

Catch up: Ukrainians beaten back in Kursk; America deports alleged gang members



Ukrainian forces are reported to have been all but pushed out of **Kursk**. They had captured large swathes of the Russia territory in a surprise attack last summer, but a months-long counterattack has now forced a retreat. [Ukrainian](#) soldiers continue to defend a small position on the Russian side of the border, and President Volodymyr Zelensky has denied reports that they are surrounded.

Nayib Bukele, the president of El Salvador, claimed on social media that more than 250 **gang members** had arrived in his country after being **deported** from the United States. Mr Bukele's announcement came hours after a federal judge temporarily forbade Donald Trump from using an 18th century law to deport alleged gang members. Mr Bukele evidently found the timing funny, writing: "Oopsie... Too late".

Binyamin Netanyahu, **Israel's** prime minister, said that he would hold a vote among his cabinet this week to dismiss Ronen Bar, the

head of Shin Bet. Mr Netanyahu [has been feuding](#) with the country's security service, as both seek to blame the other for the Hamas attack on October 7th 2023. The prime minister has accused Mr Bar of running a "campaign of blackmail threats" against him.

A fire in a nightclub in **North Macedonia** killed at least 59 people and injured more than 100. Some 1,500 people were attending a concert at the Pulse club in Kocani, about 100km east of the capital, Skopje. Pance Toskovski, the interior minister, said that initial reports suggest that the blaze was caused by pyrotechnics.

Media-advocacy groups denounced Mr Trump's decision to cut off funding for **Voice of America**, a government-sponsored news organisation. VoA was set up as a radio station during the second world war to counter Nazi propaganda in Europe and has since broadcast across the world in support of America's foreign policy. Mr Trump said that the federal government should not pay for such "radical propaganda".

Baidu became the latest Chinese tech giant to unveil a new **artificial-intelligence** model. Baidu was one of the first big Chinese firms to release an AI chatbot, but it fell behind rivals such as ByteDance and, in particular, DeepSeek. The swift rise of China's AI industry has [spooked](#) investors in American competitors.

A SpaceX capsule carrying new crew members has docked with the **International Space Station**. Two of the astronauts on the ISS had intended to be there for only eight days, but technical issues with the spacecraft they arrived on kept them trapped in orbit for nine months. After a two-day handover, they will be able to come home at last, as soon as the weather allows re-entry.

Figure of the day: 13m, the number of pints of Guinness stout consumed globally on St Patrick's Day. [Read the full story.](#)

All eyes on America's market tumult



Donald Trump's erratic trade policies have rattled markets. On March 4th the American president instituted tariffs on Mexico and Canada. Two days later, he suspended them for goods covered by the three countries' free-trade agreement until April 2nd. Then, on March 12th, he raised tariffs on all steel and aluminium to 25%. That sent the S&P 500, the most widely-watched stock index in the world, into a "correction" on March 13th, meaning it had dropped by more than 10% since its all-time high on February 19th.

Shares recovered slightly the next day, rising by 2%. But the sell-off has raised worries about the strength of the American economy. Consumer confidence dipped to its lowest level in more than two and a half years this month, according to survey data published by the University of Michigan. Combine that with the stockmarket's expensive valuations and an unpredictable administration, and the market wobble may not be over yet.

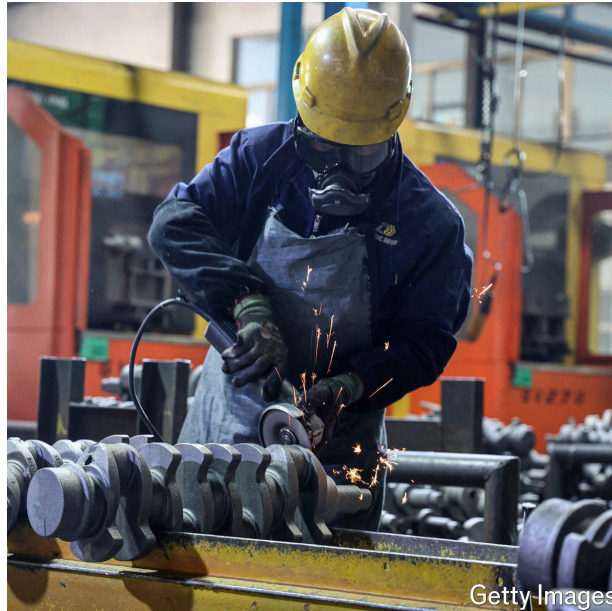
The EU responds to Ukraine peace talks



When the European Union's 27 foreign ministers meet on Monday, it will be for the first time since the unveiling of the American proposal for a ceasefire in Ukraine. Russia and America have both been involved in recent peace talks. But Europe has so far been no more than a spectator.

