

FINANCIAL TIMES

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INTERNATIONAL NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

ASIA

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Moldova fears Russia blamed for tensions

Women took part in a demonstration yesterday in Chişinău, Moldova, to demand the resignation of the country's pro-west president Maia Sandu. The protest, organised by the pro-Russia SoR party, came amid heightened political tension following warnings of a security threat to the nation of 2.6m people, which borders Ukraine. US and European officials have raised concerns about an alleged Russian plot to topple Sandu's government. US secretary of state Antony Blinken said this weekend that Washington was alarmed by "some of the plotting that we've seen coming from Russia" and directed at Moldova. Sandu said Russia was seeking to "destabilise society" and "bring people into the streets to change the government and create a pro-Russia government". Moscow has denied the claims. **US warns China over Russia page 2**



Victor Calabrese/Reuters

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Poland calls for Nato to guarantee Ukraine's security after end of war

• First anniversary of invasion • Biden set to visit Warsaw • US and Germany cautious on pledges

ROULA KHALAF — MUNICH
RAPHAEL MINDER — WARSAW
HENRY FOY — BRUSSELS
Poland's president has called on Nato to give Ukraine postwar security guarantees, on the eve of US president Joe Biden's visit to Warsaw to reaffirm the west's support for Kyiv a year into Russia's war. Andrzej Duda told the Financial Times that promises of security guarantees "would be important" for Ukraine and the morale of its soldiers by underscoring "this feeling that Nato stands with them". The call from Duda comes as he prepares to host Biden during a visit this week to mark the anniversary of Russia's invasion. Ukraine is aware that it cannot join

Nato now, but Kyiv is expecting "partnership" with "some kind of security guarantees", Duda said in an interview on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference this weekend. Duda urged Biden to reaffirm "in very strong terms" that the US stands unreservedly behind Nato's Article 5, the collective-defence clause treating any attack on a Nato member state as an attack against it. The security guarantees that Ukraine

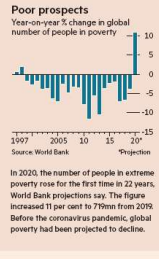
has sought would be structured differently, in effect binding leading Nato members such as the US, UK and France into providing military assistance in the event of a future attack on Ukraine. Former Nato secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who co-wrote a proposal for Ukraine's postwar security with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's chief of staff, has described such guarantees as similar to what Israel enjoys from the US. In Munich, US and German officials played down the need for security guarantees at this stage, arguing that the military support that is being provided to Ukraine is the assurance Kyiv needs. But Ukraine is adamant that it needs more binding guarantees of military support, after its experience of the 1994

Badapest Memorandum. Under that deal, Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons in exchange for promises from Russia, the UK and the US not to use military force against it. Kyiv applied for Nato membership in September, even though allies acknowledge that this is not a short-term prospect as long as the war rages on. Duda's call for guarantees would require raising Washington's pledges to Ukraine beyond what Biden has talked about recently. Some other Nato nations also remain wary of binding promises for fear of being dragged into a war with Russia, and instead argue for strengthening Ukraine's military to ensure that it can defend itself. "There is a pretty robust debate going on about security guarantees, but I

really don't think President Biden will want to put this forward now," said Michal Baranowski, director of the Warsaw office of the German Marshall Fund think-tank. Instead, he said, the US administration is pushing ahead with "a porcupine strategy", which means "arm Ukrainians to the teeth so that they can deal with Russia directly". Germany last week chided Poland and other owners of Leopard tanks for not sending them to Kyiv more quickly. Duda said that delays reflected the need to guarantee the availability of spare parts. "It is Germany who is the only producer of spare parts... So unless Germany supplies those spare parts, we have a problem with them," he said. **Reports & analysis page 2**

The US is pushing ahead with 'a porcupine strategy', which means 'arm Ukrainians to the teeth'

Datawatch



No leniency for those who stormed Brazil's Congress
Amnesty call rejected — PAGE 4

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Deutsche Bank criticised by banking regulators over forex mis-selling probe

OLAF STORBECK — FRANKFURT
Europe's top banking regulators have told Deutsche Bank that they are "not satisfied" with its probe into the mis-selling of risky foreign exchange derivatives in Spain, according to people briefed on the matter. The European Central Bank and Germany's watchdog BaFin have expressed frustration with the probe, code-named "Project Teal", which began in the second half of 2019 and is about to conclude, the people told the Financial Times. The probe has found that Deutsche Bank staff acted disingenuously, exploited flaws in the bank's controls and broke EU rules by selling complex foreign exchange derivatives to small and medium-sized Spanish companies, the FT reported earlier this month.

However, regulators have chided the group for reasons including methodological shortcomings and the duration of time it took to conduct and punish those concerned. One person familiar with the matter said regulators were not happy that the bank only scrutinised a limited number of transactions when checking the quality of its internal controls, arguing that taking a broader sample would have been a better approach. Deutsche initially found misconduct at one desk where flawed controls were deliberately gamed by employees during an initial phase of the investigation. It then widened the probe to other desks. While the bank uncovered shortcomings in its internal processes elsewhere, it did not detect that those flaws were exploited by staff on other desks too,

according to people familiar with the matter. Deutsche has replaced large parts of its management in Spain, as well as several senior investment bankers in London. Other people involved received compliance training and had their bonuses cuts, according to people familiar with the situation. In total, fewer than 12 people were hit with sanctions by Deutsche Bank, the majority for a lack of oversight but some for exploiting flawed controls in bad faith. The negative feedback on the probe from regulators could be followed by a fine. It is a blow for the ambitions of Deutsche Bank chief executive Christian Sewing, who wants to usher in a new era of more rigorous controls and a better compliance culture. Deutsche Bank, BaFin and the ECB declined comment.

| STOCK MARKETS | | | | CURRENCIES | | | | GOVERNMENT BONDS | | | | | |
|------------------|----------|----------|--------|------------|---------|---------|--------|------------------|-----------|-----------|--------|-------|-------|
| | Feb 17 | Prev | Settle | | Feb 17 | Feb 18 | Feb 17 | Feb 18 | Yield (%) | Feb 17 | Feb 18 | Chg | |
| S&P 500 | 4054.87 | 4050.41 | -0.87 | £/€ | 1.066 | 1.065 | €/\$ | 0.928 | 0.927 | US 2 yr | 4.83 | 4.84 | -0.01 |
| Nikkei Composite | 11701.85 | 11855.83 | +1.30 | \$/£ | 1.200 | 1.200 | \$/€ | 0.833 | 0.828 | US 10 yr | 3.65 | 3.63 | -0.02 |
| Dow Jones Ind | 33923.29 | 33948.89 | +0.22 | €/£ | 0.889 | 0.888 | \$/€ | 1.125 | 1.125 | US 30 yr | 3.90 | 3.89 | -0.01 |
| FTSE 100 | 1033.43 | 1036.50 | +0.17 | \$/¥ | 134.235 | 131.210 | \$/¥ | 140.240 | 140.182 | UK 2 yr | 3.79 | 3.80 | 0.00 |
| Hang Seng | 4273.61 | 4297.24 | +0.55 | \$/¥ | 161.181 | 158.383 | \$/¥ | 77.485 | 77.549 | UK 10 yr | 3.61 | 3.59 | -0.02 |
| Hong Kong Ind | 3994.36 | 4013.53 | +0.19 | \$/¥ | 0.869 | 0.867 | \$/¥ | 1.113 | 1.116 | UK 30 yr | 3.80 | 3.79 | -0.01 |
| FTSE All Share | 4370.32 | 4377.36 | +0.16 | CRYPTO | | | | | | JPM 2 yr | -0.05 | -0.05 | 0.00 |
| CAC 40 | 7347.72 | 7366.18 | +0.25 | | | | | | | JPM 10 yr | 0.50 | 0.50 | 0.00 |
| Nikkei Ind | 15467.00 | 15533.64 | +0.32 | | | | | | | JPM 30 yr | 1.48 | 1.47 | -0.02 |
| Nikkei | 27513.13 | 27598.44 | +0.66 | | | | | | | GER 2 yr | 2.87 | 2.87 | -0.01 |
| Hang Seng | 20779.81 | 20987.67 | +1.28 | | | | | | | GER 10 yr | 2.44 | 2.48 | -0.04 |
| MSCI World | 3790.63 | 3913.49 | +0.88 | | | | | | | GER 30 yr | 2.39 | 2.43 | -0.04 |
| MSCI EM E | 1011.14 | 1004.87 | -0.62 | | | | | | | | | | |
| MSCI ACWI E | 648.08 | 652.78 | -0.72 | | | | | | | | | | |
| FT Wilshire 2500 | 3466.62 | 3415.79 | -1.20 | | | | | | | | | | |
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INTERNATIONAL

Ukraine war

US warns China against lethal aid to Russia

Franght meeting between top diplomats also covers suspected spy balloon

LAUREN FEDOR — WASHINGTON
JOSEPH LEAHY — BEIJING
LAURA PYTEL — MUNICH
The US has said it is "very concerned" China will soon supply Russia with lethal arms to help in its war against Ukraine after a franght meeting between the two sides' top diplomats on Saturday that addressed multiple Sino-American tensions.

The franght exchanges between US secretary of state Antony Blinken and China's top foreign policy official Wang Yi were the first face-to-face interactions between top Washington and Bei-

jing officials since the US shot down a suspected Chinese spy balloon that floated over North America earlier this month.

During the meeting on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, Blinken demanded China cease the use of spy balloons over the US while stressing that any material support from Beijing for Russia's military would have "serious consequences" for US-China relations.

China's foreign ministry issued a firm statement following the exchanges, stressing that Wang only met with Blinken at the request of the US.

Beijing said it would never accept US attempts to "dictate" the terms of its relations with Moscow. Wang also reiterated China's position on the balloon

incident, saying its shooting down violated international conventions. He told the US to "change course" and fix the damage done to the bilateral relationship by its "abuse of force".

In a development that could further

'I made clear that would have serious consequences in our relationship'

Antony Blinken

test diplomatic relations, Blinken told US television network NBC that Washington said it would never accept US attempts to "dictate" the terms of its relations with Moscow. Wang also reiterated China's position on the balloon

incident. Blinken told NBC: "Some further information that we are sharing today and that I think will be out there soon... indicates that they are strongly considering providing lethal assistance to Russia."

"I made clear [to Wang] that would have serious consequences in our relationship... something that President [Joe] Biden has shared directly with President Xi [Jinping] on several occasions," he said.

Blinken said he was also "direct" with Wang in his warnings about China's high altitude surveillance balloon program, which the US believes has intruded into the airspace of more than 40 countries over five continents.

"I made very clear to him that China's sending a surveillance balloon over the

United States in violation of our sovereignty, in violation of international law, was unacceptable and must never happen again," Blinken told CBS. "It is safe to say there was no apology."

Earlier in the day, Wang used a speech at the Munich conference — attended by top officials from across the world — to criticise Washington for what he said was the "hysterical and absurd" US decision to shoot down the balloon.

"Across the globe there are many balloons from many countries. Do you want to shoot down every one of them?" he said. "It did not show that the US is strong. On the contrary, it showed the opposite. We urge the US not to do such preposterous things in order to divert attention from its domestic problems."

Additional reporting by Thomas Hale

Alliance plea

Sweden's PM stresses need to join Nato in tandem with Finland

GUY CHAZAN — MUNICH

The prime minister of Sweden has warned against delinking his country's Nato membership bid from Finland's, after the alliance acknowledged for the first time that the two might have to join separately owing to Turkish obstruction.

Ulf Kristersson said that for strategic reasons, the two membership applications should be ratified at the same time. "The very close military co-operation between Sweden and Finland before we are Nato members would be very much complicated by us being divided as members," he told the Financial Times.

"Finland and Sweden are security providers," he added. "We have capabilities in our part of the world that all Nato countries will benefit from, including Turkey."

Stockholm and Helsinki closely coordinated their bids, handing them in together last year. But Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan raised objections, saying he wanted Sweden to take a clearer stance against Kurdish activists he considers to be terrorists.

The three countries had been making progress in talks to resolve the dispute but Ankara suspended them in January after a Koran was burnt in front of Turkey's embassy in the Swedish capital.

Both countries need all 30 existing Nato members to ratify their accession. All but Turkey and Hungary have done so, and Ankara has suggested that it could ratify Finland before Sweden.

Budapest said it would ratify both in the coming weeks.

Nato secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg this month openly acknowledged the possibility of the two joining separately with Finland going first.

But Kristersson is continuing to insist that they are admitted together. "We started the process together and we have conducted it together, and we want to complete it together," he said. "There are very, very good reasons for ratifying us at the same time before Vilnius" — a reference to the Nato summit being held in the Lithuanian capital in July.

He warned of the consequences if Turkey failed to ratify Sweden's membership by the Vilnius summit. "I think it would be bad for Sweden, bad for our region, bad for Nato and bad for Sweden's ability, together with Finland, to provide security in the midst of a war in our neighbourhood," he said.

The prime minister, who was speaking on the sidelines of the Munich security conference, said that in all his talks at the MSC he had found "enormously strong support among other leaders in the EU and among Nato allies as well" for the two countries joining together.

Asked how he would react if Finland did not wait for Sweden and joined on its own, he said: "I'm not really planning for that." But he added: "Every country has to make its own decision."

His Finnish counterpart, Sanna Marin, appeared to endorse his line. "It's... in the interest of Nato that Sweden and Finland join simultaneously," she said during a podium discussion in Munich. "We prefer and want to join together."

Additional reporting by Henry Foy in Brussels and Richard Milne in Oslo

Defence. Munich conference

Global south deaf to western pleas on Ukraine

Message that Russian acts are a universal threat shows little sign of getting through

LAURA PYTEL AND GUY CHAZAN
MUNICH

Western leaders used a gathering of global elites in Munich to make the case that Russia's invasion of Ukraine posed a threat not just to Europe but to the whole world. There was little evidence their message got through.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, a clutch of Senior US and European officials sought to convince the rest of the world of the threat posed to them by Vladimir Putin's invasion — and show them that blame for higher global food and energy prices lay with Moscow.

US vice-president Kamala Harris said "no nation is safe" in a world where "one country can violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of another".

French president Emmanuel Macron said the "neocolonial, imperialist" Russian invasion was not "only a European war". German chancellor Olaf Scholz said it would everybody's problem if "the law of the strongest prevailed in international relations". Yet, their attempts to portray the war in universal terms met some familiar retorts.

Brazil foreign minister Mauro Vieira said the conflict was a "very sad situation" and stressed his government "deplored" invasion. But, in a message that jarred with the stance of western attendees calling for resolve to fight a long war in Ukraine, Vieira added: "It's been one year now. We have to try to build the possibility of a solution. We cannot keep talking only of war."

Organisers of the annual gathering in the Bavarian city were proud that this year's event had a record number of participants from countries in what they termed the global south, even as it remained dominated by officials from Europe and the US.

There was palpable frustration among some leaders from African and South American nations that the war in Ukraine, which on Friday will enter its second year, was consuming the time, money and attention of the west at the expense of other pressing problems.

Francisca Márquez, vice-president of Colombia, said her country wanted



Europe's help on tackling the fallout from climate change and protecting the Amazon rainforest. "We don't want to go on discussing who will be the winner or loser of a war," she said. "We are all losers and, in the end, it is humankind that loses everything."

Namibia prime minister Saara Kuugongwa-Amadhila was asked why her country had — along with China, India and 52 other nations — abstained from a UN resolution in October that saw 143 countries declare the Russian annexation of two Ukrainian regions as illegal.

She said that Namibia was focused on "resolving the problem, not on shifting blame". She added: "The bottom line is that money used to buy weapons would be better used to promote development in Ukraine, in Africa, in Asia, in the EU itself where many people are facing hardships."

Western officials said bilateral meetings with leaders of the global south on the conference sidelines revealed a much greater preoccupation with issues such as inflation, debt, higher energy prices and food security than with the war in Ukraine. There was also a lin-

gering resentment, they said, over the west's disappointing record on sharing coronavirus vaccines and compensating them for the damage caused by climate change.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, meanwhile, acknowledged the west's own problematic past, citing European colonialism in Africa and western support for dictators in Latin America in a speech yesterday.

Comfort Ero, president of the conflict prevention organisation Crisis Group, welcomed what she said was the "significant effort" by the west to respond to criticism that it was putting other countries through "a loyalty test" on Ukraine and failing to listen to their concerns. "Talking is important. Listening is important," she said. "The key will be how does that translate into actual policy engagement and practical outcomes."

Ero added it was important not to lump countries together, pointing out that, while South Africa had abstained from last year's UN vote on the Russian annexations, Ghana and Nigeria were among a string of African nations that voted in favour of it.

"We have to try to build the possibility of a solution. We cannot keep talking only of war"

Mauro Vieira, Brazil foreign minister

China's stance on the conflict loomed large over the Munich gathering along with tensions between Beijing and Washington. Amrita Narlikar, president and professor at the Hamburg-based German Institute for Global and Area Studies, said that European and American officials needed to do better in countering what she called China's "very clever" framing of itself as a part of the global south, where it promotes itself as a partner to help nations safeguard their sovereignty and boost development.

She said a peace plan for the Ukraine conflict that Beijing had promised to publish in the coming days — drawing scepticism from European and US officials — would probably target not only the west. "Equally importantly, the global south can be expected to be the audience," she said.

"If China were to present its vision as one of a peace dialogue between Russia and Ukraine, and emphasise the global economic costs of a long-drawn war, this would enjoy considerable support in large parts of the global south."

Additional reporting by Henry Foy in Brussels and Richard Milne in Oslo

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Anti-waste law

McDonald's rolls out reusable packaging in French outlets

LEILA ABOUD — PARIS

The item proving a hit with McDonald's customers in France this winter is not a new burger or chicken wrap, but a bright red, rubber container in which french fries are served.

