

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

America's **Department of Justice** asked a federal judge to unseal grand-jury testimony about **Jeffrey Epstein**, as controversy over the convicted paedophile [continued to engulf Donald Trump's](#) administration. Such material is usually kept secret. Meanwhile Mr Trump sued the ***Wall Street Journal's*** publisher and its owner, Rupert Murdoch, for libel over a story claiming he wrote a risqué birthday note to Epstein in 2003 (which the president denies).

**Israel** and **Syria** agreed to a ceasefire, according to America's envoy to Turkey. On Wednesday Israel struck Damascus, Syria's capital, and began attacking government forces in the south-west following [an outbreak](#) of sectarian violence in the predominantly Druze province of Suwayda. Earlier on Friday Israel said it would allow Syrian forces limited access to the area for two days so they could try to restore stability there.

**Meta** rejected signing the **European Union's** code of practice for general-purpose AI, a voluntary set of rules instructing companies how to comply with the [bloc's AI law](#). Joel Kaplan, Meta's global-affairs boss, said that the code exceeded the law's scope. Other firms, such as Airbus, have said they won't sign the code, but Meta is the first tech giant to pass.

**ExxonMobil**, the world's biggest independent energy company, lost its bid to block its rival **Chevron** from acquiring **Hess**, an oil firm. An arbitration panel rejected Exxon's argument that it had a contractual right of first refusal to lucrative assets that Hess owns in Guyana. The victory clears the way for Chevron to complete the \$53bn takeover deal it struck in 2023.

**El Salvador** sent home over 250 **Venezuelans** [who had been detained there](#) after **America** deported them. In exchange, Venezuela released dozens of political prisoners, including ten Americans. Marco Rubio, the secretary of state, announced the Americans' homecoming. An earlier attempt to reach a deal was reportedly botched when Mr Trump's envoy to Venezuela conducted his own negotiations separately from Mr Rubio.

**Binyamin Netanyahu** called **Pope Leo** a day after **Israel** struck the only Catholic church in Gaza. The attack killed three Palestinians and wounded ten people, including the parish priest, whom the late Pope Francis had [phoned daily](#) during the war. On Thursday Mr Trump called the Israeli prime minister to convey his displeasure; Israel issued a rare apology.

**Astronomer**, an American tech company, launched an investigation and suspended its boss, Andy Byron, after a clip of a couple embracing at a Coldplay concert went viral. The pair abruptly hid after they appeared on a giant screen at the Boston gig. Internet sleuths quickly claimed to have identified the duo as Mr Byron and one of his senior executives—both of whom are married to other people.

**Figure of the day:** 600,000, the number of people killed by cancer in America each year. [Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: Getty Images

## **The world braces for Trump's tariff storm**

Trade talks between Japan and America are intensifying ahead of a tariff deadline on August 1st. Donald Trump has warned that, without a deal, America will probably keep tariffs of 25% on Japanese imports. On Friday Ishiba Shigeru, Japan's prime minister, will meet Scott Bessent, America's treasury secretary. Mr Trump wants Japan to buy more American weapons, food and cars. But Japan has ruled out any deal that might harm its farmers or carmakers. Japan has proposed a tariff formula based on how much countries invest in America's car industry, a sector in which Japanese companies invested a lot. America is yet to bite.

Japan is not alone. Over the past fortnight Mr Trump has sent letters to more than 20 countries threatening high tariffs. Some are exploring joint retaliation; others are paying up. Indonesia avoided steeper tariffs by pledging to buy more than \$19bn of American energy and farm products. The clock is ticking. Mr Trump shows [no signs of chickening out](#).



