

## Catch up: Romania scraps election; Syrian rebels advance



A top **Romanian** court annulled the first round of the country's election. Calin Georgescu, a pro-Russian hard-right candidate, had come first, followed by Elena Lasconi, who heads the centre-right opposition. But declassified Romanian intelligence published on Wednesday alleged that Mr Georgescu's social-media campaigns were orchestrated by Russia. The second round of voting, originally scheduled for this weekend, has been cancelled.

**Russia** suggested that its citizens living in **Syria** should leave in light of its "difficult military and political situation". On Friday Syrian rebels moved closer to **Homs**, a city between Aleppo and Damascus, the capital. Syrian and Russian warplanes reportedly struck the north of **Hama province**. The rebels have captured the cities of Hama and Aleppo following a surprise insurgency on November 27th.

**Burkina Faso's** **ruling military junta** issued a decree sacking the interim prime minister and dissolving the government. The decree said that officials would continue serving in their roles until a new

cabinet could be formed. The prime minister was appointed shortly after the junta seized power in 2022, in what was Burkina Faso's [second coup](#) in less than a year.

**American employers** added 227,000 [jobs](#) in November, a rebound from a revised figure of 36,000 in October. (Last month's jobs report was affected by hurricanes and strikes.) Analysts had expected 200,000 new roles. The unemployment rate rose to 4.2% in November, up from 4.1% in October. The data could confirm expectations for a quarter-point rate cut in December.

An appeals court in Washington, DC, upheld a law that could ban **TikTok** on [national-security grounds](#). The law requires that TikTok be sold to a non-Chinese owner by January 19th or shut down. In May the social-media giant sued to block the law, arguing that it violates free speech. Donald Trump, who is set to take office a day after it comes into effect, has previously vowed to "save TikTok".

The **European Union** and Mercosur—a customs union made up of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay—signed a long-awaited trade deal. Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, called it a "win-win" agreement, with EU companies saving €4bn (\$4.2bn) on export duties per year. That will invigorate an [ailing Mercosur](#). But French farmers will probably continue to oppose the deal.

America's agriculture department ordered the country's milk supply to be tested for the **H5N1 avian flu virus**, beginning in six states this month. Those that farm, transport or process unpasteurised milk will be required to share samples. Infected cattle must be reported and monitored. The bug, which has been [spreading rapidly among dairy cows](#) in 2024, has the potential to cause a [human pandemic](#).

**Word of the week:** Russionia, a mystical land in "The Plot Against the King", a picture book by Kash Patel, Donald Trump's candidate

to run the FBI. [Read the full story.](#)

# Notre Dame's grand reopening



Some 50 heads of state and government, including Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president (as well as the American president-elect, Donald Trump), will gather on Saturday to celebrate the [reopening of Notre Dame](#) five years after fire gutted it. France's president, Emmanuel Macron, will give a speech outside the gothic cathedral. Then the archbishop of Paris, Laurent Ulrich will ceremonially open its doors, and a concert will be broadcast live from the nave. Against the odds, France has carried out a [restoration of breathtaking quality](#), and to deadline. The first mass will be held on Sunday.

Mr Macron will be hoping that the cathedral's rebirth will act as an antidote to [France's political woes](#). His prime minister, Michel Barnier, was [brought down by parliament](#) on Wednesday, and Mr Macron has yet to find a successor. In a televised address the next evening, the president urged the French to come together for the nation in the way they have to rebuild Notre Dame, "with wisdom rather than division".

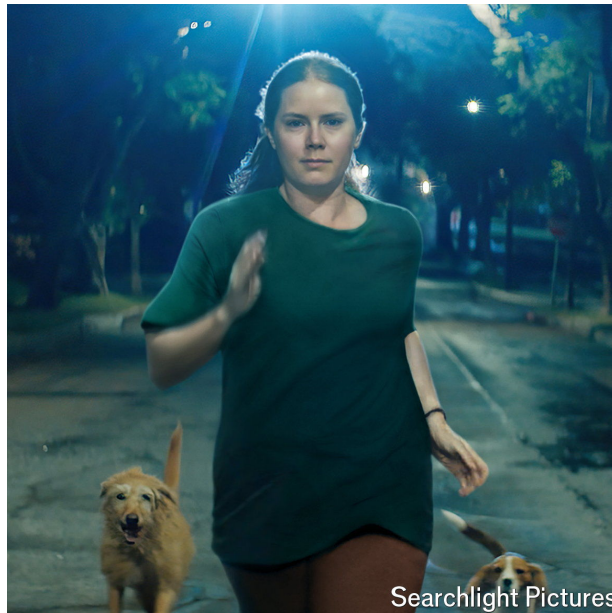
## New cardinals and the next pope



This weekend Pope Francis will appoint 21 new cardinals at [the Vatican](#). The prelates come from 18 countries spanning five continents. Those still below the age of 80 when Francis dies or retires will be eligible to take part in the conclave, the assembly at which his successor will be chosen. The 87-year-old pontiff is still actively carrying out his duties: he recently took his longest-ever foreign trip, to South-East Asia. Still, the temptation to hand over to a young, fitter man will surely only grow.

Francis, an Argentine, has used his power of nominations to alter the geographical balance of the next conclave. There is speculation the next pope [could come from Africa or Asia](#). Roadblocks remain: African representation among the electors will still not reflect the continent's importance. But the Catholic flocks in the two continents are among the world's fastest-growing.

