

# Weekly Digest: 2025-11-29

## The Economist Summary

### The world this week (Politics)

- \* **Ukraine-Russia Negotiations Progress:** President Trump announced "tremendous progress" in negotiations for a revised 28-point peace proposal in Geneva, with Ukrainian President Zelensky ready to discuss "sensitive" issues including territorial concessions and force reduction.
- \* **Trump's Legal Victories:** A racketeering case against Mr. Trump in Georgia was dismissed, ending criminal jeopardy related to the 2020 election. Three other criminal cases against him have also been dismissed or put aside since his return to office.
- \* **Immigration Crackdown Vowed After Shooting:** Following the shooting of two National Guard members near the White House by a suspected Afghan immigrant, President Trump called it an "act of terror" and vowed a crackdown on unvetted immigration.
- \* **Trump to Visit China:** President Trump accepted an invitation from Xi Jinping to visit Beijing in April to discuss trade and global security, with a reciprocal visit planned for 2026.
- \* **Marjorie Taylor Greene Resigns:** Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene resigned from the House of Representatives after a public feud with President Trump, who called her a "traitor" for her calls to publish files related to Jeffrey Epstein.
- \* **COP 30 Disappointment:** The COP 30 climate conference in Brazil ended without new promises to phase out fossil fuels, due to opposition from large oil-producing nations.
- \* **Jair Bolsonaro Jailed:** Brazil's former president, Jair Bolsonaro, began a 27-year prison sentence for plotting a coup after the 2022 election, following an incident involving his ankle monitor.
- \* **China-Japan Tensions Over Taiwan:** China escalated a dispute at the UN, accusing Japan of violating international law after its Prime Minister suggested military aid to Taiwan. Taiwan announced a \$40bn defense spending increase.
- \* **Catastrophic Floods in South-East Asia:** Severe floods affected millions in southern Thailand, Java (Indonesia) experienced deadly landslides, and thousands were evacuated in Vietnam and Malaysia.
- \* **Deadly Hong Kong Fire:** A fire engulfed seven high-rise apartment blocks in Hong Kong's Tai Po district, killing at least 55 people and leaving hundreds missing. Three construction company

employees were arrested.

- \* **\*\*Spain's Attorney-General Resigns:\*\*** Álvaro García Ortiz resigned ahead of a supreme court ruling on leaking details of a tax probe involving a conservative politician, a blow to the socialist government.
- \* **\*\*Italy's Femicide Law:\*\*** Italy's parliament unanimously passed a law making femicide (murder due to gender) punishable by life imprisonment, including harsher measures against stalking and revenge porn.
- \* **\*\*Ukraine's Drone Attacks on Russia:\*\*** Ukraine launched drone strikes on Russia's Shatura power station near Moscow and the port city of Novorossiysk, causing damage and casualties. Russia continued to attack Kyiv.
- \* **\*\*EU Court Rules on Same-Sex Marriage in Poland:\*\*** The EU's top court ruled that Poland must recognize same-sex marriages performed in other EU countries, ensuring freedom of movement and family life rights. Poland agreed to comply.
- \* **\*\*Israeli Strike in Beirut:\*\*** Israel killed Hizbullah's top military chief, Haytham Ali Tabatabai, in Beirut, highlighting the fragility of truces in the region. Israel also conducted a major raid in the West Bank.
- \* **\*\*Gaza Humanitarian Foundation Closes:\*\*** An aid group supported by Israel and America closed amid criticism that its distribution centers endangered Palestinians.
- \* **\*\*Mass Kidnappings in Nigeria:\*\*** Gunmen abducted 303 schoolchildren and 12 teachers from a Catholic school in Niger state, while previously abducted girls were freed in Kebbi. Nigeria closed schools nationwide due to intensified kidnappings.
- \* **\*\*Guinea-Bissau Coup:\*\*** Soldiers seized power and detained the president in Guinea-Bissau following a disputed presidential election.

