

Catch up: Government shutdown looms in America; apparent attack in Germany



Hours before the midnight deadline to **avert government shutdown**, America's House of Representatives had not yet struck a spending deal. The Republican-backed proposal, which would have funded the government through March and suspend America's [debt ceiling](#) for two years, came short of the two-thirds majority needed to pass on Thursday. The party's leaders met on Friday afternoon to discuss an alternative proposal.

At least one person was killed and 60-80 reportedly injured when a car drove into crowds at a Christmas market in Magdeburg, in **central Germany**. The suspected driver has been arrested, according to local media. The cause of the apparent attack has not been confirmed but Olaf Scholz, Germany's chancellor, said the reports "lead us to fear the worst".

Russia's central bank surprised markets by keeping its key interest rate at 21%. Despite rates being screwed to their tightest level in decades, annual inflation—stoked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine—is running at more than double the bank's target of 4%.

Still, its policymakers said that markets had reacted better than expected to its last hike in October, creating promising [conditions for resumed disinflation](#).

Switzerland's parliament blamed the [demise of Credit Suisse](#) on “long-term mismanagement”. The country’s second-largest lender was rescued by UBS, its rival, which Swiss authorities strong-armed into a merger to save the banking system. The political inquiry, which is Switzerland’s fifth ever, also criticised the ineffectiveness of Swiss financial regulators in policing the bank’s capital requirements.

A group of high-level **American diplomats** held their first in-person meeting with [Syria's new government](#) in Damascus, the capital. America wants the ruling **Hayat Tahrir al-Sham**, a [rebel faction](#) formerly linked with al-Qaeda, to respect minority rights. A local Syrian news outlet reported that HTS wanted to discuss the lifting of sanctions against Syria and removing the country from international terrorism lists.

Eight people were convicted for offences pertaining to [the murder](#) of **Samuel Paty**, a **French** middle-school history teacher, in 2020. [Paty](#) was beheaded by an Islamist extremist days after showing pupils satirical caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad during a freedom of expression class. The defendants’ crimes ranged from encouraging the attacker’s actions on social media to providing him with weapons. Paty’s killer was shot dead by police soon after the murder.

Two marquee names in American business were hit by **strikes** in the run-up to Christmas. At **Starbucks** a union representing about 11,000 baristas called its members to stop their daily grind to demand better [pay and conditions](#). At **Amazon**, workers at seven distribution facilities walked out in a dispute over union recognition; [the company](#) says the distribution of holiday parcels will not be affected.

Word of the week: *ikejime*. The process used to kill the world's finest tuna sold at Toyosu market. [Read the full story.](#)

The best books of 2024



We are looking back on 2024. Today, the year in culture.

Books are the litmus test of a present-giver. Good choices show how intimately the giver knows the recipient. Poor ones often reveal a certain self-regarding pretentiousness. With that in mind, *The Economist* suggests [some books](#) to please every type of reader.

Lovers of unorthodox spycraft will be enamoured with “Kingmaker” by Sonia Purnell. It tells of [Pamela Churchill](#), daughter-in-law of Winston, who used her seductive charm to help the Allies win the second world war. Those who find themselves asking “What happens when we die?” should read Carl Ohman’s [“The Afterlife of Data”](#). It considers what becomes of the terabytes of information we’ve generated after we log off for the last time. Want to give an overbearing parent a not-so-subtle hint? Try “How Tyrants Fall” by Marcel Dirsus. And give Percival Everett’s new novel [“James”](#) to anyone who might be tickled by an inventive take on Mark Twain’s “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn”. [Read our full list.](#)

The best TV of 2024



Christmas dinner's been eaten, one glass of red too many has been drunk and now it's time for a snooze in front of the TV. Just be sure not to stick on any of *The Economist's* top picks from 2024—you'll be too enthralled to drop off.

