



THE CURRENT AFFAIRS DIGEST

DAILY



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TOP STORY • THE GULF

Oil Holds Near \$109 as Hormuz Tanker Claims Clash

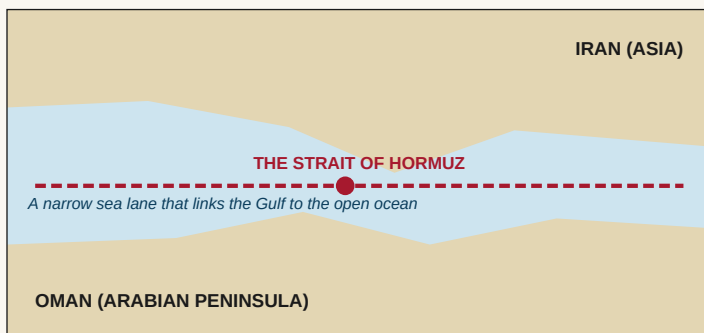
Houthi and Iranian claims keep supply fears alive; the US denies the mine reports.

Written and fact-checked by AI • News Pebbles

Brent crude, the international benchmark price for oil, closed at \$108.82 a barrel on Tuesday 20 October, according to CNBC. US West Texas Intermediate, the American benchmark, settled at \$97.15. The latest rise followed claims by the Houthis, an Iran-aligned movement in Yemen, that they had attacked several Saudi Arabian facilities on Monday. Saudi authorities did not immediately confirm the claims, and Reuters could not verify them.

The second pressure point is the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow sea lane between Iran and Oman. Iran's Revolutionary Guards said their naval mines had stopped three tankers on routes Tehran considers unauthorised, and that two caught fire. US Central Command rejected that account, saying the claims that tankers hit mines were false.

Diplomacy continues alongside. Iran and the United States remain in indirect talks through Pakistan and Qatar. Iran's foreign minister said the strait will stay closed unless Washington accepts Tehran's conditions. Each side is therefore claiming the other must move first, which leaves traders pricing in risk rather than facts.



Tankers from the Gulf pass through this strait.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Oil is priced globally, so threats to supply in the Gulf can lift fuel costs, inflation and interest-rate decisions in countries far from the fighting, including India.

WORLD • RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

Putin Agrees in Principle to Resume Three-Way Talks

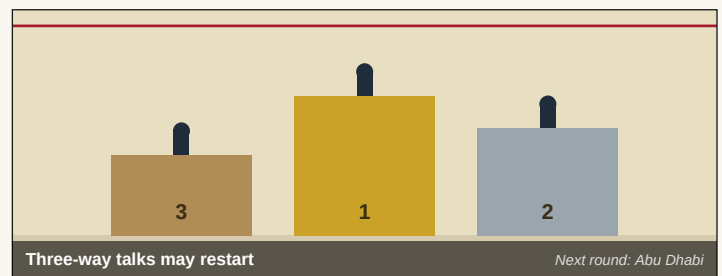
The Kremlin says talks could restart after 10 November, but warns they will take long.

US envoy Steve Witkoff met Russian President Vladimir Putin in St Petersburg on 21 October. The Kremlin said the meeting lasted about three hours. It came a day after Witkoff met Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and some European leaders in Oslo.

Kremlin adviser Yuri Ushakov said Putin agreed in principle to resume trilateral talks, meaning talks between three parties, after 10 November. He said the next round could take place in Abu Dhabi. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow would study the proposals, but that the talks would take a long time.

Moscow also set a condition. Kremlin officials said a negotiated end to the war is theoretically possible only if Ukraine's leaders make "necessary decisions". Russia also freed a US citizen, Stephen Hubbard, during the visit. The central question remains whether either side will shift its position.

Ukraine's position matters too. Zelenskyy has said he prefers trilateral talks with Trump and Putin and would reject a deal drafted by China, Russia and the US alone. He said any settlement would need the approval of Ukraine's parliament, and he told Fox News he is open to freezing the front lines as a route to a ceasefire. Fighting continued meanwhile: a Russian attack on a high-rise in Kyiv's Sviatoshinsky district killed two people, and a Ukrainian drone attack in Russia's Bryansk region killed at least one.



Talks are due to resume after 10 November.

