

Catch up: Zelensky and Trump abandon deal; Russia bombs Ukraine



A meeting between **Donald Trump** and **Volodymyr Zelensky** [descended into bitter chaos](#), with Mr Trump saying afterwards that Ukraine's president was "not ready for peace". Mr Zelensky left the White House early and abandoned a planned signing of a deal giving America access to Ukraine's rare minerals. In a heated exchange in the Oval Office, Mr Trump said that Mr Zelensky was "in no position to dictate" to him. America's president said that he was "in the middle" of the two sides, and "for both Ukraine and Russia".

Russia launched a drone attack on **Ukraine** overnight, the country's air force said. Three people were killed and seven injured in Donetsk, a city in the east, while strikes wounded civilians and damaged buildings in Sumy and Kharkiv, in the north. Ukraine's energy infrastructure also came under [heavy attack](#).

Pope Francis suffered a respiratory crisis—a bronchial spasm that caused him to inhale vomit and required "noninvasive" ventilation. The [88-year-old pontiff](#), who has long battled respiratory problems,

has been in hospital with pneumonia for two weeks. The Vatican said that he “remained alert and aware”, but that it would take one or two days to determine how the incident affected his prognosis.

Anneliese Dodds, **Britain’s** international development minister, resigned over Sir Keir Starmer’s plan to fund a £6bn defence budget increase by [slashing foreign aid](#). The move would cut aid spending from 0.5% to 0.3% of GNI. Ms Dodds accused Sir Keir of copying Mr Trump’s USAID cuts and warned it would harm Britain’s “reputation”.

The value of **bitcoin** plunged during early trading in Asia amid a deepening [cryptocurrency](#) sell-off. Bitcoin’s price has fallen by more than 25% since touching an all-time high of \$109,241 on January 20th. Traders have been disappointed by Mr Trump’s inaction on cryptocurrency. The president had vowed to implement several pro-crypto policies.

Clashes with the police broke out in Athens as hundreds of thousands of **Greeks** rallied on the second anniversary of the country’s deadliest train crash, which killed 57 people near Tempi, in central Greece. A general strike halted air, sea and rail transport. Protesters accuse the government of a cover-up. Parliament will debate political responsibility for the disaster next week.

Citigroup, an American bank, mistakenly credited a client’s account with \$81trn instead of \$280 last April due to a manual input error, the *Financial Times* reported. The mistake, caught 90 minutes later, did not result in any funds leaving the bank. The incident raises concerns over the [bank’s](#) risk management practices. It has struggled to fix longstanding operational issues.

Word of the week: güero, a Spanish term used in Mexico and the United States to describe a white person, often affectionately. [Read the full story.](#)

Gaza's precarious ceasefire



The first phase of the Gaza ceasefire [comes to an end](#) on Saturday. Although the shaky truce has largely held, both sides have violated it. And negotiations for an even more fraught second phase have only just begun. Rhetoric is becoming increasingly strident, with some senior Israeli ministers calling for a return to war. Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, says he will not move to the second stage while Hamas are still in power.

Instead phase one will probably be extended, giving negotiators more time. There is much to discuss. Phase two was meant to start with Israel withdrawing from the Philadelphi Corridor, a narrow strip along the border between Gaza and Egypt, but reports suggest that might not happen. The end of the second phase would mark a complete end to the war in Gaza. Rebuilding would start soon after. But all of that may yet be a way off.

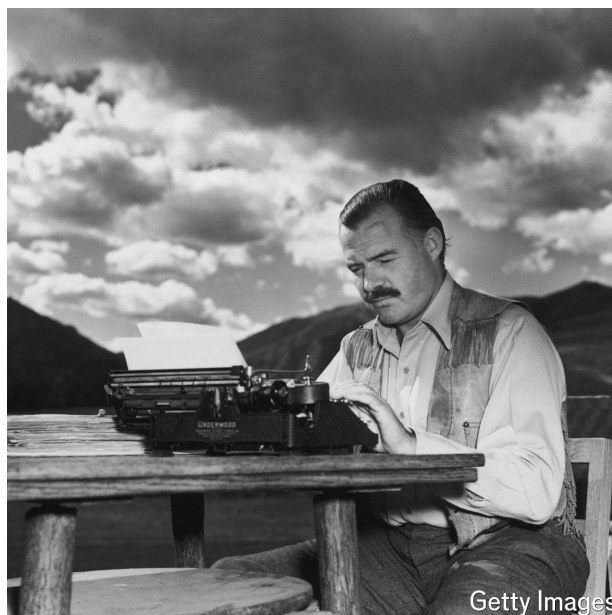
Syria's rocky transition



A new transitional government is meant to take power in Syria this week. Its composition, however, remains a mystery. It will be a key step in Syria's post-Assad transition, which has been smoother than expected. Another milestone came on Tuesday, when hundreds of Syrians gathered in Damascus for a long-delayed national dialogue. Some attendees were frustrated with an event that felt rushed and inconclusive.

The new government will face enormous challenges. Top of the list is the economy. There are long queues for bread at bakeries and for cash at the few working ATMs. Qatar was meant to help finance a raise in public-sector pay, but it has held back over concerns about American sanctions. Another question is how much [Ahmed al-Sharaa](#), the interim president, plans to share power with his new ministers: he seems to prefer centralised control. The road ahead is still long.

