

Electric dreams

Volkswagen's bold ambitions to take on Tesla and win — PAGE 7

Comeback grandpa

Biden's big primary win reboots his campaign — EDWARD LUCE, PAGE 2



Online food fight

Delivery apps turn their attention to humble groceries — PAGE 9

Italy unveils €3.6bn stimulus as world tallies cost of coronavirus

◆ Fears of Chinese contraction ◆ Korean factories shut ◆ Berlin stands ready with funds

FT REPORTERS

Italy will inject €3.6bn into its economy to mitigate the impact of the biggest outbreak of coronavirus in Europe as policymakers around the world grapple with the consequences of transport and supply chain disruptions resulting from efforts to contain the disease.

Roberto Gualtieri, economy minister, said yesterday that Rome would introduce tax credits for companies that reported a 25 per cent drop in revenues, as well as tax cuts and extra cash for the health system.

The package will amount to 0.2 per cent of gross domestic product, he told La Repubblica, and would come in addition to €900m of measures unveiled on Friday for the most severely hit regions.

Rome will also seek authorisation from Brussels to increase the budget deficit for this year, the Treasury said.

The move in Italy, which was on the brink of recession before the disease, comes as investors and policymakers anticipate greater harm to the global economy than previously thought. World markets fell sharply last week over fears that the response to the outbreak will deal a heavy economic blow.

Data released over the weekend showed that China's manufacturing sector suffered the steepest decline in activity on record in February, leading some economists to warn that the country could report its first quarterly contraction since the 1970s.

Official figures suggest the flu-like virus, known as Covid-19, is now spreading faster outside China, where it originated. Beijing reported 573 new cases and 35 deaths yesterday, bringing total confirmed cases there to 79,824.

South Korea, which has suffered the largest outbreak outside China with 3,736 cases and 18 deaths, has also announced new stimulus measures to help buffer the fallout for Asia's fourth-biggest economy, after a series of stoppages at the country's factories



South Korean soldiers spray disinfectant at Dongdaegu railway station
YONHAP/AFP via Getty

prompted concerns over damage to the global technology supply chain.

Samsung Electronics, the world's top producer of smartphones and computer chips, suspended production at a smartphone factory over the weekend after an employee tested positive.

Italy, with more than 1,500 confirmed cases and 34 dead, is home to one of the largest coronavirus outbreaks outside Asia.

The country has placed 11 towns in the wealthy north — and their 50,000 residents — under lockdown until the end of next week, closed schools and universities and cancelled football matches and fashion shows.

France banned all indoor gatherings of more than 5,000 people over the weekend, while the Louvre Museum in Paris closed yesterday.

In Germany, the number of coronavirus infections more than doubled to 117 over the weekend, according to Robert

Koch Institute, a public health body. Finance minister Olaf Scholz said yesterday that the German government had the financial firepower to fund an economic stimulus programme should it become necessary.

Late on Friday, Federal Reserve chair Jay Powell signalled that the US central bank was considering cutting interest rates in response to the “evolving risks” posed by the spread of coronavirus, which has now spread to more than 60 countries and killed more than 3,000 people worldwide.

Reports & Analysis page 4

Shipping signals page 6

Editorial Comment page 16



Rana Foroohar
Page 17

I've wondered for years when the fragility inherent in complex multinationals would force them to shift business models. I think we've reached that moment

Brussels calls emergency Idlib summit after Turkey 'opens gates' for refugees

JIM BRUNSDEN
AND MICHAEL PEEL — BRUSSELS

Brussels has called an emergency meeting of EU foreign ministers as Turkey's conflict with the Syrian regime risks creating a new refugee crisis.

Josep Borrell, the EU's high representative for foreign affairs, said that the fighting around the province of Idlib, Syria's last rebel-held enclave, represented “a serious threat to international peace and security” and that the EU had to “redouble efforts to address this terrible human crisis with all the means at its disposal”.

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan said over the weekend that his country had “opened the gates” to the EU for refugees, as nearly 1m people flee the conflict in Idlib.

The situation is a test of a refugee

deal Turkey struck with the EU in 2016 that has limited the flow of irregular migrants and asylum seekers into Greece in exchange for refugee funding from European countries.

The agreement contributed to a sharp reduction in the number of migrant arrivals into the EU compared with the peak of the refugee crisis. New arrivals numbered fewer than 125,000 last year, compared with more than 1m in 2015.

Mr Borrell said he had called the meeting, which will take place during the coming week, “in particular at the request” of the Greek government, whose refugee camps and reception facilities are already at breaking point.

Greek police said that within a few hours of Mr Erdogan's statement yesterday morning at least 500 people had arrived by sea at the chain of Greek islands close to Turkish territory. The

UN's International Organisation for Migration estimated that around 13,000 people were gathered at various points along the Greek-Turkish border.

European countries have resisted Russian pressure to normalise relations with the Assad regime in Syria and release large-scale reconstruction funds, although Hungary has upgraded its diplomatic presence in Damascus.

One EU official said a main purpose of this week's emergency meeting should be to shore up unity on Syria policy and the migration response and to “make sure panicky individual member states don't go off on tangents”.

Ministers are also likely to review humanitarian aid for Syria and migration support for Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey, measures which closely involve the European Commission.

New Syria operation page 2

World Markets

STOCK MARKETS				CURRENCIES				INTEREST RATES			
	Feb 28	Feb 21	%Week		Feb 28	Feb 21			price	yield	chg
S&P 500	2954.22	3337.75	-11.49	\$ per £	1.099	1.085	£ per \$	0.783	0.772	1.16	-0.13
Nasdaq Composite	8567.37	9576.59	-10.54	\$ per €	1.277	1.296	€ per \$	1.163	1.194	0.44	-0.03
Dow Jones Ind	25409.36	28992.41	-12.36	¥ per €	0.860	0.837	¥ per £	118.485	121.222	105.62	-0.61
FTSEurofirst 300	1464.48	1667.89	-12.20	¥ per \$	107.865	111.705	£ index	80.004	81.201	-0.16	-0.05
Euro Stoxx 50	3329.49	3800.38	-12.39	¥ per £	137.776	144.759	Sfr per £	1.236	1.268	120.93	1.67
FTSE 100	6580.61	7403.92	-11.12	Sfr per €	1.063	1.062	€ per \$	0.910	0.922	105.90	-0.78
FTSE All-Share	3673.61	4132.71	-11.11								-0.04
CAC 40	5309.90	6029.72	-11.94								
Xetra Dax	11890.35	13579.33	-12.44								
Nikkei	21142.96	23479.15	-9.95								
Hang Seng	26129.93	27609.16	-5.36								
MSCI World \$	2177.25	-									
MSCI EM \$	1030.67	-									
MSCI ACWI \$	521.92	-									



Ukrainian rabbi's dream soured by Giuliani links

Reuven Azman, one of Ukraine's most prominent rabbis, has been building his dream: Anatevka, a modern village designed to house Jewish refugees. But that dream has recently become a nightmare, thanks to the rabbi's close ties to Rudy Giuliani, Donald Trump's personal lawyer. Funding for the project has dried up since Mr Giuliani's connections in Ukraine became the focus of impeachment proceedings against Mr Trump.

Big Read ► PAGE 15

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Briefing

► UK warns Deutsche on dirty money rules

The London regulator has criticised the German lender for failing to improve anti-money laundering and compliance controls, warning its access to the UK after Brexit could be jeopardised.— PAGE 6

► Questions linger after Afghan peace deal

The peace deal signed between Washington and Taliban leaders on Saturday, aimed at securing the withdrawal of US and allied troops, has left open questions over the longest-running US war.— PAGE 2

► Elliott sets out Twitter governance fears

The activist hedge fund has laid out concerns to the board as it pushes for the removal of chief executive Jack Dorsey. The fund's 4 per cent stake puts it in the social network's top 10 shareholders.— PAGE 6

► Big bets against US oil and gas sector

Short-sellers have bumped up their bets against an industry bruised by plunging prices and oversupply. The S&P index of energy stocks is down 25 per cent so far in 2020.— PAGE 7

► Protest call after Macron pension decree

French trade unions have called for new protests against the president's reforms after the legislation was pushed through by decree. Some 40,000 amendments had been tabled to the bill.— PAGE 3

► Irish central bank chief in housing alert

Gabriel Makhoul has warned of the dangers of big spending to address an affordable housing shortage despite the issue's leading to a surge in support for the nationalist Sinn Féin last month.— PAGE 3

► NMC hires Moelis for debt advice

The embattled healthcare group has sought advice on debt restructuring as signs of a cash crunch mount. Some staff yesterday complained they had not yet received their February salaries.— PAGE 8

Datawatch

Close quarters

Overcrowding rate (%), 2018

Country	Nationals (%)	EU citizens (%)	Non-EU citizens (%)
Italy	~15	~55	~55
Latvia	~15	~55	~55
France	~15	~55	~55
EU	~15	~55	~55
Sweden	~15	~15	~15
UK	~15	~15	~15
Ireland	~15	~15	~15
Bulgaria	~15	~15	~15

Source: Eurostat

More than a third of migrants from outside the EU live in overcrowded conditions — in terms of the number of rooms appropriate to the household size — in Europe. The rate is 17 per cent for nationals and 20 per cent for foreign EU citizens

INTERNATIONAL

Military offensive

Turkey declares new operation in Syria

Mounting death toll puts Ankara's partnership with Moscow under strain

LAURA PITEL — ANKARA
CHLOE CORNISH — BEIRUT
KERIN HOPE — ATHENS

Turkey officially announced its fourth military operation in Syria in as many years in a bid to reverse gains by the Russian-backed regime of President Bashar al-Assad as clashes escalated in the embattled Syrian province of Idlib.

Turkey's defence minister, Hulusi Akar, said that operation Spring Shield had been launched after the killing of 34 Turkish soldiers last Thursday — the deadliest day that Turkey has suffered in Syria since the start of the country's civil war nine years ago.

Turkish-made armed drones launched hundreds of strikes on Syrian targets in the wake of the attack. The

Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a British-based monitor, said that 74 Syrian soldiers had been killed since Friday.

Frontlines in Idlib, Syria's last rebel-held enclave, have shifted quickly, with gains by both Turkish-backed rebels and regime forces supported by Russia.

Yesterday, Turkey said that it had downed two Su-24 fighter jets belonging to Damascus. The Syrian government, which hours earlier had declared that it would enforce a no-fly zone over the north-west of the country, confirmed that two of its planes had been targeted and said that the pilots had survived.

In comments that underscored Turkey's careful stance towards Russia, Mr Akar said that the aim of the offensive in Idlib was not to "face off against" Moscow. "Our sole aim is to put an end to the carnage by the regime and thus prevent radicalisation and migration," he said.

Mr Akar said that the Russians "must use their influence on the regime to halt

regime attacks and ensure the withdrawal [of regime forces] to the Sochi agreement borders".

Moscow accuses Turkey of failing to uphold the deal by failing to halt attacks by jihadi groups that dominate militias.

The mounting Turkish death toll has placed strain on the close partnership forged between Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian president Vladimir Putin. The casualties have pushed relations to their most tense point since the Turkish military downed a Russian fighter jet in 2015.

Despite their differences, Turkey has shown little sign of wanting to sever ties with Russia. Mr Erdogan has pushed for a face-to-face meeting with Mr Putin, and is expected to travel to Moscow to meet with him on March 5 or 6.

The Syrian regime's offensive to retake Idlib, part of Mr Assad's campaign to reclaim "every inch" of his country, has triggered the worst human-

'Our sole aim is to put an end to the carnage by the [Assad] regime'

Hulusi Akar, Turkey defence minister

itarian catastrophe of the country's civil war, according to the UN.

Nearly 1m people have been forced to flee in search of safety. Turkey, home to more than 4m refugees from Syria and other nations, has said it cannot take any more people in. Its calls for global support to create a buffer or no-fly zone inside Idlib to protect the province's 3m civilians have fallen on deaf ears.

Following last week's attack, Turkey has sought to dial up the pressure on the EU by following through on a threat to open its borders to Europe for refugees, prompting alarm in European capitals.

Thousands of people from countries including Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Syria have streamed into a buffer zone between Turkey and Greece in recent days. Most have found themselves trapped as Athens has strengthened security on the border.

Additional reporting by Jim Brunsten in Brussels and Henry Foy in Moscow

GLOBAL INSIGHT

US POLITICS

Edward Luce



Grandpa's comeback intensifies pressure on Bloomberg to quit race

You could almost hear the establishment's collective exhalation after Joe Biden's thumping win in South Carolina on Saturday night. Finally, on the fourth sampling in this remarkably polarised Democratic primary, Bernie Sanders has met a barrier, which is the African-American vote. The former US vice-president can now credibly take on Mr Sanders in the decisive cluster of primaries over the next few days.

But Mr Biden's win should not yet be mistaken for national momentum. He owes a lot to James Clyburn, the South Carolina congressman, whose moving endorsement this week was cited by almost half of black voters as influencing their choice. In that respect, all politics is local. Moreover, Mr Biden has focused almost all his time and money on winning this one state at the expense of far bigger ones next week.

Yet he is back from the near dead. In 1992 Bill Clinton turned into the "comeback kid" after he pulled off a second-place finish in New Hampshire. Mr Biden has now earned the moniker "comeback grandpa".

It would take a psephological sea change to convert the momentum he brings from South Carolina to come out top in the Super Tuesday sweep this week. Mr Biden trails Mr Sanders in the national polls by double digits. Many big states, notably California, where Mr Sanders' lead has been prohibitive for weeks, have already had unusually high rates of early voting.

Tomorrow's likelier outcome is that Mr Sanders comes out top and there is a tussle between Mr Biden, Mike Bloomberg and Elizabeth Warren for second place. It is hard to believe Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar will not follow Tom Steyer's lead in pulling out. Neither has much chance of winning any of the 14 states that vote tomorrow.

At that point, the Democratic establishment will need to unite behind one non-Sanders candidate — assuming it is not already too late. If the party wants to convert Saturday night's relief into actionable hope, it should persuade Mr Bloomberg to pull out of the race. It has been obvious for several weeks that the unintended beneficiary of the former New York mayor's record spending has been Mr Sanders.

It is hard to imagine Mr Bloomberg can be persuaded to drop out the day before his name first appears on any ballot. He took out a three-minute advertisement in yesterday morning's prime time window to address America on the coronavirus. Logic suggests Mr Bloomberg would have a far bigger impact if he spent that money on Mr Biden. Emotion will doubtless dictate otherwise.

The situation is rich and potentially bitter in irony. Mr Bloomberg entered the race in November after he concluded that Mr Biden was too weak to take on the left (Ms Warren was in the lead then, not Mr Sanders).

Yet it has become increasingly obvious that his presence is the biggest obstacle to Mr Biden's nomination. Mr Bloomberg could continue to run for the White House for several lifetimes without exhausting his personal wealth. "United we stand" is a chant of the left. The Democratic bigwigs should try to convert Mr Bloomberg to that way of thinking as fast as it can.

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Super Tuesday showdown
Big win in South Carolina for former vice-president Joe Biden sets up Super Tuesday showdown with Democratic nomination front-runner Bernie Sanders
[ft.com/us-presidential-election](https://www.ft.com/us-presidential-election)

Afghanistan. America's longest conflict

Taliban deal brings hope of end to war

Broad agreement has been reached but there are plenty of obstacles to a lasting peace

KATRINA MANSON — WASHINGTON

US president Donald Trump declared in September that talks with the Taliban were "dead". But after nine halting rounds of negotiations, the US signed a peace deal with Taliban leaders on Saturday that aimed to secure the withdrawal of all US and allied troops from Afghanistan. So is this the end of America's longest-running war?

Terms of the deal

The US has agreed to withdraw all its military forces from Afghanistan, including contractors, trainers and advisers, within 14 months. All coalition partners, including Nato, will also withdraw their 39,000 troops in this time-frame. The US will start with a reduction of about 4,000 troops within 135 days, bringing the total remaining to 8,600. The US will aim to remove UN sanctions against the Taliban by May 29, and to remove its own sanctions and any rewards it offers for the capture of certain Taliban by August 27. Up to 5,000 Taliban prisoners will be released by March 10, with the rest to be released three months after that.

In return, the Taliban has agreed to break with al-Qaeda, meaning it will no longer host, recruit, train, fundraise for or co-operate with any terrorist groups to ensure they no longer threaten the security of the US from Afghan soil. The Taliban has also agreed to start talks with Afghan political representatives and civil society, on March 10. These negotiations will seek a permanent ceasefire and could lead to the Taliban's inclusion in the Afghan government.

Rights of women and minorities

The deal is silent on this issue, but it goes to the heart of 40 years of war in Afghanistan. The agreement commits the Taliban only to hold talks with "Afghan sides" on March 10 aimed at ending the violence.

The Taliban want Afghans to live



A US soldier wounded in a 2012 clash with the Taliban in Kandahar is evacuated. The US has agreed to pull all its forces out in 14 months
Saz Ramei/Reuters

under their version of sharia law. It is unclear how their inclusion at the heart of Afghan government could accommodate the rights of women and girls, who now make up 39 per cent of Afghans who attend school. Under Taliban rule, women were banned from work and education, were required to wear burkas in public and subjected to forced underage marriage.

Any deal will also seek to address the historical grievances of the three main ethnic groups — Pashtun, Tajik and Hazara.

The next steps

Mr Trump said he would "be meeting personally with Taliban leaders in the not too distant future" and he hoped the group would continue to "kill terrorists", a reference to the Taliban's own war against Isis in Afghanistan.

Afghan negotiators are due to start talks on March 10 in Oslo, but US offi-

cials have said both time and location could shift. One stumbling block is that US officials are still trying to persuade the Kabul government to agree to release thousands of Taliban by that date for intra-Afghan talks to start.

Afghan president Ashraf Ghani said yesterday he had made "no commitment" to release prisoners before talks start. He said negotiations could instead include prisoner release as one of its agenda points, but this could scupper negotiations before they begin.

Negotiations will probably focus on ways to include the Taliban in government and the impact that will have on politics, security and society, including the role of women.

The negotiations will also be complicated by antipathy to Mr Ghani from Abdullah Abdullah, the opposition politician who refused to recognise his election victory and threatened to set up a parallel government until the US last

week dissuaded him. The deal also commits the US to support the economic reconstruction of Afghanistan.

The end of war

Far from it. Both al-Qaeda and Isis have fighters in Afghanistan and are opposed to the deal, so could seek to wreck it. UK officials suggested the changing dynamics between allied forces and Afghan security forces could give terrorist groups space to operate differently.

US officials also fear Taliban fighters could continue their association with al-Qaeda or even join Isis, the group's foe. It remains unclear whether Pakistan will refuse safe haven to any groups that threaten US security. The US says it will progressively withdraw troops only if the Taliban maintains its commitments.

Additional reporting by Stephanie Findlay in New Delhi, Farhan Bokhari in Islamabad and Helen Warrell in London

Wall Street clash Sanders' agenda would remake financial world

KADHIM SHUBBER — WASHINGTON
ROBERT ARMSTRONG — NEW YORK

While Bernie Sanders may have taken the lead in the race for the Democratic presidential nomination, Wall Street is only now beginning to weigh up the possibility that the self-proclaimed democratic socialist might be the next US president.

The billionaire-bashing Vermont senator's policy platform has been defined by broad welfare programmes — from Medicare for All to student debt forgiveness — but for Wall Street his agenda reads like a declaration of war.

Mr Sanders' agenda, if enacted, would radically remake the financial world.

Here are some of the areas in which he is looking to make big changes.

Breaking up banks

Mr Sanders wants to reinstate the Glass-Steagall Act's separation of investment and retail banking, which would force JPMorgan Chase, for example, to break itself up. He has also pledged to end "too big to fail" banks. A Senate bill he introduced in 2018 would break up any bank with "total exposure" equivalent to more than 3 per cent of gross domestic product, or about \$650bn in assets. That

would force Wells Fargo, JPMorgan, Bank of America and Citigroup to split.

At just seven pages long, the bill is relatively short on specifics. "There's a lot more detail in the [Elizabeth] Warren stuff. The Sanders [bank] break up bill is what I could call more impressionistic," said Bartlett Naylor, a financial policy advocate at Public Citizen, the consumer watchdog group.

Financial transactions tax

Mr Sanders has proposed slapping a tax of a fraction of a per cent on every financial transaction — 0.5 per cent on stock trades, 0.1 per cent on bond trades and 0.005 per cent on derivatives trades — to fund some of his social welfare programmes.

Such a levy could transform the economics of high-speed trading by making it costly to rapidly enter and exit market positions — and ultimately "restrict rapid-fire financial speculation", according to his campaign website.

Consumer banking

Mr Sanders has proposed a cap on interest rates on all consumer loans at 15 per cent to cut debt costs for Americans. Such a move would radically reduce the

size of the credit card operations of banks from Citibank to PNC Financial. It would also reshape the subprime auto and payday lending industries by banning higher cost debt that such companies use to ensure their profits while lending to riskier borrowers.

He also wants to overhaul retail banking by offering current and savings accounts, debit cards, online banking and "low-interest, small dollar loans" through the existing US Postal Service network.

The Fed

Mr Sanders has come out in support of a plan to "audit the Federal Reserve and make it a more democratic institution" — a broad proposal to give Congress more checks over the central bank, which could mean a range of things in practice.

While he has not divulged who he would appoint to the Fed if elected president, Mr Sanders previously joined Ms Warren in signing a 2016 letter urging the Fed to find ways to assemble a more diverse group of policymakers, including women and racial and ethnic minorities, in order to better serve the needs of disadvantaged groups.

Raising taxes for the super-rich — and normal rich

Mr Sanders has long advocated raising taxes on the richest Americans, including a special wealth tax on the top 0.1 per cent of US households — those with a net worth over \$32m. The tax would start at 1 per cent and rise to 8 per cent for wealth of more than \$10bn.

He also proposes eliminating the income cap on the Social Security tax that is taken out of every US worker's pay cheque: a 12 per cent levy, split between employer and the employee. Right now income above \$137,700 is not subject to the tax, so removing it would represent a major tax increase on those earning significantly more than that threshold.

One of Mr Sanders' most recent policy ideas — outlined in a Senate bill he introduced last week — is to eliminate tax breaks for special executive retirement plans, under which corporate bosses can put off paying taxes on compensation they defer until after retirement.

Doing so would recoup an estimate \$15bn in federal tax revenue, according to Mr Sanders, which he would use to shore up multiemployer retirement plans for workers.

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INTERNATIONAL

Ireland’s bank chief warns on cash for homes

Trade tensions and potential for no-deal Brexit pose threat to economy, says Makhoul

MARTIN ARNOLD — BERLIN
ARTHUR BEESLEY — DUBLIN

Ireland’s central bank chief has warned against starting a spending spree to address the country’s shortage of affordable housing after the issue led to a surge in support for the nationalist Sinn Féin party in elections last month.

Gabriel Makhoul told the Financial Times that even though Ireland’s economy was one of the top performers in Europe last year with growth of close to 5 per cent, there were risks ahead that could cause a sharp downturn.

Mr Makhoul said a no-deal Brexit was the biggest immediate risk to the Irish economy, because of its close trading links to the UK. He added that Ireland’s economy was also likely to be hit by trade tensions, changes to international tax rules and the disruption of the coronavirus outbreak.

“I’m calling this an interesting conjecture because in a bad scenario . . . you could suddenly find the fiscal surpluses that the current government has forecast are suddenly challenged very much

‘The supply of housing needs to be addressed . . . It will take a while . . . it is not simply construction’

by that change in sentiment and activity,” he said.

A lack of affordable housing was the dominant issue in last month’s general election, which boosted Sinn Féin and left the country with a deadlocked parliament.

Sinn Féin’s left-leaning manifesto tapped into the anger over housing by promising a big increase in spending on public housing, a rent freeze and changes to banking rules to cap mortgage rates — which are higher than in much of Europe.

The central bank has found that one dwelling was built for every seven extra people in the population over the past eight years. House prices have rebounded since the 2008 crisis, although they dipped last year and remain below pre-crisis levels. Rents have risen 40 per cent in the past five years, while average earnings are up only 14 per cent.

“Absolutely the supply of housing needs to be addressed,” Mr Makhoul said. “Whether you can do that overnight is extremely unlikely, so it is going

to take a while. It is not simply construction.”

He said housing supply would also depend on changes to the planning system, public infrastructure and availability of labour. “When you are running, as Ireland is at the moment, an economy at full capacity, you have to meet all of those challenges in my view to deliver the housing supply that you may want and need,” he said. “It is more than a fiscal question.”

Ireland’s public debt ratio has almost halved in recent years to just over 60 per cent of its gross domestic product but that figure is distorted by high foreign direct investment.

The country’s per capita debt remains one of the world’s highest. Although the outgoing government achieved a 0.4 per cent of GDP budget surplus, the central bank has predicted that growth could drop to below 1 per cent in a no-deal Brexit scenario. The country is also heavily reliant on increased corporation tax revenues from multinational companies with Irish operations, such as Apple, Google, Facebook and Microsoft.

A British citizen born in Egypt, Mr Makhoul is the first overseas official to lead Ireland’s central bank. The 60-year-old’s appointment last year was clouded by controversy in New Zealand, where as head of its treasury department, he was found to have wrongly blamed hackers for a budget leak.

He said public housing concern could threaten the credibility of the Irish central bank. On a recent visit to a technology college in south-west Ireland, he asked the audience what inflation had been in the past decade and most people said it had been around 6 to 7 per cent — above the actual level close to 1 per cent.

“If people’s reality is different to the one that we assert, then we have got a problem,” he said. “Housing costs, I think, at least in Ireland are the main issue” in creating a gap in public perceptions of prices and the actual data.

He added his voice to those calling for the cost of housing to be given more weight in the way inflation is calculated in the eurozone.

The EU has long debated whether it should follow the US, UK and other countries by including the cost of owner-occupied housing in its data, even though it is hard to measure.

“The EU has long debated whether it should follow the US, UK and other countries by including the cost of owner-occupied housing in its data, even though it is hard to measure.

“The main thing here is it’s not how you do it. It needs to be done,” he said. “The key thing is credibility, for me, and connecting much more with people.”

Constitutional gambit

France faces fresh protests as pension bill passed by decree

DAVID KEOHANE — PARIS

France’s trade unions and opposition parties called for new protests against Emmanuel Macron’s pension reform after the government pushed through the contentious legislation by decree.

The pension overhaul, which aims to unify 42 different profession-specific retirement schemes, sparked the longest public transport strike in France’s history before making it to parliament.

Late on Saturday, Edouard Philippe, the prime minister, announced he would trigger article 49.3 in the constitution allowing the government to override parliament to adopt the legislation.

Mr Philippe did so “not to put an end to debate but to end this period of non-debate” after opposition parties introduced more than 40,000 amendments to the bill, he told lawmakers.

The government’s decision to use the constitutional provision underlines the toxic political environment facing President Macron, whose approval ratings have slid to about 33 per cent. The reform has become the biggest challenge to his presidency since the *gilets jaunes* street protests that kicked off in late 2018.

Even though the French leader would have had no problem passing the pension bill because of his large majority in the lower house of parliament, the lengthy and tense discussions were threatening to overshadow mayoral elections later this month, in which Mr Macron’s party is expected to suffer a nationwide defeat.

“This was the only way for the government to speed up the process consider-

ing the strategy of the opposition to pose 30-40 thousand amendments to block the legislation,” said Vincent Martigny, a professor of political science at the University of Nice.

“The opposition pushed the government to this route. The France Insoumise [party] knew the government would probably do this and now they can say the government is not respectful of democracy,” he said.

Philippe Martinez, head of the leftwing CGT trade union, told AFP that the unions would take to the streets once again next week against the reforms.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the far-left France Insoumise — France Unbowed — decried the “extraordinarily violent” methods of the government while Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right Rassemblement National, or National Gathering, said the French “will not forgive this outrageous manoeuvre”.

Article 49.3 was last invoked by François Hollande, former Socialist president, to push through labour reforms in 2016 and before that a slate of business-friendly reforms put together by Mr Macron as his economy minister in 2015. Mr Hollande took the action in light of his government’s small parliamentary majority, which put the law’s passage in jeopardy.

Opposition parties have now called for a no-confidence vote against the government, which is positioned to win comfortably next week. “The timing is absolutely central because it is clear any debate in parliament would have taken months,” added Mr Martigny.



Risks ahead: Gabriel Makhoul advises against loosening the purse strings to address Ireland’s housing shortage, the issue that dominated last month’s general election

Vivek Prakash/Bloomberg

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INTERNATIONAL

Emergency legislation

UK draws up battle plan to beat coronavirus

Health chief warns of city lockdowns and school closures as cases leap to 35

SARAH NEVILLE — LONDON

The UK government could ban mass gatherings, close schools and urge people to avoid public transport to halt the spread of coronavirus, Matt Hancock, health secretary, said yesterday.

The plans were announced before the Department of Health and Social Care said a further 12 people in England had tested positive for Covid-19, taking the total across the UK to 35.

A government plan to deal with the escalating outbreak in Britain due to be unveiled this week is expected to say that a war room of scientists and other experts will be established, with each

Whitehall department nominating a minister to lead on the effort.

As Boris Johnson prepares to chair his first emergency ministerial meeting on the coronavirus outbreak today, Mr Hancock told the BBC that newly retired doctors and nurses could be called back into the National Health Service to fill in for sick or otherwise absent colleagues.

Employers could also be encouraged to tell staff to work from home if the disease strengthens its hold in the UK.

Asked whether the government would consider locking down entire cities, Mr Hancock said: "There's clearly a huge economic and social downside to that. But we don't take anything off the table at this stage, because you've got to make sure that you have all the tools available, if that is what's necessary."

However, he wanted "to minimise the social and economic disruption", stress-

ing such drastic so-called social distancing measures were not yet imminent and emphasising the steps individuals can take to limit their chances of catching coronavirus.

"So long as people are washing hands

[The government would] 'only look at things that epidemiologically, scientifically make sense'

and taking the precautions that are set out that is the right thing to do," said Mr Hancock.

The UK authorities on Friday reported that a man living in Surrey was the first case of coronavirus in a patient who had not been abroad.

The health department said yester-

day another patient, this time from Essex, had contracted coronavirus without travelling.

It added that among the 12 new cases were people from London, West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Hertfordshire and Gloucestershire.

Mr Hancock made clear that the government had not given up hope that the coronavirus outbreak could be stopped from becoming pandemic.

However, should scientists tell the government that "it's going to go right through the world and therefore become endemic here", ministers would move into the delay phase, "where we have to take judgments about how much action to take that might have downsides and costs in order to delay it", he added.

The government would "only look at things that epidemiologically, scientifi-

cally make sense", said Mr Hancock. The government plan to deal with the escalating Covid-19 outbreak is expected to provide for emergency legislation giving the public sector new powers to respond.

For example, this could include allowing school class sizes to rise to take account of sick teachers.

Mr Hancock said such "enabling powers to help the public services to continue to operate effectively" would "be temporary, if they're taken, and they are essentially about how to deal with a very large-scale problem".

