

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter

**Russia** hit a civilian bus with a drone in **Ukraine**, reportedly killing nine people, hours after delegations from Russia and Ukraine concluded peace talks in **Turkey**. The attack happened in the Sumy region. During the two-hour discussion Russia “voiced a number of things which we deem unacceptable”, said a Ukrainian spokesman. But the two countries agreed to swap 1,000 prisoners of war each.

Ceasefire talks between **Israel** and **Hamas** resumed in Qatar as the Israeli army pounded Gaza with deadly strikes. The bombings killed at least 58 people overnight, bringing the death toll to over 300 since Thursday. Israel began mobilising more troops. Hamas’s negotiators said that the new round of indirect talks was “without pre-conditions”.

Moody’s stripped **America** of its Aaa **credit rating** because of worries about the country’s ballooning debt. It is the last of the big-three credit-rating agencies to downgrade America from its highest band, in this case to one notch below, or Aa1. Meanwhile, a group of conservatives blocked a Republican budget bill from coming before a full House of Representatives session, arguing it would increase the deficit.

**Taiwan** safely shut its last nuclear reactor, which had generated around 3% of the country’s electricity. But Taiwan is debating bringing atomic power back into the mix as it fears possible disruptions to its mostly **imported power supply** by China. Blackouts have plagued the island. This week lawmakers revised legislation that could pave the way to switch the reactors back on.

“EAT THE TARIFFS” was Mr Trump’s advice for **Walmart**, the [world’s largest grocer](#), after it announced that it would soon raise prices in response to the global levies served up by his administration. Walmart’s boss had called these “too high” and warned that it would need to defend its narrow margins. The President suggested the blame was misplaced as the retailer made “billions of dollars” last year.

Liberal campaigners have accused **Romania’s** government of censorship ahead of a [presidential election](#) re-run on Sunday. The country’s constitutional court annulled the initial vote in November on suspicion of Russian meddling in favour of one candidate. But campaigners argue that measures to prevent online disinformation have gone too far. Since their introduction on April 4th, more than 4,000 orders to remove content have been issued.

**Novo Nordisk** got rid of its boss, Lars Fruergaard Jorgensen, amid a fall in profits. The firm did not name his successor. The Danish maker of weight-loss drugs has lost market share to competitors, especially America’s [Eli Lilly](#). Tests of new medicines have also yielded disappointing results. Novo Nordisk was Europe’s most valuable listed company last year; its shares have fallen by half from their peak.

**Word of the week:** *amphidromia*, an ancient Greek ceremony during which the father decided whether to keep a baby, or abandon it on a hillside. It’s better being a dad now. [Read the full story.](#)

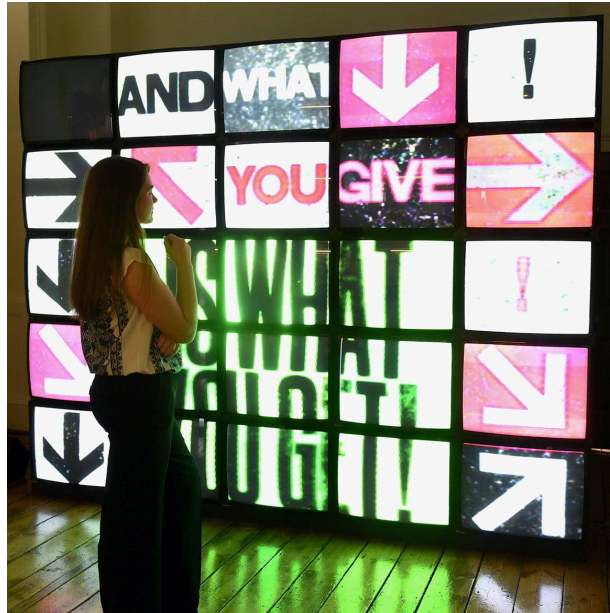


Photograph: Reuters

## Another Arab League gabfest

The Arab League will convene in Baghdad, Iraq's capital, on Saturday for a summit focusing on [Gaza](#). It comes after a week in which hundreds of Palestinians have been killed by Israel's ferocious bombardment of the enclave. Arab leaders will surely demand a ceasefire and the entry of aid: Israel has blockaded Gaza since March 2nd and food is running out. But their repeated denunciations will do little to influence Israel.

