



Kim takes strength from Moscow's embrace

BIG READ, PAGE 21

Forget WeWork: the 'office' is far from dead

GILLIAN TETT, PAGE 23

Sunak tested Braverman pushes limits

Rishi Sunak addresses guests as he hosts a reception with business leaders to celebrate Diwali in Downing Street yesterday.

The prime minister was last night facing pressure from Tory MPs to fire Suella Braverman following concerns that the home secretary had breached the ministerial code after writing an article accusing the Metropolitan Police of "double standards" in the way it treated demonstrators.

Braverman claimed in *The Times* that senior police officers "play favourites" with protesters, taking a tougher stance with rightwing demonstrators than those linked to left-leaning causes, such as this weekend's planned pro-Palestinian march.

The article "was not cleared by Number 10", the prime minister's spokesperson confirmed yesterday. **Report & analysis page 2**



Victoria Jones/PA

Briefing

► Nvidia builds new chips to suit Chinese market

The Silicon Valley semiconductor maker has developed three new chips tailored for China that aim to meet the region's growing demand for artificial intelligence technology while complying with US export controls.— PAGE 9

► Data challenge for Hunt

Productivity has barely grown since the financial crisis, figures show, underscoring the challenges facing Jeremy Hunt as he prepares his Autumn Statement.— PAGE 2; PENSIONS REFORM PRESSURE, PAGE 3

► Hard knock for SoftBank

SoftBank Group has posted an unexpected \$6.2bn net loss in its second quarter after WeWork, one of the Japanese group's biggest bets, filed for bankruptcy this week.— PAGE 10; LEX, PAGE 24

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US betting group DraftKings discussed a bid for William Hill owner 888 over the summer, opening talks with some of the struggling betting operator's biggest shareholders.— PAGE 12

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► ICBC hack disrupts trade

A ransomware attack on China's biggest bank has unsettled the US Treasuries market after it was no longer able to settle trades for its clients, forcing them to reroute their activities.— PAGE 13

Apple suffers setback in top EU court over €14.3bn Irish back taxes dispute

► Opinion finds 'errors of law' ► Ruling to quash payment in doubt ► Dublin denies state aid claim

JAVIER ESPINOZA — BRUSSELS
JUDE WEBBER — DUBLIN

Apple has been dealt a blow in its €14.3bn tax dispute with Brussels after an adviser to the EU's top court said an earlier ruling over its business in Ireland should be shelved.

Giovanni Pitruzzella, advocate-general of the European Court of Justice, the EU's highest court, said yesterday that a landmark decision quashing the EU's order for Apple to pay €14.3bn in back taxes to Ireland "should be set aside". Such opinions by advocates-general are non-binding but often influence final judgments by the EU's top court.

The General Court, the EU's second-highest court, ruled in 2020 that, while it supported the EU's right to investigate national tax arrangements, Brussels

had failed to show that Apple had received an illegal economic advantage in Ireland over tax.

But Pitruzzella said the court had "committed a series of errors in law" and "failed to assess correctly the substance and consequences of certain methodological errors". As a result, he said the court needed "to carry out a new assessment".

An ECJ ruling is expected next year. Competition commissioner Mar-

The case is part of a wider clampdown by Brussels against alleged sweetheart tax deals in member states

grethe Vestager said in 2016 that Apple's tax arrangements in effect gave the tech giant a tax rate of less than 1 per cent and an unfair edge over rivals, violating the bloc's state-aid rules.

She said yesterday on social media platform X: "All companies should pay their fair share of tax. The fact of the case: Apple paid (almost) no taxes."

Ireland collected €14.3bn in contested back taxes and interest from the company in 2018 — funds that have since been held in an escrow account as the legal process continues.

Aidan Regan, an associate professor of political economy at University College Dublin and an expert on Irish corporation tax, said the commission's argument was that Ireland "gave Apple unfair advantage in the market because

they could accumulate so much profit tax-free for such a long period of time".

Apple said the General Court's ruling "was very clear that Apple received no selective advantage and no state aid, and we believe that should be upheld".

Ireland yesterday also insisted the company had been given no preferential treatment. "It has always been, and remains, Ireland's position that the correct amount of Irish tax was paid and that Ireland provided no state aid to Apple," finance minister Michael McGrath said.

The opinion highlights Ireland's long-held policy of keeping corporation tax low as a driver of investment. Its 12.5 per cent tax rate helped attract global tech and pharmaceuticals companies and has led to bumper returns. The coun-

try's corporation tax receipts have more than tripled in the past eight years to a record €22.6bn last year.

Ireland is setting up a sovereign wealth fund to save windfall tax proceeds but, as the country prepares in January to increase its corporation tax rate to 15 per cent under an OECD deal, those tax receipts have fallen sharply for each of the past three months.

The commission said it did not comment on the opinions given by advocates-general.

The Apple case is part of a wider clampdown launched by Brussels in 2013 against alleged sweetheart tax deals in member states. Brussels is also appealing against a General Court decision overturning an order for Amazon to pay back taxes in Luxembourg.



Debut trade to put Dimon top of stock sellers' table

Jamie Dimon's mentor, Wall Street titan Sandy Weill, urged a 'blood oath' on his staff to hold their bank's shares until they left. But after JPMorgan Chase had touted the fact its chief had never sold its stock, Dimon is to break that 17-year holding streak with the sale of 1mn shares, worth \$140mn. That will catapult him to the top of the table for bank executives' stock sales, even if his peers have been more willing to sell than the boss of the biggest US lender. **Bankers' parade ► PAGE 11**

Sánchez poised to retain power after amnesty deal with Catalan separatists

BARNEY JOPSON — MADRID

Spain's ruling Socialist party has sealed a contentious amnesty deal with Catalan separatists to pave the way for caretaker prime minister Pedro Sánchez to secure another term in office.

The deal was unveiled yesterday by the Socialists and the hardline separatists of Together for Catalonia in Brussels, where the Catalan party's chief Carles Puigdemont is a fugitive from Spanish justice and probable amnesty beneficiary.

The pact has sparked outrage on the right over the move to absolve hundreds of people of wrongdoing over a failed and unlawful Catalan bid for independence six years ago that caused Spain's worst political crisis in decades.

Following an inconclusive July general election, Sánchez needs the support of smaller parties in parliament to reach

a 176-seat majority. The deal will open a potentially explosive chapter in Spanish politics. Sánchez says he is defusing long-running Catalan tensions but opponents accuse him of political expediency and trashing the rule of law.

The prospect of a pact has triggered several nights of protests outside Socialist party headquarters in Madrid, where supporters of the opposition Popular party (PP) and the hard-right Vox group have mixed with neo-Nazis blamed for violent clashes with police.

The accord between the Socialists and Together says it will "contribute to resolving the historic conflict over Catalonia's political future".

"The will and the opportunity is real," said Santos Cerdán, a top Socialist official. He signed the accord with Together secretary-general Jordi Turull, who served more than three years in prison

over the independence push before being pardoned by Sánchez in 2021.

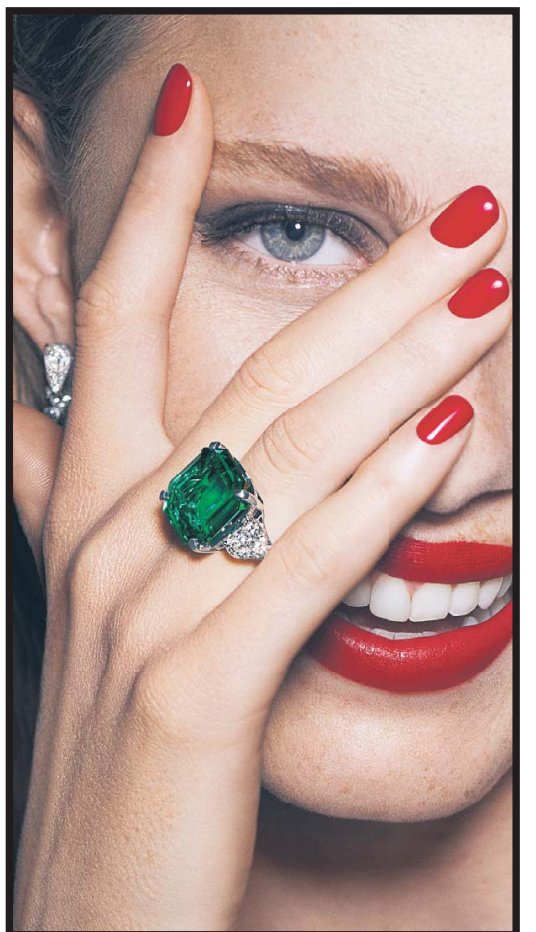
But the pact also acknowledges profound differences between the parties. It says Together is committed to pursuing a referendum on independence within the bounds of the constitution, although many experts say that is impossible.

Puigdemont said the parties were "entering an unprecedented phase that we must explore and exploit" but warned there was still profound mistrust between the two sides.

An amnesty law will end the prosecution, prison terms or other penalties facing hundreds of independence supporters who backed the Catalan bid to break away from Spain.

Isabel Díaz Ayuso, a leading PP figure and head of the Madrid region, said the pact was "bringing in a dictatorship through the back door".

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World Markets

STOCK MARKETS

	Nov 9	Prev	%chg
S&P 500	4387.27	4382.78	0.10
Nasdaq Composite	13688.86	13650.41	0.28
Dow Jones Ind	34091.52	34112.27	-0.06
FTSEurofirst 300	1772.43	1759.13	0.76
Euro Stoxx 50	4229.01	4178.49	1.21
FTSE 100	7455.67	7401.72	0.73
FTSE All-Share	4047.13	4016.24	0.77
CAC 40	7113.66	7034.16	1.13
Xetra Dax	15352.54	15229.60	0.81
Nikkei	32646.46	32166.48	1.49
Hang Seng	17511.29	17568.46	-0.33
MSCI World \$	2888.41	2887.39	0.04
MSCI EM \$	957.91	960.66	-0.29
MSCI ACWI \$	664.43	664.42	0.00
FT Wilshire 2500	5643.20	5642.09	0.02
FT Wilshire 5000	43927.80	43925.80	0.00

CURRENCIES

Pair	Nov 9	Prev	Pair	Nov 9	Prev
\$/€	1.072	1.071	€/£	0.933	0.934
\$/¥	1.229	1.229	€/¥	0.814	0.814
€/¥	0.872	0.871	€/€	1.147	1.148
W/\$	150.950	150.855	W/€	161.750	161.513
W/£	185.472	185.371	£ index	80.709	80.857
SFr/€	0.964	0.962	SFr/£	1.105	1.104

CRYPTO

	Nov 9	Prev	%chg
Bitcoin (\$)	36567.05	35639.24	2.60
Ethereum	2012.72	1889.86	6.50

COMMODITIES

	Nov 9	Prev	%chg
Oil WTI \$	76.15	75.33	1.09
Oil Brent \$	80.44	79.54	1.13
Gold \$	1959.35	1960.70	-0.07

GOVERNMENT BONDS

Yield (%)	Nov 9	Prev	Chg
US 2 yr	4.97	4.89	0.07
US 10 yr	4.54	4.52	0.01
US 30 yr	4.70	4.67	0.03
UK 2 yr	4.61	4.61	0.00
UK 10 yr	4.44	4.41	0.04
UK 30 yr	4.73	4.69	0.04
JPN 2 yr	0.11	0.11	0.00
JPN 10 yr	0.84	0.84	-0.01
JPN 30 yr	1.71	1.76	-0.05
GER 2 yr	3.00	2.99	0.01
GER 10 yr	2.64	2.62	0.03
GER 30 yr	2.88	2.81	0.07

Prices are latest for edition
Data provided by Morningstar

NATIONAL

Reshuffle push

Braverman in peril after defying Sunak

Home secretary's attack on Met police was 'not cleared' by Number 10

GEORGE PARKER, LUCY FISHER AND ANNA GROSS

The ministerial career of Suella Braverman, home secretary, was hanging by a thread yesterday after she defied Prime Minister Rishi Sunak by launching an attack on the police that was "not cleared" by Number 10.

Braverman did not apologise and the prime minister was under fierce pressure from Tory MPs to sack her. One minister close to Sunak said: "She will

be sacked in the reshuffle. She has no troops."

Downing Street declined to comment on speculation among Tory MPs Braverman's job could be on the line in a wider and long-awaited cabinet reshuffle that could happen as early as next week.

The stand-off followed the publication of an article by Braverman criticising the Metropolitan Police over its handling of protests, notably last weekend's pro-Palestinian rally in London.

Braverman accused the police of having a "double standard" and taking a tougher stance with rightwing demonstrations, claiming that senior police officers "played favourites".

Downing Street issued a rebuke to the

home secretary, who is widely seen by Tory MPs to be manoeuvring for a future party leadership bid, saying that the article in the Times newspaper "was not cleared by Number 10".

The ministerial code holds that the "policy content and timing" of all speeches, press releases and initiatives should be cleared with Number 10 at least 24 hours in advance.

But allies of Braverman insisted she had no reason to apologise, arguing that her provocative article did not contain any new announcement and did not contradict government policy.

In a sign of the tensions between the premier and his home secretary, Downing Street insiders said Number 10

requested changes to the article that were "not minor" but that Braverman did not comply.

Sunak was cloistered with senior advisers, including his deputy Oliver Dowden, yesterday to discuss a possible reshuffle, according to senior Tories. Downing Street and Dowden declined to comment.

A rightwing Tory insider supportive of Braverman claimed the changes demanded by Number 10 to her article were "not material" to the substance of the piece and insisted her stance was in line with the views of the British public, citing a poll released yesterday.

The YouGov survey for Sky News showed 50 per cent of Britons thought

the pro-Palestinian march planned for Armistice Day this Saturday should be banned, while only 34 per cent thought it should be allowed to go ahead.

Many Tory MPs want Sunak to fire Braverman. "Half the party has told the PM to sack her," said one former cabinet minister. Dowden, Kemi Badenoch, trade secretary, and Robert Jenrick, immigration minister, are among those tipped by Tory MPs to replace her.

Her article reflected her frustration with Sir Mark Rowley, Met police commissioner, who has refused to bow to political pressure to ban the proposed pro-Palestinian march tomorrow, Armistice Day. Rowley has argued there are no legal grounds to ban the march.

Conservative party. Tensions

Populist dares PM with incendiary rhetoric

Minister rumoured to be plotting leadership push but trails cabinet colleagues

GEORGE PARKER, LUCY FISHER AND ANNA GROSS — LONDON JUDE WEBBER — DUBLIN

Suella Braverman, the populist home secretary, has long been suspected by some Conservative MPs of wanting to get sacked so she can pursue her leadership ambitions unburdened by high office.

Rishi Sunak, prime minister, was yesterday under pressure from Tory MPs to oblige after Braverman went rogue in an opinion piece in The Times, attacking the Metropolitan Police without first clearing it with Downing Street.

"She has put two fingers up to the prime minister," said one former cabinet minister, referring to the article in which she claimed the Met was operating a "double standard" in policing demonstrations. "I assume she is trying to get sacked and I hope she succeeds," the former minister said.

Braverman claimed the police were allowing what she labelled a pro-Palestinian "hate march" to go ahead tomorrow while previously being much tougher on rightwing protests. Downing Street refused to endorse the inflammatory remarks. A minister close to Sunak said: "She is toast."

Aides and ministers close to Sunak believe he will sack Braverman in a forthcoming reshuffle, possibly after the Supreme Court rules next week on the legality of her flagship policy of sending asylum seekers to Rwanda.

For Braverman, an exit from government could be akin to jumping from a sinking ship. A YouGov poll yesterday put the Tories 24 points behind Labour.

The home secretary has given the impression of constantly trying her luck. At the Tory conference last month, she referred to mass migration as a "hurricane". This month, she claimed rough sleepers had made a "lifestyle choice".

It is that kind of provocative talk that has made Braverman one of the front-runners to succeed Sunak if, as many Conservative MPs believe, the party is defeated in a general election expected next year.

Tory MP Miriam Cates said on the social media site X: "Suella Braverman's



Centre stage: Suella Braverman in Downing Street after her appointment last year. Her Times article criticised the Met over its handling of protests

Niklas Halle/n/AFP/Getty Images

views may be distasteful to Westminster liberals but they're utterly mainstream in rest of UK."

Yvette Cooper, shadow home secretary, said that her counterpart was "deliberately inflaming community tensions in the most dangerous way. It is highly irresponsible and dangerous. No other home secretary would ever have done this".

Braverman also caused outrage in her article by comparing the pro-Palestinian protests to sectarian marches in Northern Ireland. Colum Eastwood, an MP and leader of Northern Ireland's Social Democratic and Labour party, said: "She has managed to offend just about everyone – no mean feat in a divided society."

But Braverman has been useful to Sunak in the past, deploying the kind of language on migration and crime that resonates in the rightwing press and with some target voters, but which he is reluctant to use himself.

Sunak made her his home secretary when he became Tory leader in October 2022, even though she had been forced

to resign days earlier after breaching ministerial rules by sending an official document to a fellow MP using her personal email. The swift political resurrection was seen as the price of Braverman offering Sunak her support in the leadership contest, although relations between the two have become scratchy.

Braverman's time as home secretary has been marked by her efforts to stop the flow of migrants across the English Channel in small boats, including the pursuit of her "dream" of deporting asylum seekers to Rwanda.

A returns agreement with Albania has helped to cut the number of migrant crossings by about a fifth this year and Braverman has told colleagues she is confident the Supreme Court will rule her Rwanda policy is legal.

But she has not "stopped the boats" – one of Sunak's five key pledges – and many MPs believe she does not have a solid record in office on which to base a future leadership run.

One minister said: "I don't see how she can win the leadership without having delivered. I am sure some on the

'She has managed to offend just about everyone – no mean feat in a divided society'

Colum Eastwood, Northern Ireland's Social Democratic and Labour party leader

right of the party are signed up to her world view, but aren't necessarily signed up to her personally."

Downing Street insiders noted with some relish that few Tory MPs have been prepared to defend Braverman in recent days, emboldening those who think Sunak should sack her.

A regular "cabinet league table" compiled by the ConservativeHome website, puts Braverman behind James Cleverly, foreign secretary, Kemi Badenoch, trade secretary, Penny Mordaunt, leader of the House of Commons, and Johnny Mercer, veterans minister.

The fact that her incendiary rhetoric has not moved her higher up the rankings may reflect growing nervousness in the party that she is damaging its standing among liberal-minded voters.

Nickie Aiken, the Tory deputy chair, criticised Braverman for getting involved in policing operations. "It is very important that police do policing and politicians do politics," she said.

One former minister said: "She is divisive and is toxifying the party's good record on law and order."

Economic growth

Productivity only slightly higher since financial crisis

VALENTINA ROMEI AND SAM FLEMING

Productivity has barely grown since the financial crisis, official figures have found, underscoring the challenge facing Chancellor Jeremy Hunt as he tries to lift growth and investment in the Autumn Statement.

Total factor productivity, a measure of how efficiently resources are used in the economy, was last year only 1.7 per cent above the level recorded in 2007, when the UK was heading into the credit crunch. It was also just a fraction of the pace recorded in the 16 years up to 2007, when productivity increased 27 per cent, according to yesterday's figures from the Office for National Statistics.

The numbers go to the heart of the UK's economic challenges, given output is the key driver of rising living standards long term. Hunt said last month his Autumn Statement on November 22 will lay out a plan for escaping the low-growth trap, saying it was about "supply side reforms".

The ONS reported that output fell by an annual rate of 0.1 per cent in 2022, following a 0.3 per cent fall in 2021.

The data revealed big differences between sectors, with total factor productivity in information and communication more than doubling since 2007, reflecting technological advancement in the sector. Manufacturing productivity was also up 11 per cent compared with 2007, while most of the other sectors, including financial services, hospitality, retail, professional services and construction, registered a contraction.

Many advanced economies have had a productivity slowdown since the financial crisis, but the trend has been particularly pronounced in the UK. Separate data by the OECD shows that between 2007 and 2022 labour productivity grew less in the UK than in the US and was below the OECD average.

With limited funds at his disposal, the chancellor is seeking to drive up business investment and improve the country's potential growth via labour market reforms, changing planning rules and lowering barriers to infrastructure.

In March, he introduced a £10bn-a-year tax break that will last three years, permitting companies to "fully expense" investment. Business groups want him to extend the measure.

In the third quarter of 2022, business investment was unchanged from the level reached in the same period in 2016, but has now risen to 6 per cent above that, in part boosted by spending on aircraft in the quarter to June.

Paul Dales, UK economist at Capital Economics, said any attempt to improve performance would need to address three key areas: improving the labour supply, lifting the investment rate and reinvigorating productivity growth.

This would entail "a deep and wide-ranging reform effort that takes in everything from pensions to planning and taxation to public services", he added.

The ONS's total factor productivity data is experimental, and is subject to revisions more than other economic data. There is further uncertainty over recent readings because of the difficulty of measuring output during the pandemic, as well as lower response rates to labour market surveys.

Bart van Ark, head of the Productivity Institute, a research organisation, said the trend was "alarming".

Competition

Petrol pump price falls out of step with wholesale fuel costs

IAN JOHNSTON

Prices at the pump are not falling in line with wholesale fuel costs, according to the Competition and Markets Authority, raising concerns that weak forecast competition is exacerbating the cost of living crisis.

In September and October, wholesale costs fell "while retail prices did not", the competition watchdog said yesterday, noting that prices had increased by 11p per litre for petrol and 13.9p per litre for diesel since May 2023.

The difference between the average price drivers paid at the pump and the price retailers buy fuel was 17-18p per litre at the end of October, "significantly higher" than the long-term average of 5-10p per litre, the CMA added.

From June to August, rises were probably driven by "global factors" such as increased crude oil prices, the CMA said.

"Drivers are feeling the pain again as petrol prices at the pump have been on the rise since June," said Sarah Cardell, chief executive of the CMA.

"More recent trends give cause for concern that competition is still not working well in this market to hold down pump prices," she added.

The data is the first monitoring report of the market by the CMA as part of an initiative to boost competition.

It comes after the body found in July that Asda and Morrisons, the supermarkets, had raised their margins on fuel since being taken over by private equity groups in 2020 and 2021 respectively.

This led to raised prices across the market, due to the supermarkets' size and traditional roles as cost-cutters, according to the CMA.

Average supermarket fuel margins fell from 11.9p per litre in May to 7.3p per litre in August, according to the data released yesterday, still higher than the annual average before 2021.

"Failure to pass on the full savings from lower wholesale costs to hard-pressed motorists, their families and businesses is unacceptable in a cost of living crisis," said Luke Bosdet of the AA, the roadside recovery group.

Student survey

T-level vocational training fails to attract numbers expected

PETER FOSTER, AMY BORRETT AND ANNA GROSS

The government's flagship "T-level" technical qualifications are still failing to attract the expected numbers of students, a survey has shown, sparking calls for an urgent revamp of the scheme.

The qualifications, launched in 2020 in a shake-up of post-16 education, were intended to boost vocational learning but have been plagued by issues including securing industrial work placements. They were designed to improve the quality and availability of skilled labour, particularly in manufacturing.

A majority of further education colleges that deliver the qualifications said that enrolments were lower than expected for the 2023 academic year in half of T-level subjects, according to an Association of Colleges survey.

David Hughes, chief executive of the association, said the survey showed that the government's ambitious plans to ramp up T-levels this year had failed.

"Despite the government's rhetoric on the success of T-levels, the stark reality is that across the country young people are simply not choosing them in the numbers hoped for," he said.

T-levels were rolled out by Department for Education to replace the previous BTEC qualifications, which were seen as overly complex and failing to deliver the necessary workplace skills.

Ofsted said in a report in September there had been "teething issues" with T-levels and added it had found "a range of shortcomings" that the Department for Education would want to address.

In October, Rishi Sunak announced a further shake-up of the UK's education system by pledging to introduce a "British baccalaureate". Hughes said that announcement had confused the messaging on T-levels.

But a Department for Education spokesperson said: "T-levels are only two years old, and already they are delivering brilliant outcomes – and we expect many more young people to benefit in the years to come."

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NATIONAL

Chancellor faces pressure to deliver on bold pension reforms

Promise to release billions for investment received no mention in the King's Speech

JOSEPHINE CUMBO
GLOBAL PENSIONS CORRESPONDENT

At the chancellor's annual Mansion House speech in July, Jeremy Hunt set out wide-ranging reforms to the trillion-pound pensions sector that he said would "boost pensions [for savers] and increase investment in British businesses".

Hunt claimed his so-called Mansion House reforms could deliver an extra £1,000 a year in retirement income for today's young savers and unlock up to £75bn in pension savings to invest in the economy.

But the absence of pension reform from the government's legislative programme in the King's Speech this week raised questions about whether the chancellor can deliver on his ambitions.

What are the Mansion House reforms?

A key plank of Hunt's package was a voluntary agreement between nine of the largest defined contribution pension providers, which hold a total of about £400bn in assets.

The agreement, known as the "Mansion House compact" committed the providers to allocating 5 per cent of assets in their default funds, the most popular types of fund, to unlisted equities by 2030. According to Hunt, this could "unlock up to £50bn of investment into high-growth companies".

Hunt also set out proposals to double the share of local government pension scheme allocations in private equity to

10 per cent, which he said could unlock a further £25bn by 2030.

A range of separate reforms aimed to create bigger and better-run pension plans, which are more suited to investing in higher-growth, higher-risk assets, such as unlisted companies.

Among them was a proposal for the state-backed pensions lifeboat fund to be given an expanded role as a consolidator of corporate pension plans, giving it a bigger pot of assets to invest in the economy.

Another potential plan was for employers to be given easier access to defined benefit pension fund surpluses to encourage schemes to invest in riskier assets that could boost the economy.

Do the reforms need legislation?

Some of Hunt's changes require primary legislation, or a pensions bill, but others need only secondary legislation or guidance, say sector experts.

A bill would be needed for an authorisation regime for new commercial defined benefit "superfunds", which pool corporate pension fund assets.

Establishing a clearing house to stop small pension pots that accumulate as people change jobs from getting lost in the system would also require legislation. The proposed registry could lead to a modest boost in pension incomes, according to analysis published with the Mansion House package.

The Mansion House compact between defined contribution pension providers does not need legislation



Ambitious plan: Chancellor Jeremy Hunt hopes to unlock up to £75bn in pension savings to invest in the economy, but legislation to make this happen was missing from the King's Speech — FT montage; Bloomberg/Epa/Shutterstock

because it is voluntary, with the chancellor saying he would not force private sector funds to invest in specific assets.

Why was the pensions bill omitted from the King's Speech?

One government official said this was because of a lack of parliamentary time, and insisted that many reforms could be carried out quickly by regulators working with the sector.

However, some industry figures said the government could be reserving the big pension announcements for the Autumn Statement this month.

What is the industry view?

The absence of a pensions bill in the King's Speech raised eyebrows among some in the sector, especially as attention was given to legislation for issues such as unlicensed pedicabs in London.

"We were all a bit surprised," said Matt Tickle, partner and chief investment officer at Barnett Waddingham, the actuarial consultants. "We were all expecting something given it was a big part of the government's plans."

LCP, one of the biggest actuarial con-

'We were all a bit surprised. We were all expecting something [in the King's Speech]'

Matt Tickle, Barnett Waddingham

sultant groups, said that the absence of pensions legislation could "severely limit what can be achieved this side of the general election".

The group had previously put forward its own proposals to ease employer access to defined benefit surpluses as a route to stimulating funds to invest in higher-growth, but higher-risk assets, that mirror those floated by Hunt.

What next?

Officials say steady progress is being made to deliver the reforms that do not require primary legislation.

Last month, 20 venture capital firms and Aon, an additional pension fund, agreed to join the Mansion House compact. The chancellor has also committed to respond to consultations linked to the reforms in his Autumn Statement.

The Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association, the trade body, said while it was disappointing the government did not include a pensions bill in the King's Speech, "its absence will mean more time can be allocated to ensuring any reforms are well designed after in-depth consultation with the pensions sector".

National Audit Office

Ministers failing to track progress on social care

LAURA HUGHES

The government is failing to co-ordinate and track the progress of its £1.7bn plan to improve the quality of England's social care over the next decade, the independent public spending watchdog has found.

In a critical report, the National Audit Office today said that more than £1bn of the budget had already been reallocated to deal with "other social care priorities."

It added that just £729mn may now be spent between 2022 and 2025 on a care system that remains under "significant pressure".

The government's plan, published in December 2021, pledged to boost staff skills and allow the elderly and disabled to remain independent for longer. But the NAO found the Department of Health and Social Care had not yet set up "an overarching programme to co-ordinate reforms, making it difficult to know if it is on track to achieve its objectives".

Campaigners and health leaders have warned the sector is under massive strain and action is urgently needed to tackle the sector's workforce crisis.

A plan to limit the amount an individual in England would have to pay towards personal social care was last year put on hold for at least two more years by the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt.

The policy, which has been on the statute book since 2014, is judged by experts to be key to addressing the risk of an individual facing catastrophic care costs.

The government "still has a long way to go", said Dame Meg Hillier, chair of the Commons public accounts committee, which scrutinises Whitehall spending.

"DHSC needs a long-term plan to deliver its vision. It must understand if it is on track and whether its activities are actually improving lives," she said.