CONNECT THE DOTS

Geography and economics: the war has pushed up energy prices around the world, which is why diplomacy in St Petersburg and Oslo can affect fuel bills in India.

INDIA • ENVIRONMENT

Delhi's Air Turns "Poor"; GRAP Stage I Begins*The first pollution-control stage of the season starts across Delhi-NCR.*

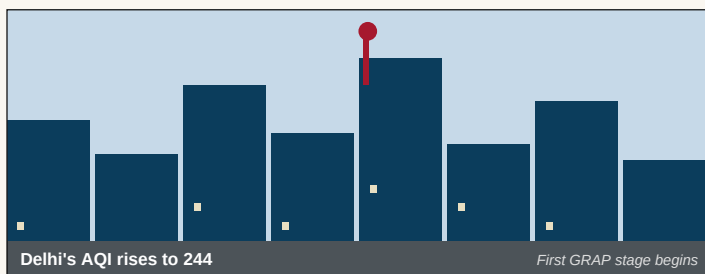
Delhi's Air Quality Index, or AQI, a scale on which higher numbers mean dirtier air, rose from 179 on 20 October to 244 at 2 pm on 21 October. That is in the "poor" band. In response, the Commission for Air Quality Management put Stage I of the Graded Response Action Plan, or GRAP, in force across Delhi-NCR, the National Capital Region. It is the first time this season.

Stage I measures focus on dust from construction and roads, vehicle checks, waste burning and industrial emissions. The Delhi Metro will add 20 weekday trips from Thursday, according to National Herald.

Later on 21 October the Central Pollution Control Board recorded an AQI of 247 at 7 pm. CAQM said it invoked Stage I because the reading entered the poor category and forecasts indicated that pollution could remain elevated. On the Board's scale, readings from 201 to 300 count as poor.

Because GRAP is a graded plan, Stage I is the first and lightest step, and later stages are meant for worse air. Forecasts from the India Meteorological Department and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology indicate the air is likely to stay in the poor category over the coming days.

Another Delhi story is running alongside. The Supreme Court advanced to 28 October its hearing on a plea asking the Election Commission to publish the list of electors who received notices in Delhi's Special Intensive Revision of the voter list, with the reasons. CJI Surya Kant said the bench was thinking of passing an order. The window for claims and objections was extended by a month, to 30 October.

*Air quality was "poor" on Wednesday.***WHY THIS MATTERS**

GRAP is a graded plan, so the AQI number decides which restrictions citizens and industry face.

POLITICS & CIVICS • UNITED STATES

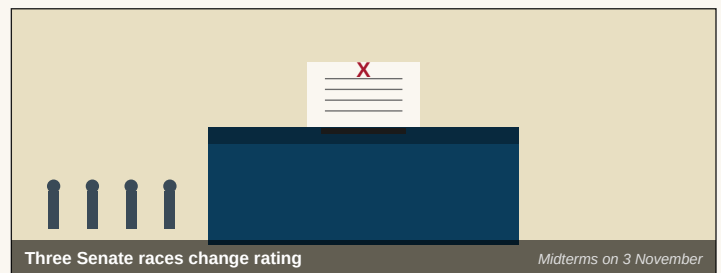
Forecaster Shifts Three Senate Races Before Midterms*The 3 November vote will decide who controls Congress.*

On 20 October the Cook Political Report, a non-partisan election forecaster, changed the rating of three US Senate races. South Carolina moved from Likely Republican to Lean Republican, and Mississippi from Solid Republican to Likely Republican. Both shifts favour Democrats.

Minnesota moved the other way, from Likely Democrat to Lean Democrat, because polling showed the Democratic nominee behind the national environment. A rating is a forecaster's judgement of how likely a party is to win, not a result.

Cook has been moving races for weeks. It moved 18 House races toward Democrats on 9 October and 11 more on 16 October. Axios reported that these moves put the likely outcome at Democrats picking up nine to 19 House seats. On 6 October Cook moved Kansas from Lean Republican to Toss Up, New Hampshire from Toss Up to Lean Democrat and North Carolina from Lean Democrat to Likely Democrat. Forecasts can be wrong, and the voters, not the forecasters, decide. On Cook's scale a Toss Up is a race either party could win, Lean means a narrow edge, Likely a clearer edge and Solid a safe seat.