Even if the summit itself is repetitious, the guest list has provided some drama. Ahmed al-Sharaa, the Syrian president, had been invited but decided to skip the event because of threats from pro-Iranian militias in Iraq. His foreign minister will attend instead. Iran is still bitter about the fall of Syria's dictator, Bashar al-Assad, a longtime ally, in December. Mr Sharaa had better things to do this week anyway: [his meeting with Donald Trump in Riyadh](#) was far more productive than an Arab League gabfest.



Photograph: Getty Images

## AI's human side

From toning down harsh accents to shunning cutlery in favour of finger food, humans frequently adapt to match the company they are in. It seems that [large language models](#), which attempt to replicate human conversation using artificial intelligence, do the same, according to a new study.

Researchers from Britain and Europe put 24 popular LLMs into repeated conversations with one another. They found that AI agents quickly formed universally accepted conventions (such as agreeing on specific words) without explicit instructions to do so.

But fitting in can cause problems. Collective biases quickly emerged in some of the groups. AI's interactions can also be swiftly thrown off-track: a minority group of intentionally disruptive AI agents could alter established conventions, provided they reached a critical proportion, sometimes as low as 2%. The findings show how human-like the technology is, the academics say—and how easily it can be swayed.



Photograph: AP

## The new realities of women's basketball

The [Women's National Basketball Association](#) returns this weekend for its 2025 season. The WNBA is going through a period of rapid transformation. In 2024 total attendance at matches rose by 48%, social-media video views jumped by more than 400% and merchandise sales soared by 600%.

The league's growing profile is [changing things](#) on the court. The owners of New York Liberty, the reigning champions, are spending \$80m on a new training facility in Brooklyn; a similar amount is going toward a complex in Indianapolis. But not everyone is on board with the rising investment required to keep a team competitive. Last year fans were outraged to learn that the Connecticut Sun shared their practice court with a two-year-old's birthday party. This week reports emerged that the team's owners, the Mohegan Tribe, are considering selling the franchise. Having bought the Sun for \$10m in 2003, they are in line to make a tidy profit: last year the team was valued at \$80m.





Photograph: Getty Images

## The Eurovision song contest returns

In 1956, as Elvis Presley flogged “Heartbreak Hotel” across America, Switzerland held the first ever [Eurovision song contest](#). Its entry—Lys Assia’s French-language ballad, “Refrain”—was hardly rock’n’roll. But it won. These days, the winning country gets to host the next year’s competition. Unluckily for the Swiss, that rule was introduced in 1958. They had to wait until 1989 to throw the party and announce the winner on live TV. (Céline Dion, with another ballad in French, was the 1988 champion.)

On Saturday they will have the honour again. At the final in Basel Switzerland will cheer on a gentle French tune. That may be a good tactic, going by the country’s past winners. But the favourite for 2025, according to Spotify, is Sweden, which shares with Ireland the record for the most Eurovision wins (seven). For the outright lead and musical bragging rights, Sweden will field three male vocalists, an accordion and a song about saunas.



Photograph: eyevine

## **Weekend profile: Casey Means, the nominee for America's surgeon general embracing the “woo woo”**

“Women are lunar beings who exist on a 28-day moon cycle, inherently reflecting the cycles and patterns of the cosmos.” So said Casey Means, [Donald Trump's nominee to be America's surgeon general](#), after she watched the Disney movie “Moana”. Yet, she continued in her weekly newsletter, the modern world “rejects, even demonises,” these cycles: “it demands constant productivity, endless yang energy, and punishing speed.”

In some respects, Dr Means is typical of Donald Trump's appointees. She lacks some conventional credentials. The 37-year-old does not have an active medical licence. She graduated from Stanford Medical School and embarked on a five-year residency to train as a surgeon. But she quit just months before finishing. Mr Trump has even said he does not know much about her.

In interviews and a best-selling book, “Good Energy”, Dr Means has recounted a classic [Make America Healthy Again](#) (MAHA)

awakening. She describes a dawning realisation “that every institution that impacts health—from medical schools to insurance companies to hospitals to pharma companies—makes money on ‘managing’ disease, not curing patients”.

Her brother, Calley Means, with whom she wrote the book, has said he quit lobbying for the food industry after a similar Damascene conversion. He is now a senior adviser to [Robert F. Kennedy junior](#), the MAHA poobah who is secretary of health and human services. On Mr Kennedy’s recommendation, Mr Trump nominated Dr Means on May 7th after credentials claimed by his previous nominee came under challenge. She must be confirmed by the Senate.

