

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter

Taiwan's strongest **earthquake** in 25 years struck the east of the island. The epicentre of the 7.4-magnitude quake was in the sea, about 18km (11 miles) south of the city of Hualien. Buildings collapsed and the power supply was disrupted in the capital, Taipei. TSMC, Taiwan's chipmaking giant, evacuated several of its factories. Details of casualties remain scant; early reports suggest that at least nine people have died and hundreds have been injured.

The **European Commission** announced two investigations into [Chinese solar companies](#) based on a foreign subsidies law. The probe will consider two consortiums that are hoping to develop a solar park in Romania. Both include Chinese firms. The investigation will assess whether their bids unduly benefited from foreign subsidies, giving them an unfair advantage over European competitors.

The **euro zone's** annual inflation rate fell to 2.4% in March, from 2.6% in February. The core rate, which strips out volatile energy and food prices, also fell, from 3.1% to 2.9%. The data will hearten those hoping that the European Central Bank will begin cutting interest rates soon. The [bank](#) makes its next monetary-policy decision on April 11th.

Volodymyr Zelensky, **Ukraine's** president, lowered the age of **enlistment** from 27 to 25. In December Ukraine's then-commander-in-chief, Valery Zaluzhny, said he wanted to recruit a further [400,000 soldiers](#), but Mr Zelensky appeared to have decided against drafting younger soldiers. There are growing concerns over a potential Russian summer offensive that could punch through Ukraine's defences.

Turkey's annual **inflation** rate rose to 68.5% in March, up from 67.1% in February. It was the highest figure since November 2022. The central bank has raised interest rates by more than 40 percentage points since June 2023. The data add to the woes of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the president. On Sunday his party suffered big losses in [local elections](#).

Virgin Atlantic recorded a pre-tax loss of £139m (\$173m) in 2023, compared with £206m in 2022. The British long-haul carrier partly blamed higher interest rates, which made servicing debt accrued during the pandemic more expensive. Virgin said it expects to return to profitability in 2024 on the back of “continued strong demand” for leisure travel.

The White House instructed NASA to develop a standardised time system for the **Moon**. It wants to establish an international norm in an age of [increasing lunar exploration](#). The Moon's weaker gravitational forces mean time moves more quickly. America's space agency has until 2026 to set up Co-ordinated Lunar Time.

Figure of the day: 5.3%, the unemployment rate in California. America's national rate is less than 4%. [Read the full story](#).



Photo: Getty Images

Texas's contentious new immigration law

On Wednesday the Fifth Circuit, America's [most conservative](#) federal appeals court, will hear oral arguments on Texas's new immigration law. [Senate Bill 4 \(SB4\)](#) makes crossing into Texas from Mexico except at legal ports of entry a state crime. It grants police the authority to arrest people they suspect have come into Texas illegally, and authorises state judges to order deportations, powers normally reserved for federal authorities. On March 19th the Supreme Court ruled that Texas could temporarily enforce the bill while the lower court deliberated on its merits. But the Fifth Circuit put it back on hold that night.

The debate is part of a clash between the Biden administration and Greg Abbott, Texas's governor, over how to handle the influx of migrants. The federal government reckons that it reserves the right to set immigration policy, while Texas contends it ought to be able to defend itself. One way or another, the case will probably return to the Supreme Court.





Photo: Getty Images

More ammunition for Ukraine

Jan Lipavsky, the Czech foreign minister, deserves the gratitude of his NATO counterparts at their meeting on Wednesday. Mr Lipavsky has led his government's initiative to source shells for Ukraine. They are badly needed: for the past few months [Russia has been outgunning](#) Ukraine at a rate of at least five to one.

Although the first tranche of 800,000 shells may not reach Ukraine until June, simply knowing that they are coming has eased the pressure on Ukrainian commanders to ration munitions. The Czechs think they can find up to 1.5m shells in total. Other NATO members, including Norway, Germany and Canada, have footed the bill.

However, the initiative is no substitute for the Biden administration's \$61bn military support package, still stalled in Congress. Apart from shells, Ukraine needs more air-defence interceptors as it reels from a new onslaught of Russian missiles, as well as the Kremlin's powerful glide bombs. Only American support will help procure them.



Photo: Getty Images

Disney's proxy fight reaches a climax

Bob Iger's re-run as boss of Disney has been far from the fairytale many hoped for. The entertainment giant's share price is up by 25% since Mr Iger returned in November 2022, a better performance than that of its rivals', including Warner Bros Discovery and Paramount Global. But Mr Iger continues to [tussle](#) with activist shareholders. They think Disney should be doing better still (it has been outpaced by the S&P 500 index of big American companies).

On Wednesday the saga will reach a climax. At the company's annual general meeting shareholders will vote on whether to accept board nominees put forward by two activist firms: Trian Partners, led by Nelson Peltz, a Wall Street veteran, and Blackwells Capital. Trian wants deeper cost cutting, among other things. Blackwells thinks shareholders could be better off if the company were broken up. If either gets a seat at the table, Disney's next season could be even more dramatic.



Photo: Getty Images

An imminent rate cut for Europe

Next Thursday the [European Central Bank](#) may yet start to cut interest rates. Euro-area annual inflation dropped to 2.4% in March, the bloc's statistics bureau said on Wednesday. Core inflation, which strips out volatile prices for energy and food, fell below 3%.

Hawks at the ECB will still want to wait for wage data due on May 23rd before deciding. But there are two reasons for the ECB to hurry. Fiscal policy can only get tighter: France is trying to trim its bombshell budget deficit, and Germany is expected to limit its spending to a constitutionally allowed size. That will weaken the economy further. Second, the gap between the ECB's current interest rate (4%) and the possible target rate (2%) is large. Reaching it will require more 0.25 percentage-point cuts than the ECB has meetings left this year. Time for the bank to look forward.



Photo: Science Photo Library

Could medical devices be oxygen-powered?

The medical-technology industry is among the most innovative. But many electric medical devices are still powered by lithium batteries, which must eventually be replaced. Chinese engineers reporting in *Chem*, a journal, may have breathed new life into medtech by drawing power from the body itself. They have developed an implantable battery that runs on blood oxygen.

The battery's electrodes—made of sodium and gold—react with oxygen molecules to produce electricity. Engineers surgically implanted the batteries in rats' backs and measured the electrical output. The 1.3 volts produced was not enough to power a medical device like a pacemaker, but metal-O₂ batteries can in theory store more energy than lithium ones. The experiment also had unintended benefits. By reading the battery's output, the scientists were able to monitor the rate at which the wound healed. And because the battery consumes oxygen, implanting it near tumours could starve cancer cells. Not a bad set of side-effects.



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: “Bedroom in Arles” and “Wheatfield with Crows” are paintings by which famous artist?

Tuesday: Which is the highest mountain in the United Kingdom?

Heresy is only another word for freedom of thought.

Graham Greene