He also moved to reassure people that the NHS could cope, promising an additional 5,000 critical care beds could be made available. The government plan is based on a 2011 document that was drawn up to respond to a flu pandemic. **Editorial Comment** page 16

Central banks. Recession risk

Policymakers face calls to prevent 'doom loop'

Spread of virus around world prompts demands for fiscal and monetary intervention

CHRIS GILES — LONDON
ROBIN HARDING — TOKYO
BRENDAN GREELEY — WASHINGTON

Disruptions caused by the coronavirus outbreak that originated in China and is now spreading through the rest of the world are driving the global economy closer to a recession, triggering calls for fiscal and monetary intervention.

Capital Economics cut its growth forecast by 0.4 percentage points to 2.5 per cent for 2020, in what the IMF considers recession territory. But Jennifer McKeown, head of economic research at Capital Economics, cautioned that if the outbreak became a global pandemic — a state some epidemiologists say has already been reached — the effect "could be as bad as 2009, when world GDP fell by 0.5 per cent".

Predictions a week ago by IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva that global growth would be hit by just 0.1 percentage points at 3.2 per cent this year already seem out of date. The OECD in Paris will rush out a new interim forecast today, setting out a greater impact than the IMF's reading, and outlining an alternative scenario with what officials describe as "more serious consequences".

A global recession in the first half of this year is "suddenly looking like a distinct possibility", said Erik Nielsen, chief economist at UniCredit.

The question for policymakers is what to do as pressure grows for them to take preventive measures to stimulate the economy. "The ability of the economy to bounce back strongly depends in large part on whether we see effective policy intervention," said Karen Ward, chief European market strategist at JPMorgan Asset Management.

Some monetary policymakers have argued that coronavirus is a supply shock to the economy, removing workers from their places of employment and components from factories, and therefore makes stimulus ineffective.

Bank of England deputy governor Jon Cunliffe said on Thursday that since coronavirus was "a pure supply shock there is not much we can do about it".



A woman at the Shanghai Stock Exchange has her temperature taken last week
Aly Song/Routters

It depends on the magnitude of the supply shocks, other economists say, however. In a study of a global flu pandemic, Oxford university professors estimated a four-week closure of schools — almost exactly what Japan has introduced — would knock 0.6 per cent off output in one year as parents would have to stay off work to look after children.

For policymakers, it is also almost impossible to distinguish between a lack of demand caused by people deciding not to spend at a time of an epidemic and pure supply shocks. The point of taking action is "to prevent the supply disruption triggering a doom loop" of weaker supply that in turn leads to lower spending, said Roger Farmer, professor of economics at UCLA.

Fiscal policy would also help pay for medical interventions and boost demand, while monetary policy can help keep demand higher and seek to prevent financial distress among indebted companies, said Olivier Blan-

chard, senior fellow at Washington DC-based think-tank the Peterson Institute.

There are signs central bankers and governments are weighing bolder steps:

US

Federal Reserve chair Jay Powell signalled on Friday the central bank was considering cutting interest rates in response to the "evolving risks" to the US economy. The Department of the Treasury, meanwhile, has been reluctant to speak about the risks posed by the virus on growth, or to commit to a response. A Treasury official said before Mr Powell's statement that the most likely outcome was still "V-shaped" — a shortlived hit, contained within a quarter, followed by a sharp recovery.

Eurozone

The European Commission has earmarked €232m to help contain the disease. Yesterday, Italy announced a €3.6bn stimulus package, saying it

A global recession in the first half of this year is 'suddenly looking like a distinct possibility'

would seek authorisation from Brussels to widen its budget deficit this year. The European Central Bank has yet to signal any imminent intervention.

Japan

The coronavirus has hit Japan just as the government was seeking to implement a new stimulus package to help mitigate a damaging rise in consumption tax.

If there is a big hit to demand, the Bank of Japan has little room to respond, with overnight interest rates at minus 0.1 per cent and 10-year bond yields capped at zero.

That leaves fiscal policy as the main tool for action. But the government has just finished legislation on a supplementary budget for the fiscal year to March 2020 and it is likely to be months before it can consider any further measures.

Additional reporting by Martin Arnold in Frankfurt
Companies & Markets page 6
Rana Foroohar page 17

Infection threat

Japan school closures cause parental alarm and political backlash in country with little childcare

ROBIN HARDING, KANA INAGAKI AND LEO LEWIS — TOKYO

The school holidays are a time of childhood delight and parental dread but for Tomoyo Koike, a 40-year-old single mother of three children, every day is now a holiday as Japan begins an unprecedented school shutdown.

Ms Koike has been left with just days to organise childcare after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called on every elementary, middle and high school across the country to close from today until April to reduce social contact and the spread of coronavirus.

The decision comes as the virus, which seems to be about 20 times as deadly as the seasonal flu, is spreading faster outside China, where it has originated, causing alarm and triggering quarantines, transport and manufacturing disruptions in Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Schools in Hong Kong have been shut since January because of protests, and the coronavirus has extended those closures to April. South Korea has postponed the start of the new school year by a week to March 9.

In Japan, the measure has fuelled parental desperation in a country with little culture of nannies and babysitters, exposing inflexible work practices and gender inequality, as well as social gaps created by the rise of single parents and families with two earners.

Experts have decried the decision as politically motivated and some municipalities have refused to close their schools after the sudden move by Mr Abe, who is desperate to stave off any threat to the Tokyo Olympics, and has come under criticism for his handling of the coronavirus outbreak.

Ms Koike's job at a non-profit organisation does not offer remote working and she has no relatives nearby to help look after her children. "My two kids in elementary school will stay home on their own and I've told them not to go out," Ms Koike said. "On the educational front, I'm worried they'll just spend the entire day playing games."

She plans to set a study schedule and will ask her children to send photos of their homework through a messaging app while she is at work until 5.30pm. If the shutdown is prolonged, she worries about nutrition, because her children

will be eating frozen food if she cannot prepare lunch boxes.

Even greater chaos awaits if the day care facility for her four-year-old daughter shuts down as well. In that scenario, Ms Koike is considering hiring a babysitter or taking time off work to avoid the expense.

"If my two kids stay at home and my youngest goes to day care, I'm not sure the government measure will be effective," Ms Koike said.



Some municipalities have refused to close their schools — Tomohiro Ohtsuki/Getty

"The risk is also higher for me to become infected by going to work so I feel like I'm the biggest danger in my household."

So far, Japan's government has urged day care centres to stay open, giving hope to parents of small children. After-school clubs will also continue at some schools, helping parents who work late, but also raising questions about the purpose of the shutdown as children will continue to mix in enclosed spaces.

Mr Abe's decision has triggered a backlash. Nobuhiko Okabe, director of the Kawasaki City Institute for Public Health and a member of Japan's expert panel on the coronavirus, said the group was not consulted on school closures. "We have to think about the balance of daily life," he said, noting that Covid-19 appeared to affect adults more than children. "My opinion is to limit school closures to specific areas."

The mayor of Kanazawa in central Japan refused to follow the prime minister's request, saying the economic impact was too large.

Renho Murata, deputy leader of the opposition Constitutional Democratic party, said: "To say 'just leave the children at home' when there's no change in their parent's work situation . . . is the worst kind of grandstanding."

According to an online poll by Yahoo Japan, 49 per cent of parents say they will leave their children home alone, 20 per cent will take time off work and 14 per cent will ask grandparents to take care of them.

In the hours that followed Mr Abe's demand for school closures Amazon's Japanese website received a flurry of

China

Forced Uighur labour reported in multinational supply chains

YUAN YANG AND CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD
BEIJING

China's Uighur minority are being moved from their homes and mass detention camps into factories to work under conditions that strongly suggest forced labour for suppliers to a range of multinationals including Apple and Huawei, according to new research.

More than 80,000 Uighur residents and former detainees from the north-western region of Xinjiang have been transferred to factories in a range of supply chains including electronics, textiles and automobiles, according to the report released yesterday by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. At least 83 Chinese and foreign multinationals are known to be benefiting from "forced Uyghur labour under a state-sponsored labour transfer scheme", it found.

The think-tank names 27 factories in nine Chinese provinces as beneficiaries of workers transferred from Xinjiang since a crackdown on the Uighur Muslim minority began in 2017. While a handful of companies had previously been named in public reports, their supply chains were concentrated in Xinjiang, particularly the cotton industry.

Over the past three years, China has detained some 1.8m Uighur Muslims in a system of camps in the region. While Beijing says some have been released, many have been sent to work in factories across China as part of government-organised labour-transfer schemes. The schemes also include individuals who have not previously been interned.

The transferred workers typically undergo "ideological training outside working hours, are subject to constant surveillance, and are forbidden from participating in religious observances", according to ASPI. The think-tank arrived at its conclusions by cross-referencing state media and government reports announcing Xinjiang work-transfer projects to lists of suppliers for global brands, as well as local companies' claims of whom they supplied.

The factories implicated by Xinjiang labour transfers stretch as far as Nanchang, a city in southern China where Apple supplier O-Film Technology has three factories. O-Film says it supplies Huawei and other multinationals with camera and touchscreen components.

Media in southern Xinjiang reported that in the space of a few days in 2017, 700 workers were transferred to O-Film's Jiangxi plants. It described the work-transfer programme as aiming to "gradually change their ideas, letting them grow into . . . youth who would understand the Party's compassion and feel gratitude for the Party".

The phrase is reminiscent of Beijing's official line that the purpose of the camps are "re-education". China has a target to transfer 100,000 people from the Uighur-majority region into industrial labour in the three years to 2020.

Asked to comment on the findings, Apple pointed to a statement previously given to The Washington Post: "Apple is dedicated to ensuring that everyone in our supply chain is treated with the dignity and respect they deserve. We have not seen this report but we work closely with all our suppliers to ensure our high standards are upheld."

Huawei declined to comment.

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Rana Foroohar Coronavirus has exposed the deep vulnerabilities inherent in the global economy ➔ OPINION

Companies & Markets

Deutsche Bank compliance failings raise red flags in UK

- BoE cites lack of progress on controls
- Lender’s post-Brexit access at risk

STEPHEN MORRIS — LONDON
OLAF STORBECK — FRANKFURT
The UK financial regulator has criticised Deutsche Bank for failing to improve its anti-money laundering and compliance controls, and warned this could jeopardise the German lender’s access to the UK after Brexit.

Bank of England supervisors have told Deutsche executives they now require monthly updates, instead of the normal quarterly meetings, according to people familiar with the matter.

Regulators are concerned that issues are still occurring four years after Deutsche was first censured and placed under special supervision by the Finan-

Regulators are concerned issues are still occurring four years after Deutsche was first censured

cial Conduct Authority for “serious” and “systemic” failings in its controls against money laundering, terrorist financing and sanctions breaches.

Deutsche has been embroiled in a plethora of compliance and misconduct scandals in the UK, US and Europe over the past decade, which have dented its reputation and resulted in billions of dollars in fines. Further compliance and systems blunders occurred at the start of this year, the Financial Times has learnt.

On January 16, the German bank accidentally sent the data relating to 12,500 transactions of 500 clients to Amazon, one of its biggest corporate customers, people briefed on the error said.

Deutsche’s tardiness in notifying affected clients and regulators led to

concerns internally it was close to breaching FCA principle 11, which states firms must be “open and co-operative” in their dealings with regulators, and “disclose to the appropriate regulator anything relating to the firm of which that regulator would reasonably expect notice”.

A spokesman for Deutsche denied it had breached principle 11.

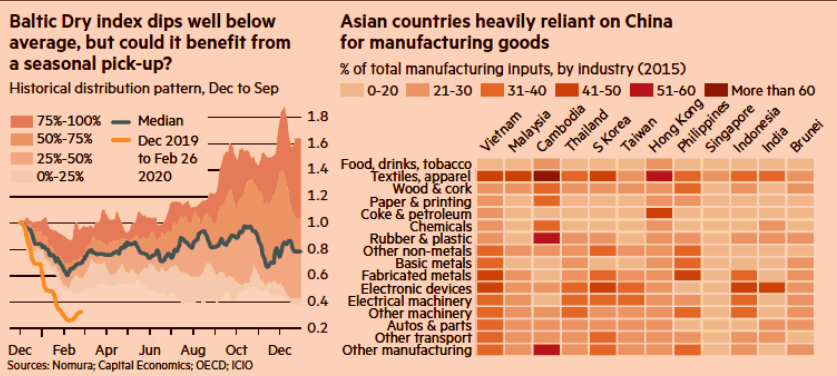
In a separate IT systems failing two weeks ago, Deutsche was unable to access Chaps, the UK’s high-value payments system, for three hours in the middle of the day, the people familiar with the matter said. A bank spokesman said all payments were eventually processed that day.

The BoE’s Prudential Regulation Authority and FCA have been monitoring Deutsche’s progress since 2015, and placed it under special supervision a year later. They have warned the German lender its post-Brexit reauthorisation could be pushed back if improvements are not seen soon, although this outcome is still a remote possibility, according to several people involved.

Deutsche, as with other non-British banks, uses EU passporting rights to operate in the UK. It is required to go through a reauthorisation process — which includes assessments of its controls and IT stability — as part of the country’s departure from the bloc. The reviews are supposed to be completed by December 31, when the Brexit transition period is due to end.

Deutsche said in a statement that it had tripled the number of staff in its anti-financial crime division since 2015, and pledged €4bn to improve its controls. The PRA and FCA declined to comment.

Shipping signals Fall in large container leasing provides clue to global impact of coronavirus



ANNA GROSS — LONDON

Investors around the world have been on the hunt for fresh insights into the possible long-term effects of the coronavirus outbreak.

That has meant that one indicator has come back into fashion: the Baltic Dry index, a measure of shipping costs for a wide range of bulk commodities such as coal, iron ore and grain.

The index shows rates for leasing the largest “Capesize” ships have dropped two-thirds since the start of December, and are well below the average level of the past 20 years. That suggests a drop in demand in China, the world’s biggest consumer of iron ore and other industrial commodities.

But the real value of the BDI may not be in what it tells us about the impact of the epidemic so far, but rather what it says about potential developments in coming weeks.

Masanari Takada, a macro strategist at Tokyo-based Nomura, points out that the BDI has a tendency to work its way downward through the first half of February — knocked by the effects of China’s Lunar New Year holiday period — but then bottoms out in the middle of the month.

Indeed, since reaching lows of 411 in early February this year, its lowest level since April 2016, the BDI — a composite of rates for four sizes of ship — has gained about 29 per cent.

In the past few years, the index had

been lifted by economic stimulus measures introduced by China at the end of February, Mr Takada explained. It remains to be seen if this year’s supercharged set of measures, including cuts to benchmark lending rates and waivers on bad loans, can boost output this year.

“If [the BDI] doesn’t recover this year, it will indicate a much more severe effect than usual on the global supply chain,” he said.

Analysts note that falls in the BDI do not always indicate drops in demand, as supply-side factors such as port congestion and the vagaries of the two- or three-year cycle from order to delivery of new ships also have a bearing on prices.

Elliott seeks to oust Twitter boss over dual CEO roles

SUJEET INDAP, ORTENCA ALIAJ AND HANNAH MURPHY — NEW YORK

Activist hedge fund Elliott Management has laid out concerns over Twitter’s corporate governance to the social network’s board and is pushing for the removal of its chief executive Jack Dorsey after taking a more than \$1bn stake in the social media company.

The New York-based activist hedge fund has taken issue with Mr Dorsey simultaneously holding the CEO title at both Twitter and Square, the fintech company Mr Dorsey also co-founded, according to people familiar with the matter.

Elliott, whose near-4 per cent stake in Twitter places it among the company’s top 10 shareholders, has had talks with the board and has privately submitted four nominees to stand for election at the company’s annual shareholder meeting to be held in May.

The \$38bn firm has flagged leadership issues with Twitter’s board of directors, said people familiar with its thinking, stemming from a CEO it believes is distracted by other activities and a high turnover rate among senior operating and financial executives.

Twitter’s board named Mr Dorsey chief executive in 2015 despite publicly stating that it would only accept a candidate that could do the job full-time. Mr Dorsey has remained at the helm even as investors flagged concerns that he has more skin in the game at Square, a company that is more valuable than Twitter and in which he has a 13 per cent stake.

Shares in Twitter dropped by a fifth in October after it reported a poor third quarter which was marred by technical problems in its advertising placement technology. Twitter shares trade just a quarter higher than its 2013 IPO price and have been overtaken by rival Facebook whose market cap of more than \$500bn is 20 times that of Twitter’s.

Mr Dorsey raised eyebrows last year when he announced plans to move to Africa for as long as six months in 2020 to explore opportunities in blockchain and digital currencies. Mr Dorsey owns more than a tenth of Square, a stake worth nearly \$5bn. In contrast, his Twitter stake of roughly 2 per cent is worth around \$500m.

Mr Dorsey did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Twitter declined to comment.

Travel & leisure. Football

Major League Soccer plays the long game

Beckham and fellow club owners keep investing despite losses as 25th season starts

MURAD AHMED — NEW YORK

When David Tepper bought a Major League Soccer franchise for \$325m in December, the hedge fund billionaire agreed a price similar to one needed to acquire football clubs in the sport’s financial stronghold of Europe.

Yet frothy valuations for sides in the US and Canada’s top tier of football — or soccer, as it is known in North America — have been achieved despite most MLS leagues — England, Spain, Germany Italy, France — those divisions benefit from multibillion-euro broadcasting contracts unmatched elsewhere.

A consortium led by Daniel Friedkin, the billionaire, is in late-stage talks to buy AS Roma for €750m (\$803m), while an investment group backed by Saudi Arabia’s sovereign wealth fund has offered £350m (\$448m) for England’s Newcastle United.

Mr Beckham paid a cut price for his franchise, triggering an option to acquire an MLS team for \$25m as part of his 2007 transfer from Spain’s Real Madrid to Los Angeles Galaxy — a move that raised global interest in the league.

Since then, team values have spiralled. In 2013, City Football Group, the Abu Dhabi-controlled parent company of England’s Manchester City, paid \$110m for a New York-based franchise.

Last year, Meg Whitman, the former Hewlett-Packard and eBay chief executive, paid \$100m for a 20 per cent stake in FC Cincinnati, valuing the club at \$500m.

While these prices are similar to those paid for teams in Europe’s “Big Five” leagues — England, Spain, Germany Italy, France — those divisions benefit from multibillion-euro broadcasting contracts unmatched elsewhere.

The privately held league reveals few financial details but Mr Garber said most franchise owners were in “deep investment mode”, building stadiums, for example, and were willing to sustain losses as the league grew.

The line that current spending will lead to future returns appears to be working. The competition is set to expand from the 24 teams that featured last season to 30 by 2022.

Among them is Inter Miami CF, which makes its debut when the MLS season begins this weekend. The new club is owned by David Beckham, the former footballer, and a group of investors that includes Masayoshi Son and Marcelo Claure, the top executives at SoftBank, the Japanese investment group.

But these rival European leagues are significantly higher in quality and offer better wages to entice the best players. US television ratings for English Premier League matches consistently beat those for MLS games.

Since 2000, no MLS side has even won the North American version of the Champions League, a continental club competition that has been dominated by sides from Mexico’s Liga MX. Analysts say the unique structure of MLS helps explain its teams’ rising valuations.

While most leagues have promotion and relegation, with the worst teams dropping out of the top division, MLS is open only to new entrants willing to pay “expansion fees”, which are then shared between existing owners.

Other arrangements more familiar to US domestic sports leagues, such as player salary caps, also keep costs down.

“You have scarcity because the number of franchises is tightly controlled,” said Dan Jones, head of the sports business group at Deloitte. “The sealed league system and collective bargaining agreements [with players] help to avoid volatility in revenues for investors.”

Mr Tepper was convinced to pay \$325m for his new franchise in Charlotte, North Carolina, partly because it would become the 30th side in MLS. Mr Garber said the competition would not grow beyond this number of teams for the foreseeable future.

“Beyond the dilution impact of adding more owners . . . when our revenues are still growing slowly, the real issue is we have six new teams coming in in the next number of years and we need to be very thoughtful about onboarding all those teams,” said Mr Garber.

Franchise owners also benefit from an equal share in Soccer United Marketing, a profitable organisation that owns rights to MLS broadcasting, sponsorship and merchandising. SUM also has the commercial rights to football across North America, such as matches held by US Soccer, the governing body behind the men’s and women’s national teams.

Mr Garber is also chief executive of SUM and said “almost half” of its revenues were “non-MLS related”, without providing further details.

While this business model has not led to team profits, Mr Garber insisted the league had come a long way since it almost ceased operations because of financial difficulties in 2001.

With the football World Cup set to be played across North America in 2026, he said investors were betting that the sport would eventually gain the same popularity in the US and Canada as it had across the world.

“The rationale [behind the prices paid for MLS franchises is] soccer is a sport on the rise in North America,” he said. “MLS is driving an enormous amount of energy and momentum and value for fans, communities, players and investors because we have so much growth in our future.”



MLS team values have leapt to parallel those of European leagues — Darryl Dyck/AP

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COMPANIES & MARKETS

VW faces long haul on road to electric profits

Ambitious plan to sell 26m emission-free vehicles in next nine years and overtake Tesla has yet to convince investors

JOE MILLER AND PETER CAMPBELL
WOLFSBURG

When Volkswagen unveiled its first battery-powered prototype in 2009, chief executive Martin Winterkorn warned about “electro hype” — the idea that this new technology could be as affordable and ubiquitous as its fleet of petrol and diesel cars.

A decade later, VW’s incumbent boss Herbert Diess is spending more than €33bn on proving him wrong.

The German group has launched a wildly ambitious plan to produce 26m emission-free vehicles in the next nine years, leapfrogging Tesla to become the world’s largest electric carmaker.

But perhaps the most radical element of the scheme is its focus on generating profits almost from the get-go, in defiance of dire industry-wide projections.

“When it comes to pricing for the next generation . . . [profitability is] on the level of a Golf [VW’s best-selling combustion-engine car],” Mr Diess told the Financial Times. The first car to make Golf-level margins will be a battery-powered model to be released next year that will be the size of VW’s Tiguan sport utility vehicle and built on VW’s purpose-designed modular “electric skateboard” platform, he added.

This forecast puts the company in pole position, ahead of some of the auto-



Volkswagen, from its Wolfsburg base above, has to clear numerous regulatory, technical and logistical challenges to meet its electric-vehicle targets — AFP via Getty

“There are hirings and firings all the time at VW, but what I like is the culture of ambition”

otive world’s largest players, including Toyota and General Motors, which caution that their electric cars are years — perhaps even a decade — from being able to generate petrol-level profits. “This is a very bold statement,” said one person close to VW’s top investors. “It would be a surprise if that was possible.”

Consultancy McKinsey estimates mid-sized electric vehicles cost \$12,000 more to produce than their petrol or diesel counterparts, forcing carmakers to charge more or face squeezed margins.

Volkswagen’s rivals “face three or four years of pressure on their profit margins” due to electrification, said Jürgen Pieper, a car analyst at Frankfurt-based private bank Metzler. What sets VW apart, he added, is its “very tough” culture. “I probably wouldn’t like to work there,” he said. “There are hirings and firings all the time, but what I like is the culture of ambition.”

That culture was in part what led to Dieselgate, the 2015 scandal in which VW admitted to having sold 11m cars worldwide fitted with devices that under-reported emissions of nitrogen oxide.

The fallout is still being felt five years later, with VW on Friday agreeing to an €830m settlement in a lawsuit brought by more than 400,000 affected drivers in Germany.

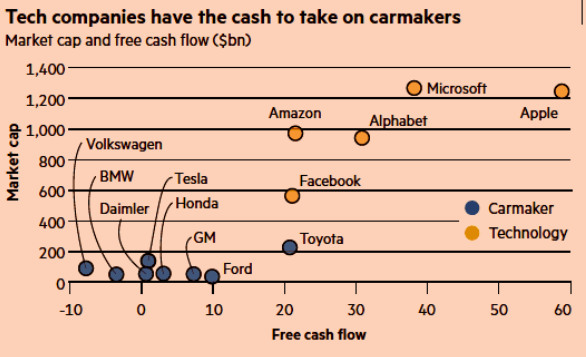
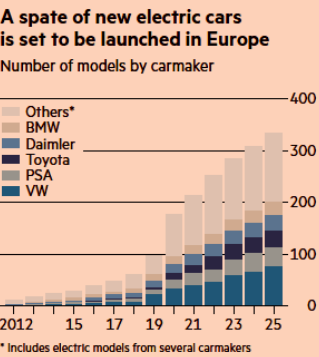
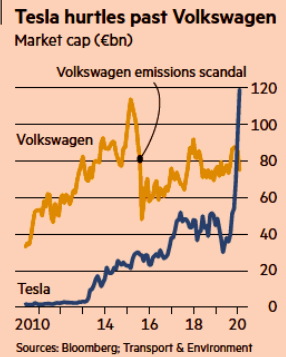
The scandal also made the company a lightning rod for criticism of the industry from environmental groups and European lawmakers.

Today, Mr Diess admits the company is the “focus” of EU rules that force carmakers to lower CO2 emissions. “We are happy with it,” he says, “because if society decides, OK, we’ll go for electric cars, actually that’s good for us.”

Ever since he ascended to the top position at VW’s Wolfsburg headquarters in 2018, Mr Diess has been insistent: despite concerns about the lack of consumer demand, inadequate charging infrastructure and bottlenecks in battery supply chains, the company’s decision to bet the farm on electric vehicles is more than a high-risk gamble.

“There is no other alternative to electric cars,” he said, in an office overlooking the sprawling factory halls and railway tracks that criss-cross VW’s home.

In a week in which production of Audi’s electric e-tron model ground to a



halt because of battery shortages, Mr Diess added he was confident the company had identified enough lithium-ion cell supply to see it through to the end of 2023, by which point it hopes to have produced 1m emission-free vehicles.

But the former BMW executive, who arrived at VW just a few months before Dieselgate broke in 2015, wants to do more than just shepherd the company out of its self-created crisis.

His long-term aim is to convince capital markets to treat VW more like Tesla than an old-world car manufacturer, propelling it to a market value of €200bn, more than double its current €75bn valuation.

Investors are yet to be fully convinced. VW boasts annual sales of almost 11m and has suffered only two loss-making years in the past three decades, on Friday reporting a 17 per cent increase in pre-tax profit for 2019, and pledging to vastly increase its dividend.

Yet the company is eclipsed in market value by Tesla, which has sold fewer than 1m vehicles in its 17-year existence, and has yet to post a yearly profit.

Mr Diess, who was on stage at a car industry award ceremony in Berlin when Elon Musk announced Tesla would be building his first European factory a mere 150 miles from VW’s base, has gone out of his way to compliment the Twitter-keen chief executive, crediting him with “paving the way” for electric cars.

“[Mr Musk] is taking risks we couldn’t,” said Mr Diess. “So I

think we make a good pair because he is pulling ahead and we are fast followers — we try to keep as close as possible.”

Despite Mr Diess’s confidence, the odds of achieving this goal appear to be stacked against the German carmaker.

Its unique ownership structure, in which the Porsche and Piëch families indirectly own a majority stake, and the state of Lower Saxony has a blocking minority, prevents the company from rushing through seismic shifts in strategy. The strength of the unions on its supervisory board also makes radically reducing VW’s 300,000-strong German workforce almost impossible.

Additionally, while Tesla can raise more than \$2bn overnight by issuing new shares, “Mr Diess would have to sell 2.5m cars to get that money”, said a person close to investors. VW has to rely on debt to finance its overhaul, and has “de facto no equity capital market access”, he added. “What Diess is doing is braver than what Musk is doing. He needs to fund this transition with 4 per cent profit margins from the VW [brand].”

It is unsurprising, therefore, that improving returns is high on the VW chief’s agenda. Addressing 120 of the company’s managers in Berlin this year, Mr Diess made it clear he would happily halve Bentley’s annual sales in exchange for higher earnings. Returning to profitability in the US, where VW has languished for years, is also a priority.

But the fate of the world’s biggest carmaker, he emphasised, is not merely dependent on boosting margins, but “more about managing the transition [to electric]

Herbert Diess says tech rivals have ‘scary’ sums of cash



Energy

Speculators raise bets against US oil and gas

DEREK BROWER — LONDON

Bruised by plunging commodity prices and oversupply across the industry, US oil and gas companies have come into the sights of market speculators, who have placed huge bets against equity valuations in the sector.

Short sellers have added more than \$460m to their short-interest positions since the start of February, according to data from S3 Partners, a research company, the largest move of this kind in the sector since June 2019, when oil prices tumbled into a bear market.

In addition, two exchange-traded funds considered proxies for US energy,

XOP and OIH, have drawn particular attention from funds seeking to profit from the sector’s deepening slump. Short interest in both now amounts to around 40 per cent of their shares.

Investor disenchantment with US oil and gas is not new — but it has suddenly accelerated. The sector’s high debt burden, patchy record of paying back investors and the inability of some producers to spend within cash flow has consistently dragged on equity valuations.

The S&P index of energy stocks is down 25 per cent so far in 2020, compared with a 7.5 per cent drop for the S&P 500, and is barely positive over the past 10 years. Bank of America calcu-

lated that the sector was now underperforming the broader market by the biggest margin in almost 80 years.

Short sellers think worse is imminent for energy equities. Some spent recent days drawing up lists of especially vulnerable companies, reflecting a sudden negative shift in mood about the coronavirus among hedge funds in the US, according to conversations with people close to these moves.

“Short sellers have put a lot more cash into the pot by shorting another \$462m worth of energy stocks, anticipating further price weakness in the short term,” said Ihor Dusaniwsky, head of predictive analysis at S3.

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COMPANIES & MARKETS

Healthcare

NMC cash crunch felt in staff wage delays

Under pressure health provider picks Moelis to lead debt restructuring

SIMEON KERR — DUBAI
ROBERT SMITH — LONDON

NMC Health has hired Moelis to advise on debt restructuring as the embattled healthcare group faces signs of a cash crunch with staff members complaining about late salary payments.

The mandate was welcomed by lenders that have become increasingly concerned about their loan exposure to the scandal-hit FTSE 100 company. Trading

of its shares was suspended last week as the UK's Financial Conduct Authority launched an investigation into its finances.

"We just desperately need to see some stabilisation," said one banker.

While NMC reported £500m of cash on its balance sheet as recently as June, the true state of its finances is now unclear after the company announced last week it had found discrepancies in its bank statements.

The group, based in Abu Dhabi, is also operating without a full finance department, after suspending a member of its treasury team and granting "extended sick leave" to its chief financial officer.

Some staff at NMC facilities yesterday complained that they had yet to receive their February salaries. "We are all very worried," said one administrator. "They don't give us any information."

One manager said salaries would be paid, blaming the delay of several days on recent management changes. "We will have to look elsewhere for work quickly if the money doesn't come through," said another employee.

Late salary payments have heightened concerns among the group's lenders that the company could collapse without external assistance.

"They are running out of cash," said one person briefed by NMC manage-

ment on the state of its finances. He said that the delayed salaries were affecting staff at facilities across the United Arab Emirates.