The US-based multinational introduced the reusable packaging to comply with a new French law that bans fast food and casual dining outlets from using disposable packaging and cutlery for customers who eat in their restaurants.

The french fries containers are so popular that customers have started taking them home as souvenirs. In France, Emmanuel Macron helped drive the craze when he tweeted a photo of the packaging to vaunt his government's initiative, which took effect in January.

The ban on disposable packaging is one of the most visible parts of much broader environmental legislation passed by Macron's government in 2020. It included hundreds of new requirements, such as reducing additional costs that can run to €15,000 per

store if new dishwashers are needed. Some executives also doubt the law will deliver any real environmental benefit and argue it will lead to higher carbon emissions and energy use.

For Stéphane Klein, Europe managing director at UK-based sandwich chain Pret A Manger, the disposable packaging ban has helped raise awareness about the need to reduce waste but it has been "very complex" to put into practice in the French shops.

"What seems like a simple change is actually quite demanding and expensive to do," he said. "It has taken us more than a year to test different approaches to figure out what will work."

Under the new system, Pret employees must package its sandwiches, salads and soups in two versions — disposable paper and plastic for takeaway and glass bowls with rubber covers for customers who are eating in.

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sandwich wrappers, are more environmentally friendly than reusable glass or plastic equivalents over the entire life-cycle from manufacturing to disposal. Such paper packaging can often be recycled, whereas reusable rubber or plastic tableware cannot.

The new rules may also increase food waste. Pret said it was now throwing away more food because unsold meals packaged in glass bowls could not be donated to charities.

Despite the concerns, the European Commission looks set to take inspiration from France. A draft version of a new regulation on packaging and packaging waste issued in November included a similar ban on disposable packaging in restaurants. The proposed regulation must be agreed by member states and parliament, so would probably not take effect until 2025 at the earliest. Some industry executives argue that the impact of the French change should be evaluated first.

Another lobbyist was less charitable: "They're going to make the same dumb mistakes as in France, but it'll be everywhere."

See The Big Read

Pret A Manger says complying with the rules is a 'complex' undertaking

INTERNATIONAL

Hungary's leader extends reach to military and defence sector

Moves come as Nato allies grow alarmed at Orbán's ambivalent stance on Russia

MARTON DUNAI — BUDAPEST

Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky was still in business with a Russian rail company under US sanctions when he took over as Hungary's defence minister last year.

Although he sold his stake weeks after assuming office, his appointment, business ties and political affiliations are indicative of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's expanding grip on Hungarian society to include the armed forces and defence industry.

The organisation of the Hungarian military-industrial complex comes as Nato allies are increasingly alarmed by the prime minister's ambivalent stance towards Russia and the war in Ukraine, where Budapest remains an outlier in its refusal to send weapons to Kyiv.

Orbán on Saturday defended his position, arguing that any actions by Nato allies that went beyond defending themselves were optional and that his country opted to stay out of the war.

"We don't think humanitarian support to Ukraine means nullifying our Russian connections," Orbán said. "That would be against our national interest... So we maintain our economic ties with Russia, and we advise the entire western world the same."

A longtime Orbán ally, Szalay-Bobrovniczky last month started a push to trim the military's top ranks, many of whom spent their whole career within Nato — a move critics say is politically motivated.

Petr Pavel, a former Nato general who was recently elected as Czech president,

described the military purge as part of a "step by step concentration of power around Viktor Orbán and restrictions on all those who had a different view".

On paper, Szalay-Bobrovniczky has the right credentials for his job: as a businessman, he invested in the defence sector and he served as Hungary's ambassador to the UK between 2016 and 2022. But his career would have probably taken a different turn had he not become what Tamás Cskí Varga, a defence expert at the Hungarian University of Public Service, called "an important member of Orbán's governing elite".

"Hungary's military upgrade will require a staggering amount of resources," said Cskí Varga, adding that the minister enjoys the "political trust" needed to spend the funds effectively.

As a former leader of a pro-government think-tank and a weekly newspaper, Szalay-Bobrovniczky has maintained close ties to the System of National Cooperation (NER), Orbán's network of institutions and private corporations that is leading the development of Hungary's defence industry.

Orbán's plans for the defence industry were made clear last year when he attended a ceremony for army recruits. "We are building a military industry here at home, in Hungary, one that can produce modern weapons."

Szalay-Bobrovniczky is seen as the right man to implement that strategy partly because he once participated in the sector as an investor. In 2021, he purchased a Czech aircraft manufac-



Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán, centre, addresses new troops during a ceremony last October. © AP/WIDEWORLD

turer, Aero Vodochody, with the help of a €150m loan from the state-owned Hungarian Development Bank. Weeks before he was appointed, he received a government order of 12 training and reconnaissance jets in an estimated €180m deal.

After taking office, Szalay-Bobrovniczky sold his stakes in the plane maker, as well as in the Russian joint venture, to an investment fund controlled by Zoltán Hernádi, chief executive of oil group MOL. Hernádi, regarded by some analysts as an NER insider, declined to comment on his role in the acquisitions.

Szalay-Bobrovniczky has long identified as a backer of the illiberal regime of Orbán. He said in 2015 that he was "an active member of the ongoing elite change" replacing leftist-liberal politics — a role that has come with powerful friends and juicy perks.

In 2020, while ambassador in London, he acquired a casino commission together with another friend of Orbán's

affiliated with NER. According to company data, the casino company paid its owners a €28m dividend in 2021.

Szalay-Bobrovniczky sold his stake in the casino venture in December for an undisclosed price. The buyer was Arpad Habony, Orbán's political mastermind.

The award of public contracts to Orbán's coterie, including for EU-funded projects, is among the reasons why Budapest has failed to unlock some €50m of EU money, despite the premier's attempts to pressure Brussels by delaying sanctions against Russia and financial assistance to Ukraine.

One of the main companies involved in Hungary's fledgling defence industry is 4iG, a listed telecoms group. Once a loss-making penny stock, it was acquired in 2018 by Orbán's childhood friend Lőrinc Mészáros, Hungary's richest man. State contracts have sparked a rapid expansion for 4iG: revenue in the first three quarters of 2022 exceeded full-year 2017 numbers about 15-fold.

Its share price has increased from Ft40 (\$0.11) in 2017 to Ft700. Passed on to a former Mészáros associate, Gellért Jászai, in 2020, 4iG has since bought state-owned transmission systems operator Antenna Hungaria; used state loans to buy Vodafone's Hungarian business; and acquired a string of Balkan telecoms companies.

German arms maker Rheinmetall, which contributes to the manufacture of the Leopard 2 tanks coveted by Ukraine, last year took a 25 per cent stake in 4iG. Their joint venture plans to offer military-grade IT services in what Jászai said was a "unique opportunity to gain a foothold in the global defence industry".

Rheinmetall will sell hundreds of Lynx armoured carriers to Hungary, as well as ammunition and technical equipment, opening at least three factories to enable local production. Production of Lynxes started in the western town of Zalaegerszeg last month. Armin Pappinger, Rheinmetall chief executive, called the co-operation "a token of our special commitment to Hungary" and an integral part of a digitisation strategy that reflects modern weapons systems' reliance on IT infrastructure.

4iG said its partnership with the Hungarian government was limited to the telecommunications sector.

"Our strategic co-operation with Rheinmetall is in no direct connection with Rheinmetall's position as a government supplier [in Hungary]," 4iG said, adding that it seeks to expand its partnership with the German company beyond Hungary's borders.

Szalay-Bobrovniczky said the defence industry partnerships were mainly European "for strategic reasons" — highlighting Hungary's increasing distance from the US, Nato's leading force.

Ties with America have frayed more rapidly since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In one especially heated exchange, US ambassador David Pressman reminded Hungary it should side unambiguously with the west, sparking an angry response from Budapest.

Pressman said Hungary's relationship with Russia was "concerning, especially as it has shown no signs of abating following Russia's full-scale invasion".

"While every country has its own interests and perspectives, Russia's brazen attempts to redraw borders by force tears up the rule book," Pressman told the Financial Times. "[They] are not merely a domestic political issue for any single country, especially an ally."

'We don't think support to Ukraine means nullifying our Russian connections'

Viktor Orbán



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INTERNATIONAL

Climate finance

World Bank warned over risks from reform

Developing nations fear threat to credit rating amid hunt for new chief

CAMILLA HODGSON — LONDON
AIME WILLIAMS — WASHINGTON

Developing nations have warned against reshaping the World Bank in the aftermath of David Malpass's departure in a way that would imperil the institution's ultra-high credit rating.

better help poorer countries mitigate and plan for climate change.

Malpass said he would leave the bank early, by June 30, and the US, the largest shareholder, is now racing to draw up a list of potential successors. The bank's board will soon announce a timeline for member states to propose candidates.

Shareholders and economists have argued that the bank could provide more climate finance by expanding its balance sheet and taking on more risk. But developing countries have warned against doing anything that would jeopardise the bank's triple A rating and thereby increase its funding costs.

The G21 group of developing nations recently distributed a note — seen by the Financial Times — in which they argued that it was important to “avoid measures... that might not be understood by rating agencies in positive light”.

The World Bank has traditionally emphasised the importance of holding a triple A credit rating from all three major rating agencies, which allows it

to “manage themselves to a level of risk appetite that can effectively be even lower than that represented by an AAA rating”, the review said, meaning they could take on more risk without being downgraded.

Changes to the World Bank's rules would need to be approved by its shareholders, with the US controlling the most votes.

The debate is likely to spill into the upcoming meetings of the IMF and World Bank in April.

Rating agency S&P said last year that it could lower the bank's rating “if management — contrary to our expectations — adopts more aggressive financial policies”.

US employment. Rising wages

Labour squeeze puts black workers in the driving seat

Tight market leveraged to quit service jobs and enter higher-paid fields such as transport

TAYLOR NICOLE ROGERS — NEW YORK

Six months ago Carrin Hayes quit her job as a special needs teacher in Denver, Colorado to become a truck driver.

“People look at me like I'm crazy, but teachers are underpaid and they are under-appreciated,” said Hayes. “I actually get paid more with a certificate. And I'm not as stressed.”

Hayes is among a growing number of black workers taking advantage of a pandemic-related boom in the transport sector. She trained at Carter Truck Driving Academy, which is believed to be the only black-owned trucking school in the US. It opened in 2021 to serve a growing number of black residents interested in changing careers.

The increasing movement of black workers into transport, as well as other sectors such as warehousing, construction and professional services, comes as many are leveraging the tight labour market to “trade up” from service jobs in search of higher wages and better working conditions.

“The number of black women who became truck drivers [over the past year] alone and meaningfully boosted their income was huge,” said Julia Pollak, chief economist for the jobs site ZipRecruiter.

The shift has helped them achieve the fastest wage growth of any racial group last year. The median black worker received an 11.5 per cent pay raise last year, compared with 7.4 per cent for all workers, according to labour department data.

In 2019, one in five black workers worked in the leisure and hospitality sector, which paid an average wage of \$20.77 an hour in December, according to labour department data. However, truck transport workers earned \$25.54 on average, and more than twice as many had access to retirement benefits. Walmart advertises starting salaries of up to \$110,000 for drivers in its private fleet.

According to an analysis by the White House Council of Economic Advisers, more black workers entered the transport and utilities sectors than any other industry grouping tracked by the labour department in the first half of 2022. Nearly 11 per cent of black workers were employed in the sector in the



Mohammed Keita, right, begins training at Hirschbach Motor Lines in Dubuque, Iowa

first half of 2022, up 1.5 percentage points from the same period in 2019.

“Traditionally, thinking 10 to 15 years back, when I first started in industry I did not see a large share of under-represented groups within the industry,” said Evans, who also works as a director for Kansas City-based engineering firm Burns & McDonnell, which advises utility providers across the country. “But in the past few years, you have seen an uptick,” Evans added. “I think that 2020 was a catalyst that gave things more steam.”

Transport jobs, like many in other industries that saw a jump in the share of black workers in 2022, typically do not require college degrees, making them an easy transition for workers looking to get out of the service industry. Many employers have also begun subsidising certificate programmes for

workers looking to enter the field for the first time.

Last year 197 per cent of the 2.5m truck transport workers in the US were black, according to the labour department, up 1.2 percentage points from 2019.

Full-time black workers have earned roughly 20 per cent less than their white counterparts since the 1970s, even as the gap between the shares of black and white Americans with college degrees has narrowed, according to a study by economists at the University of Chicago and Duke.

Black workers did benefit from record low unemployment in 2019, but that progress reversed in 2020, when the Covid-19 crisis eliminated millions of leisure and hospitality jobs.

The unemployment rate for black workers peaked at 16.8 per cent in May 2020, two percentage points higher and a month later than the overall unemployment rate.

“The number of black women who became truck drivers [over the past year] alone was huge”

“Things haven't been as bad as they were, but then that's because in the past it has been much worse,” said Patrick Mason, a professor of economics at Florida State University. “So I'm worried that wages aren't keeping up with the pace of inflation and particularly the wages for the least educated.”

Trucking jobs were also highly sensitive to economic shifts, Pollak said. The transport and utilities sector is one of just three where workers are being laid off at rates higher than before the pandemic as companies prepare for an economic downturn.

Hayes, the Colorado teacher turned trucker, said the sector was still grappling with how to be more inclusive towards black workers. In Colorado, 91 per cent of commercial driving licence holders who self-reported their race were white, according to the state's department of motor vehicles.

“This is a very scary industry, especially for people of colour,” said Hayes. “But once you break through that barrier, you can have people knocking on your door, saying, ‘Hey, I heard you have your [commercial driving licence], please come work with me.’”

Insurrection

Brazil rejects amnesty call for extremists who stormed Congress

BRYAN HARRIS AND CAROLINA INOZIZIA SAO PAULO

Brazil's justice minister has vowed there will be no amnesty for radical supporters of rightwing former president Jair Bolsonaro who last month stormed Congress, the Supreme Court and presidential palace in Brasilia.

Pledging to crack down on far-right extremism, Flavio Dino said in an interview: “This is so serious for Brazilian democracy that the response has to be firm and respect the principle of proportionality: when you have a serious crime, you must have a firm response.”

The insurrection on January 8 was not an “isolated event” but a symptom of wider extremism in Latin America's largest nation, he said.

More than 1,000 people were arrested after the riots, when thousands of pro-Bolsonaro demonstrators stormed and vandalised the government and judicial institutions. They chanted the October election, in which leftwing president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva defeated the rightwing populist, was rigged.

“Our expectation is these people will be convicted,” said Dino, rejecting any possibility the government could offer an amnesty to calm political tensions. “An amnesty” has neither been considered nor will it occur, exactly because it would only encourage other similar acts in Brazil and in other countries, he said.

Opposition politicians had proposed such a scheme late last year following post-election violence by Bolsonaro supporters. Since Lula's election there had been a series of events aimed at disrupting the new government, including an alleged plot to bomb Brasilia airport in December, Dino said. Two people have been arrested in connection with the plot, while a third suspect is missing.

“Those planning the bombing were also seeking long-sitting rifle training. On their mobile phones, there were conversations in which one of them was seeking information on weapons suitable for long-distance shooting. There is a long dialogue with instructors about this,” said Dino.

A lawyer and former governor of the northeastern state of Maranhao, Dino described the January violence as “unquestionably” a coup attempt. The rioters had hoped their movement would spread across the nation and spur the military to intervene and overthrow Lula, he said. “Why didn't it happen? In my view, because of the extreme violence that was used. That discouraged those who were sitting on the fence — and here I refer to the armed forces, the police forces — from taking part.”

Bolsonaro, who served a single term between 2019 and 2022, has sought to distance himself from the violence in Brasilia, saying rioters had “crossed the line”. But many see the former president as responsible. Following the election, he refused to concede defeat and backed his supporters’ “right to protest”.

Since the end of last year, Bolsonaro has been residing in Florida in the US, although he has told media outlets that he will return to Brazil in the coming weeks. The country's Supreme Court has named him in a criminal investigation as being potentially responsible for the disorder. The electoral court is also processing 14 lawsuits against him relating to the riots and his presidential campaign. Bolsonaro denies any wrongdoing and any involvement in the riots.

Electoral participation

Nigerian ‘democracy generation’ urged to make its voice heard as polling day draws near

AANU ADEYE — LAGOS

Jola Ayeeye's popular 154 *What I Said* podcast is a regular delve into life as a young woman in Nigeria, enlivened by boisterous discussions with her co-host and guests about pop culture, celebrity, love and friendship.

But she has recently added another topic to the conversation: the need for her generation to get out and vote in next weekend's elections that analysts say are the hardest to predict since Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999.

“I'm very invested in people understanding that your one vote is important,” said Ayeeye, 30, stressing the need for her electoral cohort to ensure they got involved. “It moves you from being a complainer to a participant. So don't just complain — instead make sure to do everything you can.”

She is one of the 57m Nigerians aged 18 to 34 who are eligible to vote on February 25. It is the largest electoral cohort in a country with a median age of 18, and one whose endorsement will go a long

way to deciding who triumphs in the presidential and parliamentary polls.

“Nigeria's electorate is very young,” said Leena Koni Hoffmann-Atar, an associate fellow at the UK-based Chatham House think-tank. “And this is the turning point election for everyone who has come of age [since 1999].”

The big beneficiary has been Peter Obi, the Labour party candidate whose campaign emphasising accountability and integrity has caught the imagination of young Nigerians hungry for change. The former governor, 61, has also lured support from the better-funded main candidates by appealing to older voters tired of the inefficiencies and excesses of an entrenched elite. Ayeeye said a vote for Obi was “the logical conclusion” of her priorities.