## “Nightbitch” on the silver screen



The protagonist of “Nightbitch” is known only as “Mother”. She was an artist, but has given up that career for labour of a more domestic and mundane sort. One day, while tending to her toddler, she notices alarming changes to her body: sharper teeth, new tufts of hair, the beginnings of a tail. Her husband pays no mind. But as she longs for raw meat—and begins to dig and snarl—Mother suspects that she is turning into a dog.

Rachel Yoder wrote her hit novel of 2021 to show the “real loss of identity” that women experience when they become mothers. A film adaptation, starring Amy Adams, arrived in American and British cinemas this weekend. Ms Adams gives a [typically committed](#) performance as a bored, exhausted woman surrendering to her animal instincts. Critics, however, have argued that this version of a shapeshifting story about the stifling nature of suburbia is a little too domesticated.



# Malaise in Africa's model democracy



Ghanaians go to the polls on Saturday to [elect a new president](#) and parliament. In an otherwise [highly unstable region](#), the west African country, which has had several peaceful democratic transitions since the 1990s, has long been relatively stable. Yet this hopeful legacy is being tested. Ghana is struggling with economic strife and democratic backsliding. Voters are dissatisfied with both candidates—Mahamudu Bawumia of the ruling National Patriotic Party, and John Mahama of the opposition National Democratic Congress.

Mr Bawumia, the current vice-president, was part of the administration that presided over a debt default in 2022 (and [Ghana's 17th IMF bailout](#)). His boss—[Nana Akufo-Addo](#), the president—has displayed increasingly authoritarian tendencies, appointing cousins to his cabinet and curbing press freedoms. Meanwhile Mr Mahama, the president between 2012 and 2016, lost in 2016 amid blackouts, inflation and a collapsing currency. Even so, the current government's poor record, a global trend against incumbents and Ghana's history of tight elections is said to be giving Mr Mahama the edge.

## Weekend profile: Jay Shah, the most powerful man in cricket



Jay Shah has arrived at the top of world cricket at the speed of a fast yorker. In 2009 he was a small-time cricket official in Ahmedabad in the western Indian state of Gujarat. A decade later, he began running the Board of Control for Cricket India (BCCI), the governing body. And on December 1st he became, at 36, the youngest-ever chairman of the International Cricket Council (ICC), which manages the game globally. He thanked the ICC's directors for unanimously voting him into the role.

But the person he has to thank most is his father: Amit Shah, India's home minister and the right-hand man to Narendra Modi, the prime minister. The pair first met as foot soldiers in the Hindu-nationalist organisation from which the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged, and climbed the ranks together. Today Mr Modi may be the face of the BJP, but Amit Shah is widely believed to be its heart, the driving force of the party machine.

Without his father's influence, Jay Shah is unlikely to have ever become a cricket administrator. He dabbled in the sport as a youth,



but was never good enough to make a career from playing it. After studying engineering at university, he eventually made his way into stockbroking, as his father once did, forming his own company. He followed his father into cricket, too. In 2009 Amit Shah became vice-president of the Gujarat Cricket Association (Mr Modi, naturally, was the president). Soon after that Jay took up his first cricketing job in Ahmedabad. As Amit Shah and Mr Modi conquered national politics, Jay Shah took over national cricket. He joined the BCCI in 2015, in its marketing arm—soon after his father was appointed the BJP's president.

Whatever he may owe to his father's prominence, Jay Shah has got some things done. His colleagues say he is a workaholic. On his watch the BCCI's revenues have nearly doubled, from 33.7bn rupees (\$466.8m) in 2019-20 to 65.5bn in 2022-23. In 2023 he launched the Women's Premier League, a tournament that is transforming women's cricket. Yet tournaments hosted by India, such as [last year's World Cup](#), have been marred by logistical issues. And corruption continues to afflict regional cricket associations.

If Jay Shah's rise highlights the growing politicisation of Indian cricket, it also bears hallmarks of an enduring theme of Indian politics: nepotism. For years, the BJP has slammed the dynastic politics of Congress, the party that ran India for most of its history since independence from Britain. But it appears that, now in power, the BJP might be helping friends and family. Reports suggest that among Jay Shah's possible successors at the BCCI is Rohan Jaitley, the son of a deceased BJP leader.

# 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* Crazy! A non-electric vehicle gets you to an island (10)

*1 across* Compassion sounds like gratitude in Paris (5)

*2 across* Greater London Authority acquires ship for a vessel (5)

*3 across* Scramble aid or wireless technology (5)

## Factual clues

*1 down* The world's fourth-largest island, famed for its vanilla (10)

*1 across* A medieval power recently wielded by Joe Biden (5)

*2 across* A hard, brittle usually clear substance (5)

*3 across* An old technology used to guide Ukrainian ordnance (5)

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am GMT on Monday to [crossword@economist.com](mailto: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



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

**Michael Lepri**, Brooklyn, New York

**Gabriel Priven**, São Paulo, Brazil

**Esther Ballachey**, North Vancouver, Canada

They all gave the correct answers of: bearing false witness against your neighbour, runner bean, Fugitive Slave Acts, the Second Empire and Indiana. The theme is films starring Harrison Ford: Witness, Blade Runner, The Fugitive, The Empire Strikes Back and the Indiana Jones movies.

The questions were:

**Monday:** What does the ninth commandment forbid?

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

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

**Thursday:** The regime which ruled France from 1852 to 1870 is generally known by which title?

**Friday:** Which state has borders with Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky and Illinois?



# Russionia

*a mystical land in “The Plot Against the King”, a picture book by Kash Patel, Donald Trump’s candidate to run the FBI.  
Read the full story.*

**The highest tribute to the dead is not grief  
but gratitude.**

*Thornton Wilder*