

Catch up: judge blocks Trump's pause of federal grants; protests in Congo



A judge temporarily blocked the **Trump administration's** attempt to freeze most **federal assistance** while it conducts an ideological review of government spending. The order was due to come into effect on Tuesday evening. It sparked confusion among nonprofits, schools and others relying on federal grants, as well as people receiving direct benefits from programmes such as Medicaid, America's health insurance for the poor. A group of nonprofits sued; the judge's pause remains in effect until Monday.

Angry crowds attacked the embassies of [Rwanda](#), Belgium, Uganda, Kenya and France in **Kinshasa**, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. They were protesting against the [Rwandan-backed assault](#) on **Goma** by the rebel group M23. The Africa Union held an emergency meeting to push for an end to hostilities in the city, on the border between Congo and Rwanda.

Germany's economic output is likely to shrink by 0.1% this year, according to the Federation of German Industries, a lobby group. It predicts the wider euro zone's economy will grow by 1.1%, making

Germany a laggard. Ahead of an [election](#) next month the country's economic model is [sputtering](#), thanks in part to high energy costs and a struggling industrial sector.

Engine No. 1, a [hedge fund](#), and **Chevron**, a fossil-fuel company, will partner with GE Vernova, an energy-equipment manufacturer, to make power plants for **AI data centres** in America. The plants will be fuelled by natural gas, and aim to deliver four gigawatts of energy by 2027. The joint venture comes as Silicon Valley [grapples](#) with competition from [China's DeepSeek](#).

Denmark announced plans to boost security in the **Arctic**, in partnership with the Faroe Islands and **Greenland**, two of its autonomous territories. The proposed plan, which includes an investment of \$2bn in surveillance, comes after Mr Trump's recent statements about America acquiring Greenland. Denmark's defence minister said his country faces serious security challenges in [the Arctic](#).

Serbia's prime minister resigned following months of **anti-government protests**. Milos Vucevic is a close ally of [Aleksandar Vucic](#), the right-wing president, who has clung to power for close to a decade despite accusations of election rigging. The latest protests started in November after a canopy collapsed at a railway station in the northern city of Novi Sad, killing 15 people.

Boom Supersonic, an American startup, broke the sound barrier with its XB-1 test plane for the first time. The company aims to bring back [supersonic](#) commercial travel, last experienced by passengers on Concorde in 2003. The XB-1 reached Mach 1, about 1200kph, over the Mojave Desert. But the plane is a fraction of the size of the company's proposed airliner, which it hopes to launch by 2029.

Figure of the day: 12, the number of the top 20 slowest-moving cities that are in Asia. [Read the full story](#).

The battle for Goma



Goma, the largest city in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, is under the de facto control of M23, an armed group backed by Rwanda. The [capture of the city](#), which began on Sunday, marks a stunning escalation of hostilities between Paul Kagame, Rwanda's president, and his country's much larger neighbour. African and Western diplomats have roundly condemned the invasion.

Many worry about a wider regional war; some observers speculate that Mr Kagame, who claims that Congo has failed to root out militias that threaten his regime, may want to topple his counterpart in Kinshasa, Félix Tshisekedi. William Ruto, Kenya's president, is trying to arrange emergency talks in Nairobi for Wednesday. Marco Rubio, America's new secretary of state, has spoken to Mr Tshisekedi. But it is unclear whether any outside power is willing to stop Rwanda's aggression. Goma may prove that, as elsewhere in the world, snatching neighbours' land is getting easier.

The Fed versus Trump



Donald Trump has said that, soon enough, he will want lower interest rates, and that he expects the [Federal Reserve](#) to listen to him. But on Wednesday, following its latest policy meeting, the Fed will display its [independence](#) by keeping rates unchanged, and by indicating that its decisions are based on economic conditions, not presidential pressure. Those conditions—a robust labour market alongside sticky inflation—do not call for rate cuts at present.

Most voters on the Fed's monetary committee will therefore be content to hold the central bank's target rate at its current level of 4.25-4.5%. Bond-market pricing suggests they will hold it there until May or June, when they will cautiously resume making small rate cuts. The question is whether Mr Trump will be so patient. Formally, he has no power over the Fed's decisions. That is unlikely to stop him from lashing out at the Fed's chair, Jerome Powell.

