

Catch up: support for the new Syria; South Korea's president defiant



Britain and **America** reported having “contact” with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, one of the [groups](#) that toppled Bashar al-Assad in Syria, though both consider it a terrorist organisation. Britain also pledged £50m (\$63m) of humanitarian aid to **Syria**, while **Turkey**, which has long backed HTS, said it stood ready to provide military training to the new Syrian administration. Israel, meanwhile, said that the victory of HTS increased the “strength of the threat” to the country from Syria.

Yoon Suk Yeol, South Korea's president, maintained a defiant tone after legislators voted to impeach him for his short-lived imposition of martial law on December 3rd. Mr Yoon vowed “never to give up” and called his suspension from the presidency “temporary”. The country's constitutional court must now rule on the impeachment. That [won't be straightforward](#).

ABC News agreed to pay **Donald Trump** \$15m in damages after one of its presenters repeatedly said on air that he had been found liable for rape. George Stephanopoulos made the claim ten times

while interviewing a Republican congresswoman in March. The president-elect has never been convicted of rape, although he was found liable for sexual abuse in a [civil case last year](#).

Britain officially joined the [Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership](#), the biggest **trade deal** for the country since it left the EU in 2016. The 12-member pact includes countries such as Japan, Australia, Singapore and Canada. Under the terms of accession, Britain can lower tariffs with eight of the members.

Two **Russian oil tankers** sank in the **Black Sea** and are now discharging their cargoes into the water, according to Russian authorities. The vessels broke apart in bad weather with 29 people on board. One person has so far been reported dead. The severity of the oil spill is not yet clear.

Israel announced that, due to the “extreme anti-Israel policies of the **Irish government**”, it will close its embassy in Dublin. Ireland has been highly critical of the Israeli assault on Gaza, and supported the [case](#) at the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of genocide. The Irish Taoiseach (prime minister), Simon Harris, said the action was “deeply regrettable” and denied that Ireland is anti-Israel.

Even as **Tropical Cyclone Chido** weakens over the African mainland, the extent of its devastation on **Mayotte**, a French island in the Indian Ocean that it struck on Saturday, has yet to become clear. The prefect of the island, home to 320,000 people, expected the death toll would “definitely be several hundred” and could rise into the thousands. President Emmanuel Macron said France was involved in relief efforts.

Figure of the day: 3%, Spain’s expected economic growth this year, almost four times the euro-area average. [Read the full story](#).

Germany's election campaign kicks off

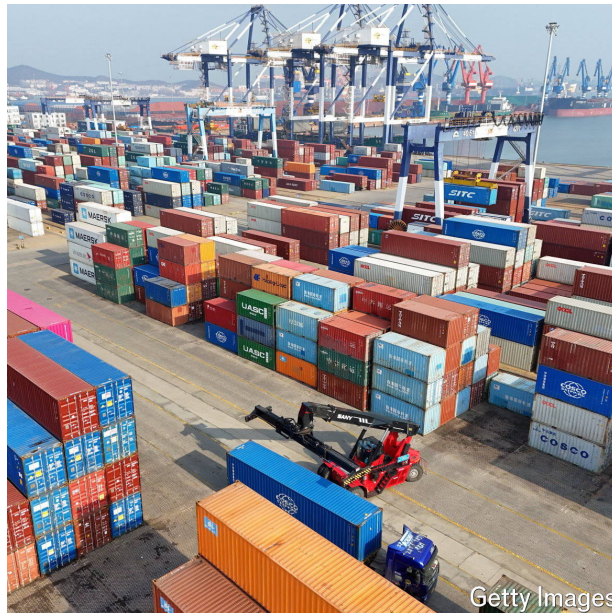


On Monday Olaf Scholz, Germany's chancellor, will ask the Bundestag to kick him out of a job. He should get his wish. The confidence vote was made necessary after Mr Scholz **ended** his dysfunctional three-party coalition last month, leaving his Social Democrats (SPD) leading a minority government. It will pave the way for an election next February.

On Tuesday the centre-right Christian Democrats (CDU) and their Bavarian CSU allies will publish their election manifesto. This week therefore marks the unofficial beginning of Germany's campaign. And unless the SPD stages an astonishing comeback Friedrich Merz, the CDU/CSU candidate, will enter the chancellery atop a fresh coalition, perhaps with the SPD or Greens.

Yet there is a wild card. Donald Trump takes office one month before Germany votes. If he **slaps tariffs** on EU exports or attempts a peace settlement in Ukraine, it will colour the final days of the campaign. Do not rule out a February surprise.

