

Catch up: Catch up: Trump's troubled cabinet picks; Israel pounds Beirut



Mike Johnson, the Republican speaker of America's House of Representatives, "strongly" discouraged releasing an ethics report about **Matt Gaetz**, Donald Trump's pick for attorney-general, arguing it breaks House "tradition" because [Mr Gaetz](#) is no longer a member of Congress. The [divisive](#) Mr Gaetz resigned following his nomination this week. He was being investigated over allegations of sexual misconduct and drug use. On Friday it was also revealed that [Pete Hegseth](#), Mr Trump's pick to run the Pentagon, was investigated for sexual assault in 2017. Both men deny impropriety.

Israeli strikes killed five paramedics at a civil defence centre in southern **Lebanon**, according to the country's health ministry. Meanwhile the [Israel Defence Forces](#) ordered residents of Bourj al-Barajneh, a suburb in Beirut, the capital, to evacuate. Shortly after Lebanese media reported strikes on buildings in the area. The IDF claims they housed Hizbullah facilities.

Olaf Scholz, Germany's chancellor, and **Vladimir Putin**, Russia's president, spoke on the phone for the first time in nearly two years. Mr Scholz **condemned** Russia's aggression, and reiterated Germany's commitment to supporting Ukraine, according to a German government spokesperson. He urged Mr Putin to engage in "serious" talks for a "just and lasting peace". Mr Putin blamed NATO for the war.

The coalition led by Anura Kumara Dissanayake, **Sri Lanka's** new president, swept to victory in a snap general election. The National People's Power, a leftist alliance, secured 159 seats, a landslide two-thirds majority in parliament. Mr Dissanayake, who was **elected as president** in September, has promised to tackle corruption and revive economic growth.

Gazprom, Russia's **state-owned gas giant**, will stop delivering to OMV, **Austria's** biggest gas firm, following a dispute over contract payments. European gas prices rose this week in anticipation of the news. Karl Nehammer, Austria's chancellor, said his country had other fuel supplies and that "no one will freeze". In January 97% of **Austria's gas imports** came from Russia.

Hundreds gathered outside the parliament of Abkhazia, a **Russian-backed** breakaway territory in **Georgia**, to protest against a deal with **Russia** that would allow its entities to invest in property in the region. Critics say it would price out locals. Protesters rammed a truck into the parliament's gates as lawmakers were set to debate the agreement.

Two **Pakistani** cities were put into partial shutdown, as **deadly smog** enveloped parts of the Punjab region. Schools and businesses in Lahore and Multan were closed, and leave for medical workers cancelled. Last week Pakistan's health ministry said smog had sickened 1.8m people in the past month. Delhi, India's capital, also closed its primary schools last week.

Taita, a reverent term meaning “Father”, which embodies the protective presence of Mount Chimborazo, Ecuador’s highest peak.
[Read the full story.](#)

America and China face off in Peru



This weekend world leaders descend on Lima, Peru's capital, for the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation summit. Both Xi Jinping, China's leader, and [Joe Biden](#), America's president, will attend. Trade and economic integration among countries around the Pacific are on the agenda. Yet the rivalry between China and America will probably overshadow the event, especially as president-elect [Donald Trump](#) builds out his team of [China hawks](#) and tariff enthusiasts.

The competition between the two powers was underscored this week when Mr Xi and Dina Boluarte, Peru's president, inaugurated a new Chinese-built megaport north of the capital. Peru hopes the \$3.6bn project will transform the country into the Singapore of South America. American officials warn that Chinese warships could dock there. That backdrop will surely heighten Chinese boosterism at APEC and risk making it a galling event for an already deflated Mr Biden.

Gabon's potential return to civilian rule



Citizens of Gabon head to the polls on Saturday to decide whether to adopt a proposed new constitution. The referendum in the oil-rich central African country is touted as a critical step on the path back to civilian rule, after [the army took power](#) in a coup in August 2023. The draft constitution includes provisions to abolish the post of prime minister and to limit presidents to two seven-year terms. The referendum will be followed by an election, though no date has been set.

Gabon's seemingly swift return to constitutional rule stands in contrast with the foot-dragging of military juntas in [Guinea and Africa's Sahel region](#). But the army officers who toppled the country's former president, Ali Bongo, are no more likely to give up real power. The new constitution would not prevent Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema (pictured), currently the "transitional president", from standing in the election. Should he do so, he will almost certainly win.

What “Gladiator II” gets wrong



When the first “Gladiator” was released in 2000, the world was instantly smitten with Maximus Decimus Meridius (played by Russell Crowe). The film won five Academy awards and the adoration of classicists. Now “Gladiator” is back, with the sequel storming modern arenas (called cinemas) in Britain this weekend and in America next week.

A lot feels familiar. “[Gladiator II](#)” offers the same blend of swords, sandals and sweatiness—and largely the same plot. Manly, moody Maximus has been replaced by manly, moody Lucius (Paul Mescal), who similarly yearns for “the dream that was Rome”. Unfortunately, quite what Sir Ridley Scott, the director of both the sequel and the original, understands this dream to be is not so clear the second time round. The film’s message as well as its aesthetic feels muddled. It also adds in improbable historical fictions. More than two decades ago, Sir Ridley changed the way you think about Rome. “Gladiator II” will not.

