

Catch up: Syrian rebels attack Aleppo; Trump picks Kash Patel as FBI head



Syrian rebels said they were advancing further south after seizing most of **Aleppo**, the country's second-biggest city. The **fighters** are led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an Islamist group. It is the first time Syria's opposition has captured territory from the regime in years. Bashar al-Assad, Syria's dictator, said his government would continue "to defend its stability and its territorial integrity".

Donald Trump said he would appoint **Kash Patel** to be director of the **FBI**. Mr Patel, who advised the secretary of defence during Mr Trump's previous administration but has little law-enforcement experience, has railed against the "deep state" and vowed to strip the FBI of its intelligence-gathering role. America's president-elect and his appointees seem intent on making **dramatic changes** to spy agencies and the FBI.

China launched its first **rocket** from its **most advanced spaceport**. The Long March 12—which has the largest payload capacity of the country's single-core carrier rockets—lifted off from the Wenchang site on the southern island of Hainan and put two experimental

satellites into orbit, according to local media. The spaceport, China's designated site for commercial launches, is central to its ambitions to challenge America's SpaceX in [lunar exploration](#).

Mr Trump threatened the world's biggest developing countries with tariffs of 100% if they seek to [dethrone the dollar](#) as the currency of global business and trade. Posting on Truth Social, his social-media site, he told the nine-country **BRICS group**—founded by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—to abandon plans for their [own reserve currency](#) and not to back any other challenger to the greenback.

Sex workers in Belgium will now be entitled to employment contracts and social benefits. A law that takes effect on December 1st, the first of its kind in the world, regulates the profession's working hours and wages. Sex workers will also be eligible for paid maternity leave, sick days, health insurance and pensions. Belgium decriminalised [sex work](#) in 2022.

Thailand and Malaysia experienced their worst floods in decades. At least 12 people were killed and more than 14,500 people were displaced in northern Malaysia. In southern Thailand floods displaced 13,000 people. Heavy rain, which started earlier this week, is expected to continue.

Riyadh's new metro—the Middle East's largest public-transport system—began operating three of its six planned lines. Spanning 176km, and dotted with 85 stations, it is also the world's biggest driverless-train network. The [Saudi capital's](#) authorities hope that the \$22bn project will reduce traffic congestion by 30%. The other three lines will open in the coming weeks.

Word of the week: Securonomics, a buzzword coined by Britain's chancellor, Rachel Reeves. It has not appeared in her speeches since she entered office. [Read the full story](#).

Mixed fortunes for Spain's Sánchez



Pedro Sánchez, Spain's prime minister (pictured), will strengthen his already firm grip over his Socialist party when it holds a congress in Seville this weekend. Loyalists are set to replace several regional party leaders who are critical of him. This month [Mr Sánchez's minority government](#) secured preliminary approval from the fragmented parliament for tax rises. That should allow the government to comply with European fiscal rules without sharp spending cuts next year.

But a corruption scandal has the Socialists worried. José Luis Ábalos, formerly the party's number three, is under investigation by the Supreme Court in connection with graft allegations at the transport ministry, which he used to run. (Mr Ábalos denies wrongdoing.) The businessman at the heart of the scandal claims to have bribed other party figures, though he has yet to present proof. Officials insist that Mr Sánchez can see out the remaining three years of his term. His opponents are not so sure.

Cheap but not cheerful: America's budget airlines



More than 3m stuffing-filled and family-weary Americans will trudge through airports on Sunday, the busiest travel day of the Thanksgiving weekend. But bosses at America's often-derided low-cost airlines are unlikely to cheer. Passenger numbers in America are forecast to hit 2.2bn in 2024, up by 7% on 2023, but that has not translated into profits. In November [Spirit filed for bankruptcy protection](#)—the first big carrier to go bust since American Airlines did in 2011.

Budget airlines have struggled in part because legacy airlines are increasingly offering cheap fares while still attracting passengers willing to pay more for extra pampering. In 2022 a judge struck down a planned merger between Spirit and Frontier, another low-cost airline, deeming it anti-competitive. Such a deal could have given the two a fighting chance against America's legacy airlines—and ensured that travellers always have a cheap option, even if they check in with gritted teeth.