Two people briefed on the matter said NMC's interim management and some shareholders have been in talks with officials in Abu Dhabi over the weekend seeking a financial solution to save the company, which faces questions over its true debt position.

The Financial Times reported last week that the group had resorted to pledging future credit card payments from customers to secure funding, a form of receivables financing arrangement more commonly used by small

businesses or those short of cash.

NMC did not respond to requests for comment. Moelis declined to comment on the appointment, which was first reported by Reuters.

Moody's, the rating agency, said last week that uncertainty surrounding NMC's share ownership "could trigger a change of control and lead to a debt acceleration" on its main loan facility — meaning that banks could demand full repayment immediately.

One investor said that NMC is now at risk of losing access to working capital loans from some UAE banks, which could make it even harder for the company to pay staff and suppliers.

Oil & gas

Wyoming in talks to buy land from Occidental

GREGORY MEYER AND
JAMES FONTANELLA-KHAN — NEW YORK

Wyoming is in talks to buy millions of acres from Occidental Petroleum in what lawmakers say would be the biggest land purchase since the US bought Alaska from Alexander II of Russia.

The US state is advancing bills authorising the use of state funds to acquire the properties. People involved say the price ranges between \$1bn and \$3bn.

Occidental, the oil and gas producer, has put the land on the block as it pays down debt from its \$55bn acquisition of Anadarko Petroleum in 2019. The company is under pressure, with oil prices sliding below \$50 a barrel and Carl Icahn, the activist shareholder, agitating for change.

The land lies on either side of the Union Pacific railroad, which originally received it from the federal government during the frontier era.

"Opportunities like this don't come along very often," Mark Gordon, state governor, and leaders of the Republican-controlled legislature wrote last week. "It's likely this would be the largest government purchase of private land since the US purchased Alaska."

The land on offer — more than 1m acres of surface land and 4m acres of underground mineral rights — could deepen the Wyoming economy's expo-

'Opportunities like this don't come along very often'

Mark Gordon, state governor

sure to natural resources. State finances are deteriorating as taxes on coal and natural gas decline.

State officials view the land as a potential bonanza for oil and gas extraction, wind and solar farms, power transmission lines, soda-ash mining, livestock grazing and big-game hunting.

Houston-based Occidental has confirmed the auction for the acreage, which cuts mostly through Wyoming's arid southern tier.

"While the state has clearly communicated a lot of interest in this asset, it is a competitive process and there's a large number of qualified participants in that," said Oscar Brown, Occidental senior vice-president. "The winner of that asset will be one of the largest land and mineral owners in the United States."

Several energy-focused private equity groups and at least two publicly listed exploration and production companies have expressed interest, according to people briefed on the sale process.

Critics at first panned the 1867 US purchase of Alaska as "Seward's folly," after William Seward, then US secretary of state, who negotiated it.

Shannon Anderson, staff attorney at the Powder River Basin Resource Council, said the Wyoming conservation group was "very concerned about the risk to our state if we spend our savings to acquire this land and minerals that Occidental can't wait to get rid of."

The state government already owns 3.5m acres of surface land and 3.9m mineral acres. Leases and royalties generate almost \$200m in annual revenue for the government, according to its Office of State Lands and Investments. The federal government owns 29m acres of Wyoming, almost half the total.

Market questions. US primaries

'Super Tuesday' and prospect of Sanders presidency spell volatility for equities

FT REPORTERS

What will 'Super Tuesday' mean for US investors?

While US investors grapple with the impact of the coronavirus, another factor has them bracing for further swings in domestic stocks: the presidential election calendar.

Danielle DiMartino Booth of Quill Intelligence, a research firm, said President Donald Trump's chances of re-election would be "appreciably lower" if the US economy were tipped into recession by the outbreak. That "opens the door to the presumptive candidate at this juncture — Bernie Sanders."

Tomorrow's "Super Tuesday", when 14 states and one US territory hold contests for the Democratic presidential nomination, could cement Mr Sanders as the party frontrunner after a string of wins in recent, smaller battles.

Profits in at least two sectors of the stock market — healthcare and energy — would be "decimated" under a Sanders administration, given the candidate's aims to in effect eliminate private health insurance and nationalise energy exploration and production, said Ms DiMartino Booth. Other sectors that could be vulnerable include financials, because of Mr Sanders' planned transaction taxes, as well as technology.

As Michael Bloomberg's chances appear to wane, investors are also watching Joe Biden, who is showing signs of a resurgence. A win for Mr Biden is seen by some as negative for markets, given his preference for an increase in the corporate tax rate.

The October Vix future, a proxy for equity volatility around the presidential election, is now 3 points above its September counterpart. "This tells me that investors are very worried about how November will play out," said Stephen Aniston, president of vixcontango.com. Jennifer Ablan

How far could European stocks fall as coronavirus spreads?

European stocks, like those in the US and elsewhere, have had their worst week since the financial crisis as the fallout from the spread of the coronavirus grows. After a 13 per cent drop in the Stoxx 600 index, a popular benchmark, investors were left asking just how bad it could get for a region so reliant on exports to China.



Making gains: tomorrow's primaries could cement Bernie Sanders as the Democratic frontrunner after a string of recent wins
Eric Gay/AP Photo

Few investors are willing to put a figure on the potential fallout, and the uncertainty is exacerbating the unease. Part of the problem is that modelling the impact of the virus is so difficult.

The 2003 Sars outbreak has been widely used as a template, but firms such as First State Investments note that Sars had only a limited impact on Chinese output and exports, while the country's share of global gross domestic product is now much higher. Oxford Economics draws a parallel with the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, but notes that China's share of global GDP is about three times higher than Japan's was in 2011. In both cases, the market impact in Europe was muted.

As prices tumble, fund managers are trying to rein in risk, stick to what they know and pick up cheap stocks if they can, rather than try to guess the bottom.

Didier Saint-Georges of Carmignac, a French asset manager, said it was hard to estimate the overall impact on European stocks. He preferred large-cap "growth" stocks, whose earnings he

expected to be less affected than small-cap "value" stocks.

Pieter Taselaar of Lucerne Capital, a Europe-focused hedge fund, believed markets were close to "maximum panic". He has been using the sell-off to add to positions in stocks such as Telnet, the Belgian broadband provider, which he believed had been hit too hard. Laurence Fletcher

Where next for the gold price?

Gold rallied strongly this year, rising as high as 9 per cent, before it was dragged into the deepening sell-off across markets towards the end of last week.

Having been powered by a flight to "safe" assets due to the coronavirus outbreak, a sharp downturn since Thursday cut its year-to-date gains back to about 5 per cent, at \$1,589 a troy ounce.

The strength of gold's early rise had exceeded most analysts' forecasts for 2020. Analysts predicted an average price of \$1,558, according to the London Bullion Market Association.

Gold had been in favour because of

falling bond yields, which reduce the downside of holding gold, which provides no income at all. The yield on the 10-year US Treasury hit a record intraday low of 1.147 per cent last week.

Holdings in gold-backed exchange traded funds have hit a record high of 3,018.8 tonnes, according to the World Gold Council, worth \$162bn.

But analysts noted that the turnaround last week suggested that investors were willing to sell any liquid asset to meet margin calls on other investments.

Gold prices slipped by more than 3 per cent on Friday, the biggest intraday drop since 2013.

Still, gold has held on to the bulk of its gains and is likely to go higher this year, given the market now expects further interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve, according to Suki Cooper at Standard Chartered in New York. "Safe-haven gains tend to be sustained when the market starts to price in a greater likelihood that a given negative shock is likely to impact global growth and trigger a recession." Henry Sanderson

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Aerospace & defence. Regulation

US ponders how to open skies to drones and flying cars

Start-ups work with regulator on system to identify and track unmanned vehicles

PATRICK MCGEE — SAN FRANCISCO

Three challenges stand in the way of filling the sky with drones and flying cars.

The first two — money and technology — are being tackled with zeal. Huge sums are flowing into aerial vehicle start-ups; Joby Aviation, for example, raised a staggering \$590m for its vision of flying taxis in December. Meanwhile, almost 70 prototypes are in development, with backing from the likes of Toyota, Hyundai and Daimler.

Mark Groden, chief executive of Skyryse, whose system can fully automate helicopter flights, said it was "entirely possible" to offer low-cost taxi flights "with technology that already exists".

The third challenge is harder: how should countries regulate their airspace so that vast fleets of drones and flying vehicles can operate safely?

In the US, the Federal Aviation Administration does not have the resources to oversee the sector. Today, 15,000 air traffic controllers manage 45,000 daily flights in the US. But such an analogue system cannot scale up to handle millions of unmanned flights.

Instead, the FAA is working with private companies to develop an unmanned traffic management system. One of the leading companies it is working with is AirMap, a Los Angeles-based start-up backed by Airbus, Microsoft, Qualcomm, Sony, Baidu and others.

AirMap's system would allow any aerial vehicle to know the location of anything flying nearby and to broadcast its own co-ordinates, trajectory and speed before it even leaves the ground.

"Immediately prior to take-off, a drone can simply tell the unmanned traffic management system where it wants to go, and the system provides a safe and efficient route that is deconflicted from all previously planned trajectories," said Ben Marcus, AirMap's chairman.

At least 20 other companies have also

partnered with the FAA to open up airspace. These include GE-owned AirXOS, as well as Kittyhawk and SkyGrid — each backed by Boeing.

But for this to become a reality the FAA needs to first lay down a framework of "digital licence plates" for all unmanned aircraft. Known as "Remote ID", this would pave the way for aerial vehicles to fly beyond the line of sight of pilots, near airports and over people — which are all prohibited today.

The framework would allow construction sites, for instance, to make use of emerging "drone-in-a-box" technology to programme self-flying aircraft for surveillance trips. "Today the skies are basically empty, so the potential is virtually limitless," Mr Marcus said.

A precursor programme known as Laanc, or low altitude authorisation and notification capability, has already shown the demand, said Dan Burton, chief executive of DroneBase, which

provides drone pilots for businesses. Before Laanc, DroneBase had to decline 40 per cent of requests because it took up to 90 days to apply for authorisation to fly in large swaths of airspace.

Laanc automated the process and instantly issued permits. "Now we say no to probably less than 1 per cent of requests," Mr Burton said.

But while everyone agrees that some sort of Remote ID rules are necessary, the FAA's specific proposal was widely considered too onerous by drone and model aeroplane hobbyists, whose collective displeasure saw nearly 30,000 responses to a consultation process that ends today.

The FAA wants virtually all aerial vehicles to be individually registered, for a fee, and equipped with both radio and internet connectivity to communicate its location and that of the pilot. Anyone unable to meet these criteria would be restricted to specific flying sites designated by the FAA.

DJI, by far the world's biggest maker of drones, called the FAA's proposal "deeply flawed" and warned it would be



A helicopter over California. AirMap is working with the FAA — Patrick McGee/FT

COMPANIES & MARKETS

How to Lead. Yves Perrier, chief executive of Amundi

Carrying out a successful mega-deal

The European investment group boss has managed to win over staff to his unorthodox approach, writes Owen Walker

Yves Perrier is a philosopher at heart. The one-time footballer who now runs Amundi, Europe's biggest investment group, signs off meetings with analysts and journalists with his catchphrase "life is beautiful". When we meet, after Amundi's announcement of its latest acquisition, Spanish bank Sabadell's investment arm, Mr Perrier, 65, offers a pearl of wisdom. "If you want to build a ship," he says, quoting writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, "don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."

Mr Perrier is explaining his approach to making sure large deals are well executed and integrated – especially when it comes to motivating staff through potentially traumatic transitions. Mega transactions in the investment industry have a notoriously low success rate.

The tie-ups in recent years between Standard Life and Aberdeen Asset Management, as well as Henderson Global Investors and Janus Capital, have resulted in larger but still underperforming businesses, accompanied by staff cuts, lost clients, low morale and disenchanted shareholders.

The question of how to combine investment businesses successfully has become more pressing, following a spate of recent transactions, from Franklin Templeton's \$6.5bn purchase of Legg Mason to Jupiter Fund Management's £419m capture of Merian Global Investors.

Mr Perrier is well placed to opine on M&A, having built Amundi up through a series of deals. The largest was the €3.5bn all-cash purchase of Pioneer Investments from UniCredit, the Italian bank. It stands out as the most successful of the industry's recent large deals and catapulted Amundi into the trillion-dollar club, the world's biggest



Perrier says he always planned for Amundi to become the biggest player in Europe
Magali Delporte/FT

CV

Education
1976 Graduates from Essec business school, Paris

Career
1987-95 Various positions at Société Générale
1995-99 SocGen chief financial officer
1999-2003 Executive committee member, Crédit Lyonnais
2003-07 Deputy chief executive of Calyon (now CACIB)
2007 Chairman and CEO of Crédit Agricole Asset Management (CAAM)
2009 Led merger of CAAM and SocGen's (SGAM) asset management activities to create Amundi
2010 to present CEO of Amundi

investment groups by assets managed.

Since the deal's announcement in December 2016, Amundi's shares had risen more than 60 per cent before last week's sell-off, compared with a 16 per cent rise for S&P's index of global asset managers. Amundi says it has not lost any significant clients or portfolio managers as a result of the deal – problems that typically blight investment tie-ups.

On a range of financial measures, the deal also stands out as a rare success story in asset management M&A. The businesses were fully integrated within 18 months – an especially quick time for such a large transaction – while the €175m of cost savings was €25m over that originally planned. Amundi's net income is up 41 per cent to €959m since the Pioneer acquisition.

Mr Perrier formed Amundi in January 2010, bringing together the investment arms of French banks Société Générale and Crédit Agricole. He says that from

the moment he and his fellow executives at the two lenders conceived the idea for the merger, they set out to become the biggest player in Europe. But he concedes that at the time the ambition was "not so realistic".

Over the past decade the group's assets have more than doubled, from €670bn to €1.6tn, placing it inside the world's top 10 investment businesses.

Mr Perrier says that the early years after launching Amundi were the hardest, and lessons learnt then have made subsequent integrations easier. He says he initially struggled to convince staff that his belief that the industry needed to go through a period of what he calls

'We were really presenting a view of the industry that was not mainstream'

"industrialisation" would work. "We were really presenting a view of the industry that was not mainstream," he says. "Many people had doubts at the time. Today, nobody has doubts."

He says the task of convincing staff to follow his unorthodox approach started with getting workers to buy into his ambition of becoming the leading player in Europe. Then he set about hiring managers who were convinced of the merits of the transformation and could carry it out. But he says the most important aspect was being consistent with the approach, and how it was articulated inside and outside the business.

"The strategy I defined in 2010 has not changed," he adds.

Mr Perrier has a prosaic view of the investment industry. He compares it to car manufacturing, where core components such as equities or bonds are developed by the investment managers into products or savings vehicles, and

then distributed to clients through a vast network of sales channels.

"With this view, we practice value analysis in order to improve efficiency, quality and reduce cost," he says, adding that low interest rates have put efficiency at the centre of the company's strategy.

The emphasis on cost reduction has inevitably led to large job cuts when businesses are bought and overlapping roles are made redundant. The Pioneer deal led to 600 roles being culled. Mr Perrier says the best way to avoid staff morale being affected is to select the best performers to stay regardless of which side of the business they come from, so management cannot be accused of favouritism, and to act swiftly to limit anxiety.

Mr Perrier eschews the star fund manager culture that was so popular in the 1990s and 2000s. He insists there are "no stars at Amundi apart from Amundi itself", and the group's pay policy reflects that view. Managers are paid well but not excessively, with bonuses

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Leadership
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linked to personal targets as well as corporate ones.

He received a 16 per cent pay rise last year, taking his salary to €1m with a €2m bonus, which in total was 21.9 times the average worker's pay at the group. His pay rise was criticised by Institutional Shareholder Services, the proxy advisory group, but his overall remuneration is dwarfed by his peers at the top of UK and US businesses.

As a teenager, Mr Perrier rejected the chance to become a professional footballer for French club Lyon, favouring a career in finance. He has a passion for the game, in particular Manchester United. But it is not the club's former player and fellow amateur philosopher Eric Cantona he most admires. He looks instead to ex-manager Alex Ferguson for leadership inspiration. "He built not only a team, but a club and then a brand," Mr Perrier says. "And that's what I have tried to build with Amundi."

We may have tired of meal kit deliveries but the food shopping disrupters are ready to feed us

Amy Lewin
Technology

Meal kit delivery companies – the likes of Blue Apron, HelloFresh and Gousto – were once the golden boys and girls of the start-up world. They offered time-strapped, cash-rich city dwellers a convenient way to shake up their cooking routines at home – and venture capitalists (who fit that profile to a T) lapped it up, just as they eagerly swallowed the promises of on-demand food delivery businesses such as Deliveroo.

But it is not looking so good for these over-funded, cash-and-customer-losing businesses. Last week it was reported that Blue Apron, the US-based veteran of the sector, is laying off staff and looking for a buyer.

UK-based Deliveroo is also looking wobbly, as the Competition and Markets Authority drags out its probe into Amazon's investment in the company.

Perhaps it is time to take a step back: is this really the convenience we need when it comes to filling our bellies?

The average person does not live by takeaway alone; most of us buy the majority of our food in the humble supermarket.

And we do, generally, buy it in the supermarket: in Europe and the US, more than 90 per cent of grocery spending still happens in store. Yet, while online grocery shopping is not a new phenomenon, it's been slow to take off.

For many of us, shopping for food online is not offering the convenience we want: it is too expensive; the delivery windows are too narrow; the bananas arrive too green or too yellow; loading up an online shopping basket is a pain; and we have no idea what we want to have for dinner next week anyway.

There are plenty of young companies hoping to crack parts of this conundrum and tap into what feels sure to be an enormous market, eventually. There's La Fourche in France, an online store which offers members heavily discounted organic goods, and Matsmart in Sweden, which sells dry goods for between 20 and 90 per cent of their original price.

Even takeaway delivery companies such as Deliveroo and its Spanish

competitor Glovo are testing out whether it makes sense for them to offer super-speedy, small basket grocery deliveries.

French entrepreneur Jacques-Edouard Sabatier thinks he has a somewhat different solution.

His app, Jow (pronounced "Joe"), recommends 15-minute recipes to users and then automatically fills up their shopping basket with the ingredients they need to make them.

Jow's core customers are people in their 30s and 40s with young families – people like Mr Sabatier, who became a father three years ago and rediscovered the weekly horror of the supermarket shop and dinnertime indecision. "I tried every supermarket app in France and found it horrible," he says. "It took more than one hour to fill a cart, and then after my fridge was filled I had the very same question: what shall we cook tonight?"

On Jow, parents can find "life-proof" recipes for steak chimichurri, pasta alla norma and coconut-breaded cod. Once they have filled their baskets with food and other essentials – nappies, toilet roll, detergent – the majority choose to pick up their pre-packed orders from their local store. (Jow is working with six big supermarkets in France.)

"It's way more flexible than the meal kits – and usually three or four times cheaper than the HelloFresh or Blue Apron equivalent," Mr Sabatier says.

"In a world where you have Netflix to recommend movies and Spotify to recommend music, there's not one global service to recommend you food," Mr Sabatier adds, somewhat ambitiously.

But that, I think, might be once again taking convenience too far. I am not sure I want an algorithm to tell me what to make for dinner. Cooking food is not an optional activity like watching films or listening to music. It has to be done and I have to do it.

And there are, we all know, only so many new recipes you can make in a row before you just want some plain old beans on toast.

Amy Lewin is deputy editor of Sifted, the FT-backed media site for European start-ups

The average person does not live by takeaway food alone; many of us buy most of our food in the humble supermarket

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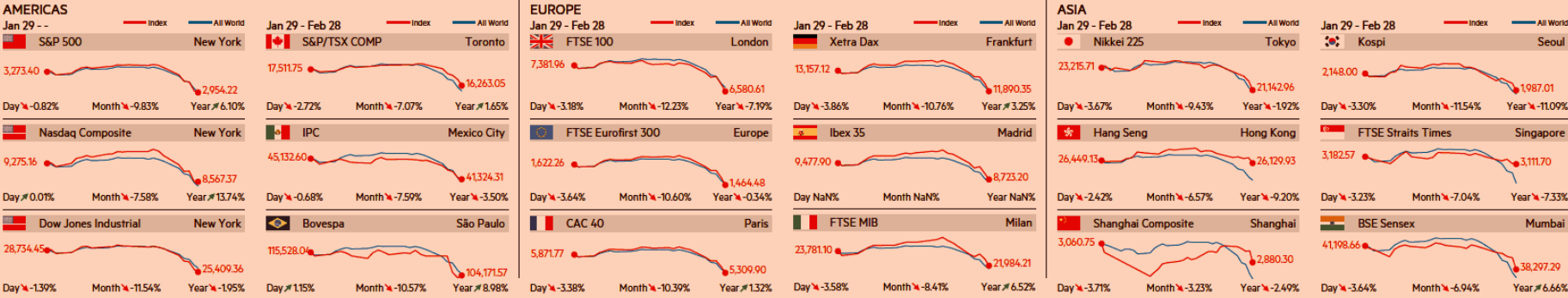
MARKET DATA

WORLD MARKETS AT A GLANCE

Change during previous day's trading (%)



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



Country	Index	Latest	Previous	Country	Index	Latest	Previous	Country	Index	Latest	Previous	Country	Index	Latest	Previous
Argentina	Merval	34973.18	35307.05	Cyprus	CSE MXP Gen	68.46	68.68	Italy	FTSE Italia All-Share	23907.05	24762.22	Philippines	Manila Comp	6787.91	6867.84
Australia	All Ordinaries	6511.50	6737.40	Czech Republic	FX	977.11	1002.24	Poland	WIG	48276.54	51318.69	Portugal	BVL	4165.73	4252.14
Austria	ATX	2787.39	2945.94	Denmark	OMX Copenhagen 20	1124.07	1157.51	Romania	BET Index	9121.27	9562.63	Russia	Mexi Index	2785.08	2915.84
Belgium	BEI Mid	3488.60	3639.51	Egypt	EGX 30	13208.94	13326.26	Russia	RTX	1259.69	1386.20	Saudi Arabia	TADJAWUL All Share Index	7628.34	7713.12
Brazil	IBOV	8037.02	8252.42	Estonia	OMX Tallinn	1267.50	1271.28	Slovakia	SAX	357.52	357.98	Slovenia	SIB TOP	673.85	674.85
Canada	S&P/TSX 60	972.15	997.73	Finland	OMX Helsinki General	9447.45	9733.56	South Africa	FTSE/JSE All Share	51068.18	53444.83	South Korea	KOSPI	2680.22	2777.09
China	S&P/TSX 500	16263.05	16717.44	France	CAC 40	5208.90	5458.59	Spain	IBEX 35	8723.20	8885.90	Sweden	CSE All Share	5552.92	5667.87
Chile	S&P/TSX 200	10471.75	10293.54	Germany	M-DAX	25366.62	26196.77	Switzerland	SMI Index	9631.03	10205.46	Taiwan	Weighted P	11536.61	11282.17
Colombia	COLCAP	1556.69	1569.74	Greece	ATHEX	11890.35	12367.46	Thailand	BSET	11684.94	11635.08	Thailand	BSET	11684.94	11635.08
Croatia	CROBEX	2013.05	2011.29	Hong Kong	Hang Seng	26129.33	26776.62	Turkey	BIST 100	4801.42	4993.68	UK	FTSE 100	6580.61	6796.40
Cuba	CROBEX	2013.05	2011.29	India	Nifty 50	10232.36	10523.11	USA	DJ Composite	8361.83	8530.18	USA	DJ Composite	8361.83	8530.18
Czech Republic	FX	977.11	1002.24	Indonesia	Jakarta Comp	5452.70	5535.69	Vietnam	VNI	882.19	886.44	Vietnam	VNI	882.19	886.44
Dominican Republic	IGB	10471.75	10293.54	Israel	Tel Aviv 125	1542.55	1689.08	Yemen	S&P 500	2584.22	2978.75	Yemen	S&P 500	2584.22	2978.75
Egypt	EGX 30	13208.94	13326.26	Japan	Nikkei 225	21142.96	21942.22	Zimbabwe	WINE	3015.07	3036.63	Zimbabwe	WINE	3015.07	3036.63
Estonia	OMX Tallinn	1267.50	1271.28	Korea	KOSPI	2680.22	2777.09								
Finland	OMX Helsinki General	9447.45	9733.56	Latvia	OMX VIX	686.05	702.35								
France	CAC 40	5208.90	5458.59	Lithuania	OMX Vilnius	720.35	720.35								
Germany	M-DAX	25366.62	26196.77	Malaysia	FTSE Bursa KL CI	1241.03	1262.07								
Greece	ATHEX	11890.35	12367.46	Mexico	BMV	12820.20	12410.25								
Hong Kong	Hang Seng	26129.33	26776.62	Monaco	MAS	538.38	559.87								
India	Nifty 50	10232.36	10523.11	Netherlands	AEX	538.38	559.87								
Indonesia	Jakarta Comp	5452.70	5535.69	New Zealand	ASX All Share	778.39	806.57								
Israel	Tel Aviv 125	1542.55	1689.08	Norway	Oslo All Share	912.79	928.08								
Japan	Nikkei 225	21142.96	21942.22	Pakistan	KSE 100	38897.32	38398.33								
Korea	KOSPI	2680.22	2777.09	Peru	BVL	12820.20	12410.25								
Latvia	OMX VIX	686.05	702.35	Romania	BET Index	9121.27	9562.63								
Lithuania	OMX Vilnius	720.35	720.35	Russia	Mexi Index	2785.08	2915.84								
Malaysia	FTSE Bursa KL CI	1241.03	1262.07	Saudi Arabia	TADJAWUL All Share Index	7628.34	7713.12								
Mexico	BMV	12820.20	12410.25	Slovenia	SIB TOP	673.85	674.85								
Monaco	MAS	538.38	559.87	South Africa	FTSE/JSE All Share	51068.18	53444.83								
Netherlands	AEX	538.38	559.87	Spain	IBEX 35	8723.20	8885.90								
New Zealand	ASX All Share	778.39	806.57	Sweden	CSE All Share	5552.92	5667.87								
Norway	Oslo All Share	912.79	928.08	Switzerland	SMI Index	9631.03	10205.46								
Pakistan	KSE 100	38897.32	38398.33	Taiwan	Weighted P	11536.61	11282.17								
Peru	BVL	12820.20	12410.25	Thailand	BSET	11684.94	11635.08								
Romania	BET Index	9121.27	9562.63	Turkey	BIST 100	4801.42	4993.68								
Russia	Mexi Index	2785.08	2915.84	UK	FTSE 100	6580.61	6796.40								
Saudi Arabia	TADJAWUL All Share Index	7628.34	7713.12	USA	DJ Composite	8361.83	8530.18								
Slovenia	SIB TOP	673.85	674.85	Vietnam	VNI	882.19	886.44								
South Africa	FTSE/JSE All Share	51068.18	53444.83	Yemen	S&P 500	2584.22	2978.75								
Spain	IBEX 35	8723.20	8885.90	Zimbabwe	WINE	3015.07	3036.63								
Sweden	CSE All Share	5552.92	5667.87												
Switzerland	SMI Index	9631.03	10205.46												
Taiwan	Weighted P	11536.61	11282.17												
Thailand	BSET	11684.94	11635.08												
Turkey	BIST 100	4801.42	4993.68												
UK	FTSE 100	6580.61	6796.40												
USA	DJ Composite	8361.83	8530.18												
Vietnam	VNI	882.19	886.44												
Yemen	S&P 500	2584.22	2978.75												
Zimbabwe	WINE	3015.07	3036.63												

© Closed. (U) Unavailable. (C) Correction. * Subject to official recalculation. For more index coverage please see www.ft.com/worldindices. A fuller version of this table is available on the ft.com research data archive.

