

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

The **Pentagon** said it struck a boat in the eastern Pacific that it suspected of carrying drugs, killing four people. It said the attack was authorised by Pete Hegseth, the secretary of war. Mr Hegseth is coming under [increasing scrutiny](#) over the legality of his boat-bombing campaign. American forces have carried out more than 20 confirmed strikes, killing at least 87 people.

**Warner Bros Discovery** is reportedly in exclusive talks with **Netflix** to sell its streaming platform, HBO Max, and its film studios. The American media company has attracted interest from several buyers, including Paramount, another old Hollywood studio now owned by [David Ellison](#), the son of Larry Ellison, a tech billionaire.

Vladimir Putin said there were parts of America's [plan](#) to end **Russia's** invasion of **Ukraine** that he couldn't agree to. Speaking to Indian television ahead of a state visit to Delhi, Mr Putin said that Ukrainian troops would either have to leave the Donbas region or it would be taken by force. The prospect of either happening soon is [slim](#).

America's Supreme Court ruled that **Texas** could [redraw its electoral map](#) so that it benefits Republicans. That will help Donald

Trump's aim of keeping control of the House of Representatives in next year's midterm elections. Last month a lower court struck down the state's gerrymandering attempt.

A British government inquiry found that **Mr Putin** authorised the attempted killing of **Sergei Skripal**, a former Russian spy, in Britain in 2018. Mr Skripal survived contact with a nerve agent, but a British woman who was exposed to it died. Sir Keir Starmer, Britain's prime minister, announced new sanctions on Russia. On Wednesday [he told](#) *The Economist* that the Kremlin was interfering in Britain's democracy.

The **European Commission** opened an antitrust probe into **Meta** over its integration of "Meta AI" into WhatsApp, its messaging app. The commission is concerned that rival chatbots could be shut out. Italy is already investigating the social-media giant for this. The case will proceed under traditional antitrust rules, potentially allowing broader penalties than the bloc's new [Digital Markets Act](#). WhatsApp called the claims "baseless".

Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain pulled out of next year's **Eurovision Song Contest**. The countries are angry at Israel's inclusion in the wildly popular singathon. The European Broadcasting Union, which runs the competition, has [refused](#) to vote on whether to bar Israel for its war in Gaza. Ireland is the joint-most-successful country in Eurovision's 69-year history. Slovenia came seventh in 2001.

**Figure of the day:** 9,000, the number of SpaceX's Starlink satellites in space. That is causing problems for astronomers. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

## The Fed's blind spot

Data delayed by America's [government shutdown](#) are still trickling out. Next up are the personal income and outlays figures for September, which will be published on Friday. The release includes spending data as well as the personal-consumption-expenditures inflation measure, which is the Federal Reserve's formal target.

The numbers may help solve two puzzles about the American economy. One is why [GDP](#) growth and [spending](#) are strong while the labour market is weakening. Retail sales in September were lower than expected; if overall spending is also soft, that might suggest a broader slowdown.

Meanwhile, [PCE](#) inflation will show how hard it will be for the Federal Reserve to balance sustaining [employment](#) and keeping prices stable. But even this new data will hardly be that fresh: September is now a while back. America's economy-watchers will be looking at dated data for a while longer.



Photograph: Alamy

## Can Germany persuade Belgium to help Ukraine?

It was once a fantasy of columnists and think-tankers. But in September, with Ukraine facing a [financial squeeze](#) after the withdrawal of American aid, Friedrich Merz, Germany's chancellor, backed an outlandish idea: issuing Ukraine a €140bn (\$163bn) "reparations loan" secured mainly by Russian central-bank assets immobilised at Euroclear, a securities house in Brussels. The money would be repaid once Russia had compensated Ukraine for its invasion.

It looked like a neat way for the EU to [help Ukraine](#) without racking up giant debts. But Belgium, which feared being left on the repayment hook, resisted fiercely. On Wednesday the European Commission issued a bold proposal designed to placate its concerns (and to stop Russia-friendly Hungary from nobbling the plan). But Bart de Wever, Belgium's prime minister, remains implacable. So on Friday Mr Merz will travel to Brussels for a tense dinner with his Belgian counterpart. Ursula von der Leyen, the commission president, will join too. Expect thumbscrews to be applied.



Photograph: Reuters

## India's plummeting rupee

The Reserve Bank of India cut its key policy rate on Friday for the first time in six months. The repo rate at which banks borrow from the RBI was lowered by 25 basis points to 5.25%. A [strong economy](#) had fuelled expectations of a rate cut. India's annual inflation was 0.25% in October, far below the RBI's target of 4%. A 5% fall in food prices over the same period and reforms to India's national sales tax also contributed to lower prices.

A plummeting [currency](#) subsequently complicated matters. Sanjay Malhotra, the central bank's governor, who took over in December 2024, has been more willing to allow the currency to depreciate than his predecessor. But on Wednesday the rupee slipped past 90 to the dollar, its lowest-ever level. So the rate cut will put even more pressure on the currency.



Photograph: Reuters

## Shein faces a legal reckoning in France

A Paris court will on Friday hear France's request for a temporary ban on [Shein](#). Last month the French government asked for a suspension of the fast-fashion retailer's website for three months, after third-party sellers were found to be trading childlike sex-dolls and lethal weapons, including machetes, on its online marketplace. The government said the suspension was intended to allow Shein to comply with the law. Roland Lescure, the finance minister, called the availability of child-pornographic products "disgusting".

In response to the government proceedings, Shein disabled its third-party marketplace, while keeping its own clothing retail operations open. The government's move came just as the retailer opened its first physical shop in France, inside a department store in Paris. Protesters, retailers and local officials argue that Shein's ultra-cheap goods threaten domestic jobs, undercut established brands and [flout environmental standards](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

## Peace and love at the World Cup Draw

The [biggest-ever](#) men's football [World Cup](#) is six months away. America, Canada and Mexico will co-host 48 teams, up from 32 previously. Curacao, Cape Verde, Jordan and Uzbekistan will debut. The group-stage draw takes place on Friday in Washington, DC. This time FIFA, the organisers, will ensure that the top-four teams in its rankings—Spain, Argentina (the reigning champions), France and England—will not meet before the semi-finals. FIFA might argue it rewards consistent performance; cynics see it as a way to ensure the biggest teams reach the late stages.

That is the least of the politicking. FIFA's president, Gianni Infantino, will also award a new “peace prize” to someone who has “helped to unite people all over the world”. Mr Infantino has previously sucked up to another president in Washington known to covet peace prizes. [Donald Trump](#) will be attending the draw; he may not leave empty-handed.



Illustration: The Economist

## Daily quiz

We will serve you a new question each weekday. On Friday your challenge is to give us all five answers and tell us the theme. Email your responses (and your home city and country) by 1700 GMT on Friday to [\[email protected\]](mailto:[email protected]). We'll pick three winners at random and crown them on Saturday.

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

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

*Never fear quarrels, but seek  
hazardous adventures.*

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**Alexandre Dumas**