

Catch up: Syria plans for new government; arrest in health-care CEO case



Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the group that spearheaded the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad in **Syria**, announced plans to [form a new government](#), pledging to restore order. NATO urged them to uphold the rule of law, protect civilians and respect minorities during the transition. European governments reacted swiftly to the developments: Germany paused over 47,000 Syrian asylum applications, while Austria announced plans to deport Syrian refugees.

[Luigi Mangione](#)—a person of interest in last week’s [murder of Brian Thompson](#), a **health-care CEO**, in Manhattan—was arraigned in **Pennsylvania** on gun charges. The 26-year-old Mr Mangione was recognised at a McDonald’s in central Pennsylvania from photos that the New York police department had released. Police recovered a manifesto that an official said revealed “ill will toward corporate America”.

Israel's defence minister, Israel Katz, ordered the air force to continue strikes in **Syria**, aiming to destroy strategic weapons, including missiles and air defence systems, to prevent them from falling into rebel hands. Over the weekend Israeli air strikes targeted suspected chemical weapons sites. Israeli forces also crossed into Syrian territory from the disputed Golan Heights to prevent [rebel groups](#) from settling near the border.

China opened an antitrust investigation into **Nvidia**, an American chipmaker, over potential anti-competitive practices. The probe centres on its \$7bn acquisition of Mellanox, a provider of networking technology. Approved in 2020 by Chinese regulators, the deal required [Nvidia](#) to ensure fair treatment of Chinese firms—a condition regulators suspect the company has failed to meet.

TikTok requested a temporary pause on [a law](#) requiring it to be sold to a non-Chinese owner or shut down in America by January 19th. An appeals court upheld the law on Friday. TikTok wants the [Supreme Court](#) to evaluate the case against the video app, and argues that a delay would give the top court, and the Trump administration, time to do so.

Gangs brutally murdered at least 110 people in **Haiti's** Cité Soleil, a slum near Port-au-Prince, the capital. The massacre, carried out with machetes and knives, targeted elderly residents accused of witchcraft by a priest after a gang leader's child fell ill. Gangs control around 80% of the capital. Criminal violence has displaced thousands of people and plunged the country in a deep [political crisis](#).

Google unveiled “Willow”, a **quantum chip** which it says needs just five minutes to solve a mathematical task that would take the fastest [supercomputers](#) 10 septillion years (longer than the age of the universe). While [quantum computing](#) remains an experimental technology, Google said it could eventually be used for “real-world applications” by advancing the fields of AI and medical research.

Figure of the day: \$5bn, the amount General Motors will write down on its joint ventures in China. [Read the full story.](#)

Correction: In yesterday's edition we mistakenly wrote that the Security Council was voting on December 9th to renew the UN's peacekeeping mission in eastern Congo. In fact it was discussing the mission, with a vote due later in December.

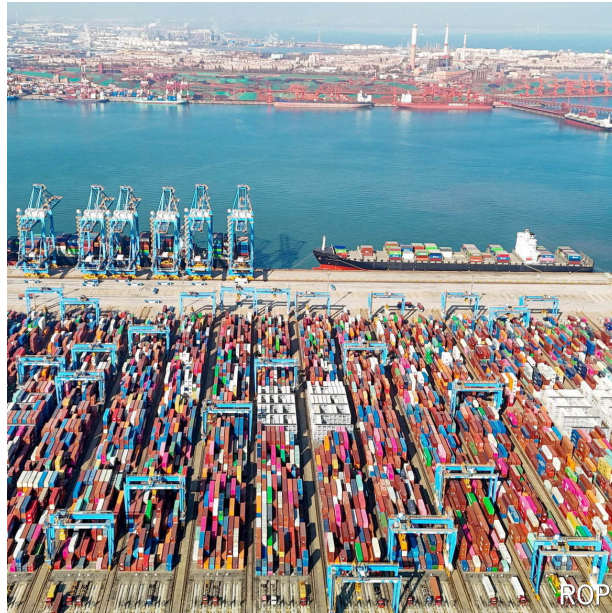
Russia's defeat in Syria



The swift [collapse of the Assad regime](#) in Syria has shaken up the region's balance of power. It is a triumph for Turkey and a disaster for Iran. But another big loser is Russia. Its status as a Mediterranean naval power has long depended on access to the Tartus naval facility in the west of Syria (see map), where it first arrived in 1971.

[Syria's new rulers](#) might strike a deal with Russia to allow it to stay. But if they eventually evict it, this would make it far harder for Russian warships to patrol the Mediterranean and Red Sea and for the country to support its mercenaries in North Africa. Russia would also have to evacuate its aircraft at the nearby Khmeimim air base, from which it spent a decade pulverising cities like Aleppo with indiscriminate bombing. Russia's fate in Syria is now in the hands of those who it was fighting against.

