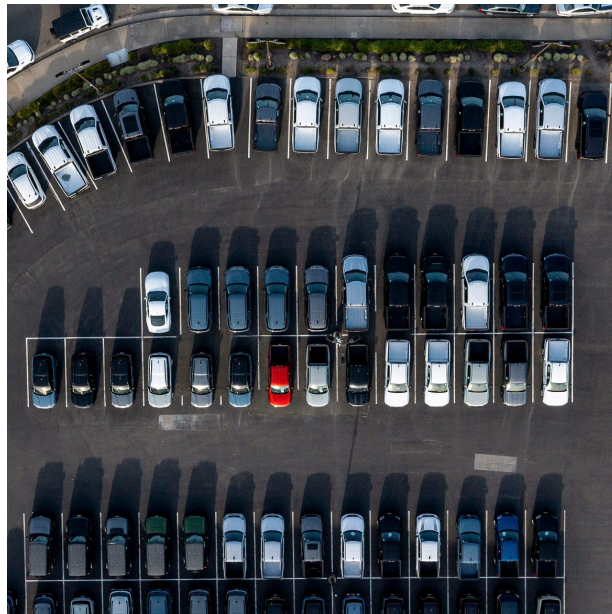


## Catch up: Trump's “happy” tariff U-turn; Hamas's “last warning”



**Donald Trump** said he was “happy” to exempt the big three American **carmakers**—Ford, General Motors and Stellantis—from paying 25% tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico for one month. Their bosses had lobbied for relief. The levies would **have been devastating** for the firms. Meanwhile, Mr Trump again lambasted Canada’s efforts to stop (the **paltry amounts** of) fentanyl from crossing the border, calling them “not good enough”.

Mr Trump issued a “last warning” for **Hamas** to release all hostages held in Gaza. In a break with longstanding policy, the White House started direct engagement with the **militant group** that it deems to be a terrorist organisation. Hamas said that the threats amounted to support for Israel, encouraging the country to back out of the **fragile Gaza truce**.

**France** offered to share intelligence with **Ukraine** a day after America suspended its co-operation. France’s defence minister, Sébastien Lecornu, said his country had “resources” to help Ukraine fight off Russia’s invasion; he noted that Britain’s situation

was “more complicated” as the country is in an “intelligence community” with America. On Monday America [suspended military aid](#) to Ukraine to pressure the country to negotiate with Russia.

**Lithuania** became the first country to withdraw from an international convention banning [cluster munitions](#). The controversial weapons scatter hundreds of smaller “bomblets” over a large area. The Baltic country’s parliament approved the decision last July citing fears about Russia, which is not a signatory and has deployed the weapons in Ukraine. Dovile Sakaliene, the defence minister, said the move was intended as a “strategic message”.

**Novo Nordisk** slashed the monthly cost of **Wegovy**, its [weight-loss injection](#), from more than \$1,300 to \$499 for American patients not paying for it through health insurance. Discounted jabs will be sold directly to them through the firm’s own online pharmacy. [Competition between weight-loss drugmakers](#) is heating up; last week Eli Lilly reduced the price of some of its Zepbound injections.

**Emmanuel Macron** said he was ready to discuss ways to extend France’s nuclear deterrence across Europe to counter Russia. The remarks came in response to a call by Friedrich Merz, who will probably soon become Germany’s leader, for France and Britain to consider “nuclear sharing” in the face of American unreliability. The president also said the [continent’s future](#) should not be “decided in Washington or Moscow.”

**Cyclone Alfred** continued its passage across the Pacific, and is forecast to hit Brisbane, on Australia’s east coast, over the weekend. Though cyclones are not uncommon in Australia, Alfred—a category-two storm—stands out for its southern trajectory. A cyclone has not struck that part of Australia since 1974. An estimated 20,000 homes could be affected by flooding.

**Figure of the day:** 3.6m. The numbers of cars that America imported from Canada and Mexico last year. [Read the full story.](#)

# Europe regroup and rearm



Leaders from the European Union's 27 member states are meeting in Brussels on Thursday to find ways to succour Ukraine—and to rethink some of its own security arrangements. Europe is hastily adjusting its thinking on defence as American policy under President Donald Trump looks [ever-less predictable](#). A plan will be presented for the EU to help member states borrow from a fund of €150bn (\$161bn) to spend on defence, some of which would be used to boost Ukraine's war effort.