Recent polls, including one from Africa-focused data group Stears, put Obi in the lead, although analysts say he still faces an uphill task against the powerful political machine backing Bola Tinubu, of the ruling All Progressives Congress, and the People's Democratic party can-

didate Atiku Abubakar. Some experts are predicting a second-round run-off for the first time in Nigerian history.

A sign of young people's growing enthusiasm for the process is evident from the fact that 84 per cent of the almost 10m newly registered voters are aged 18 to 34. Almost two-thirds of the youthful cohort have no fixed party

allegiance, according to pollster Afrobarometer, underlining the importance of winning them over.

Hoffmann-Atar said young Nigerians' frustrations over a falling economy and growing insecurity explained why they had registered to vote in such numbers. But she cautioned they would only have an electoral impact if they voted. Previ-

ously Nigerian elections were plagued by low turnout — just 35 per cent of registered voters cast a ballot in 2019. “You hear people's frustrations, and people conceiving those frustrations with inefficiencies in government,” she said. “A high turnout typically doesn't favour the incumbent party, especially an incumbent party that's been incompetent and run on autopilot.”

The increasing engagement of young voters has also forced the two main presidential challengers to tweak their campaigns in an effort to win votes. Billboards plastered across Lagos show Tinubu and running mate Kashim Shettima vowing to “lend a helping hand” to Nigeria's tech sector — an industry that has attracted overseas investment and a rare bright spot for a country where foreign investment is falling.

Abubakar, the other leading candidate, told the Financial Times in December of his plans to stem the brain drain of young Nigerians leaving the country by “empowering” the private sector to create more jobs.



People aged 18 to 34 make up most newly registered voters

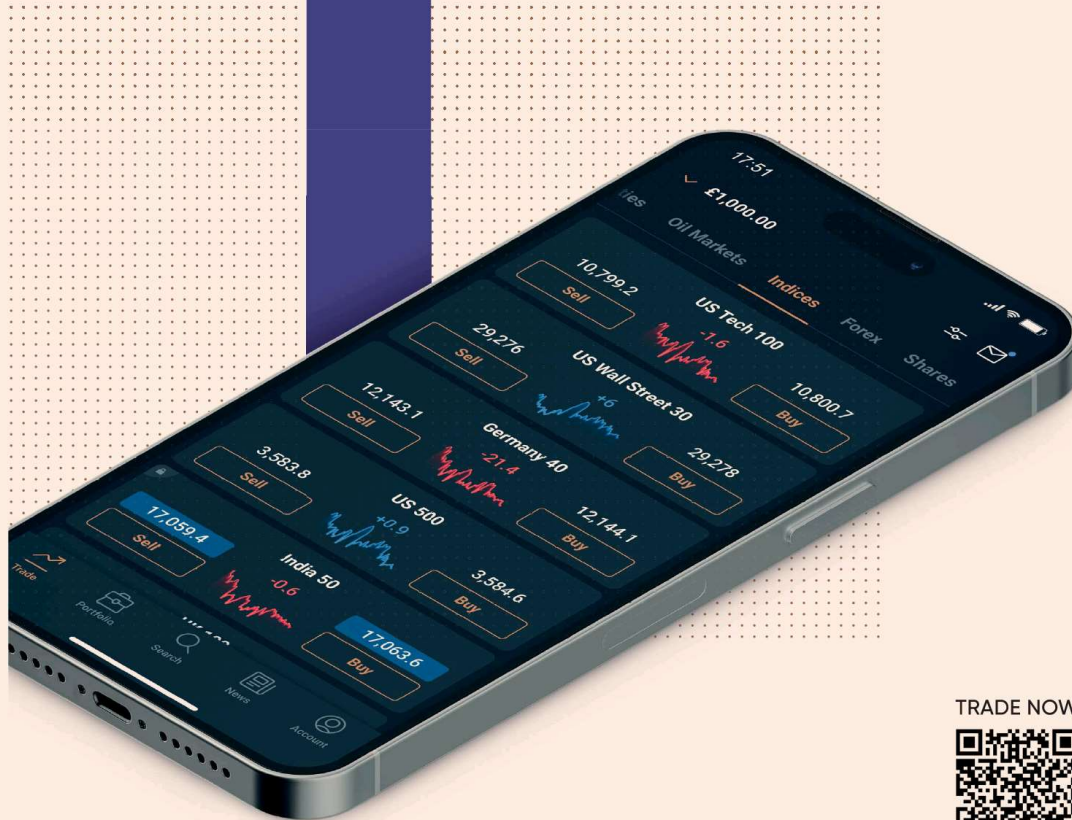
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Advice lines Who are the CEO whisperers that bosses turn to for objectivity in their darkest hours? WORK & CAREERS

Companies & Markets

Koch faces test case battle over 'Texas two-step' bankruptcy

- Filing allegedly made in 'bad faith'
- Cancer sufferer in court challenge

JAMIE SMYTH — NEW YORK

Lawyers have filed a motion to dismiss the Chapter 11 filing by Bestwall — a unit of Koch Industries in a test case that could help determine the future of bankruptcy schemes deployed by companies to harden personal injury claims.

The motion to the bankruptcy court in the Western Division of North Carolina alleges the Chapter 11 filing by Bestwall — a unit of Koch's building materials subsidiary Georgia-Pacific — was made in "bad faith" because the company was not in financial distress.

The motion late on Friday alleges that Georgia-Pacific has distributed \$5.4bn in dividends to Koch Industries since the bankruptcy petition was filed in 2017, enriching the debtor's equity hold-

The businesses say the mass tort system is broken and no longer an efficient forum to deliver justice

ers while thousands of asbestos claimants remain uncompensated.

Bestwall, Georgia-Pacific and Koch Industries have engaged in a "years-long strategy of delay", which has deprived victims of their rights to fair resolution in the tort system, it claims.

The motion to dismiss the bankruptcy filing by Bestwall was filed on behalf of Wilson Buckingham and his wife, Angelika Weiss, who allege that Buckingham contracted mesothelioma, a type of cancer linked to asbestos, due to exposure to products made by Georgia-Pacific. Koch Industries did not respond to a request for comment.

Georgia-Pacific was the first company to use a contentious legal manoeuvre called the "Texas two-step" to manage billions of dollars of legal claims from people alleging that its products con-

taining asbestos caused their cancer. The scheme enabled the company to divide itself into two separate businesses before placing one of them, Bestwall, which contained all the asbestos claims, into bankruptcy.

Johnson & Johnson, Transcendental and a US unit of France-based Saint-Gobain took the same path as Georgia-Pacific and deployed the Texas two-step, which was devised by law firm Jones Day.

The companies argue that the mass tort system is broken, poses a grave financial risk to companies, and is no longer an efficient forum to deliver justice to victims. Settlements can be made more equitably and quickly by managing the cases in bankruptcy courts, they say, rather than in front of juries.

Tort lawyers reject this. They argue that bankruptcy schemes deployed by solvent corporations are an abuse of bankruptcy courts and deny wronged people their right to trial by jury. Far from hastening a settlement, they argue, the bankruptcy process puts the tort cases on hold, thus removing an incentive for companies to come to the table to negotiate a settlement.

The motion to dismiss Bestwall's bankruptcy follows a landmark ruling issued last month by the Third US Circuit Court of Appeals, which dismissed the bankruptcy of LTL, a subsidiary of J&J, on the grounds that it was not in financial distress.

The Bestwall motion cites the J&J ruling, saying it makes clear that financial distress is the first inquiry made before a company receives the benefits of bankruptcy. Recent case law in the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals also supports this position, it claims.

Carl Tobias, professor of law at University of Richmond, said "all of that appears to be headed in the same direction to find that you can't enter bankruptcy to avoid tort claims."

Top dollar US currency regains ground amid signs of surprisingly robust economic activity



GEORGE STEER — LONDON

The dollar has rebounded from a 10-month low as investors push up their forecasts for US interest rates after signs of stubborn inflation and surprisingly strong economic activity.

The world's key reserve currency rose to a 20-year high in September but tumbled 11.2 per cent over the following four months as US inflation declined from a multi-decade peak, allowing the Federal Reserve to slow the pace at which it raised interest rates towards the end of 2022. Tamer rates and the prospect of steady or even falling rates in 2023 removed one of the currency's key supports.

But February has begun with a flurry of economic data suggesting that the world's biggest economy remains in rude health, pushing the dollar back up by 3 per cent against a

basket of six other major currencies since the start of the month and erasing January's decline. The US last month added more than half a million jobs, almost triple the consensus forecast, while inflation fell to 6.4 per cent, a smaller decrease than expected.

The inflation report has ruined markets' nice little disinflationary plan," said Florian Jelpo, multi-asset portfolio manager at Lombard Odier, with central banks likely to maintain their upward pressure on rates as a result.

Jordan Rochester, a foreign exchange strategist at Nomura, said February began "with everyone in the macroeconomic community assuming the dollar would sell off against the euro and the yen."

Since then almost every single US data point has come in stronger than expected, and markets have slowly

come around to what the Fed has been saying for a long time, that rates have further to go and will be kept on hold for a while."

Benchmark US interest rates stand in a range of 4.5 per cent to 4.75 per cent. At the start of February, futures markets were pricing in a rates peak close to 4.9 per cent, with two cuts in the second half of the year taking borrowing costs to around 4.4 per cent heading into 2024. Just over two weeks later, markets had shifted to predict a peak at 5.28 per cent, ending the year just above 5 per cent following a single cut.

Still, some investors doubt the dollar rally has much longer left to run. The haven currency was likely to continue to rise this quarter but "resume its downward trajectory as global growth and risk sentiment improve", said analysts at UBS.

Meta reveals 'blue badge' subscription paid service

TABBY KINDER — SAN FRANCISCO

Meta will launch a paid subscription service that allows Facebook and Instagram users to verify accounts for up to \$14.99 a month, chief executive Mark Zuckerberg announced yesterday.

The new feature, called Meta Verified, lets users "get a blue badge, get extra impersonation protection against accounts claiming to be you, and get direct access to customer support", according to a Facebook post by Zuckerberg.

It will cost \$11.99 for web access or \$14.99 a month on Apple's iOS operating system. Meta Verified will be rolled out first in Australia and New Zealand this week, the post said.

Meta revenues have been hammered by privacy changes made by Apple in 2021 that restricted its ability to track users' internet activity, a key source of data for targeted ads. Meta said last February that the Apple change would cost it more than \$10bn in lost advertising income for 2022, around 8 per cent of its total revenue in 2021.

Anshu Sharma, founder of data privacy company Skyflow, said the subscription model was the latest signal that social media users' "desire to bargain of exchanging our data privacy for free apps" was coming to an end.

Meta has been forced into major cost-cutting, including announcing its biggest headcount reductions — around 11,000 people or 13 per cent of employees.

Meta's new subscription service is similar to a plan by Elon Musk to launch Twitter Blue, which would allow users to verify their Twitter profiles for around \$8 a month, since he bought the platform for \$44bn last year. The full rollout of Twitter Blue, which first launched in November, was postponed after it was abused by accounts that impersonated companies and celebrities.

Zuckerberg said Meta Verified would allow users to verify their accounts with a government ID.

Messaging group Snap launched its own subscription model called Snapchat Plus last year, which costs \$3.99 a month and gives users exclusive access to new features such as longer story expiration.

Additional reporting by Patrick McGee

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Retail & consumer. Textiles

China falls out of fashion with clothing brands

Manufacturers look to relocate amid concerns over supply chains, costs and forced labour

ARJUN NEEL AHM AND OLIVER TELLING LONDON

A combination of supply chain chaos, higher costs and concerns about working conditions is forcing some Western fashion brands to rethink their decades-old dependence on factories in China.

Dieter Holzer, the former chief executive and a board member of Marc O'Polo, said the Swedish-German fashion brand started to swap some suppliers in the country in favour of factories in Turkey and Portugal in 2021.

The decision was meant to "balance and take out risk from your supply chain and make it more sustainable", he said. "I think many companies across the industry are reviewing their exposure to China."

The shift away from mass textile production in the country, albeit still in its early stages, marks the reversal of years of outsourcing to a region that has come to dominate the textile supply chain.

Big names such as Mango and Dr Martens, have recently cut or signalled their intention to shift manufacturing out of China or south-east Asia. "The big message is reducing reliance on China," Dr Martens' chief executive Kenny Wilson said in November. "You don't want all of your eggs in one basket."

The bootmaker has moved 55 per cent of its total production out of the country since he took over in 2018. "We are being deafened by the sound of clothes manufacturers [moving

away from Asia," said Rosey Hurst, director of ethical business consultancy Impact. The relocation is also being driven by stricter laws being introduced in the US and Europe against labour abuses, she added, following the alleged use of forced labour in the cotton-rich territory of Xinjiang in China.

Mango's chief executive Toni Ruiz said in December he was considering buying less from China "but we'll be very alert to how things evolve".

The shift has been accelerated by continued supply chain disruption since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to a jump in freight costs, as well as significant shipping delays as factory workers at manufacturing hubs across Asia fell ill or were forced to isolate.

One industry consultant said that one retail client's skivwer, from a previous season, arrived in the summer of 2022. "For many, gone are the days of manufacturing only in China and shipping everywhere," said Todd Simms, vice-president at supply chain intelligence platform FourKites. "Disruptions have increased costs to deliver finished goods, making it easier to justify operations in new countries in exchange for more resilience," he added.

The financial incentives to remain in the region are diminishing as wages go up after years of cheap labour — a major draw for many household names to outsource manufacturing to far-flung places. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, the average factory wage doubled between 2013 and 2021, from 46,000 renminbi (\$6,844) per year to 92,000 renminbi (\$13,628).

Jose Calamonte, chief executive of online fashion retailer Asos, said that at the company's full-year results

presentation last year that products manufactured in China were not as competitive as they seemed relative to Europe, once shipping and transport costs were taken into account.

European clothing retailers' efforts to cut delivery times, as fashion trends and consumer needs change at pace, is another reason behind their decision to opt for suppliers closer to home.

"We've been taking control of our manufacturing," said a spokesman for a British luxury brand, adding that the industry had been consolidating in Europe for years now. "This has been a trend for reasons to do with speed and efficiency."

Plans to shift production away from Asian garment hubs, however, are not that advanced owing to their complexity. Countries such as China and Vietnam represent the lion's share of textile exports according to 2020 data from CEPII.

For example, more than half of suppliers to Inditex, the world's largest

fashion retailer, were based in Asia in 2021, only a marginal reduction since 2018.

Turkey has been positioning itself as a winner from Western brands moving their production, not least because it is part of the EU customs union, allowing frictionless trade between member states. "It is a popular destination and already used by the likes of Hugo Boss, Adidas, Nike, Zara," said Simon Geale, executive vice-president of procurement at supply chain consultancy Proxima.

An increasingly important consideration for retailers is traceability in the supply chain after years of widely reported labour abuses. "Because of US laws against cotton from Xinjiang, brands have to have much better traceability," said Impact's Hurst. "Then we have got European laws [on forced labour] coming up. It is putting pressure on the industry to get a grip," she added.

But she warned: "There isn't enough money in [international supply chains] to run things the way they should be done. [Given the current economic crisis], that's only going to get worse."

Maximilian Albrecht, an analyst at AlixPartners, said that many fast fashion labels were also abandoning China to differentiate themselves from Shein, the rapidly growing Chinese fast fashion giant. "European brands can't match Shein on their costs of production, their network of production, their relationships," Albrecht said.

"You'll see some brands say 'we can't match that so we'll move to Europe'. You can still sell the story that they have higher quality products. Whether that's actually true is another thing."





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COMPANIES & MARKETS

Mea culpa time for boss of lacklustre Goldman

After apologising to partners in face of falling profit and bonus cuts, Solomon must now explain the pain to investors

JOSHUA FRANKLIN AND BROOKE MASTERS — NEW YORK
ADRIENNE KLASA — PARIS

Earlier this month, in front of massed Goldman Sachs partners at a private meeting in Miami, chief executive David Solomon performed a rare mea culpa.

The four-day off-site event was Solomon's chance to explain the deep bonus cuts and lay-offs that he said he had been forced to implement as the economy turned. Solomon's acceptance of his mistakes was welcomed by some of the angry partners in attendance, said people briefed on the event.

The Goldman boss will hope to be as convincing later this month when he faces shareholders at the bank's second ever investor day at its 200 West Street headquarters in downtown Manhattan.

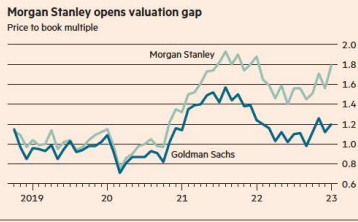
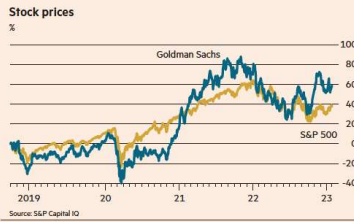
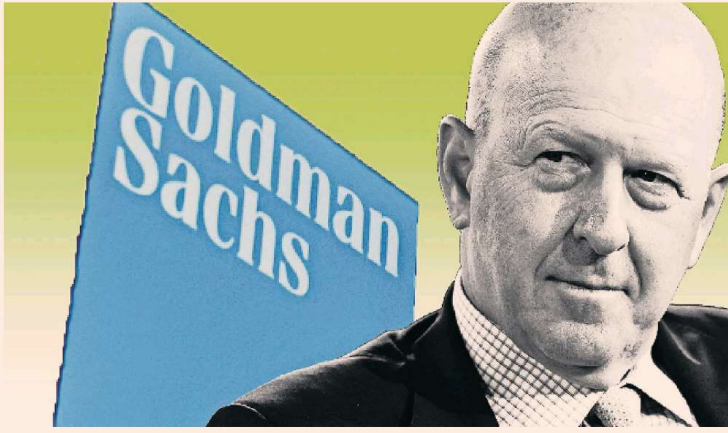
Solomon, 61, will be trying to reassure them that he can get staff back onside and that a painful fall in profits in the fourth quarter does not mean Goldman is moving in the wrong direction. Rasmus Lee Hansen, portfolio manager at AllianceBernstein, a top 20 shareholder in GS, said he wanted to hear "a humble presentation" from Solomon that acknowledged mistakes that have been made, including an expensive bet on consumer banking.