Photograph: Reuters

## Growing repression in El Salvador

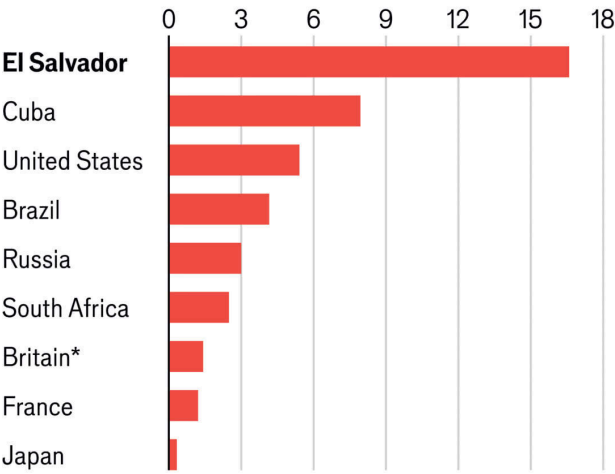
Cristosal, an NGO that promotes human rights in Central America, is shutting down its operations in El Salvador. The move comes as President Nayib Bukele [intensifies his crackdown on dissent](#). Ruth López, who led Cristosal's anti-corruption investigations, was arrested in May and remains in detention. She helped document abuses in the country's overcrowded prisons and had accused the government of misusing pandemic funds.

Mr Bukele remains popular, mainly because his government has greatly reduced gang violence. Human-rights defenders have criticised his method—mass incarceration without trial. Of late Mr Bukele has become more repressive. Ms López's arrest was a turning point: since it happened journalists, lawyers and activists, fearing similar treatment, have left the country.

Cristosal was one of the few independent organisations still monitoring the government. Its departure, and the exodus of journalists, will make it even harder to challenge El Salvador's authoritarian turn.

**Slammer crammer**

**Prison population per 1,000 people**  
Selected countries, 2024 or latest available



\*England and Wales  
Source: World Prison Brief



Photograph: AP

## America's housebuilding slowdown

America's economy is [growing despite Donald Trump's trade war](#). Even so, economists will scrutinise June's data on housing starts, released on Friday, for signs of weakness. In May new construction activity was at a five-year low. It recovered only slightly in June.

High borrowing costs are one reason for the slowdown. Thirty-year fixed mortgage rates are around their highest level in two decades, hurting demand for new homes. Mr Trump has pressed the Federal Reserve to lower interest rates. But the president's tariffs have made the housing slowdown worse; America imports lots of construction materials. Deportations of workers who entered America illegally could also raise labour costs. Many housebuilders are not starting developments because of the uncertainty. Mr Trump will be hoping that the housebuilding slowdown is temporary—and not a sign of rot in the economy's foundations.



Photograph: Alamy

## Peak migration politics in Bavaria

As a site for what is billed as a “summit”, it is hard to beat: on Friday the interior ministers of France, Poland, Austria, the Czech Republic and [Denmark](#) are convening on the Zugspitze in Bavaria, Germany’s highest mountain, at the invitation of their German counterpart, Alexander Dobrindt (pictured). The ministers’ “Zugspitze declaration” will propose reforms to the European Union’s rules on irregular migration, including easing the deportation of failed asylum-seekers.

Happily for the ministers, Europe’s asylum problem has become less acute. After a post-pandemic spike, asylum claims in the EU have been falling for almost two years. A toughened-up EU asylum pact is anyway due to take effect next year. Meanwhile, Mr Dobrindt may have some explaining to do: controls he has implemented at Germany’s borders have undermined the EU’s passport-free Schengen zone, and potentially violated domestic law. The Poles in particular are angry. Placating them may be an uphill struggle—even at 3,000 metres.



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 detective first appeared in the story “The Mysterious Affair At Styles”?

**Thursday:** Which martial arts star appears in “Bloodsport”, “Universal Soldier” and “Timecop”?





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:

**Brenda Boere**, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

**Jaime Jean**, Mexico City, Mexico

**Andrew Narracott**, London, Britain

They all gave the correct answers of junta, Anglo, Earth and [JPMorgan Chase](#).

*There are times when a leader  
must move ahead of his flock.*

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***Nelson Mandela***