

The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter

Marco Rubio, **America's secretary of state**, said the Trump administration would “move on” if a [Ukraine ceasefire](#) is not agreed “within a matter of days”. Meanwhile Ukraine said it had signed a memorandum of intent for an expanded minerals deal with America, which will be finalised next week. Ukraine said the accord paved the way for economic partnership and for investment in the reconstruction of the country.

The **Trump administration** proposed levies on Chinese vessels docking in America. Ships would face a fee based on the volume of goods carried per trip. Separately Giorgia Meloni, Italy's prime minister, said during a visit to Washington that she was “sure” the EU and America would reach a trade deal. Donald Trump has threatened 20% tariffs on [the bloc's exports](#).

The **Houthis**, Yemeni rebels backed by Iran, said that American strikes on a port in Yemen had killed 74 people and injured 171 others. America said that it had destroyed an important oil terminal to “deprive [the Houthis] of illegal revenue”. In March America intensified its [campaign](#) against the Houthis, who have been attacking ships in the Red Sea since 2023.

Mr Trump will reportedly replace the acting boss of the **Internal Revenue Service** after **Scott Bessent**, the treasury secretary, complained to the president. Gary Shapley, who was appointed just three days ago, was apparently installed [at the behest](#) of **Elon Musk**, even though the IRS commissioner reports to Mr Bessent. Mr Shapley's replacement will be the fifth to hold the job this year.

Abbas Araghchi, **Iran's** foreign minister, met Sergei Lavrov, his **Russian** counterpart, in Moscow, ahead of a second round of

[nuclear talks](#) with America. Mr Trump's administration is trying to negotiate a deal with Iran, which is closer than ever to developing a nuclear bomb. Mr Lavrov said Russia would be ready to "play any role" that would help America.

Volodymyr Zelensky, [Ukraine's president](#), imposed sanctions on "nearly a hundred more entities" involved in producing Iskander missiles, which he said were used in an airstrike on Kharkiv on Friday. Three Chinese companies specialising in aviation or machinery were among the list. This week Mr Zelensky accused China of supplying weapons to Russia; **China** dismissed his claim as "groundless".

American regulators approved **Capital One's** [acquisition](#) of **Discover**. The \$35bn merger of two of the country's largest credit-card firms, announced last year, was scrutinised by former President Joe Biden's administration, which favoured stricter bank-merger rules. As part of the agreement Capital One must pay a \$100m fine imposed by the Federal Reserve against Discover for overcharging interchange fees between 2007 and 2023.

Figure of the day: 14, the number of points by which Donald Trump's approval rating has fallen since he took office, according to our tracker. [Read the full story.](#)



Photograph: AP

Trump's diplomats talk Ukraine in Paris

Marco Rubio, America's secretary of state, and Steve Witkoff, President Donald Trump's special envoy, wrapped up a trip to Paris on Friday. The pair held talks yesterday with President Emmanuel Macron at the Elysée Palace, as well as officials and ministers from Britain, Germany and Ukraine.

Mr Witkoff arrived in the French capital having spoken directly to Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, on April 11th. He claimed afterwards to have "got an answer" to what Russia wants in return for agreeing to a peace deal, but offered no specifics. Mr Macron was co-lead with Britain's prime minister, Sir Keir Starmer, an effort to form a "reassurance" force of Europeans and other allies for Ukraine if a deal is struck. Before the meeting, the French president had not given up hope that America could be persuaded to back up such a force. But Mr Rubio's comments on Friday morning were disheartening. He said America would "move on" if a ceasefire was not agreed "within a matter of days".



Photograph: AP

Sticky inflation in Japan

A [crisis over rice](#) has become emblematic of Japan's rising cost of living, following a poor harvest in 2023. In March the price in Tokyo was nearly 90% higher than a year earlier. Soaring food prices pushed the consumer-price inflation figure for the year to March, released on Friday, to 3.2%.

The data will weigh on the Bank of Japan before its policy meeting on April 30th. The central bank scrapped its decade-old policy of negative interest rates last year. It has since lifted rates twice; another rise could come soon. But the path ahead is uncertain. The yen has strengthened amid the market jitters induced by Donald Trump. That makes imports cheaper and could cool inflation, weakening the case for more tightening.

At the same time Mr Trump's tariffs could slow growth—another reason for the BoJ to tread carefully. The BoJ's governor, Ueda Kazuo, recently warned that America's policies have pushed the economy closer to a “bad scenario”.



Photograph: Getty Images

Trump loses favour

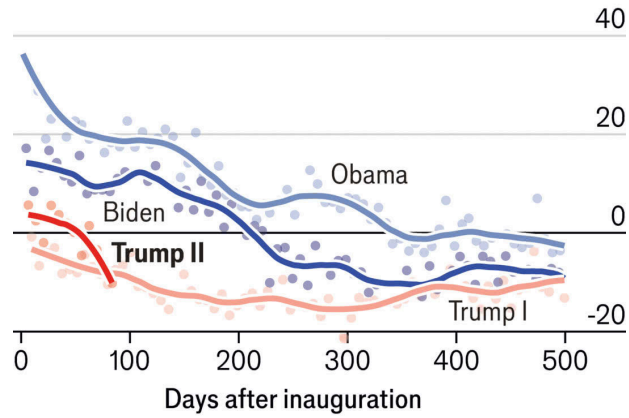
President Donald Trump is breaking his own record for rapidly annoying Americans. Since his slim popular-vote victory in November, he has claimed a “massive” mandate from voters. Many Americans did give him the benefit of the doubt, but [our new tracker](#) of his approval rating shows that has changed. Since his inauguration, his net approval rating has fallen by 14 percentage points, steeper than the five-point drop he had suffered by this point in his first term.