Goldman said it was "looking forward to investor day" and the chance to "help investors see the strategic direction going forward".

Since Solomon took over as chief executive in 2018, Goldman has expanded its market share in its core investment banking and trading business but efforts to diversify the bank's revenues into newer, less volatile areas, have been less successful.

"It's a lukewarm grade for strategic transformation so far. Goldman is essentially what it was five years ago," said Christian Bolu, a senior research analyst at Autonomous Research.

Goldman's stagnant revenue mix has meant that, although its share price has outpaced the benchmark S&P 500 index under Solomon as its profits have



shrink these investments so the majority of revenues in asset management come from fees from third-party funds.

The biggest black mark on Solomon's efforts to transform Goldman was his expansion of the consumer banking business, a project that started under predecessor Lloyd Blankfein with the Marcus savings account but ballooned under the new chief executive.

Solomon said in October that Goldman was paring back its consumer effort in response to shareholder unease about its swelling losses. Part of that business has been repacked into a new financial technology division named Platform Solutions, which suffered \$2bn in losses last year.

Investors are expecting more complete explanations of why these decisions were taken and where they go from here at investor day.

Crucially, Solomon will again have to address signs of unhappiness inside the bank, typified by a raft of senior departures including chief financial officer Stephen Scherr, co-head of investment banking Gregg Lemkau and Eric Lane, co-head of the asset management division. "Any time people are upset, it's relevant. You would hope he hears his employees," said a top 20 Goldman investor.

More than a third of the 26 speakers at Goldman's first ever investor day three years ago have now left the bank. And although Solomon's contrition in Miami smoothed some ruffled feathers, other bankers remain angered by the event itself.

Employees saw it as clashing with the job cuts and the push for savings, which includes banning travel unless it is approved by one of the bank's partners, according to people familiar with the policies. Goldman said they wanted "partners to go out and meet aggressively with their clients this year".

Goldman executives have also argued that having the bank's top employees gather in Miami allowed them to focus on the bank's strategy. That included, they said, going over slides for the investor day presentations.

Amid the growing anger, Solomon made a rare visit in late January to Goldman's trading floor in New York — a clear sign, say insiders, that he is trying to rally support. Solomon was seen meeting Ashok Varadhan, co-head of Goldman's global banking and markets division, as well as telling the rates desk what a good job they were doing.

It was the first time many employees could remember that Solomon, a career investment banker, had visited the trading floor since becoming chief executive. Blankfein, who made his name at Goldman in the markets business, was known to visit the trading floor regularly. "David's extremely accessible and is in the building and always available," a Goldman spokesman said.

Solomon has also tried to make himself a more accessible CEO for shareholders. This has included basic gestures such as speaking to analysts on earnings calls — something Blankfein had delegated to his chief financial officer — and hosting that first-ever investor day in 2020.

But three years on from that showpiece event, Solomon remains under pressure.

"As much as the last investor day was about their vision of building a broader and diversified and more durable Goldman Sachs and showed off some of its new toys," said Glenn Schorr, senior research analyst at Evercore, "this investor day is going to be them saying clearly that we're going to be a much more profitable and consistent Goldman Sachs."

Stock prices
%
2019 20 21 22 23
Source: S&P Capital IQ

Morgan Stanley opens valuation gap
Price to book multiple
2019 20 21 22 23

Under pressure: David Solomon, Goldman's chief executive, has apologised to staff for errors, but now must persuade shareholders that the bank is moving in the right direction

grown, Goldman's price-to-book ratio, which compares a bank's stock price against the value of its assets, is largely unchanged.

Investment banking and trading, while highly lucrative in good years, are less cherished by stock market investors because their performance is unpredictable. Longtime Wall Street rival Morgan Stanley has been able to improve its stock market valuation and opened a gap on Goldman in recent years by expanding in asset and wealth management, activities that promise more stable returns.

The fourth quarter typified that gap as plunging investment banking fees hurt both banks but Morgan Stanley could lean on record wealth management revenues to prop up results.

Solomon does have some cards to play when trying to demonstrate progress at investor day: he can champion the market share gains in Goldman's legacy businesses as well as \$179bn of inflows since the end of 2019 for its asset management business, which generate the kind of steady management fees prized by investors.

But the asset management business is still dominated by Goldman's so-called on-balance sheet investments, a remnant of the era when the bank would wager its own capital. That business can generate enormous profits in good years but can also inflict pain, such as a \$660m loss in the fourth quarter. Goldman is in the process of trying to

The bank 'is essentially what it was five years ago'

Christian Bolu, Autonomous Research



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Food & Beverage

BrewDog expands in China with Bud tie-up

JUDITH EVANS — LONDON

Scottish craft beer group BrewDog will begin brewing Punk IPA and other beers in China and open more bars in the country after forming a joint venture with Budweiser China, the largest international brewer in the market.

The privately owned UK craft beer maker, which has been seeking a fresh start after it postponed a planned initial public offering and faced claims of a toxic culture from staff, said it wanted to tap into a new but growing craft beer market.

It was also shifting its expansion away from its home market of the UK because of the impact of inflation on brewing and hospitality venues there, said BrewDog chief executive James Watt.

"We don't want to be owned by 'big beer' but we do want to become a global beer business," said Watt. "Most of our focus in putting our capital to work is international. The environment is very challenging in the UK."

BrewDog's Punk IPA, Hazy Jane and Elvis Juice will be produced at Bud China's newly opened Putian craft brewery in Fujian province under the deal, while it aims to open nine more BrewDog-branded bars to add to one already open in Shanghai.

It follows a similar tie-up in 2021 with Japan's Asahi, under which BrewDog said it had since doubled sales in the country. Bud China is an arm of Bud Apac, the listed Asian brewer majority-

owned by the world's largest brewer AB InBev. BrewDog previously had a smaller China partnership with distributor Top Shelf and opened a bar in Shanghai in 2020. The new deal aimed to take advantage of an emerging thirst for craft beer in China, said Watt.

The group said production of craft brews in China had reached 6.5m hectolitres by 2020, though that was dwarfed by more than 341mm hectolitres of beer produced overall in China that year, according to hops supplier Barth-Haas. Local craft brewers include Jing-A and Panda Brew.

BrewDog made a pre-tax loss of £94m in 2021, the most recent year for which accounts are available, on net revenues of £219m.

The brewer, in which private equity firm TSG owns a stake, had planned a list in London in 2020 but postponed the IPO as Covid-19 roiled markets. Watt said the company now had no imminent plans to list but would look to put a timeline in place at the end of 2023.



BrewDog will begin brewing Punk IPA and open more bars in China

COMPANIES & MARKETS

Financials

Cash floods into high-grade corporate debt

Investors keen to lock in historically high yields provided by safest paper

HARRIET CLARKE — NEW YORK
GEORGE STEER — LONDON

Investors are piling into high-quality corporate bonds this year at a record rate, reflecting their enthusiasm for an asset class that is typically seen as relatively low risk but now offers the best returns in years.

A total of \$19bn has poured into funds that buy investment-grade corporate debt around the world since the start of 2023, the most ever at this point in the

over the past year as the Federal Reserve — like other big central banks — rapidly lifted interest rates in a bid to snuff out sky-high inflation.

Yields have also leapt on more speculative junk-rated debt, but many fund managers say they prefer to stick with debt issued by companies better placed to weather a potential economic downturn as higher interest rates slow the economy.

“Clients are looking at investment-grade first,” said Christian Hantel, portfolio manager at Vontobel Asset Management. “They are cautious after having their fingers burnt last year.”

Average US investment grade yields have risen to 5.45 per cent from 5.1 per cent a year ago. The bulk of that increase reflected a broad fixed income sell-off

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Technology

Renminbi pivot by China start-ups as international funding ebbs

RYAN MCNORROW AND SUN YU — BEIJING
DEMETRI SEVASTOPOULOU — WASHINGTON

International funding for Chinese start-ups dried up last year, pushing many fledgling technology companies to raise capital and list at home instead of on Wall Street.

Dollar investments in the country's new companies fell by almost three-quarters last year, declining to 19 per cent of the total capital put into start-ups from 59 per cent in 2021, according to new data from research group IJG.

Chinese investors and founders say geopolitical tensions with the US, as well as Beijing's tech crackdown and harsh zero-Covid policy, spooked foreign investors. At the same time, growing support from the Chinese government and Washington's sanctions also made raising renminbi more appealing.

The decision to raise dollars or renminbi generally puts Chinese entrepreneurs on two very different paths. One leads to successful companies going public in New York or in Hong Kong, while the other usually results in a listing in Shanghai, Shenzhen or Beijing.

“China's venture market was very, very different last year,” said Zhou Xiang, head of Mingde Capital Advisors, which helps start-ups raise funding. “In

Market questions. Week ahead

Fed dissenters offer clue to rate rise decisions

What is the level of dissent within the Federal Reserve?

Investors will watch the release on Wednesday of the Federal Reserve's minutes from its February meeting for insight into how much dissent there was over the latest decision to slow the pace of interest rate increases.

At its meeting ending February 1, the US central bank chose to slow the pace of its interest rate increases again, lifting its key policy rate by 0.25 percentage points after a series of 0.75 and 0.5 percentage points rises last year. At the time, the decisions made sense because inflation, and the US economy more broadly, had been cooling.

But since the February meeting, the US has reported that employers hired 500,000 people in January, nearly three times the forecast, and consumer prices slowed less than expected; and that retail sales showed the US consumer remained resilient.

All that suggests the Fed's rate-raising job is not yet done and might even require more aggressive action than its members had forecast.

Dissent within the Fed should therefore indicate members' willingness to take up the mantle of aggressive policy-making once again. Two Fed officials — Cleveland Fed president Loretta Mester and St Louis Fed president James Bullard — last week said they would have supported a larger 0.5 percentage point increase at the February meeting.

Evidence of more widespread dissent could persuade the market that the Fed might be open to raising rates higher and for longer than was indicated in the central bank's last survey of officials — the so-called “dot plot” from December. *Kate Duguid*

Will China cut rates?

China's government has made a point of prioritising growth this year, and markets will be focused today on the next potential flashpoint: the so-called loan prime rates, which serve as the country's benchmark interest rate.

Economists are expecting the People's Bank of China to keep the one-year LPR, the main short-term lending rate, and the five-year LPR, which underpins mortgage lending, unchanged at 3.65 per cent and 4.5 per cent respectively.

That is mainly because the PBoC this month did not tweak the medium-term lending facility rates, which serve as floors for the two benchmarks.



Energy boost: a floating LNG storage unit at the German Baltic Sea port of Lubmin. The fall in gas prices as Europe looks to replace

Russian fossil fuels has raised hopes that the eurozone will avoid recession *market.com/energy*

The banks can, and have, changed these rates before without any earlier action by the PBoC. But economists think that is unlikely this time around, since local governments are already rolling out measures to support the country's beleaguered property sector.

In January, banks across almost 20 major cities cut their minimum mortgage rates for first-time buyers on government orders, easing pressure on the central bank to cut rates.

Iris Pang, chief China economist at ING, said such government directives “would result in banks not having enough room to squeeze net interest margins”, making any surprise moves on the LPR even less likely. *Hudson Lockett*

Will European business sentiment improve?

The fall in wholesale gas prices and the easing of inflation are expected to result

in improving business sentiment across Europe this month. The flash S&P purchasing managers' index, a measure of activity compared with the previous month, is expected to show that business growth accelerated in the eurozone in February after registering expansion for the first time in seven months in January.

Economists polled by Reuters forecast that the eurozone composite PMI, released tomorrow, will rise to 50.5 in February from 50.3 the previous month, boosted by stronger activity in the services sector. Ellie Henderson, economist at Investec, said that “the optimism seen at the start of this year extended through into this month”.

In contrast with expectations of a deep downturn forecast only a few months ago, many economists now think that the eurozone economy will dodge a recession this winter, helped by lower gas prices and cooling inflation.

Many economists now think that the eurozone economy will dodge a recession this winter

Preliminary data calculated without figures for Germany showed that eurozone inflation fell more than expected to 8.5 per cent in January from 9.2 per cent in December. Analysts calculated that final figures, to be released on Thursday, would be revised up to 8.7 per cent, but that would still be the lowest in seven months.

The PMI figures for the UK are also expected to show an improvement, with the Composite index forecast to rise to 49 this month from 48.5 in the previous month. This would still be below the 50 mark which indicates a majority of businesses reporting a contraction in activity, driven by continued weakness in manufacturing.

“Although the operating environment will no doubt be challenging over the course of 2023, continued faith in an economic recovery in 2024 should continue to support UK business sentiment,” said Henderson. *Valentina Romel*

Travel & leisure. Football

Early bidders pitch competing visions for Manchester United

UK mogul and Qatari sheikh emerge as rivals for potential record sale of a sports team

JOSH NOBLE AND SAMUEL AXINI
LONDON
JAMES FONTANELLA-KHAN
AND ANTOINE GARA — NEW YORK

Three months after the Glazer family put Manchester United up for sale, two bidders have emerged with competing visions for one of the world's most valuable sporting teams and a British cultural asset with huge global reach.

On Friday evening, the first bidder went public as Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani, the son of Qatar's former prime minister, announced his intention to buy the club he claimed to have supported since the age of 10.

Sheikh Jassim's father, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, is one of the many Gulf states' richest men. Known to many as HBH, he was the face of a Qatar investment spree in the UK that included Harrod's department store and the St James' and was previously head of the Qatar

Investment Authority, the country's sovereign wealth fund.

Within hours, Sir Jim Ratcliffe, the billionaire founder of UK chemicals group Ineos, confirmed that he too had made an offer to buy the Glazers' controlling stake in his hometown club.

Raine, the investment bank running the sale process on behalf of the Glazers, has remained tight-lipped on whether there are other bidders in the running. The bank, which handled the record-breaking auctions for both Chelsea FC and Olympique Lyonnais last year, had set Friday as a soft deadline for those seeking to put forward investment proposals. It declined to comment on any bids.

Any interested parties looking for funding will have plenty of options. MSD Capital, Oaktree and Elliott Management have all expressed an interest in providing financing for potential suitors, according to people familiar with the matter.

The price is likely to surpass the \$4.6bn spent on the Denver Broncos NFL franchise last year, the current record paid for a sports team. Since

plans for a possible sale were announced in November, United's New York-listed shares have doubled, giving the club an enterprise value of about \$5bn. However, the Glazers have not committed to a full sale, leaving open the possibility of taking in minority investment.

While both Sheikh Jassim and Ratcliffe voiced their determination to win over supporters with their initial public pitches, both drew clear dividing lines related to the perceived shortcomings of the Glazers' tenure.

Sheikh Jassim, chair of Qatar Islamic Bank, emphasised plans to bolster Manchester United's balance sheet and ageing infrastructure. He promised a “debt free” purchase via his previously unknown Nine Two Foundation, “which will look to invest in the football team, the training centre, the stadium and wider infrastructure”.

The Qatar bid is likely to have deep pockets, although the precise source of funding remains unclear. Those working on Sheikh Jassim's bid insist no money is coming from QIA. The Qatar state already owns French champions Paris Saint-Germain through Qatar

Sports Investments. Uefa, football's governing body in Europe, bans clubs owned by the same entity from competing against each other.

The Glazer family has been criticised by United fans for burdening the club with acquisition debt and extracting hundreds of millions of pounds in dividends since their leveraged buyout in 2005. Meanwhile United's infrastructure, including Old Trafford, its 74,000-



Manchester United, acquired by the Glazer family in a leveraged buyout

seater stadium and the Carrington training ground, are no longer the envy of the football world. In an open letter to potential investors in December, the Manchester United Supporters Trust said the club needed “urgent capital investment” in the stadium and training ground.

While also acknowledging the need for investment, Ratcliffe's opening pitch hinged more on rebuilding fractured ties with the United fan base and halting the march of foreign ownership in English football. Just a handful of the Premier League's 20 teams are currently British-owned.

In a statement released on Saturday, Ineos said: “We would see our role as the long-term custodians of Manchester United on behalf of the fans and the wider community.”

Ratcliffe's company also nodded to the pending release of a UK government white paper — due this week — which will outline the scope of a new football regulator. The push for an independent body to oversee the game came after the attempt two years ago to launch a breakaway competition, the European Super

League, which the Glazers were part of along with owners of five other Premier League teams.

“Football governance in this country is at a crossroads”, Ineos said. “We would want to help lead this next chapter, deepening the culture of English football by making the club a beacon for a modern, progressive, fan-centred approach to ownership”.

While Ratcliffe has hired JPMorgan and Goldman Sachs as advisers, he has not yet outlined how a bid would be financed. He will also have to address his own potential conflict as Ineos already owns French club Nice.

Ratcliffe may also have to shake off lingering doubts about his seriousness. Last year he attempted to getcrash the auction for Chelsea, launching a last-gasp offer for the London club once the formal process had already whittled down the bidders to a shortlist of two.

But in a month the club had been sold to a consortium led by Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital for £2.5bn, a record for a football club that is likely to be smashed if a full sale of Manchester United goes ahead.