A century of fashion photography



Art galleries used to spurn glossy [fashion photography](#) as commercial. No longer. In Britain both the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Saatchi Gallery have recently showcased the prowess of the genre. Elsewhere retrospectives have focused on esteemed fashion photographers such as Irving Penn, an American lensman.

“Picture Perfect”, which opens at Gainsborough’s House in Suffolk on Saturday, traces fashion photography over the past century. The National Portrait Gallery in London has loaned 29 images for the show, which span “from classic Hollywood to Croydon”. Some feature film stars, such as Audrey Hepburn and Cate Blanchett. Others are of musicians, including The Beatles and Stormzy. The images show the evolution of fashion trends. But they also reflect how culture has changed, from the Roaring Twenties to the modern catwalk, as technology has developed and women have gained more personal and financial freedom. As Penn once said, “We were selling dreams, not clothes.”

Weekend profile: Howard Lutnick, Donald Trump's resilient transition chief



Howard Lutnick owes his multi-billion-dollar fortune—his life, really—to luck and grit. The sharp-elbowed striving that made his career might have hardened other men. But Mr Lutnick also knows pain and tragedy. They have given him purpose.

The defining event of Mr Lutnick's life was September 11th 2001. Two-thirds of his employees—including his brother—died that day. The headquarters of his company, Cantor Fitzgerald, were in the World Trade Centre. After the attacks he became a fighter for his firm, which rebuilt and eventually thrived, and his city.

Decades later Mr Lutnick, now aged 63, is fighting over the fate of America itself on behalf of another big-city billionaire, Donald Trump. Once a donor to Mr Trump, Mr Lutnick is managing the president-elect's transition, filling roughly 4,000 government posts before the inauguration. In return he might be rewarded with the job of [treasury secretary](#).

Mr Lutnick grew up in a middle-class family on Long Island, the son of an art teacher and a history professor. Misery came early. When he was 16 his mother died of cancer. Then during his first week of university his father, also sick with cancer, was given the wrong dose of medicine by hospital staff and died.

A family friend got him a job at Cantor Fitzgerald, then one of the largest brokers of Treasuries. Success came quickly. A series of profitable trades endeared him to Bernie Cantor, the boss. Aged just 29, he became president of the firm.

When Cantor became terminally ill, a nasty dispute ensued between his wife, Iris, and Mr Lutnick over control of the firm. When they finally settled in Delaware's court of chancery, Mr Lutnick held up his six-day-old baby in triumph. He felt like Mufasa, the father in "The Lion King". Mrs Cantor barred him from the funeral. But he had won.

In his embrace of MAGA, Mr Lutnick mythologises American workers trampled by globalisation. More relevant to Mr Lutnick is the prospect of tax cuts and [crypto deregulation](#) under Mr Trump. Mr Lutnick says he owns "hundreds of millions of dollars" in bitcoin; he rhapsodises about the time when America had no income tax. Censorious liberals were part of his MAGA conversion, too. In 2022 he engineered the public listing of Rumble, a YouTube for the far right, to give a platform to figures deemed too odious for Big Tech.

Mr Lutnick has said he will judge prospective hires in the Trump administration on merit, as well as their "fidelity and loyalty...to the man". Several of [the cabinet picks announced so far](#) offer only loyalty, not merit. Mr Lutnick's most impressive attribute is his ability to imbue staff with a sense of mission. But that is only as worthwhile as the quality of the staff and of the mission itself.

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 The sheep get confused and take over the Pentagon (4,7)
- 1 across Do plan to reorganise a country (6)
- 2 across Near the core of humanity's home (5)
- 3 across Arrogance I brush aside (6)

Factual clues

- 1 down Recovering neocon, concerned about trans-lesbian black female dominance (4, 7)
- 1 across One of three Catholic countries with many Trump-voting descendants (6)
- 2 across Where, according to Macron, Trump is the most important man (5)

3 across What Mike Waltz thinks America showed in Afghanistan and Iraq (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:

Marcelo Birenbaum, Montevideo, **Uruguay**

Daniel Kehoe, Tokyo, **Japan**

Corina Roeder, Oslo, **Norway**

They all gave the correct answers of: *El Cid, the Iron Cross, the ox, Long Island and the rain*. The theme is words ending in bow: elbow, crossbow, oxbow, longbow and rainbow.

The questions were:

Monday: The life of which mediaeval Spanish warrior was made into a 1961 film, starring Charlton Heston?

Tuesday: Which medal was the award for bravery in the German army from 1871 to 1945?

Wednesday: Which bovine creature features in the Chinese zodiac?

Thursday: Which is the largest island in the contiguous USA?

Friday: What meteorological feature did Adele set fire to and Prince describe as purple?

Inflation is the one form of taxation that can be imposed without legislation.

Milton Friedman