

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: AP

Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, vowed to “never surrender” in response to [Donald Trump's demand](#) for Iran's “unconditional” capitulation. Israel and Iran continued to trade air strikes on Wednesday. America moved ships and aircraft to the region, signalling that it may help Israel destroy Iran's nuclear facilities. Mr Khamenei warned of “irreparable damage” in retaliation.

The **Federal Reserve** held its benchmark interest rate unchanged at 4.25-4.5%. America's central bankers appear divided on whether borrowing costs will come down this year. Jerome Powell, the Fed chair, said that he expects tariffs to raise prices, but their impact and duration is “highly uncertain”. Mr Trump wants the Fed to lower rates and earlier called Mr Powell “a stupid person”.

America's Supreme Court upheld Tennessee's ban on medical treatments for transgender minors, including puberty blockers and hormones, in a 6–3 ruling. The court rejected arguments that the law violated constitutional rights. The conservative majority cited medical uncertainty; the liberal justices dissented. The [ruling](#) may encourage similar laws in other Republican-led states.

Nippon Steel completed its takeover of us **Steel**, in a merger that was first announced in 2023. Joe Biden had [blocked the deal](#), but

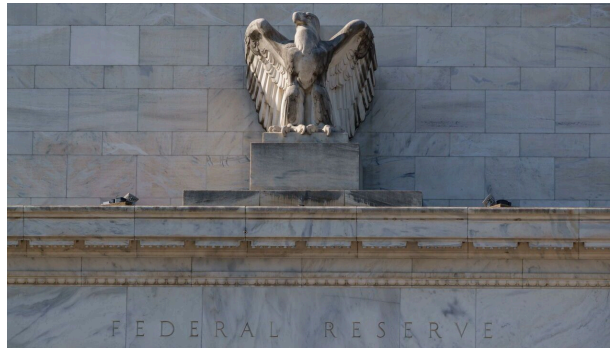
last month Mr Trump approved a “planned partnership” between the Japan-based Nippon and Pennsylvania-based US Steel. As part of a national-security agreement, America’s government has a “golden share” that gives it control over some of the company’s decisions.

Sam Altman accused **Meta** of trying to poach OpenAI staff with sign-on bonuses as high as \$100m. The owner of Facebook and Instagram is [scrambling to catch up](#) in the artificial-intelligence race; it recently hired the chief executive of Scale AI, which supplies training data for AI models, to lead its new “superintelligence” team.

Pedro Sánchez, Spain’s prime minister, faced a stormy session in Congress over a corruption scandal involving a close ally. A police report accused his party fixer of managing €620,000 in kickbacks. [Mr Sánchez](#) has apologised for what he called a “betrayal” but has faced criticism from allies as well as the opposition. He has vowed to see out the parliamentary term until 2027 but he is clearly weakened.

America last year added nearly 380,000 **new millionaires**, defined as having over \$1m in assets, according to UBS, a bank. It is now home to nearly 40% of the world’s [millionaires](#). A strong stock market and a stable dollar drove the surge. The number of dollar billionaires rose by 26, bringing the total to 2,891.

Figure of the day: 47, the age of Blaise Metreweli, the first female head of Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service, a spy agency better known as MI6. [Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: Getty Images

The Fed faces presidential pressure

Officials from America's Federal Reserve, as expected, voted to hold interest rates at 4.25–4.5%. Recent data offer reassurance on both sides of the Fed's mandate. Core inflation, which excludes food and energy, rose just 0.1% in May from the previous month, bringing the annual rate to 2.8%. The labour market has also shown resilience. Employers added 139,000 jobs in May and unemployment held at 4.2%, near historic lows.

Still, risks abound. Conflict between Iran and Israel threatens to lift oil prices. Donald Trump's "big, beautiful" budget bill—which cuts taxes and expands deficits—adds fiscal pressure. Tariffs could yet drive up prices. "Uncertainty is unusually elevated," said Jerome Powell, the Fed's chair. But Mr Trump is [impatient](#). Last week he called Mr Powell a "numbskull" for not cutting rates. Analysts expect cuts of half a percentage point by the end of the year. The president wants more.



