

Catch up: Syria's interim prime minister; Israel's buffer zone in Syria



Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the Islamist group that toppled Bashar al-Assad in **Syria**, appointed Mohammed al-Bashir as caretaker [prime minister](#). He was previously head of the Syrian Salvation Government, a rebel-led group. His transitional government will run the country until March 1st, but the leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, who goes by Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, still pulls the strings. [Banks and shops reopened in Damascus](#), the capital.

The **Israel Defence Forces** are creating a “sterile defence zone” in southern **Syria**, according to Israel Katz, the defence minister, who confirmed that the IDF had launched [dozens of strikes](#) across Syria in recent days. He said that the IDF had destroyed Syria's navy, but denied that it was advancing towards Damascus. The UN condemned Israel's strikes.

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Brazil's president, was in intensive care after brain surgery. The emergency procedure was prompted by an MRI scan showing bleeding in the skull after an accident in October. The [government](#) said the president was recovering in a

hospital in São Paulo. Lula had previously cancelled a trip to the BRICS summit on medical advice.

Luigi Mangione refused to be extradited to New York, where he is [charged with the murder of Brian Thompson](#), **UnitedHealthcare's** chief executive. Denied bail, he will remain jailed in Pennsylvania—where he was recognised and arrested—until the challenge is resolved. That could take weeks. Police recovered a manifesto that an official said revealed “ill will toward corporate America”.

A judge in Oregon blocked a [proposed \\$25bn merger](#) between **Kroger** and **Albertsons**, two big **American** grocery chains. America's **Federal Trade Commission**, a trustbuster, argued that the deal would reduce competition that helps keep prices in check. Kroger insisted that the merger would lower prices at Albertsons and allow the stores to compete with giants such as Walmart and Amazon.

Kim Yong-hyun, who resigned as South Korea's defence minister last week, was formally arrested for his alleged role in the country's [short-lived coup attempt](#) by President **Yoon Suk Yeol**. Mr Yoon faces a second impeachment vote on Saturday; he is under investigation for insurrection and banned from leaving the country. South Korea's ruling People Power Party said that he could resign by February.

Shell, an oil giant, settled a lawsuit with **Greenpeace** over a protest in which activists boarded a Shell vessel near Spain's Canary Islands in 2023. Greenpeace agreed to pay £300,000 to the [Royal National Lifeboat Institution](#), a charity, and halt protests at four sites in the North Sea. The environmental campaign group said it will not directly compensate Shell or admit wrongdoing.

Figure of the day: 20%, the share of adults in rich countries with maths and reading skills no better than a primary-school pupil.
[Read the full story.](#)

America's lingering inflation



Economists often refer to the final push to eliminate excess inflation in America as the “last mile”. It is taking a long time to run it. The latest figures, due on Wednesday, are expected to show that consumer prices in November rose by 0.3% from a month earlier, the fastest monthly increase since April. Sticky inflation will fuel debate about whether the Federal Reserve should slow its interest-rate cuts to get prices under control.

The details of the data may be a little [more reassuring](#). They will probably show that the increase in core prices—which strip out volatile food and energy costs—has remained stable, with no acceleration, for the past four months. That would probably keep the Fed on track to cut rates by another quarter-point at its meeting next week. But it is still too soon to declare victory over inflation in America, especially with Donald Trump mulling policies, from tariffs to rate cuts, that will push prices upward.

The push to rule Syria



[Bashar al-Assad's regime](#) is gone and a [new government](#) is being pulled together in Damascus, but Syria's civil war is not over. In the north of the country, a Turkish proxy group is advancing against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the predominantly Kurdish militia that helped America bring down the Islamic State caliphate. Since early December, the Syrian National Army (SNA), a rebel force armed by Turkey, has captured the towns of Manbij and Tel Rifaat, which had been under Kurdish control since 2016.

The SNA, backed by Turkish drones, is reportedly marching towards Kobani, a Kurdish town that survived a siege by IS nearly a decade ago. Over the past few months, Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has threatened a new offensive against the Kurds, designed to broaden the "safe zone" Turkey has carved out. Through the SNA, he appears to have launched one already.

Lula's emergency brain surgery



President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil is recovering after emergency brain surgery in São Paulo on Monday. Since an accident in October, Lula, as he is known, has avoided long-haul flights. His doctors said that the bleeding in his skull was nothing out of the ordinary.

Still, the episode raises serious questions about Lula's long-term ability to lead. At 79, he is the oldest sitting president in Brazil's history. But he is also the country's most popular national politician and is expected to run again in 2026. The former trade-union leader and icon of [Latin America's left](#) has no obvious successor. His vice-president Geraldo Alckmin, a 72-year-old moderate from a different party, will stand in for him as he recovers. But even once Lula returns to work next week, doubts over his fitness for office will hang over his political future.

Rain on Macy's parade



A fortnight after its annual Thanksgiving parade, Macy's might not see another rally for a while—its stock is down 15% so far this year, even as the broader market has moved up. The New York-based chain of department stores, which reports earnings on Wednesday, has faced several setbacks: talks to take the company private have stalled; an employee was found to have hidden \$154m in delivery expenses; and activist investors want it to hive off its valuable real estate and cut capital spending.

But the drama is a distraction from a more fundamental problem: Americans are increasingly shopping online or at big-box retailers—and not at department stores. Analysts at JPMorgan, a bank, predict that Macy's revenues will drop 3.8% in the 2024 financial year. Pressure is piling on Tony Spring, who was brought in as CEO in February, to [deliver on his plan](#) to steer the retailer back to growth.

No surprises for the 2034 World Cup



On Wednesday FIFA will reveal that its men's World Cup in 2034 is to be held in Saudi Arabia. Some feel that [football's global governing body](#) has steered the process too much. It likes to jump around the world: America will host in 2026, and Spain, Portugal and Morocco will share the event in 2030 (with a swing through South America to mark the centenary of the first competition in Uruguay). In effect that limited the 2034 bid to countries in Asia and Oceania.

In October 2023, FIFA suddenly announced that potential hosts needed to declare their interest by the end of that month. Saudi Arabia was ready. Their only serious rival, Australia, was not. That made a second winter World Cup all but certain. The excitement of the football (particularly the final) at the Qatar tournament in 2022 was tainted by the deaths of migrant construction workers, sky-high carbon emissions and the host's intolerance of gay fans. Returning to the region in 2034 will court [all the same controversies](#).

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: Who was the lead singer of the band Culture Club?

Tuesday: What was the catchphrase of Bugs Bunny?

None of us really changes over time. We only become more fully what we are.

Anne Rice