Tackling the world's plastic problem



On Sunday UN negotiations over the future of plastic come to an end in Busan, South Korea. The world will produce around 500m tonnes of the material this year, estimates the OECD, a club of mostly rich countries. Only about a tenth of that will be recycled and a fifth incinerated; the rest will end up in landfill or be dumped into waterways or oceans. Making and disposing of plastic also accounts for about 3% of global greenhouse-gas emissions—more than aviation.

Delegates hope to lay the groundwork for a binding treaty, to come into effect next year. But questions remain over whether the deal will cap plastic production and if the biggest polluters will be asked to pay. Multinational businesses are hoping for an agreement, too. A third of plastics are used for packaging. International rules would make the globe-spanning operations of companies such as Nestlé, Unilever and Danone easier. Meanwhile firms are exploring [sustainable alternatives](#) made from seaweed, mushrooms or agricultural waste.

Killer whales' latest prey



Killer whales are living up to their name. There has been a spate of recent attacks by the whales on yachts, notably around the Iberian peninsula. Meanwhile South African scientists observed an [orca hunt a great white shark](#). Now it seems killer whales have set their sights on another prey: whale sharks. Scientists recorded a series of co-ordinated killer-whale attacks on young members of the world's largest fish species in the Gulf of California. The area is a feeding site for them.

The vulnerability of juvenile sharks makes them an ideal target for killer whales, who appear to immobilise the creatures by flipping them over. They seem to be after the shark's lipid-rich livers. The latest observations, published in *Frontiers in Marine Science*, a journal, may help scientists to better understand the development of complex behaviours among these highly intelligent marine predators.

An artistic double bill in eastern India



The first week in December brings a festival to the Sun Temple of Konark, on the Bay of Bengal in the Indian state of Odisha. Visitors are drawn in by its striking setting: the 13th-century temple is a masterpiece of Hindu architecture, gawped at by almost 2.5m tourists a year. It is a monumental representation of a giant, 24-wheeled chariot, symbolically bearing the sun god Surya, carved from black stone. Between its massive stone wheels, panels of carvings in deep relief depict lions, dancers, musicians and erotic scenes.

Another draw to the event is the interplay of artistic genres. At the temple India's top classical dancers perform traditional forms including Odissi, which originated in Odisha. Meanwhile at nearby Chandrabhaga Beach teams from around the world compete to create vast and imaginative sand sculptures, be they of animals, gods or elaborate palaces. The two art forms, one in motion and the other still, create an intriguing dialogue with the temple's stone-built chariot.

The winners of this week's quiz



The Economist

Thank you to everyone who took part in this week's quiz. The winners, chosen at random, were:

Rob Blair, Harare, Zimbabwe

Zoe Hill, Oxshott, Britain

Peter Nicklin, Naivasha, Kenya

They all gave the correct answers of: Down Under, A Hat, Newport News, Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, the Grand Canal. The theme is words ending in stand: understand, hatstand, newsstand, bandstand and grandstand.

The questions were:

Monday: Which hit song by Men at Work has a title usually associated with Australia and New Zealand?

Tuesday: What did a man mistake his wife for, in the title of a book by Oliver Sacks?

Wednesday: Which Virginia town, on the James river, is noted for its marine terminal and military bases?

Thursday: Which Beatles album has a cover featuring a montage

of people the group admired? (Hint: the full title is needed to guess the theme)

Friday: Which Chinese waterway, more than 1,000 miles long, has sections that were built as far back as the 5th century BC?

The weekly crossword



Our crossword has two sets of clues, one for seasoned cruciverbalists and the other for less experienced solvers. Both give the same answers, all of which feature in articles in this week's edition of *The Economist*.

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am GMT on Monday to crossword@economist.com. We will pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners in next week's edition.

November 30th edition

Cryptic clues

1 down “President Valerie—I, Jim, reformed!” (6,5)

1 across Some maharaja panhandled land (5)

2 across Planet's poverty without leader (5)

3 across Regularly find cashbox in a state (5)

Factual clues

1 down Another president idolised by Trump fans (6,5)

1 across Where the share of eligible men taking paternity leave reached 30% in 2023 (5)

2 across What plays host to three trillion trees (5)

3 across What 13 counties in Oregon recently said they'd rather join (5)

Experience is simply the name we give our mistakes.

Oscar Wilde