

Catch up: Syria's dictator flees to Russia; South Korea opens investigation into its president



Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, a rebel leader, visited **Damascus** after anti-government forces took control of the **Syrian** capital. Mr Jolani controls Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an Islamist group that spearheaded the surprise offensive which [toppled Syria's regime](#)—though another group, based in the country's south, beat him to Damascus. Bashar al-Assad, the country's dictator for 24 years, has resigned and fled to Moscow. Russia, which supported him during Syria's long civil war, granted him asylum. Crowds celebrated in the country's big cities. In a statement on state television, Mr Jolani declared that “the future is ours”.

Western governments welcomed the [collapse of the Assad family's rule](#). Kaja Kallas, the **European Union's** top diplomat, observed that the regime's collapse “shows the weakness of Assad's backers, Russia and Iran”. **America**, which has some 900 soldiers based in Syria, said the troops would remain there to continue their fight against [Islamic State](#), a weakened jihadist group. Meanwhile

Israel, which occupies the disputed Golan Heights, said that its troops had moved into Syrian territory “to ensure no hostile force embeds itself right next to the border”.

South Korean prosecutors opened an investigation into **Yoon Suk Yeol**, the president, for treason. Authorities have also arrested Kim Yong-hyun, a former defence minister, whom they accused of helping to plan Mr Yoon’s [failed coup](#) on December 3rd. Mr Yoon, who survived an [impeachment vote](#) on Saturday, remains in office, but has stepped back from “handling state affairs”, according to his prime minister.

Romanian police arrested 20 armed men who were travelling to Bucharest, the capital, to join protests supporting **Calin Georgescu**, a far-right, pro-Russian politician. Mr Georgescu won the most votes in the first round of Romania’s presidential election, which was annulled after the country’s top court suggested he may have benefited from [Russian interference](#). The final round of the vote had been scheduled for December 8th.

John Mahama, a former president, won **Ghana’s election**. The vice-president, Mahamudu Bawumia, who was the ruling party’s candidate, conceded defeat, saying that early results showed Mr Mahama won “decisively”. He added that Mr Mahama’s party had also won the parliamentary election. The government of the departing president, Nana Akufo-Addo, has overseen perhaps the [worst economic crisis](#) in Ghana’s democratic history.

In an interview with NBC, **Donald Trump** said he would not try to [fire Jerome Powell](#), the chairman of the Federal Reserve, before his term expires in 2026. America’s president-elect, who feuded with Mr Powell during his first term, has previously challenged the central bank’s independence—a pillar of financial stability—by suggesting the president should have a say in setting interest rates.

A pair of ruby slippers worn by [Judy Garland](#) in “**The Wizard of Oz**”, a film from 1939, sold for \$28m at auction in America—\$25m more than the estimate. They became the most expensive piece of entertainment memorabilia ever sold. The sale perhaps benefited from the success of “[Wicked](#)”, a prequel to “The Wizard of Oz”, which broke three box-office records when released in November.

Figure of the day: \$839, the average resale price of tickets for Taylor Swift’s Eras tour in America and Canada. [Read the full story.](#)

The fall of Bashar al-Assad



After 13 years of civil war, [Syria's dictatorship collapsed suddenly](#). Less than two weeks after they began their advance, rebels captured the capital, Damascus, and forced out Bashar al-Assad, dictator for 24 years. Across the country, Syrians have cheered the end of his tyranny and hope for a new start. Will they get it?

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the Islamist group that [spearheaded the offensive](#), has avoided sectarian triumphalism and promised to protect minorities. It has learned from the chaos that followed the root-and-branch destruction of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, and has asked civilian authorities to remain in post. But Syrian politics will get complicated. As well as fighting the regime, HTS battled other rebel factions that will want a hand in running the country. Moreover, the West still views HTS as a terrorist group. Many hope that foreign powers might broker a power-sharing agreement. But with so much division in Syria, finding unanimity could be hard.

The UN continues its mission in Congo



On Monday the Security Council will renew the UN's peacekeeping mission in eastern Congo for a year. Congo's decision to support the mission marks a change of course by the government, which had been pushing for UN troops to withdraw by the end of 2024. The mission is unpopular; many think it incapable of deterring armed groups. Militias have proliferated since it began in 1999.