China fattens up for a trade war



Despite rising trade tensions with America, recent months have been strong for China's exports. Their dollar value grew by 12.7% year on year in October. Figures released on Tuesday could show year on year growth of 8% or more in November. What explains the paradox?

Foreign buyers may be front-loading their purchases before tit-for-tat curbs on commerce explode into a [trade war](#). On December 2nd America tightened controls on sales of semiconductor chips and chipmaking equipment to China. A day later [China retaliated](#) by banning exports to America of gallium, germanium and other metals used in high-end chip production.

Worse is expected. Donald Trump, America's incoming president, has threatened to impose tariffs of 60% on Chinese goods as well as additional penalties if the country does not do more to curtail the supply of fentanyl, a synthetic opioid made out of chemical precursors that often originate in China. Another trade war will be bad for cross-border commerce—but anticipation of it may have briefly boosted business.

Netanyahu finally takes the stand



Israel's prime minister tried everything to postpone his testimony in the corruption case against him. [Binyamin Netanyahu](#) attempted to get the security services to declare it unsafe to hold proceedings while he may be the target of drone strikes, and pleaded he had no time to testify while running Israel's war-effort. In recent days ministers argued that due to [events in Syria](#) a postponement is a matter of national security. But on Tuesday, he is set to take the stand as first witness for the defence in the trial which has already been going on for four and a half years.

Mr Netanyahu is charged with three counts of fraud and one of bribe-taking in a case where the allegations include receiving illicit gifts from wealthy benefactors and illegal dealings with media barons. He strenuously denies the charges. In the past he claimed to be perfectly capable of running Israel's affairs while standing trial. Now he seems less sure. Whatever the case, he insists on remaining prime minister.

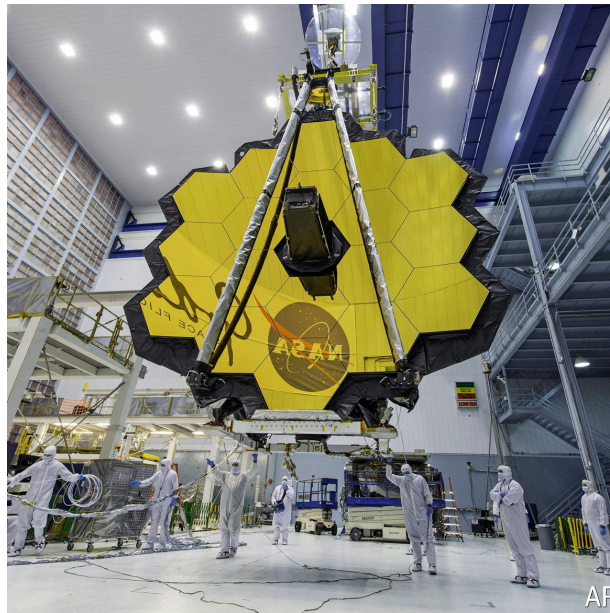
Upending America's immigration system



One of Donald Trump's signature campaign pledges was to carry out "mass" deportations of illegal migrants. Just how many is uncertain. It would be [nearly impossible](#) to deport the roughly 11m migrants who live in America without papers. However aggressive [Mr Trump's plans](#), Senate Democrats will begin to resist them in a hearing of the judiciary committee on Tuesday by warning of the dangers of mass deportations.

Mr Trump will run into political, legal and logistical obstacles. Democratic mayors and governors will try to shield migrants in their cities and states. Because America's immigration courts are gummed up, it can take years to deport someone. Detaining migrants and sending them back costs money and requires the agreement of their countries of origin. Yet even if the president-elect fails to deport millions, his threat may deter new migrants from coming.

A space mystery deepens



The universe is expanding faster each day. But cosmologists struggle to determine **exactly how fast**. The expansion rate predicted by their best model of the universe is at odds with their measurements. That mismatch, known as the Hubble tension, has led some physicists to question whether they understand the universe at all. Earlier this year, however, data from the new James Webb Space Telescope suggested that the gap could be the product of old, inferior data.

A new paper, released this week in the *Astrophysical Journal*, says otherwise. Using data from JWST and the older Hubble Space Telescope, a research team found that the telescopes agree and that the Hubble tension remains, meaning that the standard cosmological model might be wrong. This will not be the last word, however. Several teams are working on new ways to measure the rate of expansion, hoping to solve a mystery that, like the cosmos, seems to deepen with time.

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.

Tuesday: What was the catchphrase of Bugs Bunny?

Monday: Which two provinces suffered repeated transfers of power between France and Germany from 1871 to 1945?

Contentment is the only real wealth.

Alfred Nobel