

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: AP

The Israel Defence Forces said it had begun the “preliminary actions” of its planned assault on Gaza city and that it had already taken control of the city’s outskirts. In anticipation of the takeover, the IDF called up 60,000 reservists and extended the service of 20,000 already activated. Meanwhile the government mulled a new ceasefire proposal that [Hamas](#) reportedly agreed to.

The European Union and America set out new details of a **trade deal**, the outline of which was agreed on last month. Among them are a requirement for the EU to lower [tariffs](#) on American goods in order for its cars to face a reduced rate of 15%. The statement also hints at the possibility of cutting levies on European steel and aluminium.

Russia’s foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, said the Kremlin will only agree to security guarantees for **Ukraine** that give it a veto over any activation of those guarantees, in effect [making them worthless](#). His comments seemed to contradict America’s claim that Vladimir Putin, who met Donald Trump on Friday, had agreed to European and American security guarantees.

The **International Criminal Court** condemned new sanctions that America imposed on two of its judges, and two prosecutors. On

Wednesday Marco Rubio, the secretary of state, accused them of waging “lawfare” against America and [Israel](#). He condemned the ICC for being a “[national security threat](#)”. France also criticised the move; one of its judges was among those sanctioned.

Lawmakers in **Texas** passed a redrawing of the state’s electoral map, which Republicans believe will help them win five additional districts in the House of Representatives. Democratic lawmakers who had fled the state to delay [Republican gerrymandering](#) returned on Monday. Meanwhile, lawmakers in California prepared to vote on whether to hold a referendum on a new map that would make five congressional districts easier wins for Democrats.

Lisa Cook, a **Federal Reserve** board member appointed by Joe Biden, said she had “no intention of being bullied to step down” from her position. Mr Trump wants her to resign over allegations of mortgage fraud. The president is [pressing](#) the central bank and its chair, Jerome Powell, to lower interest rates.

Denmark will abolish value-added tax on books to encourage reading. Nearly a quarter of Danish 15-year-olds have [trouble understanding](#) simple texts, according to a recent [OECD](#) report. The Danish government said that the 25% sales tax, the world’s highest, was contributing to the “reading crisis”. The proposal will cost the annual budget an estimated 330m kroner (\$52m).

Figure of the day: 12%. The rise in female active-duty members in America’s armed forces since 2005. In that period the number of male soldiers fell by 10%. [Read the full story.](#)

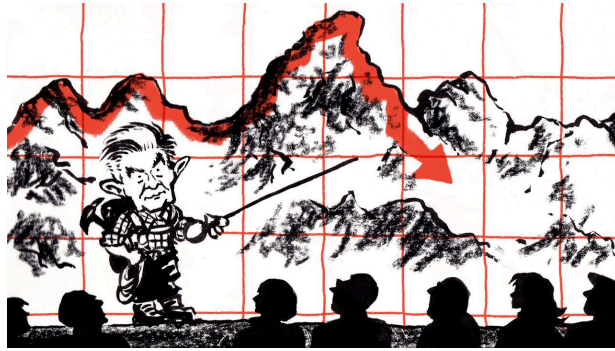


Illustration: David Simonds

Powell's final view from the summit

A full cast of central-banking celebrities are descending on Jackson Hole, Wyoming, for the monetary-policy world's biggest annual jamboree. But top billing will go to [Jerome Powell](#), the chair of America's Federal Reserve, who is speaking on Friday. Over the past few years, his speeches have been the main event at the Kansas City Federal Reserve's conference. In 2024, Mr Powell set the stage for interest-rate cuts as [inflation looked to finally be subsiding](#). The policy rate has fallen by a percentage point since, to 4.5%.

Mr Powell's speech at this year's conference will be the last of his tenure; his term as Fed chair expires in May 2026. Over the past 12 months, America's macroeconomy has become, if anything, tougher to read. Tariffs are yanking up inflation, but maybe only temporarily. A sharp slowdown in migration is choking labour supply. And pressure on the Fed from the White House is higher than at any point since at least the Nixon years.



Photograph: Getty Images

Walmart stretches the dollar

The world's largest company by revenue reported healthy earnings on Thursday. Walmart takes in a tenth of America's retail spending, excluding cars. That makes its results a good barometer of American consumer sentiment and tariff pressures.