The department said the government "remained committed to reform" and was investing up to £700mn "over this year and next" to improve social care.

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INTERNATIONAL

Industrial support

Berlin agrees €28bn in business subsidies

Help with energy costs for manufacturers by 2028 likely to upset Brussels

SAM JONES — BERLIN
PATRICIA NILSSON — FRANKFURT

The German government has agreed a “massive” new package of tax subsidies for industry worth up to €28bn by 2028 as it seeks to further shield beleaguered manufacturers from high energy costs.

The deal is likely to cause consternation in Brussels, where European officials have become increasingly critical of Berlin's willingness to provide state financial support to business, which the

EU says unfairly distorts the common market in Germany's favour.

The package was agreed by the three parties of chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition yesterday after months of disagreement. It follows a €7bn tax subsidy for business agreed in August and the “protective shield” announced last September for homes and businesses to protect them from spiralling energy costs.

Under the package, electricity tax relief worth up to €12bn a year is guaranteed for 2024 and 2025, the government said, and may be extended to 2028, pending budgetary planning.

“The federal government is massively relieving the burden on manufacturing in terms of electricity costs,” Scholz said.

German industry was long reliant on Russia for cheap gas, which it sought to replace with dearer liquefied natural gas after Russia invaded Ukraine last year. As part of its energy transition, Germany has also closed its nuclear power plants, with the last reactors being switched off this year.

“We are radically reducing electricity taxes, stabilising network fees and continuing electricity price compensation so that companies can cope better with electricity prices,” Scholz added.

Berlin said its package involved tax code changes for manufacturing, electricity taxes will be reduced to the minimum level permitted in EU law, direct state subsidies for the 350 companies

most exposed to global competition will be extended for five years, and the 90 companies with the highest electricity bills will be given further top-ups.

Government officials said the total relief package is anticipated to be worth €28bn by 2028.

It is a level of state support equivalent to a plan proposed in May by Robert Habeck, the Green vice-chancellor, to introduce hard caps of energy prices for electricity-hungry businesses. Habeck, economy and industry minister, said then the government should spend up to €30bn until 2030 to peg prices for manufacturers to stave off an “existential” crisis facing industry.

The plan was opposed by Christian

Lindner, finance minister from the free-market liberal FDP, setting the stage for months of deadlock.

“With this decision, we are relying on a market-based solution with all its advantages,” Lindner said yesterday.

The IGBCE, the union for energy, mining and chemical companies, said the plan was not enough to get energy-intensive businesses “out of emergency care”.

It said the chemical industry, in particular, would shed many jobs without further support. Tanja Gönner, managing director of the BDI lobby, said the plan must be effected quickly and welcomed a solution that did “not require state aid approval from Brussels”.

Environment

Brussels votes against tough regulations on petrol engine emissions

ANDY BOUNDS — BRUSSELS

The European parliament has voted against plans for big cuts in petrol engine emissions in another setback for Brussels' green agenda, but agreed to regulate the amount of microplastics that vehicle tyres and brakes can shed.

Under the EU's new Euro 7 emission standards, MEPs agreed to set fuel emissions limits at the lowest level permissible under current regulations, arguing that further reductions would force car-makers to spend money developing new fossil fuel engines, which are being banned in 2035, instead of on development of electric vehicles.

Alexandr Vondra, who steered the legislation through parliament, told the Financial Times that tighter rules would have a “devastating impact”, making car purchases unaffordable for many European consumers.

“The automotive industry has been clear that if the European Commission proposal goes through they would stop production of small cars immediately,” the Czech MEP said. “The industry needs to invest in electric vehicles, not the combustion engine, which is becoming obsolete.”

Diesel cars will have to cut their nitrogen oxide emissions to the level of petrol-driven models, while trucks and buses will also need to make reductions.

The curbs on microplastics, which are mostly found in brakes and tyres and shear off when vehicles are in transit, will apply to electric vehicles too. The commission said they would reduce such emissions by 27 per cent by 2030.

The Euro 7 rules would also apply to vans, buses and trucks and were backed by 329 votes to 230. Green groups condemned the vote, saying the measures hardly improved on previous rules.

Transport & Environment, a pressure group, said national and regional regulators relied on the Euro standards to decide which cars could access low-emission zones free of charge and pay lower rates of vehicle tax.

Anna Krajinska, vehicle emissions and air quality manager, said: “The Euro 7 passed today is worse than useless. Car companies will use it to greenwash cars that are hardly any cleaner than today. The last pollution standard that [petrol and diesel] engines will have to meet is a dead letter.”

Vehicle tyre particles are estimated to be one of the largest sources of microplastic emissions, contributing about 1mn tonnes of plastic pollution worldwide annually, according to Pew, the charity. Particles end up as pollutants in soil and waterways when they break off from tyres when vehicles are braking.

MEPs also delayed the implementation of Euro 7, with the limits for cars applying three years after all associated regulation was adopted and five for trucks and buses, pushing that to 2030. The European Commission had proposed 2025 and 2027 respectively for the new standards to come into force.

Acea, which represents carmakers, said the new emissions standard came with a “very heavy price tag”.

MEPs will now enter into negotiations with national governments, which also back weaker rules than those proposed by the commission, to agree the final legislation.

Employment. Crisis

Russia's war economy creates labour shortage

Munitions factories and the military are depriving vital industries of scarce workers

ANASTASIA STOGNEI — TBILISI
POLINA IVANOVA — BERLIN

Russia's army and its weapons plants are sucking in a growing number of workers as Moscow braces itself for a long war in Ukraine, leaving civilian sectors with painful labour shortages and destabilising the broader economy.

“The labour market is extremely tight,” the head of a big Russian mining company said. “It is not just the mobilisation, or people fleeing Russia. The main problem is arms production.”

The shortages have exposed weaknesses in the economy that contradict the rosy picture painted by the Kremlin.

President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly cited Russia's rising gross domestic product as proof of its economic health and the failure of either war or western sanctions to inflict serious damage. But economists say the figures are flattered by big increases in defence spending and conceal structural problems that could be destabilising in the longer term.

Russia is not alone among industrialised economies in having a tight labour market, and its ageing and shrinking population only worsens matters.

But the war makes Russia's crisis particularly severe. Last year, 300,000 men were suddenly mobilised to fight after Ukraine had stopped the Russian invasion. Hundreds of thousands more, most of them educated young men, fled abroad to avoid conscription, an exodus that badly hit IT and other sectors reliant on highly skilled labour.

Moscow's decision to move the economy on to a war footing in anticipation of a protracted conflict has aggravated the situation, said economists and Russian businesses. With defence companies working at full pelt, civilian industries are struggling to source workers.

“The state is diverting its financial resources to the defence sector, and the people are following,” said Ruben Enikolopov, research professor with Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) in Barcelona.

Defence sector workers can be exempt from military service, making jobs in such companies attractive for men who want to avoid being drafted.

Russia's jobless rate has fallen to 3 per cent, its lowest level in 30 years, leaving



Production line: military equipment manufacturer Almaz-Antey in St Petersburg is busy, yet even parts of the defence sector are short-staffed
Ilya Pitalev/Spoutnik/AFPF/Getty Images

businesses struggling to find workers for the labour-intensive industries that dominate the economy.

The extent of the war-related rises in output and of the number of such workers is difficult to estimate from data, but “we have seen a 30-40 per cent surge in [the purchasing managers' index] in military-related industries since January 2023”, said Pavel Luzin, at the Center for European Policy Analysis.

The Kremlin said last month it aimed to spend Rb10.8tn (\$118bn), or about 6 per cent of GDP, on defence next year, three times the sum allocated in 2021, the last year before the invasion, and 70 per cent more than initially planned for this year. Analysts say the real numbers are probably higher if estimates of classified expenditure are included.

One illustration of the shortage is in the length of the working week, at its longest in a decade, said analysts at the FinExpertiza consultancy. Many plants are operating in three shifts, as in Soviet times. “The labour market and the economy has been squeezed to its maximum capacity,” said Enikolopov.

In the Nizhny Novgorod region, for example, authorities report an unpre-

cedented labour shortage, the local Kommersant newspaper reported. The number of registered unemployed fell 27 per cent in September and there were 17,000 manufacturing vacancies there, of which 7,500 were in defence, and demand was growing, with 1,600 positions added in the past year.

Putin admitted this summer to manufacturing bosses. “The labour shortage is beginning to have some effect on small and medium-sized enterprises; not in the best way,” he said.

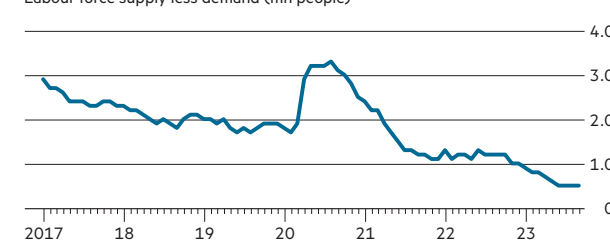
In September, economy minister Maxim Reshetnikov described the shortfall as “the biggest internal risk for the economy”. Oleg Deripaska, the metals and mining tycoon, added: “State capitalism has money, capital and orders. They have money, they will recruit, they will compete.”

Yet the key issue was a lack of investment in automation and technology, he said. “Don't [believe] it's because of war... It's the lack of investment.”

The brain drain triggered by the war has been particularly acute in IT. Many top coders and programmers fled the country, and even special exemptions from military service introduced for IT

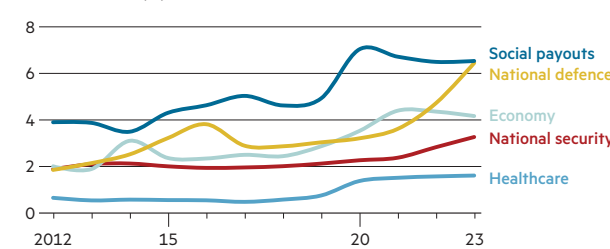
The Russian labour market has been tightening since the pandemic

Labour force supply less demand (mn people)



Russia's budget has ballooned since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine

Russian roubles (tn)



Sources: Rosstat; 2012-22 Russian finance ministry data; 2023-24 Russian budget law seen by the FT as of Oct 4

‘Honestly, you have two hands, two legs, eyes and ears? You're in’

Military aviation plant HR executive

workers have not reversed the flow. Russia is short of 500,000 to 700,000 IT workers, the digital development minister said in August. One manager in the telecoms sector said senior professionals were “a rare commodity”, and in general, he said it was a “shitshow, yes”.

The owner of a Russian employment agency said there were a lot of IT job applicants but most of them were juniors. “It's worst with cyber security specialists: they're in insane demand in all government structures,” the person said. “But you can't get them anywhere.”

Even weapons makers are feeling the pinch, despite luring staff from other sectors. Officials say the industry is short of 400,000 workers. Rostec, the state-owned umbrella company that encompasses the main arms producers and employs nearly 600,000, is looking for recruits. “We need to hire about 25,000 to 30,000,” Rostec's chief Sergei Chemezov said last week on the government's news channel Russia 24.

Another report quoted the human resources director of a military aviation plant in Siberia who needed 3,000 more staff. “Honestly, you have two hands, two legs, eyes and ears? You're in.”

Ukraine

Iron ore carrier struck during Russian missile raid near Odesa

ISOBEL KOSHIW — KYIV
SYLVIA PFEIFER — LONDON

Ukraine has sought to reassure ship-owners of the viability of its trade corridor through the Black Sea after a cargo ship collecting iron ore for steel giant ArcelorMittal was damaged during a Russian missile strike near Odesa.

This is the first time a civilian vessel has been hit in this way since the early days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine last year, though there has been damage from mines laid in the sea.

After Russia's exit in July from a Black Sea grain deal to facilitate exports, Ukraine has been steering vessels along its coast, confident that its onshore defence systems could deter a Russian assault.

The Ukrainian government, which has been focused on securing support for the corridor from shipping companies to maintain its international trade, released few details about the incident.

On Wednesday evening, Ukraine's southern military command said that the superstructure of a Liberian-flagged civilian vessel had been damaged while entering one of Odesa region's three

active ports. Photos of the damage released by Ukraine and marine tracking data suggest the ship was the bulk carrier Kmax Ruler and that the bridge was hit.

One of the port's pilots was killed and another port employee injured. Three of the ship's crew of Philippine nationals were also injured, Kyiv said. Arcelor-Mittal confirmed the ship was due to carry its cargo. Oleksandr Kubrakov, Ukraine's infrastructure minister, said the iron ore was destined for China.

Kubrakov insisted yesterday that the

trade corridor was still active despite Russian attacks. Six ships carrying 231,000 tons of agricultural products had left Odesa region ports since the attack and five more were waiting at port entrances to load, he said.

Kubrakov told X, formerly Twitter, that traffic on the corridor “continues both to and from the ports”. He added that Ukrainian defence forces “are doing everything possible to resist the attacks of the aggressor country on the port infrastructure”.

Intercargo, which represents ship-

owners, condemned what it called an act of aggression that was a “stark reminder of the fragility of maritime safety and security”. It added: “Bulk carriers, manned by innocent seafarers, represent the epitome of non-combatant vessels.”

It was not immediately clear whether the ship was the target of the strike or was hit during an attack on port infrastructure — or by debris from Ukrainian air defences. But Ukraine's MTWTU maritime union said the ship had been hit by a missile targeting vessels' radar systems. That would suggest a deliberate attempt to hit the ship.

Neil Roberts, head of marine insurance at the Lloyd's Market Association, said it still made economic sense at present for insurers, cargo owners, charterers and shipowners to continue shipments. But shipowners had to consider the safety of their crew and if attacks continued, then there might be a rethink.

Roberts said there would probably be at least a temporary increase in war risk insurance premiums for the area. Additional reporting by Robert Wright, Roman Olearchyk and Alexandra White



The bridge of the Kmax Ruler shows signs of damage from a suspected missile strike near the Ukrainian port of Odesa — Reuters

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INTERNATIONAL

Israel's October 7 intelligence failure spawns doctrine of pre-emptive action

Authorities accused of ignoring warnings, discounting dangers and putting too much faith in tech

JOHN PAUL RATHBONE — LONDON
NERI ZILBER — TEL AVIV

For two years, Menachem Gida wrestled with a sense of foreboding. He was part of a team of volunteers who, using a "satellite farm" in southern Israel, monitored Gaza's communications networks and Arab media, passing on nuggets of information to the Israeli military.

It was a semi-formal relationship. But when the amateur snoopers warned repeatedly that Hamas fighters were conducting war games near the border, they were brushed aside. "The Israeli officer told us 'you're not important, we don't need you,'" Gida said.

Gida was not alone. Michael Milstein, a former military intelligence officer, told his then colleagues and wrote articles saying that Israel's approach to Hamas was not working but nobody paid much attention. "The writing was on the wall," said Milstein, a former government adviser on Palestinian affairs in Gaza and the West Bank. "Hamas was preaching war."

Even warnings from Israel's Combat Intelligence Corps, which monitors the border with Gaza, were ignored. Noa Melman, one soldier, told her superiors earlier this year that Hamas militants were repeatedly practising attacks on a mock fence.

"But everyone treated it like it was normal, like it was routine," she said in a subsequent television interview.

At about 6.30am on October 7, more than 1,500 Hamas militants, under the cover of a missile barrage, knocked out Israel's border communications with drones, breached the security barriers with bulldozers and raided Israeli territory on motorbikes and paragliders.

The attack shattered public faith in Israel's military and intelligence services. They had failed to track what an enemy was planning and had ignored warnings that Hamas was preparing a major offensive, often in plain sight.

Israel suffered from "overconfidence, which led to arrogance, which led to complacency", said Ehud Olmert, former prime minister. "Hamas did to us what we normally do: surprise, cleverness, outside-the-box thinking."

The findings of a full inquiry into the intelligence debacle may be years away but the lessons from it are already shaping the campaign to destroy an enemy Israel has concluded it can no longer contain. Since Israel launched its retaliatory campaign, more than 10,500 people have been killed in Gaza, say officials in the Hamas-controlled territory.

"Even on the night of the attack, we smelled that something was happening but the interpretation was that it was just a regular [Hamas] military exercise," a senior Israeli official said. "Our intelligence [had] a fundamental flaw."

That was in part because Israel's security services underestimated Hamas's ability to mount a large operation requiring tight operational security, disciplined planning and detailed knowledge of Israeli terrain.

"It seems the big failure [in Israel] was a failure of imagination, as was the case with 9/11," said Sir Alex Younger, former head of Britain's MI6 foreign intelligence service. "There is always a danger of conflating what you want with what actually is... and Israel felt that Hamas had been de-risked."



Images Calls for journalists who took photos of Hamas raid to be treated as terrorists

Israeli officials have said that a group of freelance Palestinian photographers who transmitted images of the October 7 Hamas raid to international media should be treated as terrorists, claiming they had prior knowledge of the attack.

The journalists in question sent images of the assault, in which at least 1,400 Israelis were killed, according to Israeli officials, to clients such as the Associated Press and CNN.

Former defence minister Benny Gantz, a member of Israel's war cabinet, said yesterday that "journalists found to have known about the massacre, and [who] still chose to stand as idle bystanders while children were slaughtered, are no different than terrorists and should be treated as such".

Danny Danon, Israel's representative to the UN, said Israel had a list of people it would "eliminate" for participating in the raid.

"The 'photojournalists' who took part in recording the assault will be added to that list," he said on X, formerly Twitter.

Israeli officials claimed that the photographers must have had advance knowledge of the raid to take the photos, but provided no evidence to support this allegation.

The raid involved thousands of people, lasted several hours and was widely known in Gaza while it was ongoing, drawing massive crowds of onlookers near the border fence. Mehul Srivastava in Tel Aviv and Daniel Thomas in London

Israel made a similar mistake 50 years ago, before the Yom Kippur war against Egypt and Syria, when it believed its military strength would deter an Arab attack. But there is an extra historical twist to this year's assault, which Israel has likened to the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks in the US.

The official US account of 9/11 ruled that no security official foresaw that terrorists might fly planes into big US buildings — even though many said they had read "Debt of Honour", a 1994 Tom Clancy novel that depicts such a scene.

Before the October 7 attack, Avi Issacharoff, co-creator of *Fauda*, a hit television thriller in Israel, rejected a plotline in which Hamas fighters storm the border fence and attack Israel, deeming it too implausible. Israel's security services apparently thought the same.

"What are the chances that dozens, let alone thousands, would be able to do this without military intelligence or Shin Bet [the internal security service]... knowing about it?" Issacharoff recalled telling his scriptwriters at the time. "Let's move on and find something more realistic."

A second factor was what one western official said was a hubristic faith that advanced technologies such as drones that eavesdrop on Gaza and border fence sensors would outmatch Hamas's technological abilities.

Israel's Unit 8200 signals intelligence gatherers had recently stopped listening in on the handheld radios used by Hamas, judging it a waste of effort, according to *The New York Times*.

"We had become addicted to tech, cyber, big data and the rest of it," Milstein said. "But the cheapest and simplest intelligence, such as open-source,

Security gap: Israeli soldiers at a border fence gate with the Gaza Strip eight days after the Hamas attack. Below, an Israeli surveillance drone

Yuri Cortez/AFP/Getty Images



"What are the chances that dozens, let alone thousands, would be able to do this without military intelligence knowing about it?"

tracking Hamas's walkie-talkie communications, even listening to our female observation soldiers on the border, was completely under-appreciated."

Furthermore, while the latest surveillance kit can yield high-grade tactical intelligence it is less good at revealing strategy or intentions, which is the main focus of human intelligence.

National security had also been weakened and the intelligence services distracted by political turmoil over the domestic policies of prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"Shin Bet understandably was focused on the increase of violence in the West Bank, which had become increasingly challenging," said David Petraeus, a former CIA director and US general who led Iraq's allied forces and Nato and US troops in Afghanistan.

Hamas also played along with a Netanyahu policy that sought to nurture its rule in Gaza, which it has governed since 2007, to diminish the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

Even as Hamas prepared for war, it remained in daily touch with Israel on mundane issues such as export quotas and work permits. At the same time, it filtered misinformation through channels it knew Israeli intelligence was monitoring, while plans for the attack were held by a small group.

Security officials say the state must pre-empt potential threats by eliminating them. "The only solution is: no more relying on intelligence," the senior Israeli official said. "Deterrence is no longer enough... It is a new paradigm." Additional reporting by Henry Foy in Brussels

Opinion The FT View

Humanitarian pauses

Spy chiefs hold hostage talks in Qatar as battle in Gaza rages

MEHUL SRIVASTAVA — TEL AVIV
ANDREW ENGLAND — LONDON
JAMES POLITI — WASHINGTON

The US and Israeli spy chiefs were in Qatar yesterday, working on plans for a potential humanitarian pause that would allow as many as 20 hostages to be released by Hamas and more aid to enter the besieged Gaza Strip.

The three-way negotiations between CIA director Bill Burns, David Barnea, head of Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, and Qatari officials are focusing on a three-day humanitarian pause in Israel's offensive to facilitate the release of 10 to 20 civilian hostages, said an official briefed on the discussions.

Qatar is in turn liaising with Hamas, the Palestinian militant group at war with Israel. The temporary halt in fighting would also be used to push Hamas to compile and hand over a list of all the more than 240 hostages it is holding, according to the official, and to enable more aid to be delivered to the strip.

"Talks have been progressing well towards a deal in the past few days," the official said.

US president Joe Biden said yesterday he was calling for a three-day pause and that he wanted a longer one if it allowed hostages to be released. As talks continued, Palestinian Islamic Jihad — a smaller militia in Gaza that is allied with Iran and fights alongside Hamas — released a three-minute hostage video, showing a 77-year-old woman in a wheelchair and a 13-year-old. The group, which holds an unknown number of hostages, said it was planning to release both of them soon.

The White House said Israel had agreed to four-hour humanitarian pauses each day in the fighting in northern Gaza — a measure Israel had already begun. Israeli military spokesperson Richard Hecht said: "De facto we have been doing pauses. Already in the last few days, we have been doing humanitarian pauses. If there is a shift at the political level to do something differently, we will do it." The current pauses are intended to allow Palestinians to flee south, he said.

However, the Israeli prime minister's office added: "The fighting continues and there will be no ceasefire without the release of our hostages."

Discussions on a potential longer break in hostilities have swung between Hamas's demands for a five-day pause, alongside fuel and aid deliveries in exchange for an unknown number of hostages, and Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggesting hours-long tactical pauses during hostage releases.

But the talks in Qatar are the most advanced so far. Barnea is on his second trip to the Gulf nation, which has played a big role in the Gaza Strip by providing financial support for civilians and public sector workers. Doha also hosts Hamas's political office.

Israeli forces stepped up fighting near the centre of Gaza City and its military strengthened its hold over the north of the Gaza Strip. Tens of thousands of Palestinians fled south on Wednesday. Israeli military spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said Hamas had "lost its grip on the north".

Recovery threat

China economy slips back into deflation as pork prices fall

JOE LEAHY — BEIJING

China's economy edged back into deflation last month, dragged down by falling pork prices as policymakers struggled to reignite domestic demand during a property sector crisis and after the ending of strict pandemic controls.

The consumer price index fell 0.2 per cent year on year in October, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed yesterday, compared with a 0.1 per cent fall forecast by a Reuters poll of analysts. The CPI was unchanged in September.

Producer prices fell for a 13th consecutive month, dropping 2.6 per cent year on year, against a 2.7 per cent decline forecast by economists and following a 2.5 per cent contraction in September.

The NBS said the price of livestock and meat fell 17.9 per cent, driven by a 30.1 per cent decline in pork prices. Non-food prices rose 0.7 per cent.

Chinese market reaction was muted yesterday, with the CSI 300 index of Shanghai- and Shenzhen-listed stocks flat and the renminbi weakening 0.1 per cent against the dollar.

China's economy has shown mixed signs of recovery in recent months, leading economists to debate whether it will hit the government's official gross domestic product growth target this year of 5 per cent, the lowest in decades. The IMF this week upgraded its forecast for China's GDP growth to 5.4 per cent.

Analysts have blamed low consumer confidence for soft inflation figures. Falling pork prices aggravated the trend in October. Live hog futures traded on China's Dalian Commodity Exchange have dropped about 15 per cent this month. Prices of the meat in China follows boom-and-bust cycles, with over-supply leading to large price falls and causing CPI volatility.

Rob Carnell, economist at ING, disputed that China was suffering from deflation: "What China has right now is a low rate of underlying inflation, which reflects the fact that domestic demand is fairly weak. What we are seeing today is mainly the result of a supply excess, rather than a collapse in demand." Additional reporting by William Langley and Hudson Lockett in Hong Kong

Central bank

BoJ governor flags challenge of unwinding ultra-loose policy

MARTIN WOLF — LONDON
KANA INAGAKI — OKINAWA

The Bank of Japan will proceed carefully with raising interest rates to avoid bond market volatility and any adverse impact on financial institutions, its governor said, warning that unwinding the central bank's ultra-loose monetary policy will be a "serious challenge".

Kazuo Ueda told the Financial Times Global Boardroom conference that the central bank was making progress towards hitting its 2 per cent inflation target but warned that it was still "too early" to determine the sequence of its policy normalisation.

"When we normalise short-term interest rates, we will have to be careful about what will happen to financial institutions, what will happen to borrowers of money in general and what will happen to aggregate demand," Ueda said. "It is going to be a serious challenge for us."

Since becoming the first academic to lead the BoJ in April, Ueda has begun to gradually loosen the central bank's tight

grip on the bond market as it comes under pressure from a weakening yen, rising yields and persistent inflation.

The BoJ is the only major central bank to maintain negative interest rates. Its exit from decades of unprecedented easing measures could have major ramifications for international bond markets, as Japanese investors own trillions of dollars of overseas debt.

The BoJ last month decided to allow yields on the 10-year Japanese government bond to rise above 1 per cent, a step towards ending its seven-year policy of capping long-term interest rates.

Japan's core inflation rate, which excludes volatile fresh food prices, retreated to 2.8 per cent in September after hitting a peak of 4.2 per cent in January, but has remained above the BoJ's target for 18 months.

Ueda said underlying inflation, stripping out temporary factors, remained below the BoJ's target despite signs that wage-setting by Japanese companies was starting to change after the initial shock from rising commodities prices. See The FT View

Monetary policy

ECB economist makes case for maintaining big balance sheet

MARTIN ARNOLD — FRANKFURT

The European Central Bank must avoid shrinking its balance sheet too much, its chief economist has said, warning this could impair lending and threaten financial stability.

Major central banks flooded the financial system with liquidity in response to a series of shocks over the past 15 years by buying unprecedented amounts of bonds and lending vast sums to commercial banks on generous terms.

As rate-setters tighten monetary policy to fight high inflation, officials in the eurozone and elsewhere are debating the degree to which balance sheets should return to pre-2008 norms.

"There is a transition going on," Philip Lane told an ECB conference yesterday. "I don't think we should go back to the world of very low bank reserves we had before the global financial crisis."

Maintaining a larger balance sheet would encourage commercial banks to lend more, provide the financial system with a liquidity buffer to cope with future shocks and give the ECB more

"headroom" to avoid interest rates falling back towards zero in future, he said.

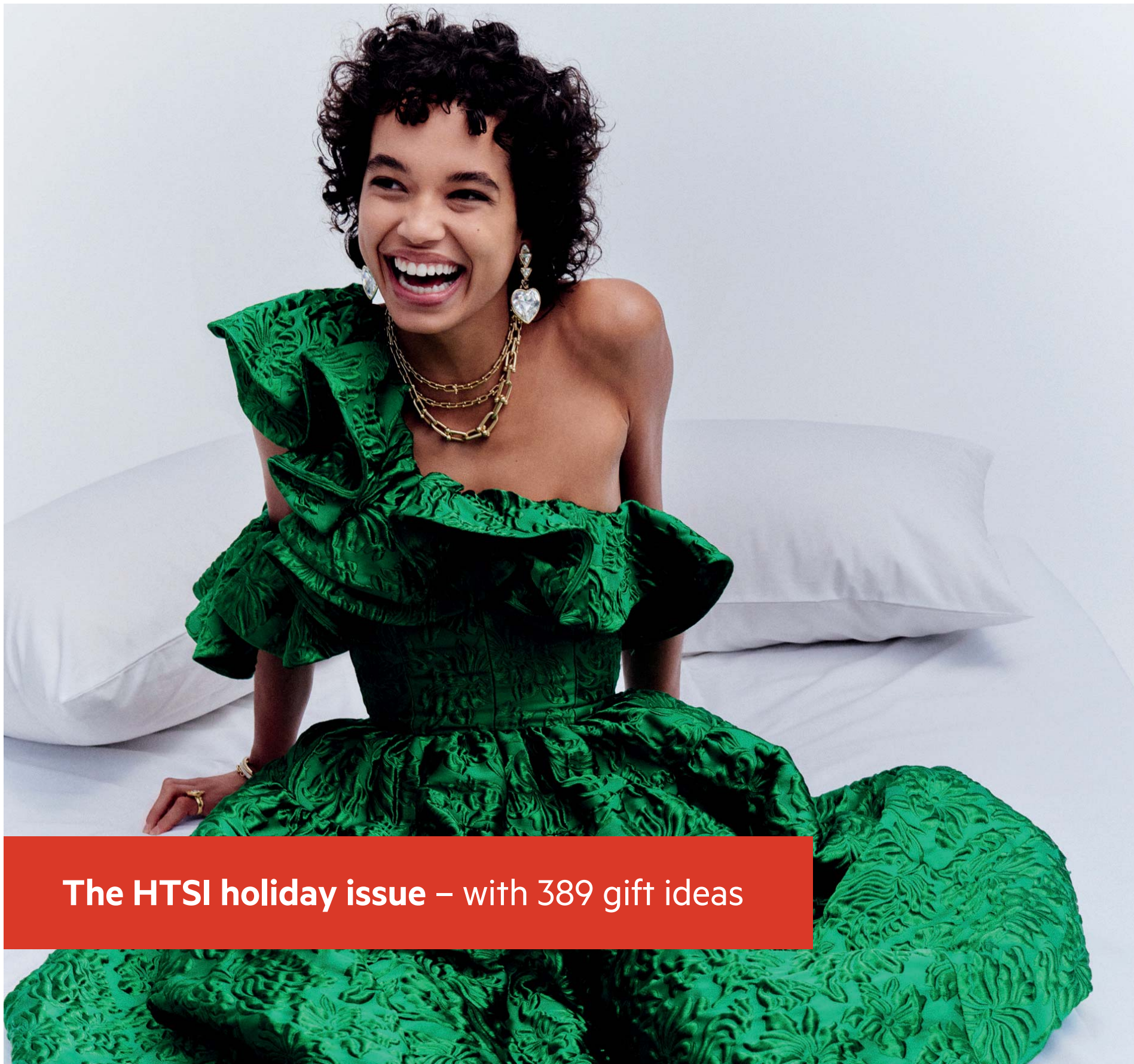
His comments underline how the world's central banks are trying to figure out how big a role to maintain in providing liquidity to the financial system, after pausing the recent monetary policy tightening they launched in response to a surge in inflation.