AI turbulence shakes a chip-industry heavyweight



Western tech firms have been rocked by the latest AI model from [DeepSeek](#), a Chinese startup, which delivers impressive results using fewer processors. One such is ASML, a Dutch firm that is the only maker of [advanced lithography machines](#) that chip manufacturers use to build cutting-edge AI processors.

On Monday ASML's share price tumbled 7% because of fears that demand for AI chips may be lower than earlier estimates. On Wednesday the company will announce its annual results. As well as the threat from DeepSeek, it is suffering from the effects of American export restrictions on demand from China, which accounted for nearly half of its sales last quarter. Intel and Samsung, two big customers, are scaling back spending. One bright spot is TSMC of Taiwan, ASML's largest customer, which expects the surge in AI-related demand to continue. Analysts are watching ASML's forecast for the coming year for clues about the prospects for other AI darlings, such as Nvidia.

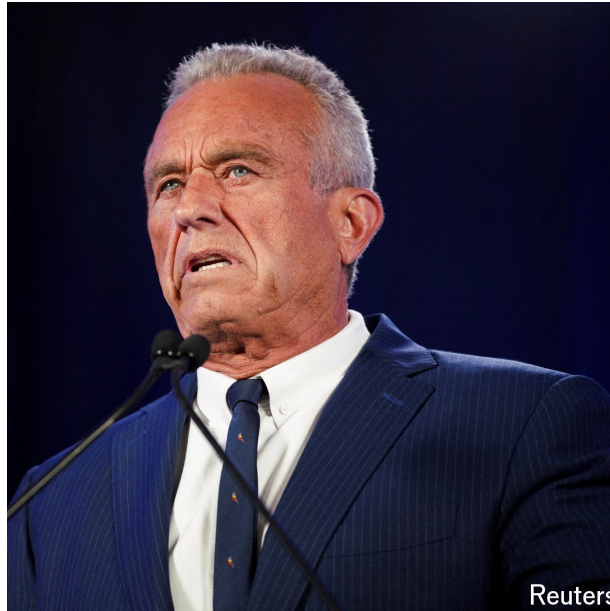
Take-off for Britain's growth plan?



Rachel Reeves, Britain's chancellor and a former junior chess champion, likes to say that “attack is the best form of defence”. The strategy has been on show lately. Against a backdrop of [market wobbles](#), not helped by a budget that borrowed freely and increased costs for businesses, [Ms Reeves](#) has been sweet-talking investors from China to Davos. On Wednesday she will announce a raft of plans to prove that Britain is “going for growth”.

Top of the list is airport expansion. An attempt to build a third runway at Heathrow, London's hub, has been a sorry multi-decade saga. Ms Reeves will say she backs it, and never mind the green concerns. Bitter opposition will make it a good test of her determination. The chancellor will also say more about plans to unshackle housebuilding and turn underused land between Oxford and Cambridge into “Britain's Silicon Valley”. She is still in a tight spot. But the counter-attack is on.

RFK explains himself



On Wednesday Robert F. Kennedy junior will try to reassure senators that he is up to the job of [leading America's health department](#). The man who wants to “Make America Healthy Again” does not fit neatly into a partisan box. Democrats will grill him about his [vaccine scepticism](#), but may like his criticisms of big food and drug companies. Some Republicans, meanwhile, are uncomfortable with his past support for abortion.

Some of his ideas are outlandish. Mr Kennedy has talked about sacking the entire nutrition department of the Food and Drug Administration, and about pausing research on infectious diseases at the National Institutes of Health to focus instead on chronic ones. Health experts condemn his anti-vaccine views. Yet many agree with a central part of his MAHA agenda: America is doing too little to prevent chronic diseases. Mr Kennedy has some sensible ideas to tackle that. To get senators' approval, he needs to strike a careful balance.

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. We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Wednesday: *Panthera leo* is the name of which large cat?

Tuesday: African trypanosomiasis is a disease that is commonly known by what name?

Monday: Which on-screen character was the most regular alter ego of Charlie Chaplin?

**Too long a sacrifice can make a stone of
the heart.**

W.B. Yeats