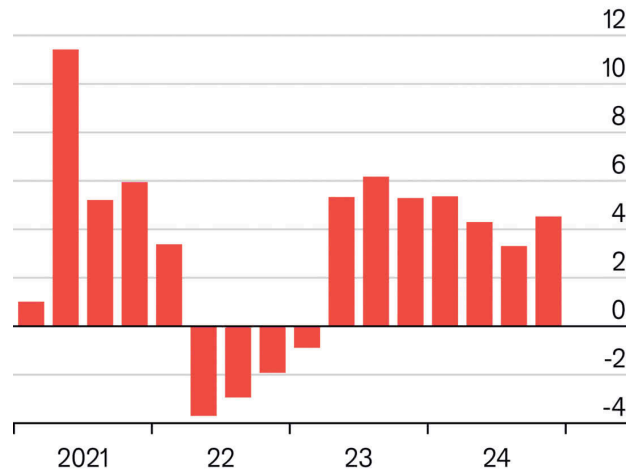
Russia's bear market

Since Vladimir Putin launched his invasion of Ukraine three years ago, Russia's economy has outperformed almost all forecasts. Following a mild recession in 2022, it grew rapidly in 2023 and 2024. But GDP figures released on Friday are [expected to confirm](#) what less comprehensive data have suggested for weeks. Russia's economy is slowing.

Year-on-year growth in the first quarter probably halved from 4.5% in the final quarter of 2024. There are three big reasons. First, Russia's wartime infrastructure splurge, which went towards [building up ports and roads](#) in the east, is coming to an end. Second, a military-spending push over the last couple of years is slowing. Third, lower oil prices—brought about by Donald Trump's trade war and [rising supply](#) from the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries—are reducing energy companies' revenues. The worsening economic situation will not force Mr Putin to the negotiating table. Yet talk of "Fortress Russia" looks increasingly wide of the mark.

Impregnable?

Russia, GDP, % change on a year earlier



Source: Haver Analytics



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 [\[email protected\]](#). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Friday: Which traditional Australian song begins with the line “Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong”?

Thursday: The state of Georgia has a nickname associated with which fruit?



Illustration: The Economist

The winners of this 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:

Jud Sinton, Hamilton, Canada

Carlos Sangil, Madrid, Spain

Marie-Christine Di Bartolo, County Donegal, Ireland

They all gave the correct answers of [Lahore](#), [Naira](#), [Greece](#) and [Lawrence Wong](#).

*The less there is of eloquence, the
more there is of love.*

Charles Perrault