

Catch up: Bondi replaces Gaetz as attorney-general pick; Northvolt files for bankruptcy



Donald Trump picked **Pam Bondi**, Florida's former attorney-general, to lead America's justice department after **Matt Gaetz** [withdrew from contention](#). Ms Bondi served as one of Mr Trump's lawyers during his first impeachment trial. Mr Gaetz gave up amid allegations that he had paid women for sex, which he denies. Enough Republican senators were prepared to block his nomination.

Northvolt filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in America. The Swedish battery-maker had piled up \$5.8bn in debt. Its co-founder, Peter Carlsson, quit as chief executive. The firm was seen by many as [Europe's best chance](#) to challenge Asia's dominance in the electric-vehicle sector. It raised more than \$15bn in investments, including Volkswagen and the German government, but struggled to scale up production.

Euro-zone business activity unexpectedly fell to a [10-month low](#) in November. The S&P's flash composite PMI dropped from 50, the threshold for contraction, to 48.1. The services sector shrank for the first time since January, no longer offsetting a recession in manufacturing. [The contraction](#) increases the odds of the European Central Bank pursuing more aggressive interest-rate cuts in December.

Volodymyr Zelensky, **Ukraine's** president, said Russia's use of a [new kind of medium-range ballistic missile](#) was a "clear and severe escalation" in the war. Russia fired it at the eastern Ukrainian city of Dnipro on Thursday. Vladimir Putin, Russia's leader, claimed there were "no ways of counteracting" the weapon and said the attack was a response to Ukraine's recent use of American- and British-made longer-range missiles.

Boris Pistorius, Germany's popular defence minister, said he would not run to be the Social Democratic Party's candidate in elections in February. Instead, Mr Pistorius backed [Olaf Scholz](#), the chancellor, to run for re-election. Mr Scholz will probably be tossed out of his job and replaced by Friedrich Merz, leader of the centre-right Christian Democrats.

Brazilian police accused **Jair Bolsonaro** and 36 others of attempting a coup after the presidential election in 2022. Brazil's prosecutor-general must now decide whether to take the case to trial. The charges stem from [Mr Bolsonaro's](#) alleged attempt to retain power after losing to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, which culminated in his supporters storming the national legislature in January 2023.

Gunmen in **Pakistan** killed at least 42 people after opening fire on a convoy of Shia Muslims. According to reports a line of around 200 cars and buses was attacked as it drove through Kurram, a district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, close to the Afghanistan border—

an area that suffers sectarian violence. No one has yet claimed responsibility.

Figure of the day: 52%, the share of Ukrainians who support negotiating an end to the war as soon as possible—a sharp rise from 27% a year ago. [Read the full story.](#)

Trump's shadow over NATO



On Friday the leaders of NATO will meet in Montreal, in Canada, for their annual gathering. Over four days they will discuss how to make their troops better prepared for the battlefield, support for Ukraine, and new defence technology, including artificial intelligence.

But the [elephant in the room](#) will be what Donald Trump's comeback means for an institution which he makes no secret of disliking. One thing is certain: Europe and Canada are going to have to [spend more on defence](#). Mr Trump has threatened to cut American support for those who don't meet the alliance's target of spending 2% of GDP on defence.

Out of NATO's 32 members, 24 now meet or exceed that goal. But Mark Rutte, NATO's new boss, believes the 2% requirement is obsolete. He recently said that countries need to spend "much more" on defence. Nobody disagrees. The problem is finding the money.

Bibi accused of war crimes



Israel's cabinet is expected to decide in the coming days whether to hire private contractors—basically mercenaries—to provide security for food convoys going into the Gaza Strip. The debate is timely: on Thursday the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, and Yoav Gallant, the former defence minister. They are accused of bearing “criminal responsibility” for using “starvation as a method of warfare”, among other crimes.

Israel's leaders have certainly taken their time organising humanitarian supplies to the strip, which has been at war for more than 13 months. In recent weeks the situation has deteriorated drastically. The convoys allowed through crossings by Israel have been looted by criminal gangs. Mr Netanyahu and his defence minister [disagreed over a solution](#). Mr Gallant supported a ceasefire and a new Palestinian security force in Gaza. Mr Netanyahu, who refuses to end the war, fired him. Now they both have warrants against them.

Germany's manufacturing malaise



Germany's Purchasing Managers' Index, a gauge of the state of the manufacturing and service sectors, was released on Friday. The index fell to 47.3, down from 48.6 in October (anything below 50 indicates a contraction). The figures reinforced concerns about [Germany's ailing economy](#), which is unlikely to regain its former vigour any time soon.

The industrial sector is particularly weak. Higher energy prices, an ageing population, competition from Chinese manufacturers and the demands of the green transition are weighing heavily on its performance. Volkswagen, Europe's biggest carmaker and a big employer in Germany, is considering the closure of three factories and up to 30,000 job cuts.

A "debt brake", which limits the federal structural deficit to 0.35% of GDP a year, restricts the government's ability to juice the economy through public investments. Without its reform, Europe's industrial powerhouse will continue to struggle.

The WHO's fight against mpox



The World Health Organisation's emergency committee will meet on Friday to address the rapid rise of mpox cases. The [highly contagious disease](#) has spread across parts of Africa. Cases have also been seen in America, Australia, Britain and Germany.

Officials are concerned about the so-called “clade Ib” virus, which is even more contagious than other variants of this virus. The new strain has been spreading since August. It can be fatal in some cases. The WHO on Friday will decide whether the spread of mpox remains a global health emergency (it almost certainly will), and if it needs to adjust any measure in response to the new variant.

The WHO has allocated 899,000 vaccine doses to nine African countries hardest hit by the disease. Over 50,000 people have already been vaccinated in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nigeria launched its vaccination campaign on Monday. Other countries, including the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, and Kenya, are set to receive doses in the coming weeks.

Wicked hits the big screen



“Wicked”, based on a Tony-winning musical that opened in 2003, is released in cinemas on Friday. The first instalment of the two-part adaptation centres on two witches: Elphaba, played by Cynthia Erivo, who doesn’t fit in partly because she has green skin, and Glinda (Ariana Grande), a popularity-obsessed blonde. They become friends while studying in the magical Land of Oz. After an encounter with The Wizard of Oz (Jeff Goldblum), their paths diverge. Glinda later becomes the Good Witch of the North, Elphaba the Wicked Witch of the West.

Jon Chu, the director of “Crazy Rich Asians”, a flashy rom-com, spent \$145m on the reinvention. Some film-industry-watchers estimate it will take in \$100m on its opening weekend in America. Musicals, long derided as uncool, have recently [been given a boost](#) by “Barbie”, which wasn’t a musical but was partly inspired by the technicolour musicals of the mid-20th century. “Wicked” might benefit from the fact that escapism is popular in a worrisome world.

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: For what words does the acronym SWALK stand?

Thursday: Which hit song by Pharrell Williams came from the soundtrack of the film “Despicable Me 2”?

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:

Tom Kestner, Tokyo, Japan

Rebecca Clements, Toronto, Canada

Rico del Rosario, San Juan City, Philippines

They all gave the correct answers of [Pete Hegseth](#), [Poland](#), [Earth](#), and [hubris](#). Check back tomorrow for this week's crossword.

**What do we live for, if it is not to make life
less difficult for each other?**

George Eliot