

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

America's **Department of Justice** began releasing more **Epstein files** ahead of a [congressionally mandated deadline](#). The records—related to investigations into Jeffrey Epstein, a convicted sex offender who died in 2019—were published on a government website. Some are heavily redacted, and the DOJ is holding back files it says would compromise active cases. Todd Blanche, the deputy attorney-general, said more would be published in coming weeks.

Fielding questions at his marathon end-of-year press conference, President **Vladimir Putin** claimed that Russian troops were still advancing in **Ukraine**, seizing the “strategic initiative”. Mr Putin praised Donald Trump’s attempts to end the war. But he also said there would be no peace until the “root causes” of the conflict were addressed. Russia demands that Ukraine cede large chunks of its eastern territory.

Ukraine thanked the **European Union** for providing it with [a €90bn loan](#) for two years. The country will only return the funds once Russia pays reparations. The bloc will raise joint debt backed by its budget. EU leaders said they would continue to discuss the

possibility of using frozen Russian assets to support the embattled country.

Delaware's Supreme Court reinstated a \$56bn pay package for **Elon Musk**, boss of Tesla, an electric-car maker, after a seven-year legal fight. In 2024 a judge found that the world's richest person had improperly influenced board members who came up with the [record compensation](#). The high court found that Mr Musk is entitled to a stock-based compensation plan worth \$140bn.

America struck dozens of suspected **Islamic State** sites across central **Syria** in what Pete Hegseth, the war secretary, said was an operation to “eliminate” IS fighters and infrastructure. It reportedly involved fighter jets, attack helicopters and artillery salvos. Donald Trump had vowed to avenge the deaths of two American soldiers and an interpreter, who were killed on December 13th in Syria by a lone gunman suspected of being affiliated with IS.

The **Trump administration** announced deals with nine pharmaceutical companies that will lower **drug prices** for some Americans. Patients who buy drugs through Medicaid (health care for the poor) or through a planned TrumpRx website (linking to manufacturers' direct-buy pages) will be charged prices [comparable](#) to those in other rich countries. In exchange the companies received three-year exemptions from threatened tariffs.

A **Pakistani court** sentenced **Imran Khan**, a former prime minister, and his wife, [Bushra Bibi](#), to 17 years in prison each. The couple were convicted of buying luxury gifts at heavily discounted prices, causing losses to the state. The sentence will begin after Mr Khan completes an earlier prison term. He denies the charges, which his party says are politically motivated.

Word of the year: slop, once a term for watery gruel, it has become shorthand for the AI-generated rubbish clogging the internet—from fake videos to autogenerated articles. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

The best books of 2025

We are looking back on 2025. Today, the year in culture.

Books make excellent Christmas presents. They are thoughtful, suggest erudition and offer respite from visiting relatives. But which to choose? *The Economist's* [best books of the year](#) are more than stocking-fillers. There is something to delight every reader, whether soft-hearted or Scrooge-like.

Many will enjoy curling up by the fire with “What We Can Know” by Ian McEwan, an inventive, exquisitely written novel that combines dystopia, romance and mystery. Those facing frosty festivities can be transported to sunnier climes in “Caribe: A Caribbean Cookbook with History”, which takes each island in turn. [“Chokepoints”](#), by Edward Fishman, offers a different type of tour: the ripping yarn shows how American sanctions evolved through trial, error and political pressure. Lovers of the natural world should try [“Raising Hare”](#), a tender, lyrical memoir by Chloe Dalton. Her greatest present of all comes bundled in a four-legged, long-eared, skittish little package. [Read our full list.](#)



Photograph: AP

The best films of 2025

Most [new Christmas films](#) are cheesy, mindless and quickly forgotten. So, as the nights draw in, we instead suggest turning to one of *The Economist's* [favourite flicks of 2025](#). They promise to be gifts that keep on giving.

[“One Battle After Another”](#) is a brilliant action caper. It will make you both laugh and care—a tricky feat—even as it makes its points about migrants, militarisation and fatherhood. Those looking for more festive fun should try [“Wake Up Dead Man”](#), another pleasurable instalment in the “Knives Out” murder-mystery franchise. It offers a star-studded ensemble cast, some pithy satire and an ingenious solution to a far-fetched crime. Or for something a little different, go with (the) “Flow”, a Latvian cartoon that tells the story of a curious cat who drifts around by boat after flood waters engulf Earth. The enigmatic and luminously beautiful eco-fable won Best Animated Feature at the Academy Awards this year. [Read about these recommendations and more here.](#)



Photograph: Des Willie / Lucasfilm Ltd.

The best TV of 2025

On Christmas day many families enter a bitter stalemate: what to put on the television? *The Economist* can help break the deadlock through our round-up of [the best shows of 2025](#).

Feeling like Jabba the Hutt after Christmas lunch? “Andor” is a sophisticated show about authoritarianism set in the “Star Wars” universe. It is so good that it will delight even those who think R2-D2 is a new AI chatbot. If you’re looking for lighter fare, “King of the Hill”, a sitcom that last aired in 2009, has been revived. Fifteen years later, the animated show’s blend of topical satire and gentle comedy is as balanced as ever. Or for a sweeping historical epic, try “The Narrow Road to the Deep North”. The masterful adaptation of [Richard Flanagan’s novel](#) follows a surgeon in the Australian army who is captured by the Japanese during the second world war and sent to work on the Burma Railway. [Discover our other favourites here](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

The best podcasts of 2025

Podcasts are the perfect way to pass the time while doing the dishes. Our selection of this year's best promises to entertain listeners long after the leftovers have entered the freezer. Those looking for a love story should listen to “Flesh and Code”, which tells the story of Travis, who is smitten with Lily Rose, a pink-haired Scot. The catch is that Travis is already married—and Lily Rose is a chatbot. This podcast delves into the world of AI relationships, asking profound questions about love and loneliness.

Prefer to get your heart racing with a thriller? “The Wargame” imagines what would happen if Russia attacked Britain—and invites real-life former ministers and military chiefs to take part in a simulated response. Meanwhile, the work-obsessed should try “Acquired”, a wonkish series of corporate histories. Start with the fascinating episode on the secret history of Rolex—which lasts five hours, meaning it should see you through cleaning up until the New Year. Read the rest of our selection [here](#).



Illustration: The Economist

The winners of this week's quiz

Thank you to everyone who took part in this week's quiz. The winners, chosen at random, were:

Rick Kahley, Wayne, Pennsylvania

Gabriel Purghel, Bucharest, Romania

Malcolm Dickson, Edinburgh, Scotland

They all gave correct answers of: The Three Stooges, comets, a silver bullet, The Banshees of Inisherin and crickets. The theme is backing bands: the Stooges (Iggy Pop), the Comets (Bill Haley), the Silver Bullet band (Bob Seger), the Banshees (Siouxsie Sioux) and the Crickets (Buddy Holly)

The questions were:

Monday: Larry, Curly and Moe were regular members of which comedy troupe?

Tuesday: Hyakutake and Hale-Bopp are two examples of which heavenly phenomena?

Wednesday: What means of killing a werewolf is also used as a term for an apparently simple method for solving a complex problem?

Thursday: Which Irish-set film won the Golden Globe for best musical or comedy film in January 2023?

Friday: Which insects, noted for their night-time chirping, featured in both a novella by Charles Dickens and the fairy tale, Pinocchio?

*The discipline of the written
word punishes both stupidity and
dishonesty.*

John Steinbeck