

Catch up: Banks sue the Fed; protests in Syria



Five trade associations representing **American banks** sued the **Federal Reserve**, claiming that the central bank's stress-testing framework was unduly "opaque". Banks have long grumbled about the stress tests, which are intended to ensure that lenders have sufficient capital to withstand a severe financial crisis. On Monday the Fed said that it would begin a public consultation on ways to make the tests more transparent.

Thousands of demonstrators rallied across **Syria** after a Christmas tree was set on fire. Masked gunmen torched a tree in the square of Suqaylabiyah, a town where most people are Christian. Syria's many minorities are anxious to ensure that their freedoms are respected by [Hayat Tahrir al-Sham](#), the group that led the rebellion against the Assad regime. HTS claimed foreign fighters were responsible for the arson.

Residents of **Australian** towns that had been evacuated because of **bushfires** were given two hours to return and collect belongings before Christmas. Fires have burnt through 43,000 hectares of the

Grampians National Park in Victoria. Local authorities warn that these blazes could be the worst since the “[Black Summer](#)” of 2019-20, Australia’s deadliest fire season on record.

A court in **Russia** sentenced **Eugene Spector**, a Russian-born American, to 15 years’ imprisonment after convicting him of espionage. The charges were not made public and Mr Spector was tried behind closed doors. He was already in prison for bribery; his new sentence includes the remainder of that term. Other Americans convicted in Russia, including [Evan Gershkovich](#), a journalist, have later been freed in prisoner swaps.

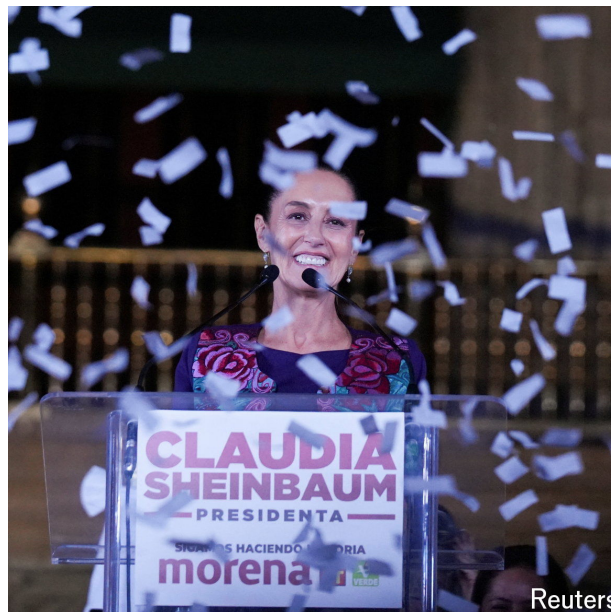
The Biden administration launched a trade investigation into **China’s** production of “legacy” semiconductor chips, which power cars, telecoms equipment and some appliances. The inquiry will be handed over to the incoming Trump administration, which has touted potential [tariff hikes](#) on Chinese technology. America has restricted shipments of China’s advanced technology on the basis of national security, prompting retaliatory restrictions on mineral exports.

Pope Francis inaugurated a jubilee, or holy year, in the Roman Catholic church with the opening of a “holy door” at St Peter’s basilica in the Vatican. Every quarter of a century a jubilee affords Catholics the chance to renew their faith and earn a “plenary indulgence”—full remission for their sins—through repentance and pilgrimage.

A spacecraft operated by **NASA** is hoped to have made a record-setting approach to the **Sun**. At around noon GMT on Christmas Eve the Parker Solar Probe was expected to reach its closest point—known as the perihelion—3.8m miles (6.1m km) from the [Sun’s surface](#). The uncrewed vehicle, launched in 2018, is currently out of contact with the Earth; scientists will find out on December 28th if it has survived.

Figure of the day: 14,000, the number of documents on which the report into Matt Gaetz's misconduct drew. [Read the full story.](#)

In 2024 Mexico got its first female president



We are looking back on 2024. Today, a year of elections

Claudia Sheinbaum was sworn in as Mexico's president on October 1st. She is not only Mexico's first female president, but the first in North America. Her resounding victory in elections in June was accompanied by a sweep of congress by Morena, the ruling party, giving Ms Sheinbaum a powerful mandate. She needs to wield it well: the country's economy is sluggish and violent crime is becoming ever more entrenched.

Many had hoped that Ms Sheinbaum, a 62-year-old scientist and former mayor of Mexico City, the capital, would chart a less ideological path for Mexico than her more aggressive predecessor, and mentor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. She has sensible plans to tackle criminal gangs, for instance. But she has continued with many of his market-rattling ways, recently abolishing seven watchdogs, including the freedom of information agency. In 2025 she must contend with a difficulty beyond Mexico's borders too: Donald Trump's return to the White House.

An extraordinary year in American politics



Donald Trump's first presidential win, in 2016, was shocking. His victory in 2024 was even more extraordinary. It came after he had incited his supporters to try to violently overturn the result of the 2020 election. He then had to weather about 90 felony indictments. In April 2024 he became the first former president to stand in a criminal trial.

Drama in the courtroom aside, by early summer the presidential contest **seemed almost dull**. Mr Trump easily secured the Republican nomination and held a **clear lead** over his 81-year-old Democratic opponent, Joe Biden. But in July, everything changed. Mr Biden withdrew after a disastrous debate performance, while Mr Trump narrowly survived an assassination attempt. Mr Biden's replacement, his vice-president Kamala Harris, ran a stronger campaign **than many expected**. But Mr Trump's victory was **ultimately resounding**. For the dazed, defeated Democrats, the inquest into the causes of their electoral humiliation has barely begun.

How the shine came off Sir Keir Starmer



Rarely has an election triumph been so keenly anticipated. The polls predicted a landslide for Sir Keir Starmer's Labour party in Britain's general election on July 4th, and that's what voters delivered. Sir Keir's majority was the largest won by any government since 1997. The party **flipped seats** in all parts of the country. The Conservative Party, led by Rishi Sunak, was routed, winning just 121 seats (out of 650).

But subsequent events confirmed what many suspected at the time, that Sir Keir's victory was more a function of Conservative unpopularity than enthusiasm for Labour. A string of minor scandals—such as “frockgate”, about ministers being gifted clothes by rich donors—**buffeted the new government**. An aggressively tax-raising budget worsened matters. By one count, Sir Keir suffered the biggest drop in approval ratings of any prime minister in the modern era. He will hope for a better start to 2025.

India's big surprise



The world's biggest electorate showed just how democracy can rebuke out-of-touch political elites, limit the concentration of power and change a country's destiny. After a decade in charge, Narendra Modi, the prime minister, was forecast to win a [landslide victory](#) in India's election. But his Bharatiya Janata Party lost its parliamentary majority, forcing him to rule through a coalition. It lost seats to regional parties in its heartlands in Uttar Pradesh and beyond, reflecting a revival of caste-based politics and worries about a lack of jobs.

The result has made politics messier. Relying on coalition partners will derail Mr Modi's grand project to renew India. But the BJP remains far and away India's most popular party. In November it won regional elections in Maharashtra, India's second-most populous state. Mr Modi may have lost his air of invincibility, but his party retains a commanding position.

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.

Wednesday: Who was the central female character in the book and film “Breakfast at Tiffany’s”?

Tuesday: Which newspaper title is shared by publications in Miami and Scotland?

The surest test of discipline is its absence.

Clara Barton