

Catch up: France's government on the edge; Russia and Iran back Syria's dictator



France's minority government appears [set to collapse](#), with a no-confidence vote expected as soon as Wednesday. Both left and hard right parties—including [Marine Le Pen's](#) National Rally—submitted motions after **Michel Barnier**, the country's prime minister, forced through a proposed [budget](#) without parliamentary approval. The last time the National Assembly brought down a government was in 1962.

Russia and **Iran** emphasised their support for the government of Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian dictator, as Russian and Syrian air forces intensified their attacks on Syrian rebels in Idlib, a northwestern city. At least 400 people have died in recent fighting, according to a human-rights group. Rebels launched a [surprise offensive](#) last week, and have captured Aleppo, Syria's second city.

Pat Gelsinger abruptly retired as boss of **Intel**, the [struggling](#) American chipmaker. The company appointed two interim CEOs as

it searches for a permanent replacement. Mr Gelsinger, who was Intel's technology chief before later running a cloud-software firm, was brought back in 2021 to help turn the firm around. Intel's share price has dropped roughly 50% since the start of 2024.

Hizbullah fired on a disputed border zone between Lebanon and Israel, its first attack since the [ceasefire](#) between Israeli forces and the militant group began last week. Earlier the speaker of **Lebanon's** parliament accused Israel of a "flagrant violation" of the ceasefire after it struck southern Lebanon. At least two people were killed, according to Lebanon's government.

Joe Biden restricted exports of certain **semiconductors** and other manufacturing tools to **China** and added 140 [Chinese chip companies](#) to a trade blacklist. America's commerce secretary described the controls as "groundbreaking and sweeping". The package is probably the outgoing president's final crackdown on Chinese technology ahead of Donald Trump's inauguration next month. Mr Trump is expected to [further tighten](#) Chinese chip restrictions.

Georgian police arrested Zurab Japaridze, an opposition leader, during a fourth consecutive night of protests. The government said that 224 people have been detained in total. Last week the ruling Georgian Dream party said it would halt EU accession talks until 2028; protesters accuse the government of [cosying up to Russia](#). Salome Zourabichvili, the country's pro-European president, called for fresh elections.

The **International Court of Justice** began hearings to help set legal guidelines on how countries should mitigate the impact of climate change. Representatives from 100 countries and organisations will present arguments before the court, which will issue an advisory opinion. The case begins after the end of COP29, the UN's climate conference, where negotiators made very [modest progress](#).

Figure of the day: 8.4m, the number of Colombians that live in areas in which armed groups operate. [Read the full story.](#)

What can NATO do for Ukraine?



NATO's foreign ministers will have lots to discuss when they meet in Brussels on Tuesday. [Syria's civil war](#) has erupted again, with advancing rebels backed by Turkey, a member of the alliance. Russian sabotage in Europe has been steadily intensifying. And the [war in Ukraine](#) appears to be entering a crucial stage: Donald Trump will probably seek negotiations after he enters office in January.

Andrii Sybiha, Ukraine's foreign minister, has asked his NATO counterparts to invite [Ukraine to join the alliance](#) at this week's meeting. That will not happen. America, Germany and several other allies are not convinced that Ukraine is ready to join. But NATO's role in the war is expanding. A new NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine programme is co-ordinating American help to the country. The organisation, based in Wiesbaden, Germany, will have 700 personnel led by a three-star general. The idea is, in part, to Trump-proof assistance to Ukraine should the president-elect cut the country loose.

Gaza's crumbling economy



Expect grim findings on Tuesday when the United Nations presents its report on the economic impact of [Israel's war in Gaza](#). Back in March, the World Bank had already estimated the cost of repairing Gaza's damaged infrastructure at \$18.5bn. The territory's economy has contracted by 90% or more. If the fighting stopped tomorrow, it would probably take until at least 2050 just for Gaza's GDP per person to return to its pre-war output.