STOCK MARKET: BIGGEST MOVERS									
AMERICA					EURO MARKETS				
ACTIVE STOCKS	stock	close	Day's change	Day's % change	ACTIVE STOCKS	stock	close	Day's change	Day's % change
Apple	265.5	273.38	+7.88	+2.9%	Alitalia Se Co. n.	104.7	104.80	+0.10	+0.1%
Amazon.com	166.8	182.75	+15.95	+8.9%	Industria	157.0	157.00	+0.00	0.0%
Microsoft	143.9	152.01	+8.11	+5.6%	Sap Se Co.	102.6	111.56	+8.96	+8.7%
Nvidia	71.3	77.07	+5.77	+8.1%	Siemens AG No.	82.8	92.30	+9.50	+11.5%
Facebook	57.9	62.47	+4.57	+7.9%	Toyota Motor	85.21	90.80	+5.59	+6.6%
Johnson & Co	51.9	51.16	-0.74	-1.4%	Mitsubishi UF J.	71.35	73.31	+1.96	+2.7%
Bank of America	48.5	48.50	-0.03	-0.1%	Sumitomo Mitsui	46.4	46.40	-0.00	0.0%
Alphabet	46.4	47.07	+0.67	+1.4%	Shin-Etsu Chemical	40.0	40.00	-0.00	0.0%
Alphabet	46.1	47.07	+0.67	+1.4%	Recruit Holdings Co	42.2	42.30	+0.10	+0.2%
Advanced Micro Devices	42.8	45.48	+2.68	+6.3%	Canon	40.1	40.10	-0.00	0.0%
BIGGEST MOVERS					BIGGEST MOVERS				
U.S. Steel	33.05	2.40	-2.40	-7.3%	U.S. Steel	33.05	2.40	-2.40	-7.3%
Cheniere Energy Inc	37.26	2.52	-2.52	-6.8%	Cheniere Energy Inc	37.26	2.52	-2.52	-6.8%
Newgen Data Holding Ltd	27.07	1.47	-1.47	-5.4%	Newgen Data Holding Ltd	27.07	1.47	-1.47	-5.4%
Qorvo	100.58	5.78	-5.78	-5.7%	Qorvo	100.58	5.78	-5.78	-5.7%
Autodesk	190.88	10.23	-10.23	-5.3%	Autodesk	190.88	10.23	-10.23	-5.3%
Downs					Downs				
Deere	16.73	-1.56	-8.53	-50.9%	Deere	16.73	-1.56	-8.53	-50.9%
Mylen NV	1.48	-0.79	-0.79	-53.4%	Mylen NV	1.48	-0.79	-0.79	-53.4%
American Airlines	19.05	-1.55	-7.52	-39.5%	American Airlines	19.05	-1.55	-7.52	-39.5%
Angen	189.73	-14.81	-7.80	-4.1%	Angen	189.73	-14.81	-7.80	-4.1%
L Brands	21.86	-1.39	-6.33	-29.4%	L Brands	21.86	-1.39	-6.33	-29.4%
Based on the constituents of the S&P 500					Based on the constituents of the FTSE 100 index				

CURRENCIES																													
DOLLAR					EURO					POUND					DOLLAR					EURO					POUND				
Feb 28	Currency	Closing	Day's change	Day's % change	Closing	Day's change	Day's % change	Closing	Day's change	Day's % change	Feb 28	Currency	Closing	Day's change	Day's % change	Closing	Day's change	Day's % change	Closing	Day's change	Day's % change	Closing	Day's change	Day's % change					
Argentina	Argentine Peso	62.2603	-0.0641	-0.10	68.3104	0.8114	1.40	0.4510	-0.5425	-0.12	Indonesia	Indonesian Rupiah	14347.5000	312.5000	2.18	15060.036	341.2400	2.26	18423	18526	1.21	258	170	-6.58					
Australia	Australian Dollar	1.5371	0.0004	0.03	1.7027	0.1653	9.57	0.9676	0.0000	0.00	Israel	Israeli Shekel	3.4614	0.0000	0.00	4.6532	0.0000	0.00	4.6532	0.0000	0.00	1.45	0.00	0.00					
Bahrain	Bahraini Dinar	0.3771	-	0.4142	-0.0000	0.4476	-	-0.0038	-0.0038	-0.01	Japan	Japanese Yen	107.8650	-2.1250	-1.98	1128	14488	-2.5001	137	1782	-1.87	3816	-1.00	-0.26					
Bolivia	Bolivian Boliviano	6.9300	-	7.9303	-0.0100	8.8282	-0.0894	-	107.8648	-2.1254	-1.98	Kenya	Kenyan Shilling	101.2000	0.0000	0.00	116.136	0.2051	129	2630	-0.75	258	170	-6.58					
Brazil	Brazilian Real	4.5117	0.0000	4.5558	0.0200	5.7367	-0.0101	-	107.8645	-2.1250	-1.98	Korea	Korean Won	101.2000	0.0000	0.00	116.136	0.2051	129	2630	-0.75	258	170	-6.58					
Canada	Canadian Dollar	1.3424	0.0067	1.4745	0.0077	1.7146	-0.0040	-	107.8632	-2.1286	-1.99	Malaysia	Malaysian Ringgit	0.3500	0.0000	0.00	0.3500	0.0000	0.00	0.3500	0.0000	0.00	0.3500	0.0000	0.00				
China	Chinese Yuan	620.3300	4.9300	801.0552	5.2972	1047.0480	-1.8551	-	Kenya	Kenyan Shilling	101.2000	0.0000	116.136	0.2051	129	2630	-0.75	258	170	-6.58									
Chile	Chilean Peso	6.9900	-0.0570	7.8792	-0.0200	8.8293	-	1.0173	Kuwait	Kuwaiti Dinar	0.3480	0.0000	0.00	0.3361	0.0000	0.00	0.3361	0.0000	0.00	0.3361	0.0000	0.00	0.3361	0.0000	0.00				
Colombia	Colombian Peso	3547.8800	-37.0000	3696.2400	-37.0000	3800.2400	-	0.1030	Malaysia	Malaysian Ringgit	0.3500	0.0000	0.3500	0.0000	0.00	0.3500	0.0000	0.00	0.3500	0.0000	0.00	0.3500	0.0000	0.00					
Costa Rica	Costa Rican Colon	568.6000	-1.2250	624.6801	-1.4232	738.7691	-	2.7606	Mexico	Mexican Peso	17.9965	0.3685	2.07	17.746	0.2026	28.281	0.275	28.281	0.275	28.281	0.275	28.281	0.275	28.281	0.275				
Czech Republic	Czech Koruna	23.1377	0.1438	25.4816	0.1747	26.3505	-0.0479	-	New Zealand	New Zealand Dollar	1.6123	0.2888	2.17	1.6101	0.0315	2.6955	0.0280	2.6955	0.0280	2.6955	0.0280	2.6955	0.0280	2.6955	0.0280				
Denmark	Denmark Krone	6.8000	0.0000	7.8003	0.0000	8.8007	-	0.0000	Philippines	Philippine Peso	55.9500	0.0000	55.9500	0.0000	0.00	67.1230	0.0000	0.00	67.1230	0.0000	0.00	67.1230	0.0000	0.00	67.1230	0.0000	0.00		
Egypt	Egyptian Pound	15.6200	0.0006	17.1717	0.0020	19.9676	-	0.1228	Norway	Norwegian Krone	9.4718	0.0272	0.29	10.4043	0.0779	12.0884	-0.0002	12.0884	-0.0002	12.0884	-0.0002	12.0884	-0.0002	12.0884	-0.0002	12.0884	-0.0002		
Hong Kong	Hong Kong Dollar	77.9300	-0.0015	8.5603	-0.0027	9.9941	-0.0022	-	Pakistan	Pakistani Rupee	154.5500	0.0250	156.8716	0.3347	14.915	-1.134	14.915	-1.134	14.915	-1.134	14.915	-1.134	14.915	-1.134	14.915	-1.134			
Hungary	Hungarian Forint	307.3800	-1.2688	337.8464	-1.4384	362.6112	-	7.2716	Panama	Panama Colon	3.4600	0.0244	3.7983	0.0234	4.4144	-0.0000	4.4144	-0.0000	4.4144	-0.0000	4.4144	-0.0000	4.4144	-0.0000	4.4144	-0.0000	4.4144	-0.0000	
India	Indian Rupee	78.7200	0.0000	82.7029	0.0000	86.6813	0.0000	0.00	Peru	Peruvian Sol	3.4600	0.0244	3.7983	0.0234	4.4144	-0.0000	4.4144	-0.0000	4.4144	-0.0000	4.4144	-0.0000	4.4144	-0.0000	4.4144	-0.0000	4.4144	-0.0000	
Rates are derived from WM Reuters Spot Rates and Morningstar (latest rates at time of production). Some values are rounded. Currency redenominated by 100. The exchange rates printed in this table are also available at www.ft.com/marketsdata .																													

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WORK & CAREERS

Volkswagen is right to hire the devil and not his advocate



Andrew Hill
On management

When the Vatican was wondering whether to beatify Mother Teresa of Calcutta in 2003, it called some unlikely witnesses: writers Aroup Chatterjee and Christopher Hitchens, arch-critics of the Catholic missionary. Another reputationally challenged, cultish global institution, Volkswagen, heralded something similar last week when Herbert Diess, its chief executive, told the Financial Times he planned to recruit a young climate activist to spar with him and other senior executives about its environmental policies. VW already has a sustainability council, populated by “renowned experts” such as the former EU commissioner for climate action and the founding director of the UN Global Compact. This group has “extensive rights of information, consultation and initiative” and wide access to senior managers. What would a single young grumbling Green add? Actually, quite a lot, according to research that takes me back to the Vatican, initiator of the centuries-old idea of the “devil’s advocate”. The hiring of a Greta Thunberg figure, despite its superficial attractions — no need to set aside a parking space at headquarters in Wolfsburg, for instance — faces some potential bumps in the road, though.

“Aggressive” internal challenge could speed up the VW hierarchy, Mr Diess believes, as he tries to steer a €33bn drive towards battery-powered vehicles. Yet a campaigner could also throw a spanner into the process if he or she took every opportunity to clog VW’s decision-making with single-issue objections. At the other extreme, the climate activist could turn passive and sink comfortably into the VW bureaucracy. The carmaker still bears the wounds of the scandals of the early 2000s after the cosy working relationship between VW managers and workers — part of Germany’s famed co-determination system — went rotten. That episode raised questions about VW corporate culture that prefigured the later Dieselgate emissions cheating crisis, from which it is still recovering. The most recent precedents for inviting critics into a German boardroom are also ill-omened. In January, Mr Diess’s counterpart at Siemens, Joe Kaeser, offered activist Luisa Neubauer a seat on the supervisory board, as he faced protests about the group’s involvement in the development of an Australian coal mine. Ms Neubauer, a leading figure in Ms Thunberg’s Fridays for Future movement, took the free publicity but

unsurprisingly rejected the chance to spend days of her young life discussing compensation, succession, and the internet of things with her elders. Appointing a spokesperson for the opposing view — or, in the modish “red teaming” approach, a whole squad of opponents — is often suggested as a way of mitigating bias and groupthink. The Catholic Church used it from the 16th century to sharpen its discussions on candidates for sainthood, and the technique does work, but only compared with no challenge at all. Over nearly four centuries, devil’s advocacy has turned into a sort of protest cosplay, with sober consensual directors dressing up as dissenters, in part to make their colleagues feel better about decisions they are likely to take anyway. (In these febrile times, “just to play devil’s advocate for a moment” has also, incidentally, become a signal that someone round the table is about to advance their honestly held but potentially unpopular opinion, without really risking their reputation.) Berkeley psychologist Charlan Nemeth has long been suspicious of “role-playing” dissent. She is convinced well-meaning attempts to avoid confrontation undermine the quality of problem-solving.

“Study after study shows that dissent, even when it’s wrong, stimulates that kind of thinking where the mind opens”

Her research adds some weight to Mr Diess’s idea of bringing in an “authentic dissenter” to juice up discussion of VW’s eco-initiatives. Dissent, she told me, “hits you in the face and it annoys you and it will make you mad — and it’s rough on the person doing the dissenting — but study after study shows that dissent, even when it’s wrong, stimulates that kind of thinking where the mind opens”. As she writes in *No! The Power of Disagreement in a World That Wants to Get Along*, “it is when you face a dissenter who believes his position, has the courage to say so, and does so persistently that you confront the possibility that you may be wrong”. Prof Nemeth has a few qualms about the VW plan. Employing and paying the activist may compromise his or her willingness to speak truth to power, for instance. The principle, though, is sound. It also comes with the tacit endorsement of the Vatican. The church ditched its devil’s advocate approach in time for Mother, now Saint, Teresa’s beatification — hence the invitation to critics to testify about the nun’s work — just as businesses were rolling it out everywhere.

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Working lives

Are free mindfulness apps really the answer to help stressed staff?

The corporate market for meditation apps is booming, but there is still no quick fix for wellbeing. By Emma Jacobs

Insomnia blighted Richard Sharp’s life. He might sleep for a restful six hours — or just two. Sometimes he would stay awake all night. That changed two years ago when he downloaded Headspace, a meditation app that promises to increase focus and productivity, as well as sleep. It was provided free by his employer, Aviva, the insurer. “I hadn’t heard of it before. I’ve always been quite cynical about stuff like this. When you’re younger you think, ‘I don’t need all this to make myself feel better.’” The app’s sleepcast, a guided meditation, was “more effective” than he expected. Mr Sharp is almost always asleep before it finishes. Out of a UK workforce of 16,000, about 2,000 Aviva employees use the app regularly (three to four times a week), predominantly to wind down and to help them sleep. With the swipe of a mobile phone, employees can access a digital version of the kind of mindfulness courses that have been offered at big companies including General Mills and Google. Mindfulness is based on Buddhist principles, helping people to clear their minds of unwanted thoughts and feelings, encouraging awareness of breathing and focus. As the consumer market for mindfulness and meditation apps has grown increasingly competitive, so they are pursuing the corporate market. Meanwhile, companies’ interest in meditation tech has risen in tandem with growing awareness of the importance of mental health and its impact on the bottom line. Research by Deloitte in January estimated that for every £1 spent on supporting employees’ mental health, companies claw back £5 by cutting absenteeism, presenteeism and staff turnover. Yet critics charge that these are relatively cheap ways for companies to look good, rather than address systemic workforce issues. According to App Annie, consumers across the world last year spent 130 per cent more money on health and fitness apps than in 2017, with Calm and Headspace taking the number one and two spots in the top ten mindfulness apps, which also included Reflectly, Meditation and Breethe. More than 600 companies offer free or subsidised Headspace to their workforce, including Adobe, General Electric and Unilever. Calm, named Apple’s app of the year in 2017, has become the first mental health “unicorn”. Alex Will, Calm’s chief strategy officer, says that employers’ interest is “absolutely heating up [and it is] not impossible” that the business market could overtake the consumer side. In response, Calm has created content around business topics, such as difficult conversations with colleagues, prioritising time, or meditation in work.



Mindfulness may bring calm to staff but don’t expect them to be dramatically more productive
Getty/FT montage

Headspace, co-founded by Andy Puddicombe, a Buddhist monk, declined to share the proportion of revenues from corporate subscriptions except to say Headspace for Work, its employer programme, is its “fastest growing opportunity”. The bulk of that business is in white collar sectors, typically tech and financial services, but it is starting to be bought by employers in retail and manufacturing. Megan Jones Bell, chief science officer at Headspace, says that staff who get the app through their employer use it as much as consumers who pay up to \$70 a year to access it — about 30 per cent of users use the app regularly every month. Ravi Kudesia, assistant professor of human resource management, Fox School of Business at Temple University in Philadelphia, says that apps might have some benefits over workplace meditation sessions: they are relatively cheap to disseminate across the workforce and thereby democratic. Apps may also offer some guarantee of quality and consistency. “As interest in mindfulness has grown, every two-bit management consultant is now offering mindfulness services — despite many lacking the deep practice necessary to really have any expertise in mindfulness.” On the flipside, the group nature of classes has merit. “In the modern workplace, we seldom do anything even remotely intimate with co-workers, and especially people above or below us in terms of hierarchical position. To sit in a room with others, close your eyes, wrestle with distraction and unruly and uncomfortable thoughts and feelings, these are all things that can bring people in a room closer.” The context of such benefits is key. David D’Souza, membership director at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, says that not enough

organisations take a rounded approach to wellbeing. “The temptation for many organisations is to buy something to fix the problem but human beings are more complicated than that.” Michael Whitmore, research leader at the Rand corporation, points out that many organisations buy products and services in a piecemeal way. “They don’t know the target needs of their workplace. They just buy things because they liked it themselves without understanding what their staff need.” The intrinsic motivation for people to use self development tools for wellbeing or health is key, says Corina Sas, professor of human-computer interaction and digital health at Lancaster University. “So people who experience discomfort

“The temptation is to buy something to fix the problem, but humans are more complicated”

usually become motivated to explore ways to address it, mindfulness being one of them. Once the benefits of the practice are experienced, they are committed to continue.” All the benefits in the world will not change a toxic workplace. Mr Sharp reflects that when he was in a high-pressure sales role, if an employer had offered an app it might have just made him cynical. “It’s not a magical fix for people.” At worst, apps can be public relations tools to make the company look good. Jeffrey Pfeffer, author of *Dying for a Paycheck*, which highlights the toxicity and stress of modern workplaces, has pointed out that “job control and social support” are more influential on employee health than wellness programmes.

Ronald Purser, author of *McMindfulness*, is sceptical about the wellness industry, pointing out “you can never be too well, that’s why it’s a massive growth industry”. He says that the appeal of apps is that they offer “a quick recharge for employees so they can jump back into business as usual. Mindfulness is not a DIY endeavour. [Companies] are outsourcing the burden on to employees. They are a superficial commercial fix to structural issues.” Ms Jones Bell agrees that meditation apps are not cure-alls, but says they can provide some respite, citing trials that found using Headspace for 10 days led to an 11 per cent decrease in stress and a 16 per cent increase in happiness. While using apps regularly can help with stress, Kathleen Vohs, professor of marketing at the University of Minnesota, who has looked into mindfulness, would not recommend that employers encourage it as a productivity tool. “If they want their employees not to be so stressed, then mindfulness can help — but that doesn’t mean that they will be more productive as a result. When you focus on the present, that’s inconsistent with working toward a goal, goals being future states of the world that you want to bring about.” Nonetheless, she says mindfulness can help people regain mental focus, which should help them with work tasks. Prof Kudesia says that mindfulness can be difficult to apply to work situations. “A lot of the meditation instructions emphasise ‘non-judgment’ of the things that you see, think, and feel. But organisations pay people precisely for their judgment. So we get people trying to apply meditation instructions to post-meditation life: not a great recipe for success.” For Mr Sharp, the benefits have been compelling. “I look back to the time when I didn’t sleep and wonder how I functioned.”

Work Tribes

‘Try a battery-chicken-chunk, hand-steeped in chlorine’

ANDREW HILL AND EMMA JACOBS



Marcus, the canteen chef
Welcome to The Thrust’s ice-breaking launch party! May I interest you in a snack? A spiced haggis ball? Or a full-English breakfast micro-bun, perhaps?
Yes, sir — they are a little like canapés. Or tapas. But as part of the building’s ongoing Sovereignty Celebrations, we’re reclaiming good, British fingerfood for the nation — while warmly welcoming other cultures and paying full regard to dietary diversity. Hence the toad-in-the-hole balti-bites and the flexitarian shepherd’s pielets.
Soft drink, Madam? Of course. The Devonshire sweet sparkling *grand cru* — or as we prefer to call it, “huge growth” — isn’t to everyone’s taste. We have chilled Irr Bru with a sprig of heather, or our Lilt-Cresta Fusion Fizz mocktail? Oops, my apologies — I frothed a bit over you there. You may need to get that specially dry-cleaned — Cresta stains are a bit of a devil to get out.
Sir, some uncooked fish? We’re not calling it sushi, no. Or would you prefer a Never Mind the Pollocks line-caught battered fish finger? Yes, it’s all sourced locally. Those are the battery chicken-chunks, hand-steeped in chlorine electrolysed from British brine. Sure, take a handful! It’s the future! No problem — this evening is all about experimentation.
Just regurgitate it straight into the Union Jack spittoon.
Perhaps the desserts are more your thing. Angel Delight mini-milvi? Or Eton Mess, served in a thimble-sized bucket?

Katherine, the worried worker
I don’t mind if I do. Brownies? I’ve got a terrible sweet tooth — oh, it’s black pudding. Wasn’t expecting that. You don’t have a vegan version, do you?
Actually, don’t go. I don’t know many people here really, apart from my big boss who’s over there. Can you just chat to me a bit longer and look like I’m really funny. How do you do that? Laugh at me! Tip your

head back. Not that far! Did you see him looking over? Yes, you’re quite right. I suppose he might wonder why I’m hanging out with the waiters instead of networking. OK, I’ll go forth — thrusting onwards, upwards, or most likely downwards.
Please — just one more drink before I go. You’ve run out of the Devonshire? Yes, I guess I’ll go for the Arsenal ale then. It will take me over my two-drink rule, but I need a bit of Dutch — sorry British — courage. I’m going. In a minute.
You can’t be sacked for not networking, can you?

Amy, the PR whizz
Pippa, right, let’s run through your speech before you get up. Don’t crack any jokes. No. Not one. Legal are already worried about architect Sir Harry’s opening gag about our Chinese tenants and the *feng shui* fiasco.
“Hello, ladies and gentlemen.” Stick to “Hello” — more inclusive. Yes, you can say your name, of course. Talk about the speed-mating events and Thrusting Upwards Together Networks that you’re organising as the building’s Vibe-master.
OK. You’re going to finish with the offer of a hug? Do you think that’s a good idea? The building just moved from mauve to fuchsia alert because of coronavirus. We don’t want anyone to misinterpret it, either.
OK, if that’s what people know for — hugging — go for it. It’s more authentic than an elbow bump. I’ll tip off the diary columns in case it’s a slow day.
Right. A final run-through. And ... you’re on. Go, go, go! Great job! Sorry about the mic fail. Don’t worry: nobody was listening anyway.

Pippa, Vibe-master
Jason, lovely to meet you. About that cheeky email to the whole building — fret not: we’ve all done it. Let me give you a hug! Ooh, you are muscly: do you work out?

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WORK & CAREERS

Coronavirus may mean lasting change in the office

Business leaders are thinking flexibly to protect staff and supply chains. By *Andrew Hill* and *Emma Jacobs*

From Sars to tsunamis, companies are used to preparing for business interruptions. The coronavirus outbreak is the test for which they have been planning for years.

Like any crisis, though, this one has new elements. They may yet bring about lasting changes in how companies manage their workers, and how those people work.

The template for short-term action is standard across large companies: reconsideration of business travel, up to and including total bans, and self-quarantine for people arriving from higher-risk zones; encouragement of remote working; regular communication of public health advice. Among more innovative approaches, international banks in Japan are operating split teams to prevent intra-company contamination.

At the same time, despite the existence of business continuity plans, coronavirus has exposed gaps.

Even though the assumption is that it is better to communicate more frequently with staff – in part to drown out misinformation on social media – Brian Kropp, chief of research in Gartner’s human resources practice, says companies are “struggling with drawing that line” between preparation and fear, as they did 18 years ago during the Sars epidemic.

Then, “a lot of companies went out and bought flu shots and encouraged employees to get flu jabs,” he says. “A lot [of employees had] had them already; a lot felt they were being forced to do something they didn’t want to do. It created anxiety for a problem that wasn’t there. One of the problems is how to prepare without creating anxiety. You don’t want to create a panic.”

Johnny Taylor, chief executive of the US Society for Human Resource Management, says its members have been



A nearly empty tram in Milan as workers are advised to stay at home

Marco Di Lauro/Getty

asking about the fever tests that some Asian offices are now applying to all building visitors. “It makes people feel better, but the reality is if you’re carrying [the virus], you may not show the symptoms” and the fever could be down to a more common virus. His organisation is instead reinforcing recommendations that staff do not come to work while sick. At SHRM itself, this is backed by an “open leave” policy that ensures sick leave is paid.

Mr Taylor says a pandemic might well bring about improvements to US practice on paid sick leave – which can encourage staff to hoard their allowance and attend work while ill. In the UK, SHRM’s counterpart, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, recommends employers “should treat any time off taken by employees who have been advised to self-isolate,

even if they have no symptoms, as paid sick leave or agree for the time to be taken as holiday,” although there is no statutory right to pay.

If schools or nurseries close, staff concerns about how to pay for childcare, or how to take time off to look after children, will increase. “Some employers might agree with staff that they should take time off as holiday out of existing annual leave if they want to be paid in these circumstances,” says Ben Willmott, CIPD’s head of public policy. “We would recommend that employers should be as flexible and generous as they can be in supporting employees.”

The most obvious development since the Sars outbreak of 2002-03, is the increase in remote working, fuelled both by more flexible and decentralised management practice and more widely available technology.

Manufacturing companies face more of a challenge in instituting remote working or emergency shift working than their service industry peers. SHRM’s Mr Taylor believes it would stretch most companies to institute remote working widely for more than a few weeks. “If you really could get away with that, perhaps you could consider having a remote workforce always,” he says.

“The tech is better than it was in the last pandemic. People are more used to it,” says Gartner’s Mr Kropp. “Some managers make it hard, however. We are telling employers to communicate with their managers to encourage people to work from home. Some are saying that the employee can work remotely and it’s up to the manager to explain why they can’t.”

A sustained period of home working

could raise questions both about the adaptability of managers and practicality of encouraging more remote work. Mr Willmott says companies should “identify managers who have transferable skills [which] might mean providing training for staff to fill in other jobs. Quite often you’ll have managers who have been promoted as they have a particular technical skill but you might have to utilise their core technical skills.”

Other management challenges include the risk that requests by ex-pats to return home from infected areas will have an effect on local employees, says Sarah Henchoz, employment partner at law firm Allen & Overy. “If employers agree to this, there is a risk that local employees will feel very isolated and it creates a real ‘them and us’ culture, which is very unhelpful and could even give rise to claims of discrimination.”

Mixed messages might also be a problem for companies such as consultancies, where employees spend much of their time at clients’ workplaces. If a company tells its employee to work from home but the client wants them to be on-site, it might prove “inconsistent and create a feeling of unfairness”, says Mr Kropp.

In general, companies say best practice is spreading alongside the virus itself. Collaboration across supply chains and even between rivals could be one legacy of the outbreak. Companies have activated established networks of human resources managers, or joined informal discussions to reach a consensus about how to react to the threat of coronavirus.

It is inevitable, though, that this crisis will also expose some basic deficiencies, just as previous emergencies did. Peter Cappelli, director of the Wharton business school’s Center for Human Resources, recalls that after Sars, a surprising number of companies reported that “they literally did not know how many employees they had [or] where they were distributed across locations”. The silver lining was that disaster planning “moved them toward better accounting on those simple matters, which then made it easier to do all kinds of things like planning”.

‘One of the problems is how to prepare without creating anxiety’

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ARTS

‘Every auction still excites me’

As chairman of Sotheby’s Asia, Patti Wong has witnessed huge changes in markets and tastes. She talks to Melanie Gerlis

China and the hub of Hong Kong have contributed considerably to the growth of the art market for the past 10 years. Now, as the Covid-2019 coronavirus outbreak takes its toll on the luxury goods industry, demand for fine art is expected to suffer too.

Patti Wong, chairman of Sotheby’s Asia and Sotheby’s Diamonds, is more than conscious that Hong Kong is a tough place to do business right now. When we meet in Sotheby’s London offices, it is soon after the virus has forced the cancellation of the Art Basel Hong Kong art fair and its satellite event, Art Central. Two weeks later, Sotheby’s had to cancel its Hong Kong series of 14 live sales, due to run April 3-8. The traditional Asian art, wine and watch sales have been postponed to July, while the international Modern and contemporary auctions have moved to New York on April 16. Among the relocated fare is David Hockney’s bright ‘30 Sunflowers’ (1996), estimated to sell for at least US\$10m.

But Wong remains confident that China, and its art market, will bounce back. She likens the situation to a

devastating typhoon that hit the territory in 1974. “It was just one year after Sotheby’s had its first auction ever in Hong Kong,” Wong says. “The airports were closed, the saleroom was empty, but by 1975 buyers were back again. We are experiencing a minor downturn, but I’m not too worried, cycles come and go.”

If anyone knows, then it is the whip-smart, Hong Kong-born Wong, whose 29-year career has exclusively been at Sotheby’s. She has worked across its Chinese art, private sales and jewellery departments internationally and became chairman of Sotheby’s Asia in 2004. She is now responsible for many of the auction house’s top clients in the region, often manning the phone lines for winning bidders around the world.

Armed with a degree in monetary economics from the London School of Economics and a postgraduate diploma in Asian arts, Wong started out in 1991 as an intern at Sotheby’s in Hong Kong and then in its Chinese art department in New York. “That was another downturn, I seemed to be interning forever,” she says. Her workload included



Main picture: Patti Wong in action at a Sotheby’s auction. Left: Sotheby’s sale of works including David Hockney’s ‘30 Sunflowers’ (1996) has been relocated from Hong Kong to New York



opening the post and replying to all that came in. “It’s hard to imagine now just how much came through the mail, including boxes of objects for valuation,” Wong says. It was at this early point, she says, that she realised “to get the real stuff, you have to go out and get it.” So began a consummate career of relationship building.

Her speciality at the time was Chinese paintings, cultivating buyers in the US, China and then for nearly 15 years in

London. Genuine enthusiasm went a long way, Wong says, something that she hasn’t lost through the years. “Every auction still excites me, whether clients are buying things for \$20,000 or \$20m,” she says.

Wong sees Sotheby’s as an “endless learning experience” — I am told by specialists in other departments that she grills them intensely during internal briefings for their major lots. She is blessed with a good memory and has a

passion for reading about art, which, she says, happily fills her many long-haul flights from her base in Hong Kong.

Wong has seen demand from Asia’s buyers grow significantly — most notably in the run-up to 2011, when the art economist Clare McAndrew found that China overtook the US as the largest international art market worldwide, with a 30 per cent share. Wong notes that repeat sales flattered the numbers. “The same pieces were being sold over and over again, it was highly speculative,” she says. Such activity has slowed down and while auction has long been the preferred route for buyers in Asia, there is now an increasing appreciation for private sales (including at the growing number of commercial galleries now in Hong Kong).

‘We are experiencing a minor downturn, but I’m not too worried, cycles come and go’

Taste has also changed, Wong says, notably towards western Modern and contemporary art. She points out that at Sotheby’s last year, Asian clients bid on 15 of its top 20 paintings (by price) and bought nine. Five of these works were by western artists, including the top lot at its contemporary art evening sale in New York in November, Willem de Kooning’s “Untitled XXII” (1977), which sold for \$30.1m.

Wong saw it coming and has been behind the expansion of Sotheby’s offerings in Hong Kong. Since 2017, the twice-yearly auction schedule in the region has included significant pieces of Modern and contemporary art from the west — this season’s relocation is expected to be a one-off.

Within the western art canon, taste has also developed quickly, Wong says. At the auction house’s first mixed contemporary art sale, the top lot was rather predictably an Andy Warhol 1973 portrait of Chairman Mao, which sold to an Asian buyer for HK\$98.5m

(US\$12.7m). Two years later, an Asian private collector bought “Black Ground (deep light)” (2006) by the edgy, Ethiopian-born Julie Mehretu for HK\$44m (US\$5.6m), a record for the artist. The work sold for far ahead of its estimate, another sign of growing confidence from buyers, who are “now happy to think for themselves and set records”, Wong says.

Sotheby’s has partly been behind the education process to help broaden taste. “You can easily show the influence of Chaïm Soutine or Francis Bacon on Zhang Xiaogang [a well-known Chinese Modern painter]”, Wong says.

Helping to grow demand are the areas beyond Greater China — before Sotheby’s unexpectedly successful October sale season (held during an intense period of protests in Hong Kong), key works toured to Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia. All are now regular stops for the major auction houses before their high-end sales.

Time will tell if Asia’s collectors will still bid and buy from next month’s relocated sales in New York, though the Sotheby’s team expects them still to be in the mix. The outlook for the protests is also uncertain, but Wong is able to think longer term.

She is particularly encouraged by the relatively young demographic of Asia’s collectors — Sotheby’s reports that, in 2019, 25 per cent of its buyers in Asia were under 40, compared to 18 per cent of all its buyers globally. “There are billionaires in their late thirties and early forties, so they have a lifetime of collecting ahead,” she says.

ART MARKET REPORT

The annual Art Basel/UBS art market report, compiled by Clare McAndrew (right), is published this week. See Friday’s FT or, from Thursday lunchtime, go to ft.com/arts



There’s life yet in the murder story

PODCASTS

Fiona Sturges



We are five years into the podcast boom, and the thirst for tales of real-life murder remains seemingly unquenched. Hardly a week goes by without a new series offering up old corpses and fresh leads. The newly launched *The Nobody Zone* — a joint operation between Irish network RTÉ and Denmark’s Third Ear Productions, and available in five languages — isn’t a whodunnit in the traditional sense, though there are bodies aplenty and it does unearth new evidence in the form of recorded interviews.

Presented by Tim Hinman, host of Denmark’s popular *Third Ear* podcast, and featuring the journalist and documentary-maker Robert Mulhern, it tells the story of Kieran Kelly, a homeless man from Ireland who was arrested in 1983 after robbing a man on London’s Clapham Common. While in custody, Kelly proceeded to strangle his cellmate using a pair of socks. On being interviewed the following day, Kelly confessed to a string of murders

perpetrated over 30 years — he claimed the first killing took place in 1953 when he got into an altercation with a man at Baker Street Underground station and pushed him in front of a train.

It’s a fascinating story, partly because the deaths seemed to go unnoticed but also due to the challenges of separating reality from make-believe. Kelly, an alcoholic with a taste for red wine mixed with methylated spirits, was prone to telling tall tales, though he is outdone here by an ex-police officer and author who says he was closely involved in the case but whose imagination spectacularly runs away with him in an interview with Mulhern.

The series has its problems, however.