Reviving China's lacklustre economy



After their annual Central Economic Work Conference, which finished on Thursday, China's leaders promised to “vigorously” boost consumption. New economic figures released on Monday will illustrate the size of [the task](#) ahead of them. Retail sales probably grew by about 4.5% in nominal terms in November, compared with a year earlier. That would be slower than the previous month, which was boosted by an early start to the “Singles’ Day” shopping festival. Consumer-price inflation, which has already been released, was only 0.2%, another symptom of weak spending.

To revive consumer spirits, China's rulers have promised a looser monetary policy and a more “proactive” fiscal policy, including higher pensions and, perhaps, an expansion of schemes that encourage households to trade in their old cars and appliances for new ones. To help finance these proposals, the central government has promised to increase borrowing. The work conference is over. Their work is not.

Facing down Russia



Sir Keir Starmer, Britain's prime minister, joins leaders of other north European countries in Tallinn, Estonia, on Monday to discuss the future of the [Joint Expeditionary Force](#). The ten-country grouping, a decade old, is intended as a vanguard force within 32-member NATO, to be deployed quickly to confront an external threat. Faced with hostility from Russia, NATO has positioned more soldiers in the Baltic, including hundreds of British troops in Estonia.

The leaders gather amid anxiety that a new administration in America, eager to contain China, will reduce focus on Europe and may even shun NATO. They will discuss whether JEF countries can offer spine-stiffening European leadership for the broader alliance, encourage [defence spending](#) above the current target of 2% of GDP (met by all in the group), and provide more effective military help to Ukraine. Much depends on the effort Sir Keir wants Britain, the weightiest power in JEF, to devote to the force. Talks in Tallinn could provide first answers.

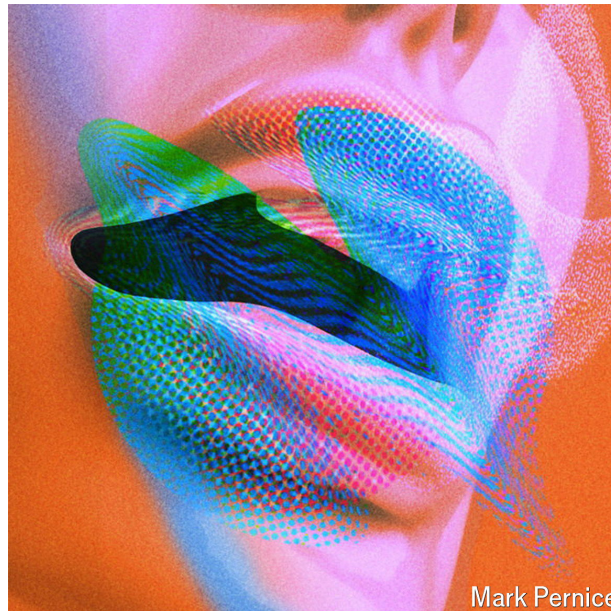
Paddington's London listing



Canal+, the French media company behind the “Paddington” film series, will be listed on the London Stock Exchange on Monday. Its flotation is part of the break-up of its parent company, Vivendi, a Paris-based media conglomerate with interests in everything from movies to magazines. On the same day Vivendi will float its advertising group, Havas, in Amsterdam, and its publishing arm, Louis Hachette Group, in Paris. Shareholders hope the companies will be worth more separately than they were together.

This crossing of the channel by Canal+ is a fillip for the [LSE](#), which has had a flat spell. Last year Arm, a celebrated British chipmaker, decided to go public in New York rather than in London. Since then British regulators have loosened rules in a bid to make London more attractive to companies. Canal+ is expected to be valued at around £7bn (\$8.9bn), making it the city’s biggest listing in two years. Marmalade sandwiches all round.

How AI helps with motor neurone disease



When Pedro, a former IT security specialist with advanced motor neurone disease, speaks, his lightly accented English flows with ease. His voice is generated by an artificial-intelligence model, trained on clips recorded before he lost his speech. His words, too, are generated by a large language model fine-tuned on his writing.

A [smartphone app](#) sits between Pedro and his interlocutors, transcribing what they say. It then generates three possible responses for him, playing them through headphones. A monitor resembling a sweatband sits on his forehead, waiting for an eyebrow twitch that he uses to select a response.

The system, dubbed Halo, is a project at Unbabel, a tech company based in Lisbon. Pedro's normal eye-tracking computer is bulky and finicky. In contrast, the Halo band can be worn on the go, giving him speech where he had none. Even when using eye-tracking to type, he says, he prefers to use the Halo voice—his own voice—to speak the answers.

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 famous singer died on Christmas Day 2016?

**No matter how many communes anybody
invents, the family always creeps back.**

Margaret Mead