"Slow Horses" may feel familiar, if only because Jackson Lamb, Gary Oldman's filthy, flatulent spy, resembles the uncle kipping in his chair across from you. Tight plotting, snappy dialogue, terrific ensemble: shows about spooks don't get much better. Those who like their intrigue a bit more feudal will love "[Shogun](#)", an incisive meditation on the pursuit of power set at the dawn of Japan's Edo period. But to really understand what it takes to run an empire, and have a laugh doing it, try "Hacks". Jean Smart plays Deborah Vance, a geriatric comedian and home-shopping maven after American light-entertainment's greatest throne: host of a late-night talk show. [Read our TV guide.](#)

The best podcasts of 2024



The Economist can also recommend some podcasts to help you get through those tedious household chores. But be warned: they are so entertaining you might lose focus while ironing and burn your shirt.

Riffing on the then-fashionable observation that “all art is propaganda”, George Orwell added in 1940 that “not all propaganda is art”. Benjamin Walker, a radio host, puts that to the test in his podcast of the same name, exploring how culture became entwined with cold-war politics. In “Thief at the British Museum” Katie Razzall of the BBCx tells the story of a curator at the august institution who gleefully pilfered its collection to sell on eBay. And fans of sport or true crime should check out “Broomgate”, in which John Cullen, a comedian and [former curler](#), recounts the roaring game’s worst scandal. These should see you through the sweeping—and we have [plenty of other recommendations](#) for the rest of the housework.

The best films of 2024



The elevator pitches for many of *The Economist*'s favourite films this year make them sound so high-concept that even a studio exec in the 1990s would raise an eyebrow. Yet behind the exaggerated premises lurk a knowing artistry that betrays the fact that they are oh-so-very 2024.

In “La Chimera” a rumpled English archaeologist (Josh O’Connor) slouches around Tuscany yearning for a lost love. He helps a rollicking band of grave robbers unearth Etruscan artefacts to sell on the black market only to find that some treasures—and some relationships—should be left in the past. In “Immaculate” an American nun (Sydney Sweeney) moves to an Italian convent, where she finds a geneticist-turned-priest planning to clone Jesus Christ. And in “Robot Dreams” an anthropomorphised dog befriends a rusty robot in 1980s New York. [Read about those picks](#), and other equally brilliant films, in our rundown of this year’s cinema.

Weekly crossword: Christmas edition



Our crossword is designed for experienced cruciverbalists and newcomers alike. Both sets of clues give the same answers, all of which feature in articles in this week's edition of *The Economist*:

Cryptic clues

1 down Redhead with cash is a festive sort of man (11)

1 across The word of God: mix almost all sloes with a dash of gin and a little prosecco (6)

2 across Rinse out something found in Christmas trees (5)

3 across Meal discovered in old inn, erroneously (6)

Factual clues

1 down Type of house likely to get decorated in a cheesy Christmas film (11)

1 across What a Nigerian megapreacher is bringing to the churches of Ukraine (6)

2 across A new renewable material that Lego is starting to make its bricks out of (5)

3 across Of what *Kaiseki* is a particularly fine example (6)

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

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:

Iker Urrutia, Bermeo, Spain

Stefano Colombu, Ang Mo Kio, Singapore

Hugh, Judith & Emma Tinsley, Wells, Britain

They all gave the correct answers of: George Michael, Edward Cullen, George Foreman, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Charles Schulz. The theme is the regnal names of the last five British monarchs: George V, Edward VIII, George VI, Elizabeth II and Charles III.

The questions were:

Monday: Which famous singer died on Christmas Day 2016?

Tuesday: Which character marries Bella Swan in the Twilight book and film series? **Wednesday:** Which heavyweight boxer made a fortune promoting a grill after retirement?

Thursday: Which Victorian poet had a secret courtship and

marriage with the writer Robert Browning?

Friday: Which artist drew the Peanuts cartoon strip?

ikejime

The process used to kill the world's finest tuna sold at Toyosu market.

Read the full story.

What is earnest is not always true; on the contrary, error is often more earnest than truth.

Benjamin Disraeli