Despite 10 successive rate rises by the ECB, a big build-up of reserves, in the form of deposits held at the central bank by commercial banks, remains. In the eurozone, the level of reserves is €3.7tn above what the region's lenders are required to hold.

The ECB bought more than 30 per cent of all the eurozone bonds it could, expanding its balance sheet from just over €1tn before the 2008 financial crisis to almost €9tn two years ago. In the past year, it has shrunk close to €7tn, following the expiry of loans and an end to much of its bond-buying activity.

Lane said the central bank could maintain a "structural bond portfolio", in addition to the regular lending operations that existed prior to 2008.

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INTERNATIONAL

Afghanistan's cricket success a bright spot for crisis-hit nation

Underdog surprises sport's elite with its World Cup performance

BENJAMIN PARKIN — NEW DELHI

Afghanistan's cricket team have emerged as the underdog success story of the Cricket World Cup in India, with historic victories that have enthralled fans and catapulted the crisis-hit nation into the sport's elite.

The men's team, a newcomer to high-level cricket, has beaten teams including current world champions England and Afghanistan's arch-rival Pakistan during the six-week tournament that started last month. They play South Africa in Ahmedabad today with a slim chance of qualifying for the semi-finals for the first time.

Afghanistan's cricketing rise over the past decade has been among the most unexpected stories in global sport, as a country racked by war — and with little cricketing history — became a formidable on-field force.

"It's unique in that they've achieved so much against the odds. And deservedly so," said Simon Hughes, a former player turned commentator. "It's fantastic for the game to have a team like this playing so well."

To many fans, the Afghan team represents an open, inclusive vision of the country that was largely erased when the Taliban seized control in 2021 and set about creating one of the world's most repressive regimes.

The Taliban has embraced the sport since its return to power, but the team continues to play under the black, red and green national flag of the toppled government. Stars such as bowler

Rashid Khan have called on the country's rulers to rescind their ban on education for girls and many players are based overseas.

The Afghanistan Cricket Board nonetheless answers to the Taliban, in a tense compromise with global cricketing authorities.

Women are no longer allowed to play cricket in the country, with the national women's team disbanded and its players forced to flee abroad. Australia, which on Tuesday narrowly defeated Afghanistan, earlier this year cancelled an individual series against the men's side in protest against the Taliban's repression of women's rights.

At home, the team's World Cup successes have been welcomed in a country struggling with multiple crises. US and international sanctions imposed since the Taliban took over have devastated the economy, leading to a surge in poverty and forcing millions of people into hunger.

Afghanistan was also last month struck by several powerful earthquakes that aid groups have said killed about 1,000 people. The UN Development Programme said Afghanistan was now among "the poorest two or three countries in the world".

"For about four decades we've been suffering from wars," said Umar, a 33-year-old former cricketer who lives in Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan.

"Without cricket we didn't have any other way of happiness," said Umar, who preferred to be identified by a single name. "It means a lot for us."



Bowled over: Afghanistan's Rashid Khan, left, celebrates with teammate Mohammad Nabi during the Cricket World Cup clash with Australia in Mumbai on Tuesday

Rajinish Kalade/AP

The hardline Islamist Taliban cracked down on sports when it first ruled the country in the 1990s, before being ousted in a US-backed invasion in 2001.

Cricket took hold in Afghanistan thanks to its popularity among refugees in Pakistan, who brought the sport back with them. Afghanistan joined the International Cricket Council in 2001 and achieved full member status in 2017.

Players such as Khan and Mujeeb Ur Rahman have since become international stars, honing their skills by playing in top domestic tournaments such as the Indian Premier League.

"They have none of the framework that has helped cricket grow in other countries," said Sharda Ugra, a sports writer based in India. "They've been Afghanistan's feel-good story over all these years."

'They've been the country's feel-good story over all these years'

But the sport continued to face resistance from violent extremists. A bomb attack on a 2018 cricket tournament in Jalalabad that Umar helped to organise killed eight people.

Despite the giant-killing victories, Afghanistan is sixth out of 10 on the World Cup tournament table and faces a tricky path to the semi-finals.

The team on Tuesday suffered a narrow defeat to Australia which was on the brink of defeat until batsman Glenn Maxwell scored a double century.

To stay in the competition, Afghanistan needs not only to defeat South Africa today by a large margin, but for Pakistan to slip up in its next match. But its supporters are already looking forward to the next tournament. "Even if this time we don't get what we want, next time we'll try for the mega-title," said Umar. "They'll fight to the end."

Judicial feud

Top Turkish courts clash over fate of jailed MP

ADAM SAMSON AND FUNJA GÜLER
ANKARA

Turkey's top appeals court has filed a criminal complaint against members of the constitutional court over the fate of a jailed lawmaker, in a feud that has amplified concerns about the judiciary system and the rule of law.

The constitutional court last month ruled that Can Atalay, elected in May as an opposition MP, should be freed as holding him infringed his rights to "engage in political activities". But the separate court of cassation on Wednesday told the lower courts not to heed the ruling and called on prosecutors to open a criminal probe into the decision.

The row pits Turkey's top appeals court for civil, criminal and administrative cases against the constitutional court, which has final say on whether human rights have been violated by authorities. There is growing angst both inside and outside the country about Turkey's judicial system as President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has tightened his grip on key institutions.

Özgür Özel, leader of Turkey's biggest opposition party, called the court of cassation's move a judicial "coup attempt", saying "we will resist in the streets, we will resist in the squares, we will not surrender to this lawlessness".

Turkey's Union of Bar Associations said the move by the court of cassation was an "attempt to change the constitutional order", adding that it marked a "turning point for a state of law".

Mehmet Uçum, a senior Erdoğan adviser, backed the court of cassation, saying "the decisions made by the constitutional court on this issue are a complete example of judicial activism".

Atalay was indicted in trials related to protests a decade ago that sparked a backlash from Erdoğan. Last year, he was handed an 18-year jail sentence for attempting to overthrow the government. He has protested his innocence.

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Special source Homemaker guru Stewart lauds India's manufacturing and supply prowess in contrast to 'difficult' China → PAGE 13

Companies & Markets

Nvidia makes new AI chips for China to avoid US rules

- ▶ Functionality lower but competitive
- ▶ Launch amid latest salvo in tech war

QIANER LIU AND ELEANOR OLCOTT
HONG KONG
TIM BRADSHAW — LONDON

Nvidia has developed three new chips tailored for China that aim to meet the region's growing demand for artificial intelligence technology while complying with US export controls, according to leaked documents and four people familiar with the situation.

The latest effort marks the second time in little more than a year that Silicon Valley-based Nvidia has been forced by new US regulations to reconfigure its products for Chinese customers, as it strives to maintain its foothold in one of its most important markets.

'Nvidia is perfectly straddling the line with these chips to get them through the regulations'

Nvidia is preparing to launch the new chips just weeks after the US restricted sales to China of high-performance chips that can be used to create AI systems, in the Biden administration's latest salvo in a tit-for-tat tech war between the two superpowers.

The three new Nvidia chips are named the H20, L20 and L2, according to a document distributed by the company to prospective customers that was obtained by the Financial Times.

The overall performance of these chips has been moderated compared with those that Nvidia had previously sold in China. Nonetheless, the new graphics processing units were expected to remain competitive in the Chinese market, said the people familiar with the situation.

"Nvidia is perfectly straddling the line on peak performance and performance density with these new chips to get them through the new US regulations," wrote

analysts at SemiAnalysis, a chip consultancy, in a note to clients yesterday.

Nvidia did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Nvidia was co-founded by Jensen Huang, who is also its chief executive. The company's market value soared to more than \$1tn this year driven by investor enthusiasm about its dominant role in the processors needed to develop AI systems. Its A100 and H100 chips have become the most sought-after components for AI companies that want to create large language models, the technology that underpins chatbots such as OpenAI's ChatGPT.

As the US sought to constrain China's AI development, the Biden administration blocked sales of the A100 and H100 GPUs in October 2022. In response, Nvidia developed two alternative models for China, the A800 and H800, which fell below the performance threshold set by US sanctions. But the US last month tightened its restrictions so that they also caught the A800 and H800.

The latest export restrictions took effect immediately, leaving Chinese tech groups dependent on outdated and stockpiled chips to pursue their AI ambitions. The rules were seen as forcing Chinese groups to turn to six-year-old technology to develop AI systems.

But Nvidia, which has held a dominant share of China's AI chip market, is moving quickly too. The manufacturing process of its latest chips for China was less complex than the development of the A800 and H800, said a person familiar with the situation. Nvidia has already sent samples of the chips for customers to test, suggesting it expects mass production to begin soon, according to two people close to the company.

In the interim, Chinese companies have redoubled their efforts to source AI chips from domestic suppliers. Prominent Chinese Nvidia competitors include Huawei, Cambricon and Biren.

Closing scene Hollywood actors tentatively agree to end Tinseltown's longest walkout



Strikers celebrate after SAG-AFTRA's TV/Theatrical Committee approved the tentative deal — Mario Anzuino/Reuters

CHRISTOPHER GRIMES — LOS ANGELES

The longest actors' strike in Hollywood history was nearing an end yesterday after a tentative agreement between SAG-AFTRA and a coalition representing studios and streaming services.

The deal, which has to be ratified by members, would end an acrimonious 118-day strike over issues including the use of artificial intelligence-generated "digital doubles" and demands by performers for higher royalties from streaming services.

The 160,000-member actors' union announced the agreement following days of intense negotiations. Studio executives presented a proposal last Friday that they described as their "last, best and final" offer.

"This is the progress we wanted," said one studio executive.

In a statement, a group representing the studios and streaming services

said the agreement would give actors "the biggest contract-on-contract gains in the history of the union, including the largest increase in minimum wages in the last 40 years".

The group, the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, said that the deal included new royalties for streaming programmes and "consent and compensation protections" covering the use of AI.

Actors took to the picket lines on July 14, joining members of the Writers Guild of America, who had been on strike since May.

It marked the first time that the two Hollywood unions had gone on strike at the same time since 1960, with the hit to the California economy estimated to have topped \$5bn.

The strikes have had a range of impacts on the studios. Warner Bros Discovery warned on Wednesday that the action would hurt the company's ability to achieve its debt-reduction

targets. But Disney said the strikes had lowered its TV production costs.

After the WGA reached a deal with the studios on September 25, many assumed that the actors would soon follow suit.

But the leadership of SAG-AFTRA had taken a tough stance from the start.

Frank Drescher, the actress who serves as the union's president, linked SAG-AFTRA's cause with the wider wave of labour activism in the US.

As the union went on strike in July, she said "we had no choice" but to fight back against the studios. "Shame on them," she said.

An end to the strike will allow work to resume on TV shows and films, helping not just actors, directors and crew but also the large ecosystem of caterers, prop houses, seamstresses and others whose livelihoods depend on the business.

Disney plans \$2bn cut page 10

AstraZeneca signs obesity pill deal and lifts outlook

DONATO PAOLO MANCINI

AstraZeneca is to enter the race for a weight loss pill, working on a next-generation class of drugs that it hopes to deploy in poorer nations as the obesity treatment market booms.

The Anglo-Swedish drugmaker yesterday announced a licensing agreement with China's Eccogene for an oral medicine belonging to the same class as Novo Nordisk's blockbuster Wegovy drug, which treats conditions including diabetes and obesity that affect more than 1bn people globally.

Chief executive Pascal Soriot said there was an "enormous need" for obesity treatments around the world.

He said that, although AstraZeneca was "years behind" competitors, it was working to come up with the "next generation" of treatments to be given as a pill, unlike current alternatives that have to be injected and are subject to significant supply constraints.

Soriot declined to say when the drug, which is in early clinical trials and called ECC5004, might be available and how much it would cost. But he said the cost of producing the drug was expected to be "much lower" than other medicines, enabling it to reach a "much broader pool of population".

Soriot said: "It will take a few years," adding that the drugmaker's strategy was two-fold — treating obesity on one hand and deploying its other drugs in combination to treat related comorbidities, such as high blood pressure.

AstraZeneca's agreement with Eccogene is worth up to \$2.01bn in total with Eccogene receiving \$185mn upfront to give exclusive global rights, excluding China, to the development and marketing of the drug. A further \$1.83bn will be payable depending on milestones.

Demand for the injectable Wegovy has pushed up shares in Novo Nordisk by almost 50 per cent in the year to date.

Regulators on both sides of the Atlantic this week approved Eli Lilly's injectable diabetes medication for use as a weight loss treatment. But a widely available oral treatment would significantly expand access worldwide.

AstraZeneca raised its yearly guidance after reporting a 6 per cent increase in revenues in the third quarter with demand for its oncology and rare disease drugs offsetting declining sales of Covid-19 vaccines. Shares in AstraZeneca rose 3 per cent yesterday, having lost 9.2 per cent this year.

Cruise's driverless-car accident underlines risks of deep learning

INSIDE BUSINESS

TECHNOLOGY

Richard Waters



uncomfortable truths about autonomous vehicles and, by extension, much of the artificial intelligence industry.

One is that the kind of races that break out around potentially world-changing new technologies create an inevitable tension. On one hand there is the Silicon Valley culture of rapid deployment of new technologies, and on the other the safety cultures and processes that take years to evolve in more mature markets.

In the US, Cruise has been racing against Tesla and Waymo, part of Alphabet, to develop robotaxi services, and parent GM has set an ambitious revenue target of \$1bn by 2025. It has now suspended all its operations and promised a complete overhaul of its safety processes and governance arrangements.

This may be welcome, but it came after California regulators barred the company from operating. Cruise and its rivals need to show they can get ahead of public expectations about safety, rather than simply being reactive.

A second uncomfortable truth is that deep learning, the technology behind today's most advanced AI systems, is not yet advanced enough to anticipate accidents like the one at Cruise. It may never be. The mishap is a reminder that supervised-learning systems are only as good as the data fed into them. And no matter how much data there is, it's simply impossible to train them on everything the world may throw at them.

Cruise is at least able to use this accident in future training: all its vehicles from now on will learn from the experience. It also estimates that this particular accident was likely to happen only

every 10mn-100mn miles of driving. Yet there will always be new situations that have not been encountered before.

To regain public trust, Cruise and its rivals will have to show not just that their cars have fewer accidents than humans, but that they also don't sometimes make the kinds of serious mistakes that a human could easily have avoided. That is still too high a bar for today's technology.

A third issue raised by the accident concerns regulation. While there has been much discussion about how AI should be regulated, there has been less about who should actually do the regulating — and what say ordinary citizens and their elected representatives at different levels of government should have about a technology that may deeply affect their lives.

In Cruise's case, approval from California's state-level regulators was enough to give its robotaxis free access to San Francisco's streets, despite protests from city transit authorities, the mayor's office and groups representing citizens that the vehicles hadn't been fully tested.

Allowing greater city-level oversight would create a thicket of regulations that would make it hard for driverless-car companies to scale. Yet the fallout from the Cruise accident suggests that the balance struck in California is inadequate.

The situation isn't lost. Cruise's response has been straight out of the crisis-management textbook, from the external investigations it has launched into its technology and handling of the accident to the voluntary recall of its cars. Rather than just a damage limitation exercise, it needs to convince the world that this is a true turning point.

richard.waters@ft.com

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Shareholders are hereby informed that, to implement the decision of the Board of Directors of 8 November 2023, the interim dividend for the financial year 2023 resolved by the same Board — amounting to 0.128 euros per share — will be payable as of 24 January 2024, upon the release on 22 January 2024 of coupon no. 40 (record date 23 January 2024). Snam treasury shares held by the company on the record date will be excluded from the distribution of the interim dividend. The dividend is subject to taxation in Italy based on the tax regime in force, which varies depending on the receivers and which is that generally applicable for dividends distributed by Italian listed companies. Shareholders may cash the said dividend with the respective intermediaries. The financial statements and the report on the basis of which the Board of Directors of Snam S.p.A. resolved to distribute the indicated interim dividend and the relative opinion of the independent auditing firm are filed at the company offices.

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The bidders may obtain the RFP documents on all working days between 1030 hours (IST) to 1600 hours (IST) from 08.11.2023 to one day prior to bid submission date on payment of non-refundable fee of Rs. 5,00,000/- (Rupees Five Lakh Only) or US\$ 7000 (US Dollars Seven Thousand Only) + 18% GST as per details provided in the RFP document available on the website www.recpcdl.in & [The Request for Proposal \(RFP\) documents can also be downloaded from our website \[www.recpcdl.in\]\(http://www.recpcdl.in\) & \[www.recindia.nic.in\]\(http://www.recindia.nic.in\), however in such cases interested parties can submit Response to RFP only on submission of non-refundable fee of Rs. 5,00,000/- \(Rupees Five Lakh Only\) or US\\$ 7000 \(US Dollars Seven Thousand Only\) + 18% GST as per details provided in the RFP document. The survey report & clarifications to RFP documents shall be issued to those bidders, who have obtained/purchased RFP document by paying requisite fee. The important timelines in this regard are as follows:](http://www.recindia.nic.in.</p>
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Sr. No.	Name of Project	Last Date for seeking clarifications	Last Date for submission of Response to RFP	Details of Opening of Response to RFP
1.	Transmission system for evacuation of power from Rajasthan REZ Ph-IV (Part-2: 5.5 GW) (Jaisalmer/Barmer Complex)-Part H1	28.11.2023	10.01.2024 up to 1200 Hrs (IST)	10.01.2024 up to 1230 Hrs (IST)

All corrigenda, addenda, amendments, time extensions, etc. to the RFP will be hosted on our websites www.recpcdl.in & www.recindia.nic.in. Bidders should regularly visit our websites to keep themselves updated.
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COMPANIES & MARKETS

Financials

SoftBank posts unexpected \$6.2bn loss

Pain for shareholders and founder Son compounded after big bet WeWork fails

DAVID KEOHANE — TOKYO
KANA INAGAKI — OKINAWA

SoftBank Group posted an unexpected ¥931bn (\$6.2bn) net loss in its second quarter, compounding the pain for shareholders and founder Masayoshi Son after one of the group's biggest bets, WeWork, filed for bankruptcy this week.

It was the fourth consecutive quarter in the red for the Japanese conglomerate, as gains from the initial public offer-

ing of chip designer Arm failed to offset the impact of a weak yen and worse than expected writedowns in private market valuations in the three-month period ending in September.

Analysts had expected a net profit of ¥180.8bn, according to S&P Capital IQ. The group had made ¥3tn in net profit in the same quarter last year after selling a stake in Chinese ecommerce group Alibaba.

"It was a disappointing quarter. We didn't expect them to take impairment charges for private investments and at a higher rate than the last quarter," said Kirk Boodry, a SoftBank analyst at Astris Advisory in Tokyo, highlighting \$2.9bn of writedowns in the private

portfolio at the group's flagship Vision Funds. "There was an expectation when they took some pretty steep writedowns in the fourth quarter that they had sort of kitchen-sinked everything."

SoftBank said yesterday that after some accounting adjustments, its tech-heavy Vision funds made an overall investment gain of \$300mn in the second quarter. Vision Fund 1 made a gain of \$2.5bn on the back of selling its stake in Arm to SoftBank for \$4bn, but Vision Fund 2 fell to a \$2.1bn loss, including from the investments in WeWork. Its LatAm Funds also made a \$100mn loss.

Calling some of the main private market losses "idiosyncratic", Navneet Govil, the Vision funds chief financial

officer, said "the performance has really stabilised in the past two quarters".

The Vision funds' public portfolio lost value in the second quarter for the first time in 12 months, according to Boodry, driven by a reversal in fortunes for logistics companies such as warehouse robotics group AutoStore, as well as consumer fintech Better, after it listed through a merger with a special purpose acquisition company in August.

The second-quarter loss comes as Son hunts for deals in AI, fuelled by an expanded war chest following the IPO of Arm. Son told shareholders in June the company was going on the "counteroffensive" after years of asset sales and losses at the Vision funds, including on

start-ups such as WeWork, the once high-flying desk-renting start-up hit hard by the pandemic after being heavily backed by SoftBank.

The conglomerate was forced to wire \$1.5bn to Goldman Sachs and other lenders days before WeWork filed for bankruptcy, taking the total SoftBank has committed to the failed start-up to more than \$16bn since its initial investment in 2017, filings analysed by the Financial Times showed.

Yoshimitsu Goto, SoftBank's finance chief, said during a results call that what happened with WeWork was "regrettable" and the group needed "to accept the reality and learn lessons from it".

See Lex

Aerospace & defence

Airbus blasts Berlin's freeze on Eurofighter deliveries to Saudi Arabia

SYLVIA PFEIFER

The head of Airbus has hit out at the German government's ban on exports of new Eurofighter aircraft to Saudi Arabia, warning that it is damaging the country's export reputation.

Guillaume Faury, chief executive of the pan-European aerospace and defence business, said that Berlin's stance was not only "damaging for the Eurofighter, but also damaging for the reputation of Germany as an export country to its partners".

Berlin has come under pressure from its partners in the Eurofighter consortium, notably the UK, which is keen to secure a new order from Saudi Arabia, to ease its stance on exports to the country.

Although a large proportion of Eurofighter components are manufactured by BAE Systems in the UK, some come from the other partner nations: Germany, Italy and Spain.

Berlin has refused to issue arms export licences to Saudi Arabia because of its involvement in the Yemen war and the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz has pushed back against pressure to unblock delivery of the jets. His coalition partner, the Greens, have firmly opposed the move.

Faury said that while he perceived a "positive trend into easing the situation", this was "not going at the pace we would need, at least the one we would consider is necessary at Airbus".

The company, he told reporters, was "calling for clear and visible decisions on that topic to be able to enable exports to Saudi Arabia for the Eurofighter, which we believe is something that would make sense".

Faury's intervention came after the group posted higher revenues and earnings for the third quarter and reaffirmed its plans to deliver 720 commercial planes by the end of the year despite persistent supply chain snags.

Airbus had delivered 559 aircraft by the end of October, leaving it with 161 planes to complete if it is to hit its target. The company's deliveries usually accelerate in the last two months of the year.

The plane maker is also increasing production of its A350 widebody aircraft to 10 a month in 2026, up from a previous goal of nine a month by the end of 2025, as the recovery in international travel has gathered pace.

Faury said that the company was sticking to its plan to produce 75 of its A320 narrow-body aircraft in 2026 despite challenges with engine maker Pratt & Whitney.

Airbus also reaffirmed plans for a restructuring of its defence and space division, where it reported new charges of €300mn on "certain satellite development programmes".

Faury said the company's defence activities remained critical to the group. The restructuring, he said, was focused on improving competitiveness and enhancing accountability.

The company's adjusted operating earnings came in at €1.01bn in the quarter to the end of September, up 21 per cent, as revenues rose 12 per cent to €14.9bn.

Airbus stuck to its forecast to deliver adjusted earnings before interest and tax of €6bn, and free cash flow – before mergers and acquisitions and customer financing – of about €3bn for the full year to the end of December.

Shipping

Sharp fall in freight rates takes toll on Hapag-Lloyd

PATRICIA NILSSON — FRANKFURT

The collapse in freight rates pushed nine-month profits at Hapag-Lloyd down almost 80 per cent as the German container shipping group cut its full-year guidance on a continuing gloomy outlook.

Container shipping companies, whose performance is seen as a bellwether for trade, have reported tumbling revenues and profits amid falling freight rates as vessel supply outstrips demand.

The Hamburg-based company said average freight rates in the quarter ending September stood at \$1,312 per 20ft equivalent unit, compared with \$3,106 in the same period last year. Costs, on the other hand, had increased 30 per cent since 2019, it said.

"If you look at [freight prices], especially in the Far East and Atlantic, those are not covering the costs of moving boxes from Asia to Europe," said Hapag-Lloyd's chief executive Rolf Habben Jansen, adding that rates were "very unsustainable".

The worsening economic outlook is not the only phenomenon that has dented the shipping industry. Authorities in Panama last week announced that the number of ships allowed to cross the country's canal would be slashed, as climate change had brought about a drought that threatened the nearly 110-year-old canal.

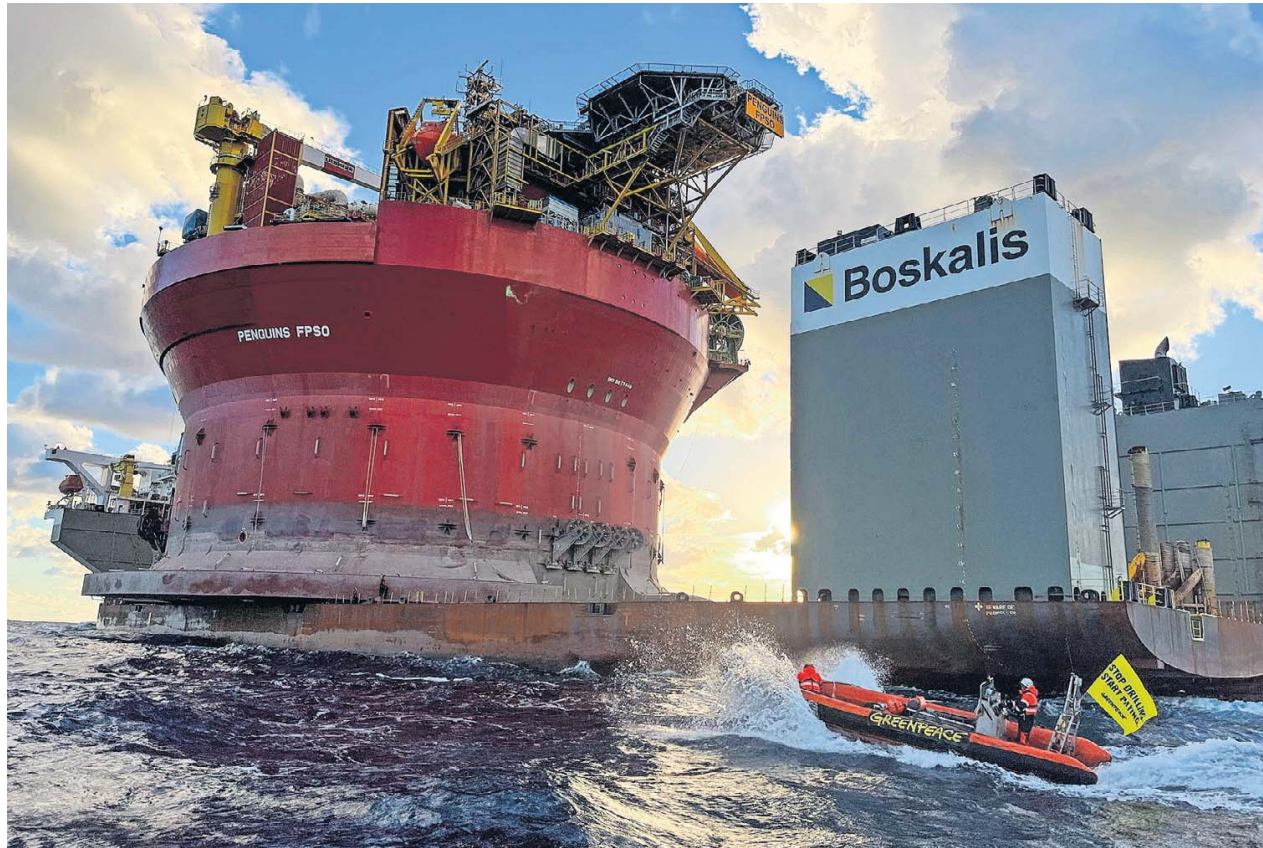
"Drought in Panama is a real problem," Habben Jansen said, warning that capacity was likely to be down by 30 to 40 per cent next year. "We'll have to find solutions," he said, adding that the company would be rerouting some ships via the Suez Canal.