The stakes are control of Congress. The 3 November midterm election, held halfway through a president's term, will decide whether Republicans keep their majorities in the House and the Senate. In Texas, Harris County reported more than 100,000 in-person votes on its first early-voting day. Texas had 911,468 early voters after two days, about 4.8% of its registered voters, and in South Carolina 97,968 votes were cast on day one, more than double the last midterm.

*Ratings are forecasts, not results.***WHY THIS MATTERS**

In the US system Congress passes laws and controls spending, so the party that holds the House and Senate shapes what a president can do.

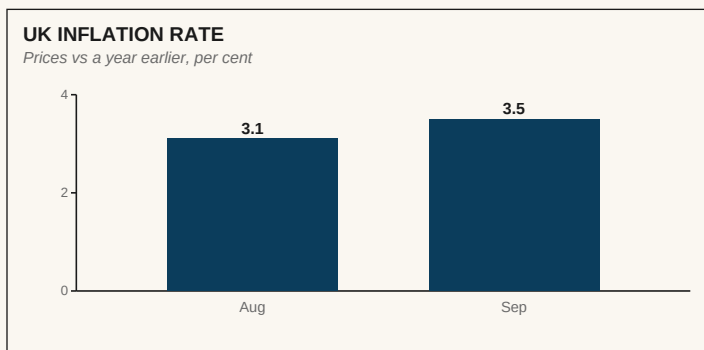
ECONOMY • UNITED KINGDOM

UK Inflation Rises to 3.5% as Fuel Prices Jump*Markets now expect the Bank of England to raise interest rates.*

UK consumer prices rose 3.5% in the 12 months to September, up from 3.1% in August, the Office for National Statistics reported on 21 October. Economists polled by Reuters had expected 3.4%. Inflation is the rate at which prices rise over a year.

Fuel drove the rise. Motor fuel prices were up 29.8% over the year, the highest rate of motor fuel inflation since August 2022. Reuters said the surge in energy prices caused by the Iran war gathered steam, and the Bank of England's July forecast had predicted a smaller rise, to 3.0%. Services price inflation also rose, to 3.7% from 3.4% in August.

Bloomberg reports the Bank of England is on track for its first interest-rate rise in more than three years. The figures arrived before John Healey's first Budget as chancellor, due next week. Core inflation, which leaves out food, energy, alcohol and tobacco, rose to 2.8%. Markets price a 98% chance that the Bank of England raises its policy rate to 4% next month, and wage growth figures released on 20 October added to the case for a rise. A rate rise would raise borrowing costs for households and firms while aiming to slow price rises.



Source: Office for National Statistics, via CNBC.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Prices and interest rates reach every household: fuel costs feed into inflation, and central banks respond by changing the cost of borrowing.

THINK LIKE AN ANALYST

Why might a central bank raise interest rates when fuel prices are driving inflation? Who gains and who loses when borrowing costs rise? What would you need to know to judge whether the rise in UK inflation will last?

SCIENCE & TECH • SPACE

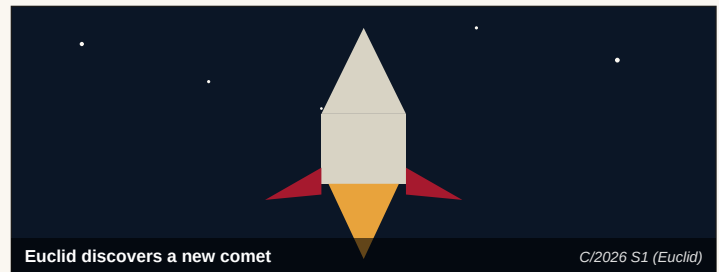
Europe's Euclid Telescope Finds Its First Comet*A PhD student's software spotted the new comet, C/2026 S1 (Euclid).*

The European Space Agency said its Euclid space telescope spotted a previously unknown comet, named C/2026 S1 (Euclid), in images taken between 16 and 24 September. The comet turned up during the Euclid Deep Field North survey.

The finder was Mikko Pöntinen, a PhD student, who used custom software that detects moving objects. He reported the object to the Minor Planet Center, which confirmed it as a comet on 8 October.

