

Catch up: Trump talks to Putin; inflation worries in America



Donald Trump said that **Ukraine** and **Russia** want to make peace, after speaking separately by phone with both countries' leaders. He spoke first to Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, and said that America would "immediately" [start talks with Russia](#) to end the war. Earlier America's defence secretary, Pete Hegseth, said it was "unrealistic" that Ukraine would regain territory annexed by Russia since 2014.

Inflation in America rose faster than expected in January, up by 3% year on year, compared with 2.9% in December. Core inflation, stripping out volatile food and energy prices increased from an annualised rate of 3.2% in December to 3.3%. The figures come as a blow to those, like President Donald Trump, who argue that interest rates should come down quickly

Austria's hard-right Freedom Party is returning its [mandate to form a government](#) after failing to form a coalition. The FPÖ came first in federal elections in September but has failed to divvy up ministries with the centre-right People's Party since. Austria's

president, Alexander Van der Bellen, may appoint a technocratic government or give other parties the chance to form a coalition.

America's Senate confirmed **Tulsi Gabbard** as [director of national intelligence](#) in a 52-48 vote. Her soft stance on Russia was among the reasons even some Republicans expressed concerns about [Mr Trump's nominee](#). But enough sceptics were swayed; only one Republican, Mitch McConnell, voted against Ms Gabbard. So far the Senate has confirmed all of the president's [cabinet nominees](#) who sat for hearings.

Binyamin Netanyahu, **Israel's** prime minister, threatened a "return to intense fighting" in Gaza unless [Hamas](#) releases hostages by midday on Saturday. On Monday the militant group said it would delay the release of three Israeli captives, whom it had agreed to free under its ceasefire deal with Israel. Hamas accused Israel of stopping displaced Palestinians from returning to Gaza.

A **Chinese rocket** launched for its first mission, transporting low-Earth-orbit satellites into space. The Long March 8A rocket is part of China's strategy to compete against Starlink, a satellite-internet service provided by Mr Musk's SpaceX that already has around 7,000 satellites in orbit. [China](#) has many fewer.

Disney and **Goldman Sachs** became the latest companies to roll back corporate diversity measures. Disney's changes include replacing its "diversity and inclusion" criterion in executive-salary reviews with "talent strategy". Goldman Sachs dropped its pledge to work on IPOs only with companies that have at least two "diverse" board members. Meta and McDonald's are among the firms that have recently scrapped [DEI policies](#).

Figure of the day: 140%, the increase in the average price of a dozen eggs in America from one year ago. [Read the full story.](#)

Inflation is now Trump's problem



The first inflation report of Donald Trump's presidency, released on Wednesday, showed that price pressures remain a problem in America. Core consumer prices—stripping out volatile food and energy costs—rose 3.3% in January from a year earlier, a bit higher, unexpectedly, than in December and still well above the Federal Reserve's target of 2%. The persistence of high inflation is why the Fed has held rates steady since it cut them on December 18th.

Mr Trump has vowed to defeat inflation. But his policies risk making it worse. Mass deportations of migrants would push up labour costs, while [tariffs will raise the price of imports](#). A survey by the University of Michigan last week found that Americans expect inflation of 4.3% in the coming year, up from less than 3% at the end of 2024. Mr Trump may soon find that inflation is a burden not just for consumers but also for political leaders.

Mexico sets up for its first judicial elections



Wednesday is the deadline for Mexico's Senate to finalise the lists of people who will stand in the country's first judicial elections on June 1st. Mexican judges used to be appointed. But in September the Senate passed a reform—backed by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, then Mexico's president—that means they will now be chosen by popular vote. In two elections, this year and in 2027, Mexico must elect over 7,000 judges from the Supreme Court to the circuit level.

Experts worry that the reform will [harm Mexico's democracy](#). Judges will be less qualified and more open to political and criminal influence. The process of drawing up candidate lists suggests that will be the case. The committees responsible asked political questions and interviewed some candidates for just six minutes. Claudia Sheinbaum, Mexico's president since October, supports the reform. But with a lacklustre economy and threats from Donald Trump, she can ill afford it causing Mexico more problems.

