

## Catch up: Russia's overture to America; Ireland's new PM



**Russia** said it was ready for “mutually respectful dialogue” with America after **Donald Trump** threatened it with further sanctions. America’s president said that his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, would face “high levels of taxes, tariffs and sanctions” if he did not “make a deal” to [end the war in Ukraine](#). Ukraine’s foreign minister, Andriy Sybiha, said the “strong” message was “welcome”.

**Ireland’s** lawmakers elected Micheál Martin as prime minister after one day of deadlock. The centre-right coalition government is bracing for trade tensions with America. Mr Trump is threatening higher corporate taxes and tariffs on Ireland, which hosts several multinational companies. Mr Martin, who [returns to office](#), has pledged to fend off the fallout to protect the [country’s economic model](#).

Firefighters battled a new wildfire north of **Los Angeles**, which has spread to more than 10,000 acres (40 square km) since breaking out on Wednesday. About 50,000 people were told to evacuate. Gusting

wind spread the blaze, as it did earlier in January, when [five fires](#) killed at least 28 people and destroyed thousands of buildings. Two of those fires—the Palisades and Eaton—are still burning.

Regulators in **China** instructed state-owned insurers and mutual funds to invest more in the country's **struggling stockmarkets**. After the announcement [China's](#) CSI 300 index rose by as much as 1.8%, before settling slightly lower. The index soared in September after the government announced economic-support measures, but has fallen by 15% from its October peak.

**Britain's** defence secretary sent a shot across Mr Putin's bow, after the Royal Navy revealed that its warships had shadowed a **Russian spy ship** in waters close to the English Channel earlier this week. John Healey said [Russian ships](#) were "mapping the UK's critical underwater infrastructure", accusing the Kremlin of growing aggression. "We see you," he told Mr Putin.

People with **ADHD** live shorter, according to a paper published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*. [Researchers studied](#) the health records of more than 300,000 people in Britain, and found the average life expectancy was 6.8 years shorter for men with the [neurological condition](#), and 8.6 years for women. People with ADHD tend to binge eat, smoke and undertake risky activities more, which could explain the difference in longevity.

**Iceland's** new government is crowd-sourcing ideas on how to [save public money](#). Consecutive governments have grappled with budget deficits. High inflation has made that gap more expensive—Iceland has western Europe's highest borrowing costs, at a rate of 8.5%. So far some 3,500 people have submitted suggestions to the government's online portal, representing almost 1% of the country's population.

**Figure of the day:** \$1.3trn, the accumulated fortune of the billionaires who turned up at Donald Trump's inauguration. [Read](#)

the full story.

# Turkey and Syria strengthen ties



The first Turkish Airlines flight to Syria in more than a decade will touch down in Damascus on Thursday. The reopening of the route signals the countries' plans to [strengthen economic ties](#) after the fall of Bashar al-Assad, Syria's dictator, last month. The route will be popular with Syrian refugees returning to their homes across the border, as well as Turkish business people interested in helping Syria to rebuild.

Turkey's support for Syria's new rulers dates back to 2012, when Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish president, cut ties with the Assad regime and backed the opposition in Syria's civil war. Turkish Airlines' announcement followed shortly after Asaad al-Shibani, Syria's new foreign minister, met Mr Erdogan. A stronger relationship between Turkey and Syria will irk other regional powers, namely Israel and Iran. Citizens from those countries will not be allowed on board Turkish Airlines' revived service, after Syria's government banned them from entering the country.