Mr Trump continues to enjoy strong support from his core constituency of partisan Republicans, but many of the voters he gained last year are alarmed by his policies. One in five of his voters say they disapprove of his handling of inflation and prices, while 12% disapprove of his decisions on jobs and the wider economy. Though he will not face voters again, opinion polls make dispiriting reading for Republican lawmakers, on whom Mr Trump is relying to pass his legislative agenda.

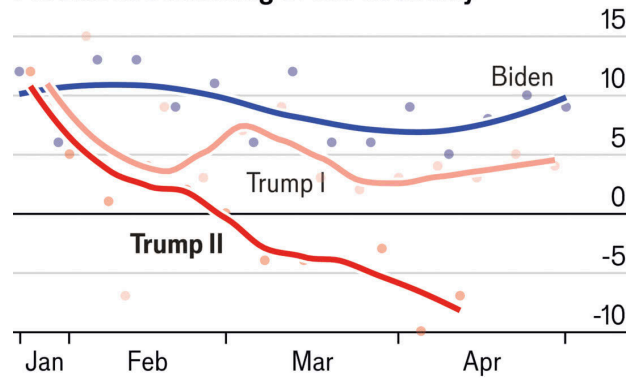
Tanking

United States, net approval, percentage points

President



President's handling of the economy



Sources: YouGov/*The Economist*; *The Economist*

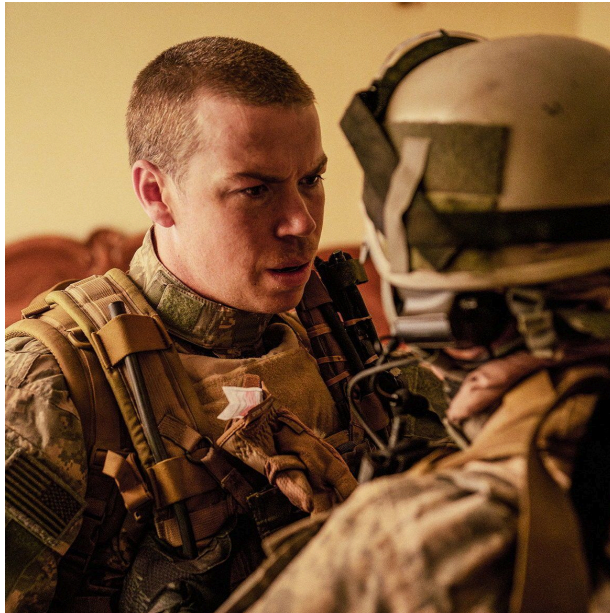


Photograph: Getty Images

DOGE takes on America's consultants

Ten consultancy firms face a deadline on Friday. The companies have been asked to reply to requests from America's General Services Administration explaining how they will cut the fees they charge the federal government, according to a letter leaked to the *Financial Times*. The GSA is one of the agencies most closely associated with DOGE, Elon Musk's [budget-slashing task-force](#). (Its building is where the group's young staffers set up their sleeping pods.)

DOGE's demand to review existing contracts is consistent with its operations elsewhere. This week the Vera Institute, a non-profit that focuses on justice reform, said that DOGE had demanded access to the organisation to investigate how it spends federal money—a part of Mr Musk's plan to assign staff to “every institute or agency that has congressional monies appropriated to it”. That intrusion has come to include [private contractors](#), too. Mr Musk's conviction is seemingly that the government—including the firms it hires—should bend to Donald Trump's will.



Photograph: Murray Close

A hyper-realistic war film

“Warfare”, a film set during the Iraq war, is in large part a recreation of the end of the Battle of Ramadi in 2006. Ray Mendoza, the co-director and a former Navy SEAL, remembers it well, having been there. The film uses only the memories of Mr Mendoza and several comrades. There is therefore a strong focus on the visceral immediacy of combat: the peril and confusion. The historical context itself is intentionally omitted—we do not know why the Americans are fighting in Ramadi.

The hyper-realistic drama focuses on an ensemble cast in real-time action. There is no musical score, only the sound of violence. The SEALs stay mostly in the same building, and never leave the neighbourhood. Alex Garland, Mr Mendoza’s co-director, says that the aim is to achieve a “neutral” narrative style. But the intention is not to make the film apolitical. Rather—having experienced the granular details of the battle—the viewer is left to ponder any wider issues alone.



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 GMT on Friday to [\[email protected\]](#). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Friday: Which footballer won the “golden boot” in the women’s 2022 Euro tournament?

Thursday: The 2024 film “Back To Black” was a biopic of which singer?



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:

Josh Galanter, Burlingame, California, America

Dibyendu Roy Choudhury, Kolkata, India

Osamu Senoo, Izumo, Japan

They all gave the correct answers of [Howard Lutnick](#), [hunger](#), [logic](#), and [Kallas](#). Check back tomorrow for this week's crossword.

*In the middle of difficulty lies
opportunity.*

Albert Einstein.