Hinman’s narration is distractingly mannered and repetitive. He also adopts an uncomfortably prurient tone as he imagines, not once but twice, how the Baker Street victim met his end. On the second occasion, he puts us directly in the victim’s shoes: “A sudden gut-wrenching shove in the middle of your back sends you flying out on to the tracks,” intones Hinman, grimly. “The last thing you see is the train driver covering his eyes.”

Similarly aggravating is the production, which, not trusting the listeners’ capacity to picture a scene, goes clumsily over the top. As Hinman recounts Kelly’s movements on Clapham Common, we are assailed by the sounds of birds flapping their wings; later, as he describes the goings-on at the police station, keys clank, doors slam, phones ring and typewriters clatter. It’s all very silly, and ends up draining the suspense from an otherwise compelling tale.

The superior American podcast *Conviction*, from Gimlet Media, has just returned for a second series, this time examining the “satanic panic” of the 1980s. Hosted by Sharon Shattuck and Julia Marchesi, it asks if satanic cults really were performing horrific rituals on children, as was claimed, or whether other forces were at work deliberately stoking mass hysteria.



Confession: Kieran Kelly

DANCE

Justin Peck and Nico Muhly: *Rotunda*
Lincoln Center, New York
★★★★

Apollinaire Scherr

Nico Muhly is not an obvious choice as a composer for dance, despite a steady stream of assignments. Though his gorgeous instrumentation and playful if rigorous structures provide fine fodder for the choreographic imagination, the music lacks the usual dance requirement: rhythmic drive. But for *Rotunda* — Justin Peck’s 19th ballet for New York City Ballet since 2012 — the composer amps up the failure of forward propulsion until it takes on a fascinating rhythm of its own.

Typical of Muhly, the score combines bursts of tootling arpeggio from the winds with a low sustained arc of notes from the brass. Imagine sardines eddying around a whale. Fizzled notes resemble the “second thought” that gets you to swallow the first. Muhly disallows easy translation from note to

step: pure enticement for someone with Peck’s keen musicality and ingenuity at architecture.

At first, the half-hour *Rotunda* seems only to acknowledge at a meta level these dips into silence. Before the start of each of the eight sections, the dancing stops for the next crew to assemble, whether for a solo, a duet, a trio or for the full 12. *Rotunda*, the ballet self-consciously reminds us, is not a make-believe, low-key encounter among millennial friends, as with other Peck ballets. It is mostly only dance. Costume design duo Reid & Harriet’s practice-wear in hip pastels reinforces this assertion of dance as dance.

Rotunda’s formalist air nicely offsets its improvisatory style. Peck’s previous attempts at casualness have tended to backfire. Like his idol Jerome Robbins, he would exaggerate the off-the-cuff until it looked mannered. *Rotunda*, though, feels genuinely immediate.

The anticlimactic silences eventually show up in the choreography’s phrasing. In a riveting duet between principal Sara Mearns and the wonderfully unfettered corps member Gilbert Bolden III, the push-pull partnering

syncs perfectly with the musical stops and starts to allow phrases to unspool indefinitely.

Peck can turn the screws on his neat constructions until your head aches. Here, via these knots of conflict Muhly has inserted, he has discovered a leavening spaciousness. This *Rotunda* lets in the light.

‘Rotunda’ returns for the spring season nycb.org



Miriam Miller and Adrian Danchig-Waring in Justin Peck’s ‘Rotunda’



REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA



MINISTRIA E INFRASTRUKTURËS DHE ENERGJITË
MINISTRY OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENERGY



MINISTRIA E FINANÇARË DHE EKONOMIKË
MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND ECONOMY

NOTICE ON THE COMPETITIVE PROCEDURE FOR THE SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE MARKET OPERATOR SHARE CAPITAL

1. Name and address of the Special Commission
Name: Special Commission
Address: Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, Str. “Abdi Toptani”, No.1, Tirana, Albania
Tel/Fax: +355 4 2222245
Website: www.infrastruktura.gov.al
Contact person: Kledis Ngjela - Kledis.Ngjela@infrastruktura.gov.al

2. Short Description of the Object of the Selection Procedure: Pursuant to Article 57 of Law no. 43/2015, “On power sector”, as amended, DCM no. 322, dated 15.05.2019 and DCM No. 609, dated 11.09.2019, it is decided to establish the Market Operator (Albanian Power Exchange), as the responsible structure for the management and administration of the organized market, through the market platform, which will operate in the field of electricity exchange in Albania, in the form of a joint stock company, financially and legally separated from Transmission System Operator (“Operatori i Sistemit të Transmetimit”) sh.a.).

The selection of other legal entities that will become part of the ownership structure of the Market Operator (excluding the Transmission System Operator - “Operatori i Sistemit të Transmetimit” sh.a. - OST sh.a.) will be selected, through the competitive selection procedure, by the Special Commission set up by the Minister of MIE and Minister of MFE.

The initial share capital of the company shall be 250.000.000,00 (two hundred and fifty million) ALL and is divided 250.000,00 (two hundred and fifty thousand) shares with a nominal value of 1.000,00 (one thousand) ALL. Every share has equal value.

The number of shares available to entities/subjects that may be part of the Market Operator’s share capital ownership structure shall be:

a) Electricity Transmission System Operators - TSOs (excluding OST sh.a.) - **51.250,00** (fifty one thousand two hundred and fifty) shares (equivalent to **20,5%** of the share capital)

b) Experienced International Operators - EIOs – **61.250,00** (sixty-one thousand two hundred and fifty) shares (equivalent to **24,5%** of the share capital);

c) Electricity Market Participants - EMPs – **25.000,00** (twenty-five thousand) shares (equivalent to **10%** of share capital);

d) International Financial Institutions - IFIs – **25.000,00** (twenty-five thousand) shares (equivalent to **10%** of the share capital).

Each participant must submit only one proposal for one of the aforementioned categories.

Number of shares reserved for the Transmission System Operator (OST sh.a.) - OST sh.a. - 87.500,00 (eighty-seven thousand five hundred) equivalent to 35% of the capital of the Market Operator company. Subject to the development of a competitive selection procedure for participants in the Market Operator’s capital, this percentage shall be increased in accordance with the provisions of these Documents of the Competitive Selection Procedure and DCM No. 609, dated 11.09.2019.

3. The deadline for the submission of proposals by the parties interested to participate in the procedure: **Date 27/04/2020**, for each participant according to the categories they participate in, the schedule will be as follows:

International Financial Institutions - IFIs	12:00 p.m.
Experienced International Operators - EIOs	12:30 p.m.
Electricity Transmission System Operators - TSOs	13:00
Participants in the Electricity Market - PEMs	13:30

4. Deadline for the opening of proposals by the parties interested to participate in the procedure: **Date 27/04/2020**, for each participant according to the categories they participate in, the schedule will be as follows:

International Financial Institutions - IFIs	12:00 p.m.
Experienced International Operators - EIOs	12:30 p.m.
Electricity Transmission System Operators - TSOs	13:00
Participants in the Electricity Market - PEMs	13:30

5. Payment of the participation fee in the competitive procedure: Participants in the procedure wishing to participate in the Competitive Selection Procedure shall pay in advance a Participation Fee (the “Participation Fee”) and shall provide the Special Commission with the details of a contact person (“The Contact Person of the Participant in the Procedure”) and the e-mail address of this Contact person, this address will be used by the Special Commission in all and any correspondence with the Participant in the procedure and related notices, for the period up to the submission of the proposal. Participants in the procedure will be required to prove payment of the Participation Fee in the Competitive Selection Procedure, stating the name of the Participant in the procedure on whose behalf this fee is paid. This Participation Fee is not refundable for any reason. If the interested person/entity acts as an authorized representative of a company, they must submit a written authorization representing the company.

The Special Commission shall make available to entities that have paid the participation fee a copy of the Competitive Process Documents in Albanian or English upon their written request. The fee to participate in the competitive process is 1 000 EURO (one thousand EURO). The payment will be made to the Transmission System Operator’s account, in the following details:

Name of Beneficiary Institution: Operatori i Sistemit të Transmetimit (Transmission System Operator)

Account Name: IBAN: AL6321211016000000000142152

Bank: Credins Bank

SWIFT: CDSALTR

Purchase of documents for the procedure: Selection of other legal entities that will become part of the ownership structure of the Market Operator, according to the shareholder structure defined in DCM no. 322, dated 15.5.2019 “On the establishment and definition of the legal form and of the ownership structure of the market operator’s share capital” and DCM no. 609, dated 11.9.2019 “On defining the criteria and procedures for the selection of participants in the market operator’s share capital”

With the description: Payment of the Participation Fee in the Competitive Selection Procedure for the Selection of Other Legal Entities that will become part of the Market Operator’s Share Capital Ownership Structure

The fee for participation in the competitive process is non-refundable.

Only participants that have paid the Participation Fee will be eligible to receive copies of the Competitive Selection Documents and will be eligible to participate in the Procedure.

6. The competitive process documents may be withdrawn from the above mentioned entities/subjects starting from 03.03.2020 from 9:00 to 14:00, any day of the week, except Saturdays and Sundays, at the Protocol Office at the headquarters of the Transmission System Operator OST sh.a., at the below address: Autostrada Tirane –Durrës, km 9, Yrtheq –Kashar, Tirana, Albania.

FT BIG READ. UKRAINE

Rudy Giuliani, Donald Trump’s lawyer, backed a rabbi’s scheme to resettle refugees from eastern Ukraine. But cash for the project is drying up over fallout from the president’s impeachment case.
By Joshua Chaffin and Roman Olearchyk



The rabbi, Giuliani and a US scandal

The rabbi gazes out of the window at a half-finished worksite, drums his fingers against his desk, and then bursts into song. “If I were a rich man!” he sings in a deep baritone fit for a grand synagogue — or the Broadway stage. “Ya-da Dee-dee Ya-da Dee-dee Da-da-dumb! I’d build a big tall house . . . Right in the middle of a . . . field!”

The site, in a 15-acre pasture about an hour’s drive from Kyiv, is where Moshe Reuven Azman, one of Ukraine’s most prominent rabbis, has been building his dream: Anatevka, a modern village built to house Jewish refugees displaced by fighting in the eastern part of the country between government forces and Russia-backed separatists.

Anatevka has come a long way in five years. It features a school, a dormitory, apartments for about 150 residents, a rustic synagogue built from pine logs, a woodworking shop, a football pitch and a nearly completed rehabilitation centre for the infirm. Yellow American school buses, donated from Brooklyn, are parked on the grounds.

Mr Azman, the chief rabbi for Kyiv — and possibly Ukraine, depending on who you ask — borrowed Anatevka’s name from the nearby *shtetl*, or village, depicted a century ago by Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem in his stories about the trials of Tevye, a Jewish dairyman in the Pale of Settlement. These were the basis for the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. The Ukrainian village, Hnativka, is just across the road.

“It’s my dream! We are in a dream!” Rabbi Azman says, showing off the half-finished Anatevka, which features a logo borrowed from *Fiddler on the Roof*.

But the dream of Anatevka has lately turned into a nightmare, thanks to Rabbi Azman’s close ties to Rudy Giuliani and what he calls “the American scandal”. That is, the recent US presidential impeachment proceedings in which Mr Giuliani, in his capacity as President Donald Trump’s personal lawyer, was shown to be criss-crossing Ukraine in search of possible evidence of corruption involving a political rival, former vice-president Joe Biden.

Mr Giuliani has not faced any charges but has drawn intense scrutiny for conduct that Democratic lawmakers argue was part of a plan to improperly leverage US foreign policy to benefit the president’s political fortunes.

The 53-year-old rabbi met Mr Giuliani years earlier, on his first visit to Ukraine. He later made him Anatevka’s honorary mayor, even presenting him with a symbolic key the size of a tennis racket. The two Soviet émigrés, Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman, who served as Mr Giuliani’s fixers in Ukraine — and have since been indicted on US campaign finance violations — are listed as board members for the American Friends of Anatevka

Digging deep: Rabbi Moshe Reuven Azman walks away from a tomb to an 18th century Hasidic holy man in Anatevka. The community was created to house Jewish people who fled fighting in eastern Ukraine. Below: the rabbi with Rudy Giuliani, Donald Trump’s personal lawyer, and the honorary mayor of Anatevka

Sergey Korovayny/FT

charity. Its registered address is an accountant’s storefront in Brooklyn.

Their familiarity with the rabbi was captured in a video that emerged at the height of the impeachment saga and has since gone viral. It shows Mr Giuliani and his friends in the lobby of the Trump International Hotel in Washington, DC, in 2018. Mr Fruman, holding out a phone, urges Mr Giuliani, to wish his friend “Moshe” a happy birthday. “Moshe, how are ya, baby?” Mr Giuliani asks in his Brooklyn twang.

Then, last May, when Mr Giuliani was pushing — unsuccessfully — for a meeting with Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine’s newly elected president, he met Rabbi Azman for two hours in Paris.

Mr Azman insists the men enjoy a genuine friendship, and suggests that he courted Mr Giuliani because he thought it would boost fundraising. But, even with fresh donations of \$1.5m — that the rabbi touted on Facebook — the flow of cash he has relied on to build Anatevka has been constrained as wealthy philanthropists, particularly in the US, have become more fearful of being drawn into the controversy.

“They’re afraid,” Rabbi Azman complains. “If you have a big company — it

‘I’d never built from scratch before. I gave the downpayment to the contractor and I said: “Build!” And I prayed’

doesn’t matter if you’re a Democrat or a Republican — you don’t want to be involved in scandal.”

To some degree, the rabbi believes he is also being punished for his unabashed support for Mr Trump. “There were no presidents who helped and loved Israel as Donald Trump does,” he told an Israeli publication in August. “I pray for him every Saturday.”

Bitter history

The Anatevka saga is a reminder of the powerful but fraught role that a handful of rabbis have come to play in Ukraine, a

place that was one of the bloodiest killing fields of the Holocaust but is now undergoing a Jewish revival.

Its territory contains some 5,000 mass graves from the second world war. One is Babyn Yar, a ravine in Kyiv where some 34,000 Jews were massacred by the Nazis and their local helpers in just two days in September 1941 in one of the most horrific events of the so-called “Holocaust of bullets”. Later, the Nazis would switch to the gas chamber, a more industrial method of murder.

Improbably, Jewish life has returned to Ukraine, with thriving communities boasting tens of thousands of members in cities such as Kyiv, the capital, and the central city of Dnipro. The country briefly boasted both a Jewish head of state and head of government after Mr Zelensky, a comic and actor, was last year elected president with 73 per cent support while Volodymyr Groysman was prime minister. “I think God wanted a laugh!” Rabbi Azman quips.

The community has been rebuilt, in part, with the largesse of a select group of Jewish businessmen, or oligarchs, who took control of Ukraine’s industry after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their patronage and political connections have aided the work of rabbis such as Mr Azman but also present risks in a country caught up in a swirl of political intrigue with a reputation for corruption and money laundering.

A chief donor to Menorah, a stunning Jewish cultural and community centre in Dnipro that is one of the world’s largest, is Igor Kolomoisky, an oligarch whose PrivatBank was taken over by the state in 2016 after regulators found a \$5.5bn hole in its balance sheet. Mr Kolomoisky and his aides have denied wrongdoing. Nonetheless, this complicates life for a rabbi in search of funding.

“A rabbi who needs to fundraise is a little bit [of a] zombie,” says one Jewish official in Ukraine who, like others, describes Rabbi Azman as big-hearted and charismatic but also a bit naive.

Further confusing matters, the community itself is riven with factions and rivalries and sometimes competing interests, according to a longtime observer of Ukrainian politics.

“What you have to understand about the Ukrainian Jewish community is [that the power struggles within it] are vicious,” this person says. “You have five different people at any time claiming to speak for the community.”

Rabbi Azman has a playful manner that belies the hardship of his youth. He grew up in the Soviet Union and studied Torah at an underground religious school whose older members at first suspected he might be a KGB informant. That experience makes him scoff at speculation that he might somehow harbour sympathy for Russia’s authoritarian government or be serving as a go-between for the Trump administration.

He left Leningrad for Israel in 1987 and then spent time in Toronto before moving to Kyiv in 1995. One of his greatest achievements was the reconstruction of the historic Brodsky Synagogue in the city centre. It was shut down by the Soviets in 1926, ransacked by the Nazis and then turned into a puppet theatre until it was reborn as a synagogue

‘[No] big company — it doesn’t matter if you’re a Democrat or Republican — wants to be involved in scandal’

in 2000. Much of the funding came from Vadim Rabinovich, an oligarch with political ambitions who hosted Mr Giuliani’s first trip to Ukraine in 2003.

During that visit, Mr Giuliani commemorated a Kyiv memorial to terrorism victims, sponsored by Mr Rabinovich, who had built strong links to New York’s Orthodox Jewish community during his two terms as mayor of the city visited the synagogue.

“He was young and I was young,” Rabbi Azman says, “I blessed him.”

He declined to say much more about the relationship, but adds that visitors across the political spectrum have paid their respects at Brodsky, including Chelsea Clinton, the daughter of the former US president. A thank-you note she penned to Rabbi Azman is one of several framed on his wall.

US fundraising

The Anatevka project began in 2014 as the fighting tore through eastern Ukraine, a region with about 20,000 Jews. Many fled the violence. “One day the rabbi in [the city of] Lugansk called me and said: ‘A few buses are coming to you,’” Rabbi Azman recalls.

He managed to resettle some in Israel and others in Kyiv. A further 300, were housed at a Jewish summer camp in the town of Shpola. “I didn’t know what to do with them — it was the middle of the forest,” Rabbi Azman says.

He wanted something more permanent. Searching on the internet, he found an empty parcel of land that happened to be near the actual *shtetl* that inspired Sholem Aleichem. It also featured a destroyed Jewish cemetery, whose gravestones had been used as building materials in a nearby town, and a tomb to a renowned Hasidic rabbi, the *Chornobyl Tzadik*.

“I’d renovated the [Brodsky] temple but I’d never built from scratch before,” Rabbi Azman says. “I gave the downpayment to the contractor and I said: ‘Build!’ And I prayed.”

First came a dormitory, and then a school and eventually a synagogue, whose Torah crowns — a decorative

piece that adorns the scroll — were provided by Marcy Kaptur, an Ohio Congresswoman. “She’s a Democrat!” the rabbi jokes. “I checked!”

He declined to discuss Anatevka’s financials or disclose its donors — except to say it had been easy before the scandal to find people to support the cause of Ukrainian refugees.

One benefactor was Mr Fruman, whose name graces a plaque outside one of Anatevka’s buildings. Before becoming caught up in the impeachment scandal, he was regarded in Ukraine as a businessman of moderate prominence — the owner of a car dealership and the Buddha Bar, a Kyiv club.

Some suggest that Rabbi Azman may have viewed Mr Fruman, who also lived in Florida, as a way to raise money in the US — while for Mr Fruman, his association with the rabbi was another means to try to enhance his business and political connections.

Whatever the source of Anatevka’s funding, it appears to have been put to good use. On a recent afternoon, dozens of students filed in and out of bright and well-equipped classrooms, each decorated in a different theme — nature, Great Britain and so forth.

“I found it on Ukrainian Monster.com,” says Noah Lloyd, a former Peace Corps member from Los Angeles, who took a job at Anatevka in September teaching English. Far from shunning Anatevka, some non-Jews in the surrounding area have sent their children to its school, according to the rabbi.

Stepping outside, the rabbi points out a half-built music school and the foundations that have been poured for three additional apartment buildings. “This will be an orphanage,” he declares, amid a whirring of buzz-saws, adding: “I’d like to buy all the land around here . . . If I were a rich man!”

The plan is for Anatevka to one day become self-sufficient as a tourism destination and producer of artisanal crafts. Its wood shop is manned by two craftsmen who in 2014 fled the shelling in eastern Ukraine. “It’s hard to understand how frightening it is,” Sergey Yarechenko, 56, recalls, explaining how his religious faith has been rekindled since he arrived in Anatevka — and how he had no intention of going back.

In addition to working on Anatevka’s synagogue, Mr Yarechenko also helped turn out the oversized “key to the city” that Rabbi Azman presented to Mr Giuliani. “We didn’t know that we’d be making the key that led to an international scandal,” his colleague, Slava, 52, adds with a smile.

Rabbi Azman says the recent fundraising will only help to cover school costs for the next year. Then he declares: “We need to finish Anatevka . . . We need millions of dollars. We have to build!” For now Anatevkans will have to do so with their rabbi — but no mayor.





FINANCIAL TIMES

‘Without fear and without favour’

MONDAY 2 MARCH 2020

Coronavirus unmasks vulnerability of bull run

Policymakers must beware the market rout becoming a credit crunch

After spending much of the last decade in abeyance, fear has returned with a vengeance to the markets. Rattled traders returning to their desks on Monday will be braced for more volatility after last week’s sell-off in global equities, the largest since the depths of the financial crisis in 2008. Mounting concerns at the rapid spread of the coronavirus caused one of the quickest market corrections in the benchmark US S&P 500 since the Great Depression in the 1930s.

The speed of the decline in equities suggests there may be reasons for a bounce in the coming days but it also highlights that markets had been riding for a fall. Investors, used to an environment of persistently low interest rates and cheap money from central banks, had grown complacent and were ignoring the mounting signs of an economic slowdown. Equities, in particular US technology stocks, had begun to look overvalued. A revision was overdue even before the outbreak of the coronavirus. The market rout has been amplified by the increasing dominance of passive index funds as well as algorithmic trading.

Previous sell-offs in response to a global health epidemic provide only so much insight into where markets are headed. A recent assessment of the market impact of past outbreaks by JPMorgan, including Sars and swine flu, found that a sharp initial stock market decline quickly gave way to a recovery. There is no certainty that a similar rebound will happen this time. There are fresh concerns that the risks of a global recession are mounting. The yield on the US 10-year Treasury note dropped below 1.2 per cent on Friday for the first time to hit 1.167 per cent as investors sought safe havens. Goldman Sachs has warned that profits at US companies will stagnate this year.

The coronavirus outbreak – and the

world’s policy response to it – are creating a negative shock to both supply and demand that will reduce growth. Strong consumer activity has underpinned the US and eurozone economies. Restricting travel, closing schools and isolating whole communities will have an inevitable effect on spending.

Given already low borrowing rates, monetary policy is limited in what it can do to sustain weakening demand and to prevent liquidity problems. Christine Lagarde last week played down the chances of the European Central Bank providing an imminent response to the virus. Mark Carney, outgoing governor of the Bank of England, meanwhile said Britain should prepare for a downgrade in economic growth. The Federal Reserve on Friday signalled it was prepared to act.

Despite the constraints, policymakers may need to deploy non-standard monetary policy tools. South Korea’s central bank last week decided not to cut its benchmark interest rate but noted that a more effective response at this stage was targeted support for sectors and companies most affected by the virus.

An area of focus should be the credit markets and upcoming debt rollovers. Corporate debt has soared over the past decade. A first test could come as soon as the start of June when some \$200bn worth of debt is due to mature in the sectors most exposed to a slowdown. Airlines and travel groups in particular are worried about losing business during the summer season.

The longer-term economic fallout remains the big unknown. The number of new cases in China appears to have dropped but in Europe and elsewhere they have kept rising. The worry is that the market rout will turn into a credit crunch. If that looks likely, policymakers need to show they are ready to take decisive action.

There is a landing zone for a UK-EU trade deal

Britain’s negotiating paper is not as hardline as the rhetoric suggests

Theodore Roosevelt summed up his foreign policy with the motto, “Speak softly and carry a big stick.” The British approach to negotiations on a post-Brexit trade deal with the EU, published last week, reverses that: the substance of the document is much more conciliatory than the often aggressive rhetoric that framed it. As talks begin in Brussels today, there are substantial areas of agreement between the two sides and an outline of a “landing zone” – if there is willingness to compromise. That is no reason to be complacent. Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s government believes brinkmanship and threats unlocked the compromise over the withdrawal agreement last year. His cabinet is comprised of Brexit true believers. The EU and business should take seriously his threat to walk away from the talks. An acceptable agreement is possible, but not inevitable.

Partly that is due to the Canada-style trade agreement the UK is seeking, which will mean there is friction on the borders. Even with no tariffs or quotas there will be administrative and regulatory checks. For many sectors of the British economy that rely on just-in-time supply chains this will feel very similar to having no deal at all. The difference in overall cost to the economy between walking away or securing an agreement is lower than it would be if the UK was seeking more alignment.

A deal is still a big prize. Trading with the EU only on World Trade Organization terms would deeply damage both sides’ economies purely through the imposition of tariffs – as high as 10 per cent on cars and 22 per cent on food. The wider agenda of co-operation on regulation, security and services trade makes a deal even more valuable. A breakdown in trade relations between such close allies would be a geopolitical as well as an economic blunder.

Headlines suggesting Mr Johnson would “tear up” the political declaration, the non-binding agreement from the first stage of Brexit talks that set out the rough shape of the future trading relationship, were not borne out by the text of its negotiating approach. Rather than rejecting outright a “level playing field”, the paper accepts the principle of non-regression, saying that a trade deal should include commitments not to scale back competition laws or environmental and labour protection.

Neither does the EU’s negotiating mandate go as far on a level playing field as some suggest. It only calls for EU law to be used a “reference point” for worker and environmental protections, rather than be directly implemented in the UK. State aid, however – where Brussels wants Britain to continue to follow EU law – is a notable exception. London and Brussels also have very different views on the governance of the new agreement, and the role the European Court of Justice will play. Movement will probably be needed on both sides.

Bellacose language now may be a tactic to ensure any deal can later be “sold” to a UK domestic audience as a success, but does not help build trust. The government’s threats to leave the negotiating table unless there is sufficient progress by June aim to raise the stakes for the EU from a breakdown. Not only could the bloc face tariffs but a recalcitrant UK, unwilling to enforce the protocol designed to prevent a hard border in Ireland and blocking EU boats from British fishing waters.

UK evasiveness over the protocol has already eroded trust. Mr Johnson says there will be no regulatory checks in the Irish Sea, though these are required by the withdrawal agreement, but never spells out how. All this is grounds for caution. A deal is there to be done – but there is no guarantee that it will be.

Letters

Collective action on climate is now pressing

Jeremy Oppenheim’s excellent letter (February 27) calls for “a wholesale effort to protect and restore the natural world, on land as well as in the ocean”, to accompany the required global transition away from fossil fuels to clean sources of energy.

He is right to stress the complementary nature of these two lines of activity. Preserving the world’s tropical rainforests will, indeed, prevent the release of millions of tonnes of stored carbon and help absorb millions more from the

atmosphere, as well as ensure that we have sufficient oxygen to breathe.

The matter is pressing, and the younger generation want to see collective action today to halt the deforestation and the overfishing of the world’s oceans. Currently, this joint human effort is entirely absent. What is needed is the establishment of UN protection forces for these two domains under the blue beret in order to police them properly. On land these multinational forces would act in support of national troops in the

implementation of agreed plans for the sustainable development of the relevant regions, strengthening the latter’s resolve and acting as a deterrent to transgressors.

Only in this way will we bring the relentless degradation of our inherited natural environment to a complete stop, allowing us to hand over a conserved ecosystem of precious plant and animal life to the generations that come after us.

Dr John Law
London W2, UK

Capacity case for third Heathrow runway has been overstated

You endorse the Court of Appeal’s decision that the UK government’s backing of Heathrow expansion was inconsistent with climate change commitments (“Time has run out for Heathrow expansion”, editorial, February 28). The capacity case for a third runway has been overstated. Most air travel is for leisure purposes. Even at Heathrow, only 25 per cent of passengers are travelling for business. There is ample scope for this segment to grow, displacing leisure travellers to other airports, as will happen naturally in the market since those on business trips will pay a premium for the advantages of Heathrow. Ultimately, the cost of leisure travel will rise as capacity constraints bite generally.

Hubbub, an environmental NGO, recently reported the results of a survey of UK young adults, finding that half the flights by men aged 20–45 in 2019 were for stag parties and a third of flights by women were for hen parties. Some increase in the cost of leisure air travel would increase the attractions of domestic destinations, with rather little loss of enjoyment.

David Metz
Honorary Professor,
Centre for Transport Studies,
University College London, UK

Europeans have social benefits Americans lack

I read with interest that “Democrats are targeting the riches of the 1 per cent” (Janan Ganesh, February 27), in order to “give Americans universal healthcare, statutory paid leave and other staples of the developed world”.

Mr Ganesh dismisses this tax policy, calling it “social democracy as understood by Robin Hood”, and points out that it is not similar to European social democratic policy of taxing “more citizens more heavily”. Democrats lack the political will, he says. It is all logic, but makes no sense.

The truth is that more Europeans can afford to pay more taxes because they have these social benefits that the middle-class and poor Americans lack. Egg or chicken, you tell me. Successful Republican administrations have successfully raided the Treasury to pay for tax cuts for the richest, while simultaneously attacking the safety nets of the poor, leaving them eking out a living with their meagre incomes.

Yes, I concede, it is now a class struggle, as David Jodrey (Letters, February 27) points out.

R Vijayaraghavan
San Jose, CA, US



Cost of leisure air travel will ultimately rise — Universal Pictures/Suzanne Hanover/Kobal/Shutterstock

No 10’s thermostat is on the wrong setting

The UK government’s approach that you describe in “Johnson should handle Whitehall with care” (editorial, February 27) will be self-defeating because of an inherent contradiction: the aspiration to inject countercultural thinking coupled with the desire to control and show no tolerance for deviation. Successful change is more likely to come from a climate of discussion, challenge and respect, overlaid by a well-articulated unifying purpose with which adherents can easily identify. However, this approach takes more skill and is therefore side-stepped.

For change to be successful, the knack is to turn up the heat sufficiently to cause discomfort but not burn down the house. I would therefore add that the prime minister’s leadership team has No 10’s thermostat on the wrong setting.

Simon Holden
Edinburgh, UK

Quick wins for AI in non-clinical healthcare

Brooke Masters compares the challenges ahead for artificial intelligence in medicine to those faced by the designers of driverless cars (“The AI doctor will see you now”, February 27).

A lot of hype surrounds AI and its alleged ability to make better clinical decisions than humans. The quick wins for the National Health Service and other providers are non-clinical, such as planning capacity, scheduling appointments and improving efficiencies. These will help overcome

the trust barriers and complexities articulated by Ms Masters.

For example, the automation of mundane paper-based processes generates large quantities of data. We use machine learning against these data to predict where bottlenecks might occur and identify better ways of delivering services. This frees doctors and nurses to focus on what they do best, which is providing care with compassion and humanity.

Bryn Sage
Chief Executive,
Inthealthcare,
Harrogate, N Yorks, UK

Help the public learn to trust AI with their health

Was it by design or coincidence that Brooke Masters’ excellent article “The AI doctor will see you now” (February 27), on health data monitoring driven by artificial intelligence, should sit next to Prabhat Jha’s op-ed “WHO must learn from the IMF to stop pandemics”?

Whereas the Chinese are using facial recognition to track the movements of coronavirus suspects, the future logic of an “at risk” population wearing a BioSticker-type product is compelling. And you can guarantee that, as well as streaming yet more data, they will be made smaller and cheaper.

