

Catch up: Syrian rebels advance; American court upholds TikTok ban law



Syrian rebels moved closer to **Homs**, a city between Aleppo and Damascus, the capital. Syrian and **Russian** warplanes reportedly struck the north of **Hama province**. Rebels captured Hama city on Thursday. Syrian rebels began a surprise insurgency on November 27th, and within days had captured Aleppo, Syria's second city. For the first time in a decade, the rule of Bashar al-Assad, the country's dictator, looks vulnerable.

An appeals court in Washington, DC, upheld a law that could ban **TikTok** on **national-security grounds**. The law requires that TikTok be sold to a non-Chinese owner by January 19th or shut down. In May the social-media giant sued to block the law, arguing that it violates free speech. Donald Trump, who is set to take office a day after it comes into effect, has previously vowed to "save TikTok".

A top **Romanian** court annulled the first round of the country's election. Calin Georgescu, a pro-Russian hard-right candidate, had come first, followed by Elena Lasconi, who heads the centre-right opposition. But declassified Romanian intelligence published on

Wednesday alleged that Mr Georgescu's social-media campaigns were orchestrated by Russia. The second round of voting, originally scheduled for this weekend, has been cancelled.

American employers added 227,000 [jobs](#) in November, a rebound from a revised figure of 36,000 in October. (Last month's jobs report was affected by hurricanes and strikes.) Analysts had expected 200,000 new roles. The unemployment rate rose to 4.2% in November, up from 4.1% in October. The data could confirm expectations for a quarter-point rate cut in December.

The **European Union** and Mercosur—a customs union made up of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay—signed a long-awaited trade deal. Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, called it a “win-win” agreement, with EU companies saving €4bn (\$4.2bn) on export duties per year. That will invigorate an [ailing Mercosur](#). But French farmers will probably continue to oppose the deal.

German industrial production unexpectedly fell by 1% in October from the previous month. Energy production declined by 8.9%. [Germany's factories](#) have struggled in recent years because of waning demand. Energy-intensive industries, such as chemicals and metal-work manufacturing, have been hit particularly hard. Germany's economy is on track for a second year of recession.

Elon Musk donated more than \$250m to **Donald Trump's** election campaign, according to electoral filings. He made three donations of \$25m to [America PAC](#), Mr Musk's pro-Trump PAC, in the final weeks of the election. Meanwhile, on Thursday Mr Musk denied reports that he will donate £80m (\$102m) to Reform UK, a British right-wing outfit led by Nigel Farage.

Figure of the day: 71%, the increase in border-crossing attempts between 2018 and 2019, when Donald Trump was president. [Read the full story.](#)

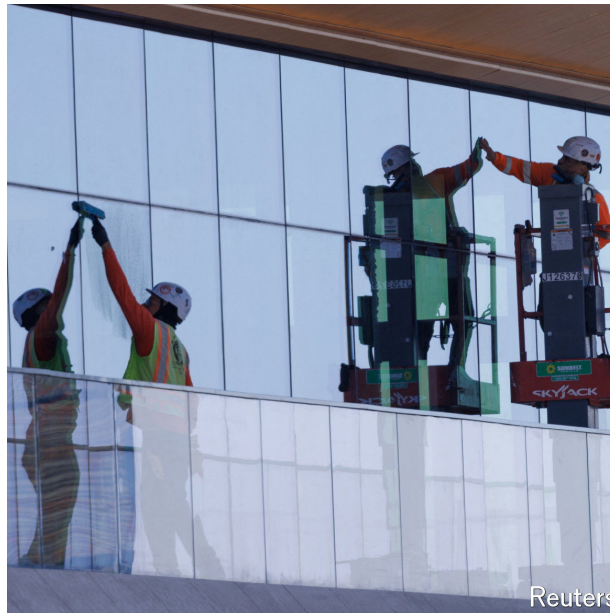
What next for South Korea?



Yoon Suk Yeol's unexpected declaration of martial law late on Tuesday—and his swift reversal the following morning—have [plunged South Korea into chaos](#) and tested the strength of its democracy. By sending the armed forces to seize the National Assembly, the president may have thought he could outmanoeuvre his opponents from the Democratic Party, which controls the legislature and had threatened investigations into the president and his wife. Instead, his failed gambit has almost certainly sealed his downfall.