Decoding AI's writing voice



From Shakespeare's soliloquies to Ernest Hemingway's machine-gun prose, great writers have distinctive styles. The styles of large-language-model (LLM) chatbots may never rank as great—but they, too, have distinguishing characteristics. Researchers at several American universities trained a neural network to identify the linguistic features of five popular AI chatbots—ChatGPT, Claude, Grok, Gemini and DeepSeek—with 97% accuracy.

Claude likes to preface responses with “here's a summary”, while Google's Gemini prefers “here's a breakdown”. DeepSeek, a Chinese LLM, tends to opt for “below is”. Grok, the chatbot developed by Elon Musk's xAI, goes, most simply, with “here is”. There are other quirks: Grok heavily uses the word “remember”, while GPT-4o, the model underpinning ChatGPT, typically utilises the words “typically” and “utilise”. But remember this before dismissing AI's hackneyed phrasing: humans are also often unoriginal. Not everyone is the next Shakespeare.

A radical take on radicalisation



Every year there are a few debut novels that get the literary industry tremendously excited. “Fundamentally” by Nussaibah Younis is one of 2025’s crop. The rights to the book were subject to an eight-way auction in Britain; the television rights had ten bidders. The front matter is bursting with puff quotes.

The novel follows Nadia who, after a breakup, takes up a job at the UN to create a deradicalisation programme for brides of Islamic State fighters in Iraq. In a refugee camp she meets Sara, who left London at age 15. The mouthy young woman reminds Nadia of herself, and she is determined to help her. “Fundamentally” is timely—it will remind British readers of the case of Shamima Begum, who joined the terrorist group in 2015 and has been stripped of her citizenship—and it probes themes of faith, family and identity. Yet it is not a hand-wringing take on a controversial topic, but a wry satire, particularly of aid workers.

Weekend profile: Steve Witkoff, Trump's savvy dealmaker



It was 1986. Greed was good and the hours were punishing. Still, even round-the-clock dealmakers had to eat. That is how Donald Trump happened upon Steve Witkoff at a deli counter in midtown Manhattan at 3am. One was a son of Queens, the other of the Bronx. Both were hungry. Mr Witkoff paid.

Forged over a ham-and-cheese sandwich, their friendship has thrown Mr Witkoff into the eddy of geopolitics. In November the president named him envoy to the Middle East. Mr Witkoff's first order of business—before his boss had even been inaugurated—was to negotiate a truce between Israel and Hamas. Ceasefire in hand, he broadened his portfolio. Earlier this month he flew by private jet to meet Vladimir Putin and secure the release of an American prisoner held in Russia. In a matter of weeks Mr Witkoff's diplomacy has brought him to Gaza, Jerusalem, Moscow and Riyadh.

Diplomats who get that sort of brief tend to have oodles of experience handling foreign leaders and matters of national

security. Mr Witkoff has neither. Like his boss, he is a billionaire property developer who made his career in New York City and south Florida. But he has what counts in this White House: a dealmaker's savvy, a penchant for flattery and a fortune. Mr Witkoff spent nearly \$2m to help elect Mr Trump. His grandson is named after the president.

He also has Mr Trump's trust. Their rapport stems from the fact that both are outer-borough strivers who started in down-market real estate, then made it in Manhattan luxury. More recently his property empire has included the Park Lane Hotel on Central Park South, known as billionaire's row. In 2023 he sold that trophy to the Qatari sovereign-wealth fund for \$623m.

Such dealings with a foreign government would normally be considered a disqualifying conflict for any diplomatic job. To Mr Trump it is an asset. What their shared transactionalism actually means for Gazans and Ukrainians does not look good. Before the blow-up between Mr Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House, it seemed like Ukraine would hand over much of its mineral wealth to America. Meanwhile, Mr Trump wants to unleash construction crews on Gaza. Sitting beside Mr Witkoff in the Oval Office in January, the president did not give away much: "We'll see how it all turns out."

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 Chaotically leash my daring senator (7,6)

1 across Call on donors to reveal capital (6)

2 across At first you invest every last dollar for this (5)

3 across Tom is a revolutionary adherent of communism (6)

Factual clues

1 down Senator for South Carolina who found little wrong with the dismissal of 18 inspectors-general (7,6)

1 across European capital that is technically classed as a forest (6)

2 across What Donald Trump would like to lower on ten-year Treasury bonds (5)

3 across Such communist fervour drove China and the Soviet Union to the brink of war in the late 1960s (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. And please send any thoughts you may have about the new interactive version to the same address.

The winners of this week's quiz



Thank you to everyone who took part in this week's quiz. The winners, chosen at random, were:

Amanda Hey, Sudbury, Canada

Caroline English, Ann Arbor, Michigan, America

Andreea Imecs, Bath, Britain

They all gave the correct answers of Face/Off, Martin Short, Under Milk Wood, Back to the Future and Animal Farm. The theme is words ending in hand: offhand, shorthand, underhand, back hand and farmhand.

The questions were:

Monday: In which 1997 film thriller, directed by John Woo, do Nicolas Cage and John Travolta swap identities?

Tuesday: Who co-stars with Steve Martin and Selena Gomez in the TV series *Only Murders in the Building*?

Wednesday: Which play by Dylan Thomas is set in the fictional Welsh town of Llareggub?

Thursday: Which movie series stars Michael J. Fox as the time-travelling Marty McFly?

Friday: Which satirical novel by George Orwell features a tyrannical pig named Napoleon?

güero

*a Spanish term used in Mexico and the United States to describe a white person, often affectionately.
Read the full story.*

**Simplicity is the highest goal, achievable
when you have overcome all difficulties.**

Frédéric Chopin