Looking at the disruption and costs of the current hit and miss approach, we must ensure that society is sufficiently informed and appreciative of why AI-monitored devices will have an essential role, not just in the current virus avoidance, but also general healthcare.

Vivian Bush
Beverly, E Yorks, UK

It’s time UK taxpayers stopped funding fossil fuel projects abroad

In an extraordinary 24 hours last week, Teck Resources cancelled a C\$20bn project to develop Canadian tar sands, the Anglo-Pacific investment group ruled out investment in new coal mining operations, and Equinor became the third major oil company to abandon plans to drill for oil and gas in the Great Australian Bight marine park. These decisions all reflect the same basic truth: the economics, and ethics, of new fossil fuel projects simply don’t make sense in today’s world.

So if investors do not see the profit, then why are taxpayers still having to shell out? The UK government continues to use taxpayer money to fund new fossil fuel projects abroad, with backing for a new gas drilling project in Mozambique currently under consideration. The project would be an ecological disaster, destroy the livelihoods of many local people, and produce enormous quantities of climate-wrecking greenhouse gases.

The government should follow businesses’ lead and withdraw – and then end all costly and hypocritical fossil fuel funding abroad once and for all.

Aaron Kiely
Friends of the Earth,
London SW9, UK

Scale is not the only factor in online banking success

Further to Revolut’s \$5.5bn funding round (report, February 25): it is evident that the race for scale in the online banking sector is on. But with fickle customers (see the Ogury research you mentioned in “Fintech users just can’t get enough of traditional banks”, FT Alphaville, January 7), how many profitable and independent digital banks can Europe realistically stomach?

One should rejoice at the hyper-competition in this sector in the UK, which, in theory, can only be beneficial to consumers. However, what’s in it for investors? Not all digital banks will survive (see N26 pulling out of the UK as a potential sign of weakness). And not all of them will be able to do an initial public offering. In this context, it is surprising that trade sales do not seem to be a priority, when there is a multitude of potential acquirers: from retail banks, which have already started buying online banks, to investment banks (think Goldman Sachs becoming a consumer brand) and digital giants (Apple, Alibaba, Google, Tencent) to name but a few.

An IPO is a logical and efficient goal for investors. But in digital tech at large, entry barriers can collapse rapidly. One could argue that the future of an online bank should be more secure if it is part of a large company than if it remains “on its own”, listed on a stock market.

The jury is out, but scale is not the only success factor. The timing and nature of an exit might count more.

Christophe Cauvy
Partner,
Intersection M&A,
Oxford, UK

COMMENT ON FT.COM
Nick Butler
European oil majors’ climate change steps are good but celebration now is misplaced
www.ft.com/nick-butler

How extremists find solace and identity online

Book review Siddharth Venkataramakrishnan



Going Dark: The Secret Social Lives of Extremists
by Julia Ebner
Bloomsbury, 368pp, £16.99

Extremists were among the first to grasp the power of the internet as a medium for radicalisation. Stormfront, a white nationalist online forum, was started nearly a decade before Facebook was founded. Encrypted apps such as Telegram have become favoured ways of communication for Isis and affiliates.

The use of the internet by terrorists and their sympathisers has generated a significant number of books in recent years. Julia Ebner, a researcher at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, makes a compelling attempt to understand how these groups work.

Going Dark is based around her infiltration of several extremist communities, where she poses as an adherent to get others to open up.

Ebner’s comparative work across groups including Isis-aligned hackers, far-right QAnon conspiracy theorists and proud neo-Nazis shows the same sense of community that they offer beyond their ideological differences. It is easy to dismiss extremists’ thinking as irrational or inexplicable to moderate society. The reality is both more mundane and more concerning. These groups offer a chance to belong, a chance to have fun and an “antidote to loneliness”.

The resulting narrative is more engaging and visceral than many other works on the topic. At times, Ebner’s undercover work reads like a thriller. While embedded with European far-right “identitarians”, she is nearly discovered when her credit card is picked up by the partner of an

Austrian far-right leader with ties to the Christchurch shooter. Later, while waiting to enter a neo-Nazi festival in Germany, Ebner worries that a police background check will lead to her identity being revealed.

In one case, she is not so lucky. After an article she wrote on white supremacists mentioned English Defence League founder Tommy Robinson, the far-right activist arrived at Ebner’s office along with a camera crew. The video, which went out to Robinson’s thousands of followers, led to threats of violence and death towards Ebner and her colleagues.

Going Dark pulls back the facade of invulnerability and remorselessness that extremists promote with glossy propaganda, to understand those they recruit. Europe’s identitarians may look to educated, well-dressed members as their vanguard, she says, but “a recurring theme . . . is identity – a troubled self-image, a broken self-esteem”. Similar “profound identity crises” play out on a white nationalist chat group on the gaming app Discord. Ebner finds multiple far-right extremists there who are struggling with non-white ancestry disclosed by DNA tests.

It might be expected that members would be pushed out for failing racial purity tests, and that this might change their world view. Instead, extremists often turn to mental gymnastics, including “even more absurd conspiracy theories”. One member of the Discord chat who calls himself “Mr White” claims that the

DNA tests are simply a tool of the “Zionist Occupied Government”, a classic anti-Semitic canard. “Distrust is one of the key constants that brings individuals to extreme-right channels,” says Ebner. She finds similar patterns in Islamist groups: recruiters encourage “situational estrangement” in order to win over would-be supporters.

“Subversion over confrontation”, a phrase taken from an identitarian book, is another recurring theme. Its implications are clearest when Ebner talks to “trad wives”, a group that sits at the intersection between male supremacist and white nationalist ideologies. The language it adopts – attacking feminism and “modernity” – has a certain allure even to Ebner. “It was far too easy to get drawn into this strange place,” she admits.

Despite the bleakness of *Going Dark*, Ebner does offer solutions for the problems. Those range from finding ways to “immunise” activists against intimidation attempts to improving algorithmic transparency. Her final recommendation, “education against extremism”, is perhaps the most important. Ebner is right to argue that these issues deserve a “human-centred approach” rather than treating them as primarily technological flaws. “Questions around identity, trust, friendship in the online world must be raised if we want to break through the ‘us and them’ thinking that all extremist movements have in common.”

The reviewer is an FT leader writer

Opinion

UK threats to walk away from a trade deal are real

EUROPE

Wolfgang Münchau



Here's an astute observation from a former senior British official in the EU, which came during a conversation about political misjudgments: in the corridors of Brussels, one no longer bumps into Brits to talk about how the politics is shaping up back home. There is nobody around any more at the heart of the EU machine to tell you what the UK government is really thinking.

This decline in informal contact set in long before the UK officially left the EU at the end of January. It was part of the reason why EU politicians and journalists ended up underestimating support for Brexit in the UK at the 2016 referendum and afterwards. And now they may be misreading the UK's implicit threat to end the trade talks in June.

The fundamental assumption in Brussels is that this will not happen. But can it be right? In the absence of perfect foresight, the best we can do when weighing up the possible success of the trade talks is to rely on revealed preferences — and from both sides.

The EU said loud and clear last month that it would not grant a Canada-style free trade agreement to the UK. The council of ministers has since hardened its position. I do not think the EU can easily climb down.

On the UK side, the signs are also clear. Boris Johnson began his premiership last summer by proroguing parliament. He went on to fight and win a general election.

The Conservative manifesto on which he has gained his mandate was explicit not only about going through with Brexit, but about establishing a distant future relationship with the EU.

After his election victory, Mr Johnson ruled out an extension of the negotiating deadline for a trade deal at the end of this calendar year. The UK parliament even passed legislation to that effect. He is, what's more, backtracking on the level playing field commitment in the

political declaration attached to the Brexit withdrawal agreement. He seems to be backtracking on the customs border in the Irish Sea as well. He got rid of a chancellor of the exchequer in Sajid Javid who would have constrained some of his fiscal plans to increase investment in pro-Brexit areas and support new high-tech industries.

London and Brussels have turned these negotiations into a zero-sum game

Both plans could easily run into conflict with EU rules on state aid.

Whatever you might think of Mr Johnson, this is a remarkably consistent story. So why would anyone think that he is bluffing?

Classic trade negotiations are win-win games. The negotiations that start today will be different. Both sides have framed their objectives in terms of regulation, not of trade. The UK seeks maximum regulatory independence. The EU wants

to prevent it on grounds of competition. If you take the politics out, it is not hard to construct a technical compromise. But there is no deal imaginable that would allow both sides to declare victory in terms of their stated goals. They have turned it into a zero-sum game.

Also consider another unusual aspect of this negotiation. The UK may be the smaller country, but it can secure its chief negotiating goal of regulatory independence unilaterally by walking out. The EU cannot do the same.

The political reality in the UK is that Mr Johnson has a House of Commons majority of 80, and many of these MPs owe their political careers to him. There will be no rebellion. The worst to expect from the business lobby would be a raised eyebrow. British businesses are not going to stop Mr Johnson just as the German carmakers will not stop the EU.

Maybe we should start looking at second-best options: a no-deal outcome followed by a trade agreement a year or two later. This would clearly not be economically efficient. Both sides would incur the costs of no-deal first, the UK more than the EU. But at least we would

find ourselves in a scenario where both sides stand to regain trade flows that had been lost in the rupture. The problem today is that the losses are hypothetical. In two years, they will have materialised. That could make it easier for the UK and the EU to calculate gains from a zero-tariff, zero-quota agreement.

This means that Europe as a whole, the UK included, should prepare for two foreseeable material economic shocks this year: a spread in the coronavirus and a WTO Brexit. I agree with Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of England, that the economic impact of Brexit on the UK is genuinely uncertain. Success or failure will depend on what the UK does with its new freedom.

The EU faces all these shocks, plus perhaps US tariffs on cars: the perfect storm for an economy dependent on exports and global supply chains. The EU cares deeply about institutions and laws, but lacks strategic thinking in virtually all policy areas. Brexit is not the biggest crisis for the EU, but it could end up as the wrong one at the wrong time.

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Beware 'badwill' in European bank mergers and acquisitions

Simon Samuels

Europe's largest banks are undergoing the biggest chief executive shake-up since the financial crisis. As these new leaders inevitably come up with updated strategic plans at their new institutions, dealmaking is bound to form part of them.

Andrea Enria, who chairs the European Central Bank's supervisory board, signalled earlier this year that the body is actively looking at ways to make bank mergers and acquisitions easier. But the ECB is deploying more than just warm words. It is also smiling favourably on an accounting manoeuvre that will make deals more possible — the creation of negative goodwill or, as it is more widely referred to, "badwill".

Indeed, leaders of Italy's second-largest bank, Intesa Sanpaolo, specifically cited the generation of several billion euros of goodwill as an important rationale for their recent unsolicited €4.9bn bid for smaller rival UBI Banca. That is because, in the sometimes topsy-turvy world of bank accounting, goodwill is good and goodwill is bad.

When one company buys another, it normally pays a premium above the undisturbed share price that reflects the price for taking control. That is also usually higher than the so-called book value of the company, which is the sum of all its assets less all of its liabilities. This gap is called goodwill.

However, valuations are upside down today for most European banks: most of them have a market capitalisation that is below their book value. In the case of UBI Banca, despite Intesa's offer price

In the topsy-turvy world of bank accounting, goodwill is good and goodwill is bad

of €4.9bn being 30 per cent higher than its current share price, it is below UBI Banca's book value of nearly €8bn. Intesa is paying less than the accountants say UBI Banca is worth. This gap between the price paid and the book value is goodwill.

For banks, this goodwill could have enormous value. The ECB has been hinting that banks will be able to boost their capital ratios, by generating a one-time paper "profit" that counts as capital. Mr Enria alluded to this possibility last summer when commenting on potential goodwill arising from the aborted Deutsche Bank-Commerzbank merger.

Intesa is so certain that this goodwill will be available that it has already outlined to investors how it would use it. And with most European banks currently trading well below their book value — thus creating the possibility for goodwill — the ECB's generous treatment could encourage bank-sector M&A.

But is this sensible? It is widely accepted that paying €100 for assets valued at €50 creates a negative charge that needs to be written off. But does paying €50 for assets valued at €100 really create a windfall that can then be spent? The answer depends on whose valuation we should trust. Is UBI Banca worth the €3.8bn the stock market awarded it before the bid, the €4.9bn Intesa is offering, or the €8bn the accounting book says its assets are worth?

Back in 2011 Andy Haldane, now chief economist at the Bank of England, tried to address this issue by comparing banks' published capital ratios, which are based on book values, with "market based" capital ratios, where the book value was replaced with the stock market value. When he applied this to pre-2008 capital ratios, the results were emphatic. The accounting-based ratios completely failed to identify banks that would subsequently collapse, but the market-based ratios proved unerringly accurate. The collective wisdom of the stock market crowd knew more than accountants or regulators.

This conclusion has important implications for European bank M&A. Rather than presuming that a lender's book value is accurate and considering adjustments during the sale process, perhaps regulators and investors should assume the stock market valuation is correct and acquirers should be forced to justify a higher offer. After all, it's just possible that goodwill really is bad.

The writer is a banking consultant at Veritum Partners

Margins are going to be squeezed

BUSINESS

Rana Foroohar



If there is a simple lesson to be drawn from last week's market rout, it is that there is fragility in complexity. The coronavirus outbreak has, like the 2011 Japanese tsunami and Thai floods that disrupted auto and electronics businesses, or the 1999 earthquake in Taiwan that brought the semiconductor industry to a halt, shown us the vulnerabilities of our highly interconnected economy and global supply chains.

This time around, the trigger is an outbreak spreading outwards from China, still the factory of the world as well as its second-largest economy. It comes at a time when US politics are in flux, and we are in the midst of what Ray Dalio, founder of the Bridgewater hedge fund, recently called a "paradigm shift" for both markets and economies. This is a new era in which few of the old rules will apply.

Goldman Sachs last week warned investors to expect zero profit growth from US companies this year, mainly because of the growing impact of the virus. But I wonder how much profit growth big corporations will be able to expect even after the infections play out and the results of the November

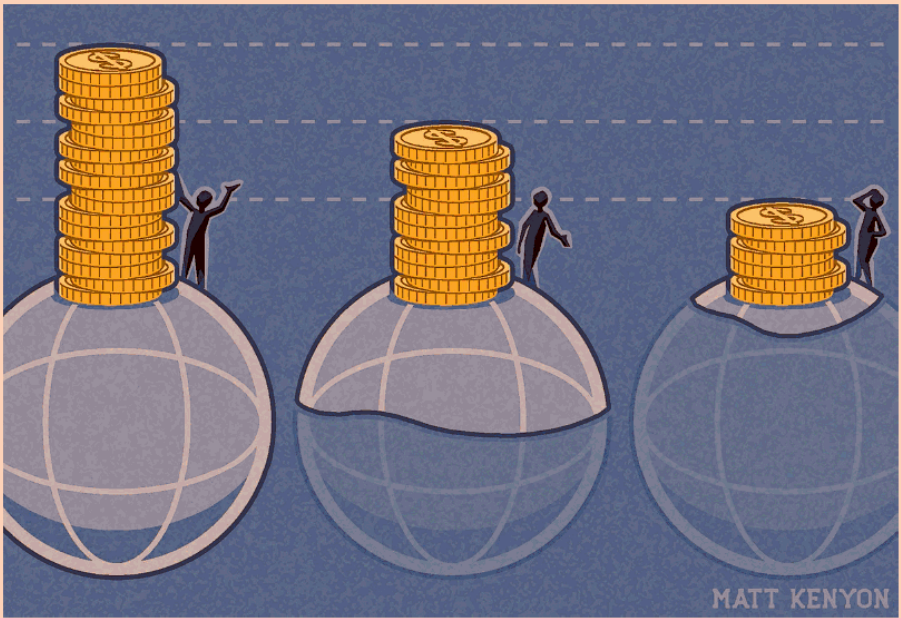
US presidential elections come in.

In this new and unsettled era, the main forces that have propelled profit margins over the past 40 years or so — globalisation, increasing corporate concentration, a lower tax burden for corporations versus workers, and a larger share of wealth going to companies versus workers — are all facing headwinds.

The healthy margins of today's highly optimised, extremely complex multinational corporations have largely depended on their ability to manufacture in China, sell in the US and Europe, and stash wealth wherever it makes most sense — particularly in favourable tax destinations like Hong Kong, Dublin or the Cayman Islands.

As Gavekal founding partner Charles Gave put in a client note last week, these companies have become as optimised, fast paced and high performing as English rugby player Manu Tuilagi. "Yet, as England fans know, the problem with Tuilagi is that injuries mean he is seldom available to put on the white shirt. The more optimised a system is, the more fragile it potentially becomes."

I've wondered for years when the fragility inherent in complex global multinationals would force them to shift their business models, and I think we've reached that moment. I believe coronavirus will speed the decoupling of the US and Chinese economic ecosystems, increasing regionalisation and localisation of production. That may result in "supply chains that are less efficient but more resilient", says Mike Pyle, BlackRock's chief global investment



strategist. He also believes the trend towards decoupling and deglobalisation will speed up in the wake of the virus.

A pullback from no holds barred globalisation may come with some upsidings (see Raghuram Rajan's book *The Third Pillar* for more on that). However, it will cost companies more in the short to midterm. There is only so much production slack that countries like Vietnam can quickly pick up from China.

If decoupling continues, multinationals will have to make costly choices around labour, productivity and transport in order to manage a shift away from China. That's something that many investors are counting on, given that the two most likely winners of the 2020 US presidential elections, Donald Trump or Bernie Sanders (now seen as

I find it hard to imagine corporate taxes or labour's share of income going any direction but up

the Democratic favourite by many) both believe that greater economic nationalism is a good thing.

Mr Sanders and many other Democrats would also like to curb corporate concentration, which has helped boost margins but reduced government tax revenues, labour's share of revenue and competition. Many on both sides of the US aisle (not to mention in Europe) would be happy to curb the power of Big Tech, which is responsible for the single largest chunk of the S&P 500 for varying political reasons, from national security and competition concerns to privacy and tax justice.

Beggar thy neighbour tax politics (to which the US capitulated in 2017 with Mr Trump's tax cuts and rule changes) have bolstered corporate margins for decades. But that looks to be shifting, too, with some European countries taxing tech giants, the OECD putting pressure on member states to work together on new digital tax rules, and states including California considering things like a digital dividend tax. In a world where populists are gaining influence,

I find it hard to imagine corporate taxes or the labour share of income going in any direction but up.

Meanwhile, the spectre of slower growth or even recession by November, makes a Sanders presidency more likely. Even if Mr Trump were reelected or the US Federal Reserve approved more quantitative easing, I doubt that US corporate profit margins will return to levels anywhere near where they have been in the past several years.

Mr Trump is, predictably, urging investors to buy equities. But the right response to that advice depends on whether you think we're going back to business as normal for the longer haul. I don't. We may well see the market begin to come back. It would respond positively to additional monetary stimulus from the world's central bankers or a slowing of the spread of coronavirus, or both. But I doubt that shape of the share price graph will be a perfect V. The other big V — the virus — has exposed too much vulnerability.

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The EU should regulate Big Tech as 'attention utilities'

Tristan Harris

The European Commission's new digital strategy missed a momentous opportunity to better shape our global future. While it may create marginal advantages for the bloc in the race to control data and artificial intelligence, it fails to address the way digital technology platforms are degrading democracies. That will undermine the EU's ability to accomplish its agenda.

When I was working as a design ethicist at Google, I saw how the emergence of the "attention extraction" business model led to vast individual and societal harms. The social media platforms now intermediate the way we construct shared truths and social relationships.

This business model sells advertisers and political actors highly sophisticated techniques to manipulate individuals and the public sphere. Children

and teens are especially vulnerable.

The commission has earned a reputation as the world's foremost online watchdog. Brussels' General Data Protection Regulation has become the gold standard for data protection — about 120 countries have adopted privacy laws — and its proposal to create a shared data pool has merit. But the new EU strategy, despite its attempts to lay down rules for artificial intelligence and data use, fails to grapple with the underlying crisis.

Signs include rampant polarisation, extremism, fake news and toxic tribalism, which are amplified by today's major digital platforms. Tech companies are distracting, dividing and out-raging citizens to the point where there is little basis for common ground. This is a direct threat to democracy.

For example, the EU wants a Green Deal — but how can it achieve that if a majority of YouTube climate change videos oppose the scientific consensus, as one 2019 study showed? How can the bloc promote unity and democracy if tech platforms amplify extremism and spread conspiracies that inspire

mass shootings and divide society?

While nations protect their physical borders, tech platforms leave digital borders wide open. In more than 70 countries, disinformation campaigns have been used to undermine elections, swing referendums and elect quasi-dictators. If Russia tried to fly a fighter jet into EU airspace, they would be met

Commission has a chance to convert online lawlessness into humane, regenerative technology

by Nato. But if Russia launches content intended to sow division and fracture the EU, Facebook and Google's powerful automated microtargeting algorithms are there to help. We must not ignore the lessons from the Cambridge Analytica scandal.

This crisis gives the commission a chance to convert online lawlessness into humane and regenerative technology that will lead the world. Platforms

such as Google, Facebook and YouTube are creating the public infrastructure of the digital age; we should treat it as we do telephones, trains or power grids.

First, the EU should create a new corporate classification for large, dominant social platform businesses that have created vital public digital infrastructure. These "attention utilities" should be required to operate in the public interest, according to rules and licences that guide their business models.

Traditional companies have been subject to licensing for many years. Attention utilities should be required to obey limits on data extraction and message amplification practices that drive polarisation, and should be required to protect children. We should ban or limit microtargeting of advertising, recommendations and other behavioural nudges.

Second, instead of relying on revenue based on advertising, attention utilities should be required to convert to a monthly licence fee model a bit like the BBC or a subscription like Netflix. They must adhere to the terms of an operating licence framed by a duty of care.

Margrethe Vestager, the EU antitrust commissioner, has suggested Facebook should use a subscription model.

Third, attention utilities should be subject to a "social impact assessment", in which their new products are evaluated for their potential impact on mental health, social isolation, fake news, polarisation and democracy. This pre-clearance would be akin to an environmental impact assessment or safety protocols used for medical devices.

Finally, the EU should create a new directorate to regulate and oversee an industry that is increasingly central to every aspect of our lives. It should identify key research needs, require platforms to be interoperable and help other EU agencies to apply existing law to online companies.

The EU can lead the world toward more humane technology. But doing so requires thinking more broadly about reining in social media platforms to prevent them from degrading our democracies.

The writer is president and co-founder of the Center for Humane Technology



Fantasy football
US soccer teams attract frothy valuations despite losses
COMPANIES & MARKETS

Stuff the inspiring types, find me an anti-role model



Emma Jacobs
Business Life

I am tired. Not just from being at my desk too long and staying up too late (though both are true). It's something altogether different: inspiration fatigue.

I discovered my malaise after receiving an email offering to introduce me to inspirational women. I hit delete. This is a difficult time of year. Ahead of International Women's Day, inspiring women come out in droves. But, in fact, inspirational men and women are with us all year – at conferences, as after-dinner speakers and in books, urging us to take control of our careers and reach for the top.

"Inspirational", as applied to business figures, sums up many of the things that are wrong with the modern ideology which frames work as a quasi-religious experience.

The inspiration market is booming; there is a publishing industry devoted to cataloguing inspirational figures.

On my desk is a motivational book by Ben Williams, a former drug addict who became a marine. In his book, *Commando Mindset*, he writes that inspiration can "be fun and make you feel good. An inspiration can make you punch the air with excitement. But it can also be sobering." In other words,



What not to do: Meryl Streep in "The Devil Wears Prada" (Feb. 2000)
Pictures: Moviestore/Shutterstock

inspiration is whatever you want it to be.

Recently, Hillary and Chelsea Clinton wrote *The Book of Gutsy Women*, in which they describe heroic figures "with the courage to stand up to the status quo, ask hard questions, and get the job done".

I can see that Hillary is gutsy and even (whispers), inspirational. But I fail to see what I could learn from her daughter, aside from the realisation that being born to American political royalty gives you a huge advantage.

It is inspirational women that I find particularly irksome. With the emphasis on success, they put a gloss on difficult workplace issues – like the gender pay gap. As Shani Orgad, author of *Heading Home: Motherhood, Work, and the Failed Promise of Equality*, puts it: "The trouble with role models is that they individualise and personalise issues." It's all about the plucky

This is a difficult time of year. Ahead of International Women's Day, uplifting women come out in droves

individual, rather than focusing on changing the structures of the workplace.

An inspirational label puts pressure on the role models, too. Inevitably they are inundated by requests for mentoring, to speak at events, to do work beyond their actual jobs.

Elisabeth Kelan, a professor of leadership and organisation at the University of Essex, warns her students against seeking for inspirational women. "I normally encourage women to pick more specific behaviours to emulate, like the way they lead meetings, mentor their team or have dinner with their children. These composite role models are more concrete and realistic."

May I suggest an alternative? An anti-role model. These are unspirational people who show you the path to avoid. There are those who teach the perils of perfectionism, or not to be vile to colleagues. A friend has learnt from their manager never to belittle their team and hold them back. "Their progress doesn't detract from your own," she says, but the reverse.

Another friend told me that she left her company and thanked her boss,

who she couldn't wait to escape. "What did I do?" the boss asked, fishing for compliments.

As my friend looked at her boss, she realised he was her anti-role model. She never wanted to become like him: exhausted, overworked and trapped by their job. In that moment, she felt vindicated by her decision to leave and grateful for the unspiring lesson.

When I look back to the people who have made a difference to my career, it's not inspirational figures kicking ass and all the other slick empowerment mantras but ones who spotted potential in me, gave me opportunities, or, better still, a pay rise.

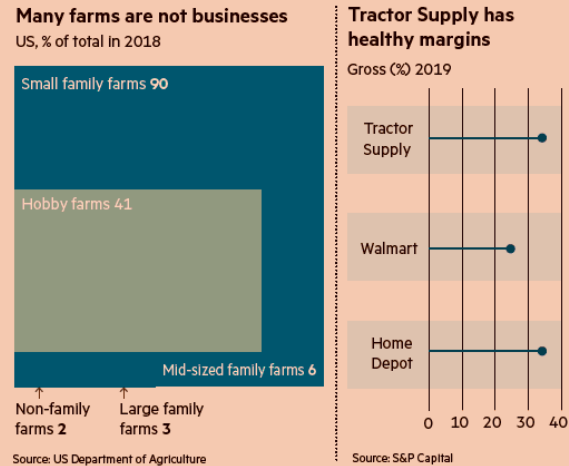
One only needs to listen to former Arsenal footballer Ian Wright's interview on BBC radio's Desert Island Discs to be reminded of the importance of such people.

It was moving to hear him talk about the teacher who took him under his wing. "I don't know why he chose me but he did," Wright said. "He gave me responsibility . . . It was really good, I just felt important. He just gave me a sense of feeling like I had some use."

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Lex.

Tractor Supply/hobby farms: field of dreams



Retirees. Dirt-loving hipsters. Modern homesteaders. Whatever the moniker, more Americans seek the pastoral life these days and the number of "hobby" farms across the country has risen. That is good news for those retailers that cater to their needs.

Almost 820,000 farms were run by people who had other primary jobs in 2018, according to the Department of Agriculture. Recreational farms accounted for more than 40 per cent of the total, up from 38 per cent in 2012. Equally as telling: in 2012-17 only the smallest (less than 10 acres, or 4 hectares) and the largest (2,000 acres, 800ha, or bigger) rose in number, the agency noted.

All this has yielded good business for Tractor Supply. Founded in 1938, the Tennessee-based retailer's sales have grown by more than half over the past five years to \$8.3bn. That is no small feat. Other department stores such as Macy's have shed billions in revenue and market value over the same period.

Some of Tractor Supply's new-store openings have been on sites abandoned by struggling chains such as Kmart and Bed Bath & Beyond.

Despite its name, Tractor Supply does not actually sell tractors at any of its 1,844 small-box stores. But it does

have everything else that small-time farmers need to run their farms and look after their pets and livestock. Shoppers can buy chicken coops, cattle gates, work overalls, snow ploughs and gardening and power tools.

Its specialised focus and merchandise mix (one-third of its sales are from its own private labels) have helped shield it from online competitors. Try to buy 40lb (18kg) bales of chopped hay from Amazon. Tractor Supply also has very respectable gross and operating margins (9 per cent) compared with Home Depot, and better than Walmart.

Clever marketing helps. It woos followers with blog posts devoted to horses, chicken raising and beekeeping. Recent topics include raising therapy goats, chainsaw-sharpening tips and hotspots for ice-fishing.

Selling to rural communities does pose unique challenges. There is a lack of broadband in farm areas – 80 per cent of those without reliable, low-cost connections in America reside there, says the USDA. Tractor Supply thus focuses on shopping via smartphones.

Tractor Supply prefers its customers in plaid flannel shirts. No need to target label-conscious, young millennial professionals. It has done well from harvesting dollars in the countryside.

WEATHER

Forecasts by MeteoGroup

Legend: Warm front, Cold front, Occluded front, Wind speed in MPH

Today's temperatures

City	Weather	Temp (°C/°F)
Amsterdam	Rain	7 45
Athens	Fair	19 66
Atlanta	Thunder	15 59
Beijing	Cloudy	11 52
Belgrade	Fair	21 70
Berlin	Drizzle	10 50
Bermuda	Cloudy	17 63
Bogota	Shower	21 70
Brussels	Shower	9 48
Buenos Aires	Sun	34 93
Caracas	Sun	31 88
Chicago	Fair	7 45
Copenhagen	Shower	7 45
Dallas	Fair	22 72
Delhi	Sun	27 81
Doha	Sun	25 77
Dubai	Sun	29 84
Dublin	Hail	7 45
Edinburgh	Shower	6 43
Frankfurt	Shower	10 50
Geneva	Rain	7 45
Hamburg	Cloudy	9 48
Helsinki	Cloudy	6 43
Hong Kong	Fair	21 70
Honolulu	Thunder	26 79
Jakarta	Fair	31 88
Karachi	Sun	32 90
Lima	Fair	28 82
Lisbon	Fair	17 63
London	Sleet	9 48
Los Angeles	Sun	21 70
Luxembourg	Rain	7 45
Madrid	Shower	14 57
Manila	Sun	33 91
Melbourne	Cloudy	17 63
Mexico City	Sun	28 82
Miami	Cloudy	26 79
Montreal	Rain	3 37
Moscow	Drizzle	6 43
Mumbai	Sun	30 86
Nassau	Fair	25 77
New York	Fair	12 54
Nice	Shower	14 57
Oslo	Shower	5 41
Paris	Rain	9 48
Prague	Fair	9 48
Reykjavik	Sleet	4 39
Rio	Thunder	25 77
Rome	Shower	17 63
San Francisco	Sun	20 68
Seoul	Sun	8 46
Shanghai	Fair	11 52
Singapore	Fair	33 91
Stockholm	Cloudy	7 45
Sydney	Fair	33 91
Taipei	Cloudy	19 66
Tel Aviv	Fair	18 64
Tokyo	Rain	8 46
Toronto	Rain	7 45
Vancouver	Rain	8 46
Vienna	Fair	13 55
Warsaw	Rain	8 46
Washington	Fair	17 63
Zurich	Shower	7 45

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FT Weekend

FINANCIAL TIMES

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ACROSS

- Soldiers left two pints unfinished before argument (7)
- Racket during bash spoiled holy day (7)
- Jack in drugs to get court discharge (5)
- Introducing discussion of fish in Crosby (9)
- Translate Pinter play first in Russian and French (9)
- Heard angry calls for alcohol (5)
- Cause contamination of dressing (5)
- Rude old fellow swamps me with very extreme language (9)
- A maths geek's no good when forced to hurry (4,5)
- Predatory animal has female bird protecting young one (5)
- Get rid of wasteland (5)
- Thought company nervous having lost leader (9)
- Eager for mischievous child to get a connection with books (9)
- Dismantle canape and remove a nut (5)
- Times without number, regret being unfaithful (3,4)
- Decide to do puzzle again (7)

DOWN

- Challenges point in risqué production (7)
- Amazed to pronounce rower beaten C-6)
- Device going round either way (5)
- Wearisome debts after childbirth in America (9)
- Way to take away fat (5)
- Form of support for ordinary members? (4,5)
- Morning turn around island with Spanish friend (5)
- Cleaning routine picked up important bit of DNA (7)
- Artist displaying work in old house's keeping one section restricted to Americans (9)
- Fine crew bringing in King and Queen's vessel (9)
- Duplicate papers briefly tempt top grade student (9)
- Fail to get on satellite-bearing space flight (7)
- Worker in high mountains reduced to a slow tempo (7)
- Regularly reed grass is put in a new container (5)
- Vocal group from town in Cheshire (5)
- Spelling mistakes found in community posters (5)

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Business Education

Online Learning

Monday March 2 2020

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An accessible option — but not always a cheaper one

As demand for online MBAs surges, providers are adopting different strategies. By *Jonathan Moules*

The future of the MBA is digital. While the number of applications for places on campus-based courses has declined globally for the past two years, demand is up for most online MBAs.