Net profits for the nine months to September totalled €3.2bn, while earnings for the third quarter plunged 95 per cent from the year before to €264mn.

The group cut its full-year profit outlook owing to a continued slide of freight rates in the third quarter, and now expects earnings before interest and tax to total €4.1bn-€5bn compared with €17.5bn in 2022.

"If spot rates do not recover, we could face some challenging quarters in this subdued market environment," Habben Jansen said.

Hapag-Lloyd's stock rose 8.8 per cent yesterday, despite the gloomy outlook, after a decline of nearly a third in the past month.



Shell sues Greenpeace for \$2.1mn

Greenpeace activists prepare to board Shell's vessel in the Atlantic this year — Alice Russell/Greenpeace

Shell is suing Greenpeace for at least \$2.1mn in one of the largest-ever legal claims against the environmental group after its protesters occupied a vessel for 13 days earlier this year.

The lawsuit follows a protest in February when six Greenpeace activists boarded a ship in the Atlantic Ocean transporting a Shell floating production storage and offloading unit (FPSO) to the Penguins oil and gas field, north-east of the Shetland Islands.

The environmental group said the size of the claim and a Shell request that Greenpeace cease targeting its oil and gas assets represented "one of the biggest legal threats" in more than 50 years of Greenpeace campaigns.

Shell is trying "to crush Greenpeace's ability to campaign, and in doing so, seeking to silence legitimate demands for climate justice", said Areeba Hamid, co-executive director of Greenpeace UK.

While Greenpeace has faced damages claims after protests in the past, such a large claim was unusual, the group said.

Shell told the Financial Times that it respected the right to protest but that "it must be done safely and lawfully".

Video footage from January 31, when

protesters boarded the ship, showed Greenpeace activists approaching the giant FPSO vessel in small boats and rough seas before hauling themselves on to the deck using ropes.

Shell said the damages represented the legal costs of securing two previous injunctions against the protesters and the expense, among other things, of mobilising an extra safety vessel.

"Shell and its contractors are entitled to recover the significant costs of responding to Greenpeace's dangerous actions," it said.

Shell, which is Europe's largest oil producer, made a record \$40bn in profits last year, equivalent to about \$110mn a day.

After Shell and its partner Fluor, which built the FPSO, informed Greenpeace of their intention to make a claim, the court granted time for the parties to negotiate out of court.

During that period, according to correspondence provided by Greenpeace, Shell offered to reduce its claim to \$1.4mn if Greenpeace agreed to a broader undertaking not to hold a protest in the future at any Shell asset, at sea or in port, anywhere in the world.

Shell's lawyers added that, were the case to return to court, the claim could

rise by as much as \$6.5mn if Texas-based Fluor decided to pursue Greenpeace for additional losses. Fluor did not respond to a request for comment.

Greenpeace rejected the offer in October, telling Shell it would only agree to no further protests if the company complied with a court ruling in the Netherlands in 2021 requiring Shell to cut all emissions by 45 per cent by 2030. Shell has appealed against that ruling.

Shell has cut its oil output by about 20 per cent since 2019 and is investing in lower-carbon forms of energy to help bring down the company's emissions over time.

However, new chief executive Wael Sawan has faced criticism that he has slowed the pace of Shell's transformation after announcing in June that oil production would be held steady until 2030 and that gas sales would continue to grow.

The Penguins field has been producing oil since 2002. In 2018, Shell approved plans to extend the life of the project. The field will produce 45,000 barrels of oil equivalent a day once the redevelopment is complete.

Tom Wilson

Media

Disney plans to cut further \$2bn from cost base and reignite creative spark

CHRISTOPHER GRIMES — LOS ANGELES

Walt Disney reported stronger-than-expected earnings for its most recent quarter and forecast that it would cut another \$2bn from its costs while generating higher levels of cash in the coming year.

The results come almost a year after Bob Iger returned to Disney as chief executive to replace his handpicked successor, Bob Chapek. They reflected "significant progress" over the past year, Iger said, which had allowed the company "to move beyond the period of fixing and begin building our businesses again".

Iger said he was personally working to improve the content coming out of Disney's studios, which he said had suffered in part because of the pandemic. "Performance from a quality perspective has not been up to the standard we set for ourselves," he said. "We lost our focus."

The studios would now "make less and focus more on quality", Iger said.

The group's earnings of 82 cents a share in the fourth quarter exceeded Wall Street forecasts of 70 cents, thanks in part to a 31 per cent increase in operating income at its theme parks and experiences business. It raised its target for annualised cost cuts from \$5.5bn to \$7.5bn.

Iger said his priorities included achieving profitability in Disney's streaming business, transforming the ESPN network into the "pre-eminent digital sports platform", reigniting the creative spark at its film studios, and stoking growth at its theme parks.

Disney's shares have fallen more than 15 per cent over the past year, prompting a new challenge from activist investor Nelson Peltz of Trian Partners, who is seeking three board seats. The shares were up 7 per cent in early afternoon trading yesterday.

In a call with investors, Disney said it had cut 8,000 jobs, reduced its content spending, and made plans to cut costs further – steps it said would lead to free cash flow of about \$8bn in fiscal 2024.

Investors have been focused on Disney's cash position as it prepares to

acquire Comcast's 33 per cent stake in Hulu. Disney will pay an initial \$8.6bn for the stake in December, but the final sum will depend on an appraisal process which is expected to conclude next year.

Disney said its improved outlook for cash flow would let it reinstate a small

dividend, having suspended payments to shareholders during the pandemic. Kevin Lansberry, interim chief financial officer, also floated the idea of a share buyback programme.

Those plans come as Disney is moving aggressively to cut its losses in streaming. Disney's streaming business lost \$387mn in the quarter, down sharply from the \$1.47bn loss a year ago that shocked the markets and contributed to Chapek's dismissal. The company held to its target of reaching profitability in streaming by the fiscal fourth quarter of 2024.

The Disney+ streaming service added nearly 7mn subscribers, helped by the addition of *Elemental*, *Little Mermaid* and *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3*, which were released in cinemas earlier in the year.

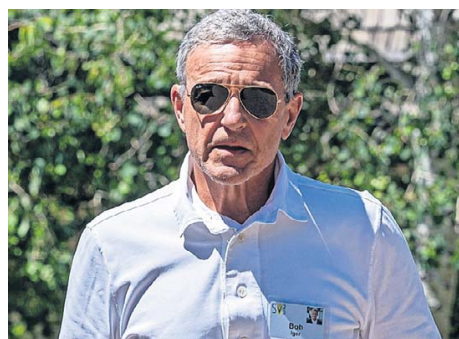
However, subscriptions fell 7 per cent at Disney+ Hotstar, the group's streaming service in India, where Iger is exam-

ining whether to sell stakes in its Disney Star businesses or potentially shed its entire holding.

"We're considering our options there," Iger said on Wednesday. "We'd like to stay in that market but we also are looking to see whether we can strengthen our hand."

Disney's traditional television networks, including ABC, reported a 9 per cent revenue decline in the fourth quarter due to a weak advertising market. But programming and production costs fell in part due to the Hollywood strikes.

Despite the decline in TV, Iger said he was optimistic about the prospects of transforming ESPN into a digital sports business. A full-service ESPN streaming service would ultimately be included in a bundle with Disney+ and Hulu, he said. "If you think about the portfolio of streaming assets that we will have, Hulu, Disney+ and ESPN, that's a very, very strong hand."



Bob Iger: Walt Disney chief's priorities include achieving profitability in streaming — David Paul Morris/Bloomberg

COMPANIES & MARKETS

Dimon joins parade of bankers ditching stock

JPMorgan boss will outstrip sector peers at Goldman and Morgan Stanley when he offloads 1mn shares worth \$140mn

PATRICK TEMPLE-WEST, JOSHUA FRANKLIN AND STEPHEN GANDEL — NEW YORK

When JPMorgan Chase chief executive Jamie Dimon starts unloading his \$1.2bn of stock next year, the Wall Street figure, who has never previously sold stock, will join a parade of top bankers who have cashed in some of their holdings.

Dimon's refusal to sell harks back to the era when his mentor, Sandy Weill, dominated Wall Street and instigated a "blood oath" that required his team to hold their shares until they left. JPMorgan itself has trumpeted the fact that Dimon had "not sold a single share of JPMorgan Chase common stock".

Breaking that holding streak with the sale of 1mn shares, worth about \$140mn, will catapult Dimon to the top of the table for stock sales by current US bank executives, a Financial Times analysis of data from VerityData, S&P Capital IQ and regulatory filings shows, even if other top bankers have proved far more willing to sell than the boss of the biggest US bank.

Indeed, two of the other top 10 sellers among the current crop of executives at Wall Street's big six banks are at JPMorgan.

Head of asset and wealth management Mary Erdoes has sold \$63mn, and investment banking chief Daniel Pinto has cashed in \$53mn since Dimon took the top job at the start of 2006. Other substantial sellers at the bank include commercial banking boss Douglas Petno, who has sold \$34mn, and co-head of consumer banking Marianne Lake, who has sold \$29mn. "They all hold at least 50 per cent of the shares they've been granted," JPMorgan said.

During the 17-year period in which Dimon has sold nothing, chief executives of rival banks have cashed out large chunks of stock.

James Gorman, Morgan Stanley's chief executive since 2010, has sold \$78mn of his shares in the bank — including almost \$48mn so far this year — making him the biggest seller among executives at the US's six largest lenders. Ted Pick, who will succeed Gorman in January, has cashed in \$30mn, while his former rivals for the top job Dan Simkowitz and Andy Saperstein have sold \$25mn and \$19mn respectively.

That puts the Morgan Stanley trio in a similar ballpark to Goldman Sachs chief David Solomon, who has sold almost \$22mn since 2006. Goldman's second-ranking executive John Waldron has offloaded \$20mn in that time, while John Rogers, who served as the bank's chief of staff until stepping back in August, has sold \$34mn worth of stock.

In contrast, executives at Citigroup and Bank of America have sold paltry amounts of shares. Bank of America's Brian Moynihan sold \$1.9mn before becoming chief executive but none since; Citi chief executive Jane Fraser has also not sold since taking the top job.

Dimon is also rare in how much stock he holds compared with rival bank executives. "[He] is in a league of his own given the sheer magnitude of stock that he owns," said Mike Mayo, analyst at Wells Fargo.

The JPMorgan boss had also bought about half of his shares in the bank personally in the open market, a spokesperson said. Gorman similarly bought



Reduced holdings: Goldman chief David Solomon, left, JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon and Morgan Stanley boss James Gorman

FT montage/Bloomberg

100,000 shares in Morgan Stanley in 2011; he sold the same amount of stock five years later.

Dimon will still own more stock than any other current executive after the planned sales, with a holding that earns him tens of millions of dollars each year from dividends.

The only other banker who comes close to holding such a large stake in

their bank is David Viniar, Goldman's former chief financial officer who still sits on the lender's board. Dimon holds 0.3 per cent of JPMorgan's outstanding shares; Viniar, who became a partner at Goldman seven years before its initial public offering in 1999, holds 0.28 per cent after \$75mn in share sales since 2006.

Gorman only holds 1mn of stock in

'If you get paid \$25mn, 50% goes to taxes and 80% is paid in stock. Everyone can live on that, but you're [not building] liquid net worth'

Morgan Stanley, and Solomon has 140,000 shares in Goldman Sachs.

The FT's analysis of executives' current holdings does not include restricted stock awards or share options, which generally account for a substantial slice of annual pay. The current chief executives of the big six US banks have been paid more than \$400mn in restricted stock over the past three years, figures from proxy advisory firm ISS show.

As the stock element of executives' pay has increased relative to the cash portion, so has the incentive to liquidate some of those holdings. "If you get paid \$25mn, 50 per cent goes to taxes and 80 per cent is paid in stock," said one long-time Wall Street executive. "Everyone

How much Wall Street chiefs have sold

Jamie Dimon JPMorgan
Stock sold since 2006
None. Planning to sell shares worth \$143mn in 2024
Current holdings \$1.2bn

James Gorman Morgan Stanley
Stock sold since 2006 \$77.9mn
Current holdings \$77mn

David Solomon Goldman Sachs
Stock sold since 2006 \$219mn
Current holdings \$45.7mn



Jane Fraser Citigroup (pictured)
Stock sold since 2006 \$4.6mn
Current holdings \$6.8mn

Brian Moynihan Bank of America
Stock sold since 2006 \$1.9mn
Current holdings \$67.4mn

can live on that, but you're still not accumulating liquid net worth."

While chief executives' stock sales draw attention, many of the largest sellers have been lesser-known lieutenants who might not face pressure to hold shares. Matthew Koder, Bank of America's head of corporate and investment banking, sold \$11.3mn in February 2023 alone. Goldman's chief risk officer Brian Lee has sold \$5.9mn over the past 12 months.

The FT's analysis also only captures sales by board directors or executives who are still employed by the bank.

Lucian Bebchuk, a professor at Harvard, has argued for requirements that bank executives hold shares for several years after they are awarded by a bank.

In Dimon's case, he has been working at JPMorgan for so long that he should be free to sell shares he accumulated a long time ago, Bebchuk said. "But with other bank executives, it is important to impose tighter restrictions on unloading of shares that we have at present."

Additional reporting by Eva Xiao

Wall Street's top 10 executive stock sellers

Value of shares sold 2006-23

Rank	Name	Bank	Value of shares sold	Sales over time
1	James Gorman	Morgan Stanley	\$77.9mn	
2	Mary Erdoes	JPMorgan	\$63.4mn	
3	Daniel Pinto	JPMorgan	\$53.0mn	
4	John Rogers	Goldman Sachs	\$34.0mn	
5	Douglas Petno	JPMorgan	\$33.7mn	
6	Ted Pick	Morgan Stanley	\$30.0mn	
7	Marianne Lake	JPMorgan	\$29.4mn	
8	Eric Grossman	Morgan Stanley	\$26.6mn	
9	Dan Simkowitz	Morgan Stanley	\$24.9mn	
10	Ashley Bacon	JPMorgan	\$24.1mn	

The line charts showing sales over time are scaled according to each individual's selling history, not uniformly across all rows

Source: Verity

Banks

Overdue US commercial property loans hit 10-year high

STEPHEN GANDEL AND JOSHUA FRANKLIN — NEW YORK

Delinquent commercial real estate loans at US banks have hit their highest level in a decade, as higher interest rates, an uncertain economy and the rise of remote working pile pressure on building owners.

The volume of past-due loans in which so-called non-owner occupiers have missed more than one payment jumped 30 per cent, or \$4bn, to \$17.7bn in the three months to the end of September, according to industry tracker BankReg-Data. The figure had risen by \$10bn in a year.

Bank lending remains in historically good shape and even after the recent jump, just 1.5 per cent of commercial property loans were past due. Nonetheless, industry watchers said the number of properties under pressure was likely to continue to rise, especially in the office sector.

Bill Moreland, who runs BankReg-Data, told clients that commercial real estate lending was "getting ugly fast".

"It's not a hiccup — it's not Covid and then recover," said Leo Huang, the head of commercial real estate debt at Ellington Management Group, an asset manager. "Property prices are going to come down and loan delinquencies are going to keep going up."

The third-quarter data did not capture the impact of this week's bankruptcy filing by desk rental company WeWork, one of the largest office tenants in cities from New York to San Francisco. The Chapter 11 filing will allow it, at least in the US, to rationalise its portfolio by terminating scores of leases with little financial penalty, putting pressure on building owners.

Wells Fargo recently cited WeWork's troubles among its reasons for adding a \$20.5mn mortgage on 599 Broadway, a mid-sized office building in lower Manhattan, to its watchlist of loans at risk of missed payments. The loan was made by Bank of America, but has been sold to investors and is serviced by Wells.



The number of properties under pressure looks likely to rise — Jason Henry/Bloomberg

With more than \$70bn in commercial real estate loans outstanding, Wells is the nation's largest lender in the category, and the most exposed to property losses. Its past-due property loans rose more than 50 per cent to \$3.4bn in the third quarter, from \$400mn a year ago.

Despite the rising delinquencies, Wells and other banks have been slow to put borrowers in default or otherwise declare losses on their growing pile of delinquent loans. Wells wrote off just \$91mn in CRE loans in the third quarter.

On a call with analysts last month, Wells expressed optimism that many such borrowers would restart payments or otherwise avoid losses, though the bank's executives reiterated there

would be some impact. "We haven't really seen any losses of significance yet, but we will," said Mike Santomassimo, Wells' chief financial officer.

Kevin Fagan, the head of commercial real estate economic analysis at Moody's, said he expected delinquency rates to climb for at least the next 12 months. There was "pain to come, that's for sure," he said, but it would take time for delinquencies to turn into losses.

Among regional banks, Pittsburgh-based PNC had one of the biggest spikes in delinquent commercial real estate loans, more than doubling in the quarter to \$723mn. "The pressures we anticipated within the commercial real estate office sector have begun to materialise," Rob Reilly, PNC's chief financial officer, told analysts last month. He added, however, that the lender had ample reserves to cover potential losses.

Other banks are stepping up their efforts to restructure property loans in order to avoid losses. At BofA, the volume of modified property loans, for which the bank had either forgiven interest or extended due dates, rose nearly \$750mn to \$1.2bn in the quarter.

"Bankers are going to extend the loans if they think the asset can be saved," said Christopher Whalen, head of Whalen Global Advisors. "If the bank has to take back the building, the value can get cut in half."

CARRARO FINANCE S.A.
€180,000,000 Fixed Rate Senior Unsecured Notes due 2025
ISIN: XS1747134564

NOTICE TO NOTEHOLDERS

THIS NOTICE IS GIVEN to the holders of the €180,000,000 Fixed Rate Senior Unsecured Notes due 2025 (ISIN: XS1747134564) (the "Notes") issued by Carraro Finance S.A. (the "Issuer") on 7 February 2018.

The Notes are governed by the terms and conditions (the "Conditions") set forth in the prospectus approved by the Commission de Surveillance du Secteur Financier (the "CSF") on 22 January 2018, Kroll Trustee Services Limited (formerly Lucid Trustee Services Limited) acts as trustee in connection with the Notes (the "Trustee").

Capitalised terms not otherwise defined in this Notice have the meanings given to them in the Conditions. BY THIS NOTICE, CARRARO FINANCE S.A., as Issuer of the Notes, communicates to the holders of the Notes that it intends to exercise the option for the early redemption in whole of the Notes pursuant to Condition 7(c) (Redemption at the option of the Issuer).

The Notes will be redeemed in whole on 11 December 2023 (the "Redemption Date") at the redemption price of 100.375 per cent. of their principal amount outstanding, together with accrued and unpaid interest outstanding to the Redemption Date.

The Principal Paying Agent for the Notes is The Bank of New York Mellon, London Branch and the address of the Principal Paying Agent is 160 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4LA, United Kingdom.

THIS NOTICE IS GIVEN BY THE ISSUER TO THE HOLDERS OF THE NOTES AND THE TRUSTEE pursuant to Condition 7 (c) (Redemption at the option of the Issuer) on 9 November 2023.

Enquiries in connection with this notice should be directed to the Issuer as set out below:

Carraro Finance S.A.
11, rue Beaumont
L-1219 Luxembourg, Grand Duché de Luxembourg
Luxembourg, 10th November 2023
Carraro Finance S.A.

Legal Notices

NOTICE OF ADJOURNED NOTEHOLDERS' MEETINGS

THIS NOTICE IS IMPORTANT AND REQUIRES THE IMMEDIATE ATTENTION OF NOTEHOLDERS. IF NOTEHOLDERS ARE IN ANY DOUBT AS TO THE ACTION THEY SHOULD TAKE, THEY SHOULD IMMEDIATELY CONSULT THEIR OWN FINANCIAL, LEGAL, ACCOUNTING OR TAX ADVISERS.

10 November 2023

PERNOD RICARD
A société anonyme established with limited liability in the Republic of France having a share capital of €396,229,186.15 with its registered office 5, cours Paul Ricard, 75008 Paris, France 582 041 943 RCS Paris (the "Company")

NOTICE OF ADJOURNED MEETINGS OF THE HOLDERS OF THE FOLLOWING NOTES:

€600,000,000 3.250 per cent. Sustainability-Linked Notes due 2 November 2028 (ISIN FR001400DOV0 – Common Code 255135040) (the "2028 Notes") and
€500,000,000 3.750 per cent. Sustainability-Linked Notes due 2 November 2032 (ISIN FR001400DP44 – Common Code 255135074) (the "2032 Notes"), and, together with the 2028 Notes, the "Notes", and each of the 2028 Notes and the 2032 Notes being a "Series of Notes" issued by the Company

The Noteholders are hereby informed that a general meeting of the holders of each Series of Notes convened by the *Président-Directeur général* of the Company by means of a notice of meetings published on 20 October 2023 on the website of the Company to take place on 6 November 2023 at 11.00 a.m. and 11.40 a.m. (Paris time) was unable to validly deliberate on the following agenda as the quorum was not met.

CONSEQUENTLY, NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that, pursuant to Condition 13(f) (General Meeting) of the terms and conditions of the French Law Notes, the *Président-Directeur général* of the Company has decided to convene the holders of each Series of Notes to an adjourned general meeting (each a "General Meeting"), and together the "General Meetings" at the premises of Clifford Chance Europe LLP, at 1, rue d'Astorg, 75008 Paris, France on 20 November 2023 at 11.00 a.m. and 11.40 a.m. (Paris time) on second convocation. As set out in the Condition 13(f) (General Meeting) of the Terms and Conditions, no quorum is required to enable the adjourned General Meeting to validly deliberate on second convocation.

The *Président-Directeur général* of the Company has convened the General Meetings in order to deliberate on the same agenda as on first convocation and as reproduced below and, if thought fit, approve the related resolutions, the text of which, together with copies of other relevant documents, are available, inter alia, on the website of the Company (<http://www.pernod-ricard.com/>).

AGENDA

* approval of the revision of the level of the Water Consumption KPI for the 30 June 2018 Baseline Date to reflect an updated calculation in one of the production sites, and the resulting update of the Company's Sustainability-Linked Financing Framework; and

* filing at the Company's registered office of the attendance sheets, the relevant powers of represented Noteholders set out in the Participation Form and the minutes of the General Meetings.

Noteholders should contact Société Générale, acting as Centralising Agent, for more information:

Société Générale Securities Services – General Meeting
32, rue du Champ de Tir
CS 30812 44308 Nantes Cedex, France
Email: agobligataire.fr@socgen.com

UK COMPANIES

Travel & leisure

DraftKings eyed bid for William Hill owner

US sports betting group held summer talks with top shareholders in 888

OLIVER BARNES
LEISURE INDUSTRIES CORRESPONDENT

US betting group DraftKings discussed a bid for William Hill owner 888 with some of the struggling UK betting operator's top shareholders, according to two people briefed on the talks.

The early-stage discussions, which took place in June and July, are a sign of the increasing dominance of US operators in the industry, and how their financial firepower may yet drive a further wave of consolidation in the sector.

DraftKings chief executive Jason Rob-

ins held talks with a group of 888 shareholders – FS Gaming – about making an all-stock offer for the William Hill owner, the people said. Advisers were present on both sides.

FS Gaming, which includes industry veterans such as former GVC chief executive Kenny Alexander, was at the time a top-five 888 shareholder. Robins met with FS Gaming's Lee Feldman, a former GVC chair, to discuss the takeover plans, including the possibility of appointing Alexander as 888 chief executive, the people said.

Despite the plans falling through, DraftKings' interest in expanding internationally through a possible acquisition of 888 underlines the expansion ambitions of US betting operators at the top of the \$9bn-a-year industry after a

Supreme Court verdict opened up the sector five years ago.

888 has been widely viewed by analysts as a takeover target because of its languishing share price resulting from management upheaval, compliance problems and a recent profit warning.

DraftKings did not approach 888 directly. The talks took place while 888's chair, Lord Jonathan Mendelsohn, who had been hunting for a new chief executive since January, was separately hold-

'888 is one we're aware of – we've certainly watched it over the years. There's been quite a twisty-turny story'

ing discussions with FS Gaming about the top management role.

DraftKings walked away after Mendelsohn revealed in mid-July that the UK gambling regulator had placed 888's licence under review over concerns about a longstanding tax bribery probe into GVC's business dealings in Turkey during Alexander's time as chief executive. Mendelsohn has since appointed former Fortuna chief executive Per Widerström as 888 chief executive.

Any bid would have valued the London-listed company at a significant premium to its market capitalisation, which reached £550mn while discussions were taking place, the people said. But the biggest hurdle to any deal would have been 888's £1.7bn debt pile, left over from the acquisition of William

Hill's non-US business from Caesars Entertainment last year, they added.

In an interview following third-quarter results last week, DraftKings' Robins declined to comment on any discussions about a takeover. He added: "888 is one we're aware of – we've certainly watched it over the years. I know there's been quite a twisty-turny story."

Responding to a Financial Times query about the talks, DraftKings said that the company was "focused on the massive US opportunity in front of us".

"We speak to a variety of companies regarding various matters in the normal course of business, and it is our general policy not to comment on the specifics of any of those discussions," it added.

FS Gaming and 888 declined to comment.

Airlines

Wizz narrows outlook after being forced to ground jets

PHILIP GEORGIADIS – LONDON
SIMEON KERR – DUBAI

Wizz Air has cut its annual profit forecast after being hit by an "unprecedented operational challenge" and geopolitical uncertainty.

The London-listed airline yesterday said it would be forced to ground 45 of its roughly 200 planes because of potential problems with their Pratt & Whitney engines.

József Váradi, chief executive, said the company expected to be compensated by the engine maker for its direct financial losses.

However, it was facing an "unprecedented operational challenge" that could last 18 months as the engines were removed for inspection amid concerns over contaminants in the powdered metal used to make them.

"I don't think the industry has ever gone through this," he said. "This is new territory. But we think we are ready for it. We will be covered for the financial losses, but we have to still protect capacity and remain intact as a competing force."

Wizz has tried to contain the worst impact of the groundings by using its remaining aircraft more intensively and extending leases, while it has continued to take deliveries of new Airbus planes.

But the engine problems will hit growth plans, with schedules in the year beginning March 2024 forecast to be "at similar levels" to the current year.

"While the group is offsetting the headwind as best it can... it is not enough to maintain expansion, and a lower number of operating aircraft will mean numbers have to come down," said analysts at Bernstein.

Wizz said it expected to report a net profit for the current financial year of between €350mn and €400mn, down from guidance in June of €350mn to €450mn.

Other airlines have also faced supply chain problems, including delays in deliveries of new aircraft. Ryanair has said it is concerned its summer season next year could be hit by delays in receiving new aircraft from Boeing.

Váradi said the narrowed guidance was also down to geopolitical uncertainty and war in the Middle East. Wizz has suspended flights to Israel, which account for 5-6 per cent of its flight schedules, and reported a slowdown in sales to neighbouring countries.

Shares in Wizz dropped 9.8 per cent in London yesterday.

The airline became the latest to report strong trading over the summer, with net profit of €400mn for the six months to the end of September, up from a €384mn loss a year earlier. Wizz said it had "positive bookings" in the current quarter.

Separately yesterday, Emirates said profit in the six months to the end of September had risen 134 per cent against a year earlier to a record \$2.6bn on strong demand for air travel, on revenues that were up 19 per cent to \$16.2bn.

By the end of September the airline was operating passenger and cargo services to 144 airports as it restored operations to destinations such as Nice, Beijing and Shanghai.

Emirates carried 26.1mn passengers over the half-year, up 31 per cent on the same period 12 months earlier. Average passenger seat factor reached 81.5 per cent, up from 78.5 per cent in the same period last time.

Support services

Inflexion sells ranking group Chambers in £400mn deal

WILL LOUCH AND SUZI RING

UK private equity firm Inflexion has agreed to sell legal rankings provider Chambers and Partners to US investment group Abry Partners, the latest deal in a sector that is attracting keen investor interest.

The deal values Chambers at more than £400mn, said a person familiar with the deal, netting Inflexion about four-and-a-half times its initial investment.

The acquisition marks private equity's latest bet on a company that provides information to the financial services and legal industries. The industry has seen a number of big-money deals over the past few years, with financial data providers including Reorg, Macrobond and Leveraged Commentary and Data changing hands.

Founded in 1990, Chambers is a legal research company that provides rankings of lawyers and law firms across a range of industries and countries.

Law firms place a lot of weight on the rankings to attract business and make submissions to be included. A lawyer or law firm's Chambers ranking is often referenced, along with quotes from clients interviewed by the directory.

Inflexion bought the company in 2018. Under private equity ownership, Chambers has reshaped its publishing business from print to an online, subscription-based digital company. It has also expanded into China and Brazil, and continued to grow its US presence.

Chambers has also expanded its research and sales function.

Boston-based Abry invests in the communications, media, information and business services industries, among others. The firm owns assets including Best Lawyers, a US-based lawyer-ranking company.