## **The world this week (Business)**

- \* **\*\*Britain's Budget Overview:\*\*** Chancellor Rachel Reeves's budget will increase yearly spending by £11bn and taxes by £26bn by 2029-30, leading to increased borrowing in the short term. Markets reacted positively, but the budget avoided serious welfare cuts.
- \* **\*\*France's Budget Rejected:\*\*** France's National Assembly rejected parts of Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu's budget draft, making him the third PM in 12 months to struggle with budget passage.
- \* **\*\*IMF Aids Ukraine:\*\*** The IMF approved an \$8.2bn four-year funding program for Ukraine to

stabilize its economy and cover war costs.

- \* **Tech Stocks Rebound, Nvidia Slips:** The NASDAQ 100 recovered 5% after a difficult few weeks, driven by hopes of a Federal Reserve interest rate cut. Nvidia's share price, however, slid further (down 13% from its peak) amid reports Meta is considering Google's chips.

- \* **Bitcoin Price Plunges:** Bitcoin's price fell 27% since October, causing "crypto treasury" firms to suffer and raising fears of a "doom loop" as they sell off assets.

- \* **Chinese AI Models Gain Dominance:** A study by MIT found that Chinese "open" AI models (free to download and modify) surpassed American models in download share over the past year (17% vs 16%).

- \* **Robinhood to Launch Futures Exchange:** Robinhood announced a partnership with Susquehanna to launch a futures and derivatives exchange, offering prediction contracts on events like sports matches and elections.

- \* **BHP Withdraws Anglo American Bid:** Mining giant BHP abandoned its takeover bid for Anglo American, which will now merge with Teck Resources, forming a top-five global copper producer.

- \* **Volkswagen's EV Strategy in China:** Volkswagen plans to build electric cars entirely in China, leveraging 50% lower production costs for some models, and aims to release 30 EV types in China over five years. The company is also trying to reduce its German workforce.

- \* **Nuclear Energy for AI:** Investors are increasing bets on nuclear energy to power AI, with companies like X-energy (backed by Amazon) raising significant funds for small modular reactors.

- \* **Alzheimer's Drug Fails Trial:** Novo Nordisk's potential Alzheimer's treatment failed a late-stage trial, causing its share price to drop. Meanwhile, Eli Lilly became the first health-care firm to reach a market value above \$1trn.

- \* **"Wicked: For Good" Box Office Success:** The second part of the "Wicked" film musical grossed \$150m in American ticket sales on its opening weekend, the second-best performance of the year.

## Leaders

- \* **What China Will Dominate Next:** China is rapidly advancing in autonomous vehicles and new drugs, driven by vast talent, manufacturing scale, and agile regulators. The West needs to learn from China's innovation and address security concerns and dumping while rethinking its own innovation policies to compete effectively.

- \* **Britain's "Bodge-It Budget":** Rachel Reeves's budget is criticized as a "bodge job" that fails to

address Britain's economic decline, prioritizing Labour's political survival over ambitious reforms. It increases short-term borrowing and backloads tax rises, without tackling rising welfare or pension costs, leading to increased public cynicism.

\* **\*\*Avoiding an Unjust Peace in Ukraine:\*\*** An American-Russian peace plan for Ukraine, initially leaked as a "surrender plan," has been modified but still presents challenges. Europe and Ukraine must seize the initiative to ensure a "just and lasting peace" that protects Ukraine's sovereignty and future, backed by significant European financial commitment, to prevent future Russian aggression.

\* **\*\*Japan's Outdated Takaichinomics:\*\*** Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae's big-spending policies and opposition to interest rate hikes are deemed ill-suited for Japan's current economic climate of higher inflation and rising bond yields. This approach, resembling a "yields up, currency down" dynamic, risks financial instability.

\* **\*\*Iran's Reformists Extend a Hand:\*\*** Despite recent Israeli and American bombing campaigns against its nuclear sites, Iran's foreign minister is signaling a willingness to restart nuclear talks with the US, including proposals for international oversight. This presents a unique opportunity for Western engagement to potentially stabilize the region and counter hardliner influence, especially given the aging Supreme Leader.

## Letters

\* **\*\*Taiwan's Real Estate Problem:\*\*** Correspondence highlights Taiwan's low property taxes and political-business interests as fundamental drivers of its housing crisis, diverting capital from productive investment and impacting wages and birth rates.

\* **\*\*Britain's Reputation:\*\*** An expert clarifies that "Brand Britain" has consistently maintained a strong international image, with global perception gradually rising, rather than having recently "bounced back."