Given how much is at stake for the continent, the EU is keen to weigh in on any potential deal. After the guns fall silent, some of its members would probably have to send troops to Ukraine to fend off further Russian aggression. And Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, has demanded an overhaul of Europe's security architecture, which includes NATO's collective defence of countries Russia's president considers within his country's sphere of influence. That Donald Trump, America's president, might entertain such an idea makes EU leaders nervous. Later in the week they will meet to discuss a variety of topics. Ukraine is top of the agenda.

China tries to spur consumption



Li Qiang, China's prime minister, mentioned consumption 32 times in his annual speech to the country's legislature on March 5th. And the government is not finished talking about it yet. On Sunday China's cabinet released a 30-point plan to boost household spending. It endorsed raising the minimum wage, subsidising consumer loans and helping workers take their annual leave. Expectations of the plan's arrival helped China's stockmarkets rise by over 2% on Friday.

The momentum will be hard to sustain. Figures released on Monday showed that retail sales grew by about 4% (before adjusting for inflation) in January and February, compared with a year earlier. That was better than prior months but still far below the pre-pandemic trend. Previous government plans, including a 20-point agenda released in July 2024 and another a year earlier, did not restore the confidence of China's consumers. The new plan has 50% more points, but may be no more effective.

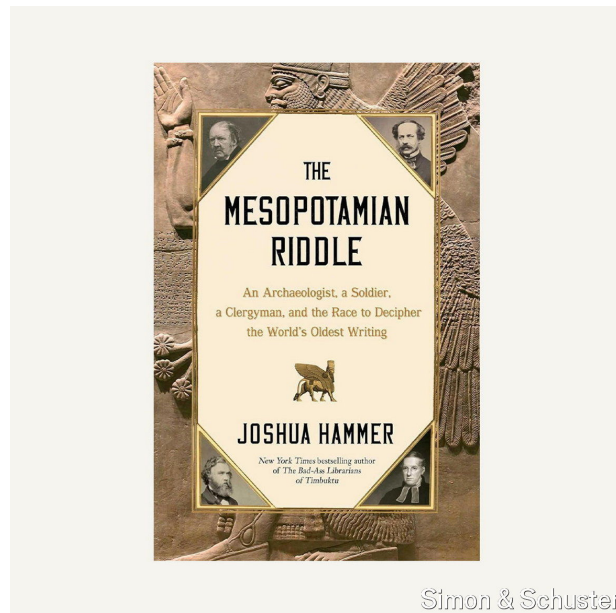
Hizbullah's staying power



On Monday the UN Security Council will discuss the failure of Israel and Hizbullah, a Shia militant group, to implement resolution 1701, which in 2006 ended a war between them. Hizbullah was to withdraw from south Lebanon and hand over its weapons. For almost two decades little progress was made. But last year's much more destructive war with Israel left the group weakened. The Lebanese army has recruited and deployed thousands of additional soldiers to police the south.

Hizbullah is far from disarmed, and refuses to disband its militia. After five years of financial crisis, Lebanon's army is underfunded. Many soldiers work side jobs as drivers or food-delivery riders. Some new recruits received just a few weeks of training. Israel has largely withdrawn its troops from south Lebanon but continues to occupy five hilltops. It plans to stay until resolution 1701 is fully implemented. That will take still more time.

How to read dead letters



You think Greek is hard? Try Akkadian, the language of the “Gilgamesh”, the first epic poem. Akkadian is one of several languages written in the “wedge-shaped” symbols known as cuneiform, considered the world’s oldest writing system.

Until the 1840s cuneiform and its languages stumped scholars. Joshua Hammer’s “The Mesopotamian Riddle” explains how three men cracked it. Henry Rawlinson, an East India Company officer, used a multilingual cuneiform inscription to finish deciphering Old Persian in 1846. But Akkadian proved tougher, and Rawlinson struggled to read inscriptions discovered by Austen Layard, a self-taught archaeologist. It was Edward Hincks, a cantankerous Irish vicar, who had the realisation that unlocked the script: that some characters represent both words and syllables. Layard recognised Hincks’ brilliance, but Rawlinson was loth to credit him. This tale of dusty scholars could have been as dry as the desert. But by exploring the relationship between this “often combustible” threesome, Mr Hammer makes dead languages speak again.

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

Monday: How many fluid ounces equal a pint in the US?

Wonder about yourself.

Erik Satie