

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

At least 44 people died in a fire that tore through seven high-rise apartment blocks in **Hong Kong**. Another 45 were in critical condition; 279 were still missing. The cause of the fire is unknown, but the towers were undergoing renovations and so clad in green netting and bamboo scaffolding. Police arrested three men from the construction company on suspicion of manslaughter.

Donald Trump described the shooting of two members of the West Virginia **National Guard** near the White House as “an act of terror”. [The guardsmen](#) are in critical condition. America’s president said the shooter is believed to have arrived in the country from Afghanistan in 2021. His administration requested an emergency stay on a federal judge’s order to remove “unlawful” National Guardsmen from the city.

Britain’s chancellor, **Rachel Reeves**, [announced tax rises](#) worth £26bn (\$34.3bn) over five years. Measures include a freeze on income-tax thresholds and a levy on homes worth over £2m. Ms Reeves said this will allow the government to stick to its fiscal rules. Britain’s **economic watchdog** released details of the budget before the announcement by accident, embarrassing the government and sending bond yields yo-yoing.

Taiwan announced plans for an additional \$40bn in defence spending. **Lai Ching-te**, the president, said China had increased military drills and “grey-zone harassment”, and strengthened its campaign of “infiltration and influence”. With concerns growing in **Taiwan** over America’s commitment to its protection, Mr Lai has pledged to increase the defence budget to more than 5% of GDP by 2030.

The army of **Guinea-Bissau**, in west Africa, launched a coup three days after presidential and legislative elections. The incumbent president, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, was reportedly arrested, and soldiers announced that they were taking total control and suspending the electoral process. Provisional results had been due on Thursday, with both Mr Embaló and his closest rival claiming victory. Since independence in 1974, Guinea-Bissau has previously suffered four successful [coups](#).

s&p Global, a ratings agency, downgraded its rating of **usdt**, a [stablecoin](#) pegged to the dollar issued by **Tether**, to its lowest level. The agency cited exposure to high-risk assets in **usdt**’s backing reserves, including Bitcoin, and criticised Tether for weak transparency. s&p warned that such vulnerabilities increase the risk of the coin breaking its peg.

The prosecutor overseeing Mr Trump’s racketeering case in **Georgia** dropped all charges against the president. The case, in which Mr Trump [was accused](#) of trying to overturn the presidential election in 2020, was the last remaining criminal investigation into the president. The probe also targeted several of Mr Trump’s associates, including Rudy Giuliani, New York’s former mayor.

Figure of the Day: 47, the number of people America executed this year, nearly double last year’s tally and the highest in almost two decades. [Read the full story here](#).



Photograph: Getty Images

Drought-stricken Tehran turns to prayer

In most years, by late November, snow shrouds the mountains overlooking [Iran's capital](#). No more. Seen from Tehran, those hillsides are yellow-grey and mostly dry. Last week the city enjoyed the briefest drizzle, too little to break the worst drought in half a century.

Reservoirs, including those near [Tehran](#), may soon be declared empty. City officials impose nightly rationing on poorer households, cutting off supplies. (In wealthy areas, fountains continue to play in artificial lakes.) Last week Masoud Pezeshkian, Iran's president, repeated a warning that Tehran's 10m or so residents may have to abandon their city if supplies dry up.

Respite is unlikely. Climate change is making Iran steadily drier. Worse, industry and [agriculture](#) (especially rice farmers) have long slurped up too much water. An economic crisis and sanctions mean resources to repair inadequate infrastructure are lacking. Just one cheap option remains: clerics are praying for rain.



Photograph: AFP

Japan edges closer to yen intervention

Japanese markets have had a bruising few days. The yen slid past ¥157 to the dollar last week, its weakest level since January, while yields on long-dated government bonds rose to their highest level in more than two decades. Traders blame Sanae Takaichi, [the prime minister](#). On November 21st she presented a big fiscal stimulus package that stoked fears of more borrowing and higher inflation. They also worry that Ms Takaichi, an advocate of loose monetary policy, may press the Bank of Japan to delay raising interest rates, which could further weaken the yen.

The government wants to stop its slide. Aida Takuji, an adviser to the prime minister, said the finance ministry is ready to use its foreign-exchange reserves to intervene in currency markets. He implied that it could act even before the currency falls to ¥160, the level that triggered intervention in 2024. To achieve both low interest rates and a stable currency, [Japan](#) may have to spend a lot of money.

Intervention watch

Japanese yen per \$, inverted scale



Sources: LSEG Workspace; Japan's Ministry of Finance



Photograph: AP

“Hamnet”: To see or not to see?

Maggie O’Farrell’s “Hamnet” was an acclaimed bestseller in 2022. The novel’s big-screen adaptation is already attracting nearly as much praise. Directed and co-written by Chloé Zhao, the [Oscar-winning](#) maker of “Nomadland”, this haunting costume drama imagines how Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” might have been influenced by his marriage to Anne Hathaway, and by the death of their 11-year-old son, the eponymous Hamnet.

Paul Mescal is typically vulnerable as Will, the driven playwright who chooses fame in [London](#) over family life in Stratford-upon-Avon. The film, however, belongs to Jessie Buckley, who plays Will’s wife Agnes (as she is known). Her anger and anguish when Hamnet dies has made Ms Buckley a front-runner for 2026’s best actress Oscar.

The film is broader and less convincing than the novel, but Ms Buckley’s fierce intensity sells the central thesis: that “Hamlet” isn’t really about a vengeful Danish prince, but about a parent turning his grief into art.



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

Wednesday: Which is the longest novel in J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" series?

Tuesday: Which British general achieved fame for his victory at the battle of El Alamein in 1942?

Learn from yesterday, live for today, look to tomorrow, rest this afternoon.

Charles M. Schulz