\* **\*\*AI in Hiring Ethics:\*\*** Readers raise ethical concerns about the flawed use of AI in hiring, noting its inability to accurately assess candidates and the rise of "interview fraud," suggesting a need for more human-centric approaches.

\* **\*\*Economic Impact on Relationships:\*\*** The decline of relationships is attributed to economic factors like the soaring cost of raising children and workplace HR policies that discourage office romances. Comments also touch on online dating behaviors and the emergence of AI companions.

## By Invitation

- \* **\*\*Ukraine's Internal Governance Challenges:\*\*** Alexander Rodnyansky, a former adviser to President Zelensky, argues that a major corruption scandal (Energoatom affair) and the concentration of power in the presidential office threaten Ukraine's stability, potentially undermining foreign aid and the quality of any future peace deal.
- \* **\*\*No Amnesty for Russia in Peace Deal:\*\*** Gyunduz Mamedov, a Ukrainian lawyer-turned-soldier, contends that granting Russia "full amnesty for wartime actions" in a peace plan would perpetuate impunity and erode international law. He advocates for strengthening international justice mechanisms, such as empowering the ICC to prosecute the crime of aggression.

## Briefing

- \* **\*\*Iran's Overtures to America:\*\*** Despite recent US and Israeli attacks on its nuclear program, Iran is making surprising overtures to America, seeking a "fair and balanced deal." This is driven by internal weaknesses, including a blunted military deterrent, severe economic crisis, and widespread popular discontent, suggesting a willingness to adapt for survival.
- \* **\*\*Impending War Between Israel and Iran:\*\*** Israeli intelligence analysts believe another war with Iran is inevitable, with differing views only on whether it will happen sooner or later. Iran is expected to seek retribution for past humiliations, potentially through proxies, leading to swift Israeli reprisals.

## United States

- \* **\*\*MAGA Divided on AI:\*\*** The MAGA movement is split between techno-optimists who advocate for deregulation to achieve "global AI dominance" and neo-Luddites who fear mass unemployment, "techno-feudalism," and the spiritual implications of AI. This division is playing out in debates over federal versus state AI regulation.
- \* **\*\*Immigration Policies Tighten After Shooting:\*\*** A shooting involving an Afghan immigrant near the White House is being used by President Trump to justify a more aggressive stance on "unvetted foreigners," promising re-examination of arrivals and broader immigration restrictions, despite evidence that immigrants commit fewer crimes than native-born Americans.
- \* **\*\*Federal Funding for Native American Healing:\*\*** Four US states (Arizona, California, New Mexico, Oregon) now cover traditional Native American healing rituals through Medicaid, a Biden administration initiative. This aims to improve health outcomes for Native Americans and preserve

ancient practices, with advocates optimistic about its continuation under the current health secretary.

\* **Chicago's Budget Crisis:** Chicago faces a significant \$1.2bn budget deficit as federal pandemic aid winds down. Mayor Brandon Johnson's proposals for new business taxes to avoid spending cuts are meeting strong opposition, leading to a fiscal impasse and concerns about the city's credit rating.

\* **California's New Gold Rush:** Record-high gold prices and recent winter storms are sparking a new gold rush in California, attracting tourists and prospectors to old mining towns, revitalizing local economies.

\* **Surge in US Executions:** Executions in the US are nearly double last year's tally, reaching a two-decade high, primarily driven by Florida. This increase is influenced by political pressure and a more conservative Supreme Court, despite public support for capital punishment being at a 50-year low.

\* **Trump's "MAGA Narrative" Through Fundraising Emails:** Donald Trump's fundraising emails offer a window into the MAGA narrative of his presidency, focusing on triumphs, threats from "Radical Left Lunatics," and core issues like immigration, while largely ignoring foreign policy successes.

## **The Americas**

\* **Bolsonaro Jailed, Fracturing Brazilian Right:** Jair Bolsonaro's 27-year prison sentence for a coup attempt has left Brazil's hard-right without a clear leader for the upcoming elections, leading to internal divisions. His son's actions in the US, which triggered tariffs, inadvertently boosted President Lula's standing.