Photograph: Alamy

Quality of life in cities stalls

For the second year running, there has been no improvement in living conditions in the world's cities, according to the latest [liveability index](#) from EIU, our sister company. The annual survey is designed to help companies calculate hardship allowances when they relocate staff and rates 173 cities across five categories. This year, declines in the “stability” category, which quantifies the threat of military conflict, civil unrest and terrorism, cancelled out improvements elsewhere.

Vienna lost its crown as the world's most liveable city after two foiled terrorist attacks brought down its stability score. The Austrian capital now shares second place with Zurich. Copenhagen tops this year's overall ranking. Melbourne and Geneva round out the top five. Damascus remains rooted at the bottom of the ranking.

The outlook for the coming year is mixed. Inflation, which has hurt living standards over the past few years, seems to be falling. But geopolitical tensions are increasing, further threatening stability and the quality of life everywhere.

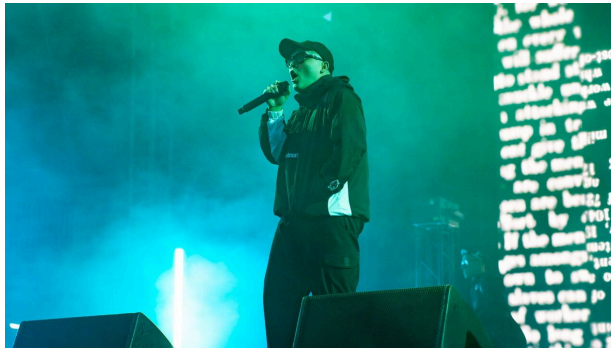


Photograph: Getty Images

Busy season at SCOTUS

On Wednesday America's Supreme Court released five of its 21 remaining judgments. The Trump administration has added to the justices' usual burden with emergency pleas to lift lower-court injunctions against its policies. It has sent roughly one matter per week to the court since January 20th. Many of those emergency cases have divided the justices. In contrast, nearly two-thirds of the 36 merits rulings through last week were unanimous.

Not so today. As [predicted](#) by SCOTUSbot, *The Economist's* AI tool, key late-term rulings are more fractured. The justices voted 6-3 to uphold a ban on medical treatments for transgender teens. More decisions are coming Friday and next week. Among those are challenges to funding for Planned Parenthood, an abortion provider, age checks for internet pornography and Donald Trump's bid to end birthright citizenship for babies of undocumented immigrants. A weighty to-do list before the court decamps for its summer recess.



Photograph: Getty Images

A controversial Irish rap group

The trial of Liam Óg Ó hAinmádh, a Northern Irish rapper who performs under the name “Mo Chara”, started on Wednesday in London. He is facing terror charges for displaying the flag of [Hizbullah](#), an Iran-backed Shia militia that is banned in Britain, during a concert in London last November.

The rapper is a member of “Kneecap”, an Irish-language group known for their support for Irish Republicanism and criticism of Israel. The band are no strangers to controversy. Britain’s prime minister, Sir Keir Starmer, criticised the group after allegations that one member said “The only good Tory is a dead Tory. Kill your local MP” in 2023.

Mr Ó hAinmádh and the band deny supporting groups such as Hizbullah, or inciting violence. Kneecap have been removed from several festivals. But they have also witnessed a recent surge in interest in their music—the group has surpassed 1m monthly listeners on Spotify, a streaming platform.



Photograph: The Economist

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

Wednesday: Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons are the two best known members of which exuberant rock band?

Tuesday: Acts of hostility towards people because of their race, gender or sexual orientation are generally known by which two-word term?

*It's not what a movie is about, it's
how it is about it.*

Roger Ebert