Anger at the UN has grown since 2022, when M23, a [rebel group backed by neighbouring Rwanda](#), conquered swathes of Congolese territory. Protests by Congolese have grown. In response, the UN agreed to a phased withdrawal. Peacekeepers left South Kivu province in June. But leaving more violent places such as North Kivu—where M23 is active—is another matter. Congo's own fight against M23 is going badly. The group controls more territory than this time last year. And although peace talks continue, few think Congo's corrupt army can fill the void should the blue helmets leave.

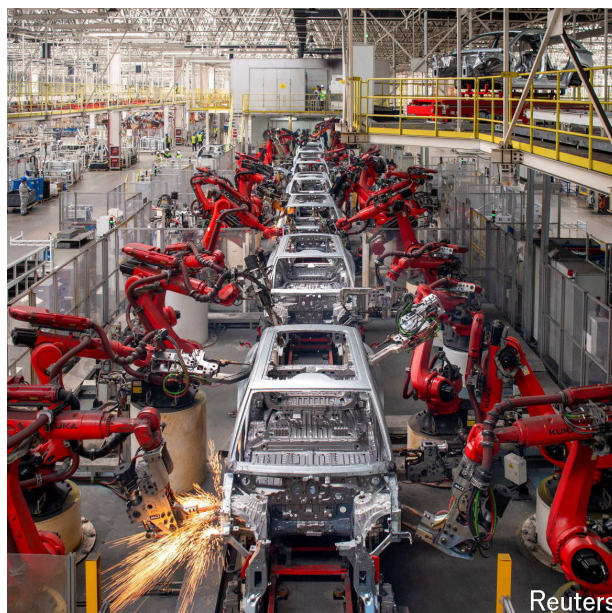
Cloud computing's sky-high growth



Oracle, a technology giant, announces its quarterly results on Monday. Once better known for its database software, the company has invested heavily in its cloud-infrastructure business. Bloomberg Intelligence, a data provider, estimates that Oracle's capital spending could reach around \$14bn in fiscal 2025 (ending in May), with the majority going towards its cloud operations. That level of spending could position Oracle as the fourth-largest cloud provider, trailing just Amazon, Microsoft and Google.

The company's push into cloud services is shrewd. The [artificial-intelligence boom](#) has boosted demand for such services, helping to offset declines in Oracle's older database products. In the past year the firm's share price has risen by 67%, compared with 39% for the gains of the Nasdaq, an index of tech-heavy stocks. This surge has made [Larry Ellison](#), the company's co-founder, one of the world's richest people. And Oracle is well-placed to keep thriving: Mr Ellison is a vocal supporter of Donald Trump, America's president-elect.

How low inflation adds to China's woes



Later this week China's leaders are expected to hold their annual Central Economic Work Conference, at which they will ponder their policy targets for [the year ahead](#). The growth target (which will probably remain secret until March) attracts most attention. Thanks to a [late stimulus push](#), the economy will probably come close to this year's 5% target: "a little to the left or right of 5% is acceptable," according to state-run media.

But China will fall far short of another, less prominent goal: its inflation target of 3%. Consumer prices in the first ten months of this year are only 0.3% higher than last year. And figures due on Monday will probably show a similar increase in November, compared with a year earlier. Low inflation may seem like a blessing. But it reflects inadequate spending and increases the real cost of borrowing. Inflation is far to the left of where it should be.

An audacious adaptation of a great Colombian novel



“One Hundred Years of Solitude”, published in 1967, is often referred to as the greatest novel ever written. It is also regarded as “unfilmable”. Part of the problem is its complexity: [Gabriel García Márquez’s](#) tale follows several generations of the Buendía family, many of whom have confusing variations of the same name. Another is its idiosyncratic style. It relies heavily on narration; dialogue makes up only about 5% of the book. And it includes sudden magical-realist flights of fancy, which can be enchanting on the page but risk looking strange on screen.

Undeterred, Netflix has taken up the challenge. The streaming service has turned Márquez’s book into 16 hours of television; the first tranche of episodes is released this week. Filmed in Colombia in Spanish, the show is a faithful adaptation and draws much of its script verbatim from the novel. Netflix has spared no expense in bringing the Buendías and the town of Macondo to life, either. It has spent more on “One Hundred Years of Solitude” than on any other [Latin American production](#).

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.

Monday: Which two provinces suffered repeated transfers of power between France and Germany from 1871 to 1945?

**Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and
to argue freely according to my
conscience, above all liberties.**

John Milton