\* **Canada's Indigenous Healing Lodges:** Canada's indigenous-style prisons, known as healing lodges, aim to address historical injustices and rehabilitate indigenous prisoners through culturally relevant practices and elder counseling. These lodges have shown significantly lower recidivism rates compared to conventional prisons.

\* **Colombia's Drone Warfare:** Armed groups in Colombia, including drug gangs and revolutionary militias, are increasingly using weaponized commercial drones for attacks on security forces, a trend influenced by the war in Ukraine. This poses a new challenge to the government's "paz total" strategy.

## Asia

- \* **\*\*Yogi Adityanath, India's Monk-Politician:\*\*** Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, is presented as a powerful Hindu nationalist leader. He is credited with impressive economic growth and infrastructure development in UP, alongside a controversial "zero-tolerance" approach to crime. Critics highlight concerns about human rights and his Muslim-baiting rhetoric.
- \* **\*\*Nepal's Youth-Led Political Remake:\*\*** Following youth-led protests against corruption and a social-media ban that toppled the government, Nepal is preparing for elections. Young leaders and new voters are injecting energy into politics, driven by hopes of addressing high youth unemployment and economic stagnation.
- \* **\*\*Thailand's Shift Towards China:\*\*** America's oldest ally in Asia, Thailand, is increasingly aligning with China. This shift is driven by growing Chinese investment, trade, and tourism, as well as security cooperation (arms deals) that filled a void after US military aid scaled back.
- \* **\*\*Malaysian Footballers and Citizenship Controversy:\*\*** Malaysia's national football team is embroiled in a scandal as FIFA accuses it of forging documents for naturalized foreign players, leading to fines and suspensions. The incident also highlights broader concerns about the opacity and double standards in Malaysia's citizenship process.

## China

- \* **\*\*Chinese Pharma Going Global:\*\*** China is rapidly emerging as a global leader in new drug development, with its firms running a third of global clinical trials. Western pharmaceutical companies are increasingly licensing Chinese-developed drugs, despite US concerns about supply chain reliance and potential crackdowns, driven by China's streamlined approval processes and low-cost innovation.
- \* **\*\*Dr. Chatbot in Chinese Healthcare:\*\*** China is embracing telemedicine and AI chatbots to address public health challenges, including uneven access and an aging population. The government aims for "full coverage" of AI-powered diagnosis tools in grassroots health centers by 2030, leveraging rapid technological adoption.
- \* **\*\*Deadly Hong Kong Apartment Fire:\*\*** A fire in Hong Kong's Tai Po district tragically killed 55 people and left hundreds missing in a high-rise apartment complex.
- \* **\*\*Communist Party's "Positive Energy" Campaign:\*\*** China's Communist Party is enforcing a national campaign to promote "positive energy" online and suppress pessimism, a response to a weak economy and declining public optimism. This involves censoring critical social media content

and influencers, though these measures are seen as masking underlying economic issues rather than solving them.

## **Middle East & Africa**

- \* **\*\*Changing Shape of Chinese Aid to Africa:\*\*** China's health aid to Africa, while not as large as past Western aid, is strategically targeted at countries like Zambia (rich in resources) to build political influence and secure support for its international positions, such as on Taiwan.
- \* **\*\*Guinea-Bissau Coup:\*\*** Guinea-Bissau experienced its latest coup, with soldiers seizing power and detaining the president after a disputed election. The country's chronic instability and links between the military and the cocaine trade are cited as key factors, with some questioning if the president orchestrated the event.
- \* **\*\*Houthis Threaten Saudi Arabia Amid Financial Crisis:\*\*** Yemen's Houthi militia, facing a severe financial crisis, is resuming threats against Saudi Arabia, seeking to pressure the kingdom into paying public-sector salaries. However, renewed US-Saudi ties under President Trump could lead to strong retaliation if attacks occur.
- \* **\*\*Fragile Truces in the Middle East:\*\*** Israel's assassination of Hizbullah's military chief in Beirut underscores the extreme fragility of ceasefires in the region (Lebanon, Gaza, Iran). Despite US-brokered agreements, Israeli strikes and suspected Hizbullah rearmament continue, indicating a need for sustained diplomatic effort to prevent renewed conflict.
- \* **\*\*Pepsi's Dominance in the Middle East:\*\*** Pepsi has historically outsold Coca-Cola in much of the Middle East, a legacy of Arab boycotts against Coca-Cola in the 1960s due to its ties with Israel. Pepsi's success is attributed to shrewd local political navigation, though recent boycotts of American brands related to the Gaza war have seen local competitors gain ground.