Companies that sell information to financial services firms have attracted significant amounts of investor capital in recent years, attracted by the dependable revenues that come from selling a specialist product to large institutions.



Earnings lift Fortunes start to look up for housebuilders

Top team: Taylor Wimpey roofers at work on a new home
Chris Ratcliffe/Bloomberg

Housebuilder Taylor Wimpey gave the latest sign of improvement in the country's housing sector yesterday with an optimistic update on its profits.

The FTSE 100 group said it expects annual operating profits of close to £470mn, the high end of its guidance, although this would still be down almost 50 per cent from record levels in 2022.

Its update comes in the same week that rival developer Persimmon flagged "a strong pick-up" in home sales in October, while data from Halifax and Nationwide showed month-on-month house price increases for the first time since the spring.

These positive signals come after the Bank of England paused its relentless run of interest rate increases. Stable borrowing costs will be a relief to the housing sector after fast-rising rates hammered house prices and demand from buyers.

Taylor Wimpey chief executive Jennie Daly said the real test for the market will come early next year, after the seasonally quiet winter and holiday

period. "What we're really looking out to now is the spring selling season," she said.

Daly credited the good news on profits to cost discipline and careful management of supply to match demand and make sure the company did not have to "cut prices in order to liquidate".

Incentives for buyers, such as free carpets and upgrades, averaged 5 per cent this year, she said. These perks are commonly used by housebuilders to encourage buyers without cutting prices. Taylor Wimpey shares closed up 2.6 per cent yesterday.

Analysts caution that stabilisation and recovery for housebuilders and the wider housing market will be slow. Andrew Bailey, BoE governor, said on Wednesday that interest rates needed to remain restrictive for an extended period of time.

Taylor Wimpey said it had yet to see an improvement in the pace of home sales compared with last year.

"Conditions remain difficult, it is not going to be a sharp bounce back, but it

increasingly looks like we are past the darkest days for the sector," Peel Hunt analyst Sam Cullen said.

Halifax on Tuesday reported a 1.1 per cent rise in house prices between September and October, ending six months of decline, and echoing a similar report from Nationwide last week. Prices are still down 3.2 per cent compared with last October.

In forecasts on Wednesday, estate agent Savills said the UK housing market looks to be "past 'peak pain'". Lucian Cook, its head of residential research, cautioned that "continued affordability pressures are likely to result in further modest house price falls over the first half of 2024, resulting in a peak-to-trough house-price adjustment in the order of -10 per cent".

Mortgage rates have ticked lower with the average five-year fixed deal now at 5.35 per cent, down from 5.92 per cent this time last year, according to Rightmove. Joshua Oliver

Support services

Hackers hit Allen & Overy with ransomware

SUZI RING

Allen & Overy, the magic circle law firm, has suffered a cyber attack on its systems, making it the latest big legal group to fall victim to a ransomware hack.

A&O confirmed that it had experienced "a cyber security incident impacting a small number of storage servers" after posts on X on Wednesday claimed that hacking group LockBit had attacked the legal group and threatened to publish data from the firm's files on November 28.

The firm did not identify which hacking group might be responsible.

"Investigations to date have confirmed that data in our core systems, including our email and document management system, has not been affected," A&O said yesterday.

"As a matter of priority, we are assessing exactly what data has been impacted, and we are informing affected clients."

The UK's National Cyber Security Centre has warned that law firms

present an attractive target for hackers due to the wealth of information they hold on companies.

Hackers such as LockBit target companies and governments with ransomware that disables access to computer systems. Groups then often demand payments or threaten to release private data and communications.

'Data in our core systems, including our email and document management system, is not affected'

Royal Mail suffered a ransomware attack by LockBit in January, one of the group's highest-profile targets. The criminal gang threatened to publish or block access to Royal Mail's data unless it received a payment from the postal service.

At the time, LockBit claimed it had hacked 40 organisations in a month, from a private school in Malaysia to a dental group in Sydney.

A number of law firms have been targeted by hackers over the years, including an attack on DLA Piper in 2017 by Petya ransomware. A group of law firms including Kirkland & Ellis were reportedly hit by a ransomware group earlier this year.

"Our technical response team, working alongside an independent cyber security adviser, took immediate action to isolate and contain the incident," A&O said. "We appreciate that this is an important matter for our clients, and we take this very seriously. Keeping our clients' data safe, secure, and confidential is an absolute priority."

"The firm continues to operate normally with some disruption arising from steps taken to contain the incident."

A&O is one of London's elite law firms along with Clifford Chance, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, Linklaters, and Slaughter and May. A&O's partners last month voted to merge with US law firm Shearman & Sterling to create a 4,000-lawyer firm by May 2024.

Treasuries disrupted page 13

Media

S4 Capital points to gloomy revenue outlook

DANIEL THOMAS

Shares in Sir Martin Sorrell's S4 Capital fell sharply after the group warned that revenues this year would be lower than last year's, in the latest blow to investors in the digital marketing company.

S4, which was founded by Sorrell in 2018 as a technology-focused agency after he left advertising agency WPP, warned that trading had been worse than expected in the past three months.

Revenues at the advertising agency were almost a fifth lower year on year at £245.9mn, while billings from clients were down 7 per cent at £450.3mn.

The company blamed tough macroeconomic conditions and clients reluctant to commit to sizeable marketing projects, especially in the technology sector.

Shares in S4 initially dropped a quarter yesterday morning after its latest profit warning sent them into freefall. They recovered some of the losses to trade at 59p, a tenth of a peak of 878p

just two years ago, and ended the day at 58p. The company has now lost more than two-thirds of its value since the beginning of the year after multiple profit warnings, with the first half of the year proving equally tough for trading at the group.

As a result, S4 said that like-for-like net revenue for 2023 would be below last year's, with an operational margin

The business, led by Sir Martin Sorrell, says clients are reluctant to commit to sizeable projects



for earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation forecast at 10 to 11 per cent, down from 12 to 15.5 per cent.

Sorrell said: "Trading in the third quarter was difficult, reflecting the global macroeconomic conditions with continued client caution to commit and extended sales cycles, particularly for larger projects and to some extent

clients in the technology sector." S4 said full-year profits would be heavily weighted to the last quarter, reflecting anticipated client activity, along with the impact of cost cutting.

The group said it would end the year near to the top of its guided range on net debt of £180mn-£220mn, reflecting an aggressive mergers and acquisition programme over the past few years.

Sorrell has wanted to create one of the biggest advertising companies, focused on digital marketing and new technologies such as artificial intelligence. As part of these plans, he has bought dozens of small rival groups, but this has left S4 saddled with legacy payments to their founders and difficulties in bringing together different teams spread across the world.

Sorrell said that he remained confident in his strategy and business model, which he argued would position the group "for above average growth in the longer term, with an emphasis on deploying free cash flow to dividends and share buybacks, especially as 2024 will have no further merger payments".

COMPANIES & MARKETS

Financials. Regulation

SEC faces fierce pushback on plan to police AI investment advice



Brokers, funds and advisers say proposals are unnecessary and impossible to implement

JENNIFER HUGHES — NEW YORK

Brokers, hedge funds and investment advisers are pushing back hard against attempts by the main US markets regulator to manage how artificial intelligence is used to give financial advice to investors.

Rules proposed by the Securities and Exchange Commission in July would force banks and fund managers to neutralise or eliminate any conflict of interest involving almost any form of technology when they advise clients.

Comments have continued to flow in to the SEC well past the October 10 deadline, most of which have blasted the plans for their sweeping reach and what one industry group called the regulator's "arbitrary and capricious" rule-making style.

"I haven't seen in a long time — or ever really — such a line of opposition," said Jesse Forster, equity market structure specialist at research group Coalition Greenwich.

The pushback comes as the US is seeking to establish itself as the leader in regulating AI. Last week, Joe Biden signed an executive order bringing together more than 25 government agencies in overseeing the fast-developing technology.

SEC chair Gary Gensler has long worried about the technology's dangers and told the Financial Times last month that without swift intervention, it was "nearly unavoidable" that AI would trigger a financial crisis within a decade.

The SEC's July proposals, focused on predictive data analytics and dubbed "Reg PDA" by the industry, are designed to combat the risk that the scalability of AI-related advice could hurt more investors, more rapidly than was possible with earlier technologies.

However, critics have argued that investor protection is already covered under existing rules such as a requirement that broker-dealers act in customers' best interests and under the fiduciary duties that govern investment advisers.

They also warned that the SEC's definition of "technology" in the new rules was so broad that it could cover the use of a calculator and that the need to remove any conflict, rather than just disclose it, would be almost impossible to meet.

Forster said the pushback also reflected the cumulative effect of a flood of SEC rulemaking. "PDA hasn't happened in a vacuum though. People are reaching breaking point and the industry is essentially saying, 'Are you freaking kidding me?'"

The SEC has put forward more rules under Gensler than at any point since the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, a recent tally showed, with fewer of them stemming from congressional legislation than under other recent SEC chairs.

Other Gensler-era proposals include sweeping overhauls of the Treasury and stock markets and new rules for asset custody and environmental, social and governance investing.

Rules already enacted have included changes to mutual fund pricing and cyber security disclosures.

In its comment to the SEC, industry body Sifma called for Reg PDA to be dropped entirely as it would amount to arbitrary and capricious rulemaking.

The Investment Company Institute, representing asset managers, warned that the proposed rule would raise constitutional issues by unduly restricting advisers' communications with investors.

Groups including Morgan Stanley and JPMorgan's wealth and asset management arms responded with individual

Feedback loop: the Securities and Exchange Commission said it 'benefits from robust engagement from the public' on its proposals

Andrew Harner/Bloomberg

letters, in addition to the missives from industry groups that normally represent them.

Morgan Stanley said it had written "to amplify" the worries set out by Sifma, the ICI and others.

One regulatory expert who frequently responds to SEC proposals said their response uncharacteristically did not include suggestions on how to improve Reg PDA because they felt the whole proposal was unnecessary.

Stephen Berger, policy head for hedge fund Citadel, described the rules as "ill-considered and overexpansive".

He said: "While the commission claims the proposal is intended to be technology-neutral, that is only true in the sense that the proposal is universally hostile to technology."

The SEC said in a statement that it "benefits from robust engagement from the public and will review all comments submitted during the open comment period".

Asked at a Sifma event on Tuesday about the rule and industry concerns, Gensler said the key was protecting investors from the financial equivalent of targeted communications online.

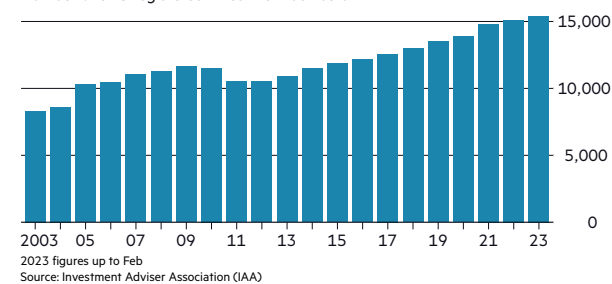
"If the app is putting something in about [people's] revenues and profits, it's going to tilt the recommendation. It's that basic thing we're trying to address," he said, noting how this could skew what an investor sees.

Support for Reg PDA has come largely from consumer groups, who say current investor protections do not go far enough.

They point to the risk that advisers' technology could still steer investors, even if it stops short of being a recommendation of the sort covered by existing protections.

Financial advisers come under SEC scrutiny

Number of SEC-registered investment advisers



'I haven't seen in a long time — or ever really — such a line of opposition'

Personal & household goods

Style guru Stewart praises Indian outsourcing

CHLOE CORNISH — ANJAR, GUJARAT

Homemaking entrepreneur Martha Stewart has praised India's capability as a textile manufacturing hub and contrasted it with the difficulty of producing goods in China.

The remarks come as pandemic-era disruptions and political tensions between Washington and Beijing prompt US businesses to rethink their supply chains.

"[The] supply chain has been difficult through Covid... China became more and more difficult to do business in," the style guru told the Financial Times during a factory tour of her sole Indian supplier, Welspun Living. "And India is an extraordinary country... This is a nice fit."

Since lockdowns in China caused severe supply chain disruption, international companies have attempted to reduce their reliance on the so-called "world's factory".

The China-plus-one shift has given low-cost India a chance to increase its share of global manufacturing in products ranging from bed linen to Apple's iPhones.

While much of Stewart's eponymous homewares range, including kitchen

knives and cooking pots, are still made in China, the lifestyle entrepreneur hinted that this could change.

"We have a few things being done still in China, but gradually you have to revisit each contract," the entrepreneur said. "With a business like mine, it changes."

Stewart also alluded to trade tension between Washington and Beijing as one of the factors encouraging companies to



Martha Stewart, right, touring Welspun Living at Anjar, Gujarat

shift sourcing away from China. "There's a certain amount of unfriendliness and we don't want to get mixed up in that," said Stewart.

She is part of the leadership team at US marketer Marquee Brands, which acquired the Martha Stewart media and merchandising operations in 2019.

"Politics is not part of our business," she said. "We want excellent manufacturing, we want excellent deliveries, we want no hold-ups."

Towels and bed linen carrying her name have been produced exclusively by Welspun since 2019, predating the pandemic and sanctions. "What's been manufactured for us in the last few years is excellent," Stewart said.

Companies such as Welspun are at the heart of New Delhi's "Make in India" exports drive, supplying US retailers such as Macy's and Walmart.

Welspun can produce 1mn towels a day across two automated factories. Most of the goods are destined for the US market.

The company has bounced back from its own supply chain disaster. A 2016 scandal involved sheets mislabelled as Egyptian cotton made by Welspun and sold by retailer Target in the US.

Indian textiles got an extra boost in

2021 when a US ban came into force on products from Xinjiang, China's biggest cotton-producing region. Washington alleges that people from the region's Uyghur minority are victims of forced labour.

"The Xinjiang cotton [ban] was a very challenging time for China and it has definitely put the whole cotton supply chain focus on India," said Dipali Goenka, chief executive and managing director of Welspun Living.

But Indian textile makers still face stiff competition from Vietnam, Bangladesh and Pakistan, she added.

Indian manufacturing also continues to lack scale compared with China. Stewart said she was not expecting to redirect her supply chain entirely to India.

"I don't think they have every single capability of the things that we make," she said.

Stewart, whose supply chain has wound through China, Vietnam, Brazil and Egypt over the years, remarked that she "would like to see some of [the manufacturing] come back to the United States", adding that, when she started selling soft goods in the 1980s, many of the suppliers were in her home country.

Fixed income

Ransomware attack on ICBC disrupts US Treasuries trades

COSTAS MOURSELAS — LONDON
KATE DUGUID — NEW YORK
HANNAH MURPHY — SAN FRANCISCO

A ransomware attack on China's largest bank has disrupted the US Treasury market by forcing clients of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China to reroute trades, market participants said yesterday.

The Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association told members that ICBC had been hit by ransomware software, which paralyses computer systems unless a payment is made, according to several people familiar with the discussions.

The attack prevented ICBC from settling Treasury trades on behalf of other market participants, according to traders and banks. Market participants, including hedge funds, were rerouting trades because of the disruption but said the attacks' effect on Treasury market functioning appeared to be limited.

ICBC was starting to restore services as of yesterday afternoon, according to some of the people briefed on the incident. A person familiar with the situation said: "The firm has told people that

Equities

Shares in Arm decline as first public results underwhelm

MICHAEL ACTON — SAN FRANCISCO

Shares of UK chip designer Arm fell after its revenue forecast for the current quarter left Wall Street underwhelmed, in its first earnings report since going public in September.

Arm on Wednesday forecast revenue of between \$720mn and \$800mn for the quarter, falling short of analysts' expectations. It anticipates between \$2.96bn and \$3.08bn in full-year revenue.

The shares were 6.8 per cent lower in after-market trading following the earnings release, taking them below the \$51 a share initial public offering price.

The Cambridge-based company reported a \$110mn loss in the three months ending September 30, as it revealed it had to pay out more than \$500mn of remuneration costs following its listing in New York. When it went public, Arm had to settle shares that had been previously granted to employees.

Arm's one-time expense offset better than expected revenue during the quarter as a result of its long-term licensing agreements with tech groups, as well as increased royalties on its intellectual property. Arm's revenue rose 28 per cent from a year ago to \$806mn in the quarter, beating expectations of \$746.5mn by analysts polled by Bloomberg.

Increased investment in artificial intelligence by Arm's customers helped

'A few years from now we won't talk about the percentage of devices that have AI in them'

drive license revenue up 106 per cent year over year, the company said.

The company's IPO in September was the largest US listing in two years and raised almost \$5bn, a move that fuelled hopes of a resurgence in the flagging listings market. Since then its shares have fluctuated. SoftBank holds more than 90 per cent of shares in Arm. It acquired the business for \$32bn in 2016.

Arm is hoping a boom in AI will help fuel higher revenues as it shifts from its dependency on the cyclical smartphone market. On a call with investors after the earnings release, Arm's chief executive Rene Haas credited an "AI R&D supercycle" for a boost in licensing revenues during the quarter, as smartphone and PC makers chase the computing power needed to offer AI products.

"A few years from now we won't talk about the percentage of devices that have AI in them, it will be sort of table stakes that they all do," Haas said.

He also said the latest wave of US government restrictions on AI chip exports to China "did not impact Arm", because many of the chips that it designs were not covered by the current restrictions.

Grocery-delivery platform Instacart, which also went public in September and reported earnings on Wednesday, posted a \$2bn post-tax loss in the third quarter that it said was driven by a \$2.6bn accounting charge triggered by its listing.

Additional reporting by Camilla Hodgson
See Lex

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COMPANIES & MARKETS

Exxon and Chevron deals point to Big Oil's necessary shift

Charlie Penner

Markets Insight



In the past month, two megadeals have been launched in the oil and gas industry: the announced acquisition of Pioneer Natural Resources by ExxonMobil and Chevron's planned takeover of Hess.

In the Pioneer deal, Exxon will become the dominant operator in the Permian Basin, the largest oilfield in the US. And in acquiring Hess, Chevron will become one of the largest producers in the Bakken Formation (and gains a foothold in Guyana where Exxon already has a leading presence).

Both acquisitions were accompanied by triumphant announcements regarding the long-term outlook for fossil fuel demand, including Chevron's chief executive challenging the International Energy Agency's projections of a peak in fossil fuel demand in the next decade.

Yet the rationale for these transactions can be squared with either view of oil demand. For Exxon, in particular, expansion in the Permian offers a path to profitability even in significantly lower long-term fossil fuel demand scenarios, with estimated production costs of approximately \$35 a barrel.

Permian shale patch production, which has a typically short cycle of development and exploitation, also offers the ability to flex production up and down more easily in response to changes in demand.

Megaprojects, by contrast, can take up to a decade to start producing and even longer to start generating a return.

This stands in marked contrast to Exxon's stance on capital allocation a couple of years ago, when I led a campaign with my former colleagues at Engine No. 1 to replace members of the oil group's board.

The company at that point had for

years disregarded the market's preference for focusing on value over volumes — and was instead setting capital expenditure levels by reference to market share rather than expected returns.

As a result, its shares had underperformed those of its peers for years, even before Covid-19. In fact, Exxon had spent so heavily that at the start of 2020, the estimated oil price required for its projects to break even was close to \$90 — almost 50 per cent higher than its closest peers, including Chevron.

At the time, there were also no independent directors with outside energy experience. This is why investors were

Long-term investors continue to prefer focusing on lower cost projects offering greater flexibility

open to change. They were under no illusion that Exxon would stop investing in oil and gas; in fact, in our first letter we noted — just as Exxon's chief executive did in announcing the Pioneer deal — that oil and gas companies must spend to offset natural decline rates.

But we also argued that Exxon should spend more intelligently to account for long-term demand uncertainty.

Specifically, we called for focusing on projects that would deliver a rate of return well above the company's cost of capital under a wider variety of long-term demand scenarios and we highlighted the Permian Basin — as well as Guyana — as meeting that criterion.

This is why, despite the public debate about the direction and speed of the energy transition, the real focus for oil

and gas companies will continue to be around capital allocation in a time of uncertainty.

Exxon and Chevron may be right that oil and gas demand will grow far beyond the expectations of the IEA or the hopes of citizens wishing to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Recent events include a rise in interest rates and supply chain issues that have dented the economics of renewables while there's been minimal progress at the COP26 and 27 summits on climate change and, most likely, COP28, starting later this month in Dubai.

Exxon is also not wrong when it says it cannot move faster than the pace of the energy transition (leaving aside the matter of its historical role in slowing this transition), as other producers would simply pick up the slack.

Still, I believe that long-term investors continue to prefer Exxon to eschew a strategy of chasing market share without sufficient regard to returns, instead focusing on lower cost projects offering greater flexibility if the pace of the energy transition increases over time.

The stock market certainly does, with Exxon outperforming Chevron substantially since the former embraced a more disciplined capital allocation strategy during the proxy campaign.

With this acquisition, Exxon enhances its flexibility for the future.

However, it will be up to investors to again hold the company accountable should it return to a strategy rejected not just by those focused on climate change but those focused solely on shareholder returns as well.

Charlie Penner is a former partner at Jana Partners and the former head of shareholder activism at Engine No. 1

The day in the markets

What you need to know

- Wall Street rally slows after eight straight sessions of gains
- US government bonds sell off, wiping out Wednesday's gains
- Brent crude rises following two days of steep declines

The rally in US stocks slowed yesterday after eight consecutive days of gains as investors awaited a speech from Jay Powell, chair of the US Federal Reserve, for further clues on the direction of interest rates.

Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 and the tech-dominated Nasdaq Composite were both trading 0.1 per cent higher in early afternoon trading in New York.

Traders were looking to Powell's comments for guidance after central banks in the US and Europe held interest rates steady and markets priced in rate cuts in big economies next year.

But the bets threaten to undermine central banks' attempts to curb inflation, since expectations of future rate cuts bring down borrowing costs.

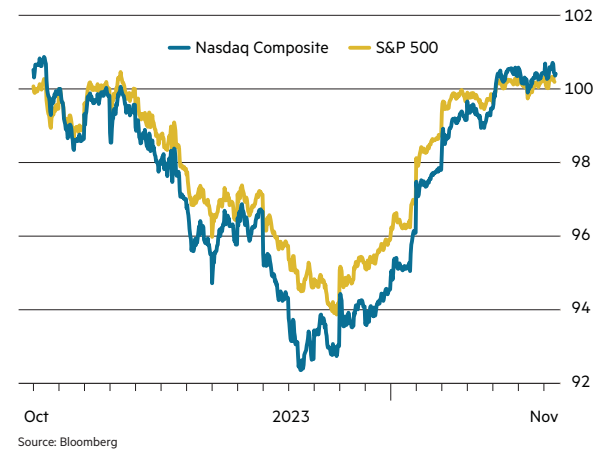
A higher close on Wall Street would mark the S&P 500's longest winning streak since 2004. The benchmark has risen more than 5 per cent since late October on hopes that US interest rates had peaked.

Optimism sparked by the Fed's decision last week to leave rates unchanged and the bond market rally that followed have proved particularly beneficial for companies promising high future growth.

"Market breadth isn't as narrow as people think, but almost all the S&P 500's recent improvement has come from

November's US stock rally loses steam

Normalised returns



Source: Bloomberg

large-cap, strong-balance-sheet-growth companies that might benefit from [artificial intelligence]," said Manish Kabra, head of US equity strategy at Société Générale.

Remove the 20 or so "AI-boom" companies from the index and the S&P 500 would be in negative territory for the year, he added.

Across the Atlantic, the region-wide Stoxx Europe 600 rose 0.8 per cent, the CAC 40 in Paris added 1.1 per cent and London's FTSE 100 rose 0.7 per cent.

US government bonds sold off as domestic equities hovered in a tight

range with 10-year Treasury yields rising 4 basis points to 4.55 per cent, wiping out Wednesday's declines, while yields on rate-sensitive two-year Treasuries rose to 4.96 per cent.

Brent crude, the global benchmark for oil, rose 1.2 per cent to \$80.45 a barrel following two days of steep declines that brought it down below \$80 a barrel for the first time since July, despite military action in the Middle East.

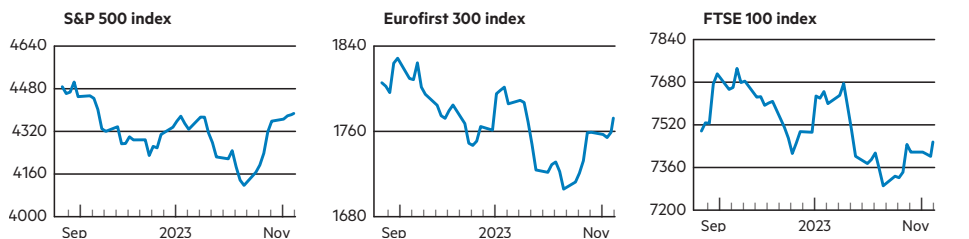
The US Dollar index, a measure of the currency's strength against a basket of six peers, retreated 0.1 per cent. **George Steer and Stephanie Stacey**

Markets update

	US	Eurozone	Japan	UK	China	Brazil
Stocks	S&P 500	Eurofirst 300	Nikkei 225	FTSE100	Shanghai Comp	Bovespa
Level	4387.27	1772.43	32646.46	7455.67	3053.28	11974.81
% change on day	0.10	0.76	1.49	0.73	0.03	0.47
Currency	\$ index (DXY)	\$ per €	Yen per \$	\$ per £	Rmb per \$	Real per \$
Level	105.622	1.072	150.950	1.229	7.285	4.897
% change on day	0.027	0.093	0.063	0.000	0.131	0.231
Govt. bonds	10-year Treasury	10-year Bund	10-year JGB	10-year Gilt	10-year bond	10-year bond
Yield	4.535	2.644	0.837	4.441	2.663	10.981
Basis point change on day	1.200	2.700	-0.720	3.600	0.000	-6.700
World index, Commods	FTSE All-World	Oil - Brent	Oil - WTI	Gold	Silver	Metals (LME)
Level	439.62	80.44	76.15	1959.35	22.44	3642.20
% change on day	0.29	1.13	1.09	-0.07	-0.42	-0.02

Yesterday's close apart from: Currencies = 16:00 GMT; S&P, Bovespa, All World, Oil = 17:00 GMT; Gold, Silver = London pm fix. Bond data supplied by Tullett Prebon.

Main equity markets



Biggest movers

	US	Eurozone	UK
Ups	Transdigm 9.48	Schneider Electric 8.35	Auto Trader 8.47
	Walt Disney (the) 7.36	Henkel 4.15	Spirax-sarco Eng 3.99
	Micron Technology 4.70	Merck 3.34	Rightmove 3.90
	Tapestry 4.41	Oci 3.31	Rs 3.73
	Western Digital 4.17	Legrand 3.16	Kingfisher 3.32
Downs	Becton Dickinson And Co -8.17	Coloplast -6.87	Flutter Entertainment -10.22
	Corteva -7.26	Novo Nordisk -2.77	B&M Eur Value Retail S.a. -3.09
	Fmc -4.92	Hann.rueck -2.37	Entain -1.40
	Tesla -4.44	Swatch -1.95	Si -0.93
	Epam Systems -3.88	Airbus -1.79	Anglo American -0.93

Prices taken at 17:00 GMT. Based on the constituents of the FTSE Eurofirst 300 Eurozone.

All data provided by Morningstar unless otherwise noted.

Wall Street

Near to the head of the S&P 500 index was **Walt Disney**, the entertainment conglomerate, which rallied alongside **Paramount Global** after a breakthrough in the Hollywood actors' strike.

SAG-AFTRA, the actors' unions, reached a tentative agreement overnight with major studios, putting an end to 118 days of industrial action.

Providing a further fillip for Disney was the unveiling of an additional \$2bn in cost savings and quarterly earnings of 82 cents per share — more than 17 per cent ahead of Wall Street estimates.

Buy-now-pay-later provider **Affirm** was among the session's biggest risers after posting a quarterly loss of 57 cents per share, significantly better than the 70 cents loss Wall Street had expected.

Bank of America described the results as "strong", anticipating further market share gains by the group, but also feared that the discretionary spending backdrop remained "unfavourable".

Language learning business **Duolingo** jumped on the back of "record" adjusted core profits of \$22.5m in the third quarter, up markedly from \$2.1m a year earlier.

Through its experiments in A/B testing, Duolingo said it was on track to achieve its "best year ever in terms of user growth, bookings, revenue and profitability". **Ray Douglas**

Europe

Dutch payments provider **Adyen** surged, benefiting from a relief triggered by its business update and investor day.

The sector has been under scrutiny this year, intensifying last month when French peer **Worldline** trimmed its sales outlook and revealed that it was cutting off some clients in a bid to clamp down on fraud.

"Realistic" was the word chosen by numerous analysts to describe Adyen's revised mid-term ambitions, which were scaled back.

Adyen's rivals **Worldline** and **Nexi** in Italy rallied on the back of these fresh projections.

German outdoor advertising group **Ströer** rose sharply after posting quarterly revenue and earnings that came in 3 per cent ahead of analysts' estimates.

Christian Schmalzl, co-chief executive, remained "very confident" looking ahead to 2024, forecasting "double-digit organic growth in year-end bookings, which exceeds our previous expectations".