Talks but no plan for Ukraine



Despite a flurry of diplomacy ahead of the annual Munich Security Conference on Friday, there is little to suggest that a ceasefire in Ukraine is near. Donald Trump has confirmed that he spoke with Vladimir Putin, Russia's president.

When Mr Trump came into office he gave Keith Kellogg, his special envoy to Ukraine, 100 days to come up with a [peace plan](#). The 26th meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, an alliance of more than 50 countries, on Wednesday may offer some clues as to Mr Kellogg's thinking. One ominous sign for Mr Zelensky is that America plans to take a back seat at the gathering, which Britain will chair instead. The UDCG coalition has sent \$126bn worth of military kit to Ukraine, half of which has come from America. Whether the group can keep it up will depend on Mr Trump.

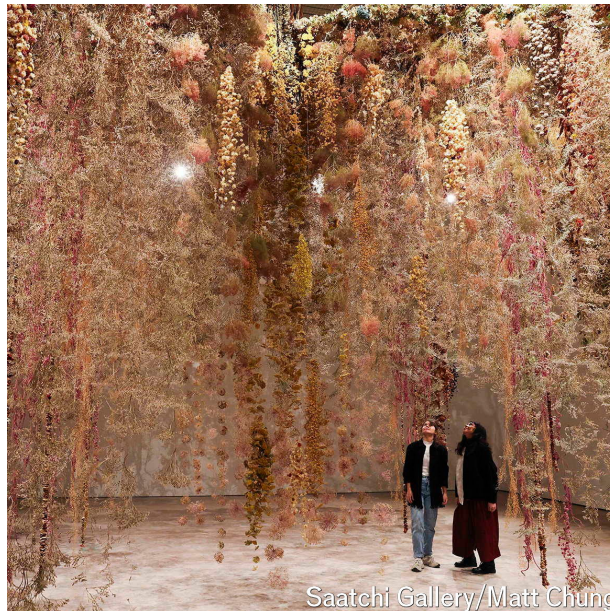
Spain's macho football culture on trial



When Spain's women's football team won the World Cup by beating England 1-0 in August 2023, the gloss was swiftly removed from their triumph. At a medals ceremony for the players, Luis Rubiales, the head of the country's football federation, [pinned a kiss](#) on the lips of Jenni Hermoso, the captain.

On Tuesday Mr Rubiales began presenting evidence at his trial for sexual aggression, for which he could be jailed for 30 months. He and three others, including the team's coach, will give evidence over the coming days. They face charges (which they all deny) of attempting to coerce Ms Hermoso into agreeing with him that the kiss was consensual. Ms Hermoso insists it was not; several of her teammates have backed her up in court. Some Spaniards see Mr Rubiales as a victim of "Me Too" culture: he was forced to resign. But many others think that it is high time that the machismo surrounding the management of the game is taken seriously.

Spring arrives early in London



In the film “The Devil Wears Prada” Miranda Priestly, a feared fashion editor, scolds one of her stylists for suggesting a flower-themed photo shoot. “Florals? For Spring?” she asks with a deadpan expression. “Groundbreaking.” Even if they are *passé* in the world of *haute couture*, flowers can still draw a crowd. In 2019 a “superbloom” of orange poppies near Los Angeles tempted [social-media influencers](#) and their fans, who trampled the flowers and caused traffic jams.

“Flowers: Flora in Contemporary Art & Culture”, which opens on Wednesday at the Saatchi Gallery in London, may attract flower fans. It puts more than 500 works on botanical display, exploring the “roots”, or history, of floral depictions as well as (dare we say) flower-inspired fashion. The highlight of the exhibition is an installation by Rebecca Louise Law, a British artist, in which 100,000 dried flowers cascade from the ceiling. The gallery describes the room as “a quiet space” where visitors can “connect with nature”, though Ms Law’s art will no doubt also draw online trendsetters. As Instagram blooms with pictures taken among the buds, so too may ticket sales.

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: Who killed Lee Harvey Oswald, President Kennedy's assassin?

Tuesday: Which author was the first American woman to win the Nobel prize for literature?

**Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's
true; Real becomes not-real where the
unreal's real.**

Cao Xueqin