MARKET DATA

FT500: THE WORLD'S LARGEST COMPANIES

Table listing FT500 companies with columns for Name, Price, % Change, P/E, Dividend Yield, and Market Cap. Includes companies like Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Google, etc.

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Table listing FT500 companies with columns for Name, Price, % Change, P/E, Dividend Yield, and Market Cap. Includes companies like United Parcel, Amazon, etc.

FT500: TOP 10

Table showing the top 10 FT500 companies by market cap, including Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Google, etc.

FT500: BOTTOM 10

Table showing the bottom 10 FT500 companies by market cap, including various smaller firms.

BONDS: HIGH-YIELD & EMERGING MARKET

Table listing high-yield and emerging market bonds with columns for Issuer, Coupon, Maturity, and Yield.

BONDS: GLOBAL INVESTMENT GRADE

Table listing global investment grade bonds with columns for Issuer, Coupon, Maturity, and Yield.

INTEREST RATES: OFFICIAL

Table showing official interest rates for various countries and currencies.

BOND INDICES

Table showing performance of various bond indices.

VOLATILITY INDICES

Table showing volatility indices for different markets.

GLTS: UK CASH MARKET

Table showing UK cash market data for gilts.

INTEREST RATES: MARKET

Table showing market interest rates for various instruments.

BONDS: EURO-AREA

Table showing Euro-area bond data.

BONDS: BENCHMARK GOVERNMENT

Table showing benchmark government bond data.

GLTS: US FTSE ASSESSMENT GRADE

Table showing US FTSE assessment grade data.

COMMODITIES

Table listing commodity prices for various goods.

BONDS: EURO-AREA

Table showing Euro-area bond data.

BONDS: TEN YEAR GOVT SPREADS

Table showing ten-year government bond spreads.

GLTS: US FTSE ASSESSMENT GRADE

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MANAGED FUNDS SERVICE

SUMMARY FT.COM/FUNDS

Summary table with columns: Winners - US Fund Foreign Large Growth, Losers - US Fund Foreign Large Growth, Morningstar Star Ratings, Global Broad Category Group - Miscellaneous. Includes Fund Name, Yr Return, and other metrics.

Advertising Feature: edentree investment management. Performance chart showing Fund vs Category vs Sector returns from Jan 2020 to Feb 2023. Includes Risk Measures and Top 10 Holdings as of 21/12/2022.

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Logos for various fund providers: algobris INVESTMENTS, BLUE WHALE GROWTH FUND, CANDRIAM, DODGE & COX WORLDWIDE FUNDS, Fidelity INTERNATIONAL, Fundsmith Equity Fund.

Table of fund performance data for various providers including Candriam, Dodge & Cox, Fidelity, and Fundsmith. Columns include Fund Name, Yr Return, and other metrics.

Table of fund performance data for various providers including Algobris, Blue Whale, and Brook Macdonald. Columns include Fund Name, Yr Return, and other metrics.

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MANAGED FUNDS SERVICE

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Table with columns: Fund, Bid, Offer, Yield, 1Y, 3Y, Fund. Includes TOSCAFUND and TOSCAFUND.

LAZARD ASSET MANAGEMENT logo and text.

MIRABAUD ASSET MANAGEMENT logo and text.

RAM ACTIVE INVESTMENTS logo and text.

Slater Investments logo and text.

TROY ASSET MANAGEMENT logo and text.

Troy Asset Mgt (1200) logo and text.

Table with columns: Fund, Bid, Offer, Yield, 1Y, 3Y, Fund. Includes Lazard Fund Managers Ltd (1200F).

Table with columns: Fund, Bid, Offer, Yield, 1Y, 3Y, Fund. Includes Oasis.

Table with columns: Fund, Bid, Offer, Yield, 1Y, 3Y, Fund. Includes Ram Active Investments SA.

Stewart Investors logo and text.

Table with columns: Fund, Bid, Offer, Yield, 1Y, 3Y, Fund. Includes Stewart Investors.

KEEP THE SPOTLIGHT ON YOUR FUNDS graphic.

Table with columns: Fund, Bid, Offer, Yield, 1Y, 3Y, Fund. Includes Lethbridge Property Trust (UK).

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STONEHEDGE FLEMING GLOBAL BEST IDEAS EQUITY FUND logo and text.

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RUFFER logo and text.

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SUPERFUND INVEST BETTER logo and text.

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RUBRICS logo and text.

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SCOTTISH FRIENDLY ASSET MANAGERS LTD logo and text.

Table with columns: Fund, Bid, Offer, Yield, 1Y, 3Y, Fund. Includes Scottish Friendly.

Table with columns: Fund, Bid, Offer, Yield, 1Y, 3Y, Fund. Includes Scottish Friendly.

WORK & CAREERS

'You look like you're swimming in cash when everyone else is swimming in sewage'



Rutherford Hall Critical Comms

Messages from the archive of Rutherford Hall, critical communications strategist

What's up to Stephen: Don't worry, I'm not a secret ally with our head of data, or my promise to tell staff about the reorganisation in a way that doesn't start rumours. But I've got a rush job for a client. NorthSouth Water is panicking about media calls for a new crackdown on their god-given right to pollute our rivers with sewage. You know the old phrase, "Where there's muck there's brass"? Well, where there's effluent, there's affluence.

From: Rutherford@Monkwellstrategies.com To: Sarah@NorthSouthWater.com

Hi Sarah, We are on it. But we need to be realistic. There is no campaign that makes this look good. We are on cleanup duty either way. In a dream world, we'd pledge a fast and expensive programme to end the dumping of sewage in rivers. So the challenge is to frame a plan addressing public concerns while reassuring your shareholders you won't do anything as environmentally unfriendly as cut dividends.

stellar environmental record. Yes, this looks bad, but actually you are way ahead in your 10-point green plan. We need to stress how much you've reduced your carbon footprint, the work on water conservation, your fleet of electric vehicles. The message is you are super green, but still a work in progress. Oh, and let's start referring to sewage as "organic waste". Sounds more environmentally friendly.

Yours, greenwashing, Rutherford Member DCMS Panel on Business and the Metaverse

Find me on Strava, Kohl Sydnam Hill, PW London to Brighton 2k 47m

From: Rutherford@Monkwellstrategies.com To: Sarah@NorthSouthWater.com

Hi Sarah, I like the way you think. Yes, we could say the sewage was biodegradable but we don't want people thinking about it more than necessary. Lots of things are biodegradable but you don't necessarily want to swim in them. I take your point about the scale of this being exaggerated but let's avoid the phrase "a drop in the ocean".

I'm not surprised the other water chief execs have asked you to front up this campaign. It's relatively flattering to be told by your peers you are a

natural communicator and the best person to go on the Today programme to defend the industry. But I'd urge you to think carefully. On the one hand, you earn the respect of your peers while they shelter behind you. On the other, you'll get your salary on the front of the Mail and environmental activists turning up at your house to dump sewage in the driveway.

Best, Rutherford Member DCMS Panel on Business and the Metaverse

From: Rutherford@Monkwellstrategies.com To: Sarah@NorthSouthWater.com

Great. That was my instinct too. Stay in the peloton and let someone else take the heat. It's what you pay Water UK for. On the wider campaign, the message to ministers is that jail sentences or fines of up to £250m will just lead to higher bills for customers and lower investment in infrastructure. We also need to push back calls for a beed up Environment Agency. Do ministers really want untested regulators pushing up bills at a time when everyone is feeling the pinch?

But clean rivers are not net zero. All Tories can, sort of, see the point of them. Total inaction is just a gift to Labour and we don't see a future

I take your point about the scale of this being exaggerated, but let's avoid the phrase "a drop in the ocean"

Labour government as our friend on this issue. They might prioritise those swimming in sewage over those swimming in cash. So we need to get ahead of this. I have to advise that you can't avoid spending so the game is to stretch the timelines and give them a reason not to act. I know what you are thinking: there goes the dividend. But we just need to structure this correctly. It's like H2S - we're totally committed to it but will be dead before it happens.

That means a plan costing multiple millions but spaced over several years and backloaded, which will lower river emissions by another big number. Our sustainable, long-term clean water plan. Is there anything you can do that seems to link it to your remuneration so it looks like a personal commitment? BTW you do anything about the places the media keep focusing on. Stick to less accessible areas and they might pick on another company.

Best, Rutherford Member DCMS Panel on Business and the Metaverse. Find me on Strava...

What's up to Stephen: Honestly mate, I'm on it. I've just been dealing with a business leader dumping toxic crap on the people around them. So don't worry, you're very much on my mind. Messages recovered by Robert Shrimley

Leadership

CEO whisperers: Who do bosses turn to in their hour of need?

Some leaders use trusted insiders and others rely on 'professional critics' to tell them uncomfortable home truths, writes Oliver Balch

When Covid-19 struck, Glenn Fogel sensed he might have a problem. Then came the first government lockdowns and the chief executive of Booking.com, the hotel reservation service, was left in no doubt. No travel meant no demand, no demand meant no earnings. The company's cash reserves were sound, but not sound enough to keep an involuntary idle workforce on the books.

"I thought, 'Well, we need to take action immediately to make sure that we can survive for the long term,'" Fogel recalls. A drastic cut in payroll was the obvious solution. "Horrible" as such a decision was, tough calls are part of a chief executive's job. However, Fogel was hesitant.

Unsure, he turned to a small coterie of trusted advisers, made up of the company's chief financial officer, general counsel and head of human resources. Their feedback? "We can afford to wait." So he did. Booking.com eventually laid off 25 per cent of its workforce, but not until a year after the pandemic hit.

Cries and firefighting are all in a day's work for the average CEO. So too is the receipt of professional advice. Senior executives can call on any number of experts and consultants, yet finding a confidant is not always easy. Who is that person the boss can be certain has their back? Who is always there to act as a sounding board when times are tough? And who can hold up a mirror and ask the questions that no one else will? In Fogel's case, his trinity of senior insiders act as his "go-to" source for honest feedback. "I trust them 100 per cent. I never have any question that I'm not getting the straight dope from them," he says.

He is lucky. Boardrooms can often be a minefield of ego, ambition and internal wrangling - conditions ideal for sycophancy and power games, not for the building of trust. Fogel credits a combination of respect for his trio's judgment and a long history of working together as reasons for his confidence. "We've been through so many crises together where all these people have been very honest - brutally so, at times."

For Helen O'Neill, chief executive of the health tech company fertility, the bond of trust goes deeper. A research scientist by background, she co-founded her London-based venture with her identical twin sister, Deirdre, an ex-corporate lawyer. "There are very few people who will cut to the core like her," Helen says of her sister, who heads up the company's legal affairs.

"It doesn't matter how direct or insulting it is - there's no filter between us." In addition to their deep connection, Helen puts a high value on the alternative take on a problem. "Deirdre brings as a result of their different



Executive coach René Carayol, below. Philippe Maso, CEO of Ormlark, says exchanges with him 'are always open and frank'

For those chief executives who lack a sibling to turn to, the next best person is often a spouse or close friend. While confidentiality rules can inhibit full openness, few individuals know them better or care for them more deeply.

Eric Shoup, chief executive of US peer-to-peer booking service Peerspace, often looks to his wife for a critical ear. She has a knack for distilling a problem, he says - a gift enhanced by her distance from the "noise" often surrounding the problem at hand. That said, mixing headhaches at work with life at home can put a strain on personal relationships. Wisely, Shoup is mindful to be "sparing" in pursuing his wife's advice.

Another downside of the friend-adviser is his or her ability to weigh in with criticism. Highly competent as chief executives typically are, none are perfect. So, who is on hand to highlight their blind spots? One obvious candidate is the external critic. The instinct of most business leaders may be to dismiss challenging voices as either ill-informed or ideologically antagonistic. Yet critics can have insights that those confined behind an institution's walls often lack.

"Take the work of ShareAction, a UK-based charity that seeks to hold companies' feet to the fire through investor activism. Catherine Howarth, ShareAction's chief executive, sees her job as an "outside agitator", waking up company leaders to overlooked business risks.

"I trust them 100 per cent. I never have any question that I'm not getting the straight dope from them"

contrarian. In an advisory style he half-jokingly calls "insultary", he employs a mix of humour and provocation to flush into the open issues that "everyone knows exists, but no one wants to talk about". The strategy, he admits, meets with mixed results. Even when intended constructively, a criticism remains a criticism. Gillespie's experience is that the closer to home a truth hits, the fiercer business leaders fight back.

"When it's something that questions the fundamental assumptions that underpin your business model, that's when people say, 'We can't go there,'" he adds. So, if the friend is too friendly and the critic too critical, is there a role for a professional "critical friend" to step into the gap? Philippe Maso believes so. In his career as chief executive for AXA UK, then Aviva France and later for Ormlark, a driving-instruction start-up, he has had executive coach René Carayol on near or constant speed-dial. Having someone like Carayol who can enter a situa-

tion and rapidly identify the issues at play is invaluable, says Maso. An additional bonus is knowing that Carayol - a former board director of IPC Media, now Time Inc. - has previously walked in the same shoes. "Our exchanges are always open and frank," Maso states. "He has licence to say everything he believes is right. You're misjudging this person, for example. Or, 'you're not looking at the right signal!'"

For all their history together, however, it is a licence Carayol says he is careful never to abuse. In his role as confidant-and-challenger, he is diplomatic and charming to a fault, he says. Questions, not assertions, are his preferred tools. The individuals on his client list - who include board executives at Coca-Cola, Barclays, GSK and AstraZeneca, among many others - tend to be those at the "top of their game" rather than those in more obvious need of support. "You could say they are the ones who need [me] less, but they are also the ones who are not afraid to say they've got someone they go to in their hour of need," he explains.

Margaret Heffernan, an entrepreneur, business writer (her books include *Wild Blindness: Why We Ignore the Obvious at Our Peril*) and mentor, prefers the term "thinking partner" to "critical friend", but the basic task is the same. She asks what a business leader is not seeing and, with a series of astute questions, edges them towards a resolution.

The task she is being paid has its advantages. Unlike the intimate friend or external critic, with whom emotional detachment is near impossible, the professional critical friend can stand apart. Operating in a bounded relationship of this kind not only lowers objectivity, but reduces fear of causing offence. In Heffernan's case, she never goes looking for conflict, but nor does she hold back when hard truths beckon. "I will be as robust as I think helps them think," she says of her chief executive clients. Besides, most guests as good as they get, she notes: "They're all pretty tough cookies."

Dear Jonathan

YOUR QUESTION FOR OUR EXPERT - AND READERS' ADVICE

I've done the same job for years - how do I move my career on?



This week's problem

I have worked in the mobile telecoms industry for 30 years, in the UK and abroad. I prioritised my family over my career, but my child has now almost finished school and I would like to move forwards. How do I overcome the challenge of feeling stuck and being seen purely as a technical resource? Is it too late to change companies and transfer skills when an employee has reached a certain maturity? Male, 50s

Jonathan's answer

After 30 years in one industry, you want to explore other opportunities but are concerned it might be too late to change. Most career choices are a compromise, based on the circumstances, now your family priorities are lower, circumstances have shifted, and you feel you can now consider new roles.

Phanella Mayall Fine, co-founder of Up Rising Human Capital, says it is never too late to change, citing well-known examples - such as American cooking teacher Julia Child and former US president Ronald Reagan - who made career U-turns in their fifties, and older.

However, you need to be clear on why you're feeling stuck, and what you really want for the next role," she adds. You may not be used to thinking without constraints, so she suggests exercises such as free writing.

You ask about transferring your skills, as you generate ideas on what you are interested in, and develop an inventory of your skills, both technical and managerial. Arpad Szakal, principal consultant at Cornis Partners, an executive search and leadership advisory firm, recommends doing a skills audit, and then using it to rebrand yourself to be attractive to your target employer or industry.

"People often don't do enough to craft their career narrative, highlighting the skills and experiences they can bring that are relevant," he says.

Fine says test and refine your new brand with others and by asking how your career role plays to these skills. It's worth checking whether you could adjust your job to better suit your new ambitions, your

employer may not know of your frustration of feeling stuck and could help. Szakal says you could convene a "personal advisory board of mentors, assembled from professionals you trust". They'll challenge you, help and guide you as you start your search.

Your personal appetite for risk will be a particular influence. Even though your family caring responsibilities may have lifted, how able and willing are you to leave behind what you know and join a new organisation? It sounds like you're both ready to do something new, and could be able to do so, perhaps built on your current or an adjacent role.

Readers' advice

The What Color is Your Parachute? book is an excellent start point. Buy the most up-to-date version and do some of the exercises. Some useful clarity follows. It's never too late to adapt and thrive. Robin Gibb

Combine your technical and soft skills for a transition into a more managerial role. Consider a short-term executive education programme to bridge the knowledge gap. Matteo Giovinetti

Write down some job descriptions for different versions of the near future you. Let your imagination run riot. You will start to see people around you who have elements of what you like. Pick and mix the best and keep writing ideas down. Anop

The next problem

I'm a business manager with seven years' experience in financial services. Both my strengths and interests are in talent strategy, performance management and workforce planning. But which other areas can I consider outside of HR? I am interested in environmental, social and governance and the role of company secretary, for example. How should I equip myself for mid-senior opportunities in these areas? Female, 30s

Jonathan Black is director of the Careers Service at the University of Oxford. Every fortnight he answers your questions on personal and career development and working life. Do you have a question for him? Email: dear.jonathan@ft.com

WORK & CAREERS

How to Lead. Pablo Isla, former chair and CEO of Inditex

‘Whatever I do, I think about doing it indefinitely’

The head of the world's largest clothing retailer for 17 years tells Jonathan Moules how he steered long-term growth

What do you do after hanging up your jacket as boss of the world's biggest clothing retailer? For Pablo Isla, who stepped down from running Inditex a year ago, part of the answer is passing on his expertise to business students as chair of the international advisory board at Madrid's IE University. And yes, he is still wearing his former employer's clothes.