Forecast-beating results lifted Italian lender **BPER Banca**, which reported net interest income — the difference between what it pays on deposits and what it earns from loans and also other assets — of €836.5m in the third quarter, 8 per cent ahead of market estimates. **Ray Douglas**

London

Heading the FTSE 100 index was online car dealer **Auto Trader**, which reported a "record" volume of buyers on its site, with vehicles continuing to sell "quicker than pre-pandemic levels".

Group revenue grew 12 per cent to £280.5m for the half year, helping to generate a 10 per cent rise in operating profit of £164.6m — 4 per cent ahead market estimates.

At the opposite end of the blue-chip benchmark was bookmaker **Flutter**, which warned that its non-US earnings for the full year would be at the lower end of its previously announced guidance.

This reflected "very customer friendly sports results in September and October" and "adverse" forex movements, it said.

Near the top of the FTSE 250 index was insurer **Lancashire**, which said it would be returning around \$169m to shareholders, including \$119m in special dividends and up to \$50m in buybacks.

Cab Payments, which specialises in cross-border payments, joined Lancashire in the top half the mid-cap index, being swept up in a sector-wide rally triggered by a well-received update from Dutch group Adyen.

S4 Capital, the digital marketing company run by ex-WPP chief Martin Sorrell, dived after warning that revenues this year would be lower than last year's. **Ray Douglas**

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MARKET DATA

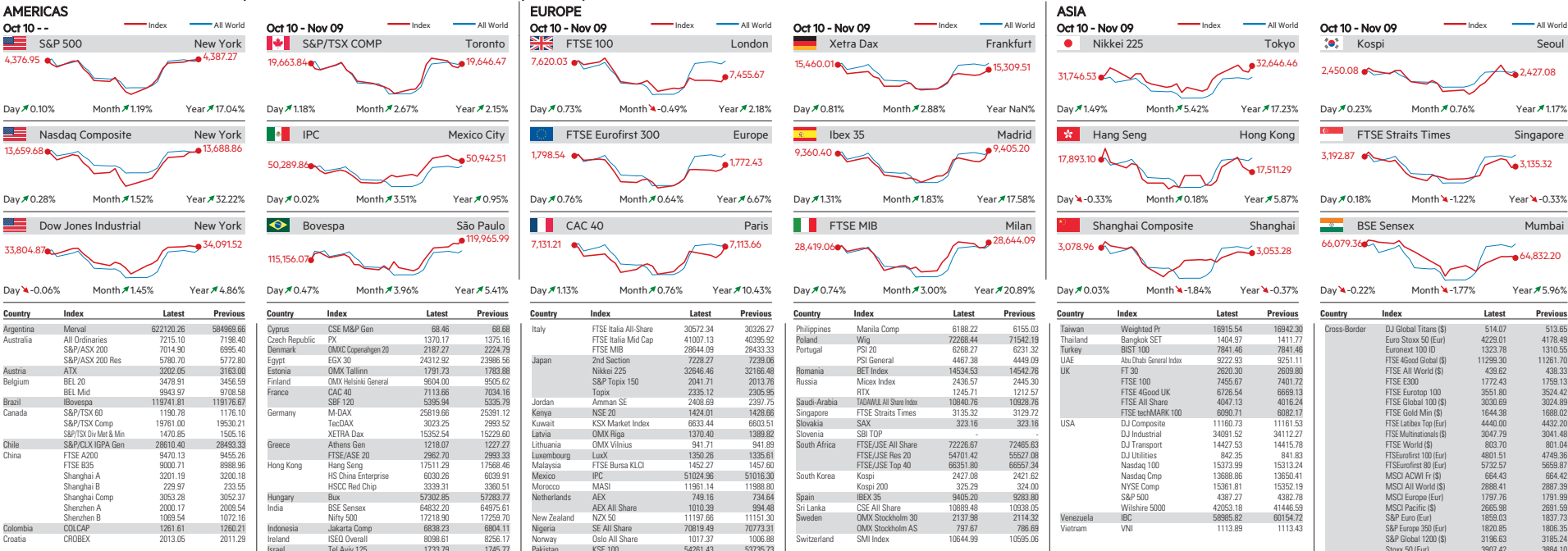
WORLD MARKETS AT A GLANCE

FT.COM/MARKETSDATA

Change during previous day's trading (%)



Stock Market movements over last 30 days, with the FTSE All-World in the same currency as a comparison



(c) Closed, (u) Unavailable, f Correction, Subject to official finalisation. For more index details please visit www.ft.com/worldindices. A fuller version of this table is available on the ft.com research data archive.

STOCK MARKET: BIGGEST MOVERS. Table listing top gainers and losers in various sectors (Tech, Healthcare, Energy, etc.) with columns for stock name, price, and change.

CURRENCIES. Table showing exchange rates for major currencies (Dollar, Euro, Pound) against various global currencies (Argentine Peso, Australian Dollar, etc.).

FTSE ACTUARIES SHARE INDICES

Table of FTSE Actuaries Share Indices, including FTSE 100, FTSE 250, FTSE 500, FTSE 100 Summary, and FTSE 100 Industries, with columns for closing price, change, and volume.

FTSE GLOBAL EQUITY INDEX SERIES

Table of FTSE Global Equity Index Series, listing various regional and sectoral indices (Asia Pacific, Europe, North America, etc.) with performance metrics.

UK STOCK MARKET TRADING DATA

Table of UK Stock Market Trading Data, showing turnover, volume, and price changes for various market segments (Order Book, Total Values, etc.).

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UK COMPANY RESULTS. Table showing quarterly and annual financial results for major UK companies like AstraZeneca, Anglo Irish Bank, and others.

UK RECENT EQUITY ISSUES. Table listing recent equity issues by major UK companies, including AstraZeneca, Anglo Irish Bank, and others.

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SUMMARY FT.COM/FUNDS

Summary table with columns: Winners - EAA Fund EUR Corporate Bond, Losers - EAA Fund EUR Corporate Bond, Morningstar Star Ratings, Global Broad Category Group - Equity. Includes Fund Name, Return, and Rating details.

Advertising Feature for Prusik. Includes performance chart for Prusik Asia Emerging Opportunities Fund A Acc, weightings as of 30/04/2023, and top 10 holdings as of 30/04/2023.

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Table with columns: Fund, Bid, Offer, +/-, Yield, 1Yr, 3Yr. Lists various funds and their performance metrics.

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Fund	Bid	Offer	+/-	Yield	1Yr	3Yr
Doris Crescent Global Medium Equity Fund USD A (Dist)	£ 13.35	-	-0.04	0.82	2.37	0.78
Doris Crescent Global Property Equity Fund USD A (Dist)	\$ 7.41	-	0.03	2.07	2.33	0.92
Doris Crescent Global Short Term Income Fund USD A (Dist)	\$ 0.93	-	0.00	2.82	3.40	0.17
Doris Crescent Variable Fund GBP A (Dist)	£ 9.45	-	-0.03	0.71	-0.69	1.76

Marwyn Asset Management Limited (CYM)
 Regulated
 Marwyn Value Investors £ 329.72 - -6.14 0.00 - -7.17

Omnia Fund Ltd (UK)
 Other International Funds
 Estimated NAV \$ 929.86 - -0.72 0.00 -2.69 16.70

McInroy & Wood Portfolios Limited (UK)
 Easter Alderson, Haddington, EH41 3SF 01620 825867
 Authorised Inv Funds
 Balanced Fund Personal Class Units \$ 683.20 - -27.10 1.40 0.73 3.25
 Income Fund Personal Class Units 2821.20 - -14.40 2.40 -0.01 4.87
 Emerging Markets Fund Personal Class Units 2077.80 - -3.50 1.48 -9.48 -0.81
 Smaller Companies Fund Personal Class Units 5665.40 - -24.80 1.30 -2.24 -3.08

Orbis Investments (U.K.) Limited (GBR)
 28 Dorset Square, London, NW1 6DG
 www.orbis.com 0800 358 2030
 Regulated
 Orbis OEIC Global Cautious Standard £ 12.03 - -0.02 0.00 3.07 6.49
 Orbis OEIC Global Balanced Standard £ 19.92 - -0.09 0.37 5.08 11.93
 Orbis OEIC Global Equity Standard £ 23.40 - -0.12 2.43 9.23 9.14

Parisma Investment Fds (UK) (1200)F (UK)
 2nd floor, 20-22 Bedford Row, London, WC1R 4EB
 Order Desk and Enquiries: 0345 922 0044
 Authorised Inv Funds
 Authorised Corporate Director - Waystone Management (UK) Limited
 Global Total Fd PCG A 426.04 - -1.74 0.16 16.92 6.90
 Global Total Fd PCG B 419.76 - -1.71 0.00 16.63 6.64
 Global Total Fd PCG INT 411.06 - -1.67 0.00 16.33 6.37

Parisma Investment Fds (CI) Ltd (JER)
 Regulated
 PCG B 321.22 - -3.11 0.00 22.37 5.28
 PCG C 311.88 - -3.01 0.00 22.11 5.06

Slater Investments (UK)
 www.slaterinvestments.com; Tel: 0207 220 9460
 FCA Recognised
 Slater Growth A Acc 562.33 562.33 3.52 0.00 -11.30 -2.79
 Slater Income A Inc 128.11 128.11 0.02 5.22 -0.67 9.13
 Slater Recovery A Acc 290.98 290.98 1.28 0.00 -11.76 0.83
 Slater Artorius 248.50 248.50 3.33 0.61 -13.19 1.01

Toscafund Asset Management LLP (UK)
 www.toscafund.com
 Tosca A USD \$ 436.74 - -3.62 0.00 7.57 12.50
 Tosca Mid Cap GBP £ 120.64 - -6.43 0.00 -28.78 -4.42
 Tosca Opportunity B USD \$ 252.81 - -15.03 0.00 -29.95 -19.96
 Pegasus Fund Ltd A-1 GBP £ 28.54 - -0.00 0.00 -29.25 -4.72



Milltrust International Managed Investments ICAV (IRL)
 mimm@milltrust.com, +44(0)20 8123 8316 www.milltrust.com
 Regulated
 British Innovation Fund £ 121.92 - -2.89 0.00 - -
 MAI - Buy & Lease (Australia) AS 103.45 - -0.59 0.00 -16.53 1.41
 MAI - Buy & Lease (New Zealand) NZ 91.20 - -6.06 0.00 -7.20 -2.67
 Milltrust Global Emerging Markets Fund - Class A \$ 88.91 - -0.47 0.00 1.32 -5.83

Platinum Capital Management Ltd (UK)
 Other International Funds
 Platinum All Star Fund - A \$ 150.35 - - - - 3.97
 Platinum Global Growth UCITS Fund \$ 8.33 - -0.05 0.00 4.00 -14.18
 Platinum Essential Resources UCITS Fund USD Class 1 \$ 9.42 - -0.70 0.00 -19.83 13.34
 Platinum Global Dividend UCITS Fund \$ 43.73 - -0.18 0.00 -7.25 -6.96

Milltrust International Managed Investments SPC (UK)
 mimm@milltrust.com, +44(0)20 8123 8316, www.milltrust.com
 Regulated
 Milltrust Alaska Brazil Fund SP A \$ 99.05 - -0.82 0.00 17.44 12.69
 Milltrust Laurium Africa Fund SP A \$ 94.70 - -0.32 0.00 -0.51 2.00
 Milltrust Marcellus India Fund SP \$ 133.80 - -0.68 0.00 2.94 7.83
 Milltrust Singair ASEAN Fund SP Founders \$ 122.93 - -0.24 0.00 -2.12 -3.33
 Milltrust SPARK Korea Equity Fund SP A \$ 115.39 - -1.01 0.00 22.15 -5.99
 Milltrust Xingtai China Fund SP A \$ 88.41 - -0.38 0.00 2.63 -14.07
 The Climate Impact Asia Fund SP A \$ 70.90 - -1.04 0.00 -3.65 -
 The Climate Impact Asia Fund (Class B) \$ 70.01 - -1.03 0.00 -4.13 -

Polar Capital Funds Plc (IRL)
 Regulated
 Artificial Intelligence I USD ACC \$ 16.90 16.90 0.05 0.00 25.28 0.38
 Asian Starts I USD ACC \$ 13.80 - -0.01 0.00 8.83 -5.97
 Biotechnology I USD \$ 36.09 36.09 -0.22 0.00 -2.30 0.15
 China Stars I USD ACC \$ 9.53 9.53 -0.03 0.00 0.85 -15.97
 Emerging Market Stars I USD ACC \$ 11.12 - -0.01 0.00 7.65 -7.41
 European Ex UK Inc EUR ACC £ 15.03 15.03 0.08 0.00 10.51 12.74
 Financial Opps I USD \$ 13.35 - -0.09 2.48 2.78 6.92
 Global Convertible I USD \$ 13.07 13.07 -0.07 0.00 0.85 -5.97
 Global Insurance I GBP £ 10.75 - -0.03 0.00 5.17 16.96
 Global Technology I USD \$ 80.30 - -0.42 0.00 38.66 -1.29
 Healthcare Blue Chip Fund I USD ACC \$ 17.92 17.92 -0.02 0.00 1.82 4.46
 Healthcare Dis I Acc USD \$ 10.49 - -0.20 0.00 -7.82 -8.56
 Healthcare Opps I USD \$ 61.21 - -0.12 0.00 0.25 -0.08
 Income Opportunities B2 I GBP ACC £ 3.03 3.03 0.01 0.00 5.33 12.77
 Japan Value I JPY ¥ 178.03 178.03 1.92 0.00 25.79 19.49
 North American I USD \$ 35.11 35.11 -0.13 0.00 11.60 7.41
 Smart Energy I USD ACC \$ 8.55 8.55 0.04 0.00 1.79 -
 Smart Mobility I USD ACC \$ 7.86 7.86 -0.01 0.00 -2.48 -
 UK Val Opp I GBP ACC £ 11.96 11.96 0.05 - - 4.18 4.20

Ram Active Investments SA (UK)
 www.rai-ai.com
 Other International Funds
 RAM Systematic Emerg Markets Eq £ 223.51 223.51 -0.04 - -14.11 4.35
 RAM Systematic European Eq £ 505.31 505.31 1.86 - -1.16 4.18
 RAM Systematic Global Sustainable Income Eq £ 149.81 149.81 -0.46 0.00 4.63 7.39
 RAM Systematic Long/Short European Eq £ 151.90 151.90 0.36 - - 0.07 2.06

Royal London (UK)
 80 Fenchurch Street, London EC3M 4BY
 Authorised Inv Funds
 Royal London Sustainable Diversified A Inc £ 2.34 - -0.02 - - 6.04 -0.67
 Royal London Sustainable World A Inc 353.10 - -1.80 0.70 8.05 8.05
 Royal London Corporate Bond Mth Income 73.53 - -0.06 4.91 5.69 -3.97
 Royal London European Growth Trust 205.20 - -3.30 1.77 8.64 5.77
 Royal London Sustainable Leaders A Inc 755.10 - -6.90 1.50 4.73 3.37
 Royal London UK Growth Trust 600.60 - -3.30 2.39 3.40 5.11
 Royal London UK Income With Growth Trust 197.10 - -0.60 5.09 2.27 7.10
 Royal London US Growth Trust 420.00 - -0.60 0.00 15.13 11.62

STONEHAGE FLEMING (UK)
 GLOBAL BEST IDEAS EQUITY FUND

Stonehage Fleming Investment Management Ltd (IRL)
 www.stonehagefleming.com/gia/enquiries@stonehagefleming.com
 Regulated
 SF Global Best Ideas Eq B USD ACC \$ 246.31 - -1.19 0.00 21.26 1.90
 SF Global Best Ideas Eq D GBP INC £ 304.10 - -1.73 0.00 14.11 4.22

SUPERFUND INVEST BETTER

Superfund Asset Management GmbH (UK)
 www.superfund.com, +43(1)1 247 00
 Other International Funds
 Superfund Green Gold \$ 839.19 - -14.00 0.00 -31.46 -15.77
 Superfund Green Silver \$ 696.06 - -1.70 0.00 -35.63 -19.02
 Regulated
 Superfund Green US\$ \$ 637.31 - -5.48 0.00 -36.84 -13.33

Ministry of Justice Common Investment Funds (UK)
 Property & Other UK Unit Trusts
 The Equity Idx Tracker Fd Inc 1878.00 - -10.00 2.60 4.62 6.23
 Distribution Units

Private Fund Mgrs (Guernsey) Ltd (GSY)
 Regulated
 Monument Growth 31/10/2023 £ 527.55 532.57 2.14 0.00 1.51 4.44

Ruffer LLP (1000)F (UK)
 2nd floor, 20-22 Bedford Row, London, WC1R 4EB
 Order Desk and Enquiries: 0345 601 9610
 Authorised Inv Funds
 Authorised Corporate Director - Waystone Management (UK) Limited
 LF Ruffer Diversified Rtm C Acc 98.62 - -0.17 1.77 -5.95 -
 LF Ruffer Diversified Rtm C Inc 96.13 - -0.18 1.80 -5.30 -
 LF Ruffer Equity & General C Acc 560.85 - -3.87 1.38 1.95 7.54
 LF Ruffer Equity & General C Inc 499.90 - -3.46 1.39 1.96 7.54
 LF Ruffer Gold C Acc 245.32 - -3.63 0.42 19.13 -7.68
 LF Ruffer Gold C Inc 147.85 - -2.19 - - 19.14 -7.68
 LF Ruffer Total Return C Acc 530.25 - -7.89 2.46 -5.95 3.15
 LF Ruffer Total Return C Inc 322.96 - -4.81 2.50 -5.94 3.15

Thesis Unit Trust Management Limited (UK)
 Exchange Building, St Johns Street, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 1UP
 Authorised Funds
 TM New Court Fund A 2011 Inc £ 18.98 - -0.07 0.00 6.57 3.16
 TM New Court Fund - A 2014 Acc £ 19.15 - -0.07 - - 6.63 3.17
 TM New Court Equity Growth Fund - Inc £ 20.79 - -0.07 0.00 8.11 3.78

Mirabaud Asset Management (LUX)
 www.mirabaud.com, marketing@mirabaud-am.com
 Please find more details on our website: www.mirabaud-am.com
 Regulated
 Mir - Glb Strat. Bd I USD \$ 116.51 - -0.35 0.00 5.45 -0.78
 Mir - DiscEur D Cap GBP £ 150.50 - -2.26 0.00 -5.80 -1.30
 Mir - UKEq HA Cap I GBP £ 128.74 - -0.43 0.00 -3.06 1.04



Prusik Investment Management LLP (IRL)
 Enquiries - 0207 453 1331
 Regulated
 Prusik Asian Equity Income B Dist £ 167.29 - -0.03 6.21 7.73 5.68
 Prusik Asia Fund U Dist. £ 182.43 - -0.13 0.00 -9.33 -4.61
 Prusik Asia Sustainable Growth Fund A Acc £ 81.06 - -0.05 0.00 0.36 -

Rubrics Global UCITS Funds Plc (IRL)
 www.rubricsam.com
 Regulated
 Rubric Emerging Markets Fund UCITS Fund £ 138.86 - -0.04 0.00 6.27 -0.01
 Rubrics Global Credit UCITS Fund £ 16.92 - -0.01 0.00 4.30 -1.15
 Rubrics Global Fixed Income UCITS Fund £ 168.99 - -0.40 0.00 2.16 -2.43



Toscafund Asset Management LLP (UK)
 www.toscafund.com
 Authorised Funds
 Aptus Global Financials B Acc £ 5.25 - -0.01 3.90 12.73 17.75
 Aptus Global Financials B Inc £ 3.26 - -0.01 4.02 12.72 19.20

Scottish Friendly Asset Managers Ltd (UK)
 Scottish Friendly House, 16 Blythswood Sq, Glasgow G2 4HU 0141 275 5000
 Authorised Inv Funds
 Managed Growth ♦ 349.10 - -0.90 0.00 3.93 6.37
 UK Growth ♦ 394.40 - -0.40 0.00 0.33 4.46

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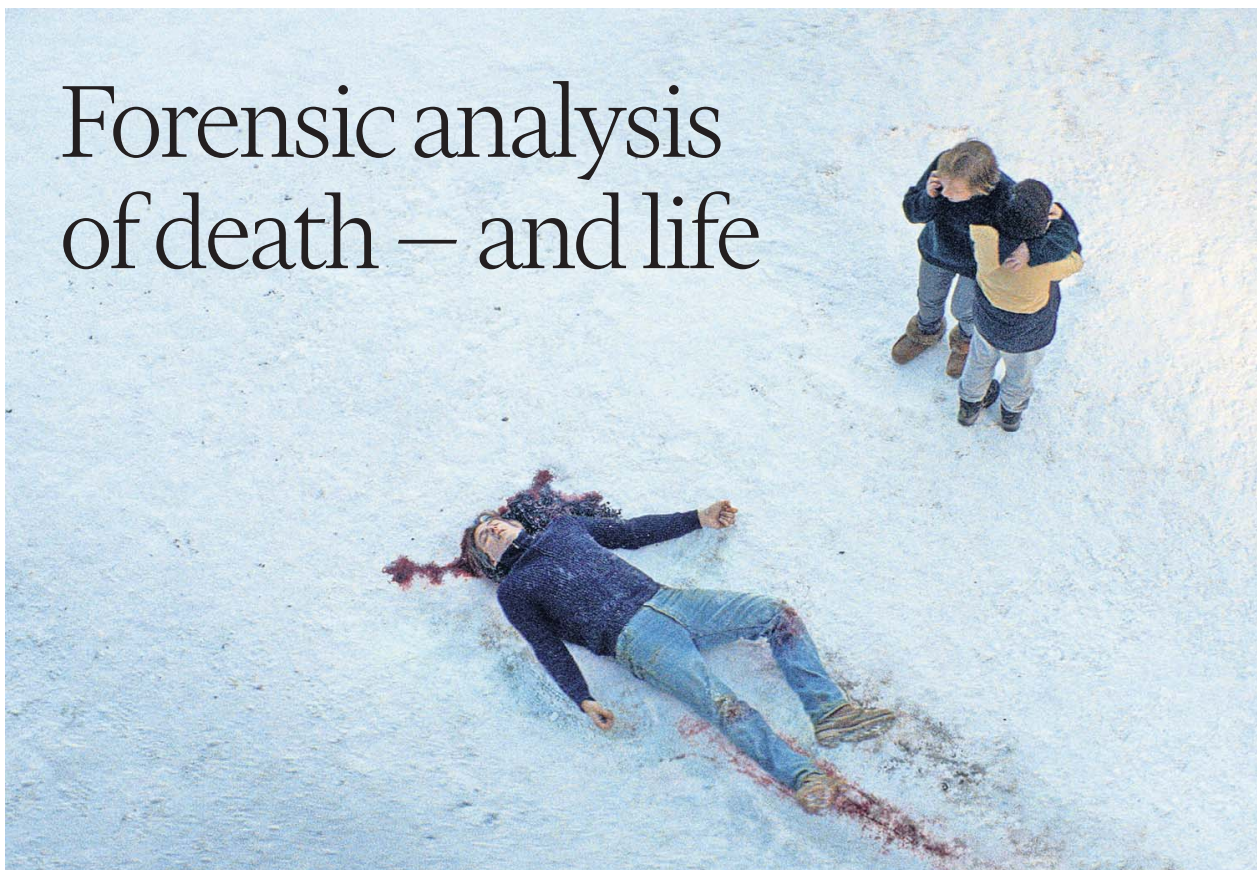
ARTS

FILM

Danny Leigh



Forensic analysis of death – and life



The picture looks so simple, it might have been drawn by a child, with stick figures and red pen. Early in the superlative French thriller *Anatomy of a Fall*, snow covers the ground, the white broken only by blood and a dead body. A man has fallen from high in a chalet. Nearby is a boy: his son. The boy cries for his mother: the man's wife. She stands above, on a balcony close to the spot where her husband must have fallen. Fallen? And so this stark image is engulfed by the first question mark put there by director Justine Triet. There will be many more.

The film stars the fine-tuned Sandra Hüller as the woman on that balcony, just outside Grenoble. For now, the actress is still best known for impish 2016 German comedy *Toni Erdmann*. That much is set to change. Her performance here as Sandra Voyter, acclaimed novelist of soul-baring autofiction, has been feted as the stuff of Oscars. The movie won the Palme d'Or at Cannes this year. Industry prizes aren't always much guide, but here the baubles are testament to the excellence of a very modern courtroom story: one that makes us doubt the clean lines of other crime dramas.

A scene of the slab is profoundly inconclusive. "Forensic cause: accidental and/or deliberate," the coroner notes, a perfect nutshell for ambiguities ahead. Scalpels precede lawyers. A murder trial begins. Sandra's account of her movements before her husband's death seem weirdly suspect. But would a guilty party not find a better alibi?

Double bluff? Triple? Either feels plausible. Raw, sad details of married life become public knowledge. (Long-term couples will find the film makes an interesting date night.) But mostly, like courtroom observers, we simply train our gaze on Sandra, narrowing our eyes to judge her as grief-struck or indifferent, forthright or cold. Hüller herself is quite the star witness. Her work is so authentic, the actress vanishes, leaving only the character to study.

Anatomy of a Fall

Justine Triet

★★★★★

The Marvels

Nia DaCosta

★★★☆☆

Dream Scenario

Kristoffer Borgli

★★★☆☆

The Eternal Memory

Maite Alberdi

★★★★☆

What follows is, on the Saturday night level, a top-drawer thriller. With Hitchcock the model, Triet is not above a morbid little joke. Her first shot is a dog's rubber ball bouncing downstairs; an instrumental cover of the 50 Cent steel drum/hip-hop anthem "P.I.M.P." takes a key, incongruous role. And once inside the courtroom, the rhythm of rival lawyers cranks to grand crescendos.

But the movie is much more than a high-end jigsaw puzzle. It is also a legal drama about the drama of the law: forever prey to spectacle and strategy, the actual truth worth less in court than whatever sounds most like it. More crucial still, Triet invests her parlour game with gravity. At one point, the bickering of lawyers sends a giggle through the



court; the camera quietly finds Voyter's partially sighted son, still bereft, mourning the death of one parent as the other is tried for killing them.

Hitchcock once described his actors as mere "oval shapes": just surface visuals. On this point, Triet breaks with the maestro. Instead, her film cuts ever deeper into the humanity of the story, reminding us that a murder charge will often conceal a mass of complexity and contradiction. A death can be pinned down, as here, by details of blood spatter and snow melt. The forensics of life are harder to know.

In cinemas now

Is Marvel retro yet? Four years after the epic inflection point of *Avengers: Endgame*, the once all-conquering studio has been subject of Hollywood debate as to just how far from the glory days it might have drifted. Too many spin-offs, too few good ideas; so runs the charge sheet.

Sceptics may not be silenced by *The Marvels*: the company's newest project embodies just that sense of a business madly whirring and clanking. "We're literally herding cats?" a character exclaims, and it is hard not to hear the inner voice of director Nia DaCosta.

The movie is a sequel to 2019's *Captain Marvel*, as much as any Marvel movie now has so simple a link to any other. Brie Larson returns as onetime fighter pilot Carol Danvers, also known by that professional title. The other *Marvels* (plural) now include the super-powered but plainly named Monica Rambeau, played by Teyonah Parris; and teenage Desi-American fangirl Kamala Khan (Iman Vellani), a live-wire audience proxy. Thematic musings on the families we're born into and the families we make are given pretext by interplanetary sci-fi. "Once again, the Skrull have betrayed the Kree," snarls the villainous Dar-Benn (Zawe Ashton) towards actors made-up as sentient globe artichokes.

There is sugar-rush charm to at least some of the movie. DaCosta, who previously directed smart horror remake *Candyman*, is a genuine talent, giving vibrancy to the sitcommy Khans and a sturdy *whump* to fight scenes. A running gag centred on those footloose cats (actually Lovecraftian aliens) stays funnier than you might expect. Parris, meanwhile, is excellent, her star power outshining Larson, who can seem in need of coffee and purpose.

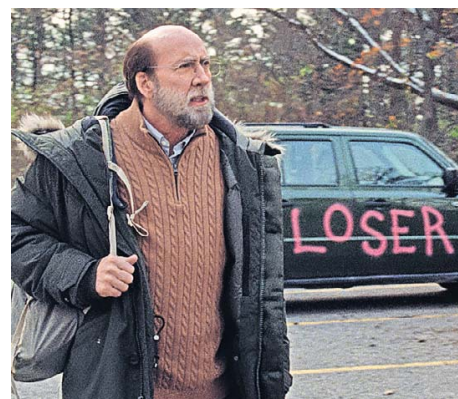
But caffeine is the last thing the film requires. If the archetypal Marvel hit came fused into a three-tonne lump of multiplex entertainment, DaCosta lets the new film be tonal spaghetti: a chaos of group hugs, antic montages and earnest self-reflection, with odd musical interludes and still-iffier effects. (A noted recent weak spot for the studio.) The running time sails by. But as a future model for Marvel's corporate captain, company president Kevin Feige, you sense the cats remain un-herded.