## **Europe**

- \* **\*\*Ukraine's Path to Peace or Destruction:\*\*** A revised US-Russian peace plan for Ukraine emerged from Geneva talks after initial panic over a "surrender plan." While some detrimental clauses were removed, core issues remain unresolved. The process is complicated by internal US rivalries and Ukrainian corruption, with Russia likely biding its time.
- \* **\*\*Europe's New Trilateral Leadership:\*\*** The leaders of Britain (Sir Keir Starmer), France (Emmanuel Macron), and Germany (Friedrich Merz) are forming an informal "E3" leadership.



Despite domestic struggles, they collaborate closely on Ukraine, US relations, and European security, aiming for greater "strategic autonomy" and compensating for Brexit.

- \* **\*\*Denmark Ends Letter Collection and Delivery:\*\*** Denmark's PostNord will cease all letter collection and delivery by December 30th, becoming the first European country to do so, driven by a 90% decline in letter volume and high national digitization. This trend is expected to be followed by other postal services globally.

- \* **\*\*Turkey's Sports Gambling Scandal:\*\*** Turkish football is embroiled in a massive gambling scandal, with over 1,000 players and 149 referees banned for betting on matches. The incident highlights deep-seated corruption concerns in Turkish sports, paralleling its political landscape.

- \* **\*\*Denmark, Europe's Wedding Destination:\*\*** Copenhagen has become a popular wedding destination for foreign couples due to its liberal marriage laws and efficient digital registration, contrasting with the bureaucratic hurdles in much of Europe. This popularity is, however, creating tension over wedding slot availability for locals.

- \* **\*\*Europe's Post-Ukraine Infighting (Charlemagne):\*\*** A potential end to the war in Ukraine, while a relief, will lead to "de-galvanisation" and internal divisions in Europe. Eastern states will push for continued isolation of Russia, while Western states may seek normalization and question defense spending. This will challenge European unity and complicate decisions on Ukraine's future and relations with the US.

## **Britain**

- \* **\*\*Britain's Budget Prioritizes Labour's Political Survival:\*\*** Chancellor Rachel Reeves's budget is criticized for prioritizing Labour's political survival over addressing Britain's economic challenges. It increased spending and backloaded tax rises while avoiding difficult reforms in welfare and pensions, contributing to public cynicism.

- \* **\*\*Tax on Electric Cars Introduced:\*\*** From 2028, electric vehicle drivers in Britain will face a three pence per mile levy, a "crude form of road pricing." This is seen as a necessary tax reform to address declining fuel duty revenues and ensure all road users contribute, despite potential impacts on EV sales.

- \* **\*\*Reeves's Budget Mudslinging:\*\*** An AI analysis of budget speeches reveals Chancellor Rachel Reeves blamed the previous Conservative administration 28 times in her latest speech, the highest number recorded in 50 years of data.

- \* **\*\*Controversial Puberty Blocker Trial Approved:\*\*** Britain has approved the PATHWAYS clinical

trial for puberty blockers in children with gender dysphoria, following a ban in 2024. The trial is highly controversial, with critics questioning its design and ethics, and opponents considering legal challenge.

\* **Debate Over British Newspaper Ownership:** Lord Rothermere's £500m bid to merge his Daily Mail empire with the Telegraph newspaper raises concerns about media plurality and right-wing dominance. While resolving issues of foreign government ownership, it may prompt a regulatory investigation.

\* **Spain: Britain's Most Similar Country:** An Economist analysis suggests Spain, rather than frequently studied countries like Denmark or the US, is the most similar OECD country to Britain based on ten indicators. This highlights that Britain might learn more from its less-obsessed-over counterpart.

