

Catch up: calls for impeachment in South Korea; American CEO killed



South Korea's opposition party presented a bill to impeach the president, Yoon Suk Yeol. They said his [short-lived coup](#) attempt was an “unforgivable crime”. On Tuesday Mr Yoon declared martial law, banning all political parties and curbing media freedom. But six hours later, after opposition politicians had barricaded themselves inside parliament and protesters had flocked to the streets, he reversed course.

Brian Thompson, the boss of UnitedHealthcare, an American health insurer, was killed in Midtown Manhattan. He was shot in the chest and leg, in what the police believe was a targeted attack. Police are still searching for the suspect. [UnitedHealth Group](#), UnitedHealthcare's parent company, is the largest private health insurer in America, with a revenue of \$371.6bn in 2023.

A UN official told AFP, a news agency, that 115,000 people have been newly displaced in **Syria** since [last week](#). State forces reportedly pushed back rebel groups close to Hama, the country's fourth biggest city, on Wednesday. The Syrian Observatory for

Human Rights said that the army had retaken towns in Hama province which had been captured by rebel groups on Tuesday.

Donald Trump is reportedly considering nominating Ron DeSantis, Florida's governor, to become secretary of defence. His original pick, [Pete Hegseth](#), a former Fox News anchor with no government experience, has been accused of sexual assault, which he denies. Matt Gaetz, who was Mr Trump's first choice for attorney-general, withdrew his nomination last month.

The Philippines said that **China's** coastguard fired water cannon at one of its patrol vessels in the [South China Sea](#). America called China's actions "unlawful" and "dangerous". The incident happened at Scarborough Shoal, a strategic lagoon which is controlled by China but close to Manila, the capital of the Philippines. Tensions are rising over the region's disputed territories.

Emmanuel Macron asked French lawmakers to reject a vote of no confidence in the government, to be held on Wednesday. Left-wing and hard-right parties submitted no-confidence motions after **Michel Barnier**, the prime minister, forced through a proposed [budget](#) without parliamentary approval. Jordan Bardella, president of the hard-right National Rally, confirmed that his party will vote in favour.

Business activity in the euro zone slowed in November, according to a benchmark survey. S&P Global's purchasing-managers index fell to 48.3, down from 50 in the previous month. (A reading below 50 denotes contraction.) The services sector suffered its first decline in output since January. Big European economies such as [Germany](#), France and Italy all registered contractions.

Figure of the day: 1962, the last year when France's National Assembly brought down a government. [Read the full story.](#)

France's government on the edge



Michel Barnier's minority [government may collapse](#) on Wednesday when the French National Assembly votes on two motions of no confidence. Both were tabled on Monday in response to the prime minister's use of a constitutional provision to try to force a budget through parliament without a direct vote. Marine Le Pen's hard-right National Rally, which tabled one motion, says it will also back the other, tabled by the left-wing alliance.

The two blocs have the numbers to topple Mr Barnier. President Emmanuel Macron could ask him to stay on temporarily, while he searches for a replacement. This would enable the government to use special measures to continue spending at levels authorised by this year's budget, without inflation adjustments, into 2025. The last time Mr Macron lost a prime minister, in July, it took him two months to name a successor. This time the markets may not give him that luxury.

The new map of Syria



It has been a week since rebels launched a [surprise offensive](#) in northern Syria. They are consolidating their control of Aleppo, Syria's second city, from which Bashar al-Assad's regime has retreated. The insurgents have pushed back the [Syrian Democratic Forces](#) (SDF), an America-backed, mainly Kurdish militia that governs the north-east of the country.

The rebel advance has slowed on the northern outskirts of Hama, 120km south of Aleppo. Where it goes next will depend in part on geopolitics. Turkey is supporting the rebels. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan wants to push back the SDF, which Turkey considers a terrorist group, and wants Mr Assad to negotiate a deal that would allow Syrian refugees in Turkey to return home. The rout of the regime gives Mr Erdogan more leverage. And with Mr Assad's chief backers, Russia and Iran, embroiled in other wars, he is more isolated than ever.

Milei's lessons for Trump



On Wednesday the Conservative Political Action Conference, the premier talk-fest for conservative American lawmakers, hosts its first event in Argentina. Javier Milei, Argentina's president, is expected to speak alongside Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil's hard-right former president, and Lara Trump, co-chair of the Republican National Committee. Mr Milei, who gave an [interview](#) to *The Economist* last week, admires her father-in-law—he was the first leader to meet Donald Trump after his re-election.

But the populists meeting in Buenos Aires disagree about a lot. Mr Milei has cut public spending and red tape with promising results. Monthly inflation is down from 13% to 3%. Mr Trump also wants lower taxes and less regulation. But whereas America's president-elect is an enthusiastic protectionist, Mr Milei believes in open markets and free trade. He hates big budget deficits of the sort that Mr Trump is likely to run. [His experiment](#) is more promising than the one Mr Trump plans to conduct.

Trouble with the rouble



Over the past month [Russia's currency](#) has tumbled. At its lowest level one week ago the rouble was down by almost 13% against the dollar and by 11% against China's yuan. The immediate cause was the expanding of American sanctions on November 21st to cover Gazprombank, the largest Russian lender not previously subject to them. The restrictions come at a time when Russia's economy is showing signs of strain. Inflation is rising again and interest rates are now at their highest level since 2003.

A weaker rouble is a doubled-edged sword for the Kremlin. It increases the rouble value of oil exports, helping to contain the government's growing deficit. Yet it also pushes up the price of imported goods. China has become Russia's biggest trading partner in recent years, providing more than a third of all imports, as well as high-tech inputs that are crucial for the armed forces. After two years of good growth, 2025 might be tougher for Russia's economy.

SCOTUS tackles healthcare for trans youth



The divisive question of gender transitioning for adolescents arrives at America's Supreme Court on Wednesday. In *United States v Skrametti*, the justices will examine whether Tennessee's ban on puberty blockers and hormone treatments for minors diagnosed with gender dysphoria violates the 14th Amendment.

The challengers—three transgender children and their parents, joined by the federal government—cite a recent Supreme Court ruling on discrimination against trans employees. Tennessee cannot bar [medical treatments for trans youth](#), they say, while permitting these therapies for other children to treat conditions such as early puberty or endometriosis.

The plaintiffs persuaded a district-court judge to block the law in 2023. But two months later the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals sided with Tennessee, saying that since the law bans “sex-transition treatments for all minors, regardless of sex” it is not discriminatory. The Supreme Court's decision, expected in the spring, will affect similar laws in 23 other states.

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: Which two acts, with the same name, were passed by the US congress in 1793 and 1850, only to be repealed in 1864?

Tuesday: *Phaseolus coccineus* is better known as which vegetable?

Curiosity is the lust of the mind.

Thomas Hobbes