In cinemas now

Many of us will know the feeling of being unable to escape Nicolas Cage. Only older cinemagoers will even recall the time before the actor became a pop-culture punchline, churning out movies that would once have filled the lowest shelves of video stores. It makes an unexpected treat of *Dream Scenario*, the ticklish new comedy that might be a wry riff on just how much the world has seen of Cage. So much he even haunts our sleep.

Sandra Hüller's performance in *Anatomy of a Fall* has been feted as the stuff of Oscars

Such is the fate of his character here: Paul Matthews, a frustrated biology professor at a provincial US university. His work on zebra camouflage is respected, but that does not explain the sudden rapt attention of his students. Instead, en masse, they report seeing him as a figure in their dreams. They are not alone. Old exes; friends of friends; absolute strangers in large number. Soon the whole world is having dreams about Paul – in every other aspect a "remarkable nobody", now a meme virally coursing through the mass unconscious.



Left: Nicolas Cage haunts people's sleep in *Dream Scenario*. Below: Chilean documentary *The Eternal Memory* follows a man with Alzheimer's and his wife



Left: questions surround a man's death in *Anatomy of a Fall*, starring Sandra Hüller, above. Below: Brie Larson in *The Marvels*

It is a premise only a churl could fail to smirk at. Comically and dramatically, it could go here, there or anywhere. And for a while, director Kristoffer Borgli seems able to take us to each of those places at once. A string of dream sequences have the uncanny wooziness of the real thing (albeit, yes, with Cage wandering through them). And in waking life, the whimsy is spliced with a drier realism, detailing what very possibly would happen to a thwarted academic who finds global fame in several billion nocturnal reveries.

The good things in Borgli's movie are all underscored by Cage. At first, the casting seems a cheap nudge in the ribs, this most outside actor playing a nonentity in oatmeal knitwear. But the performance blooms into something else: a pinpoint panorama of bafflement, glee and hubris.

The film can be such fun, you feel a killjoy for having to say that diminishing returns do later set in, as the tone turns curdled and one-note. Take a nap for the last 20 minutes and leave with your own dreams intact.

In UK and US cinemas now

There is frequent laughter in bitter-sweet Chilean documentary *The Eternal Memory*. Dancing too. Both may catch you off-guard, given how much of Maite Alberdi's film is about the dread presence of Alzheimer's. But to say that is the subject is reductive. Rather than a study of a disease, the movie is a portrait of two people living – in the fullest sense – alongside it.

One is former TV journalist Augusto Góngora, first diagnosed in 2014. The other is his partner, actress Paulina Urrutia. Their narrative is still clearly a love story. In the film's first scene, Góngora wakes to find himself unsure of the identity of the woman in his bedroom: but he seems delighted anyway, and only more so on learning that this is his wife.

Alberdi last made 2020's Oscar-nominated feelgood documentary *The Mole Agent*. Here too, she leans into human warmth. But the emotion is real enough to survive proximity to pain. After establishing the bond between Góngora and Urrutia, there are scenes of anguish, the kind that could feel exploitative, but here do not.

At one point, distraught, he clutches his books to his chest. "What if they take them?" he sobs. The threat of stolen knowledge has a history, we realise. The couple once actively resisted Chile's Pinochet dictatorship; even now, with his fractured recall, Góngora remembers friends murdered by the regime. Alberdi makes this deceptively slim film hold much of value: happiness and sorrow, a salute to memory, and to film in helping it endure.

In UK and US cinemas now

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FT BIG READ. NORTH KOREA

Despite sanctions, the dictator has built up alliances with Russia and China and continued to develop nuclear weapons – illustrating how a fragmenting international order has benefited his isolated country.

By Christian Davies

At a recent banquet to celebrate the achievements of his country's navy, a relaxed Kim Jong Un sat with his wife and young daughter as they were serenaded by a choir of North Korean sailors.

The east Asian country's millennial dictator had every reason to feel content as he sipped wine at the lavish jamboree, held at a luxury Pyongyang resort in August, overlooked by a giant scale model of a Hwasong-18, the regime's most advanced long-range intercontinental ballistic missile.

Steering North Korea through a period of extreme isolation to counter Covid-19 while defying tough international sanctions, he has emerged into the warm embrace of Moscow and Beijing amid intensifying geopolitical tensions in the region.

"He survived [Donald] Trump, he survived the sanctions and he survived the pandemic," says Andrei Lankov, professor of history at Kookmin University in Seoul. "Who in his position would not feel triumphant?"

A month later, Kim embarked on his first foreign trip since 2019, boarding his armoured train destined for a Russian spaceport to meet Vladimir Putin. The visit consummated a relationship that has flourished in the wake of the Russian president's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, illustrating how a fragmenting world order has benefited a country under sanctions from almost a dozen UN security council resolutions since its first nuclear test in 2006.

"It's nothing new for North Korea to be out in the cold, but for Russia to join it there is a massive stroke of luck for Kim Jong Un," says Benjamin Katzoff Silberstein, a North Korea expert at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs.

With travel having reopened between North Korea and its northern neighbours as Pyongyang starts to relax Covid-era restrictions on foreign trade, analysts see little prospect of western countries exerting sufficient pressure on the regime to cease, or even slow, its nuclear weapons development.

Kim has also used the pandemic to strengthen his regime's grip on power, bulking up border controls and passing legislation threatening the death penalty against subjects caught distributing or consuming foreign media.

"The regime is much more secure than when Kim came to power in 2011," says Peter Ward, a fellow at the University of Vienna's European Centre for North Korean Studies. "He's purged his internal opponents, he's built a formidable nuclear weapons programme, he has tightened his control over society and Russia and China's growing enmity with the US is playing right into his hands."

Some observers argue that with the country's economy still in disarray Kim is unlikely to enjoy anything more than a brief moment in the sun. His ambition to create a "completely different North Korea" remains unrealised, says Go Myong-hyun, senior fellow at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul.

But Jenny Town, director of the 38 North programme at the Stimson Center think-tank in Washington, says that Kim's ambitions have shifted. In the past, North Korean leaders have sought to trade what leverage they have for concessions from the international community. Kim would therefore be expected to return to the negotiating table, seeking to lift sanctions and ease the economic pressure on his regime.

Instead, says Town, Kim appears to have given up on the possibility of reaching a compromise with the US and "what we are seeing is a fundamental reformulation of his foreign policy".

"It is often assumed that we are still in the same old cycle of confrontation and engagement as we always had," says Town. "But if there's one thing Kim has shown, it's that he paves his own way."

Facing a cold front together

Putin arrived 30 minutes early for his meeting with Kim at the Vostochny Cosmodrome, taken as a rare mark of respect from a president with a history of turning up late for meetings with world leaders.

Kim repaid the favour, describing the two countries, via a translator, as partners in the "fight against imperialism". Russia's war in Ukraine, he declared, was a "sacred fight to protect its sovereignty and security".

As talk of a new cold war emerged, Kim quickly embrace the idea, says Town. "He chose sides early on, and now he is being rewarded."

The relationship between the two countries is proving fruitful. Last month, the US published images it claimed showed 1,000 containers of "military equipment and munitions" being transported from North Korea to Russia following a deal brokered by Putin's defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, during a visit to Pyongyang in July. In exchange, North Korea is seeking



Global chaos has given Kim a stronger hand

Kim Jong Un's relationship with Vladimir Putin has flourished as the North Korean leader embraces talk of a new cold war

FT montage/AP/Getty/KCNA/dpa

"fighter aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, armoured vehicles, ballistic missile production equipment", among other materials and advanced technologies, according to US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby.

South Korea's unification minister, Kim Yung-ho, warned on Monday that Pyongyang appeared to be receiving technical assistance from Moscow before an anticipated launch of its first military reconnaissance satellite.

At the same time, Kim continues to benefit from the patronage of Beijing, which has been accused by human rights campaigners of colluding in crimes by the North Korean regime against its own people.

Hanna Song, of the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB) in Seoul, points to China's decision last month to forcibly repatriate hundreds of North Korean refugees in the face of international opposition.

"It was a huge win for Kim," says Song, adding the refugees faced a high likelihood of torture and execution. "The US Congress, the governments of several different countries, big human rights organisations and UN representatives were all demanding for it to be stopped, but Beijing did what Kim wanted."

The decision is rooted in growing tensions between Beijing and Washington. "China always valued North Korea as a

buffer zone, even if they do not like its nuclear ambitions or its provocative behaviour," says Lankov, of Kookmin University, adding that as long-term conflict with the US looks likely, Beijing "is willing to support Pyongyang and ask for very little in return".

Other perks have emerged from the regime's blossoming friendships. The number of North Koreans entering Russia has surged amid demand for workers in its sparsely populated far east. As a thank you, the governor of the eastern Russian region of Primorsky Krai sent Kim five kamikaze drones, according to Russian state news agency Tass.

There has also been a rebound in cross-border trade, including in areas where co-operation is still prohibited by UN sanctions. Data published last month shows that recorded trade between North Korea and China in September jumped to its highest level in almost four years, with Beijing openly offering Pyongyang banned goods, including industrial equipment, while receiving imports of sanctioned North Korean coal and steel.

North Korea has also started to close down foreign embassies and missions in Africa, Europe and Asia – marking an acceptance, says Silberstein, of the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, that "the idea of expanding trade relations far beyond China and Russia is dead, for the time being."

This shows that Kim is "doubling down on relationships" where the benefits, although not as great as improved relations with the US, are "tangible, quick and come at very little political cost", says Town.

It helps that Russia and China's commitment to support the sanctions regime, which cannot be ended without unanimity among the UN security council's five permanent members, has waned. The two countries now regularly circulate draft resolutions calling for the alleviation of the measures, while shielding Pyongyang from western censure of its illegal ballistic missile tests.

Western officials worry that the easing of sanctions and a resumption of

economic activity will accelerate the unrelenting progress of North Korea's nuclear weapons programme, which continued even during the pandemic.

In September, Kim christened the country's first nuclear-capable submarine. Two weeks later at the North Korea's Supreme People's Assembly, he reaffirmed his commitment to "exponentially increase nuclear weapons production".

Pyongyang is now "on pace to deploy nuclear-armed intercontinental range missiles in sufficient numbers that could potentially challenge US homeland ground-based ballistic missile defences", warned a report from the US Congress last month.

This has exposed the limitations of sanctions, some analysts argue. "If the goal . . . is to demonstrate there's a cost to breaking international law, then they still have a purpose," says Town. "But if the goal is to dissuade North Korea from [developing weapons of mass destruction] they have abjectly failed."

'Guns but no butter'

Growing military muscle and a limited resumption of trade with Russia and China cannot by themselves repair the fundamental problems facing the North Korean state, however.

Go, of the Asan Institute, argues that the country today, and its relationship with the wider world, falls far short of Kim's true aspirations: "Kim's two most important ambitions are still securing recognition as a nuclear state and having the sanctions regime lifted, and he needs the US for both."

"His real high point was during his summits with Donald Trump in 2018 and 2019, when he was being taken seriously by a US president – Putin is just a consolation prize," Go adds.

The country's economy also remains in a parlous state. In 2021, the regime admitted to a "food crisis" brought on by border closures, sanctions and a miserable harvest. Hundreds of thousands of North Korean children are malnourished, according to a recent UN report. Kim has made attempts to reform

North Korea's agricultural sector, reviving a ministry of food administration and calling on his officials to improve irrigation systems and supply "high-efficiency" farm machines to rural areas.

In his September speech, Kim signalled that economic development would soon replace upgrading his nuclear programme as his regime's main priority.

Meanwhile, the regime has ramped up its propaganda efforts, such as exhorting citizens to display miniature models of the country's nuclear weapons at home and in the workplace.

More significant, Go argues, are Kim's efforts to clamp down on foreign influences, such as a new law prohibiting his subjects from adopting South Korean patterns of speech. "The intensity of regime propaganda and social oppression is directly connected to the level of economic malaise," says Go. "He wanted to offer 'guns and butter', but all he can offer is the guns."

But others argue that Kim's decisions are consistent with a longer-term political strategy. The years of lockdown simply offered him an opportunity to "rid the country of the menace of foreign influence", says Vienna university's Ward, noting that Kim's campaign to tighten regime control over its once porous border with China stretches back at least a decade. "They've used the pandemic to really cement a far greater level of social control than they otherwise would have been able to do."

While the ordinary North Korean goes hungry, the elites upon whose loyalty Kim depends have benefited from a post-pandemic influx of luxury goods. His foreign minister, Choe Son Hui, was pictured clutching a rare ostrich leather Gucci handbag during a recent visit to Russia's Yuri Gagarin Aviation Plant.

To Kim, wider prosperity is not necessary for regime survival, explains Silberstein. "The most relevant question is not whether the economy is doing great, but whether it is doing well enough to meet the basic needs of a society used to a very low standard of living."

"Hunger appears to be widespread, but starvation appears to be rare," he adds. "It's not the economy Kim dreamt of, but I think it's one that he's perfectly content with."

Biding his time

What is clear is that Kim is growing in confidence as he reaps the benefits of Russian and Chinese protection, leaving the US and its allies at a loss as to how to halt his momentum.

A key concern is that Pyongyang's alliance with Moscow could accelerate his nuclear arsenal, perhaps by boosting North Korean supplies of the plutonium and highly enriched uranium needed to produce nuclear bombs.

"There are no technical hurdles to [Russia] shipping 100 or even 1,000 kilograms of plutonium . . . to North Korea," Siegfried Hecker, a former director of the US Los Alamos national nuclear research laboratory, told the Stimson Center in a recent interview.

Even if Moscow was unwilling to transfer fissile material directly, it could offer Pyongyang composite carbon fibre materials to upgrade centrifuges used to produce highly enriched uranium, warns Go. "Composite materials can be . . . slipped into any container transporting wheat or flour – it would be almost impossible to track," he adds.

North Korea's nuclear progress – and Washington's inability to stop it – has spooked neighbouring South Korea. Last month, Cho Hyun-dong, Seoul's ambassador to the US, told a parliamentary committee he was worried that American faith in the possibility of successful nuclear diplomacy with Pyongyang was fading.

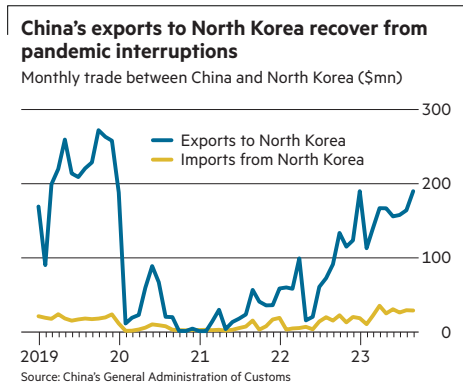
US president Joe Biden attempted to soothe the growing South Korean anxieties this year by agreeing to a new bilateral nuclear consultative group to give Seoul more input into US war planning.

The US military is also deploying more nuclear-capable bombers and submarines on temporary missions to South Korea and, last month, a US B-52H nuclear bomber appeared alongside fighter jets from the US, South Korea and Japan during the three countries' first ever joint aerial drills.

The problem, says Go, is that "the debate in the US is now almost exclusively about how to reassure the South Koreans, which is not the same thing as deterring the North Koreans".

In the meantime, Kim, not yet 40 years old, is free to bide his time and build his power, warns Lankov, of Kookmin University, who says the best explanation for Kim's nuclear weapons development is that he is seriously preparing for a second round of the Korean war, "a threat that will start to become more apparent over the next 10 or 15 years".

"Now, Kim Jong Un has his apparatus in place," Lankov adds. "I assumed it was impossible for the old level of control to be restored – I was wrong."



'If the goal of sanctions is to dissuade North Korea from [developing weapons of mass destruction] they have abjectly failed'

The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES

"Without fear and without favour"

ft.com/opinion

Japan's fiscal and monetary policies are going opposite ways

Tokyo has to consider whether a stimulus will help or hinder its central bank

The Bank of Japan still has "some distance to cover" before it can sustainably meet its 2 per cent inflation target, its governor, Kazuo Ueda, has told the Financial Times Global Boardroom. This is a vital objective. The central bank's slow and cautious approach to normalising its ultra-easy monetary policy therefore makes a great deal of sense. What makes less sense, however – except as a matter of electoral politics – are plans by Japan's government for a fiscal stimulus, much of it timed to arrive in the middle of next year. Fumio Kishida, the prime minister, should think again.

In the latest tweak to its monetary policy, which the BoJ announced at its meeting last month, the central bank changed its 1 per cent limit on 10-year

government bond yields from a strict cap into a "reference" around which it will "nimblely conduct" the buying of assets.

The move gets zero marks for comprehensibility – but the strategy behind it is solid enough. Ueda is trying to keep policy as easy as he can while allowing some adjustment to market pressures, fuelled by the gap between negative interest rates in Japan and 5 per cent interest rates elsewhere, that have forced the yen below ¥150 against the dollar.

Even though Japan's headline inflation rate has been above 2 per cent for many months, there are several reasons why Ueda is correct to delay a substantive tightening of policy. First, as he notes, much of the pressure on Japanese prices is imported, with domestic wages still not rising fast enough to meet the inflation target over the long term.

Second, global interest rates are likely to turn at some point, with Ueda highlighting doubts about the outlook in

China and the US. There is a window in which to embed inflation in Japan, but it may not last for long. Third, while above-target inflation can be tackled by raising interest rates, Japan has little scope to cut rates if prices undershoot. It therefore makes sense to err on the side of higher inflation.

By contrast, the Kishida government's fiscal policy is harder to understand. Last week it announced a stimulus that could, in theory, run to 3 per cent of gross domestic product. Headline numbers usually overstate the real value of a Japanese stimulus.

The package includes quite large tax cuts and rebates for households – although they only last for a year, so their impact on consumption is questionable – as well as some sensible corporate tax changes designed to encourage investment. Overall, economists do not expect a large effect on growth. The package has the strong flavour of an unpopular government trying to curry favour with a grumpy electorate.

The prime minister's plan has the strong flavour of an unpopular government trying to curry favour with a grumpy electorate

At many moments during the past 30 years, Japan needed fiscal stimulus to tackle slack in its economy and the risk of deflation. One purpose of such stimulus was always to get the economy into a healthier equilibrium, with positive inflation, so the business cycle could be managed by changing interest rates, and the budget deficit kept under control. It remains important to avoid a premature tightening of policy. It is perverse, however, to ease fiscal policy just as the central bank is finally moving in the other direction.

Doing so risks making the Bank of Japan's exit from easy policy, which Ueda already describes as a "serious challenge", even harder. It also uses up scarce fiscal space that will be needed in the case of a global economic shock.

Repeatedly during the past three decades, the Bank of Japan has been knocked off course by badly timed tax rises. It would be more than unfortunate if the next mistake went in the other direction.

Opinion Middle East

Israelis grapple with the trauma of October 7

Ewan White



Ayelet Gundar-Goshen

Balloons in all colours of the rainbow welcomed shoppers at the mall in Eilat. Over 30,000 evacuees from along Israel's border had been relocated to the southern resort city, and shops offered them special discounts. But when one of the balloons popped – as balloons do – the reaction was severe: passers-by shrieked in alarm, dropped to the floor or sprinted frantically to the doors. One woman fainted. The massacre of October 7 is playing out before our eyes as a prolonged, collective trauma, and its costs are far from being understood.

More than 1,400 people were murdered in the surprise attack by Hamas on what is now known in Israel as "Black Saturday". Tens of thousands were locked in their homes for many hours under a barrage of rockets. But even those not in the line of

For civic society to recover, it must accept and nurture every spark of life it can still find

fire found themselves bearing direct witness to the atrocities, which Hamas live-streamed. Israelis desperate to know if their relatives or friends had been injured logged on to Hamas media channels and found pictures that will haunt them forever. Mental health support centres are struggling to cope. Symptoms vary: hyper-vigilance and extreme anxiety; fear of leaving the house; nightmares; depression. But when I went to Eilat with a delegation from the Shalvata psychiatric hospital to help survivors, there was another symptom that presented over and over again: guilt.

People ask themselves how their children could have been taken hostage to Gaza, while they themselves are still here. How could their spouse have been murdered, while they survived? How could they have failed to protect their family, their friends, their community? Some can't stop imagining what they could have done differently, and hating themselves for surviving. At one *shiva*, I heard of a father of two who hid in a safe room with his children. The terrorists set the house on fire. He grabbed his little girl and jumped out the window, but left the boy behind. There are no words to describe the horror and guilt.

The guilt gnaws at survivors and keeps many from seeking treatment:

some feel they deserve to suffer, a sort of punishment for staying alive. Others feel they have no right to receive mental healthcare when so many others are suffering more. Survivor guilt is not limited to people who physically survived the massacre. It is a contagious disease, no less than Covid-19.

I met with a woman who had fled after a rocket hit her building. She had not left the home she was staying in for three weeks. At nights she watched fearfully from the window. When I asked how she used to relax, she told me about how much she loved music, especially Taylor Swift. I asked whether she'd be willing to try going for a walk and listen to music. She looked at me in astonishment. "There are 239 kidnapped Israelis, and you're telling me to listen to Taylor Swift on the lawn?"

As far as this patient and many others are concerned, resuming normal life is a desecration, an abandonment of the hostages and the dead. Even people who survived the inferno are thereby confining themselves to a psychological cell. They permit themselves bread and water, but no more, out of a profound and painful identification with those whose worlds have been destroyed. With the entire country bleeding, how can you sip your coffee, go to work, walk in the park?

To be happy, to laugh, to make love – all these seem impossible now. But for civic society to recover, it must accept and nurture every spark of life it can still find. When we refuse to live, we give those who attacked us what they wanted – a reign of terror and sorrow. It turns out that even listening to Taylor Swift can be an act of choosing life. If we are to keep supporting survivors, we must, before anything else, stand back on our own two feet.

Collective trauma has a mental price, but also an economic one. Communities far from the front lines have completely suspended their fabric of life: many are keeping their kids home from school. Shops are bare, cafés are empty, commerce and traffic have all but ceased. Clothing stores and restaurants have put their employees on leave without pay.

Huge billboards along the highways used to advertise products. Now they display smiling faces: Yahel Shoham, three years old, kidnapped by Hamas. Raz Asher, five years old. Aviv Asher, three years old, kidnapped. Tal Goldstein, nine years old, kidnapped. These faces are tattooed on our hearts. So many civilian lives have been lost, first in Israel and now in Gaza. The trauma is so profound, on both sides of the border. It is incredibly difficult to imagine that healing will ever be possible, but bringing home the hostages is the first step for Israelis.

The writer is an Israeli clinical psychologist and author. Translated by Jessica Cohen

Letters

EU needs to rediscover the vim and vigour of its 1992 project

It was disconcerting to read that the EU's relatively poor performing economy is being undermined by a single market hamstrung by bureaucracy and distorted by state aids, impediments addressed four decades ago in the broad context of Europe's "1992" programme ("The EU's plan to regain its edge", The Big Read, November 6).

The goal was to sweep away barriers to trade in goods and services, promote the free movement of people and capital in Europe and act against distortions of competition.

Britain's heft in advancing that agenda was considerable but is now lost to Europe, while the single market itself is diminished in size through Britain's Brexit withdrawal.

British exporters, meanwhile, who were supposed to prosper from a barrier-free Europe, are now enmeshed in stifling bureaucratic and costly post-Brexit trade barriers, resulting in reduced export volumes and lost trade with the EU.

To combat the rebureaucratisation of Europe, including in the UK, policymakers could do no worse than

revisit the original strategy underpinning the creation of the EU's single market and implement it with the same vim and vigour adopted by its two principal proponents, Britain's prime minister Margaret Thatcher and Jacques Delors, then president of the European Commission.

Richard Wright
London NW8, UK

Hidden FX fees are not just a holidaymaker's headache

Fabio Panetta, European Central Bank executive board member and incoming governor of the Bank of Italy, is right to point out that cross-border payments are "prohibitively expensive and sluggish" (Markets Insight, November 1). But his thesis, that a lack of governmental co-operation and adequate technology are the root cause of this problem, is wide of the mark. The real reason is a chronic lack of competition. For years, retail banks have wilfully, and without supervision, misled customers about the cost of foreign exchange (FX) to the tune of billions of pounds. Hidden fees affect everyone from small businesses purchasing from overseas suppliers, to British holidaymakers, to those remitting money to their families out of or into the UK.

That is why we and more than a dozen of our peers in the UK financial services industry appealed directly to the chancellor in July to make the UK the first country to enforce transparency on foreign exchange transactions, something that would in turn open up competition.

The government should mandate that the total cost of currency conversions, including any mark-up or margin, is transparent; create a clear definition for terms such as "conversion charge" and make FX providers use the same aggregated mid-market rate. The Financial Conduct Authority, as regulator, has an important role to play in issuing clear guidance to all companies serving people with foreign currency.

Unlike other areas of financial regulation, this is a straightforward problem to resolve. Technology is not a barrier.

Kristo Käärmann
Founder and Chief Executive, Wise
London E1, UK

Businesses say 'give us self-policing over red tape'

I was not surprised to read the article "Accounting watchdog scraps plans for full-scale overhaul of boardroom rules" (Report, November 8). The pressure on companies and boardrooms has never been greater, with high inflation rates and rising costs – overhauling boardroom rules would be yet another set of obligations to adhere to.

But positively, our research among senior executives working for FTSE-listed and private companies across the UK with combined revenues of more than £45.8bn shows that many feel they are reporting to the highest standards anyway.

It makes business sense. And it's self-policing rather than being driven by red tape, as investors are expecting and demanding increased ESG reporting. Those businesses who fail to provide it will simply be left behind.

Rachel Gardiner
Director – Head of Prescribed Roles
Newgate Compliance (Channel Islands)
Limited, St Peter Port, Guernsey



Don't let hydrogen distract us from better alternatives

Camilla Palladino's article ("Ditching hydrogen for home heating makes sense", Opinion, October 27) mentions the possibility of making hydrogen from the electrolysis of water and renewable energy and that it can be a direct substitute for natural gas. Challenges arise because of the physics, chemistry, engineering, geology and consequent economics of hydrogen.

If offshore, water is salty, meaning desalination and its costs must be factored into its production using wind farm sources. While hydrogen can be blended with methane at low concentrations, boiler and oven hob flames will not ignite when the mix is more than about 20 per cent.

Hydrogen also causes steel embrittlement, meaning that many pipelines would need to be lined or replaced. Being small, nimble and diffuse, hydrogen is hard to entrap and store for when it is needed. The best repositories are found where rock salt deposits occur in the subsurface such as in Cheshire, eastern England, and Northern Ireland, but these do not occur everywhere, and none exists onshore in Scotland or Wales. As no natural hydrogen has been found during six decades of subsurface exploration in the UK, use of buried geological reservoirs remains unproven.

Hydrogen undoubtedly has its uses (eg in fertiliser and transport), but its wider use, including for domestic heating and cooking, is problematic. Companies owning gas networks will disagree, but they have a vested interest in avoiding ending up with stranded assets.

As the failed experience at Whitby Hydrogen Village shows, local communities have yet to be convinced of the benefits that hydrogen will bring to the home. Until these issues are resolved, hydrogen will be an expensive and inefficient solution that distracts from better alternatives as the UK navigates a pathway to net zero.

Professor John Underhill
University Director for Energy Transition
University of Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, UK

Time Spain considered a full-fledged federal system

You are right to say it is a gamble worth taking, for Pedro Sánchez, Spanish prime minister and leader of the Socialist party, to offer a bill granting amnesty for the Catalan politicians, officials and activists who played a role in organising the 2017 referendum and declaration of independence (FT View, November 7).

As has been seen in the daily protests in Madrid and elsewhere, there are many in Spain who strenuously object to an amnesty for those who blatantly violated the law.

But it's a gamble worth taking, provided the two pro-independence parties – Together for Catalonia and the Catalan Republic Left – agree to support a comprehensive negotiation. This would be undertaken by the new Sánchez government to address fully the grievances that gave rise to the 2006 statute that granted Catalonia greater autonomy – a statute that, despite its approval by overwhelming majorities in both the Spanish and Catalan parliaments, was subsequently thrown out by the Constitutional Court.

As part of that negotiation, the Socialist and Catalan parties should agree to consider whether Spain and its historic regions should move beyond the ambiguous halfway-house of "autonomous communities" within a unitary state to a full-fledged federal system of government in which the regional governments, including the government of Catalonia, have substantially more autonomy.

David R Cameron
Professor Emeritus of Political Science
Yale University, New Haven, CT, US

Your Catalan editorial and its cryptic conclusion

You urge Spain's acting prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, to push for what most Spaniards believe is a high stakes and self-serving political bid to stay in power (FT View, November 7) and yet you also list a number of reasons why he should not take that course.

You rightly say there is no consensus for the move either in Catalonia or in the rest of Spain. The wholesale pardon for those who staged an illegal self-determination referendum in October 2017 and declared a Catalan republic "will outrage many Spaniards". The prospect already has, judged by the massive street protests in Madrid and elsewhere.

The jury is out on whether it is constitutional. Sánchez himself, who is perceived as a "slippery politician", deemed an amnesty as "unacceptable" before the result of the snap general election he called in July made his renewed mandate dependent on the separatist votes in parliament.

But you say "it is a gamble worth taking – if not entirely for the right reasons".