One Euclid frame, a 560-second exposure from 20 September, shows the comet as a streak with a fuzzy coma, the cloud of gas and dust around a comet's nucleus. Pöntinen predicted the comet's position to find it in five sets of images and found no match against known comets or asteroids. Starlust reports the comet was about 1.3 billion km from Earth.

The find was made by a PhD student using custom software, not by Euclid's main survey pipeline. The Minor Planet Center is the body that officially records new comets and asteroids, so its confirmation is what makes a discovery count. The comet's name, C/2026 S1 (Euclid), follows the usual convention of naming a comet after the survey or person that found it, with the year and a letter code. The discovery was unexpected. Euclid was built to map distant galaxies and to study dark matter and dark energy, not to track fast-moving objects. Earlier comets it observed were already known, so this is its first new find.



Found in images from 16-24 September.

WHY THIS MATTERS

It shows that survey data collected for one purpose can yield discoveries in another field, if researchers write the tools to look. It also shows how a discovery is confirmed: a candidate is reported to the Minor Planet Center, checked against known objects, and confirmed with follow-up observations, here including ground-based ones.

ONE-LINE BRIEFS

- Albania: Protests that began on 13 October as a student boycott over higher education have grown into a movement demanding that Prime Minister Edi Rama resign.
- United Kingdom: The King, the Queen and the Prince of Wales marked 60 years since the 1966 Aberfan disaster, in which 144 people died.
- European Union: Leaders ended a summit on 16 October without agreeing the EU budget for 2028 to 2034.
- Football: Como beat Manchester United 4-1 in the Champions League on Wednesday.

VOCABULARY BUILDER**Words that unlock today's news****Trilateral**

Involving three parties. Today: Putin agreed in principle to resume trilateral talks with the US and Ukraine.

Inflation

The rate at which prices rise over a year. Today: UK prices rose 3.5% in the year to September.

Air Quality Index

A scale on which higher numbers mean dirtier air. Today: Delhi's reached 244, in the poor band.

Comet

An icy body that grows a fuzzy cloud when it nears the Sun. Today: Euclid found a new comet, C/2026 S1.

DID YOU KNOW?

Euclid was built to map distant galaxies and study dark matter and dark energy, yet its first discovery of a new comet came from software written to find moving objects.

EXPLAINER**Why central banks change interest rates**

A central bank, such as the Bank of England or India's RBI, sets the interest rate, the price of borrowing money. When prices are rising too fast, a central bank can raise that rate.

Higher rates make loans and mortgages dearer, so households and firms tend to spend and borrow less. That cools demand and helps slow price rises. The trade-off is that slower spending can also slow growth and jobs.

QUIZ**Eight questions on this issue**

1. What did Brent crude close at on Tuesday 20 October?
(a) \$18.82 (b) \$108.82 (c) \$208.82
2. Between which two countries does the Strait of Hormuz lie?
(a) Iran and Oman (b) Egypt and Sudan (c) India and Sri Lanka
3. After which date did the Kremlin say three-way talks could resume?
(a) 10 November (b) 21 October (c) 3 December
4. Where could the next round of talks take place, according to Ushakov?
(a) Oslo (b) Abu Dhabi (c) Delhi
5. What was Delhi's AQI at 2 pm on 21 October?
(a) 179 (b) 244 (c) 300
6. Which state's Senate race moved from Likely Democrat to Lean Democrat?
(a) Minnesota (b) Mississippi (c) South Carolina
7. What was UK inflation in the 12 months to September?
(a) 3.1% (b) 3.5% (c) 29.8%
8. Who confirmed the new Euclid object as a comet on 8 October?
(a) The Minor Planet Center (b) The Bank of England (c) Cook Political Report

Answers. 1 (b): \$108.82. 2 (a): Iran and Oman. 3 (a): 10 November. 4 (b): Abu Dhabi. 5 (b): 244. 6 (a): Minnesota. 7 (b): 3.5%. 8 (a): the Minor Planet Center.

TOMORROW'S WATCHLIST

- Whether Brent crude stays near \$109 a barrel, and whether the US and Iran agree a way to reopen Hormuz.
- Whether Delhi's AQI worsens and triggers a stricter stage of GRAP.
- Whether the Bank of England raises interest rates, and what John Healey's Budget says next week.

You are not just reading the news — you are learning to think about it. See you tomorrow.