

Catch up: South Korea's president lifts martial law; Syrian rebels advance



South Korea's president, Yoon Suk Yeol, said he would lift **martial law**, hours after [he declared it](#). People protesting against “dictatorship” outside parliament cheered the reversal. Lawmakers had voted to block Mr Yoon's move, which they deemed to be unconstitutional. The president had accused the opposition Democratic Party of sympathising with North Korea and banned “all political activities”.

Syrian rebels advanced towards **Hama**, a western city. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the Islamist group that launched a [surprise offensive](#) in north-west Syria last week, has now taken control of several towns in Hama province. In response Syrian and Russian air forces have carried out several strikes in the area, according to the organisation.

China banned the export to **America** of rare minerals used to make semiconductors and military equipment. [China](#) provides most of the world's supply of minerals that fall under the ban, which include gallium, germanium and antimony. On Monday President

Joe Biden placed limits on the sale of American-made high-bandwidth memory chips to more than 100 Chinese companies, a move China called “illegal”.

Ukraine’s foreign ministry said that the “only real guarantee of security” for the country was full NATO membership. The alliance’s foreign ministers are meeting in Brussels on Tuesday. [Ukraine](#) hopes NATO will issue it an invitation to join the bloc this week, although that seems unlikely. Many worry Donald Trump will impose a disastrous deal on Ukraine to stop the war.

Fatah, the main political faction in the West Bank, and **Hamas**, a militant group, reportedly reached an agreement to appoint about a dozen non-partisans to run post-war Gaza. [Israel](#) has said it does not want either group to have a role in the strip’s governance. Meanwhile Israel issued new evacuation orders in southern Gaza as it continues its bombardment of the enclave.

Speaking in **Angola**, President Joe Biden declared that **America** was “all in” on its relationship with Africa. Mr Biden’s visit to Angola—the first such trip by an American president—highlighted a \$3bn investment in a railway upgrade, with the goal of strengthening ties and combating China’s influence in the region. Donald Trump is expected to [follow his predecessor’s approach](#).

Truong My Lan, a **Vietnamese** property tycoon, lost her appeal against the death penalty. It is rare for women to be sentenced to death for white collar crimes in Vietnam. Ms Lan was sentenced in April for embezzling \$12bn from Saigon Commercial Bank. Her sentence could be commuted to life imprisonment if she returns three-quarters of the money she took.

Figure of the day: 1962, the last year when France’s National Assembly brought down a government. [Read the full story](#).

France's government on the edge



Michel Barnier's minority [government may collapse](#) on Wednesday when the French National Assembly votes on two motions of no confidence. Both were tabled on Monday in response to the prime minister's use of a constitutional provision to try to force a budget through parliament without a direct vote. Marine Le Pen's hard-right National Rally, which tabled one motion, says it will also back the other, tabled by the left-wing alliance.

The two blocs have the numbers to topple Mr Barnier. President Emmanuel Macron could ask him to stay on temporarily, while he searches for a replacement. This would enable the government to use special measures to continue spending at levels authorised by this year's budget, without inflation adjustments, into 2025. The last time Mr Macron lost a prime minister, in July, it took him two months to name a successor. This time the markets may not give him that luxury.

The new map of Syria



It has been a week since rebels launched a [surprise offensive](#) in northern Syria. They are consolidating their control of Aleppo, Syria's second city, from which Bashar al-Assad's regime has retreated. The insurgents have pushed back the [Syrian Democratic Forces](#) (SDF), an America-backed, mainly Kurdish militia that governs the north-east of the country.

The rebel advance has stopped on the northern outskirts of Hama, 120km south of Aleppo. Where it goes next will depend in part on geopolitics. Turkey is supporting the rebels. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan wants to push back the SDF, which Turkey considers a terrorist group, and wants Mr Assad to negotiate a deal that would allow Syrian refugees in Turkey to return home. The rout of the regime gives Mr Erdogan more leverage. And with Mr Assad's chief backers, Russia and Iran, embroiled in other wars, he is more isolated than ever.

Milei's lessons for Trump



On Wednesday the Conservative Political Action Conference, the premier talk-fest for conservative American lawmakers, hosts its first event in Argentina. Javier Milei, Argentina's president, is expected to speak alongside Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil's hard-right former president, and Lara Trump, co-chair of the Republican National Committee. Mr Milei, who gave an [interview](#) to *The Economist* last week, admires her father-in-law—he was the first leader to meet Donald Trump after his re-election.

But the populists meeting in Buenos Aires disagree about a lot. Mr Milei has cut public spending and red tape with promising results. Monthly inflation is down from 13% to 3%. Mr Trump also wants lower taxes and less regulation. But whereas America's president-elect is an enthusiastic protectionist, Mr Milei believes in open markets and free trade. He hates big budget deficits of the sort that Mr Trump is likely to run. [His experiment](#) is more promising than the one Mr Trump plans to conduct.

Trouble with the rouble



Over the past month [Russia's currency](#) has tumbled. At its lowest level one week ago the rouble was down by almost 13% against the dollar and by 11% against China's yuan. The immediate cause was the expanding of American sanctions on November 21st to cover Gazprombank, the largest Russian lender not previously subject to them. The restrictions come at a time when Russia's economy is showing signs of strain. Inflation is rising again and interest rates are now at their highest level since 2003.

A weaker rouble is a doubled-edged sword for the Kremlin. It increases the rouble value of oil exports, helping to contain the government's growing deficit. Yet it also pushes up the price of imported goods. China has become Russia's biggest trading partner in recent years, providing more than a third of all imports, as well as high-tech inputs that are crucial for the armed forces. After two years of good growth, 2025 might be tougher for Russia's economy.

SCOTUS tackles healthcare for trans youth



The divisive question of gender transitioning for adolescents arrives at America's Supreme Court on Wednesday. In *United States v Skrametti*, the justices will examine whether Tennessee's ban on puberty blockers and hormone treatments for minors diagnosed with gender dysphoria violates the 14th Amendment.

The challengers—three transgender children and their parents, joined by the federal government—cite a recent Supreme Court ruling on discrimination against trans employees. Tennessee cannot bar [medical treatments for trans youth](#), they say, while permitting these therapies for other children to treat conditions such as early puberty or endometriosis.

The plaintiffs persuaded a district-court judge to block the law in 2023. But two months later the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals sided with Tennessee, saying that since the law bans “sex-transition treatments for all minors, regardless of sex” it is not discriminatory. The Supreme Court's decision, expected in the spring, will affect similar laws in 23 other states.

Daily quiz



The Economist

We will serve you a new question each day this week. On Friday your challenge is to give us all five answers and, as important, tell us the connecting theme. Email your responses (and include mention of your home city and country) by 1700 GMT on Friday to QuizEspresso@economist.com. We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Wednesday: Which two acts, with the same name, were passed by the US congress in 1793 and 1850, only to be repealed in 1864?

Tuesday: *Phaseolus coccineus* is better known as which vegetable?

Curiosity is the lust of the mind.

Thomas Hobbes