

Catch up: Musk given cabinet role; American aid to Israel to continue



Donald Trump chose **Elon Musk** and **Vivek Ramaswamy** to run a new Department of Government Efficiency. The president-elect tasked the “two wonderful Americans” with dismantling government bureaucracy and cutting “wasteful expenditures”. **Mr Ramaswamy** ran against Mr Trump during the Republican primaries but became a full-throated supporter. **Mr Musk**, a tech billionaire, used his fortune to bolster the Trump campaign.

The president-elect’s **picks** for office came thick and fast. Mr Trump picked **Pete Hegseth**, a Fox News presenter and army veteran, as secretary of defence. Mr Hegseth is no fan of NATO and has railed against “woke” generals. **Kristi Noem**, the governor of South Dakota, looks likely to be the homeland-security secretary. **Mike Huckabee**, a former governor of Arkansas, was tapped to be America’s ambassador to Israel.

America said it would continue to send military aid to **Israel** because the country had attempted to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. America had set a 30-day ultimatum for Israel to

take “urgent and sustained actions” to improve conditions in [Gaza](#) or face restrictions on military assistance. The UN’s aid agency for Palestinians said Israel failed to meet America’s demands and that the enclave is on the brink of famine.

Sudanese authorities agreed to extend the use of the Adre border crossing with Chad, two days before a UN agreement to keep it open was due to expire. The passage allows aid agencies to bring in supplies to help civilians affected by [Sudan’s catastrophic civil war](#). Some government members argue that the paramilitary groups also use the crossing to distribute military equipment.

Russia launched a missile attack on Kyiv, **Ukraine’s** capital, for the first time since August. The overnight bombings sparked a fire in a warehouse and injured one person. Nobody was killed, according to reports. More than 100 people sought refuge in underground stations. Russia has previously sought to overwhelm [Ukrainian](#) air defences with similar attacks.

BioNTech, a German pharmaceutical giant, agreed to buy **Biotheus**, a Chinese biotech firm, for around \$950m. The deal includes “global rights” to an innovative cancer treatment, which has the potential to rival Keytruda, the world’s biggest-selling cancer drug. Big pharma is increasingly looking to China for acquisition opportunities: over the past year Western companies have bought five such Chinese firms.

Seven & i, the Japanese owner of **7-Eleven** convenience stores, resumed negotiations with Alimentation Couche-Tard, a Canadian retailer, over a \$47bn **takeover**, which would be Japan’s biggest ever. [Seven & i](#) rejected a previous bid, worth \$39bn, in September. Seven & i also received a rival buyout offer from its management, led by members of the Ito family that founded the company.

Figure of the day: 4.5%, the amount by which global coal consumption grew last year. [Read the full story.](#)

America's new Senate majority leader?



The end of an era is near. In January Mitch McConnell, the longest-ever serving Republican leader in America's Senate, will stand down. On Wednesday Republican senators hold elections to decide his successor, who will become the Senate's majority leader. John Thune, the party whip, and John Cornyn, his predecessor, are the front-runners. But Rick Scott, a MAGA dark horse from Florida, is also in contention.

Messrs Cornyn and Thune are touting their competence and experience, while Mr Scott is pitching his loyalty to Donald Trump. The president-elect has not endorsed a candidate, but has said that anyone who wants the job should allow him to make some [temporary appointments](#) without a Senate vote. Mr Scott has agreed to do as Mr Trump suggested; the others signalled openness to it. The election will be secret, so senators can vote with their conscience. Their pick will say something about whether they have greater loyalty to the Senate's responsibilities or to their new president.

Germany heads for fresh elections



It took nearly a week of wrangling, but Germany got there in the end. On November 6th the country's fractious three-party coalition [collapsed](#). Olaf Scholz, the chancellor (pictured right), had hoped to forestall early elections until March. But on Tuesday he yielded to the centre-right opposition, the Christian Democratic Union, and agreed to submit a vote of confidence to Germany's parliament on December 16th. Elections are now expected on February 23rd. The CDU, along with its Bavarian ally, the Christian Social Union, will probably unseat Mr Scholz's Social Democratic Party.

Before then, Mr Scholz wants to get various initiatives through parliament, including on asylum, tax and transport. Now leading a minority government with the Greens, he needs the help of the CDU/CSU. Mr Scholz is expected to offer more details to parliament on Wednesday. It may not be the parties' last dance: many predict that Germany's next government could be a "grand coalition" of the CDU/CSU and the SPD.

India's “quick-commerce” boom



Swiggy, one of India's largest [food-delivery apps](#), made its stockmarket debut on Wednesday. The company raised \$1.4bn through its initial public offering (IPO), valuing the firm at \$11.3bn. Its share price listed at about 7% higher than the IPO price. But some investors are still cautious. Swiggy reported a \$280m net loss for its financial year ending in March. It trails Zomato, a rival worth \$27bn, in both prepared-food and grocery delivery.

Though still a small part of India's retail market, “quick commerce”—which delivers everything from food to phones to customers' homes, sometimes in less than ten minutes—is booming. Competition is increasingly fierce. Besides Swiggy and Zomato, upstarts and large e-commerce firms like Amazon and Walmart (through its ownership of Flipkart) are eyeing stay-at-home consumers. Swiggy will hope that the fast growth of India's delivery market will persuade investors that it can turn a profit.

The Horn of Africa's only democracy goes to the polls



Somaliland, an unrecognised state that declared independence from Somalia in 1991, elects a president on Wednesday. Many hope that international recognition may at last be at hand. [Muse Bihi Abdi](#), the president since 2017 (pictured), is campaigning for re-election on that basis. In January he struck a controversial deal with Ethiopia, which reportedly offered to recognise Somaliland's independence in return for a strip of its coastline. Mr Bihi has also developed ties with allies of Donald Trump, whose incoming administration may be persuaded to support the agreement.

But opposition figures have criticised the opacity surrounding Mr Bihi's deal and worry about tensions it has raised with Somalia. Moreover Somaliland's clan-riven society has become more polarised on his watch. Last year the army fought and lost a war against SSC-Khaatumo, a clan-based militia in the east. Fears of violence on polling day abound; some worry a contested election could spark a civil war. Somaliland's case for recognition rests on stability, which could be at risk.

'Tis the season... for bad films



Courtesy of Netflix

Christmas is a time of cosy predictability. Every year the same recipes, carols and moth-eaten jumpers make an appearance. Nowhere is convention adhered to more faithfully than on screen. Hallmark Media, an American company, is releasing 47 Christmas films this year. Many have cringeworthy titles like “To Have and To Holiday”. Most are romances; a quarter involve the protagonist returning to their hometown.

Netflix has also embraced festive [schlock](#). In 2022 one critic described the streamer’s leading seasonal film, “Falling for Christmas”, as a “rom-com in which both rom and com are in short supply”. That didn’t put off subscribers: the film was watched 31m times within four days of release. This year Netflix’s most eye-catching Christmas offering is “Hot Frosty”, which is out on Wednesday. It tells the story of a sexy snowman who comes to life to woo a young widow. Silly? So what? Viewers will probably give it a festive reception.

Daily quiz



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: Which bovine creature features in the Chinese zodiac?

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

**Life is not a matter of holding good cards,
but of playing a poor hand well.**

Robert Louis Stevenson