

Catch up: Heathrow closes after fire; EU discusses Ukraine aid



London's **Heathrow** airport has been **closed** until midnight on Friday after a fire at a nearby electrical substation caused power outages. [Heathrow](#), one of the world's busiest airports and Britain's main international hub, said it expected significant disruption over the coming days and advised passengers not to travel to it. More than 16,000 homes are also without power and 150 people have been evacuated.

European leaders failed to agree on a military-aid package worth €5bn (\$5.4bn) for **Ukraine** at a summit in Brussels. Some countries, including France and Italy, reportedly balked at the proposed expenditure. There was greater consensus, however, on imposing further sanctions on Russia. Only Hungary dissented from that plan. Earlier [Ukraine launched a drone strike](#) against a Russian airfield some 700km behind the front line.

The upper house of **Germany's** parliament approved the creation of a €500bn (\$542bn) fund for infrastructure and the loosening of the "debt brake", the country's legal limit on government

borrowing, to allow for greater defence spending. The centre-right Christian Democrats, led by [Friedrich Merz](#), the probable next chancellor, passed the bill with the support of the centre-left Social Democrats and the Greens.

Donald Trump signed an executive order directing the education secretary to begin dismantling America's **Department of Education**. The order stops short of abolishing it, which would require Congressional approval, and the White House said that it would still administer loans and enforce civil-rights laws. The department's workforce has [already been halved](#) under the Trump administration.

Israel's cabinet voted to fire Ronen Bar, the head of **Shin Bet**, the country's domestic-security service. Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, has long tried to blame Mr Bar for failing to prevent Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7th 2023. Tensions have risen recently as [Shin Bet](#) has investigated some of Mr Netanyahu's aides, including over alleged leaks of classified documents.

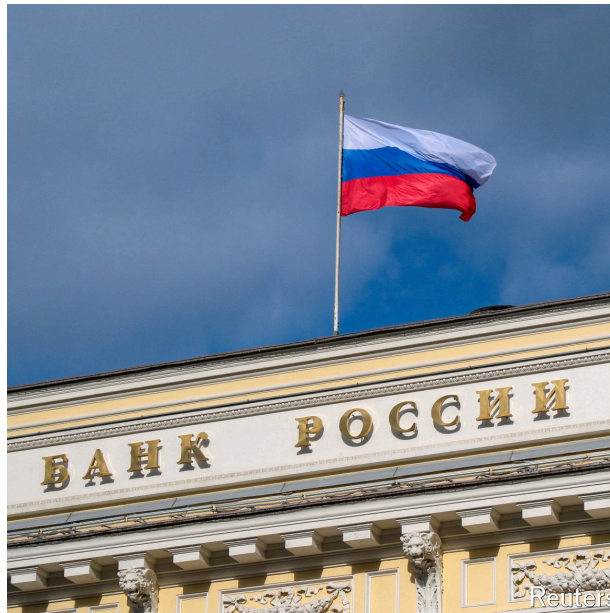
The **Sudanese Armed Forces** recaptured the presidential palace in Khartoum, the country's capital. The army appears to be on the cusp of reclaiming the city from the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group which seized it soon after the outbreak of civil war in 2023. The RSF still controls much of [western Sudan](#), including large swathes of the Darfur region.

Conor McGregor announced a bid for **Ireland's** presidency. The [mixed martial-arts fighter](#) plans to campaign on an anti-immigration platform, though he still requires the nomination of at least 20 Irish lawmakers (or four of the country's councils) to run in the elections, to be held this year. Mr McGregor was found liable for rape in a civil suit in Ireland last year.

Figure of the day: \$1.5bn, the value of cryptocurrencies stolen by North Korean hackers in a single heist on February 21st. [Read the full story.](#)

Every week we set a history quiz using snippets from The Economist's 182-year-old archive. Can you puzzle out the year each extract was published? [Play Dateline](#) and prove your historical mettle.

Pressure on the Russian economy



On Friday Russia's central bank kept interest rates on hold. That's news, you say? Well, yes. At 21%, Russia's rates are among the highest in the world. The central bank's inaction betrays deep concern about the economy. The problem is not growth, which has been bolstered by the government's vast war spending, but inflation. In February the annual rate surpassed 10% for the first time since early 2023. Wage growth is exceptionally strong, forcing companies to raise their prices.

The central bank has raised interest rates by 13 and a half percentage points in less than two years. Another plank of its inflation-fighting strategy involves reforming regulations. The government has helped by eliminating many of the schemes that had shielded the real economy from the effects of policy rates, such as a big [mortgage-subsidy programme](#). The central bank hopes that price pressure will soon subside. But so far there is little sign of such relief.