After giving up her residency, Dr Means embarked on a search for the underlying reasons for why people get sick. It led her to conclude that “everything is connected”. She warns that rising rates of all sorts of maladies, from cancer to Alzheimer’s to erectile dysfunction, stem from plastics and chemicals in the food chain, over-medication, needless surgery, bad lifestyle choices and disregard of nature.

Dr Means, who co-founded a company to help people monitor their glucose levels, has built a career as a wellness adviser, recommending dietary supplements, skincare products and other choices. She has called vaccine mandates “criminal” and the childhood vaccine schedule “insane”. But some MAHA adherents, suspicious that Mr Kennedy is prioritising food quality over the anti-vaccine policies they long for, find her scepticism too mild.

When it comes to overseeing Americans’ health, the post of surgeon general, once significant, is a vestigial organ. What authority it has left is not regulatory but hortatory. Mr Trump could do worse than appoint someone concerned that Americans take too many pills and eat too much lousy food, or even that society puts quarterly profits ahead of “sustainable living”. But Democrats



should worry that Mr Trump, having already co-opted some of their economic policies and their working-class constituency, may make off with their yin energy, too.



Illustration: The Economist

## Mini crossword

We now publish an interactive edition of our crossword twice a week, allowing you to enter and check the answers, and see explanations, instantly. [Try it here](#). Or, if you prefer to do things the old-fashioned way, use the grid below.

Our crossword has two sets of clues, one for seasoned cruciverbalists and the other for less experienced solvers. Both give the same answers, all of which feature in articles in this week's edition of *The Economist*:

### Cryptic clues

*1 down* Fair or incorrect? Crime without limit, only this moves Donald Trump (3,5,3)

*1 across* In part to outflank a rascal, Zelensky headed here (6)

*2 across* Far out! Before a beer, Pakistan soldiers claimed they downed this (6)

*3 across* A dedication to European science, perhaps (6)

### Factual clues

*1 down* Presidential plane at the centre of a corruption storm (3,5,3)  
*1 across* The city in which Volodymyr Zelensky met Recep Tayyip Erdogan this week (6)  
*2 across* French-made warplane that Pakistan claims to have shot down (6)  
*3 across* A tribute to someone who died (6)

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am GMT on Monday to [\[email protected\]](#). We will pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners in next week's edition.

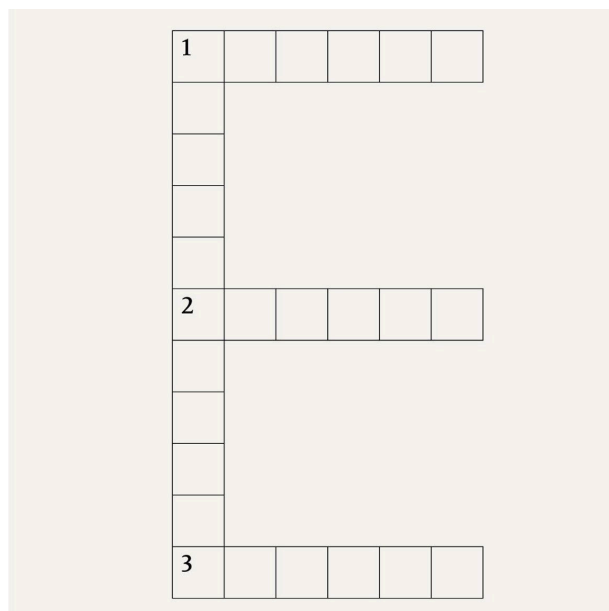


Image: The Economist



Illustration: The Economist

## **The winners of this week's quiz**

**Jaci Noel**, Phoenix, Arizona, United States

**Hélène Tremblay**, Gatineau, Canada

**Carlos Sangil**, Madrid, Spain

They all gave the correct answers of Bonnie Prince Charlie, Giant, Fox News, a peach and Waltzing Matilda. The theme is books by Roald Dahl: Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, the BFG (Big Friendly Giant), Fantastic Mr Fox, James and the Giant Peach and Matilda.

The questions were:

**Monday:** What popular nickname was attached to the member of the Stuart family who led the Jacobite rebellion in Britain in 1745?

**Tuesday:** What was the last film made by James Dean before he was killed in a car crash?

**Wednesday:** Roger Ailes was the long-term head of which cable news network?

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

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



*Although this may seem a paradox, all exact science is dominated by the idea of approximation.*

---

***Bertrand Russell***