

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter

Robert Fico, **Slovakia's** populist prime minister, is no longer in a “life-threatening situation”, the country’s deputy prime minister said. Mr Fico was shot several times while greeting people in the central town of Handlova. An official confirmed that the attack was an “assassination attempt” and “politically motivated”. Mr Fico, who began a fourth term last September, has proved an [extraordinarily divisive figure](#).

Vladimir Putin arrived in Beijing, where he will meet **Xi Jinping** for the 43rd time. It is the Russian president’s first overseas trip since he won a sham election in March that gave him a fifth term. Russia and China have become [staunch allies](#) against what they consider to be the West’s attempts to contain them.

Geert Wilders, the leader of the **Netherlands’** far-right Party for Freedom (PVV), said he had reached an agreement on forming a coalition government. PVV won the most seats in [November’s general election](#), but not a majority. Coalition talks got stuck over [Mr Wilders’s](#) anti-Muslim policies and climate-change scepticism, among other things. Mr Wilders said he would not become prime minister, but has yet to name his preferred candidate.

Japan’s economy shrank in the first quarter of 2024 because of a slowdown in consumption. GDP contracted at an annualised rate of 2%, after barely expanding in the previous quarter. Private consumption fell for a fourth consecutive quarter. Demand has been hit by rising living costs. In March the Bank of Japan [raised interest rates](#) for the first time since 2007.

America’s three main stock indexes closed at record highs after data showed that the country’s annual **inflation rate** fell to 3.4% in

April, from 3.5% in March. The core figure—which strips out volatile food and energy costs—was 3.6%, the lowest since April 2021. The slowdown will buoy the Federal Reserve, which worries about sticky [inflation](#) hampering plans to cut interest rates.

Yoav Gallant, **Israel's** defence minister, demanded that Binyamin Netanyahu come up with a “day-after” plan for **Gaza**. Mr Gallant, a longtime adversary of the prime minister, said an Israeli “military-civilian regime” in [the territory](#) was “a bad and dangerous alternative”. A defiant Mr Netanyahu called any discussion of a post-war plan before Hamas had been eliminated “detached from reality”.

France declared a state of emergency in its overseas territory of **New Caledonia** amid violent protests. The riots, which have killed four people so far, were triggered by proposals to expand the right to vote to all citizens who have lived in the [southern Pacific archipelago](#) for more than a decade. Many of the indigenous Kanak population oppose the change because they believe it will dilute their vote.

Figure of the day: \$27bn, the amount that Apple took in last year through commissions on app subscriptions. [Read the full story](#).

In the run-up to America's presidential election, we've launched [The US in brief](#)—a daily update to help you keep on top of the political stories that matter. [Sign up here](#) to receive it as a newsletter, each weekday, in your inbox.



Photo: Alamy

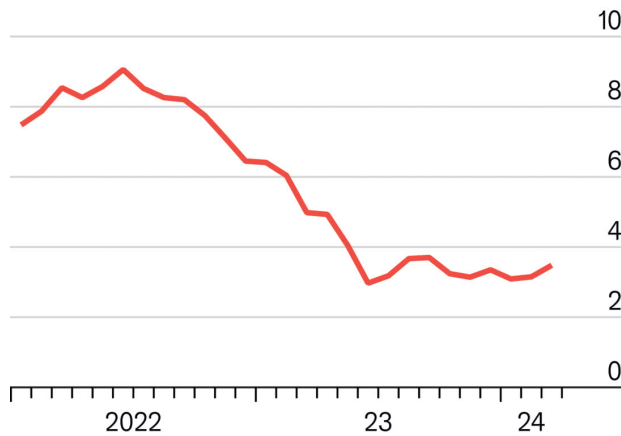
America's inflation resumes its slowdown

After a stretch of troublingly high inflation readings, the American economy may have caught a break. April's figures, published on Wednesday, showed the annual rate falling to 3.4%, down from 3.5% in March. The core figure, which strips out volatile food and energy cost, was just 3.6%, the lowest reading since April 2021. To some extent investors had already priced in this relatively good development, igniting a small rally in stock and bond prices over the past week.

Goods inflation has come down markedly from its high as supply-chain snarls have unwound. The focus now is on whether inflation for services and housing (rent in the inflation data) will also start to move lower more decisively. A slowdown in wage gains—a key factor in the cost of services—and a decline in non-official measures of rents have fed optimism that more disinflation is in the pipeline. But such hopes have been repeatedly dashed over the past year.

Hanging on to inflation

United States, consumer prices,
% increase on a year earlier



Source: Bureau of Labour Statistics



Photo: Getty Images

Singapore's new leader

Singapore has had just three prime ministers since its independence in 1965. The first was Lee Kuan Yew, the country's founding father, who held office for over three decades. The third was his son, Lee Hsien Loong. Next up is Lawrence Wong, who takes over from Mr Lee as the city-state's fourth leader on Wednesday. Mr Wong wants to keep the "miracle" going. Singapore has few

natural resources, but has become one of the world's richest places. Can its improbable success continue?

