

Catch up: Russian aide rejects ceasefire proposal; Trump threatens alcohol tariffs



Vladimir Putin's foreign-policy adviser, Yuri Ushakov, rejected the [30-day ceasefire](#) proposed by America, calling it a “temporary breather” for Ukraine. America and Ukraine agreed to the idea during talks in Saudi Arabia this week. Russia has reportedly proposed conditions for a ceasefire, including that Ukraine be prevented from joining NATO. Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine’s president, accused Russia of “seeking to prolong the war”.

Writing on Truth Social, **Donald Trump** threatened a 200% [tariff](#) on alcohol from EU countries. America’s president said the move would be a response to the bloc’s \$28bn in tariffs on American imports, including a “nasty” 50% levy on bourbon. Earlier Canada also introduced \$21bn-worth of retaliatory tariffs on its neighbour.

Hours before his confirmation hearing, the Trump administration withdrew its nomination of Dave Weldon to run the [Centres for Disease Control and Prevention](#), America’s primary public-health agency. According to *The New York Times*, the former Republican congressman and doctor was told by officials that they “didn’t have

the votes” to confirm his appointment. Mr Weldon has previously cast doubt on the safety of vaccines.

Andrzej Duda, **Poland’s president**, told the *Financial Times* that America should move nuclear weapons to [Poland](#) to deter Russian aggression. Mr Duda said he had already discussed the proposal with Keith Kellogg, America’s special envoy for Ukraine. Earlier this month Poland’s prime minister, Donald Tusk, said that the country would consider seeking nuclear weapons and wants to more than double the size of its army.

Taiwan’s president, Lai Ching-te, accused [China](#) of trying to “absorb” the island, by stepping up “influence campaigns and manipulation” there. Sixty-four people were charged for Chinese espionage in 2024—the majority of whom had been in the army. Mr Lai proposed a raft of countermeasures, including stricter rules on residency applications by Chinese citizens and a restoration of military courts.

Kyrgyzstan and **Tajikistan** signed a border deal after three decades of conflict. Tajikistan will reportedly give Kyrgyzstan 25 square kilometres of land in exchange for territory and improved access to shared water resources. The office of Sadyr Japarov, Kyrgyzstan’s president, said that the agreement would foster “security, stability and sustainable development” in Central Asia.

Rodrigo Duterte, a former president of the Philippines, said he would “be responsible for everything” as he prepared to face charges of crimes against humanity from the **International Criminal Court** in The Hague. The remarks, posted on his Facebook account, are his first since his arrest at Manila airport on Tuesday. In office, [Mr Duterte](#) urged police to commit thousands of extra-judicial killings.

Figure of the day: 38%, the share of American college students displaying symptoms of depression in 2024, down from 44% in

2022. [Read the full story.](#)

Waiting for Putin's next move



“The ball is now in Russia’s court,” said America’s secretary of state, Marco Rubio, on Tuesday, after [talks with Ukraine](#). The sides had agreed on the terms of a 30-day ceasefire and the resumption of American intelligence and military support. What Russia does next will become clearer after Donald Trump speaks with Vladimir Putin, possibly within the next day or two. The outcome will hinge on how Russia’s president manoeuvres Mr Trump, who may not appreciate just how uncompromising the Russian president is in his demands.

On the battlefield, Ukrainian forces have held their ground and even launched counter-attacks in areas such as Pokvrosk and Toretsk in eastern Ukraine. But Russia may be closer to driving them out of the part of Kursk that has been under Ukrainian control since August. If [Ukrainian troops](#) remain in the Russian region, they risk being encircled. A retreat may be unavoidable—sacrificing territory to save 10,000 of Ukraine’s best soldiers.

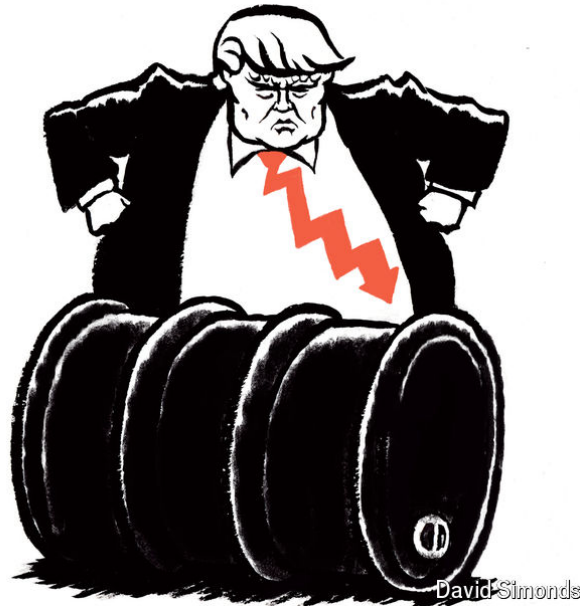
A culture shock for America's health agencies



The Trump administration's attacks on America's civil service are far from over. Federal agencies have been instructed to submit lists of workers for the first of two phases of forthcoming lay-offs by Thursday, according to a memo from the Office of Personnel Management, Elon Musk's efficiency-enforcer. At the [Centres for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the country's primary public-health agency, big cuts would make monitoring diseases, tackling outbreaks and preparing for disasters much harder.