The company reported quarterly earnings to July 31st up by 4.8% year on year as its low prices continue to attract customers pinched by inflation. That contrasted with the shaky results from its American rivals this week: Target's revenue fell over the same period; Home Depot's sales increased but not as much as analysts had expected. Both retailers cited rising costs as a result of tariffs.

Walmart, however, may be better prepared to weather the trade storm. It has diversified its supply chains away from China and brought home some manufacturing. And despite its sprawling network of stores, Walmart has been [doubling down on e-commerce](#). Its online sales are growing at 20% a year, twice as fast as Amazon's.



Photograph: Getty Images

Italy's battle of the banks

Shareholders in Mediobanca voted on Thursday to stop the Milan-based investment bank from buying Banca Generali, the private-banking arm of Generali, Italy's biggest insurer. The move has far-reaching implications for Italy's financial sector. Mediobanca is the target of a [takeover bid](#) by Monte dei Paschi di Siena (MPS), the world's oldest lender. Its chief executive, Alberto Nagel, had hoped to stymie the hostile takeover by instead absorbing Banca Generali, which would boost the bank's value to far more than MPS is tendering.

The shareholder vote is a blow for Mr Nagel, who called the outcome a "missed opportunity". It is a coup, meanwhile, for Mediobanca's two largest investors: Francesco Gaetano Caltagirone, a construction magnate, and the investment fund of the Del Vecchio family, who are also seen as [allies of Giorgia Meloni's](#) conservative government. Both are leading investors in MPS and support its bid. It now looks a lot more feasible.



Photograph: Alamy

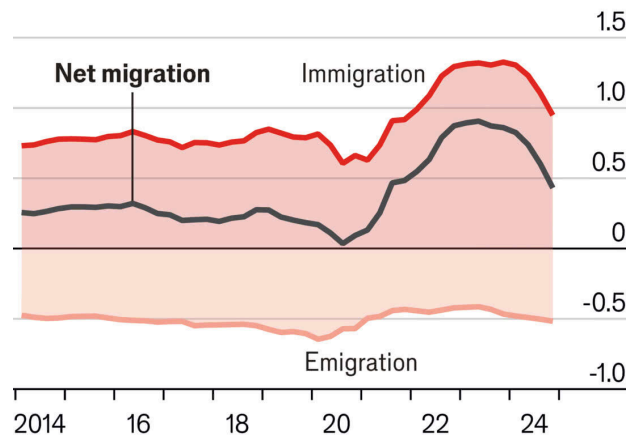
Britain's immigration tangle

On Thursday Britain's Home Office released statistics on immigration during Sir Keir Starmer's first year in office. It is a politically sensitive subject for the Labour government. Overall, net migration shot up after 2020 as the government made it easier for students and workers to obtain visas. It has fallen recently because the [rules were tightened](#).

But according to the new release, the number of asylum-seekers crossing the English Channel has risen to a record 111,084 people for the year ending in June, a rise of 14% from last year, fuelling claims that immigration is out of control. The number of asylum seekers in hotels used as temporary accommodation was up by 8% from last year, to 32,059 by the end of June, but notably lower than the peak of 56,042 in mid -2023. Protests outside these hotels have sometimes turned violent. The new data for Sir Keir's first year in office may only heat up the issue.

The road less travelled

Britain, migration flow, m
12-month moving total



Source: ONS



Photograph: Des Willie/Netflix

Nightmare on Downing Street

Britain's prime minister faces an unthinkable decision. When her husband is kidnapped in French Guiana, his captors demand that she resign to save his life. In "Hostage", a political thriller released on Netflix on Thursday, she must choose between her family and her country.

Suranne Jones, an English actress, stars as Britain's leader, who, on top of blackmail, must handle a health-care crisis and a row about immigration with France's president, played by an inscrutable Julie Delpy. Ms Jones, who was also an executive producer of the programme, said that making it convinced her that she "would never want to be prime minister".

Created by Matthew Charman, a British screenwriter who co-wrote "Bridge of Spies" (2015), the show is packed with surprising twists. Though it echoes today's controversies, the story of extortion and revenge makes this show at once immersive and escapist.



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.

Thursday: The Althing is the oldest-known example (still in existence) of what type of institution?

Wednesday: What was the first Agatha Christie novel to feature Miss Marple?

*Nothing is too beautiful, nothing
is too expensive.*

Ettore Bugatti