When we meet at IE, he's in a navy blue suit and shirt by Massimo Dutti, the group's affordable luxury brand. "I was buying this label before I joined Inditex, and I have many of those suits, most of them navy blue," Isla, 59, says.

He's by no means the only repeat customer. During his 17-year tenure at Inditex, the group's capitalisation rose sixfold. In 2021, Isla's last full year leading the retailer, Inditex generated a net profit of €3.24bn on a turnover of €27.7bn.

As chief executive of the group, and executive chair, how did Isla implement such a successful growth strategy in an already huge company?

One key point is that Inditex, whose brands include Zara and Pull & Bear, has always kept its supply lines local and nimble. "If you have the fabric, you can send this fabric to a factory in Galicia or in Morocco, then you could have in two weeks the garment coming back to the logistics platform and being sold," he says.

The company's capacity to produce sought-after garments on a very quick turnaround became a template that other high-street retailers have since tried to imitate. Inditex produces about half of its clothing close to home in factories near its headquarters in the Galician town of Arteixo, in north west Spain, as well as in Portugal and Morocco.

'What is essential is... to lead with values. Honesty, reliability, respect, transparency, diversity'

One of Isla's most significant improvements to this process was to shepherd the development of technology that turned a largely brick-and-mortar operation into a hybrid retailer, using its global network of 6,400 stores as display windows and mini distribution hubs for people buying garments on their smartphones.

The move was successful, and by 2021, a quarter of Inditex's sales came from online purchases. The global financial crash, the coronavirus pandemic, and, most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic, reduced consumer spending and cost inflation ravaged the sector. But under Isla, the retailer also expanded its store network while many rivals closed theirs.

Isla won't talk about Inditex's competitors. "I will never talk about another company, even with investors." But he believes there is more than one way to succeed in any market. "In business, you thrive not just because of the business model but your execution of that model. But it is nearly impossible to be successful if you try to replicate another company's business model without having the right culture."

He admits Inditex has had a degree of luck in its success with sales of particular garment designs, such as the white polka dot dress produced by Zara in 2019 that became a social media sensation.

"In fashion there is always an element of surprise," he says. "It is something to do with emotions. That is why flexibility is so relevant."

While keeping things nimble, he also prioritised focusing on the long term bonds. "Some of these suppliers we have had relationships with for over 20 years, so it is very integrated. Also Inditex owns 10 factories and these factories are those that are in contact with these suppliers all the time."

Inditex operates a very flat dispersed management structure, giving country managers the power to make decisions quickly. "I don't know what the best word is in English but something like



Pablo Isla: 'It is nearly impossible to be successful if you try to replicate another company's business model without having the right culture' — Jonathan Moules/FT

the granularity. When you think about the Inditex buying process, there are hundreds of buyers, so each buyer is not dealing with so many factories," Isla says. "With this granularity, at Inditex it is not so centralised a supply chain function."

When he was CEO, Isla shunned the spotlight. "I thought it would be better for the company to be the main character," he says.

"Of course I was doing press conferences. It was not that I was out of touch with the media. I prefer to be low profile." Low-profile did not mean that his performance went unnoticed: he is one of the few people to top the Harvard Business Review's ranking for best performing CEO for two consecutive years.

Now he talks openly about how important it was to support the company's internal culture as leader. "For me, what is essential is how important it is to lead with values," he says. "Honesty, reliability, respect, transparency, diversity. With your employees, investors, media, suppliers and all the stakeholders, I have always tried to be very reliable, somebody you can trust."

He also worked hard to diversify the company's leadership, he says, noting that he appointed women as company heads in key markets, including China, Japan, Australia and Canada. "By diversity, I mean to promote it at every level inside the company. Gender diversity and race diversity."

Isla cites as his leadership hero his former boss, Inditex founder Amancio Ortega. The two were in daily contact while Isla ran the retailer and they still speak frequently, he says. "It is the most similar to being family without being family. I would say, at the beginning it was quite obvious, the level of under-

standing between us. We are now very close friends."

It has been reported that when Ortega was looking for a chief executive in 2005, he set a condition that anyone selected had to agree to relocate to Galicia and as a consequence several candidates withdrew from the process.

At the time of his appointment, Isla, a lawyer by training, had been chair of Alladix, a Spanish tobacco group (now owned by Imperial Tobacco). He says that he not only expected to be at Inditex for a long time but had no end point in mind when he joined. "Whatever I do, I think about doing it indefinitely. I think it is the only way of dealing with your professional life."

When Isla stepped down in 2022, Ortega's daughter Marta took over as chair, while the CEO's job was handed to Oscar García Macceiras, general counsel and secretary of the Inditex board.

When I ask Isla whether he had any involvement with the succession planning that appointed Macceiras, he says: "That is totally private. But I have total

'In fashion there is always an element of surprise. That is why flexibility is so relevant'

trust in the way we have organised the succession and the management team for the company."

Isla also refuses to be drawn on saying anything about Marta Ortega. "I have known Marta since she was a university student, and we have shared many family moments. But I never in life more generally like to comment, or criticise, other people. I prefer to stay quiet."

Post-Inditex, Isla retains a board position at Nestlé, the Swiss consumer goods group, and is a trustee of the Amancio Ortega Foundation.

At IE University — which is the FT's partner in Headspring, an executive education company — Isla can share his management experience with students. But he doesn't see himself as a regular teacher standing in front of an auditorium, and prefers a more fluid approach.

He wants to be in conversation with the dean of the business school in front of new students, followed by a question session. "This kind of interaction I like... but I see myself very much like this rather than becoming a professor."

And he is also finding time for another of his passions, the cinema. Isla is co-founder of a film-production company. "When I was starting in university, I was going every afternoon. When I began to rent videos, I was always the shop's best customer." It's a nod to the enduring power of retail in his life.

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- Three questions**
- **Who is your leadership hero?**
Amancio Ortega. I admire his vision to create a company with a disruptive business model. Also, the way he is able to get the best of everyone around him [and] his ambition to improve.
 - **What was your first leadership lesson?**
It was from my father, who had several executive positions. There was a level of commitment of ethic. He had a practical vision on business problems, the orientation to the customer.
 - **If you were not doing what you do now, what would you have done?**
I love the legal profession, so I might have been a senior partner or created my own law firm. Or perhaps I'd have been a film director. It's a big passion.

ARTS

‘If you saw yourself in a museum, you’d go back’

Real people and their stories and artefacts are at the heart of Manchester Museum’s new South Asia Gallery, writes Debika Ray

In the corner of the Manchester Museum’s new South Asia Gallery is a mannequin wearing a first world war uniform that belonged to Subedar Mohammed Ali, the great-grandfather of journalist Talat-Farooq Awan — crumpled, smudged and worn, but otherwise well preserved as a reminder of the soldiers from Britain’s colonies who fought in Europe’s major 20th-century conflicts. Awan discovered the outfit on a visit to his father’s village in Pakistan. “It’s an ongoing and personal journey to uncover my family history through these objects,” his text next to the object reads. “I hope it inspires others to do the same.”

Personal reflections have been rare in such contexts: it is uncontroversial today to point out that museums aren’t objective containers of universal truth, but it’s still not standard for major institutions to centre the perspectives of the people whose stories they are trying to tell.

That was the intention here in what is billed as the “first permanent gallery in the UK dedicated to the experiences and histories of south Asian diaspora communities” — people who, like more than 11 per cent of Manchester’s population, have origins in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Pakistan, Nepal or Sri Lanka. It is one of several spaces opening this week as part of a £15m transformation of Manchester Museum, including a gallery dedicated to Chinese culture and another that explores notions of belonging.

Awan is one of 30 people known as the South Asia Gallery Collective — community leaders, educators, artists, historians, journalists and musicians with an interest in south Asia and a connection to Manchester. They were assembled in 2018 to collaborate with the institution



Above: a collage by Michellie Oliver focuses on those of mixed heritage. Below left: co-curator Nusrat Ahmed



and its partner, the British Museum, on the project. Manchester Museum director Esme Ward explains that the original idea in 2015 was for a more conventional gallery about south Asia, but when she entered her role in 2018, “it didn’t feel right to create a gallery that said, ‘These are your histories, folks.’”

Nusrat Ahmed, who had worked in the voluntary sector, started out as a member of the collective but was brought on board midway as the gallery’s co-curator.

“I remember coming to Manchester Museum when I was seven and I can’t remember anything other than old coins,” she says. “Museums have to change, because that’s what people want — and I think they would become extinct if they didn’t.”

The gallery makes people whose experiences aren’t often narrated in these contexts feel visible. “It has been hard for us British-born members of the diaspora to connect to our south Asian backgrounds,” Ahmed says. “This a place I would bring my child and say, ‘This is your heritage.’ If you saw yourself in a museum, you’d go back — why wouldn’t you?”

As curators and also as the intended audience, the collective will literally see themselves in the gallery — many stories are narrated through their quotes, rather than an anonymised museum voice. Their personal possessions — the first world war uniform or a sewing machine from the workshop of Taslima Ahmad, who trains women from disadvantaged backgrounds in textile skills — sit alongside objects from museum collections, including an ancient brick from the Indus Valley and a multilingual label from a piece of cotton woven in Manchester and sold in Kolkata.

The stories, grouped into six “anthologies”, often highlight connections between south Asia, Britain and the wider world — Past and Present includes Gandhi’s 1931 visit to Darwen. Movement and Empire draws parallels between Partition in 1947 and recent mass displacements. Others home in on the British Asian experience — from doctors in the NHS to young people attending “daytimer” raves and inhabiting queer spaces.

The breadth of time, space and topics this exhibition seeks to tackle is vast: a period spanning from 2600BC to the modern day, a region of more than 5m sq km with a population of 1.9bn and a diaspora of 44m. In some respects, the process of co-curation made this ambi-



Bodhisattva Maitreya statue in the South Asia Gallery

tious effort more realistic — it was clear from the outset that it would be subjective and selective exploration. The display will evolve over time as new members, with other perspectives and identities, are brought in. Meanwhile, a central project space will have a more frequently changing display, including films and performances.

Balancing the views of the 50 members of the collective with those of two museums and their design team came with its own challenges, adding time, cost and unpredictability. “It was essential to accommodate multiple perspectives, while recognising that 30 people can’t represent the diversity of such a large region. Mining your personal history for public consideration can also be traumatic.”

“Hearing what some of the others had been through was a real eye-opener — everyone was crying,” says Taslima Ahmad, recalling the experiences of racism and abuse her fellow collective members related. The museum responded with counselling to support participants’ mental health. “Co-curation isn’t scripted,” Nusrat Ahmed explains. “What I hope we’ve done well is that, when we knew it wasn’t working, we stopped and re-evaluated.”

Even for the British Museum, which has done co-curation before, this has

been a project like no other, according to Emily Hamman, its curator who worked on the project. “This is the biggest in scale and depth that we’ve done. And I don’t think it’s ever been done like this — I believe museums across the UK and the world will look to this as an important catalyst, and it’s exciting to think about where it can go next.”

Where next, then? Ward says museums don’t need to make a choice between fact and feeling — they can value both. “A lot of museums have been telling a rather one-dimensional story for a long time and now, as a curator, we’re thinking about what it means to not just to care for collections, but for people, their ideas, beliefs and relationships,” she says.

For her, the South Asia Gallery is a study in how museums can build empathy. “I knew that this gallery could be a really powerful place for emotional connection, and I’m looking forward to seeing whether that has worked.”

Taslima Ahmad already feels something changing. “I think this will draw in many people who never come to museums — ordinary people from every walk of life, rather than only middle-class people. Because museums should be for everybody.”

museum.manchester.ac.uk



Above right: Talat-Farooq Awan of South Asia Gallery Collective. Above: tabla

FT LIVE

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PODCASTS

Fiona Sturges



Pop fans of a certain vintage may remember Lance Bass, singer with NSYNC, the 1990s boy band famed for the hit “I Want You Back” and for their copious use of hair gel (and also for launching the career of Justin Timberlake). What they may not recall is that Bass is also a Russian-trained cosmonaut, having gone through training in Star City outside Moscow during a break from the band. In the end, Bass never got to go into space, but his obsession with the stories of those who have remains undimmed.

All of which explains how Bass came to be hosting *The Last Soviet*, a new podcast telling the story of Sergei Krikalev, a flight engineer from Leningrad who, in 1991, was stationed alone on Mir, the Soviet space station, just as his country was collapsing.

With the break-up of the Soviet Union, the space programme was left in disarray, with no funding for further missions. Krikalev wasn’t initially told what was going on; the first he heard of it was from an associate in Australia with whom he had occasional radio contact.

When mission control finally brought him up to speed, he was given a choice: he could return home in his re-entry capsule, reunite with his wife and one-year-old child and leave the space

station to circle the Earth without a crew, or he could stay there until events on the ground stabilised. Krikalev chose to stay and was alone in space for a total of 313 days.

It’s a remarkable story, expertly narrated by Bass, whose celebrity presence is not the distraction it might have been. The sound design is also excellent, with the (presumably imagined) sounds of the Mir space station interspersed with archive audio of news reports and crackling transmissions from mission control, all set against a tinkling otherworldly soundtrack.

The series draws on the testimony of historians, space experts and Helen Sharman, the first Briton in space, who trained with Russian cosmonauts for 18 months before visiting Mir in 1991. Sharman’s tales of training regimes, space travel rituals and the hospitality

extended by her fellow cosmonauts are wonderful.

If there is one voice missing here, it’s Krikalev’s. It turns out the series had lined up an interview with the retired cosmonaut, who is now 64, to be done in Moscow last spring but, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the trip was called off. While it would have been good to hear how it felt for him to be marooned in space while his country imploded, the series successfully plugs the gaps with geopolitical context and how the Soviet space missions, beginning with Yuri Gagarin’s, captured the nation’s imagination. *The Last Soviet* delivers a vivid slice of sociopolitical history while allowing us to bask in the wonder of human beings climbing aboard space rocks and blasting off into the unknown.

podcasts.apple.com



Cosmonaut Sergei Krikalev on his return to Earth in March 1992. ©DPA via Getty Images

FT BIG READ. SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS

The ESG initiative pledges to turn companies into forces for good, but some are wary of its growing focus on multinational corporations and question its ability to drive meaningful change.

By Anjali Raval

The struggle for the soul of B Corp

When Nestlé subsidiary Nespresso was awarded 'B Corp' status in May 2022, the founders of tiny Glen Lyon Coffee Roasters could scarcely believe it. Their initial reaction was "dismay", the Scottish firm said in a post on its website last summer. It had only just attained the same certification, which demonstrates enhanced commitments to environmental and social goals, and felt there was a big difference between its own achievements in that field and those of the Nestlé-owned megabrand.

Nespresso, best known for its single-serve coffee pods endorsed by actor George Clooney, emphasises it underwent a "comprehensive" assessment requiring "detailed evidence and supporting data". But critics point to allegations that some of its farmers are earning poverty incomes and that its capsules create huge amounts of waste.

Janie Grant, a director at Glen Lyon, says that while he acknowledges Nespresso is working to create biodegradable pods, "a line needs to be drawn somewhere to protect the reputation of the certification scheme" and businesses such as his, echoing the statement made last year.

The controversy is part of a wider debate about the future of the B Corp movement, which started in the US but has now certified thousands of companies globally as "a force for good". The movement came to prominence as environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues rose to the top of boardroom agendas in recent years. Listed corporations emphasised social responsibility and investors and the public demanded more on everything from executive pay to climate change.

Among a range of ESG benchmarks, frameworks and certifications, B Corp set out to be a gold standard. To achieve the status, firms have to meet high levels of overall social and environmental performance, transparency and legally commit to balance profit and purpose.

But just as so-called stakeholder capitalism has begun to feel a backlash, the B Corp ecosystem is now under scrutiny. Many of the early adopters are concerned about what they perceive as a focus on enlisting multinationals and trying to get them to be "less bad" rather than to be transformationally "good".

They have also raised questions about the credibility of B Lab, the certifying authority, setting in motion a battle for the heart and soul of the movement.

"It's incredibly accessible. Any company can become a B Corp," says Erinch Sahani, former chief executive of the World Fair Trade Organization who now works at the Doughnut Economics Action Lab. "It is its biggest strength, but also its biggest weakness. It doesn't require the big changes in business that we urgently need."

"What they do really well is creating a community of business people who are passionate about sustainability," adds Sahani. "When you tell everyone you're now a B Corp... people expect that you really do prioritise people and planet. But that's not necessarily the case."

The B Lab

B Lab was started almost 17 years ago in the US by university friends Bart Houlihan, Andrew Kassoy and Jay Coen Gilbert. It is a non-profit network with the lofty goal of revolutionising capitalism and remaking the global economy to "benefit all people, communities, and the planet".

Today, there are about 6,400 certified B Corps around the world. Once largely made up of smaller businesses trying to change how business was done, the pool of B Corps now also includes major companies - from Ben & Jerry's ice cream, owned by Unilever, subsidiaries of French food group Danone to outerwear brand Patagonia and Natura, the Brazilian company that owns Body Shop.

The number of companies seeking certification "continues to accelerate", Houlihan tells the Financial Times. "We are incredibly excited about the proliferation of submissions and tremendous growth, but we want to be incredibly careful. How do we scale with integrity while keeping the rigour and credibility of the certification?"