The new PM faces [several challenges](#). Singapore is “a tiny little island in a vast and dangerous world, which is going to get more dangerous”, [Mr Wong](#) told *The Economist* on May 6th. Tension between America and China threatens its delicate diplomatic balancing act, through which it remains open to both countries. It is also ageing fast, which will strain its health-care system and workforce. Climate change poses a big threat, too. Running the small island is no small task.

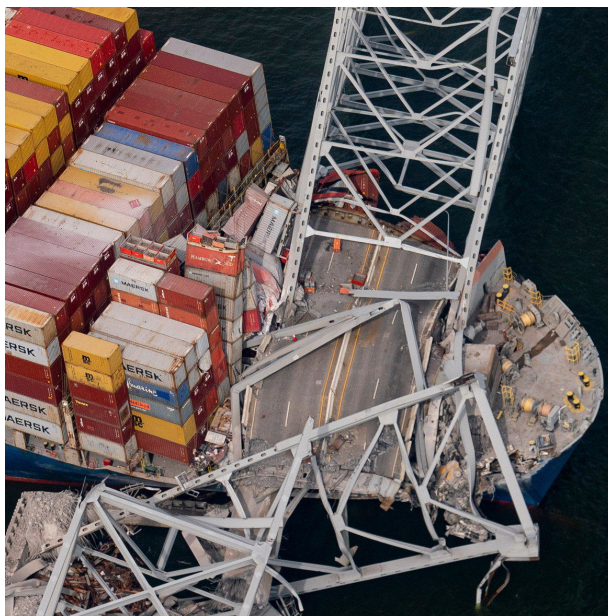


Photo: Getty Images

Responding to the Baltimore bridge disaster

On Wednesday a House of Representatives panel will hear from some of the federal agencies investigating the [collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge](#) in Baltimore on March 26th. A container ship, the *Dali*, lost power and collided with one of the bridge supports, causing most of the structure to fall into the river below. Six people died, and Baltimore's port has been unusable for weeks. President Joe Biden pledged to “rebuild this bridge as rapidly as humanly possible”, and asked Congress to cover the cost. But a bill to that effect has stalled in the House.

Several federal inquiries have begun, including a criminal probe—reportedly into whether the crew left the port knowing the ship had problems. In the meantime, the *Dali* remains stuck in the port. On Monday explosives were used to dislodge it from the debris, in the hope that it could be re-floated at high tide later this week.



Photo: EPA

Filipino protesters in the South China Sea

Boatloads of Filipino demonstrators headed on Wednesday towards [Scarborough Shoal](#), a fishing ground from which China has tried to bar the Philippines since 2012. The atoll lies well within the Philippine 200-nautical-mile (370km) exclusive economic zone in the vigorously contested South China Sea. The unarmed civilian protesters staked the Philippine claim by planting buoys bearing the words: “It’s ours!” But they planted them a safe distance from the atoll, where a Chinese maritime flotilla, water cannon at the ready, stood ready to defend China’s claim. It is the latest of many angry confrontations that have arisen where China’s territorial ambitions meet resistance from its neighbours.

Many of the demonstrators are more accustomed to chanting anti-government slogans on the streets of Manila. But they back government policy on Scarborough Shoal. By rallying there, with

official acquiescence, they can demonstrate that the atoll is, in theory, part of the Philippines. The occupying force, by thwarting any demonstration, can prove instead that the atoll is, in practice, part of China.



Photo: EPA

Leonora Carrington set to break auction record

Fiercely independent and firmly devoted to her art, Leonora Carrington ran away from a world of privilege to join the Surrealist movement in the 1930s. Decades later, her work is being embraced by the kind of wealthy patrons she had shunned.

During an auction at Sotheby's on Wednesday, Carrington's "Les Distractions de Dagobert" is expected to sell for between \$12m and \$18m, making her one of the most expensive British female artists in history. The work was painted in 1945 after [Carrington emigrated to Mexico](#), and it contains all the hallmarks of her distinctive style—including alchemical allusions and mythological beasts.

This year marks the centennial of Surrealism, a movement that was once dominated by men but is now being recognised for its pioneering women. In surpassing her previous record of \$3.3m,

Carrington will join the likes of Frida Kahlo, Remedios Varos and Leonor Fini, whose works have also fetched record-breaking prices in recent years.



Daily quiz

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 [\[email protected\]](#). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Wednesday: Which Ivy League university is based in Providence, Rhode Island?

Tuesday: Which astronaut was the central character in David Bowie's song "Space Oddity"?

*Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in
the soul*

Emily Dickinson