

Catch up: Canada's new leader jabs at Trump; Russia steps up attacks ahead of peace talks



Mark Carney will be Canada's new prime minister after winning the Liberal Party's leadership contest. The former central banker will succeed Justin Trudeau. **Mr Carney's** first challenges include preparing for an election that must be held this year and defending Canada from Donald Trump's economic onslaught and territorial ambitions. "Canada will never, ever be part of America," Mr Carney told supporters on Sunday.

Russian troops recaptured three more settlements in Kursk, the **Russian** region partly occupied by Ukrainian forces following a surprise incursion last year. Earlier, Russian strikes on Ukrainian cities killed at least 20 people, officials said. **Volodymyr Zelensky**, Ukraine's president, said he was "fully committed" to talks with American officials in Saudi Arabia this week on ending the war.

Calin Georgescu was barred from standing in **Romania's** re-run presidential election later this month, after falling foul of rules on

extremism. Last November Mr Georgescu, a pro-Russian candidate, topped the first round of voting. However the result was annulled as evidence of interference by the Kremlin emerged. The hard-right politician has [received support](#) from high-ups in the Trump administration, including J.D. Vance, the vice-president.

Ahmed al-Sharaa, the recently anointed leader of **Syria**, vowed to “hold accountable” anyone involved in the “bloodshed of civilians”. Over the past four days more than 1,000 people have been killed in clashes between security forces and supporters of [Bashar al-Assad](#), the deposed president, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor. Most were Alawite civilians killed by pro-government forces.

Seven & i Holdings, the Japanese owner of 7-Eleven, said it was discussing the sale of some of its American stores with Alimentation Couche-Tard, a Canadian firm that wants [to buy](#) it for \$47bn. The divestments might ease anti-trust concerns. Despite the talks, Seven is still playing hard to get. Last week, it announced sweeping restructuring plans—including appointing its first foreign CEO—in an attempt to block the deal.

Germany’s incoming chancellor said he would welcome talks with Britain and France about sharing their nuclear weapons. However, [Friedrich Merz](#) added that any new arrangement would be “supplementing” the existing American nuclear shield in NATO rather than replacing it. Mr Merz also added that he would like to wrap up talks on forming his new coalition government by Easter.

Britain’s government outlined plans to reform the **civil service**. Pat McFadden, a cabinet minister, told the BBC that under-performing officials would be given incentives to leave and performance-related pay would be introduced. He said overall civil service numbers “would and can become smaller”, but denied any comparisons to Elon Musk’s [assault](#) on federal bureaucracy in America, arguing that he just wanted a bigger “bang for our buck”.

Figure of the day: 40%. The percentage by which Britain's government is slashing the aid budget to boost defence spending.
[Read the full story here.](#)

Ukrainian and American officials meet in Saudi Arabia



On Monday Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, will land in Saudi Arabia for a long-planned trip to meet the country's crown prince, Muhammad bin Salman. Mr Zelensky had initially planned to travel to the kingdom last month, but postponed his visit after Saudi Arabia hosted America and Russia in their first high-level peace talks since the invasion of Ukraine. Ukraine was not invited.

Things might be different this time around. Mr Zelensky indicated that his team would meet with [American officials](#) led by Marco Rubio, the secretary of state, in Saudi Arabia to discuss ending the war. Steve Witkoff, Donald Trump's special envoy, says the delegations will discuss a "framework" for peace. Mr Zelensky, however, will not attend the talks. Instead he will focus on strengthening Ukraine's economic ties with Saudi Arabia. Mr Zelensky is planning on signing a raft of economic agreements with other countries in the region, too. If he gets sight of a good peace deal, too, it could be a productive trip.

Germany's export industries fear the worst



On Monday Destatis, Germany's statistics agency, will publish figures for the country's trade balance in January. They will likely show a surplus for the export-oriented economy. Even so, German industry is deeply concerned about Donald Trump's threat to slap a 25% tariff on European imports; America is Germany's most important trade partner. Last week's one-month postponement of similar [tariffs](#) against Canada and Mexico gives scant comfort.

Last year Germany's trade surplus with America reached a record level owing to higher exports and lower imports, a consequence of the weakness of Germany's domestic demand. Mr Trump has singled out for his wrath Germany's car industry, which accounts for a big chunk of the country's exports to America. The Kiel Institute for the World Economy calculated that Mr Trump's proposed tariffs would lead to a decrease in car production of 4%. This would be a big blow at a time when the German car industry, in particular, is struggling.

Ceasefire negotiations between Israel and Hamas



An Israeli delegation will arrive in Doha on Monday for mediated talks with Hamas on a possible extension of the [ceasefire in Gaza](#). The talks were to have started weeks ago, but the Israeli government has demanded that any resolution of the war must include Hamas' expulsion from the coastal strip.

Israel's alternative to extending the two-month ceasefire is a renewed military offensive, which its generals warn will be even more devastating for Hamas than the last. However, before he gives the orders for a new attack, Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, is under pressure from Donald Trump to return first to the talks with Hamas. The American president has taken the cause of the 59 Israeli hostages still being held in Gaza to his heart, and is insisting that Mr Netanyahu and Hamas try again to reach a deal for their release before any more fighting.

A pandemic-era star fades



BioNTech, a German biotech firm, reports its annual results on Monday. The pandemic-era star, which developed the first vaccine against covid-19 with Pfizer, another pharma giant, now faces tougher times as demand for the jabs has plunged. Since 2022 its share price has fallen by 27%, while an index of big pharma firms has climbed 20%. To revive its fortunes, BioNTech is banking on new uses for its [messenger-RNA technology](#), the backbone of its covid vaccine.

The pivot away from covid shots is proving rocky. On March 4th America's drug regulator halted trials of BioNTech's experimental malaria vaccine. A day later, a German court ruled that it and Pfizer infringed a covid vaccine patent held by Moderna, an American rival. The Trump administration is another worry. The health secretary, Robert F. Kennedy junior, is a prominent [vaccine sceptic](#). But analysts believe he cannot unilaterally change vaccine guidelines without legislative approval. BioNTech, and its investors, will be hoping they are right.

Watches get smart on health



Smartwatches of the type sold by Apple, maker of the iPhone, are a status symbol. But new research suggests they could help save lives, too. Scientists at Aalto University, Stanford University and Texas A&M University say the wrist-worn gizmos could help to quell the spread of [pandemic-causing viruses](#) such as SARS-CoV-2, which was behind covid-19. Using data such as heart rate and skin temperature gathered by smartwatches from prior peer-reviewed studies, the researchers concluded that devices can detect with 88% accuracy whether someone is suffering from covid-19 four to five days before symptoms appear. For flu, accuracy rises to 90%, 24 hours before symptoms.

Pre-existing data suggest people reduce social contact dramatically once they know they're ill. Isolation helps pandemics fizzle out. So when the next global virus arrives, the researchers say, governments should consider sending everyone a smartwatch. Starting at \$230, Apple Watches aren't cheap—but for governments they could prove cheaper than other interventions.

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.

Monday: What must be at least 50 metres long and 25 metres wide to be used in the Olympics?

**I don't go out of my way to be outrageous,
I just go out of my way to look at things.**

Dave Allen