

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter

**Reform UK** beat Britain's ruling **Labour Party** by just six votes in a by-election in Runcorn and Helsby—one of the closest parliamentary elections ever. Labour had held a huge majority in the northern constituency. It is a big win for Reform, a hard-right party led by [Nigel Farage](#), a cheerleader for Brexit. Meanwhile the Conservative Party looked set for big losses in local council elections in England.

**Donald Trump** reshuffled his foreign-policy team. America's president made Marco Rubio interim national security adviser, adding to his already considerable responsibilities as secretary of state. Mr Rubio will replace **Mike Waltz**, who Mr Trump [nominated to be America's next UN ambassador](#). Mr Waltz's stock had declined since he [mistakenly added](#) a journalist to a Signal chat in which officials discussed sensitive military plans.

**Germany's** domestic spy agency labelled the hard-right [Alternative for Germany](#) party a “proven right-wing extremist organisation”. The classification—backed by a report detailing breaches of the constitution and the rule of law—is a first for any mainstream modern German party in parliament. The agency may increase surveillance of the AfD, which notched up its best-ever national result in elections in February.

**Ireland's** Data Protection Commission fined **TikTok** €530m (\$599m) for illegally transferring European user data to China (TikTok's European headquarters are in Dublin). The watchdog said the video-sharing app was not transparent about sending data to China and failed to show that Chinese authorities could not access Europeans' personal information. [TikTok](#) said it would appeal the decision.

**China's** commerce ministry said it was “evaluating” recent proposals from American officials to start **trade talks**. The ministry said that if America “wants to talk, it should show its sincerity and be prepared to correct its wrong practices” by scrapping “unilateral tariffs”. Mr Trump slapped a 145% tariff on China in April; in response, [China](#) imposed a 125% levy on imports from America.

**Israel** carried out further strikes on **Syria**, targeting an unspecified site near the presidential palace in the capital, Damascus. In a joint statement Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, and Israel Katz, the defence secretary, said the strikes sent a “clear message” to the Syrian government that Israel would protect the [Druze](#), a religious minority, following the recent outbreak of sectarian violence.

Peter Dutton, **Australia's** opposition leader, is [trailing opinion polls](#) ahead of Saturday's elections. Still, he may take some comfort from an unusual endorsement. Speckles, a crocodile tasked with calling the vote from his pool in the Northern Territory, snapped up a chunk of buffalo meat with Mr Dutton's picture tethered to it. He left the other slab, with a picture of Anthony Albanese, the prime minister, for seconds.

**Figure of the day:** 15 gigawatts, the amount of power that Spain's electricity grid suddenly lost shortly after noon on April 28th. [Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: Reuters

## **Drill, maybe, drill**

“Liquid gold” is what Donald Trump calls petroleum. Since returning to office his administration has been busy deregulating and reforming the energy sector, all to get American oil companies pumping more. Not so fast. On Friday Britain’s Shell reported net profits of \$5.6bn in the latest quarter, a 28% year on year drop. ExxonMobil and Chevron, the biggest Yankee majors, will also report their quarterly earnings later in the day. Their reports come on the heels of disappointing numbers put up by BP and TotalEnergies, European rivals.

Despite Mr Trump’s support, analysts expect grim profits and an even bleaker outlook for these behemoths. The energy sector looks likely to be the worst performing of the S&P 500 index of big American companies this year. The main culprit is the oil price, which has dropped close to \$60 a barrel of late from an average above \$80 a barrel in 2024. That is because the OPEC group of producer countries has doused the market despite a weak world economy, and indicated it will release even more barrels shortly.

**Drip, drip, drop**

Brent crude oil price, \$ per barrel



Source: LSEG Workspace



Photograph: Getty Images

## Trump's economy isn't working

America's labour market appears to be losing steam. GDP data released on Wednesday showed the [economy contracting](#) for the first time in three years. On Friday the Bureau of Labour Statistics will publish the April jobs report. Expect more bad news.

Bloomberg's survey of economists forecasts just 125,000 new jobs—down from 228,000 in March. Some of that is due to Elon Musk's spring cleaning. His [Department of Government Efficiency](#) has slashed public-sector jobs. However, because many departures were voluntary buyouts, a portion of the layoffs may not appear in official figures until later this year. And private firms may have slowed hiring, as they brace for a slowdown in business when Donald Trump's tariffs take hold.

Still, the overall picture may not be too dire. Analysts expect the unemployment rate to hold steady at 4.2%, suggesting that the labour market is cooling, not collapsing.