Donald Trump's nominee to lead the CDC, David Weldon, was set for a Senate confirmation hearing on Thursday. But the White House abruptly withdrew his nomination, citing a lack of votes. Interviews with CDC insiders and nearly 100 emails obtained by *The Economist* reveal an anxious workforce. *Researchers* have been banned from communicating with the public and directed to eliminate research of "gender ideology extremism" and any references to diversity, equity and inclusion. Even senior scientists are terrified that any misstep will cause them to lose their jobs.

Trump dampens the oil market



On Thursday the International Energy Agency, an official forecaster, released its monthly update on global oil markets. It was a subdued one.. Oil prices, which usually rise with geopolitical tensions, are struggling to stay above \$70 a barrel. Donald Trump is having a **deflationary effect** on the world's most-traded commodity.

Markets fear that American tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China—and their retaliation—will slow the global economy. The **dollar is weakening**, which could stimulate a little more appetite for oil overseas because oil is priced in dollars. But investors worry that America's economy, too, will suffer from Mr Trump's policies, depressing overall oil demand.

At the same time, oil supply is continuing to rise. On March 3rd OPEC+, a cartel of oil exporters, said that its members would start increasing output in April, reversing some of the cuts made in recent years. Mr Trump wants American oil firms to produce more. As prices cool, they have few reasons to obey.

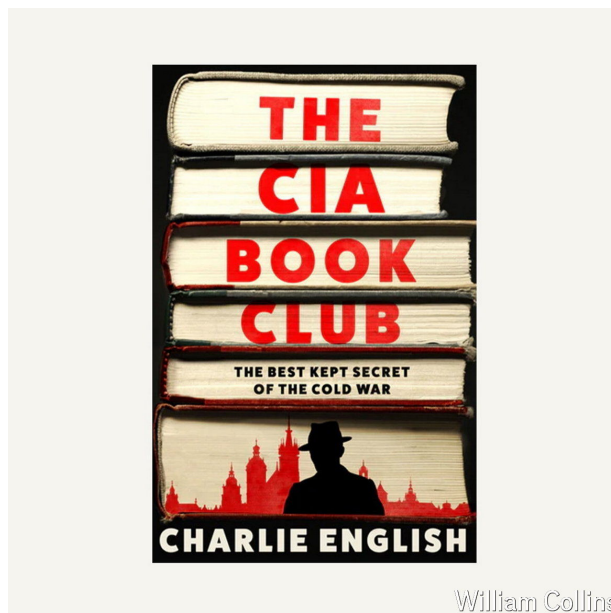
South Sudan's fragile peace



Uganda says it has deployed special forces to South Sudan to protect the government of Salva Kiir, the president, following violent clashes in the country's north. Though the South Sudanese government denies it, eyewitnesses in the capital, Juba, say dozens of soldiers arrived on Tuesday and are stationed outside the president's office.

Mr Kiir is on edge. Last week a general and dozens of soldiers were killed when the White Army, an ethnic militia, attacked a UN helicopter attempting to evacuate them from a town in the oil-producing Upper Nile state. Mr Kiir accuses the group of being linked to his longtime rival, Riek Machar, the vice-president. In response, he has arrested several of Mr Machar's senior allies, including the petroleum minister. Observers fear the crisis could unravel the fragile peace deal that ended South Sudan's five-year civil war in 2018. America has already evacuated most of its embassy staff.

The best-kept secret of the cold war



Books were smuggled on planes, trains and trucks. A copy of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's "The Gulag Archipelago" was stowed in a baby's nappy. George Orwell's "1984" was disguised as a defunct computer manual. Over three decades leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the CIA's literary-propaganda scheme funneled 10m books into the Eastern Bloc.

It was "the best-kept secret of the cold war", writes Charlie English, an author, in "The CIA Book Club", published in Britain on Thursday and later in the year in America. To undermine Soviet censors, the agency circulated everything from *Cosmopolitan*, a glossy lifestyle magazine, to spy thrillers and the philosophical works of Albert Camus. It even smuggled in works by Soviet writers, including Boris Pasternak's "[Doctor Zhivago](#)". The programme worked. Adam Michnik, a Polish dissident, argued books saved his country in Soviet times. "They allowed us to survive and not go mad," he told Mr English.

Daily quiz



The Economist

We will serve you a new question each day this week. On Friday your challenge is to give us all five answers and, as important, tell us the connecting theme. Email your responses (and include mention of your home city and country) by 1700 GMT on Friday to QuizEspresso@economist.com. We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Thursday: What term was given to the series of discussions between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow in 1959?

Wednesday: What term, linked to a South American country, was used to describe the series of negotiations that led to the establishment of the World Trade Organisation?

Often the fear on one evil leads us into a worse.

Nicolas Boileau-Despreaux