

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: AP

A British government inquiry found that **Vladimir 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 Russia was interfering in Britain's democracy.

The White House said that **American** and **Ukrainian** officials would meet in Florida on Thursday to continue discussions to end the war in Ukraine. President Donald Trump said the path to peace in Ukraine remained unclear, despite a “reasonably good” meeting between Russian and American officials this week. Meanwhile, Russia [attacked energy infrastructure](#) in Kherson and Odessa, two Ukrainian cities, leaving thousands of people without power.

The European Commission opened an **antitrust probe** into **Meta** over its integration of “Meta AI” into WhatsApp, its messaging app, amid concerns it could shut out rival chatbots. Italy is already investigating the social-media giant for this. The case will proceed under traditional antitrust rules, a route that allows potentially

broader penalties than the bloc's new Digital Markets Act. WhatsApp called the claims “baseless”.

Claims for **jobless benefits** in America fell to a three-year low last week, despite some reports hinting at job losses in November. The data adds to [confusion about the economy](#). Growth remains strong while the labour market looks weak, with fewer jobs openings and rising unemployment. Analysts still expect the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates at its meeting next week.

The FBI arrested a man suspected of planting pipe bombs in Washington, DC the night before the Capitol riot on January 6th 2021. Brian Cole allegedly placed the weapons, which were discovered and neutralised before they could explode, near the headquarters of the Republican and Democratic National Committees. In January Mr Trump [pardoned 1,600 rioters](#), hours after being sworn into office.

**Visa**, a payments processor, said it would start operating in **Syria**. The company will partner with the country's central bank to develop a payments system aimed at boosting economic recovery. Syria's economy has been wrecked by years of war and sanctions. Many of those sanctions have now been waived after rebel forces overthrew the bloody [regime of Bashar al-Assad](#) last year.

People **inherited** more **wealth** than ever this year, according to UBS, a Swiss bank. Some 91 people became billionaires by inheriting \$297.8bn—a third more than was passed down last year. The bank estimates that \$5.9trn will be handed to the children of billionaires over the next 15 years. Economists [worry](#) that hereditary wealth is becoming increasingly central to economic fortunes, entrenching inequality.

**Figure of the day:** \$5bn, the size of India's “emergency procurement” fund for its armed forces. [Read the full story](#).

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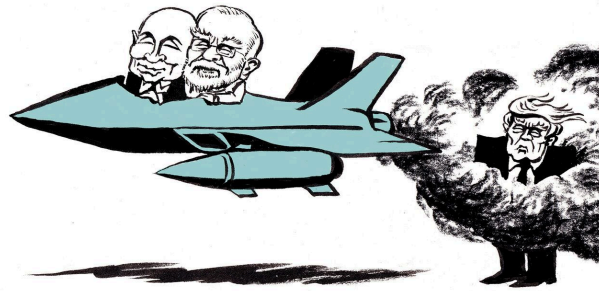


Illustration: David Simonds

## Not to be crude: Vladimir Putin visits Delhi

On Thursday Vladimir Putin arrives in India for the 23rd India-Russia summit, his first visit since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. The timing is awkward. India's [purchases of Russian oil](#) are falling as tighter American and European sanctions make transport, insurance and payments more difficult. That has led some in the West to speculate that India might be rethinking the relationship.

Their hopes are probably misplaced. Donald Trump's recent move to punish India for its Russian oil purchases—with an aggregate tariff of 50% on Indian goods—has only [pushed India closer to its long-standing partner](#). The summit is expected to advance joint projects on new weapons. Although Russia's defence industry has a growing reputation for shoddy workmanship and unreliable supply—not helped by the war in Ukraine—it remains India's biggest arms supplier, accounting for roughly 35% of its defence imports. [Russian kit](#) is typically cheaper and more readily available than Western alternatives. For now, Mr Trump seems to be making the India-Russia relationship great again.



Photograph: EPA

## Central European rifts on display at the Visegrad summit

[Karol Nawrocki](#), Poland's president, and [Viktor Orban](#), Hungary's prime minister, have much in common. Both are right-wing populist leaders who excoriate Brussels for over-reaching regulation; they denounce immigration, gay rights and green-energy policies. But when it comes to Russia, they disagree. Mr Nawrocki shares his nationalist countrymen's antagonism towards Russia; Poland is one of Ukraine's biggest supporters. Mr Orban is the most pro-Russian leader in the EU. He has tried to veto sanctions and refuses to wean his country off Russian oil and gas.

This week those differences were on display at the Visegrad summit in Hungary, an annual gathering of four central European countries (the Czech Republic and Slovakia are the others). Last week Mr Orban had a friendly visit with Vladimir Putin in Moscow. As a result, Mr Nawrocki canceled plans for a one-on-one with Mr Orban on Thursday.



Photograph: Getty Images

## Luxury watches withstand tariff pressure

Watches of Switzerland, Britain's biggest luxury-watch retailer, reported strong half-yearly results on Thursday. The company said revenues had increased by 10% year on year to £845m (\$1.1bn) for the six months ending on October 26th.

Sales of fancy timepieces have held up despite adverse events. In August the Trump administration announced 39% tariffs on [Switzerland](#), which dominates the market and ships a fifth of its watch exports to America. The following month such exports plunged by 55%. In November, however, Swiss authorities talked Donald Trump down to a 15% rate, helping to [restore demand](#).

[Affluent Americans'](#) appetite for shiny chronometers has not abated. Many, undaunted by price increases, are on waiting lists for the most in-demand watches, notes Watches of Switzerland, which sells plenty of Rolexes. As a result, the company's American business, which is now nearly as large as its British one, delivered a standout performance during the same period: a 20% boost to sales.



Photograph: Getty Images

## Trump brokers deal between Rwanda and Congo

On Thursday Donald Trump hosted the leaders of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, who signed what the White House has called a “historic peace and economic agreement”. The arrival of [Paul Kagame](#) and Felix Tshisekedi signals the latest stage of American-brokered talks to resolve the long-running conflict in the [east of Congo](#), where M23, an armed group backed by Rwanda, still controls important towns and cities.

Much remains to be worked out, not least whether this proxy force remains in Congolese territory. Yet all sides see benefits in a deal. America gets better access to critical minerals; Rwanda has built a buffer zone to its west; Congo gets the promise of more American investment. As ever, though, the people of eastern Congo, who for the time being live under the harsh rule of M23, risk being left out.



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 [\[email protected\]](#). We'll pick three winners at random and crown them on Saturday.

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

**Wednesday:** Dr Sidney Russell invented what night-time heating device in 1912?

*Political questions are far too serious to be left to the politicians.*

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***Hannah Arendt***