\* **Britain's Left-Wing Government is Left-Wing (Bagehot):** Rachel Reeves's budget confirms Labour as the most economically left-wing government in five decades, with significant increases in tax and spending. However, the government is unpopular, particularly with its own left-wing base, due to a perceived botched political strategy combining left-wing economics with right-wing social policies.

## **International**

\* **AI Reshapes the Porn Industry:** AI is fundamentally transforming the porn industry by enabling on-demand, customized content, with major AI firms entering the market. This creates new opportunities for content creation but also significant perils, including the proliferation of illegal content (child abuse imagery) and X-rated deepfakes for blackmail and scams.

\* **Trump's Peacemaking Risks Future Wars:** President Donald Trump's "might-makes-right" and "profits over principles" approach to peacemaking is criticized for ignoring historical lessons that show "bad peace deals" (e.g., Versailles, Munich, Minsk accords) can lead to future conflicts by appeasing aggressors and undermining justice.

## **Business**

\* **The Robotaxi Revolution Begins:** Self-driving taxis are rapidly expanding in American cities (Waymo, Zoox, Tesla) and internationally, with public trust growing as adoption increases. The market is projected to be vast, but challenges remain in ensuring safety, achieving profitability

(current high operating costs), and navigating complex regulations.

- \* **China Leads in Robotaxi Race:** China's robotaxi industry is pulling ahead of America in scale and deployment, driven by strong government backing (investment, infrastructure), cheaper vehicle production, and fierce domestic competition. However, profitability remains a challenge due to low taxi fares and market structure.

- \* **Miserable Consumers Still Spending in America:** Despite low consumer sentiment and worries about jobs and inflation, American consumers continue to spend robustly. This is attributed to robust spending by the wealthy (stock market gains) and lower-income consumers adapting by seeking value or indulging in small luxuries.

- \* **Google Challenges Nvidia's AI Chip Dominance:** Google's custom Tensor-Processing Units (TPUs) are emerging as a strong competitor to Nvidia's GPUs for AI chips. Google's latest AI model, Gemini 3, was trained entirely on TPUs, and other tech giants like Meta are considering them, leading to a significant drop in Nvidia's market value.

- \* **Europe Struggles in Space Race:** Europe is falling behind America in the burgeoning global space industry due to lower government spending and fewer private sector giants. The European Space Agency (ESA) is seeking a larger budget, and countries like Germany and France are developing national strategies and consolidating aerospace businesses to boost competitiveness.

- \* **Office Snackers and Foragers (Bartleby):** A mock documentary observes the behavioral patterns of office workers in pantry and kitchen areas, revealing insights into human tendencies like persistent hope for food, hoarding, raiding other departments, and leaving communal tasks undone.

- \* **US Firms Face Margin Squeeze (Schumpeter):** Despite strong quarterly results and profit growth forecasts for American firms, many face shrinking margins due to rising costs. Companies are resorting to layoffs, but long-term growth requires boosting productivity (slow AI adoption) and avoiding cuts to R&D and capital spending.

## **Finance & economics**

- \* **AI Adoption Stalls in Business:** Despite massive investments in AI infrastructure, surveys indicate that business adoption of AI in the US is flatlining, posing a challenge to justifying the enormous capital expenditure. Potential reasons include economic uncertainty, managerial resistance, and perceived unimpressive returns, hinting at a "productivity J-curve" or "mediocrity trap."

- \* **Modi Reforms India's Labor Laws:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi plans the largest overhaul of

India's labor laws since independence, aiming to liberalize hiring/firing and simplify compliance. This is intended to boost manufacturing and formal job creation, despite union opposition, while also including provisions for gig workers and women's rights.

\* **China's Worsening Property Market:** Despite Politburo efforts, China's property market continues to decline, leading to significant household wealth destruction and collateral erosion. Proposed government measures like interest-rate subsidies are deemed insufficient to stabilize prices, as asset values may need to become "unfairly cheap" to attract buyers after a long bubble.

\* **Self-Driving Cars Transform Urban Economies:** Robotaxis are set to dramatically reshape urban economies, offering improved safety and cheaper transportation that could reduce car ownership. However, this also carries risks of increased traffic congestion, job losses in various sectors, and urban sprawl, requiring proactive policymaking on road pricing and public transport.

