

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



Britain and **America** reported having “contact” with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the [group](#) 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 for 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.

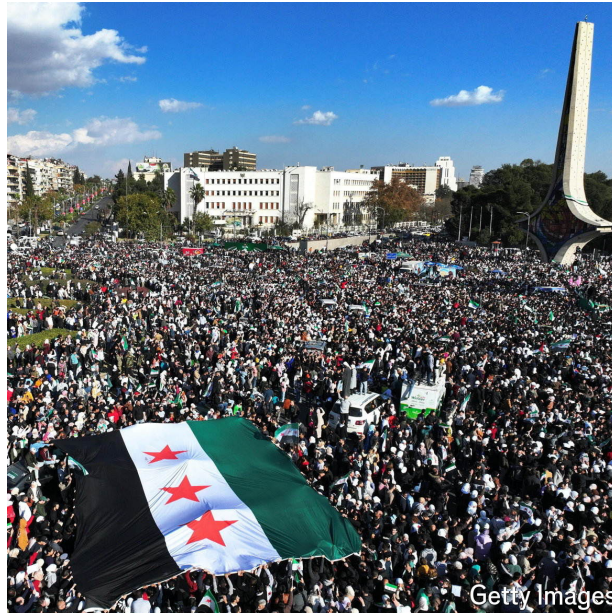
Two **Russian oil tankers** sank in the **Black Sea** and are now discharging their cargoes into the water, according to Russian authorities. The vessels broke apart in bad weather and had 29 people on board. One person has so far been reported dead. The severity of the oil spill is not yet clear.

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”, but denied that Ireland is anti-Israel.

Five **Australians** convicted of drug smuggling in **Indonesia** returned to their home country. The men were the last of the so-called [Bali Nine](#) locked up in Indonesia (two were executed). They served almost 20 years, but following a deal between the two governments had their life sentences commuted. Anthony Albanese, Australia’s prime minister, thanked Prabowo Subianto, Indonesia’s president, for his “act of compassion”.

Word of the week: *Chuan Jianguo*, a nickname given to Donald Trump by some Chinese nationalists, meaning “Trump the Nation Builder”. [Read the full story](#).

Syria looks eagerly to a new era



For now, the mood is still exuberant. On Friday hundreds of thousands of people in Syria came out to celebrate [Bashar al-Assad's downfall](#). Muhammad al-Bashir, the interim prime minister, led Friday prayers from the historic Umayyad mosque in Damascus. Syrian exiles are flocking back to visit a country they doubted they would see again.

But a tough reality lies ahead. The [interim government](#) says the economy is a top priority. It wants to raise salaries for civil servants, which are currently as low as \$25 a month. It may also need to find new suppliers for important commodities. In recent years Syria sourced much of its grain from Russia and its oil from Iran, often paying for both on credit (it is thought to owe Iran tens of billions of dollars). Those shipments have been suspended. Western powers do not seem in a hurry to lift economic sanctions—but Syria will need help soon.

America and Ukraine dispute arms and men



A war of words has broken out between the outgoing Biden administration and Ukraine's president. Several senior American officials have recently argued that Ukraine's biggest problem is a lack of manpower, and that it needs to lower the minimum age of conscription from 25 to 18. A government spokesman said that if Ukraine changes its policy, America will arm and train the recruits.

Volodymyr Zelensky retorted that allies had fully equipped only a quarter of the ten brigades they he had requested earlier in the year. He said that young soldiers should not “compensate” for a lack of arms and training, and argues that preserving lives, and not “weapons in storage”, should be the goal. That reflects Ukraine's worries about its [long-term demographics](#). Meanwhile Russia has suffered some 87,500 [casualties](#) over the past two months, as estimated by Britain's defence ministry, to achieve quite small gains. Russia only controls 0.5% more of Ukraine's territory than a year ago.

Sri Lanka's new leader visits India



Anura Dissanayake's election as Sri Lanka's president in September raised concerns in India. His Marxist-leaning party has criticised "Indian expansionism" in the past and has ties to China. Some of India's apprehensions will be allayed on Sunday. That is when Mr Dissanayake travels to Delhi, in his first foreign visit since taking office.

His meeting with Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, will focus on economic co-operation, maritime security and infrastructure projects. India provided Sri Lanka with aid during an economic crisis in 2022 and has invested in its infrastructure, including in a controversial wind-power project by the [Adani Group](#), a giant Indian conglomerate. Indian help, however, is dwarfed by support from China, which remains Sri Lanka's biggest lender. Mr Dissanayake will take care in his dealings with the two giants. He plans to visit Beijing next month. Indian officials may become jittery again soon.