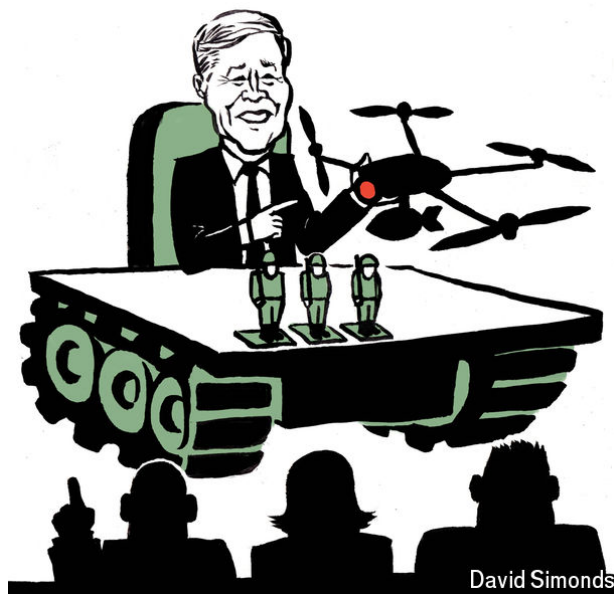
# South Korea's economic wobbles



The [arrest](#) last week of Yoon Suk Yeol, South Korea's impeached president, marked a new phase in the country's political turmoil. Mr Yoon's failed coup in December shook consumer confidence and rattled the stockmarket. GDP figures released on Thursday gave South Koreans further cause for concern. The economy grew by just 0.1%, quarter on quarter, between October and December. The Bank of Korea has cut its growth projection for 2025 from 1.9% in November to 1.6-1.7%.

Donald Trump's return to the White House is adding to the uncertainty. Last year South Korea was America's largest source of foreign investment, as manufacturers built chip and battery factories with the help of Biden-administration subsidies that Mr Trump could reverse. A trade war could also harm the country's export-driven economy. And without a stable government, South Korea will be ill-prepared to deal with other long-term challenges, such as growing competition from China, which is catching up in the semiconductor industry.

# America's would-be army chief



Donald Trump has vowed to shake up the Pentagon. His [nominee for secretary of defence](#), Pete Hegseth, has been accused of sexual abuse, financial mismanagement and inexperience. (He denies all this.) But scores of other people are also waiting for jobs. On Thursday the Senate will grill Mr Trump's choice for secretary of the army: Daniel Driscoll, an ex-soldier who served in Iraq.

Mr Driscoll is also a friend of J.D. Vance, the vice-president, and has worked as an investment banker and a consultant. If senators approve his nomination, Mr Driscoll's main task will be to prepare the army for an age in which ground forces are under threat from constant aerial surveillance and cheap precision-guided munitions. Mr Driscoll will not command any troops—his task will be to train and equip them for different roles—but his job has been a stepping-stone to bigger things. Mark Esper, Mr Trump's first secretary of the army, ended up as secretary of defence.



# Thailand legalises same-sex marriage



Around 300 same-sex couples will wed in Bangkok on Thursday, when a new marriage-equality law came into effect. Some lovebirds are exchanging vows in a huge shopping centre. Others are spending the day at government offices in the aptly-named district of Bang Rak, meaning “Love Hamlet”. MPs are cheering them on as Thailand becomes the first South-East Asian country to legalise same-sex marriage.

The law passed partly because of religious tolerance and social acceptance of LGBT people. Political will was also crucial: at the last election the two biggest parties campaigned for the bill. It changes the definition of marriage in Thailand’s civil code and gives married same-sex couples inheritance and adoption rights. LGBT couples across Asia hope the law will boost acceptance in their countries. Australia, New Zealand, Nepal and Taiwan have legalised same-sex marriage in the past decade or so. Progress across the region is uneven. But at least Asia is making some strides towards pride.

## A thriller plays by the numbers



A mathematics postgraduate at the University of Cambridge is on the verge of a breakthrough. In fact, his research into prime numbers has the potential to break the cryptographic algorithms that protect computers and financial transactions. That puts him in the sights of America's National Security Agency and [other shadowy organisations](#). “Prime Target”, released on Apple TV+ this week, is a rollicking thriller (despite its clunkingly predictable title).

The series offers a formula for the streaming era. It gives the viewer a recognisable heartthrob (Leo Woodall), visually alluring set pieces (shot on the coast of southern France and among the spires of Cambridge) and a conspiracy fit for a true-crime documentary. But it has a flaw: it prefers maths to emotions. Mr Woodall's character, Edward Brooks, the student genius, is cold and aloof. “I know he's brilliant,” his thesis supervisor admits, but “I want to punch him in the face.” This unlikability is one problem the show never manages to solve.



## 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](mailto:QuizEspresso@economist.com). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

**Thursday:** The Neon tetra, Harlequin Rasbora and Pea Puffer are all types of which animal?

**Wednesday:** The original “Die Hard” film is set during which seasonal holiday?

**A novel is a mirror carried along a main road.**

*Stendhal*