

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Reuters

European markets fell on Friday as a sell-off in stocks spread after hitting Asia. The Stoxx 600, an index of big European firms, fell by 0.7%. British, French and German stocks also fell. Earlier on Friday Asian markets also slid following a drop in American markets on Thursday. Investors have been ditching assets despite strong third-quarter results from **Nvidia**, the world's most valuable firm, which have failed to assuage [fears of an artificial-intelligence bubble](#).

Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, said he was ready for "honest" work with America to end Russia's war. He is expected to meet **Donald Trump** within days after America presented him with a peace plan. The [proposal](#), drawn up without Ukrainian involvement, reportedly demands concessions that are tantamount to capitulation, such as relinquishing tracts of land under Ukraine's control. European allies pushed back.

The price of **Bitcoin** briefly dipped below \$81,000, its lowest value in seven months, as investors fled risky assets amid the global stock sell-off. It has since climbed back above \$84,000. The cryptocurrency peaked at around \$126,000 in early October, propelled by Mr Trump's crypto-friendly policies. Since then,

cryptocurrencies have collectively lost an estimated \$1.2trn in market value according to CoinGecko, which tracks such things.

Britain's public-sector borrowing exceeded official forecasts by nearly £10bn (\$13bn) between April and October, piling pressure on **Rachel Reeves**, Britain's chancellor, ahead of next week's budget. She is [expected to raise taxes](#) despite an earlier pledge not to do so. Meanwhile retail sales unexpectedly fell in October, the first monthly drop since May, as uncertainty around the budget weighed on households.

Japan approved a ¥21.3trn (\$135bn) stimulus package of spending and tax cuts, the largest since the covid-19 pandemic. It is the first major economic policy of **Takaichi Sanae's** [new right-wing government](#). Policymakers said it will boost Japan's sluggish economy and ease pressure on households hit by inflation. Investors worry it will strain Japan's public finances; bond yields rose to their highest level since 2008 on the news.

Cyril Ramaphosa, [South Africa's president](#), said America had a "change of mind" about skipping the **G20 summit** in Johannesburg this weekend, and that the countries were "in discussion" about it participating. The White House, however, called Mr Ramaphosa's statement "fake news". Mr Trump said earlier this month America would boycott the talks, citing unsubstantiated claims that South Africa persecutes its white minority.

A surrealist self-portrait by **Frida Kahlo**, a [Mexican painter](#), sold for \$54.7m at Sotheby's in New York, setting a new record for a work by a female artist. "El sueño (La cama)", from 1940, is one of the few Kahlo pieces held in private collections outside Mexico. Those in Mexico cannot be sold abroad or destroyed because they are designated artistic monuments.

Figure of the day: \$1trn, the amount Donald Trump claims Saudi Arabia plans to invest in America. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: AP

Donald Trump's battle with America's universities

Friday is the deadline for [American universities](#) to accept or reject the Trump administration's "compact", a demand for concessions in exchange for preferential access to federal grants and contracts. Of the nine initially offered the deal, most have replied with a polite "no way in hell". Vanderbilt and the University of Texas suggested they might be open to parts of it. They are in Republican-run states, where many lawmakers and officials are on Team MAGA. Administrators there may be reflexively opposed but need to tread carefully.

The compact is plainly a non-starter for any self-respecting dean. It would mean heavy-handed government intrusion into their affairs. Among the demands are a ban on university employees spouting off on politics, a cap on tuition fees and foreign-student admissions, and restrictions on transgender students' bathroom use. All fit with Donald Trump's war-on-woke and the use of state power to punish lefties. But they also fit with Mr Trump's tendency to overreach.



Photograph: Getty Images

The two sides of Germany's economy

On Friday S&P Global, a credit-rating firm, published data on manufacturing and services in Germany for November. The index slipped to 52.1 in November, down from 53.9 in October. The numbers still indicate an expansion, but a weaker one than had been expected.

Services performed better; firms such as banks and IT companies are thriving. But the manufacturing sector contracted. Germany's metal-bashers are struggling. Bosch, an engineering firm, and [Volkswagen](#), a carmaker, are cutting thousands of jobs. The Cologne Institute for Economic Research has said that one-third of companies surveyed are planning layoffs, with manufacturing firms preparing the most. Another report, by the German council of economic experts, a panel of academics advising the government, recently forecast growth of just 0.2% for this year and 0.9% in 2026. The council warned that the opportunities presented by the government's massive fiscal stimulus could be wasted. Germany's manufacturers—once the backbone of the country's economy—have their work cut out.



Photograph: Alamy

Britain's vet industry gets a check-up

This week the London Vet Show, Europe's biggest veterinary conference, has transformed the city's Excel centre into a maze of dog-CPR mannequins, parasitic-worm posters and the occasional cat skeleton. Sessions include a crash course on what to do when chickens start producing spaghetti-like droppings to a guide to why donkeys behave differently from [horses](#). A talk titled "Love in scrubs" offers exhausted vets advice on dating while juggling on-call rotas.

But a Competition and Markets Authority investigation into the industry is commanding most attention. After a decade of private-equity-fuelled consolidation, six chains now own around 60% of British vet practices in whole or in part. Prices have shot up. Vet bills rose by 63% between 2016 and 2023. Profits, the CMA warns, look far higher than a competitive market should allow. Yet the boom may not last. Rising wages, staff shortages and a fading pandemic-era surge in pet ownership mean that the industry's dog days could be imminent.



Photograph: Alamy

Cricket's oldest rivals face off

Where does Ben Stokes (pictured) fit in the pantheon of England [Test cricket](#) captains? His win rate is just under 60%, putting him third behind W.G. Grace, a Victorian colossus, and Douglas “Bodyline” Jardine, an early 20th-century legend, among men who have led England in more than ten matches. Like Grace and Jardine, he is an innovator. He and Brendon McCullum, England’s coach, favour an aggressive style of play that other teams have tried to copy. What Mr Stokes lacks is a statement series win.

The Ashes series against Australia, which began in Perth on Friday, is a chance to remedy that. The Australian team is tough and experienced, but also old and stricken by injuries. England has a wretched record down under; they have not won any of their last 15 matches in Australia. The Ashes rivalry dates back to a match in 1882. Defeating England’s oldest nemesis would confirm Mr Stokes’s place among the greats.



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.

Friday: White, rose and yellow are the most common colours for which precious metal when used in jewellery?

Thursday: The singer-songwriter Yusuf Islam is also known by which stage name?

*Cherish those who seek the truth
but beware of those who find it.*

Voltaire