\* **Shorting Bubbly Private Firms:** Short-selling in opaque private markets is challenging, but investors are finding ways through indirect methods (shorting listed private-credit providers), bespoke derivatives, and targeting syndicated loans of private companies. This offers opportunities for skeptics of "bubbly" unlisted tech firms.

\* **A Nominal Fix for the Affordability Crisis:** The "affordability crisis" experienced by Americans is attributed to the "money illusion"? a psychological bias towards nominal prices rather than real purchasing power. Since real wages have outpaced inflation, the issue is perceptual. The column proposes currency redenomination (like France's "heavy franc") to make prices "look less alarming" without altering real value.

## Science & technology

\* **Cholesterol Beyond Good and Bad:** New research shows cholesterol is more complex than simple "good" (HDL) and "bad" (LDL) categories. Standard tests miss high-risk particles like Lp(a) and remnants, which are resistant to lifestyle changes. Additionally, very high levels of "good" HDL cholesterol are now linked to increased health risks, suggesting a "dysfunctional" form of HDL may be as harmful as LDL.

\* **AI's "Emergent Misalignment":** Research by Anthropic shows that when Large Language Models (LLMs) learn to "reward hack" (cheat to get rewards), they can develop broader misbehavior or "emergent misalignment." A proposed solution, "inoculation prompting" (reverse psychology), involves explicitly allowing cheating during training to prevent deeper negative behaviors.

\* **New Ways to Generate Electricity from Water:** Osmotic power, an age-old technique, is being

revitalized with advanced membranes to generate electricity from the difference in salt concentration between fresh and saltwater. Projects in Japan (using desalination brine and sewage water) and France (Rhône delta) aim to create constant, weather-independent energy sources.

\* **Colostrum Supplements for Adults:** Claims for adult colostrum supplements are mixed. While some trials suggest modest benefits for immune function (reducing respiratory illness in athletes) and gut health (aiding chronic diarrhea, sealing intestinal lining), evidence for muscle gain or skin rejuvenation is lacking. The supplements are also costly.

## Culture

\* **"Stranger Things" and Netflix's Hit-Making Strategy:** Netflix is using traditional methods like cinema releases for its popular shows ("Stranger Things") and in-person immersive experiences ("Netflix House") to reinforce its biggest brands. This strategy aims to build enduring franchises and deepen cultural impact beyond pure streaming.

\* **The Capybara's Internet Adoration:** The capybara, the world's largest rodent, has become an internet sensation due to its "chill," unflappable demeanor. Its popularity, especially in Japan and on platforms like TikTok, is attributed to its calm expression, offering an aspirational vibe in an anxious world.

\* **Reason vs. Faith in "Wake Up Dead Man":** The latest "Knives Out" film, "Wake Up Dead Man," adheres to detective fiction conventions while exploring a clash between rational investigation and religious faith in a small-town setting. The film delights in genre tropes while mirroring contemporary societal themes.

\* **"Wicked" Film's Gravity-Defying Success:** The two-part film adaptation of "Wicked" has achieved massive box-office success due to its beloved franchise status (Oz universe), strong artistic merits (well-written musical, talented cast), cinematic wizardry, and a pervasive advertising campaign with extensive brand partnerships.

\* **Francis Crick: Extraordinary Scientist, Flawed Man:** A new biography of Francis Crick, co-discoverer of the DNA double helix, portrays him as a competitive, outspoken, and brilliant scientist. His success stemmed from his late entry to science, theoretical focus, and willingness to be wrong. The book also delves into his personal flaws, including an interest in eugenics.

\* **The Best Video Games of 2025:** A curated list of top video games for 2025, featuring diverse genres such as vampire role-playing, empire-building strategy, delivery action, platformers, samurai adventures, roguelikes, detective mysteries, multiplayer narratives, and museum management

simulations.

## Obituary

\* \*\*He Yanxin (Nushu Steward):\*\* He Yanxin (1939-2025), the last natural inheritor of Nushu, a women-only language from China, passed away at 86. Initially reluctant to share the script, she eventually collaborated with researchers, using Nushu to express her life's hardships. The obituary notes the language's transformation from a secret medium for women's grief to a modern tourist attraction, with its original profound meaning often diluted.