Impeachment proceedings against Mr Yoon are set to begin on Saturday, unless he resigns first. The impeachment motion requires a two-thirds majority vote in parliament. Mr Yoon's party controls 108 seats, so just eight would need to defy him. On Friday the head of the party called for Mr Yoon's suspension. An affirmative vote would trigger a trial by the constitutional court. The process could drag out for months, leaving the political system in limbo. Once new elections are held, the DP candidate will probably win. The drama has only just begun.

America's big jobs rebound



[America's economy](#) added 227,000 jobs, more than forecast and a sharp rise from 36,000 in October (itself an upwardly revised figure). But this will mainly reflect a return to normality. In October Hurricane Milton struck Florida and Boeing's workforce went on strike. Last month people went back to work.

An average of the two months' data gives a more accurate picture of the jobs market. This works out to an addition of about 131,000 jobs per month, which suggests that hiring is weakening slightly. Indeed, there was evidence of that slowness as the unemployment rate ticked up to 4.2% last month, from 4.1% in October. Taken together, the new data will probably confirm the Federal Reserve's inclination to cut interest rates by another quarter-point later this month as it tries to guide the economy to a soft landing.

Putin's bet on Trump



Vladimir Putin will be in an upbeat mood when he meets Alexander Lukashenko, the president of Belarus, in Minsk on Friday to sign a new security pact, the latest indication of their countries' ever-deepening union. Russian forces are making gains—albeit slow and costly ones—on multiple fronts in eastern Ukraine (in a war that [Belarus supports](#)). Meanwhile Russian missile and drone attacks on Ukrainian cities and infrastructure continue relentlessly. Mr Putin appears to be betting that convincing Donald Trump's incoming administration of his eventual victory, while undermining Ukrainian morale, will force a ceasefire on the Kremlin's terms.

Mr Putin's strategy, however, hinges on Ukraine being abandoned by its allies—a risky assumption. And Russia's problems are mounting. Its forces are sustaining nearly 2,000 casualties a day, putting their ability to maintain the current level of operational intensity in doubt. Russia's economy and society are [showing increasing signs of strain](#). But for Ukraine, European support is more critical than ever.

A dilemma for India's central bank



On Friday India's central bank left interest rates unchanged, as it has in all of its policy meetings since February 2023. But this was far from a routine decision. India's economy, which had been purring along, is now showing signs of stalling. Data published last week showed that the year-on-year rate of GDP [growth](#) had fallen to 5.4% between July and September, a seven-quarter low. That had increased calls for the Reserve Bank of India to begin cutting rates. But rising inflation has strengthened arguments for a hike. India's annual inflation rate rose to 6.2% in October, the highest in more than a year.

For now, the RBI is holding steady. The bank's governor said that only "durable price stability" could provide the foundation for more growth. Nevertheless, the RBI is seeking to improve economic conditions in other ways. On Friday it also announced it would be cutting a cash-reserve rate as a way to inject liquidity into the banking system.

A G7 summit like no other



Seven world leaders meet to discuss a global crisis. They start to draft an anodyne statement to release to the world. Then things get weird. Onanistic “bog bodies”, mummified in mud in the Iron Age, rise up to spawn a new civilisation. “Rumours”, co-written and directed by Guy Maddin, a Canadian film-maker, opens in British cinemas on Friday. The film is completely bonkers. As the bawdy mud men stagger about, the president of the European Commission becomes enamoured with a car-sized brain.

Yet it is also a riotous political satire. The sultry leader of Canada (Roy Dupuis) gets it on with the German chancellor (Cate Blanchett). Italy’s prime minister (Rolando Ravello) admits his biggest regret is going to a party dressed as Mussolini. And the G7 gift-bags include a cyanide pill with IKEA-style instructions. Beneath the absurdity, Mr Maddin’s film is bracingly cynical.

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.

Friday: Which state has borders with Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky and Illinois?

Thursday: The regime which ruled France from 1852 to 1870 is generally known by which title?

The winners of last week's crossword



Thank you to everyone who took part in our weekly crossword, published in the weekend edition of Espresso. The winners, chosen at random, were:

Xiaochen Su, St. Paul's Bay, Malta

Timothy Hagan, Honolulu, Hawaii

Michael Williams, Penang, Malaysia

They all gave the correct answers of [Javier Milei](#), [Japan](#), [Earth](#) and [Idaho](#). Check back tomorrow for this week's crossword.

**If people never did silly things nothing
intelligent would ever get done.**

Ludwig Wittgenstein