EU fiscal rules that constrain spending also look likely to be relaxed so that national governments can splurge up to 1.5% of GDP more on defence. The star of the show will be Friedrich Merz, the presumed future chancellor of Germany. Though he will not attend the summit (lacking thus far a coalition agreement to take power) he will meet some of his counterparts in Brussels ahead of the main meeting.

# Can Costco raise its fees—and profits?



The world's third-largest retailer announces quarterly results on Thursday. Unlike rivals who mark up prices to boost profits, Costco makes most of its money from the membership fees that its 137m customers pay to shop at its stores. In 2024 these netted \$4.8bn, more than half of Costco's operating profits. In September the company increased the annual fees by \$5 in America, the first rise in seven years. In Britain, where the company operates 29 stores, fee rises take effect this month.

But [shoppers aren't flinching](#). With inflation squeezing budgets, more consumers are flocking to the warehouse giant for deals. Analysts expect revenue from membership fees to rise by 8.5% to \$1.2bn this quarter from a year ago. Investors are buying in too—Costco's share price is up 13% this year, while the S&P 500 has slumped by almost 2% during that time. As the company reports its results, investors will also be watching for signs of any impact of tariffs on its growth.

# What Germany's fiscal U-turn means for the euro



On Tuesday Germany's chancellor-in-waiting, Friedrich Merz, delivered a bombshell announcement. Even before formal coalition talks had started, the probable coalition partners agreed to [bypass decades-old debt rules](#). The shift adds to the headache at the European Central Bank as its top brass meet on Thursday to decide interest rates.

Euro-zone inflation has come down recently. The decline in services inflation to 3.7% in February is especially good news. That will encourage the ECB to cut rates yet again, to an expected 2.5%. But a big fiscal boost, while welcome for the economy, will force the bank to be more cautious. Germany's ten-year yields, the euro zone's benchmark, shot up by more than 0.2 percentage points to almost 2.8%, following Mr Merz's announcement in Berlin. Thursday's may be the last ECB cut for some time.



# Rwanda pushes into Congo



The government of the Democratic Republic of Congo is refusing to enter into talks with [Rwanda-backed M23 rebels](#), even though they [control](#) the two largest cities in eastern Congo, Goma and Bukavu. The rebels have threatened to march on the capital, Kinshasa. Congo's army in the east is in tatters; after losing control of two strategic airports, it is unable to bring in supplies. Still, Congo's president, Felix Tshisekedi, will only consider talks with Rwanda, which he calls M23's "masters".

UN experts report that Rwanda has deployed up to 4,000 troops to support M23. Regional African organisations have called for an immediate ceasefire. The UN has urged the M23 to lay down arms. America has imposed sanctions on one of Rwanda's top officials, and Britain and Germany have suspended some aid. But the diplomatic pressure on Rwanda may be too little, too late. Its government, which doesn't admit involvement, shows no sign of recalling its troops.

## Another lap from Femke Bol



One of the best moments of the Paris Olympics last year was the mixed 4x400m relay. With 250 metres left on the final lap the Americans led, followed by the British and the Belgians. Then Femke Bol of the Netherlands began an extraordinary surge. She moved into third place with 150 metres to go, passed Amber Anning of Britain with 50 metres left and eased past the exhausted American, Kaylyn Brown, in the final ten metres. Her languid style stood out—at no point in the chase did she look hurried.

Ms Bol thus arrives as the headline act of the European Athletics Indoor Championships, which begin in Apeldoorn in the Netherlands on Thursday. After a sparkling 2024, she is competing only in the women's and mixed 4x400 relays. Nonetheless, Ms Bol's participation makes the Dutch favourites in both events. The championships will also feature other Olympic gold medallists, including Norwegian runner Jakob Ingebrigtsen, German shot-putter Yemisi Ogunleye and Greek long-jumper Miltiadis Tentoglou.



## 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](mailto:QuizEspresso@economist.com). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

**Thursday:** Which French group is generally regarded as one of the world's energy supermajors?

**Wednesday:** Which actress is known for roles in "The Princess Bride", "Forrest Gump" and "House of Cards"?

**Youth is the gift of nature, but age is a work of art.**

*Stanislaw Jerzy Lec*