And there is still no deal to stop the decline. Last week an Egyptian delegation flew to Israel to present their latest ceasefire proposal. Representatives of Hamas, the Palestinian militant group, then held their own talks in Cairo. There are signs that Hamas is willing to lower its demands: it no longer expects an immediate Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, for example. But [Binyamin Netanyahu](#), the Israeli prime minister, is reluctant to accept a resolution that might imperil his political future.

Salesforce bets on AI “agents”



Salesforce, a business-software company which reports its quarterly earnings on Tuesday, is on a tear. In the past six months its share price has increased by 39%, compared with a 14% rise for the S&P 500 index. Investors seem excited by the company's bet on artificial intelligence: “Agentforce”. The company wants to use its existing software tools to [train AI-powered “agents”](#) to perform simple tasks in areas such as customer service and marketing. Analysts say that customers are impressed by the early results.

Still, no one expects the AI efforts to generate meaningful revenue this year. The up-front costs will also be significant. Salesforce is hiring another 1,000 (human) staff to flog the new products. That is only equivalent to 1% of its workforce, but comes as the company tries to cut costs elsewhere. The latest results will give some indication of whether the AI visions, talked up by its boss, Marc Benioff, can become a reality.

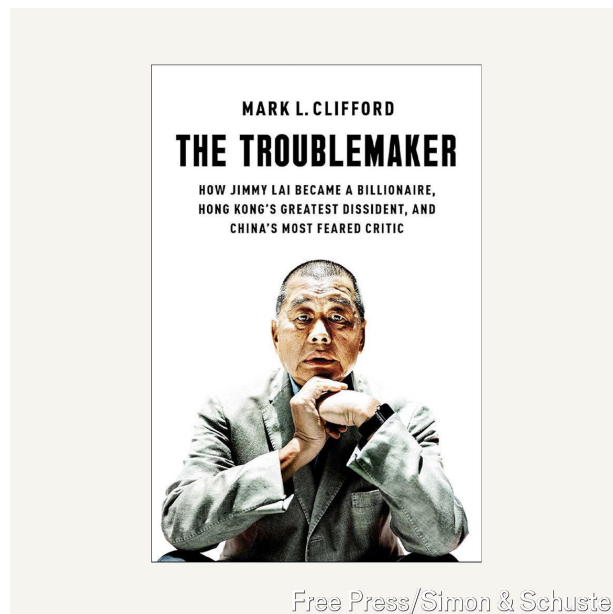
Turkey gets ready to cut rates



When Turkey's statistics agency releases November's inflation figures on Tuesday, the country's central bankers will be watching closely. The annual rate dipped to 48.6% in October, from 75.5% in May, after the [bank's aggressive tightening](#). Monthly price growth has also slowed, to under 3% since August.

Heartened by such results, the central bank has lately sounded more doveish. Further good news could push its monetary policy committee to cut the benchmark interest rate, currently 50%, for the first time in nearly two years later this month. The economy could use the extra push. GDP shrank by 0.2% in the third quarter, compared with the second, as the central bank's dramatic rate hikes dried up lending. Easing would help rekindle growth—but cutting rates too much or too soon risks another spike in inflation.

Hong Kong's most famous political prisoner



Jimmy Lai is testifying in his national-security trial in Hong Kong this week. The pro-democracy media tycoon is **charged with collusion** with foreign forces. He has been behind bars for four years, mostly in solitary confinement.

A timely new biography, “The Troublemaker” by Mark Clifford, a former colleague, is out on Tuesday. It describes how, having arrived on the island’s shores as a 12-year-old refugee from China, Mr Lai founded a retail empire before turning to media. His papers peddled a curious mix of sex, scandal and democratic values; they staunchly defended widespread pro-democracy protests in 2019. After China imposed a national-security law in 2020, Mr Lai became one of its first targets.

The book is less a work of biography than of advocacy. “The Troublemaker” has little hope of changing Mr Lai’s fate: national-security trials have a 97% conviction rate, no juries and judges who are handpicked by Hong Kong’s government. But it hopes to keep his case in the public eye.

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

Monday: What does the ninth commandment forbid?

**One must from time to time attempt things
that are beyond one's capacity.**

Pierre-Auguste Renoir