Stardust on the oche



Last year a British teenager, Luke Littler, became an unlikely sensation by reaching the final of the Professional Darts Corporation world [darts championship](#), the sport's biggest event. He will try to go one better at this year's championship, which begins at Alexandra Palace in London on Sunday. Since his breakthrough, Mr Littler has won tournaments in Bahrain and the Netherlands, as well as his first major title, the PDC Grand Slam, last month. He is now ranked fourth in the world.

Those in his way include the world number one, Luke Humphries, who beat Mr Littler in the 2023 world-championship final. Both players have a bye in the first round and are scheduled to meet in a mouth-watering semi-final. The PDC's president Barry Hearn, is looking to capitalise on Mr Littler's eye-catching emergence. The body's broadcasting deal with Sky Sports ends after this tournament—and Mr Hearn is talking up interest from big streamers such as Amazon Prime and Netflix.

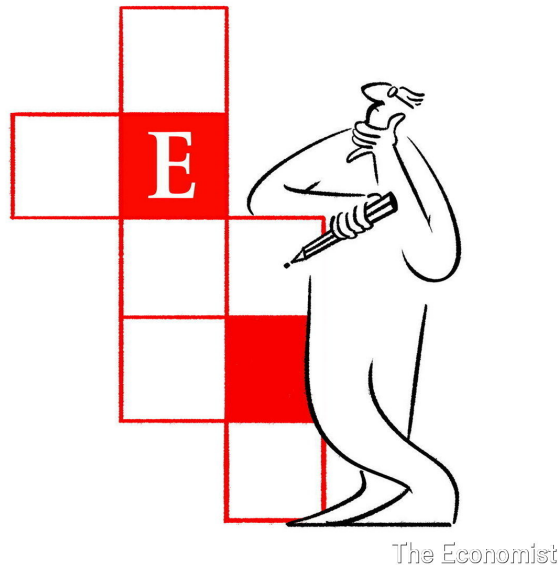
Works on paper at the Pitzhanger



Art often starts with a blank sheet of paper—whether to scrawl ideas in notepads, or to sketch the early shapes of works. Yet a growing number of artists are using the humble material as their [primary medium](#). Works on paper are diverse: they include those painted with oils or splashed with acrylics, as well as experiments with printmaking techniques, from etchings to woodcuts.

A new exhibition at the Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery in west London showcases this diversity, assembling more than 150 original works. The highlight of the show is an assortment of colourful prints by Sir Peter Blake, the “Godfather of pop art”. Striking works by lesser-known artists include Fei Alexeli’s surreal collages and Kristina Chan’s wild landscapes. But the rest of the exhibition feels more random. The gallery that supplied the works, For Art’s Sake, is hoping visitors will purchase the prints. But to properly showcase an oft-overlooked medium, the Pitzhanger might need to go back to the drawing board.

Weekly crossword



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 Russian ruler's pet hate—regret, unfortunately (5,3,5)

1 across Vegetable dish comes with irregular caution (6)

2 across Murmur a little nonsense for someone like you (5)

3 across Reversing track critical for country (6)

Factual clues

1 down One of the leaders under which the Russian Orthodox Church flourished (5,3,5)

1 across Main ingredient of pancakes popular in Poland (6)

2 across Species for whom tracing a migration pattern is tricky (5)

3 across One of the three countries that bombed targets in Syria the day after Bashar al-Assad fled (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:

Jeannette Duplessis, Calgary, Canada

Emilio J. Ferreira, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Ksenia Lenina, Lewes, Britain

They all gave the correct answers of Alsace and Lorraine, What's up, doc?, Boy George, Marty and the DeLorean Motor Company. The theme is the film Back to the Future; Marty McFly, his parents Lorraine and George, his scientist friend Doc Brown and a time-travelling DeLorean.

The questions were:

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

Tuesday: What was the catchphrase of Bugs Bunny?

Wednesday: Who was the lead singer of the band Culture Club?

Thursday: Which movie starring Ernest Borgnine won the Oscar for best picture in 1956?

Friday: Which short-lived motor company produced a sports car in the early 1980s with gull-wing doors?

Where all think alike, no one thinks very much.

Walter Lippmann