Companies gain B Corp status based on how they score out of 200 on a variety of metrics across governance, treatment of workers and customers, community and the environment. The process can be long and expensive - anywhere between \$500 and \$500,000 each year, and they have to be reappraised every three years. Companies, which



Smaller companies are questioning the value of B Corp certification after brands such as Nestlé's Nespresso and Unilever's Ben & Jerry's were awarded the status. Below right: the founders of the non-profit behind the B Corp movement, Bart Houlihan, Jay Coen Gilbert and Andrew Kassoy

FT Magazine, Dreamstime

have to get at least 80 points, also have to legally cement the B Corp commitment into their mission statement.

In the US, one way to do that would be to reincorporate as a benefit corporation, a legal structure that formally embeds societal obligations into the company's goals and gave the B Corp movement its name. Companies in the UK must rewrite their articles of association to include a commitment to social or environmental good. This, B Lab believes, is what makes the certification more than a tick-box exercise.

The UK is one of the fastest-growing regions for B Lab and data from B Lab UK - one part of the global network that sits under B Lab Global - shows firms outperform on revenue growth, investment levels and staff retention compared with those outside the community. Achieving certification is also good PR for the business and the movement. Company advertisements and product packaging increasingly display the B Corp logo in the same way they might advertise organic or Fairtrade status.

UK supermarket Waitrose and online grocery retailer Ocado have created virtual aisles for B Corp-certified products on their websites. One UK executive tells the FT he is pursuing B Corp status as younger potential employees increasingly seem to demand it.

There are limits to the certification. A company may commit to paying its own employees a fair wage but there is no requirement to extend this further down the supply chain. If a company makes increased profits, how it deploys those funds is not for B Lab to dictate. It could invest in growers, increase staff wages, install solar panels - or just ramp up dividends or executive pay.

For these and other reasons, questions linger over whether B Corps are enacting truly meaningful change internally and whether the effects of that change is being felt more widely. Another UK executive says that while

the certification helped show the company in a good light when pitching to clients, he does not really think about the larger purpose of the movement.

"Companies are keen to say we have a social purpose, therefore we have a good company," says Mark Gwyler, a corporate governance expert and founder of think-tank Tomorrow's Company. "But they don't emphasise the how. Here are the ways we underpin this, how do you ensure values are upheld and how do you govern things like culture?"

Even if a company does manage its internal processes relatively well, there is less focus on the real-world impacts of their products and services.

"Unless B Corp starts to focus on the deep design of business - how companies are owned, who's represented on their board, where their profits go - it risks falling far short of its own marketing claims," says Sahani.

"Other standard-setters that might be better at overhauling how businesses operate include Social Enterprise World Forum, Employee Ownership Association and Co-operatives UK, he says.

"We need to be very clear about what B Corp is and isn't. It's not social enterprise. It's not akin to co-operatives or employee ownership. It's not fundamentally changing the deep design of businesses. But it is helpful for assessing if a company is trying to do better on sustainability."

B Lab is attempting to address this criticism. It says that a change next year will force B Corps to be more prescriptive about where they stand on 10 specific topics - including fair wages, diversity and inclusion, human rights, action on climate change and risk standards.

At the moment, the points system allows companies to pick and choose which criteria apply to them and focus on meeting them. But Dharmash Mistry, a veteran venture capitalist and a non-executive director at several listed companies, says B Corps often have too many goals. Many of them are difficult for investors, the public and even the companies themselves to track.

"I'm looking for one positive impact metric that is linked to the growth of a company," he says. "This way, a company can focus on it, deliver against it, and communicate it effectively. It could be a climate metric or a world sustainability goal. Companies need to keep it really simple. That is much more meaningful and over time you will be known for that," said Mistry.

He acknowledges this means there may be other areas where companies fall short, but maintains it is a price worth paying for simplicity and clarity. "The goal is to have a net positive impact. Having a system like this is

much more strategic and is better for society than filling in endless forms".

Critical friends

There is now a growing movement to encourage B Lab to go back to its roots. About 40 individuals, including some working for founding B Corps in the UK, and others in the sustainability industry, are part of an informal WhatsApp group that views itself as a "critical friend" of B Lab, according to people familiar with their discussions.

They want B Corp to thrive, but fear that awarding the status to multinationals sows confusion in the minds of consumers. They say that Nespresso, for example, could be viewed as equivalent to a company with higher standards.

John Steel, chief executive of Cafédirect, is reluctant to directly criticise B Corp's certification of Nespresso. But he points out that this company was set up to give farmers a leadership position "rather than make them impoverished beneficiaries at the end of a long value

"Unless B Corp starts to focus on the deep design of business... it risks falling far short of its own marketing claims"

expanded off the back of smaller companies now regards their views as less of a priority than B Lab's growth plans. Houlihan says he is at ease with dissenting opinions and has seen it all before, recalling the outrage in some parts of the movement when Ben & Jerry's was certified in 2012 or when the first company that didn't fall under the "organic" banner attained the status.

Opening up to more multinationals is a good thing as it meant the broader business ecosystem would change for the better, he says. There are several companies valued at \$1bn or more in the pipeline, says Houlihan, but only a "small number" will get the status. He adds that most B Corps are still valued at under \$100m.

The pockets of dissent are also small compared to the swelling enthusiasm elsewhere. Few companies opt to relinquish B Corp status, engagement is high and the backlog of companies seeking certification stands at about 5,000, says Houlihan, though he adds it is still important to listen to critics as this helps to ultimately raise standards. He also emphasises that when things don't work out, a company's certification is in genuine jeopardy.

Less than two years after the Scotland-based BrewDog attained B Corp status, its certification was revoked just as it was grappling with revelations of bullying a "culture of fear".

Even when a status is retained, it does not always go to plan. Danone's chief executive, Emmanuel Faber, put the company on a path to becoming one of the first big corporations whose total sales were covered by the B Corp certification. But he was forced out by activist shareholders unhappy at his focus on sustainability. About 70 per cent of its sales are under B Corp.

B Lab says its model means that any company, regardless of size, legal structure or industry, can gain a certification that is now well-recognised enough to help companies differentiate themselves from traditional corporations.

While the number of B Corps is still a tiny proportion of the hundreds of millions of businesses that exist globally, the pool is still growing. Lucky Saint, a brewer of alcohol-free beer, attained B Corp status last December because it wanted to embed sustainability into everything from how they hired staff to how they defined their mission.

Emma Heal, the brewer's managing director, says B Corp certification has provided a helpful benchmark and a guide from which to work.

"Just because we have the status, it doesn't stop," said Heal. "It's a good carrot and stick that pushes us to be better and better."

'[B Corp] is incredibly accessible... It is its biggest strength, but also its biggest weakness'



Source: B Lab

* End of year figure not available



chain" and argues that B Corp needs to make sure it is pushing for "systems change" at certified companies.

"B Corp needs to make sure it's not just some kind of club. In 2023, we don't have the luxury of time to let greenwashing rule. If they don't raise standards there will be a dilutionary effect," Steel says.

Some also think allowing subsidiaries of large corporations to attain the status even if the parent is not certified is a way for bigger companies to benefit from the status without doing all the work.

B Lab argues that in fact the bar is far higher for larger companies, recognising that "the obligations to stakeholders are greater when a company has greater scale, influence, and impact". The recertification process also requires companies to improve every three years.

But that has not stopped a feeling in some quarters that a movement that

The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES

Without fear and without favour

India's creeping clampdown on free expression

The raids on the BBC are part of a troubling global picture for media rights

Harassment by the tax or legal authorities is becoming a common occurrence in India for those deemed critical of premier Narendra Modi. Last week, tax police turned up at two Indian offices of the BBC - weeks after the UK broadcaster aired films questioning Modi's actions during deadly religious riots in Gujarat in 2002. The raids on one of the most respected global media brands are emblematic of the spiralling threat to freedom of expression in a country that promotes itself as the world's largest democracy. The Hindu nationalist government had tried to block online circulation of the two-part BBC documentary that probed the response of Modi - then Gujarat's chief minister - to the riots in which more than 1,000 people, mostly

Muslims, died. Many Indians still found ways to watch. Officials denied any link with the "survey" at the BBC offices. But the finance ministry alleged on Friday evidence had been found of tax irregularities at a "prominent international media company". Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a media watchdog, said the raids bore "all the hallmarks of a reprisal". Some headline Modi supporters alleged the BBC films were a British plot to bring down India - which suggests a profound misunderstanding of the nature of the broadcaster. The squeeze on media freedom under Modi resembles those of strongman nationalist leaderships from Russia to Turkey to Hungary. While India's press was once seen as "fairly progressive", RSF says Modi engineered a "spectacular rapprochement" between his Bharatiya Janata party and the billionaire families that dominate the media. The businesses of Mukesh Ambani, now a Modi friend, own more than 70 outlets followed by at least 800m Indians.

Gautam Adani, who has longstanding ties to India's premier, recently took over NDTV, a rare bastion of independent media. Many of the largest outlets in India's sprawling media landscape are owned by corporate groups with other business interests, susceptible to various forms of regulatory pressure. The New Delhi government has realised media groups' financial reliance on advertising from local and regional governments can also be used to encourage a favourable narrative. Pressure from fiscal and law enforcement agencies is increasingly common against remaining independent and online outlets. Targets have included not just journalists and opposition voices but think-tanks and foreign non-profit groups including Oxfam India and Amnesty. The Indian clampdown is part of a depressing global picture. A Unesco analysis found 85 per cent of the world's population experienced a decline in press freedom in their country between

The squeeze under Modi resembles those of strongman nationalist leaderships from Russia to Turkey to Hungary

2016 and 2021. Some 455 journalists were killed in that period. Just last week, Hun Sen, Cambodia's leader for 38 years, revoked the licence of Voice of Democracy - one of that country's last independent outlets. Media freedoms are threatened in developed democracies too. Libel and privacy laws are being used to hound investigative reporters. RSF warns that the spread of Fox News-style "opinion media" and disinformation amplified by social media are fueling disunion. But events in India are particularly disheartening in what is set to become the world's most populous country this year - an aspiring counterweight to authoritarian China. Liberal democracies should do more to call out what is happening. Ultimately, however, a drift to illiberalism - stifling the flow of ideas and the media's ability to hold wrongdoing to account - will do favouring the Modi circle's hopes of turning India into an economic superpower.

Opinion Asia

The curious case of Japan's reported crime rates



Leo Lewis
Last year, Japan's crime rate rose for the first time in 20 years, and did so quite sharply. Alarming, perhaps, and surely not to celebrate. Especially since, without that bump, the country was on course to become the world's first major society to be totally crime-free. Well, sort of. Japan's crime figures, say the criminologists, involve equal measures of complexity and paradox. The nation's reputation as a place of low street crime where a great many people are relatively safe from casual violence is well deserved. In other areas, such as fraud and cyber crime, it is something of a villain's playground. The headline balance of all this is recorded each year by the National Police Agency under the title "penal code offences known to the police": a metric which is deeply entwined with numerical police targets, which many

world-beating 259 per cent, continues to justify hefty police budgets at both the national and prefectural levels. This budget supports a total force (including office workers) of 296,194, meaning that in one every 250 working age Japanese are employed by the police. For those that see this vast scale of state-funded employment as a form of disguised economic subsidy, there are less Keynesian than Keynesian cops. The obvious strategy might be for the police to claim that the country was drowning under a tide of crime, and that their budgets were the only thing capable of holding that back. Instead, they have spent the past two decades highlighting their success as crime-fighters: regularly hitting (and, some people suggest, manipulating) numerical targets for crime reduction at a pace that produced the strange prospect of eventually reaching zero. Between 2015 and 2022, the "known crimes" number fell by roughly 50 per cent. Though calculation methods changed slightly over that period, the NPA budget rose by about 21 per cent during that time, and will rise again by a small margin in 2023. The police wheeze has worked because the general public do not believe the figures any more than the criminologists. Japanese media, especially those beaming lurid daytime news analysis into elderly households, do a fine job of making Japan look hopelessly crime-ridden. The assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe last year played directly into this narrative. When the NPA surveyed the public last October - after a decade in which their metric of crime had plummeted - 67 per cent of respondents said public safety had fallen over the past 10 years. But the fascinating possibility, says Hamai, is that the 2022 uptick in recorded crime marks a much more fundamental inflection point. We may, he says, be seeing the early symptoms of a shift to more realistic methods of tallying crime. Ultimately, the police may also start more actively uncovering and recording major categories of what are currently wildly under-reported crimes, such as domestic violence, sexual abuse and stalking. In the longer-term, say criminologists, an even more significant overhaul is required to produce a scientific estimate of the crime trends in Japan. The model here, suggests Hamai, is the kind of crime survey that is conducted in the UK. Japan may, even then, retain its reputation as a fabulously safe country. But surely not one without any crime at all. leo.lewis@ft.com

Letters

Guterres has no excuse for delays helping Syrian quake victims

You rightly highlight (Report, February 16) the slowness of the response of the UN to help earthquake victims in Syria's rebel-controlled north-west enclave. The problem was acknowledged by none other than the UN relief chief Martin Griffiths, who said: "We have so far failed the people in north-west Syria. They rightly feel abandoned. Looking for international help that hasn't arrived." However, as an apology it soon became clear it was hollow, when it emerged Griffiths's UN colleagues had been stopped from crossing the Turkish border into Syria - on the

orders of the office of UN secretary-general António Guterres. This provides yet another demonstration of the UN's deference towards Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad who, with Russia's Vladimir Putin, has weaponised aid deliveries and degraded all infrastructure in the region, even systematically bombing hospitals, all of which have greatly amplified the horrific impact of the earthquakes. Last Monday the UN announced that Assad had given permission to reopen border crossings to speed up aid delivery. But Guterres had lost precious

days as thousands died under the rubble. Faced with a human tragedy of this scale, should respect for state sovereignty and the prerogatives of dictators take precedence over the security of women and children dying under rubble? The way the current secretary-general interprets international law gives the impression it is more designed to protect alleged war criminals like Assad than civilians? Otherwise how can one interpret his failure to immediately reopen aid corridors from Turkey?

Guterres appears to have no defence. According to an open letter from 16 leading international lawyers, the International Court of Justice argues "there can be no doubt that the provision of strictly humanitarian aid to persons or forces in another country, whatever their political affiliations or objectives, cannot be regarded as unlawful intervention, or as in any other way contrary to international law". Roman I. Tynan, Director, 'Bringing Assad To Justice' Co-Founder, Esperanza Productions Dublin, Ireland

Rothschild does such a good job, I'm not selling

I have held shares of Rothschild & Co since it was Paris Orléans. I agree with management and the various private family groups attempting to buy the company that the proposing good private price would be an attractive investment for the new investors (Report, February 10). So attractive, in fact, that I do not intend to tender my shares. I believe many other current shareholders feel similarly. Paul J Isaac, Arbitrator, New York, NY, US

Joanna Hamilton Concord, MA, US
Sturgeon's successor must make economy a priority
I read the articles by Robert Shrimley and others ("Sturgeon ran out of ideas on independence", Opinion, February 16) on Nicola Sturgeon's resignation with great interest. However, I was surprised at how few references there were to the economic and financial problems which have affected Scotland since she became first minister eight years ago. Many of those problems the UK's Brexit from the EU. Sturgeon

has little personal interest in economic and financial issues, and delegated those responsibilities to other ministers. However, the Scottish independence currently comes from young people who have not been affected by these economic and financial problems. However, an increasing proportion of older residents have turned against independence, as recent polls show. I am sure that trend will continue unless the next first minister makes radical policy changes to improve the performance of the Scottish economy, including the work of public bodies such as Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Futures Trust. Tony Mackay, Professor of Economics Inverness, Inverness-shire, UK

New York's real estate dreams face a new reality

The pandemic has hastened an ongoing trend - working from home. Joshua Chaffin's Big Read article "Turning offices into condos" (February 15) provides an excellent summary of one part of the larger dilemma facing New York's real estate industry. Not only must the industry figure out how to repurpose Lower Manhattan and Midtown, but simultaneously figure out how the expansion of a refurbished Penn Station area and the further development of the adjacent Hudson Yards site will also be used. Unstated in all of this expansive real estate market speculation is the new reality of a devalued role for central location in 21st-century metropolitan life. Advances in information and communications technology reduce the longstanding critical need for ongoing and easy access to a central place. Elliott Sclar, Emeritus Professor of Urban Planning Columbia University, New York, NY, US

OUTLOOK CULTURE

Orchestras need maestros to make music profitable

There is a scene in *Tar*, the Oscar-nominated film about a charismatic but abusive conductor of a major orchestra in Berlin, in which the character played by Gisele Bündchen whispers along to an old programme. It shows Leonard Bernstein, the maestro of the New York Philharmonic, charming his audience in one of his Emmy award-winning Young People's Concerts. The New York Phil has not been led by such a compelling maestro for a long time, but it will soon be again. It has announced this month that it has poached Gustavo Dudamel, the charismatic leader of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, to become its music and artistic director from 2026. Transfers do not get much hotter in classical music. I reflected on this recently as I sat in the Berlin Philharmonic's wonderful 1963 concert hall listening to it play works by Ligeti, Britten and Debussy. The orchestra's low-key, Russian-Austrian conductor Kirill Petrenko was absent, but his British stand-in Daniel Harding summoned the orchestra's virtuosity handily. Dudamel's appointment shows the value of a public face. Herbert von Karajan, the Berlin Philharmonic's most famous maestro, sold 200m albums under the yellow label of Deutsche Grammophon in his lifetime. But recorded music can no longer sustain the finances of even the world's leading orchestras. Orchestras have never been good

businesses. "The permanent orchestra season has, as usual, been financially a bad one all over the country," the New York Times wrote in 1903. There are too many musicians to employ, and too much sunk into venues and promotion, far too little return. The first duty of maestros is to make music: "They have to work bloody hard and make the musicians work hard too," says Norman Lebrecht, founder of the music site Slippedisc. Berlin's bet on Petrenko was that virtuosity compensated for less public presence than his predecessor Simon Rattle. But the economics keep deteriorating. The usual explanation is the "cost disease" in the performing arts identified by the economists William Baumol and William Bowen in 1966: wages rise steadily but there are no productivity gains. Playing Beethoven's fifth symphony requires deep ranks of basses, violins and cellos and it can never be done much faster. Orchestras indeed face higher expenses. It cost \$550m to rebuild the NY Phil's home, now called David Geffen Hall after the biggest donor. But the larger problem is revenue disease: traditional forms of income, from recordings to ticket subscriptions, have been steadily eroded. It is a constant effort to attract audiences and money. That is the genius of Dudamel. The 42-year-old Venezuelan is one of the few maestros who spans the gap between classical and pop music, and to charm not only orchestras, but

audiences and donors. Even the NY Phil, with its large endowment and base in one of the world's wealthiest cities, has to keep hustling. "It all starts with compelling, electric, exciting performances on the stage," says Gary Ginstling, executive director. It needs to, because fewer people now subscribe to season tickets, the traditional annuity of US orchestras. The New York Phil's ticket subscriptions are down by 21 per cent on pre-pandemic levels, although it played to 85 per cent capacity last year. So charisma is useful. Dudamel's appeal reaches beyond the suburban symphony crowd: the LA Phil has played with Billie Eilish and Dudamel was the model for the lead character in *Mozart in the Jungle*, an Amazon Prime comedy drama about a flamboyant maestro who joins the New York Phil (really). A maestro also brings in funding. European orchestras rely on public subsidy but US ones require private support. There is nothing like a charmer to attract donations and build endowments. "I gaze with joy and excitement at the world that lies before me in New York," Dudamel said, and the feeling is likely to be mutual. When an orchestra is in full flow, the conductor waving at the front can feel more of a luxury than a necessity. But when it comes to making profits, the maestro call the tune. john.gapper@ft.com



by John Gapper

Opinion

Britain can learn from Singapore on savings

ECONOMICS

Martin Wolf



The UK invests too little. This is now widely agreed. Naturally, this has led to a discussion of how to induce more investment. Yet how would the extra investment be funded by a country that is even more strikingly short of savings than it is of investment? According to IMF data, gross investment averaged a mere 17.1 per cent of UK gross domestic product from 2010 to 2022. This was lower than Italy's 18.6 per cent, and the US's 20.6 per cent. It was even further behind Germany's 21.1 per cent and France's 23.5 per cent. Korea's 31.4 per cent seems from a different planet. The UK unquestionably lags behind on investment.

