

Catch up: Zelensky “committed” to peace talks; Syria’s escalating violence



Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelensky, said he is “fully committed” to talks with [America](#) in Saudi Arabia next week on ending the war. Earlier, he urged allies to tighten sanctions on **Russia** after strikes killed at least 14 people and wounded 37, officials said. Missiles hit homes in Dobropillia, a town in the east, killing 11, while three more died in Kharkiv, in the north.

The new leader of **Syria**, Ahmed al-Sharaa, called for peace and “national unity” after days of violent clashes between the security forces and supporters of **Bashar al-Assad**, the deposed president. More than 1,000 people have been killed overall, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor. That number includes about 700 Alawite civilians killed execution-style by pro-government forces in the coastal strip, Mr Assad’s [sectarian stronghold](#).

Iran’s Supreme Leader, [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei](#), said he would not negotiate under “bullying”. His comments follow **Donald Trump’s** letter proposing the talks. Mr Khamenei accused America of

imposing new demands on Iran's missile programme. During his first term America's president abandoned a nuclear pact with Iran, which he said was too generous, but failed to secure a stricter agreement.

Britain's government outlined plans to reform the **civil service**. Pat McFadden, a cabinet minister, told the BBC that under-performing officials would be given incentives to leave and performance-related pay will be introduced. He said overall civil service numbers "would and can become smaller", but denied any comparisons to Elon Musk's assault on federal bureaucracy in America, arguing that he just wanted a bigger "bang for our buck".

France, Britain, Germany and Italy said they support an Arab-backed plan for the reconstruction of **Gaza**. The proposal has been rejected by Israel and Donald Trump, who wants to turn the war-ravaged enclave into the "**Riviera of the Middle East**". Meanwhile Israel and Hamas signaled they were preparing for the next stage of ceasefire negotiations, as mediators sought to extend a fragile truce.

China announced tariffs on **Canadian** food products, **retaliating** for Canada's own tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, as well as steel and aluminium products, in October. The new levies, which will take effect on March 20th, further heighten global trade tensions, which had already risen due to Donald Trump's **erratic** policy.

Cyclone Alfred tore through **Australia's** Queensland state, causing flash flooding and leaving more than 300,000 people without power. The storm, which was downgraded to a "tropical low" on Saturday, made landfall near Brisbane, the state's capital. One man died in floodwaters in the state of New South Wales. Tropical cyclones **are becoming more damaging** because of climate change.

Word of the week: *sertanejo*, Brazil's most popular music genre, a country-inspired style reflecting the country's rural and agricultural

roots. [Read the full story.](#)

No eggflation in China



Can China beat [deflation](#) this year? A broken property market, cautious consumers and tense geopolitics have sapped demand in the world's second-biggest economy. That has put downward pressure on prices. Against this backdrop, the government this week cut its inflation target to 2%, down from 3% in recent years.

Most commentators saw the shift as a simple recognition of reality. Inflation undershot the official target by a wide margin in 2024. Figures released on Sunday showed that consumer prices actually fell by 0.1% in the two months of January and February, compared with the same period a year earlier. Even eggs were 1% cheaper.

China was, then, never going to hit an inflation target of 3%. But lowering the goal may still send a damaging, defeatist signal. It could suggest that the government is resigned to the economy's underperformance and less determined to reverse it. By bowing to China's deflationary reality, the new target could further entrench it.

Who will lead Canada's Liberals?



Canada's Liberal Party will select a [new leader](#) on Sunday. The victor will automatically become the country's prime minister, succeeding Justin Trudeau. An internal party revolt and record-low polling numbers forced him to announce his resignation in January. Surveys of Liberals, endorsements from Liberal lawmakers and fundraising figures all point to Mark Carney as the probable winner. The former governor of central banks in Canada and England is the contender least associated with Mr Trudeau's unpopular government.

Donald Trump will be the new leader's biggest headache and biggest opportunity. His tariffs threaten Canada's economy, and possibly its security. Canada can avoid them by becoming the 51st American state. Yet Mr Trudeau's tussle with the truculent Mr Trump caused a revival of the Liberals' popularity. [According to our poll tracker](#), they have a chance of beating the Conservatives in an election that must be called this year. In part to capitalise on the Trump bump, the next prime minister may call the election within days.

A mass without the pope



This Sunday is a big day for Roman Catholics. The day marks the first Sunday of Lent, the 40-day period of fasting and abstinence that Christians observe before Easter. At the Vatican, a mass will be celebrated in front of St Peter's Basilica, one in which a number of Roman Catholic prelates normally take part—but this year without [the pope](#).

Francis will be in the Gemelli hospital in Rome, where he has been treated for double pneumonia since February 14th. The Vatican said on Saturday that there has been “a gradual, slight improvement” in his condition. Francis would doubtless like to resume his normal activities, especially because 2025 is a papal Jubilee, a special year of pardon and pilgrimage in which more than 30m people are expected to visit Rome. But in a recording he released on Thursday to thank those who have prayed for him, he sounded alarmingly breathless. It scarcely reassured those who question whether he will ever be fit enough again to assume the heavy workload of a pope.