Really? That is pretty cryptic.
Tom Burns Marañón
Adviser, Eurocofin, Madrid, Spain

ESG's role in never-ending quest for alpha is central

The environmental, social and governance investing movement is indeed "facing a mountain of troubles", as Aswath Damodaran highlights in his recent opinion piece ("ESG is beyond redemption and deserves to RIP", Opinion, October 25).

Whether it's Florida real estate, California manufacturing, upstream energy or across large samples of public companies exploring a carbon premium or rewards to green investments, all show that climate risk and opportunities can be material, particularly as investors become more aware of the climate transition.

Where we differ most fundamentally with Damodaran is in his conclusion. He claims that ESG is beyond redemption. I see the ESG movement as navigating a shakeout in which virtue signalling, greenwashing and hype slowly lose out to the effort to add ESG factors to the playbook of activism, engagement, portfolio construction and factor models.

ESG investing will never outperform the market any more than any other investment strategy or criteria can. However, ESG factors will increasingly be a central element of the toolkit that we use in training the investors and professors of the future and that they use in the never-ending quest for alpha. This incorporation will generate some extremely profitable trading opportunities for some investors and losses for others with the effect of increasing the efficiency in the long-term allocation of capital.

Witold Henisz
Vice Dean and Faculty Director, ESG Initiative, Deloitte & Touche Professor of Management, The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, US

By his own logic, Trump shouldn't be allowed to run

Martin Wolf spells out all the negative consequences for the world of a Trump victory in next year's US presidential race (Opinion, November 8).

Yet logically Donald Trump cannot be eligible to run for the presidency, because under the US constitution a president can only be elected for a maximum of two terms. As he denies that he lost the last election, he must therefore think himself to be the current president and therefore in the midst of his second term.

The only way he could be allowed to stand is if he admits that he lost the election, and that he was lying when he said that he had won. Let us hope that this argument will save the world!
Christopher Cruickshank
Kraainem, Belgium

Correction

● Valeriy Zaluzhnyi is commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian armed forces, not chief of general staff as wrongly stated in an article on November 8.

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Opinion

To fix towns, politicians must not forget about cities

BRITAIN

Andy Haldane



Among the most eye-catching of the announcements during this year's party conferences concerned towns. Conservative ministers announced plans to regenerate 55 struggling UK towns, while Labour proposed the creation of a number of "new towns" located along the M1 motorway corridor.

The politics of these announcements are easy to understand. Towns are home to more than half the UK population. More than that, they will be a key political battleground in the next election. With the Conservative party tending historically to dominate the rural shires, and the Labour party the cities, it is towns that are home to the most sacred of psephological animals – the swing voter.

Many UK towns are ripe for regeneration after years of neglect and both parties' proposals contain encouraging elements. The 10-year funding for towns provided in the government plan is a clear and positive break from past short-term financing. So too is the proposal to give full discretion on spending priorities to a wide set of local stakeholders, through a Towns board.

As for the Labour plans, new towns offer the tantalising prospect of developing "greyfield" land – the plentiful but unlovely bits of the greenbelt – to support increased housebuilding and other public and private development. New towns would be relatively unencumbered by the Nimbyism of existing residents and local planning perils.

In other respects, however, the economics are questionable. First, in their scale. Extra government financing for towns – £20m per town over 10 years – amounts to less than £50 extra per person per year. By comparison, local government funds, per head of population per year, have been cut by around £300 since 2010.

More curiously still, the government

plan was justified as rebalancing the scales historically tilted towards cities. Yet there is strong evidence that it is the cities outside London which account for the UK's spatial underperformance. Raising their performance to the levels of European counterparts could yield a dividend of £100bn per year for the UK.

The cities versus towns distinction is itself a completely false dichotomy.

Chronic lack of spending on transport connections is partly to blame for underperformance

With the right connectivity, the benefits of successful cities spill over to satellite towns – their relationship is symbiotic. So a number of well-connected UK towns – such as Luton, Swindon and Basingstoke – have levels of gross domestic product per head above non-London cities. It is differences between regions, rather than within them, that make the UK an international outlier.

The chronic underperformance of British cities and their surrounding regions is easy to diagnose: it stems from underinvestment. In cities, levels of investment per head differ massively: Newcastle has a third of Manchester's and an eighth of the London borough of Westminster's.

A chronic lack of investment in improved transport connections is partly to blame, both within cities and to their surrounding towns and villages. Only 40 per cent of people can reach their nearest city centre within 30 minutes in the UK, compared to two-thirds in comparable EU cities. Many satellite towns end up stranded, failing to harvest the spillover benefits of proximity to the centre, leading to widening disparities between regions.

If we turn to the Labour proposals, many of the same questions arise. If new towns are poorly connected to surrounding cities and towns, and fail to benefit from their existing skills, culture and business activity, they will be stranded at birth. New towns are not new. Those built in the 1950s and 60s have average levels of GDP per head

below the national average. For every Milton Keynes, there is a Thamesmead, Cumbernauld or Runcorn.

As international experience makes clear, unlocking potential prosperity in the UK means releasing the potential of its city-regions, nurturing that strong symbiotic relationship between cities and surrounding towns. It is no coincidence that regeneration success stories – both internationally in places like Detroit, Pittsburgh and Dortmund and in the UK in places like Docklands and Stratford – followed that recipe.

Thriving towns are as good as any metric of success – not just politically, but economically and socially. But the means matter in achieving that end. The road to success is not through subscale, towns-centric initiatives. It is through a long-term plan for city-regions, connecting the satellites and supporting the stranded towns and villages. The UK's politicians would better serve their citizens' needs, rural and urban, this way.

The writer, an FT contributing editor, is chief executive of the Royal Society of Arts

Progress towards net zero is slow but steady

ECONOMICS

Chris Giles



Bad news on the climate and energy transition has been impossible to avoid this autumn. Devastating floods have rocked Libya, Slovenia, Greece and Hong Kong, while drought hinders trade through the Panama Canal. These natural disasters are partly the consequence of global temperatures breaking further records this year.

If the climate news has not been sufficiently grim, environmental policies seem beset with roadblocks and squabbles. This autumn the EU has backtracked on plans to toughen emission reduction plans, Germany has brought additional coal-fired power plants back into operation for the winter, with its ministers locked in battles with France, seeking to prevent its neighbour from maintaining and expanding its prowess in clean nuclear power.

Last month's annual meeting of the IMF and World Bank could come up only with the worst form of weasel words on climate, pledging to "act collectively, as appropriate, to support climate transitions, taking into account country-specific circumstances". This fell far short of the necessary shift in finance to end poorer countries' reliance on fossil fuels.

And as politicians squabble ahead of the COP 28 conference this month, the renewable energy sector is beset by funding problems amid rising costs and high interest rates. The capital-intensive wind power sector is encountering turbulence with Siemens seeking gov-

Fossil fuel use will probably peak this year and begin to fall from 2024 at an accelerating pace

ernment support and Ørsted, the world's largest offshore wind developer, abandoning two US projects.

The consequences appear inevitable and dire: a continued rise in global temperatures and a global inability to meet the challenge.

But stop a second. All of the above is depressing and true – but also only half the story. Scratch the surface a little and progress towards decarbonisation is still moving rapidly, helped by a continued sharp reduction in the costs of mitigating global warming.

Take Germany. The nation's politicians have been rightly criticised for standing in the way of France's decision to decarbonise using nuclear power. But Berlin capitulated in that spat. The fear of Germany becoming a heavy user of coal is not supported by electricity generation statistics. Coal use in the power sector was down more than 20 per cent in the first half of this year.

With similarly impressive figures across the EU, the US and China, fossil fuel generation of electricity rose only marginally in the first half of 2023. In the power sector, fossil fuel use will probably peak this year and begin to fall from 2024 at an accelerating pace.

Solar power installation is still rising quickly and solar manufacturing capacity rose 70 per cent in 2022 and is on track to double again by 2024. The latest International Energy Agency figures show an increase of 268 terawatt hours in solar photovoltaic electrical generation in 2022 – more than twice the level expected as recently as 2018. Every year the IEA forecasts solar installations will be a little higher than the previous one and each time has been proved extremely pessimistic. This is the sort of forecasting error that everyone can be happy about.

Along with the rapid shift to renewable electricity, we have also witnessed price effects from the energy crisis improving efficiency of power use, which gives us some breathing space to enhance the grids, essential for progress to net zero. To get there, the IEA recommends a clear focus on renewable power generation and greater energy efficiency until 2030. The good news is that this part of the process is "well understood, most often cost effective and taking place at an accelerating rate".

Clearly, the world is not yet on track to defeat global warming. There is still much to do. But despite relentless difficulties, the trade-offs are actually getting easier. Long may that continue.

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The office is dead – long live the office

BUSINESS

Gillian Tett



High-rolling entrepreneurs such as Adam Neumann, co-founder of WeWork, and Masayoshi Son, creator of SoftBank, do not usually take Latin lessons. Nor do most real estate moguls, or their financiers.

That is a pity. For as the dust settles after the implosion of desk-renting start-up WeWork – whose putative valuation has collapsed from \$47bn to almost nothing, creating chastening losses for its backer SoftBank – it is worth pondering the concept at the core of Neumann's dream, namely: the "office".

In modern parlance, this word is synonymous with a building. No wonder: physical "offices" epitomised white-collar work in 20th-century western culture. Hence the widely popular television show of that name.

But, ironically, the original Latin roots of the word had nothing to do with buildings. Instead, *officium* meant "task", "service" or "[divine] position". This is why English speakers talk about politicians "running for office".

On one level, this is just a cultural and etymological curiosity. But on another, it should remind investors of two crucial

points. First, our working practices, like other elements of culture, are never fixed in stone, even if each generation thinks their social patterns are inevitable, proper and permanent. Memes and mores change.

Second, in our post-pandemic, hyper-digitised world, that Latin concept of *officium* – work being about tasks and people, rather than buildings – is newly relevant. The "office" culture is heading back to the future, albeit in a way most investors in commercial real estate never expected.

The issue at stake involves more than whether people are working from home or not. Yes, during the pandemic, levels of remote working soared dramatically. And while they have since dipped, the practice remains widespread. A recent survey by the US Federal Reserve found that a quarter of employees were engaged in hybrid or remote work, up from 10 per cent in 2018, and this proportion is expected to rise. A Gallup survey puts the hybrid ratio even higher, at about 50 per cent.

But what is even more intriguing than working from home is an associated – and subtle – shift in the mental map of work. In the 20th century, "offices" were associated in the west with temporal, spatial and social boundaries. The idealised vision of work (if not the lived reality) was that this happened outside the home, at defined hours (nine to five, say), with non-family colleagues and at a defined life-stage (for instance, before the age of 65).

But a combination of the pandemic



and digitisation has blurred boundaries: more people have learnt to blend their home and work spaces, toil at a range of hours and "work" beyond retirement. This was (and is), of course, entirely normal for most societies during the sweep of human history. But it is different from 20th-century norms.

Some executives hope this shift is temporary. A survey by the accounting firm KPMG found that two-thirds of executives "believe that there will be a full return to office in three years' time". Maybe so. But I doubt that those last-century norms will return in full, not least because digitisation is fostering another subtle cultural shift in the direction of personalised consumer choice.

A generation is emerging whose members assume it is normal for con-

WeWork's implosion should teach investors the folly of modelling the future on the recent past

sumers to customise their food, media, music, politics, families and identities according to individual tastes. And this pick 'n' mix approach also shapes attitudes to work: employees increasingly demand flexibility in their jobs, even if they are going into an office, and many employers so far feel compelled to offer that.

This feels infuriating for many older executives. But it seems natural and desirable for younger workers. Hence the challenge for commercial real estate investors today.

In some senses, Neumann himself was highly attuned to these cultural shifts. The whole *raison d'être* of WeWork was to offer flighty gig workers (and others) the ability to pick and mix contracts in a flexible manner.

But since WeWork had leases that were on average 15 years in duration, compared with customers' membership agreements that averaged just 1.5 years, there was an asset-liability mismatch. This, coupled with sky-high leverage and a wrong-headed belief that the new generation of gig workers would wish to

go to an office (albeit a trendier version) as much as their parents did, sowed the seeds of WeWork's demise.

That does not mean other co-working models will necessarily fail; if they are better run, they may chime with the times. Nor does the downfall of WeWork mean that urban spaces will die. Although office vacancies are high, and stranded assets are proliferating, mixed-used districts and buildings that offer flexibility can still thrive. Or at least they will if policymakers have the imagination to amend zoning laws, which are often ridiculously rigid.

But the key lesson that CRE investors – and SoftBank – need to learn from WeWork is the folly of modelling the future on the basis of the recent past in times of cultural flux, and amid gushes of excessively cheap money.

Or, to put it another way, the "office" is not dead; but it now thrives as much in its Latin form as in the 20th-century sense. Maybe it is time for a clever entrepreneur to create an *officium* app?

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Russia and China are opening a new anti-western front in the Arctic

Kristina Spohr

On October 21 – exactly two weeks after what appeared to be deliberate EU-pipe and cable breakages in the Baltic Sea – Nato Admiral Rob Bauer made a major statement. "We must prepare for the fact that conflict can present itself at any moment and in any domain, including the Arctic."

With war continuing to rage in Ukraine, Bauer believed that the "Russian threat" could also "come from the High North". He looked towards China, too, which has significantly intensified its activity in the region.

After Finland's accession to Nato earlier this year, Russia finds itself flanked in the west, north and east by the alliance. Yet it asserts geostrategic pre-eminence in the Arctic, its immense military strength combining with its control of growing commercial activity

on the Northern Sea Route (NSR) – Arctic waters to which Moscow lays extensive legal claims.

China's entry on to this scene, meanwhile, has been remarkable. Over the past decade, it has pumped some \$90bn into Russian Arctic fossil-fuel and mineral projects. Gradually, it has also begun to co-operate with Moscow over the creation of its "Polar Silk Road" – the newest strand of Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative.

Beijing's Arctic ambitions, rooted in overwhelming economic leverage, were thrown into relief this year when western sanctions began to bite in Moscow. In March, Russia and China agreed to establish a joint umbrella organisation for traffic along the NSR. In April, a bilateral Arctic maritime agreement was signed by the FSB Border Guard Service and the Chinese Coast Guard. This formally pulled China, a self-declared "near-Arctic state," into the region's security arrangements.

By July, a regular Chinese NSR container-line service between St Petersburg and Shanghai had started and Russia made its first crude oil shipments to

Asia. Using non-ice class oil tankers, Russia has discarded good practice on ice-protection, putting profit over environmental security.

Geographically, Russia holds the reins, although China controls the purse strings. Russia operates its Arctic ports; its state atomic corporation, Rosatom, grants foreign ships NSR traffic permits plus atomic icebreaker assistance. Torgmoll, a Chinese transport and logistics

Beijing's ambitions were thrown into relief when sanctions began to bite in Moscow

group and its newest subsidiary, NewNew Shipping Line, serve Sino-Russian Arctic cabotage and commerce. How this Arctic Sino-Russian rapprochement is to be understood, how far the Chinese state is directly involved in this bilateral web of trade and military ties and what Xi's Arctic intentions really are, remain unclear.

The issue of potentially hostile joint Sino-Russian activities, however, suddenly surfaced over the infrastructure incidents in the Gulf of Finland on October 7-8 affecting the Finno-Estonian Balticconnector pipeline and two fibre-optic undersea cables linking Estonia with Finland and Sweden.

Automatic identification system data revealed that NNSL's NewNew Polar Bear, seemingly in tandem with Rosatomflot's Svmorput, had steamed over all three sites at the times of the ruptures. The Estonian prime minister, Kaja Kallas, surmised that these acts of possibly intentional damage were "related". The Finns agreed, pointing to deep drag marks around the pipe and a broken anchor lifted from the seabed, even before photos of the Polar Bear in Arkhangelsk on October 22 showed the ship without its anchor.

Other details to have emerged have merely fanned speculation. These include a crew substitution on the Polar Bear in Kaliningrad just prior to the ruptures and the ship's reluctance to engage with Finland's coast guard as it began its journey back to the Pacific.

Although the focus was on the Polar Bear, Russian complicity cannot be ruled out. While China has so far shown restraint in Europe's North, Russia has both a motive and a history of intimidating neighbours.

Yet China doubtless fears that a weak Russia could "lose" to the west in Ukraine. Seeing much to gain from a common pursuit of a "post-western", polycentric world, China probably calculates the costs of limited acts of provocation against Nato to be low.

Whatever the truth, the dual Sino-Russian presence around the Baltic Sea incidents has certainly unsettled Nato allies. Northern waters appear to be contested maritime environments – commercially, politically and increasingly militarily.

Nato wants to prevent conflict. But it must also deter enemies and ensure that its infrastructure is secure, Bauer said. The Arctic waterways should stay "free and navigable" for everyone's benefit.

The writer is professor of international history at LSE and author of *Post Wall, Post Square*

Lex.

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Multi-managers/pay: pods of wails

A full pot-kettle-black emergency has been declared in the vicinity of this week's Hong Kong investment conference. First responders in high viz jackets have been directing bystanders away from the irony spillage. As a hedge fund tycoon, Paul Marshall was not the obvious candidate to call out the payment of "incredible amounts" to hedge fund managers.

It would be equally easy to dismiss his comments as the sour grapes of a traditional hedge at the astonishing rise of so-called "multi-managers".

Yet soaring pay suggests the multi-manager platform model is knocking up against growth constraints.

These highly leveraged hedge fund groups diversify investments across a wide range of asset classes. US-based Millennium, for example, has in excess of 300 teams (or "pods") each with an individual strategy. Sophisticated risk systems prevent big drawdowns.

The multi-managers, whose other breakout star is Citadel, have over the past decade outperformed traditional hedge funds in absolute terms. But, on a risk-adjusted basis, they have blown their rivals out of the water. Since 2012 they have returned 8.2 per cent a year on average, compared with 7.5 per cent for traditional hedge funds, Goldman Sachs says. Multi-managers did so with lower year-to-year volatility and less correlation to the underlying market.

Their stronger performance net of fees is even more impressive given that their charges tend to be substantially higher. Multi-managers have accordingly generated much of the growth in hedge fund assets under management over the past five years.

After so much success, observers should question whether "peak pod" approaches. There are two other reasons to do so beyond pure mean reversion. The first is that size matters. If enough money is poured into this group, even the most recondite trading strategies will get crowded.

Next, multi-manager platforms are people-intensive. Already, platforms account for about a quarter of all hedge fund staff globally, despite having 8 per cent of the industry's assets. Growth comes from seeding new pods, with new teams and new strategies.

Talent is, by its nature, a scarce

resource. Reports that platforms are wrestling managers from each other in a "kind of battery-hen farming merry-go-round", in Marshall's words, suggest we might be bumping up against this constraint.

SoftBank: no safety net

The \$54.5bn listing of SoftBank's chip unit Arm Holdings gave analysts good reason to expect a positive group net income figure for the September quarter. Perhaps that was why Masayoshi Son, founder of the Japanese tech investment group, was not on hand to deliver the results with his usual dramatic flair.

The group announced a disappointing net loss of ¥931bn (\$6.2bn). If SoftBank cannot turn a profit with a boost as big as Arm, when can it? The flagship Vision Fund segment has been hit by valuation declines of tech investments and the bankruptcy of WeWork.

There are signs of improvement. More listings, including the Arm IPO, helps the Vision Fund unit improve its liquidity profile. The business has lost \$53bn in the past two years. SoftBank has been cashing in on its stake in Alibaba, which reduces its exposure to geopolitical risk. But the disposals remove a safety net valued by SoftBank shareholders. For example, SoftBank posted a profit for the September quarter last year, thanks partly to sales of Alibaba shares.

The timing could have been better if Son was going to cash in on its most lucrative investment. China's tech crackdown has seen Alibaba shares dive 72 per cent from their 2020 peak.

Shares of SoftBank have dropped 8 per cent in the past year despite rising interest in tech, especially artificial intelligence. Its funds' gross multiple on invested capital, a measure of the value a private equity investment has generated, for its realised investments is at 1.8 times, underperforming peers such as EQT of Sweden.

The multiple on invested capital on SoftBank's investment in Arm is just over three times, a far cry from a figure for Alibaba of more than 1,300 times.

SoftBank funds made a loss on the value of 72 per cent of its portfolio companies as of June. Investors can

Sugar: granular inflammation

A supply squeeze has pushed up the price of the sweetest commodity. The effects of El Niño are partly to blame. These have brought dry weather to India and Thailand, the world's second and third-largest producers. That in turn has reduced yields.

Sugar rush

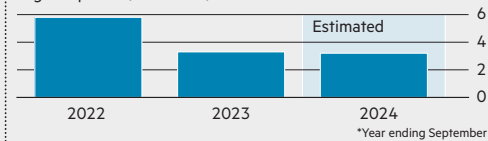
Last price (\$ per lb)



FT graphic. Source: Bloomberg

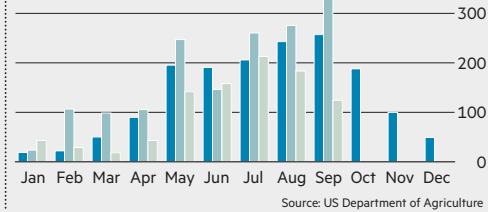
India is world's second-largest producer

Sugar exports* (mn tonnes)



Dry weather in Thailand reduces its crop

Monthly precipitation in 2022 and 2023 versus long-term average (mm)



Source: US Department of Agriculture

Sugar wears away tooth enamel. Its surging price, up 41 per cent in the past year, has also eaten into consumer budgets.

Paying an extra 40 pence per kilogramme in the supermarket may not break budgets in the UK. But, in developing economies with expanding populations, a sugar rush is under way. Supply is tight. Consumption of these moreish calories shows no sign of abating.

Blame the El Niño weather phenomenon. This can cause unusual and violent weather patterns. Top producers Brazil, India and Thailand have local issues too. For the largest, Brazil, production is not the problem. This year its output has climbed 10-15 per cent compared with two

years ago. Getting sugar out of the country is tough, however. Heavy rain plus congestion at important ports such as Santos, near São Paulo, is squeezing world supply. Do not expect any expansion of capacity before mid-2025, says senior analyst John Stansfield at DNEXT Intelligence.

India and Thailand have the opposite woe. Dry weather has axed sugarcane yields. Number two producer India has curbed its exports. One forecast from the US Department of Agriculture has India's exports falling again in the year to September 2024, down by almost half over two years.

Meanwhile, demand in emerging economies has not stopped. Countries such as Indonesia and Egypt have plenty of festivals that revolve around

sugary treats and fast-growing populations, say experts at Marex. Strong demand in the Middle East and south-east Asia regions should mean a supply deficit of 5mn tonnes of sugar worldwide this year.

Higher sugar prices have boosted the fortunes of some listed producers, such as Brazil's São Martinho. Its locally listed shares have climbed by a quarter over the past year, and now trade at about five times forward ebitda. As with larger rival Cosan, a fair bit of its sugar goes into making ethanol fuel, widely used in Brazil. About half of Brazil's sugar crop is turned into ethanol.

Consumers worldwide will take more lumps by paying steep prices for the next year at least.

only hope Son was absent from results presentations because he was hunting out a safety net to replace Alibaba.

Arm: architectural drawings

Newly listed companies do not enjoy long grace periods. After the hype of initial public offering roadshows, the reality of a company's first set of quarterly earnings can be a let-down.

Slowing growth tripped up Facebook. High losses weighed on Etsy. On Wednesday, chip architect Arm lost steam with downbeat forecasts.

Arm's IPO encouraged investors to focus more on what the company could become than what it is now. It earns

money from licensing fees charged for access to its designs and royalty fees on sales. Its technology is used in nearly every smartphone but this is a saturated and slowing market.

The hope is that expansion into cloud computing, self-driving cars and artificial intelligence – areas that require specialised, more expensive chips – will power future growth.

Excitement around AI infrastructure in particular has been responsible for lifting Arm's value. Its near \$56bn market cap is 40 per cent higher than the amount Nvidia offered three years ago in a cash and stock deal. But at 18 times forecast sales, Arm trails Nvidia's equivalent valuation.

Based in the UK, listed in the US and 90.6 per cent owned by Japan's SoftBank, the company has a sprawling

footprint. Like Nvidia, its business is also exposed to the geopolitical risks related to the US and China's tech tit-for-tat. China accounted for about a quarter of Arm's sales in the last fiscal year.

But such risks have been ignored in favour of the role Arm could play in an AI revolution. So far, though, there is little evidence of an AI-related growth spurt.

The lumpy nature of licensing deals means that revenue in the three months to September 30 beat expectations by rising 28 per cent, but forecasts for the current quarter were underwhelming. It shows up in costs. Arm added nearly 1,000 employees over the past year.

Another large licensing deal is needed to raise post-IPO spirits.

Auto loans: repo trading

Americans splurged on cars in a big way during the pandemic. Auto loan originations in the US hit a record \$747bn last year following a brisk 2021, says data from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Total outstanding debt in the sector stood at \$1.6tn at the end of September, or \$260bn higher than at the start of 2020.

Four banks dominate vehicle lending in the US – Ally Financial, Capital One, Wells Fargo and JPMorgan Chase. Auto loans have been a bright spot for them amid a sluggish recovery in broader loan growth. But cracks are appearing. Loan delinquency is rising and used-car prices are falling. Investors in auto lenders and low-rated bonds backed by car loans should buckle up.

High inflation and interest rates are squeezing the finances of American households, particularly lower-income ones. The percentage of auto borrowers at least 90 days overdue on their loans hit 2.53 per cent during the third quarter. That is the highest level in over 13 years, according to Fed data.

Lower used-car prices mean many motorists who took out loans during the buying frenzy of the past two years now owe far more than their vehicles are worth. The Manheim US Used Vehicle Value index is down 23 per cent from its peak in December 2021.

Negative equity, when the amount of debt owed exceeds the vehicle's worth, is becoming more commonplace, say credit report group TransUnion and market researcher JD Power. Lenders repossess the cars of borrowers in default. Falling used-vehicle prices means they are less likely to make enough selling the cars of defaulted borrowers to cover unpaid loan balances. The problem is acute for loans made at a peak in used-car prices in 2021 and 2022.

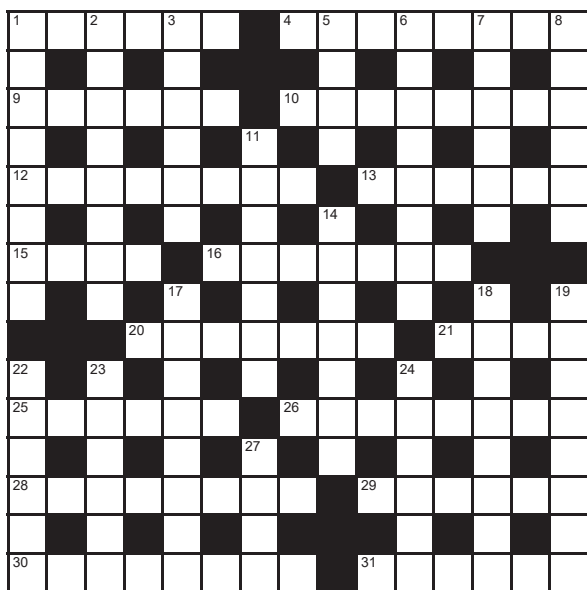
Underscoring this point, auto loan charge-offs at the biggest consumer banks are now well above 2019 levels, says Moody's. Shares of Ally Financial and Capital One are up 7 per cent and 14 per cent respectively this year. Time for investors to step on the brakes.

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ACROSS

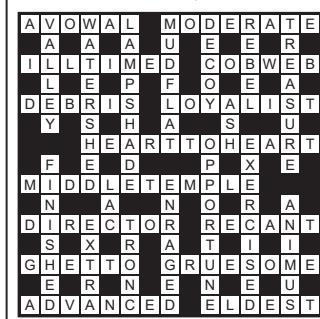
- Relish predicament (6)
- Exercise had negative effect for spinner on machine (5,3)
- Loud, somewhat vulgar is he? (6)
- First and foremost, omnipotent? (5,3)
- Place to go wild isn't real (8)
- It's hard to get down from the Gods, less hard moving (6)
- Free bar (4)
- Sign behind cut in gymnast's garment (7)
- Malice in tedious mischief (7)
- Life form partial to Sartre, existentialist (4)
- Record broken by university yearly (6)
- Find saucer finished (8)
- Rule in force, go through (8)
- Diocese on the boil (6)
- Decisive battle later rectified in court (8)
- A sea around America, diverted (6)

DOWN

- Boxer dog, one on heel (8)
- Wound I have dabbed with rag briefly, healing (8)
- So tile, when loose, hit the roof (4,2)
- Precious little thing, girl initially expelled from school (4)
- Can: a vessel guzzled by parrot (8)
- Spirit, variety unknown (6)
- Banker, person telling stories? (6)
- Book group (7)
- Dark substance in hole illuminated at night (7)
- Madonna originally great as extraordinary icon (8)
- Shift a half of girder, vast weight (8)
- Help turn around day with minimum of ease (8)
- Two hands required for fruit (6)
- Child that's female held by granny in it (6)
- Ultimate in yells, the best shriek! (6)
- Case of Seoul in old, old capital (4)

JOTTER PAD

Solution 17,570



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