Online MBAs outgrew all other professional MBA programme types in the US in 2019, according to the applications data gathered each year by entrance test administrator the

Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC).

“The shift is from all forms of physical study to online,” Sangeet Chowfla, GMAC president, says. “Online gives new options for people who used to go for the part-time evening or weekend programmes as well as the new generation who have grown up digital.”

There is some evidence that online MBAs are cannibalising campus-taught courses. The MBA.com Prospective

Students Survey last year found that 42 per cent of those considering part-time study were also considering an online MBA, up from 32 per cent in 2015.

However, it is also true that online programmes are drawing in people who would never previously have considered a business education, either because of the flexibility offered by being able to study wherever and whenever you like or because of the lower cost of such courses.

“The demographic of the typical online student is older and more experienced than campus-based students,” Mr Chowfla says. “Therefore it cannot be just a case of online courses taking away demand from campus-based courses.”

Business schools are reacting by increasing their online MBA offerings. Five years ago just 20 per cent of the 862 institutions accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate

Schools of Business (AACSB) said they offered an online MBA. At the end of the last academic year, this had grown to 35 per cent.

“Learners demand more options, which is why we have also seen a growth in specialist, accelerated and part-time masters programmes,” says Juliane Iannarelli, AACSB chief knowledge officer.

Schools, she adds, have become better at delivering online education,

Continued on page 2

Inside

The Financial Times online MBA ranking
The top 10 courses from around the world
[Page 3](#)

Tech ventures reshape business education
New disrupters want to profit from a world that’s hungry to learn
[Page 2](#)

Online or on-campus?
Students need to weigh the benefits of flexibility versus networking
[Page 2](#)

The perfect blend
How an MBA helped one student build her career in coffee
[Page 4](#)

Masterclass
Insights into strategy, luck and irrational bias from this year’s top-ranked school
[Page 4](#)

Digital degrees open doors to broader student demographic

Diversity

Business schools want a more varied student intake. Technology may offer a solution, writes *Seb Murray*

Lizette Melendez grew up in El Paso, one of the poorest cities in Texas, and was the first in her family to go to university. Now the American, who is Latina, is studying for an MBA at a top US business school.

She is not doing so in the conventional way. Ms Melendez is part of the first cohort in the MBA@Rice, launched by Houston’s Jones Graduate School of Business at Rice University in 2018 on the 2U online learning platform.

Most of the course is delivered digitally. Flexibility was important for Ms Melendez, who could not afford to quit her job as policy adviser to a member of the Austin, Texas, city council because of undergraduate loan debt.

Experiencing financial hardship has inspired Ms Melendez to explore launching a social enterprise, possibly to raise financial literacy in public schools. She is therefore keen to hone her business skills.

Peter Rodriguez, dean of the school, claims that the MBA@Rice is a step towards democratising business education. The lowest and highest student incomes in the online cohort are below those in the executive MBA class, which is similar in age and experience, he says.

“It is not such a significant difference that they have blue-collar jobs. But online education helps combat the geographical and cost challenges of getting an MBA,” says Prof Rodriguez.

Enrolling a diverse intake is a priority for most business schools, including students from less affluent backgrounds. Diversity of thought improves classroom discussion, the schools argue.

Technology can lower the financial barriers to a full-time MBA, such as quitting a paid job and funding steep tuition and living fees. It can also improve access for people from poorer areas who do not live near top schools.

The most elite residential MBAs cost upwards of \$200,000 — not including the lost earnings from full-time study. With schools incurring smaller costs for classroom facilities, digital degrees are often a fraction of the price.



MBA on the way: Lizette Melendez

The \$22,000 iMBA from the Gies College of Business at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is about \$61,000 cheaper than the campus version, which is being phased out, though Illinois residents get a hefty discount.

Jeffrey Brown, dean of Urbana-Champaign, says that larger online class sizes offset the substantial cost of paying faculty to teach. “Online learning is an economies-of-scale game.”

He adds: “We are making a high-quality MBA accessible to people who otherwise would not be able to afford it.”

But there are no agreed definitions of socio-economic status, or consistent

‘It is a misconception that high-quality online education is easy and cheap to produce’

standards for measuring progress on financial diversity.

Evidence is hard to come by; complicating matters is the fact that online MBA students tend to have significant work experience and a correspondingly decent income. However, some students are the main breadwinners supporting their low-income families, says John Colley, associate dean at the UK’s Warwick Business School.

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Business Education Online Learning

Financial Times Online MBA 2020

The top 10 Online MBA programmes

Rank in 2020	Rank in 2019	Rank in 2018	Three-year average rank	Business school	Country	Programme name	Career progress						Online delivery		Programme diversity						CSR and idea generation			Additional notes*			Rank in 2020	
							Salary today (US\$)	Salary increase (%)	Value for money rank	Career progress rank	Aims achieved (%)	Careers service rank	Programme delivery rank	Online interaction rank	Female faculty (%)	Female students (%)	Women on board (%)	International faculty (%)	International students (%)	International board (%)	International mobility rank	Corporate social responsibility rank	Faculty with doctorates (%)	FT research rank	Course tuition and fees (local currency)**	Average completion time (years)		Online teaching materials (%)
1	1	1	1	Warwick Business School	UK	Warwick Distance Learning MBA	204,799	40	2	1	80	3	8	8	43	31	33	78	75	22	3	6	100	3	£32,681	3	100	1
2	2	2	2	IE Business School	Spain	Global Online MBA	163,788	36	6	6	76	9	5	4	40	38	50	70	91	96	2	1	100	6	€50,000	1.5	80	2
3	3	3	3	University of Massachusetts Amherst: Isenberg	US	Isenberg Online MBA	168,046	46	3	4	83	7	4	6	46	36	27	25	6	2	9	3	76	7	\$35,191	3	100	3
4	5	-	-	University of North Carolina: Kenan-Flagler	US	MBA@UNC	171,665	26	10	7	79	2	6	5	33	30	23	38	3	4	6	10	84	2	\$124,967	2.42	97	4
5	4	4	4	Indiana University: Kelley	US	Kelley Direct Online Programs	148,934	30	7	5	83	1	1	2	26	27	23	30	14	33	8	8	78	1	\$74,520	3	97	5
6	6	7	6	University of Florida: Warrington	US	Online MBA	126,535	41	8	9	83	5	2	1	27	35	13	27	4	0	10	5	93	4	\$55,340	2	100	6
7	7	5	6	Durham University Business School	UK	Online MBA	142,892	27	4	3	82	6	10	9	34	24	40	71	50	80	1	4	99	8	£23,000	2.57	100	7
8	8	12	9	Northeastern University: D'Amore-McKim	US	Online MBA	137,104	30	9	2	78	4	3	7	28	40	23	27	4	2	7	9	89	5	\$82,000	2.97	100	8
9	-	-	-	Politecnico di Milano School of Management	Italy	International Flex MBA	144,316	40	5	8	70	8	7	3	39	18	47	10	32	65	5	2	82	9	€32,000	2	100	9
10	10	14	11	University of Bradford School of Management	UK	MBA Distance Learning	128,524	34	1	10	73	10	9	10	31	33	29	50	63	38	4	7	83	10	£17,425	3	100	10

* Data in these columns are for information only and are not used in the rankings. ** Average course tuition and fees (local currency)

AnalysisLeo Cremonezi on what a UK school does well, and what its rivals do better

Warwick takes top slot in FT ranking for third year in a row

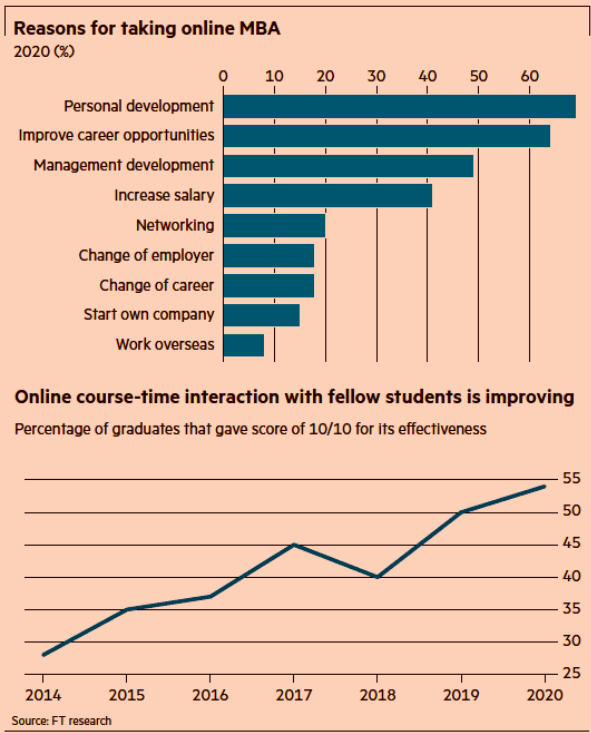
Warwick Business School is number one in the 2020 Financial Times ranking of online MBAs – the third consecutive year that it has taken the top slot. The main factor in Warwick’s success is the salary that its alumni command: an average of \$204,799 three years after graduation, a 40 per cent increase over that period. The school also ranks highest for career progression and for the percentage of international faculty – 78 per cent.

In second place, also for the third consecutive year, Spain’s IE Business School (which is the FT’s partner in HeadSpring, an executive development

venture) has the highest percentage of international students at 91 per cent, as well as a 96 per cent international board. Students praise IE’s international exposure, and the networking opportunities it provides. The school also has the highest score for corporate social responsibility.

Alumni of the University of Massachusetts have the highest salary increase three years after graduation – 46 per cent – and the school also comes top for female faculty: 46 per cent of full-timers are women.

Indiana University’s Kelley scores highest for its careers service, programme delivery and research. Its alumni also highlight its strengths in



teaching corporate strategy, entrepreneurship and ecommerce.

Newcomer Politecnico di Milano School of Management, ranked ninth overall, comes second for corporate social responsibility and third for online interaction.

“It was excellent to follow . . . lessons [at a distance] and to interact with participants from different countries,” was one graduate’s verdict.

FT

Best of the rest
For a directory of online MBA programmes at 40 business schools, go to
ft.com/online-mba/list/2020

Schools seem to have become better in the past few years at encouraging online interaction among their students – or perhaps students have become more comfortable with the format. Meanwhile people’s reasons for doing an online MBA have remained fairly constant: alumni cite personal development as the primary goal, followed by improved career opportunities and then management development.

This year’s ranking is based on surveys both of schools and of alumni who completed their online MBA in 2016. Although 22 schools took part, the alumni response rate was too low in some cases to allow more than half the schools to qualify for the final ranking.

Key to the table

- Weighting percentages shown in brackets.
 - For the three gender-related criteria, schools that have 50:50 (male: female) composition receive the highest score.
- Salary today US\$ (20):** average alumnus salary three years after graduation, \$ PPP equivalent (see methodology).[†]
- Salary increase (10):** percentage increase in alumnus salary in current job versus three years ago on graduation.[†]
- Value for money (3):** calculated according to alumnus salary, tuition, fees and other costs.[†]
- Career progress (4):** progression in alumni’s level of seniority and the size of company they now work for, versus three years ago on graduation.[†]
- Aims achieved (4):** extent to which alumni fulfilled their goals for taking an online MBA.[†]
- Careers service (4):** effectiveness of school careers service in terms of career counselling, personal development, networking events and recruitment, as rated by alumni.[†]
- Programme delivery (5):** how alumni rate the online delivery of live teaching sessions, other teaching materials and online exams.[†]
- Online interaction (10):** how alumni rate the interaction between students, teamwork and the availability of faculty.[†]
- Female faculty (3):** percentage of female members of faculty.
- Female students (3):** percentage of female students on MBA programme.
- Women on board (1):** percentage of female members of school advisory board.
- International faculty (4):** percentage of faculty whose citizenship differs from their country of employment.
- International students (4):** percentage of current students whose citizenship

differs from the country the school is located in.

International board (2): percentage of board whose citizenship differs from the country in which the business school is situated.

International mobility (5): based on alumni citizenship and the countries where they worked before their MBA, on graduation and three years after.[†]

Faculty with doctorates (5): percentage of full-time faculty with a doctoral degree.

Corporate social responsibility rank (3): proportion of credits from core courses dedicated to CSR, ethics, social and environmental issues.

FT research rank (10): calculated according to the number of articles published by a school’s current full-time faculty members in 50 academic and practitioner journals between January 2017 and December 2019. The rank combines the absolute number of publications with the number weighted relative to the faculty’s size.

Additional notes

The following data are for information only and are not used in the ranking calculations.

Course tuition and fees (local currency): Programme tuition and fees paid by the most recently enrolled class, in the currency of the country where the school is situated. Figure shows weighted average.

Average completion time (years): The average amount of time students take to complete the programme.

Online teaching materials (%): Percentage of programme teaching materials that are delivered online.

[†] Includes data for the class of 2016 and one or two preceding classes where available.

For the full methodology visit: ft.com/online-mba-method/2020

How mini-courses are paving the way to a full MBA

Access

Online learning modules boost students’ academic confidence and business knowhow, says *Seb Murray*

Matthew Rivers was a police officer in Urbana, a city in Illinois, for nearly a decade before he applied to do an online MBA in 2017. His ambition was one day to lead the police department and he did not want to pause his career to study on campus.

The nearby University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign offered him a place on its iMBA – an online MBA – with the caveat that Mr Rivers master the fundamentals of business by passing two modules before the start of term in 2018. It was also a way for Mr Rivers, now 38, to prove he could handle academic rigour after years of employment.

He chose courses in corporate finance and investment, which are available for

free via Coursera, a digital learning platform, and paid a fee for academic credit (approximately \$1,200 per course today) towards the iMBA.

“Online learning is a gateway to an MBA,” he says. Of the 2,882 iMBA students currently enrolled, 35 per cent took a course for credit before applying to the degree programme.

Jeffrey Brown, dean at Urbana-Champaign, likens the courses to Lego building blocks. “They are stackable,” he says. “We are breaking down this traditional idea of one degree into finer pieces that fit around your schedule.”

Business schools are unbundling the MBA to make it more flexible and accessible. Students who take four digital business courses on FutureLearn, an online learning website owned by the UK’s Open University and the Seek Group of employment and education businesses, can earn degree credits for the OU’s online MBA.

They get the credit if they buy a £62 certificate of achievement from FutureLearn for each course, then pay and pass a £540 OU assessment module.

Terry O’Sullivan, senior lecturer in management in the OU’s faculty of business and law, says the initiative, launched in 2016, enables students to test-drive the MBA with minimal financial risk. “Online courses are like a shop window to see what the university offers,” he says.

Other schools are introducing online courses for students with less business experience that act as a primer for an MBA. About 40 per cent of the MBA students who entered Harvard Business School in 2019 took at least one Credential of Readiness (CORE) course after being admitted. For most of them it was a requirement to start the MBA.

The CORE courses, online modules in economics, accounting and business analytics, are free for admitted students but otherwise collectively cost \$2,250.

They help students contribute during case discussions in the MBA, when they work as a group to analyse a corporate challenge. “CORE makes discussion more fruitful,” says Patrick Mullane, executive director of Harvard Business School Online.



Chioma Isiadinso: online is on the up

“It helps the person with no finance background talk intelligently and confidently about net present value alongside someone who worked at Goldman Sachs.”

He adds that CORE can set applicants apart, but it does not guarantee them admission. “It shows intellectual curiosity, ambition, commitment.”

Chioma Isiadinso, chief executive of Expertus, an admissions consultancy,

says admissions teams once viewed online courses as inferior to in-person training. This perception is changing as technology improves the digital learning experience.

Ms Isiadinso says 5G mobile networks are a “game-changer”, enabling more seamless interaction between online students with less delay.

At Imperial College Business School in London, admitted MBA students can take free online courses in maths, finance, data analysis and accounting.

Leila Guerra, associate dean, says the classes have broadened the range of backgrounds on the MBA, adding doctors and artists. “They would not otherwise meet the admissions criteria, as they have no business experience,” she says. Their experience in other areas, though, benefits the course, with diverse perspectives enhancing group discussions.

The iMBA gave Mr Rivers the confidence to switch careers. He moved to Dallas in Texas, where he investigates collisions involving city-owned vehicles. Mr Rivers plans to apply for business

administration jobs in the private sector when he graduates this year.

But some schools have struggled to convert students from online courses to degrees. In 2017, the Thunderbird School of Global Management, which is owned by Arizona State University, launched a “MicroMasters” in global business leadership, an online course on the edX platform.

It grants academic credit towards a digital masters degree in applied leadership and management at Thunderbird. Yet to date only about 5 per cent of the 553 people who enrolled for the MicroMasters have done so for the masters, despite a \$9,000 discount on tuition fees through this route.

Sanjeev Khagram, dean at Thunderbird, is not concerned because the idea is to widen access through a relatively cheap taster course.

Some students are satisfied with the MicroMasters, he adds, and achieve their aims, whether a career switch, promotion or pay rise. For those who want to get ahead in business, online learning may be a win-win.

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Student profile

An online MBA helped Molly Laverty pursue a passion for sustainable coffee, writes *Amy Bell*

At harvest time in Nicaragua, trees are usually laden with coffee cherries at farms across the country, waiting to be picked. But these days, most of the coffee falls to the ground, wasted.

Coffee farmers have been hit so hard by low market prices in the past three years that it is no longer worth their while to harvest the crop. This, combined with political turmoil, means many coffee buyers are staying away.

"You just see coffee falling off the trees," says Molly Laverty, director of sustainability at Farmer Brothers, a Texas-based coffee company supplied by these farmers. "The market price is so low that they can't afford to hire seasonal workers to pick it."

The uncertainty farmers face each year is mostly driven by changing weather patterns and the volatility of the coffee market. Ms Laverty is working to address this, using the business skills she learnt in her online MBA degree to improve the sustainability of the coffee supply chain and build a stronger partnership between her company and the coffee growers.

"Through direct sourcing we can have longstanding buying arrangements with groups of farmers, and commit to a full year of production — letting them know how much we will need, what price we will pay, often with a premium on top of the regular rate, direct to the farmer, to incentivise selling," she says. The goal is to ensure the company has a reliable supply and that the farmers continue growing coffee.

Having built up expertise in different supply chain and sustainability roles at Farmer Brothers, Ms Laverty realised that an MBA would enable her to "get a grasp on the financial and supply chain concepts that drive our business, and help me perform my job better". In 2018 she enrolled in the online MBA at the



Ask a busy woman:
Molly Laverty says fitting her course around work and other commitments required 'a real lifestyle adjustment'
Cooper Neill

University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler Business School.

In January, a month after completing the two-year online course, Ms Laverty took on additional responsibility for the company's commodities hedging function. She now speaks directly with customers about the risks involved with the coffee market and hedges on their behalf, confident that she has gained the technical expertise and financial tools to back her knowledge of the market.

"I would not have been able to have those types of conversations with our financial partners about the details — how the hedging will work, how we track it, how it gets charged — without the MBA," she says.

Now aged 32, she joined Farmer Brothers in 2009 straight out of university, initially as a Spanish translator to help the company set up programmes with coffee farmers.

"It was a fun entrance into the coffee world," says Ms Laverty, whose undergraduate degree was in Spanish literature and anthropology.

Travelling to coffee farms, from central and south America to Africa and Indonesia, sparked an interest in sustainability. "I started seeing the real impact of environmental sustainability on coffee growing conditions and the volatility of the coffee market on a farming family's ability to predict what their income will be."

Finding an MBA course with a focus on sustainable business seemed a logical step. She already knew she wanted to keep working full-time while studying, rather than taking two years out, and Kenan-Flagler's course was the only one she came across that covered sustainable enterprises. "That really sealed it for me," she recalls.

"I liked that I could get the same degree as if I were on campus; it wasn't a special online degree, but just their regular MBA."

The finance, accounting and business modelling courses proved most valuable, though Ms Laverty had been nervous beforehand about taking these subjects. "What I do day-to-day is very

'It has given me the financial acumen to make my case to the board'

open-ended and strategic, there's no right or wrong — so sitting and working through a problem in a finance class was an interesting mental exercise for me."

Getting to grips with business terminology — such as "how ebitda is calculated, or what discount rate we're using when we are making long-term capital decisions" — has already proved useful in her work.

"It has made me understand our business so much better," she says. "It has shown me how to approach the investments I want to make, and given me the financial acumen to make my case to senior leadership and the board."

Ms Laverty initially worried that it would be harder to build strong connections with her classmates on an online programme than on a campus course, but this was not the case. "The community at UNC feels really close, because we are all making more of an effort — we're not seeing each other every day."

Students in the online cohort had lectures to watch and assignments to complete each week, logging into live classes via video. LinkedIn and Facebook groups helped Ms Laverty to get to know her classmates, but the programme also required at least two in-person meetings. One of these took place in Helsinki and Tallinn, giving the students insights into Baltic business culture.

Ms Laverty says the course involved "a real lifestyle adjustment", with five to six hours per week of lectures and other work, plus two to three hours of live classes, all to be fitted in after work or during the weekend.

Meanwhile she bought a house with her partner and became stepmother to two girls. Other students faced similar challenges. "We had breastfeeding mothers, babies waking up during the night," she says. "All the professors understood that life was happening around the demands of the course."

Ms Laverty says the MBA has added an extra layer of credibility to her skills and experience. It has already opened up opportunities to expand into strategy, the supply chain and operations, but sustainability will remain at the heart of her work.

"It's a personal passion of mine, and it's becoming more and more relevant in the business environment," she says.

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Sometimes the smartest strategy is a matter of luck

MASTERCLASS

Chengwei Liu

An MBA can boost your salary, your connections and your career prospects — but what will you actually learn? In an occasional series, we showcase the work of teachers at top-ranked business schools.

At one point in *Moneyball*, Michael Lewis' book on the improbable winning run of the Oakland A's in the early 2000s, Billy Beane, general manager of the underfunded baseball outfit, makes a surprising declaration. His statistical analysis doesn't work in the play-offs, he says — that's down to luck.

He uses more colourful language, but the point is that Beane is aware that, for all his ingenuity in identifying undervalued players, luck or randomness is an inescapable factor in baseball, as it is in all walks of life.

Yet luck played a part in the story in more ways than one. *Moneyball* is often portrayed as a triumph of data analysis, but that is not sufficient to explain the success of the A's, because data on players as well as the techniques for crunching it had been publicly available for decades. What helped swing things Beane's way was his rivals' tendency to reach too soon for luck as an explanation for performance.

Over many years, scouts and team managers had built up stereotypes about what good players looked like. Competent but counter-stereotypical players such as the "submarine pitcher" Chad Bradford were underestimated because managers concluded that their successes had to be down to mere luck. Such biases — and the consequent misattribution of luck — protected these "hidden gems" from discovery until Beane's statistical approach cut through to the facts.

The result was a team that could take on the giants of the sport and reach the play-offs four seasons running. Thanks to Lewis's book, Beane's strategy has become widespread across baseball and has filtered into other sports.

This contrarian approach can be used in business as well, where strategy and behavioural science can be combined to exploit irrational biases. I



The lowdown: 'submarine pitcher' Chad Bradford was undervalued by talent-sporters
Getty

call this "analytical behavioural strategy": it consists in drawing on behavioural science to search for contrarian opportunities, and then using data analysis to formulate an exploitation strategy.

For instance, most people don't anticipate regression to the mean — that is, that the exceptional will probably be followed by the average. This, though, is the likeliest outcome whenever a business's performance — in terms of sales, say — is not entirely under the control of those in charge.

A great performance may suggest that managers are doing a great job, but it's more likely to arise from fortunate timing — luck. By definition, luck is not going to persist: the business's future performance will regress downward to the mean. A good contrarian strategist looks for evidence that rivals are not mindful of this.

Take "top CEOs", for example — specifically the annual top 30 list compiled by Barron's magazine. When I analysed the 2005-10 line-ups in terms of how the companies they led performed, a clear, inverted V-shape

A great performance may suggest that managers are doing a great job, but it's more likely to be luck

pattern emerged: the performance (as measured by factors such as sales growth, profitability and stock price) improved before the CEO made the list, but plummeted afterwards.

The usual explanations for such decline include complacency or hubris on the part of the CEO. A simpler explanation, however, is that the CEOs

were never that special in the first place. It was luck that enabled them to attract unwarranted attention after successes. And it was (bad) luck that made many of them attract unwarranted blame after failures.

A contrarian strategist can profit from rivals' "luck biases" in at least two ways: short sell and buy low. A salient success is rarely sustainable but the market usually believes otherwise. Consider the 50 companies featured in three of the most popular business bestsellers of the past 40 years: *In Search of Excellence*, *Good to Great* and *Built to Last*. Of the 50, 16 failed within five years after the books in which they starred were published, and 23 became mediocre as they underperformed in the S&P 500 index.

Next time you browse the business bestsellers section, pay attention to the companies featured. Instead of trying to emulate them, as your rivals may do, you should make these "role models" your target for short selling.

On the other hand, opportunities also lurk in the "regression upward" that often follows a notable failure. A common reaction to failure is to find scapegoats and fire them — as many ex-CEOs and sports coaches can attest. Nevertheless, the more extreme the failure, the less we should attribute it to the person, and the more to the system. Otherwise we create an opportunity for the shrewd contrarian, who can step in and hire the scapegoat.

Businesses that are aware of these biases are better placed than those that aren't. Fortune favours the strategist with a clear-eyed view of luck.

Chengwei Liu is associate professor of strategy and behavioural science at Warwick Business School and ESMT Berlin and author of 'Luck, A Key Idea for Business and Society' (Routledge)



Margaret Franklin
CFA chief on the
'hardest exams' in
the world
PAGE 4

Coronavirus puts funds to the test

Asset managers restrict business trips amid falling share prices and rising risk of recession

CHRIS FLOOD, ATTRACTA MOONEY,
SIOBHAN RIDING AND PETER SMITH

A violent correction across global markets battered investment managers last week as the rapid spread of coronavirus caused severe disruption to business activity worldwide.

Asset managers suffered accelerating fund outflows, hefty share price falls and operational challenges to their client-facing work as companies banned travel to the countries worst hit by the virus.

Share prices of asset management companies were hammered, with FTSE 100 group M&G down nearly a fifth over the past week, with Standard Life Aberdeen and Schroders off about 15 per cent.

In the US, BlackRock and Invesco each plunged 18 per cent in a week, with T Rowe Price and Franklin Resources falling 14 per cent.

"The risk of global recession is rising," said Michael Hartnett, chief investment strategist at Bank of America Merrill Lynch. The bank expects worldwide corporate earnings per share to shrink 3.5 per cent this year and global economic growth to slow to 2.8 per cent, the lowest since 2009.

Vanguard has banned business travel to nine countries including Italy, China, Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore. Staff who return from these locations must work remotely for 14 days.

Fidelity International banned all travel between countries, except for "business-critical meetings" and



where possible has swapped external meetings for video or conference calls.

Schroders has restricted business trips to Italy, mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, Thailand, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea and Taiwan. Split working arrangements have been introduced into offices in Asia and Milan that allow remote working. "Schroders will be able to operate business as usual, should working remotely become a greater necessity," the FTSE 100 manager said. Standard Life Aberdeen has introduced "tag team" arrangements

in Asia where groups of staff work in the office one week and from home the next. The Edinburgh-based manager said it had received frequent "self-declaration" requests to ask if its workers had visited an infected area for 14 days before meetings could be agreed with multiple organisations.

Italy's largest investment conference, which was scheduled for this month, has been postponed. More than 10,000 people usually attend the Salone del Risparmio in Milan, an event which brings financial advisers together with Italy's asset managers and international groups such as

JPMorgan and Goldman Sachs. "The inconvenience involved in postponing is significant, but we have decided to adopt maximum prudence," said Fabio Galli from the Italian trade association Assogestioni.

Generali and Eurizon, the two largest Italian asset managers, have cancelled meetings, events and business trips, and asked staff to use video conferencing technology instead. Both companies are encouraging employees in the Italian cities and towns affected by the virus outbreak to work from home. Amundi, the Paris-based manager with a large Italian

workforce, is allowing working from home and has asked employees to refrain from travelling for business either within Italy or internationally.

Atlanta-based Invesco has cancelled off-site events mainly in the Asia Pacific region. Staff in Singapore and Hong Kong have been working from home for more than month. Invesco's offices in Japan, Italy and Taiwan have not so far directed staff to work from home.

Janus Henderson and Columbia Threadneedle imposed bans on all travel to coronavirus hit areas in Europe and Asia.



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NEWS

Fund houses demand action on diversity

LEADERSHIP

Columbia Threadneedle and RBC GAM target lack of women at the top

ATTRACTA MOONEY

Columbia Threadneedle and RBC Global Asset Management are stepping up their efforts to improve gender diversity at public companies, pledging to vote against board directors of businesses that are failing to promote women to top jobs.

RBC GAM said it would vote against all members of the nominating or governance committees at the annual meetings of businesses where women did not make up a quarter of the board under new plans for the upcoming annual meeting season. The policy will apply in the US, Canada, the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand.