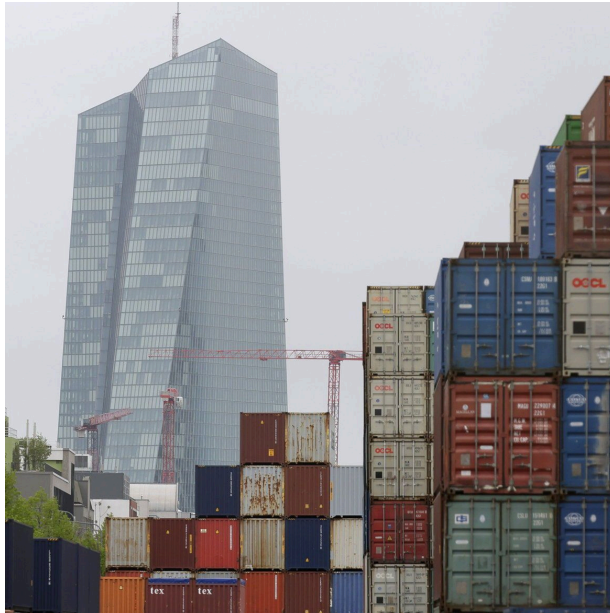
Photograph: Getty Images

## Extreme hunger in Gaza

On Friday the International Court of Justice will conclude a week of hearings into the [humanitarian crisis in Gaza](#). Two months have passed since Israel imposed a total ban on food, medicine and other essentials entering the territory. The situation is bleak. The World Food Programme has run out of food to deliver to kitchens, which supplied hundreds of thousands of hot meals each day. All 25 UN-supported bakeries have closed too. Cooking gas is scarce, leaving families to scrounge for wood or rubbish to burn.

Ammar Hijazi, the Palestinian ambassador to the Netherlands, told the court Israel was turning Gaza into a “mass grave”. Israel has refused to participate in the hearings, with the foreign minister calling them a “circus”. Any ruling from the ICJ will be non-binding. Still, Israel must soon decide whether to lift the ban on aid. Politicians insist they will not, arguing it will help Hamas. But the army has quietly urged them to relent.





Photograph: EPA

## **Euro inflation closes in on target**

The economic outlook is dimming across Europe. Germany has lowered its growth forecast to zero; the IMF revised its euro-zone projection for 2025 down by 0.2 percentage points to 0.8%. The European Central Bank will no doubt consider weaker growth when it mulls a probable interest-rate cut in early June.

It will also feel the added pressure from the latest euro-zone core [inflation](#) figures, released on Friday, which put the annualised rate sticking around 2.2% in April, above expectations. Falling energy prices pushed down inflation in March. But inflation in services, which had fallen slightly to 3.5% in March, rose again to 3.9%. That may in part be a distortion caused by the late Easter holiday this year. Luckily, the ECB will get a fresh set of data in May, in time for its next interest-rate meeting.



Photograph: Utopia

## A musical detour on screen

If you are a member of Gen x—and you were a slacker or a dork or a poet—you probably listened to Pavement: the quintessential '90s indie-rock band of disaffected dudes from suburban California, all arch lyrics and vocal fry. They never had huge commercial success but they had a devoted fanbase, including Alex Ross Perry, an American filmmaker. “Pavements”, his documentary about the band which opens in New York this weekend before expanding elsewhere, is as delightfully offbeat as its subject.

The film weaves together four bits of footage: from a parody biopic that Mr Ross Perry shot with actors; a jukebox musical set to Pavement tracks; the band’s reunion tour; and an exhibit of its ephemera held in 2022. The effect is to poke fun at the hagiography and clichés of [music movies](#). Wry and slightly ludicrous, the film’s style perfectly matches that of the band. And yet Mr Ross Perry’s fandom is totally sincere.





Illustration: 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.

**Friday:** Which Serbian-American inventor was a pioneer of the alternating current electricity system?

**Thursday:** Which company was founded in 1968 by the Beatles to manage their business interests?



Illustration: The Economist

## The winners of this 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:

**Stefanos Spyridon**, Agios Kyrikos, Greece

**Ania Grobicki**, Laprade, France

**Andy Cayley**, Mount Claremont, Australia

They all gave the correct answers of [Mark Carney](#), [Model Y](#), [China](#) and [yields](#). Check back tomorrow for this week's crossword.

*Painting is poetry which is seen  
and not heard, and poetry is a  
painting which is heard but not  
seen.*

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***Leonardo da Vinci***