Jonathan Haskel, a member of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy

Committee, also noted in a recent interview that the growth in real investment has lagged well behind that in France, Germany and the US since the Brexit referendum. Haskel estimates the productivity penalty from this post-Brexit investment slump at about 1.5 per cent of GDP, some £1,000 per household. Yet the UK's share of investment in GDP was consistently lower than in peer countries well before the referendum. This is a chronic weakness. The fake pre-2008 productivity boom in financial services masked this longstanding problem.

It is essential, then, to raise public and private investment if the country is to attain faster growth. This will require a higher share of investment in GDP than its historically low levels. But investment is financed by savings. The striking fact about UK investment is that it is also heavily dependent on foreign savings. That is because its savings are even weaker than investment. This, too, is a chronic condition, not a recent one.

Between 2010 and 2022, UK gross national savings averaged a mere 13.3 per cent of GDP. The US average was 19.0 per cent and Italy's was 19.8 per cent.

Still further ahead were France, with 22.4 per cent and Germany, with 28.2 per cent. Korea's averaged 35.7 per cent.

The UK's low rate of national savings makes it significantly dependent on foreign savings to finance its investment. This is revealed in the current account deficit. On average, that deficit was 3.8 per cent of GDP from 2010 to 2022. That financed roughly a fifth of UK gross

The UK's low rate makes it significantly dependent on foreigners to finance its investment

investment over that period. If investment rose without an equivalent rise in domestic saving, the external deficit would become still bigger.

This makes sustaining foreign lending a big part of the returns on investment go to foreigners. It means, too, that the investment rate is a worse indicator

of the future standards of living of British people than their even lower savings rate. Some of the benefits of investment do indeed accrue to the British even if it is owned by foreigners. But not all do. Otherwise there would not be the inward investment. If the country saved more it could not only afford a higher rate of investment, but its people could accumulate a nest egg of foreign assets as well. In brief, savings matter.

We heard a ridiculous discussion of "Singapore on Thames" during the referendum campaign. As a low-tax base for multinationals is the EU, Ireland seems a better analogy: "Singapore on the Liffey." Yet the UK can learn things from Singapore. Even if one removes the huge profits of foreign multinationals from savings, one is left with a savings rate of 30 per cent of GDP there. This is the result of forced savings through the "central provident fund", which compels workers and employers to contribute 57 per cent of their wages and salaries up to the age of 55. As a result, Singapore finances a huge domestic investment rate as well as accumulations of foreign assets: between 2010 and 2022,

the current account surplus averaged an astounding 17.5 per cent of GDP.

Needless to say, Singapore's forced savings have not been discussed as a model by Brexiters. Yet it would greatly help the prosperity of the UK if savings were raised, alongside policies to promote higher investment. Greater public savings would help. But household savings could also be raised by increasing the minimum rate of contribution to defined contribution pension schemes under the "auto-enrolment, with an opt out" now in place. The current rate of 8 per cent is far too low to achieve an adequate pension. This could be steadily raised in the years ahead, perhaps to 20 per cent. That would also surely increase the country's ultra-low savings rate.

If the aim of policy is to raise the incomes of British people in the decades ahead, the focus cannot only be on investment. The British need to accumulate more real wealth. That depends on productive investment of higher savings. The debate on improving the economic prospects has to focus on both.

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We must prepare for the biosecurity threats to come

Sophie Rose

We need to get serious about biosecurity—and quickly. Biological risks have evolved dramatically in a short time, and governments need to act, both at home and overseas.

Advances in biotechnology have potentially made it easier to create or modify deadly pathogens, lowering the barriers for adversarial states and extremist organisations to develop biological weapons. Referring to the 2018 novichok attack in Salisbury, the UK's integrated review has warned of a "realistic possibility" that terrorists will launch a successful chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attack by 2050.

Meanwhile, high-containment laboratories proliferate around the world as life science research expands, bringing increased likelihood of an accident involving dangerous pathogens. And as we have learned, naturally occurring outbreaks could become future pandemics, even more transmissible or deadly than Covid-19.

Whether through malign intent, human error or the evolution of viruses, we face a range of heightened threats. Biosecurity needs to keep those charged with protecting our safety up at night.

The US has begun to recognise the risks. At the end of last year, the Prevent Pandemics Act was passed to bolster the country's preparedness. The bipartisan legislation promises to enhance detection capabilities, bolster supply chains and accelerate medical countermeasure development. Senator Patty Murray, champion of the legislation, told Con-

Whether through malign intent, human error or the evolution of viruses, there are many risks

gress that "we are taking action so we never go through crisis like this again."

An Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy will be responsible for mitigation of biological threats across the federal government. The new unit will implement the national biosecurity strategy, which includes developing early warning capabilities and investing in emerging technologies to deter state and non-state actors from developing biological weapons. Signaling the scale of the ambition, the strategy seeks \$88bn of funding over five years.

In the UK, officials in the Cabinet Office's national security secretariat are finalising a refresh of the 2018 national biological security strategy. While that plan recognised the range of biological risks the country faces, it provided few details on implementation of resources. Without clear accountability and sufficient funds, it's perhaps no surprise that by the Covid-19 outbreak, some 18 months later, the UK wasn't nearly as well prepared as it should have been.

The new strategy is our best shot at rectifying this. It must include an implementation plan identifying who will tackle each risk, with a timeline for delivery. And its commitments must be properly funded. These are financially constrained times, but the £376bn cost of the pandemic in the UK shows the eye-watering consequences of failing to invest. The recent national resilience framework is at least one heartening sign that the government is starting to recognise the imperative of defence against extreme risks.

Finally, the UK needs to act in concert with others around the world to counter the risk of biological threats of every origin. The UK leads the world in metagenomic sequencing—this could offer the possibility of detecting new pathogens at the very beginning of an outbreak. We should pioneer the creation of an interconnected early warning system at home and, through artificial diplomacy, drive development of a global system to sound the alarm on potential pandemics.

With a new cabinet facing so many challenges, ruthless prioritisation is needed to safeguard the UK's economic wellbeing and national security. Biosecurity needs to be up there—delivered through an ambitious strategy and dogged implementation of its recommendations.

The writer is biosecurity policy manager at the Centre for Long-Term Resilience and a fellow at the Council on Strategic Risks

The rise of kitchen table economics

BUSINESS

Rana Foroohar



It is not often that a Pulitzer Prize-winning dramatist gives the keynote speech at a competition policy conference. But last week in Washington, I introduced PEN America president Ayad Akhtar before he gave the luncheon address at a conference on monopoly policy sponsored by the Open Markets Institute.

The pairing wasn't as random as it might seem. The narrator of Akhtar's most recent book, *Homeland Elegies*, is a Pakistani immigrant whose family came to what they believed to be the land of opportunity, only to realise that America had turned, over time, into a country in which hyper-individualism had collided with the money culture. The result? A society in which it is easier to protect shareholder rights than civil rights.

The novel, read in book clubs across America, contains not only lengthy excursions into antitrust jurisprudence, but also critiques of financialisation and healthcare for profit. It also examines all the ways in which "protecting the consumer's right to the 'lowest price' as a first principle has operated as the legitimising discourse of the takeover of the political process by (and ever big-

ger) business", as Akhtar put it. "In other words, our political order — by which I don't just mean legislative — is increasingly defined by corporate thinking and interest."

When monopoly power becomes a kitchen table topic in America, something embedded in popular fiction, business leaders should listen carefully. The popularisation of antitrust is part of a much larger shift in which economic policy discussions are increasingly the purview of not just economists, but also lawyers, activists and ordinary people. These groups are less interested in technical minutiae and more interested in mechanisms than in a grassroots discussion about how corporate power has distorted the market in ways that they find about.

Consider sales contracts that make it impossible for farmers to repair their own equipment rather than paying for the costly services of the manufacturer. Or the minimum wage cleaning staff stuck with non-compete clauses that prevent them from doing janitorial work for a company that might offer a dollar or two extra per hour. Or the fact that, until recently, simple over-the-counter hearing aids weren't available because device makers made it impossible to buy them without a costly prescription (Senator Elizabeth Warren's bill overturning that in 2017 was one of the very few things that she and Donald Trump agreed on).

Part of this shift towards a kitchen table sensibility in competition policy is down to an increasing public sense that



the economics profession itself has been captured by corporate interests. As Cristina Caffarra, an economist and consultant on hundreds of corporate matters, put it at the event, "economists make up useful narratives and sell them to lawyers". They then use this seemingly scientific testimony to argue their cases.

But the current crop of regulators in Washington is much less interested in economic assumptions about how markets, many of which are increasingly questioned, particularly in the digital space, should work. Instead they prefer a more inductive approach to the truth, in which facts are laid out in a reported fashion and judged on their own merit.

This sort of approach is what brought Federal Trade Commission chair Lina Khan and Department of Justice antitrust chief Jonathan Kanter to their positions. Their starting point is that economics is structured by politics, and that it's very different than the way the people with the most money. Thus, traditional economic theories about markets are no more, or less, useful than the collection of real world facts that either side can bring to case.

As Kanter, who sat on one of the panels, put it, "the discussion [about corporate power] now is about real people, and that's very different than the technocratic conversation we were having when I came into the field. And I think it's crucial to having an honest conversation." To him, thinking around antitrust policy should include anything that makes it impossible for individuals to have full self-determination, in the sense of being able to make the choices that might afford them a better life. That's an antitrust philosophy that's much more aligned with ideas of constitutional democracy than with the Chicago school.

It's also a broad definition, and one that has yet to be fully proven out in

court. Despite more federal resources, more state antitrust cases and an explicit 2021 White House executive order with 72 different initiatives from federal agencies designed to tackle competition policies, the global mergers and acquisitions market hit an all-time high in 2022. 2022 numbers were lower but still healthy compared with pre-pandemic levels.

Perhaps that's why Warren, who also attended the conference, called for an even broader competition agenda, going beyond her arguments about breaking up Big Tech. Among other things, she called on policymakers to oppose more questionable mergers outright rather than deploying "remedies" (which are costly to enforce and easy to game), to lead executives personally responsible in criminal cases if their companies violate antitrust laws and to halt private equity roll-up strategies. Warren has a record of setting the policy agenda in antitrust. CEOs should watch this space carefully.

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When monopoly power becomes a topic in popular fiction, corporate leaders should listen carefully

Old arguments for debt cancellation in Africa no longer apply

Bright Simons

Two decades ago, the world was in the grip of a great debate over debt and debt cancellation in Africa. Total public debt stock had climbed to nearly \$500bn by 2002 from \$40bn in the two decades prior. Jubilee Debt Campaigners insisted on immediate cancellation. The Pope concurred.

Today, Africa's external debt alone exceeds \$700bn. Campaigners are back asking for cancellation. And the Pope again concurs. It would seem as if nothing at all happened in the intervening 20 years. Yet quite a bit did.

After intense criticism of earlier designs and subsequent brainstorming, additional resources were injected into the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) and Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI) set up by the Bretton Woods institutions and their rich coun-

try partners in 2005. Nearly \$125bn, to be precise.

Between 2000 and 2015, 31 African countries (out of 36 beneficiary countries) had substantial portions of their total debt wiped out. For example, both Malawi and Liberia saw 90 per cent of their external debt cancelled. Sierra Leone received about 95 per cent relief. Bigger economies like Ghana experienced a lower, but still impressive, decline in debt stock of about 70 per cent.

It is surprising, in view of these facts, to see a brand new debt cancellation campaign ignore lessons learnt from previous rounds of debt relief and their impact on economic growth and transformation.

Some African countries—including Kenya, Angola and Nigeria—were considered ineligible for HIPC for various reasons. None of them are among the countries that big HIPC beneficiaries that have been compelled to seek debt restructuring recently.

Unmissable in this fuzzy picture, however, are the billions that have occurred in global development financ-

ing. Three decades ago, sub-Saharan African countries owed roughly 80 per cent of their debt to the so-called official creditors—rich countries and multilateral financial institutions. Today, I estimate the countries with the biggest debt burdens tend to owe more than 70 per cent of their obligations to domestic private investors, international bondholders and not-so-rich countries such as China, India and Turkey.

Questions have arisen about where the returns on the borrowed billions have gone

Consequently, whatever the merits of the debt cancellation campaigns, yesterday's arguments seem ill-fitting today. Ghana's dramatic debt restructuring effort of recent weeks began on the domestic front last December. It has involved pensioners and trade unions adamant that not a penny from their bond holdings will go to support the gov-

ernment's debt relief efforts. Seventy-five per cent of Ghana's debt servicing expenses cater for domestic creditors.

Now that Paris Club and Bretton Woods creditors are responsible for a significantly lower proportion of the debt, some campaigners are focusing more on commercial creditors in the west. While it is true that rich banks do hold some African sovereign bonds, quite a lot are also held by institutional funds whose money comes from ordinary pensioners and workers.

It is safe to say that a cancellation campaign in the current circumstances will have to do more than suggest that the creditors won't miss the money. The humanitarian argument about how high debt servicing takes away money from social services remains compelling, especially in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria where debt service costs are approaching 70 per cent of domestic tax revenues. But that is not about where the returns on the borrowed billions have gone.

Ghana's leaders, for instance, have

faced widespread criticism for prioritising a "national cathedral", complete with a "Bible museum" and "biblical gardens", that could cost upwards of \$1bn, in the middle of a struggling debt restructuring exercise. Despite repeated assurances to the IMF, which has provided a bailout to the country roughly every four years since independence, to pass all public spending through a national accounting platform, nearly 90 per cent of Covid-19 expenditures bypassed it.

In 2005, Ghanaian-born economist Elizabeth Asiedu published a paper in which she predicted that debt relief would have minimal impact on the HIPC's due to weak institutions. That prediction now looks prophetic.

However emotionally appealing it may sound, debt cancellation alone will not encourage or enhance efforts, already under way in many African nations despite everything, to demand stronger accountability and force much-needed institutional reform.

The author is a policy analyst affiliated with Insmat, a think-tank based in Accra



Rutherford Hall
'You look like you're swimming in cash while others are swimming in sewage'

WORK & CAREERS

A manager's foibles can be a delight



Pilita Clark
Business Life

Last week, Sally Mapstone was exposed for breaking a big unwritten rule on how a modern boss should behave. The principal of Scotland's University of St Andrews has made it clear her team should never write an email that starts with "I hope this finds you well", or ends with "I hope this helps".



Kenneth Anderson

boss Fred Goodwin. During his fearsome reign, catering staff were once reportedly told off for bringing "rogoe" pink water biscuits with the executives' afternoon tea. Still, some managerial fixations have benefits, especially when it comes to communicating clearly.

bullying is obviously intolerable but there is nothing wrong with encouraging staff to write crisply without needless blather. There is something else about a boss's quirks. If harmless, they can humanise a manager and have a pleasingly unifying effect on staff.

smelled a rat when he got an email from a colleague that began with Mapstone's detested greeting. The mail proved to be a fake and if the professor had opened an attachment it contained, he could have been hacked. When I spooked Mapstone the other day, she said she had never issued a formal edict on either emails or corduroy to her fellow academics.

Lex Corporate training: class pass



Corporate training videos were once as earnest as airline safety instructions. Now companies are jazzing up their training using techniques borrowed from computer games. Scavenger hunts, leader boards and virtual reality simulations aim to boost engagement.

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