This will pit the asset manager against businesses such as JPMorgan, where women make up 18 per cent of the board, and Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway (21 per cent). Other big companies that fail to hit the 25 per cent hurdle include Comcast, PepsiCo and Pfizer, according to ISS ESG, a division of Institutional Shareholder Services.

Columbia Threadneedle, the \$494bn asset manager, is planning to target companies with a lack of women in senior leadership, an extension of its policy against diversity laggards.

Iain Richards, head of responsible investment at Columbia Threadneedle, said it would vote against the chair of the nomination committee

at FTSE 350 companies that it believes are too slow at addressing a lack of women in leadership. It is the first time a big asset manager has publicly taken such a tough stance.

"We are focusing on the laggards. These are the ones we need to send a wake-up call to," he said.

A report from the Hampton Alexander Review, an independent body, last year found that British companies including tobacco businesses Imperial Brands and British American Tobacco, Reckitt Benckiser, the consumer goods company behind Dettol, miners Glencore and Antofagasta, travel business Carnival and the beleaguered NMC Health were among the poorest performers in terms of women holding executive roles or reporting directly to the executive committee.

Clare Payn of the 30% Club Investor Group, which advocates for more women in business, said the research for diverse boards is compelling. A study last year by Credit Suisse found that companies with more women in senior management yield superior returns. "It's not just the right thing to do, it's also the best thing for a business," she said.

A separate report from the Hampton Alexander Review this year found that women now make up 33 per cent of all FTSE 100 board members, up from 12.5 per cent less than a decade ago. According to ISS ESG about a third of companies in the S&P 500 have less than 25 per cent women on their boards, down from nearly two-thirds in 2016.



Dick Weil's \$8.4m pay, though down on the \$9m he earned in 2018, came despite an 11 per cent plunge in the group's shares

Janus Henderson chief paid bumper \$8m

SIOBHAN RIDING

Janus Henderson's chief executive earned \$8.4m in total pay despite presiding over \$27.4bn of investor outflows and an 11 per cent tumble in the fund group's share price last year.

The bumper reward for Dick Weil came after a brutal year for active asset managers, whose high fees and patchy performance has come under renewed scrutiny following the Neil Woodford investment group scandal.

Janus Henderson was one of hardest hit by the investor exodus from active funds last year, ranking as one of the worst-selling groups globally according to data provider

Morningstar. The dual US-Australia-listed fund group awarded Mr Weil \$7.4m in bonus payments on top of his \$725,000 base salary and \$49,000 in benefits and pension. He also received \$223,421 in relocation benefits after he moved from Denver to London in 2017. Mr Weil had already taken home \$612,670 in relocation benefits for the previous two years.

Janus Henderson said in its annual report that its financial results "fell short of expectations" in 2019, when operating income fell 13 per cent.

Buoyant equity markets helped to increase assets under management to \$374.8bn, masking the impact of net withdrawals, which

were up by half from the previous year.

Mr Weil's total pay was down from the \$9m he received in 2018. However, his total package dwarfs the average pay packets awarded to his European asset management peers.

Amundi's Yves Perrier received \$3.5m in total pay for 2018, while Mark Zinkula, until recently CEO of Legal & General Investment Management, took home \$3.2m. The

[Dick Weil's] package dwarfs the average pay packets awarded to his asset management peers

groups have not yet disclosed executive pay for 2019.

The metrics Janus Hender-

son used to calculate Mr Weil's pay in 2019 were investment excellence, financial results and strategic progress.

The company pointed to the fact that 76 and 77 per cent of its assets under management outperformed their benchmarks over three and five years respectively. It said that it achieved "numerous strategic objectives", including recruiting talented professionals, building a "one firm" culture and delivering good service to investors.

Luke Hildyard, executive director of the High Pay Centre, said that in addition to raising moral questions, Mr Weil's \$8.4m pointed to a lack of alignment between pay and performance.

Ex-Woodford fund shrivels by 12%

OWEN WALKER

The former Neil Woodford fund taken over by Standard Life Aberdeen has shrunk by more than a tenth in the fortnight since it reopened to trading.

The ASI Income Focus fund was suspended in October after Mr Woodford dramatically resigned as manager and closed his business.

SLA began managing the portfolio at the start of the year and the suspension was lifted on February 13. Since then the fund has reduced from £251m to £220m — a 12 per cent contraction — on the back of client withdrawals and share price falls.

The fund has been hit by the global market sell-off, sparked by fears over the spreading coronavirus.

"It is only two weeks since the fund reopened and we invest with a three to five-year view, so we should be careful not to draw too many conclusions on early performance," said Charles Luke, a co-manager of the fund. He added the scale of outflow had been relatively limited so far.

The fund has suffered £8.3m of net outflows since it reopened, while it has lost 7.3 per cent due to market moves over the same period, compared to an average 6.8 per cent fall for the rest of its peer group, according to Morningstar and

FE Fundinfo. The figures are based on Thursday close prices and do not factor in market falls on Friday.

When Mr Luke and Thomas Moore, another SLA manager, took over the fund, they set about repositioning the portfolio with their favoured companies, focused on liquid UK income stocks. But among the fund's top ten holdings are several businesses that have been particularly badly hit by the roiling markets.

Shares of Tui, the Anglo-German travel group, have fallen more than 30 per cent in the past two weeks after a Tenerife hotel used by the agency was put on lockdown when an Italian doctor tested positive.

Tui was the eighth largest holding in Income Focus when it reopened, making up 3.3 per cent of the portfolio.

Other top 10 holdings in the fund — including Babcock International, the engineering group, and Inchcape, a car distribution company, as well as lenders OneSavings Bank and Close Brothers — have suffered share price falls of 10-15 per cent over the past fortnight.

Mr Woodford launched Income Focus in 2017 and it initially grew to a high of £742m. But by the time Mr Woodford was forced to suspend his flagship Equity Income fund last June, Income Focus had shrunk to just over £500m.

FTfm

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ANALYSIS

Investors pressed on private jail holdings

Abuse issue has come back to the centre of political debate as US presidential election draws closer

LEKE OSO ALABI

Asset managers and pension funds are being confronted with tough questions about their investments in US private prison providers, as the issue re-emerges as a hot political topic in the race for the White House.

Human rights abuses in private prisons and migrant detention centres have galvanised campaign groups, which have called for asset managers such as Vanguard, BlackRock and Fidelity to divest from CoreCivic and Geo, the largest operators of US private prisons and migrant detention centres.

In the aftermath of the 2016 presidential elections, banks including Wells Fargo and JPMorgan Chase were criticised for the lines of credit they provided to private prisons. Both banks have now cut ties with the sector. The issue has come back to the fore in the Democratic party primaries for this year's US election, with candidates criticising Michael Bloomberg for his campaign's use of prison labour.

Democratic candidates Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Pete Buttigieg and Joe Biden have all criticised the industry on the campaign trail. In October, California became the first state in America to ban private prisons.

New York became the first big US city pension fund to divest fully from private prison companies in 2017. The sector is "financially risky and morally bankrupt", according to Scott Stringer, New York City comptroller.

"This industry's business model is fundamentally premised on taking criminal justice backwards, and their reported human rights abuses pose enormous long-term financial and reputational risks to our pension fund portfolio," he says.

Last year the deaths of children at migrant detention centres drew attention to the racially charged issues of criminal justice reform and US immigration. Advocacy group SumOfUs started an online petition that asked investors to demand that Vanguard and Fidelity divest from the private prison groups.

SumOfUs says it focused its campaign on Fidelity and Vanguard because of their size and the influence that their actions could have on other asset managers.

A previous campaign by SumOfUs and Leadnow, another advocacy group, which targeted the C\$392bn (\$295bn) Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, clocked up more than 55,000 signatures. Campaigners also spoke out against CPPIB's investments in private prisons at the pension board's public meetings in Van-



Human rights abuses in private prisons have galvanised activist groups, which carried out a campaign against BlackRock chief Larry Fink, below
Sue Ogrski/AP



couver and Toronto. The CPPIB subsequently divested from CoreCivic and Geo, but a spokesperson for the scheme says the decision was not in response to the campaign.

BlackRock, the second-largest shareholder in both CoreCivic and Geo, has also been targeted by campaigners. Last year Art Space Sanctuary, an artist-driven initiative, carried out a campaign against New York's Museum of Modern Art focused on one of its trustees, Larry Fink, the chief executive of BlackRock.

The group sent a letter calling on MoMA to demand BlackRock divest from the private prison operators or for Mr Fink to step down as a trustee. It was signed by more than 220 artists, academics and curators, including art critic Hal Foster and artist Andrea Fraser.

The pressure from campaigners on asset managers already appears to be paying off. Fidelity has sold its Geo stock, and owns just 1.5 per cent of CoreCivic having been a top 10 shareholder last year. The fund manager denies this was a response to client pressure, but says it considers "social responsibility" when structuring its investment portfolios.

Vanguard – which is

the largest shareholder in CoreCivic and Geo – describes the immigration crisis at the US-Mexico border as "deeply saddening", but adds that "this troubling issue needs to be solved by our elected officials".

Vanguard says private prisons make up a "very modest portion" of its funds' portfolios, which were largely held in index funds. The fund manager owns shares worth \$306m in CoreCivic and \$335m in Geo, according to S&P Capital IQ, the data provider.

Last year the California Public Employees' Retirement System, which manages \$373bn on behalf of 2m members, divested from both private prison operators.

Calpers told FTfm the decision was made solely on investment grounds, following a comprehensive review of the plan's holdings, which resulted in 217 companies being ditched. Calpers said the review was based on considerations including materiality, liquidity, geography and governance rights.

Emily Goldman, founder and director of ESG Transparency Initiative, an advocacy group, says the decision taken by Calpers and others reflects a wider shift within the industry.

"I'm cautiously optimistic that we're seeing a couple interlinked trends: pension fund divestment from for-profit prisons; and a fundamental shift in the evolving standard of fiduciary duty based on greater – often implicit – recognition of the

financial materiality of environmental, social and governance issues."

In January, the Rhode Island public pension fund announced that it would become the latest to divest from for-profit prisons. This followed similar moves in recent years by the Philadelphia Board of Pensions and Retirees, the New York State Common Retirement Fund, the Chicago Teachers' Pension Fund, the New Jersey Pension Fund and the California State Teachers' Retirement System.

The Oregon State Treasury, which manages the \$81bn Oregon Public Employees Retirement Fund on behalf of nearly 375,000 current and former public employees, has retained small investments in CoreCivic and Geo. But it is showing its displeasure with the prison providers as a shareholder.

In January, Oregon state treasurer Tobias Read and attorney-general Ellen Rosenblum wrote to CoreCivic and Geo. They accused the directors of the companies of breaching their fiduciary duties by failing to provide "safe, humane detention centres".

Geo told FTfm that the letter was "clearly a politically motivated portrayal of our company based on a false narrative and deliberate mischaracterisation of our role as a long-standing government services provider".

CoreCivic says it appreciates the opportunity to engage with all of its stakeholders, "including those who own stock in the company".

This industry's business model is premised on taking criminal justice backwards

FACE TO FACE MARGARET FRANKLIN

CFA chief on the ‘hardest exams’ in the world

INTERVIEW

Franklin says there is no easy solution to low rates and an ageing population

ATTRACTA MOONEY

Margaret Franklin, the new head of the CFA Institute, failed her first round of tests when studying to become a chartered financial analyst. She sat the first part of the CFA exams in 1994 as a new mother of a one-month-old boy. “I fell asleep in the morning exam. I thought I’d put my head down for just a moment and woke up significantly later, and did not pass my first level,” she says. Although few will have made what she describes as an “insane” decision to take the test as a new mother, she is not alone when it comes to failing the CFA exams, which have been dubbed the world’s hardest. Only about 40 per cent pass the first level of the exams, which are widely taken across the asset management industry. Fewer than one in five go on to receive the charter, which Ms Franklin was awarded in 1997. It is a hard test, the chief of the association for investment professionals concedes. “For many programmes the difficult part is getting into the programme. The material and content, oftentimes, is not nearly as difficult as the entry. “For us, anybody can take it, but the actual programme itself is difficult and rigorous.” The 54-year-old took the job as chief executive of the CFA Institute, whose research arm publishes the respected Financial Analysts Journal, last September. She is the first woman to hold the position in the body’s 73-year history and she has spent much of the past six months flying around the world. Over coffee at the Ned, London’s hotspot for business meetings, Ms Franklin says she is worried about her carbon footprint. Small, lively and warm, she leans into the conversations in a way that gives the impres-



Tony Healey/FT

CV	
Born	May 1965 Ottawa
Total pay	not disclosed
Education	1987 BA in economics, McMaster University, Ontario 1997 CFA Charter
Career	1992-96 State Street Global Advisors, client relationship associate 1996-97 Mercer Investment Consulting, investment consultant 1997-00 Barclays Global Investors, principal (defined benefit) 2000-02 Altamira, managing director (institutional asset management) 2002-10 KJ Harrison & Partners, partner 2010-16 Marret Asset Management, president (Marret Private Wealth) and CFO 2016-19 BNY Mellon Wealth Management, head of North America, and president, Canada

sion that she is taking the listener into her inner circle. As the conversation progresses she bats away requests for minute details, instead focusing on her overall argument. Her appointment comes at a time of change for the CFA and the wider investment industry. The CFA’s charter programme has been hugely successful, but a battle for talent between finance and technology and a changing investment landscape is driving a rethink at the Charlottesville-based non-profit. “We’re in really interesting times,” the Canadian native says. “Nobody practising right now has any playbook for this. Forty years ago, we were dealing with extraordinary inflation, largely through the energy markets and, for a long period of time, you had declining inflation, declining interest rates, and growing GDP, and that is the perfect trifecta for all assets to do well. “And whether we’re at the end of it or the tailing end of it, this is going to be a very challenging time,” she says. “People living for longer and lower-for-longer returns, that’s a pretty interesting mathematical equation.” She cites an example from her own family of the challenge facing the industry. Her father-in-law started his teaching career aged 21 and

retired at 50. Now aged 94, he has been drawing his pension from the Ontario Teachers’ Pension Plan for more years than he worked. Pension funds were never set up to operate this way, she says. “It’s a maths problem for which there may not be an investment solution. And that’s why the complexity of what we’re dealing with requires really, really good people at the table. It requires deep thinking.” The CFA’s job is to “capture those changing dynamics” and incorporate them into its flagship exams and into life-long learning, she says. As part of this, the organisation has been piling resources into developing post-charter education. It spent the past 18 months looking at the main jobs in the investment industry in order to develop a new competency-based further education framework, which will be launched this year. The conversation turns to Ms Franklin’s experience as a woman in fund management. A former competitive road cyclist, she worked at Barclays Global Investors when the chief executive was Patricia Dunn, one of the best-known female asset management bosses. “That, for me, is a normal ecosystem and it has had a lasting imprint on me.” Reflecting on almost three decades

CFA Institute
Established 1947
Assets n/a
Employees 658
Headquarters Charlottesville
Ownership member organisation

in the industry, however, she says there were times when being a woman meant missed promotions and pay discrepancies. She cites an example of where a male employee she managed was awarded a similar bonus to her, with the justification that “he has a family to support”. Now, she says, more and more businesses are thinking about diversity and tackling biases. As part of a CFA initiative, 20 asset managers are trialling various strategies to improve diversity and inclusion in their businesses. Like the majority of the fund industry, the CFA is also looking to tap into growing demand for environmental, social and governance investing. The organisation launched a working group aimed at developing a taxonomy and standards for ESG investing, akin to the widely used global investment performance standards known as GIPS. More than 200 people applied to be on the working group. She says the asset management industry is increasingly waking up to ESG risks, particularly when it comes to climate change, where there are growing fears that the shift to a lower carbon economy could hit the valuations of some assets. “You can see that Minsky moment when the market turns and pays attention to it, and there’s an immediate and material repricing of assets. And if your portfolio analysis and your due diligence and your research did not consider that, I think for most managers . . . that would create a problem.” The CFA’s focus on ESG comes as younger people increasingly say they want to work in careers that make a difference. At the same time, the number of students sitting the upcoming CFA exams in June is expected to fall by more than 5 per cent, after a rapid rise during the past three years. As well as ensuring clients’ cash is not put at risk, the growing focus on the environment will play a role in helping ensure the finance industry is an attractive place to work for young people, says Ms Franklin. “We have a part to play in restoring the nobility of what we’re doing. At the end of the day, the financial system is not going away, asset management is not going away. It is a necessary activity, and done well can contribute so much to innovation, to financial security for citizens.”



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THE BIG PICTURE



Private debt frenzy reaches \$800bn

Senior figures warn market looks frothy with too much capital chasing too few deals, write *Siobhan Riding and Robin Wigglesworth*

Private debt has become one of the hot topics for fund managers desperate to build a fee-rich asset class at a time when their traditional businesses are struggling. But even industry insiders are now warning that the boom in private debt is turning into a frenzy.

Once a niche area of the global asset management industry, assets invested in private debt – largely made up of non-bank loans to unlisted companies – reached a record \$812bn in 2019, putting the market on track to break through the \$1tn barrier within the next year.

The number of asset managers operating in the field also reached a new high last year, totalling 1,764, more than double the amount five years earlier, according to consultancy Preqin.

The main managers competing for assets were historically US private equity groups with credit arms, such as KKR and Blackstone. But more mainstream fund groups, including M&G, Schroders, Amundi and Standard Life Aberdeen, have made forays into the market in recent years, eager to take advantage of healthy investor appetite.

Private debt is moving into the mainstream as investors hunt for higher yield. Its growth has been spurred by banks quitting the market when they rationalised their loan books to meet tougher capital rules.

“Sovereign wealth funds and large state pensions were among the earliest adopters, but increasingly the rest of the institutional investor world has followed suit,” says Ji-Eun Kim, head of private asset manager solutions at Schroders.

“Private debt’s . . . enhanced cash yields are especially attractive in a low-return environment.”

However, a growing chorus of senior figures are voicing fears that the market is looking frothy as too much capital chases too few deals.

“It would be crazy to start a private debt business right now,” says a former senior private debt executive. Another senior private capital fund manager thinks the asset class is in bubble territory. “We see the same movie happen every time. When too much money goes into one place the outcome isn’t great.”

Vulnerabilities are being exposed. In February, Hadrian’s Wall Secured Investments, a listed fund that lent money to UK small and medium-sized companies, said it was winding down its business after warning of “material” losses on investments in two biomass companies.

Preqin data show that over the past four years 327 direct lending funds, the most common type of private credit strategy, have been raised, with about \$207bn flowing into the strategies.

At the same time, dry powder, the amount raised for direct lending but

not invested, is at a record \$112bn. Dry powder for all private credit, including strategies such as distressed and mezzanine debt in addition to direct lending, stands at \$261bn, a figure which is down slightly on the year before but still represents the second-highest level on record.

The capital raising frenzy, combined with competition among lenders, is damaging returns and loan condition standards are suffering. Jaime Prieto of Kartesia, an asset manager that lends to SMEs, says that some managers are yielding to pressures by agreeing to weaker loan terms and looser covenants.

“The huge amount of capital floating around means that it is inevitable there will be some deterioration in credit quality,” says the former senior executive. He says mounting leverage across private assets is evidence that problems are building up as they did in the run-up to the subprime mortgage market crisis.

Mariano Belinky, chief executive of Santander Asset Management, which set up a private debt unit last year, says that more problems are coming

down the track. He highlights the spate of bumper fund launches as an area of concern. Last year a private debt fund managed by BlueBay Asset Management raised €6bn, while a vehicle from BNY Mellon subsidiary Alcentra closed at €5.5bn, nearly double its minimum target.

“How do you deploy that capital at scale?” he asks. “As the asset class keeps heating up, a lot of these managers will have a tougher time finding good deals.”

Other industry executives warn that the cracks now on show will become much wider when the market cycle turns.

Nicholas Brooks, head of investment research at Intermediate Capital Group, the £42.6bn specialist credit manager, says rising markets over the past decade have masked problems lurking under the surface. “There are probably a number of newer players that are lending unwisely but we won’t know until we get to the next downturn.”

There are also concerns that some fund groups have jumped on the private debt bandwagon without the skills to fully understand the risks of the loans they provide.

“As managers raise bigger funds, the question becomes can they originate big enough loans and do they have teams of experienced people to sort things out when problems arise,” says Paul Shea, co-founder of specialist SME loan manager Beechbrook.

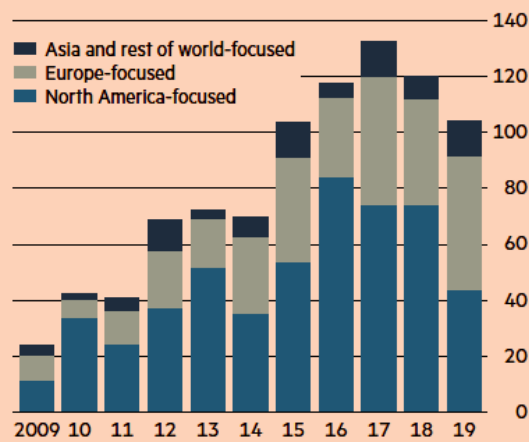
\$112bn
Direct lending funds’ level of dry powder, the amount raised but not invested

€6bn
Amount raised last year by a private debt fund managed by BlueBay

THE BIG PICTURE

Private debt funds raise record sums

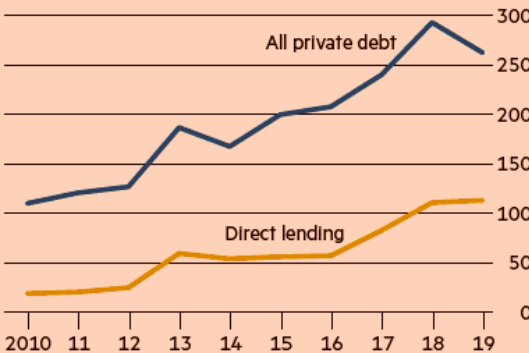
Aggregate capital raised by private debt funds (\$bn)



Source: Preqin

Plenty of dry powder in the market

\$bn



Source: Preqin

Mr Belinky says Santander AM’s private debt unit, which benefits from access to its parent bank’s origination pipeline, has been approached by groups that are struggling to find deals by themselves.

“Managers have come in and said ‘Hey, we’ll buy 50 per cent of whatever you originate’. That gives you a sense of how managers have limited access to good deals.”

But Ken Kencel, chief executive of Churchill Asset Management, which examined 800 potential deals last year, takes a different view, arguing ample opportunities abound.

He says credit quality is holding up, particularly at the upper end of the market where fewer managers compete. Competition has been acute among those looking to arrange loans for small and midsize companies.

Mr Kencel says that the groups that are able to write bigger cheques to corporates are still in a minority and will flourish in the coming years.

But writing big cheques is also risky, making it even more important for fund managers to have large teams of professionals tasked with monitoring the loans they have made.

Established private debt managers that benefit from revenue streams from existing funds can afford to finance this. But newcomers may take years before they turn a profit considering the high costs of arranging private loans and the fact that many groups earn management fees

based on the amount of money they have invested, rather than raised.

Many believe the market is set for a wave of consolidation in which smaller and less specialist groups will be squeezed out or merge with competitors. Investors are increasingly gravitating towards more established managers with larger funds; according to Preqin, the 10 biggest funds that closed last year accounted for 36 per cent of new capital raised.

Mr Belinky says that some managers are already conceding defeat. When his company was recruiting for

a new private debt team last year, it received applications from professionals whose previous employer had been forced to close their private debt funds because they failed to find enough companies to lend to. “When we interviewed them, they said they had commitments from investors and were ready to go but just couldn’t find enough assets to put the capital to work,” he says.

In January, Swedish private equity firm EQT said it was considering offloading its €3.9bn credit arm to focus on its core business. M&A activ-

ity is already under way among specialist direct lending entities in the US known as business development companies or BDCs. Crescent Capital last year acquired Alcentra’s BDC, taking its portfolio to \$923m.

“In a more challenged credit environment, some of the smaller shops are going to find it hard to service their portfolio and have the resources needed to deal with restructuring their portfolios,” says Mr Kencel. “Rather than spending significant time working through these problems, some are likely to opt to sell.”



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‘As the asset class keeps heating up, a lot of these managers will have a tougher time finding good deals’

OPINION

US ‘energy dominance’ is not based on reality

LAST WORD

John Dizard



We can all relax now. Anyone who has a stake in US energy and climate policy no longer needs to follow the primaries, or even the final returns. The political debate is not connected to the material reality. So ignore it, like the brief waking memory of a bad dream.

Start with one of the pillars of the Trump administration’s re-election campaign, the assertion of US “energy dominance” of the world. Forget the baroque psychosexual undertones of the slogan. Just consider what is happening to the prospects for US liquefied natural gas exports. None of those exports, by the way, are going through terminals that started construction under this administration.

Thanks in part to the economic impact of the coronavirus, Asian LNG prices have collapsed much faster than US prices. That means it no longer pays to chill American natural gas, load it on to LNG tankers, ship it across the Pacific, and re-gasify it. So US LNG exports are ex-growth.

Far from feeling “dominant”, US exploration and production companies are feeling the spike heel of bondholders’ demands for capital spending discipline grind into the once-



It no longer pays to ship US natural gas across the Pacific — Bloomberg

brave face they presented to Wall Street. They are tied up by contractual commitments to fill pipelines and processing plants and by their lenders’ austerity.

I think the Trump campaign and its allies can forget about bigger pledges from grateful E&P friends. They should be thankful not to be hit up for a refund on earlier cheques.

US coal plants will shut down, whatever the Trump administration thinks or does

On the Democratic side, the promises (of varying intensity) to “ban fracking” will be turned into toxic waste water after the fall elections, that is, if they survive the Pennsylvania and Texas primaries. The US signed its fracked-gas-generation deal back in the Bush and Obama administrations.

Given the high rates of depletion of shale gas wells, any significant restrictions on hydraulic fracturing would lead to the current gas surplus turning in to a shortage in less than an election cycle. Power prices would rise sharply.

Put a cap on those, using executive

magic, and you are back in the 2001 California blackouts. You could re-bankrupt PG&E, again, and do the same for many other utilities. Then who could use renewable energy contracts with the utilities to finance wind or solar projects? Oh, federal guarantees?

OK, so the guarantees would cover the engineering and planning costs for anyone proposing renewables projects. Does everyone get their own engineers? From where? And who would select the winners? Green New Deal enthusiasts who co-ordinated balloon releases at campaign rallies?

The enthusiasts are correct that the unit costs of power produced by wind turbines and solar panels have continued to decline. US coal plants will keep shutting down, whatever the Trump administration thinks or does.

The problem, though, is that renewables developers around the world are coming up against cost and planning barriers to connecting their generation to power grids. Those are more or less prohibitive depending on how well the energy transition has been planned, and the quality of the grid’s connections with flexible neighbouring generation.

Denmark expects to have a completely green grid by 2026. But then it is connected to hydro and nuclear power in Sweden and Norway.

On flimsier grids, or grids in the developing world, connectivity becomes expensive or administratively difficult when renewables take

as little as 20 or 25 per cent of market share. Transmission operators or national power authorities can insist that renewables projects pay not only for their direct connections, but to whatever upgrades are desired in the rest of the system. This can kill the economics.

In Argentina, low cost wind resources in Patagonia lack the high voltage lines to bring power north. The country does not have the foreign exchange to build them.

In Mexico, Cenace, the national grid operator, has decided to interrupt solar energy from European-financed projects rather than reduce output from dirty fossil power from government-owned turbines. The president’s appointee prefers the controllability of the legacy power’s product. The Europeans can sue Mexico, in Mexico, under Mexican law.

In California, solar projects are having record amounts of power “curtailed”, because the grid cannot make use of their output in the middle of the day.

Wind turbine and solar manufacturers, and cash-challenged advocates, believe needed transmission system upgrades should be paid for by “black molecule” generation, or, alternatively, the tax system. Most politicians would rather not choose sides.

US voters will not hear that debate this year. Instead “energy dominance” and “Green New Deal 2030”. Pathetic performance. Tune out. Stop worrying.

Fund houses face increasing regulation in cyber security battle

VIEWPOINT

Ben Watford

An arms race — unseen, digital and all too little understood — is raging. The UK’s chief of the defence staff, Nick Carter, recently stated that “the risk of cyber warfare with Russia is now a greater threat than terrorism”.

Companies are fighting to adapt to a reality where “hacktivists”, organised crime syndicates and state-sponsored groups attack IT infrastructure, raid databases and meddle in democratic elections. The internet was never designed to be secure, it was designed to be open. And while this open exchange has brought huge ben-

efits, it has also increased the attack surface. The hedge fund industry is particularly vulnerable. It is no secret that there is money in asset management and corresponding incentives for those willing to test an institution’s cyber defences. This fact is not lost on the industry’s participants, including traders who paid for access to a hacked Bank of England audio feed, hoping it would give them an edge in the moments before a press conference on interest rates.

What is more, while cyber attacks have historically been associated with the theft of sensitive data, high-profile digital heists — like the theft of \$81m from the Bank of Bangladesh — should alarm anyone feeling complacent about our digitised economy.

A new generation of attacks is anticipated to have a fundamental and systemic impact on financial markets and their infrastructure. Leaving aside the risk of financial loss

or system failure, fund managers can ill-afford the press coverage that comes with a breach of their control systems. Managers trade on their reputation for competence and an ability to inspire trust — poor cyber security calls both into question.

These risks have been apparent for some time, but as financial institutions struggle to keep up, regulators are stepping in. In the UK, the Financial Conduct Authority covers its requirements in its principles for businesses, with further information set out in the Senior Management Arrangements, Systems and Controls Sourcebook.

The key takeaway from these documents is that basic cyber security measures are in the rule book. There has been a particular focus on fundamental controls, because while the figures making attacks are increasingly sophisticated, many of their methods are not. Phishing emails

requesting sensitive data remain one of the most effective means of breaching systems, with hacking software widely available online.

Not every manager needs to be a software engineer, but good digital hygiene is a necessity: employ practical systems, make sure they are understood by their users and regularly review controls. These steps should become habitual, like brushing your teeth (or flossing).

The same close attention is vital for those outsourcing key functions. In May 2019, a UK retail bank was fined nearly £2m owing to perceived lax oversight of its outsourcing arrangements. There is no reason to expect that investment managers won’t be liable for the same harsh treatment.

Of course, risk cannot be eliminated and, when preventive measures fail, a real-time response is essential. In the UK the recurrence of IT failures and perceived risk to con-

sumers triggered a joint review by the FCA, the Prudential Regulation Authority and Bank of England in 2018. The signals coming from these bodies is clear: firms are expected to continue operating even if they become the target of a cyber attack.

Force majeure clauses make clients feel safer, but when it comes to cyber security, it is not enough to say that the attack was unanticipated. Cyber attacks are part of the furniture and the fund’s policies must reflect that.

Cyber security is not something that can be fixed once, and continual improvement is fast evolving from best practice to minimum requirement. Fund managers have long been fighting to keep pace with the cyber attackers. They now need to do so under an increasingly watchful regulatory eye.

The writer is a partner of Eversheds Sutherland, the law firm

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