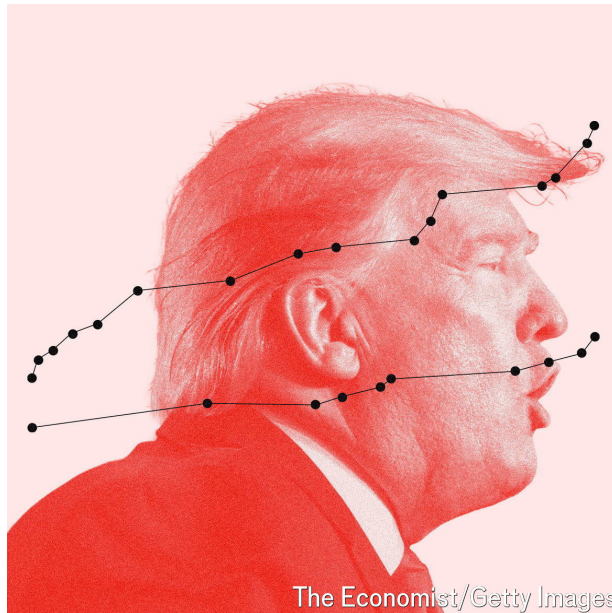
Beware the Black Caps



Any sports institution wanting to learn how to maximise its resources ought to travel to Canterbury, on New Zealand's south island, to visit its cricket governing body. At \$60m in 2024, its annual income is a fraction of that of its rivals in [India](#) (\$820m), England (\$420m) and Australia (\$265m), but its teams compete with the best. On Sunday the men's one-day side, known as the Black Caps, will contest the final of the Champions Trophy against India in Dubai.

India's advantages are not just financial. Match conditions in Dubai will also be closer to those in Ahmedabad than Auckland. But New Zealand are well-drilled and unafraid of the big stage. They beat India to win the inaugural World Test Championship in 2021, and also in the one-day World Cup in 2019. Fast bowler Matt Henry and batsman Rachin Ravindra have also been two of the tournament's best players. India won't be underestimating them.

Our Trump legal tracker



Donald Trump didn't waste any time on his return to office, signing 26 executive orders on his first day. Neither did his critics, who began filing lawsuits that same day and have not stopped. Judges have allowed some of the administration's policies, such as transferring migrants to a detention facility in Guantánamo Bay in Cuba, to remain in place while cases proceed. They have also blocked several, including a freeze on foreign aid spending. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency have [attracted a lot of litigation](#).

The Economist has added a legal section to our [presidential tracker](#) to help you cut through the reams of court papers. We will keep you up to date on the most important challenges to the administration's actions as they progress from district courts all the way up to the Supreme Court. With so many lawsuits filed, the justices may have a busy four years ahead of them.

Weekly crossword



We now publish an interactive edition of our crossword, allowing you to enter and check the answers, and see explanations, instantly. Try it [here](#). Or, if you prefer to do things the old-fashioned way, use the grid below.

Our crossword has two sets of clues, one for seasoned cruciverbalists and the other for less experienced solvers. Both give the same answers, all of which feature in articles in this week's edition of *The Economist*:

Cryptic clues

1 down Distant place has protester rioting (12)

1 across Precious metal found in fossil vertebrae (6)

2 across Men stop European leader (5)

3 across Strange kiss and hug used for mass departure (6)

Factual clues

1 down What dead satellites end up polluting (12)

1 across An asset that's becoming increasingly popular (6)

2 across Politician who is a staunch Russian ally (5)

3 across Something New Zealand is currently experiencing (6)

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am GMT on Monday to crossword@economist.com. 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:

Don McKinley, Calgary, Canada

Beatrice Ballini, Milan, Italy

Andrej Galogaza, Zagreb, Croatia

They all gave the correct answers of Minnesota Twins, Conan O'Brien, Robin Wright, TotalEnergies and Predator drones. The theme is films starring Arnold Schwarzenegger: *Twins*, *Conan the Barbarian* (and *Conan the Destroyer*), *Batman & Robin*, *Total Recall* and *Predator*.

The questions were:

Monday: Which baseball team last won the World Series in 1991?

Tuesday: Who briefly replaced Jay Leno as host of *The Tonight Show* from 2009 to 2010?

Wednesday: Which actress is known for roles in *The Princess Bride*, *Forrest Gump* and *House of Cards*?

Thursday: Which French group is generally regarded as one of the

world's energy supermajors?

Friday: Which remote air force weapon was replaced with the Reaper in 2018?

Sertanejo

Brazil's most popular music genre, a country-inspired style reflecting the country's rural and agricultural roots.

Read the full story.

**The luck of having talent is not enough;
one must also have a talent for luck.**

Hector Berlioz