

Catch up: Ukraine strikes Russian airfield; Israel bombs Gaza



Ukraine launched a drone strike against a **Russian** airfield some 700km behind the front line. Ukrainian officials said that the base hosts strategic bombers that Russia uses to target Ukraine. Meanwhile Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, said that Russia was [preventing a full ceasefire](#) by making "unnecessary demands that only prolong the war". On Thursday Ukraine and Russia agreed to halt attacks on energy infrastructure.

At least 85 people were killed in Israeli air strikes on **Gaza**, according to health officials in the enclave. **Hamas** responded by launching three rockets at Israel, all of which were intercepted or landed off target. The exchange followed Israel's [resumption of ground operations](#) in Gaza, particularly around the Netzarim corridor, which separates the north and south of the territory.

Authorities in **Turkey** arrested nearly 40 people for social-media posts in support of **Ekrem Imamoglu**, Istanbul's mayor, who was [arrested on Wednesday](#). The government said it was searching for more than 200 others suspected of making similar posts. Mr

Imamoglu was set to be named as the main opposition candidate to Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the authoritarian president.

The **Trump administration** [imposed sanctions](#) on two **Chinese** firms that it accused of buying **Iranian** oil. The measures target an oil terminal and an independent refinery that allegedly received shipments of oil from vessels linked to the [Houthis](#), a Yemeni militia, and Iran's army. It is the first time America has hit one of China's "teapot refineries" with sanctions.

M23 rebels captured the town of Walikale, a tin and gold mining hub in eastern **Congo**, according to the Congolese army. The town is the furthest west that the Rwanda-backed group has reached since it began a [big offensive in January](#). On Tuesday Félix Tshisekedi, president of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Paul Kagame, his Rwandan counterpart, called for a ceasefire.

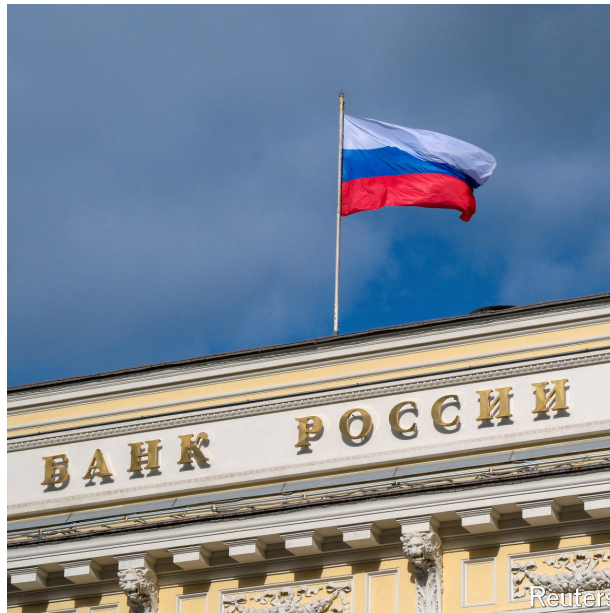
The **Bank of England** held its benchmark interest rate at 4.5%, warning that trade tensions caused by Donald Trump's tariff policies were causing "a lot of economic uncertainty". The bank lowered interest rates from 4.75% at its last meeting on February 6th. The annual rate of inflation, which was 3% in January, remains above the bank's target of 2%.

Tesla recalled more than 46,000 of its Cybertrucks in America—nearly all models on the road—to replace a faulty exterior panel. It is the eighth Cybertruck recall since [Tesla](#) began delivering the electric vehicles to customers in November 2023. The carmaker said it was "not aware" of any collisions caused by the defect, which it claims has only affected 1% of its models.

Figure of the day: \$1.34bn, the value of cryptocurrencies stolen by North Korean hackers in 2024, according to Chainalysis, an industry analyst. [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 is expected to keep 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 expected 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?



The Sudanese Armed Forces are close to recapturing the presidential palace in Khartoum, Sudan's capital. The national 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, would be an important symbolic victory for the army. It would probably also be 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 remains 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 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