America's spat with South Africa



Ebrahim Rasool will return to South Africa this week much sooner than he had planned. The former anti-apartheid activist (pictured) was until recently ambassador to America. But the host country expelled him after his comments at a webinar on March 14th. They seemed like innocuous leftie musings: he suggested that part of the reason for Donald Trump's rise is that white Americans fear that ethnic minorities will outnumber them.

But the remarks intensified the Trump administration's dislike of South Africa's dominant party, the African National Congress. The MAGA movement sees the ANC as friendly to American adversaries, like China, and thinks it pursues "woke" policies. Mr Trump's executive orders have cut aid to South Africa; some American conservatives suggest that the country should lose its trade preferences and that ANC figures should face individual sanctions. The ANC may celebrate Mr Rasool as a returning hero. But his homecoming represents a broken relationship that will harm South Africa more than it will America.

A turning point in Sudan?



Following days of heavy fighting, the Sudanese Armed Forces have entered the presidential palace in Khartoum, Sudan's capital. The army has taken back large parts of the city from its paramilitary rival, the Rapid Support Forces, in recent weeks. Ousting the RSF from the palace—which the group seized, along with most of the city centre, at the start of the war two years ago—is an important symbolic victory for the army. It may also mark a turning point in a civil war that has displaced 12m Sudanese and caused one of the world's worst famines in decades.

Yet the RSF has until now remained defiant. In a rare video address on Saturday the RSF's leader, Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti, called on his troops not to surrender or retreat. Numerous corpses have been found in areas recaptured by the army in recent weeks. A stubborn last stand in the capital will lead to more bloodshed.

Will the universe eventually collapse?



Last year a group of astronomers tentatively suggested that their best model of the universe was [showing cracks](#). They had analysed data from the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument, which maps galaxies in the sky. It also allows astronomers to track a mysterious entity called dark energy, which is responsible for speeding up the universe's expansion. The model assumes dark energy to be constant, but instead it seemed to have grown weaker. This week the group released more data, doubling down on their conclusion.

If they are right, the finding has implications for the fate of the universe: rather than expand faster and faster, it might slow down or even collapse. But astronomers are now scratching their heads; most other data fit the model. The new result also does not yet reach the threshold of statistical significance that physicists rely on to tell discovery from fluke. They will be eagerly anticipating the next data drop.

An indie band set for stardom



Japanese Breakfast, whose latest album is out on Friday, has always been a critics' darling. The American band's debut record, "Psychopomp", released in 2016, combined ethereal melodies with a melancholic mood. "Soft Sounds from Another Planet", which followed in 2017, expanded the group's string-tinged lo-fi style with more electronic sounds and complex song structures.

But it was not until 2021 that they reached the mainstream, or at least the edges of it. Michelle Zauner (pictured), the band's creative force, released a bestselling memoir, "Crying in H Mart". Then the group released "Jubilee", an album replete with clever references to 1980s sounds that appeared to gently mock the simple-mindedness of that era's pop music. The next year the band received two Grammy nominations. The band's new album, "For Melancholy Brunettes (and Sad Women)", will no doubt please the critics again. And it may take Japanese Breakfast, finally, into music's big leagues.

Daily quiz



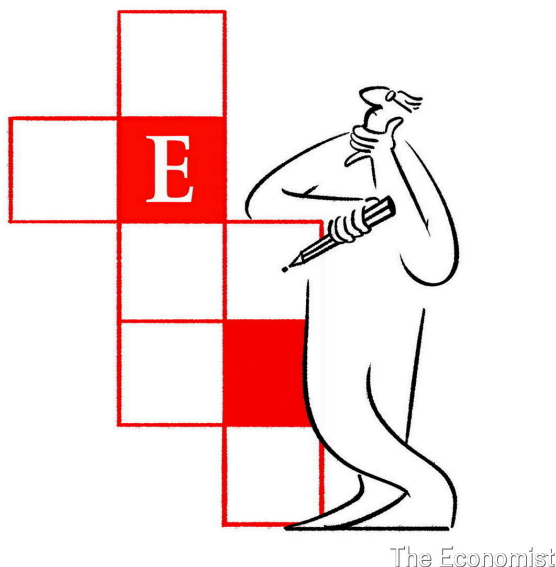
The Economist

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.

Friday: Angelina Jolie recently played which opera singer in a movie biopic?

Thursday: Fold, dome and plateau are all types of which geographical feature?

The winners of last week's crossword



Thank you to everyone who took part in our weekly crossword, published in the weekend edition of Espresso. The winners, chosen at random, were:

Thierry Rajaobelina, Anduze, France

Kariem Abdellatif, Uebersyren, Luxembourg

Ailsa Green, Choma, Zambia

They all gave the correct answers of [Scott Bessent](#), [Sweden](#), [budget](#) and [tariff](#). Check back tomorrow for this week's crossword.

The poet is a liar who always speaks the truth.

Jean Cocteau