

## Catch up: South Korea impeaches another president; Russia accused of downing plane



Lawmakers in **South Korea** voted to impeach the acting president, **Han Duck-soo**. The former prime minister has held the office for less than two weeks after replacing Yoon Suk Yeol, who had been [forced out](#) over his brief attempt to [impose martial law](#). The opposition accused Mr Han of stalling the previous president's impeachment process. Choi Sang-mok, the finance minister, is the next to fill the hot seat.

**Azerbaijan Airlines** paused more than half of its flights to **Russia** following reports that Russian air defences were to blame for a [deadly crash](#) of one of its passenger planes in Kazakhstan on Wednesday. Azerbaijani officials have reportedly found that the flight was struck by Russian anti-aircraft fire. Russia warned against such "hypotheses". At least 38 of the 67 people on board died.

**NATO** will step up its military presence in the Baltic Sea following a suspected [act of sabotage](#) that damaged undersea power and telecommunications cables running between Finland and Estonia. Estonia's navy said it would guard the remaining power cable; **Sweden's** coast guard also said it would increase surveillance of ships. Earlier **Finland** seized a tanker carrying embargoed Russian oil to investigate its involvement.

**Israeli** soldiers ordered some 350 patients and staff to evacuate from **Kamal Adwan hospital** in northern Gaza before torching sections of the [medical facility](#). Israel's army said that the hospital had served as a " Hamas terrorist stronghold". Earlier, dozens of Palestinians were killed in an [Israeli strike](#) in the area.

A soldier believed to be the first **North Korean** prisoner captured by Ukraine has died, according to South Korea's spy agency. He was reportedly seized in the Kursk region of Russia. Ukraine says that North Korea has [supported Russia's invasion](#) with more than 11,000 troops—and an estimated 3,000 of them have been killed or wounded. Neither [Russia nor North Korea](#) confirmed the claims.

**America** imposed sanctions on Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of Georgia's governing **Georgian Dream** party, for jeopardising his country's "democratic and Euro-Atlantic future". The [pro-Russia party](#) recently suspended efforts for the country to join the European Union, prompting [protests](#) and [violent repression](#). Salome Zourabichvili, Georgia's departing and pro-EU president, accuses her successor of being illegitimately elected and has [refused to step down](#) this weekend.

**China** approved the construction of the **world's largest hydropower dam** on the Yarlung Tsangpo river in Tibet. It would cost an estimated \$137bn to build. It would be the world's largest infrastructure project, expected to generate three times more power than the Three Gorges [dam in China](#). Since its announcement in 2020, the project has sparked rare protests in Tibet and provoked

environmental and economic concerns downstream in India and Bangladesh.

**Word of the week:** Bossman. A name (originating in London slang) for those who run a small shop in Britain. [Read the full story.](#)

# Streaming slows to a trickle



*Until January 2nd we are looking ahead to next year's big stories. Today, what will shape culture and science?*

Film and television projects delayed by the [Hollywood strikes](#) of 2023 will finally hit screens over the next 12 months. Cinema-goers can look forward to instalments of “Avatar”, “Mission: Impossible” and “Captain America”. Television viewers will get new series of [“The White Lotus”](#) and “Stranger Things”. But they should enjoy these glossy productions while they can, as studios are tightening their belts.

Making money from streaming services is proving to be harder than expected. Netflix and Disney are managing it, but most of Hollywood's older studios are struggling to turn a profit on their digital ventures. An industry-wide economy drive is therefore under way. Disney's spending on content, excluding sport, was 30% lower in 2024 than in 2022. Even Apple, which jostles for the position of the world's most valuable company, is said to be curbing its TV-commissioning enthusiasm. Viewers should [prepare to pay more](#) for less impressive shows and films.

# American football's global ambitions



In 2023, 93 of the 100 most-watched television broadcasts in America were National Football League games. Abroad, the [Super Bowl](#) is popular, helped by its star-studded half-time show (and, in 2024, by a romance between [Taylor Swift](#), a singer, and Travis Kelce, a player for the perennially outstanding Kansas City Chiefs). But American football remains a niche sport in much of the world.

The NFL is [trying hard to change that](#). In 2025 the league will play eight games abroad—more than in any previous season. Teams are focusing on building fan bases overseas; in recent years they have been able to keep revenue earned abroad as they do for home games, rather than having to give it back to the league. And the NFL has invested heavily overseas in flag football, a non-contact version that will be an Olympic sport in 2028. American football may never be more popular than the beautiful game, but more languages may soon need translations for “touchdown” and “linebacker”.



# The AI revolution comes to drugs



Developing a drug is an arduous process that often fails. It begins by identifying a target, such as a protein or gene, associated with a disease. Researchers then search for a molecule that can either block or enhance the target's activity safely. This can involve screening as many as 1m compounds before selecting just one or two promising candidates. Software can help to identify such molecules. But [generative artificial intelligence](#) can dream up entirely new ones to test.

BCG, a consultancy, estimates that about 65 AI-inspired molecules are currently being tested on humans. During 2025 results from second-phase clinical trials, which test for effectiveness and side-effects, will be reported for more than half a dozen such drugs. Previous trials of some AI-designed drugs, including treatments for eczema and cancer, were disappointing. But scientists remain optimistic. AI-developed treatments, when they arrive, will [profoundly change drug development](#).

# Fusion power gets closer—no, really



The quest to generate cheap and abundant power from nuclear fusion is undergoing a shift from the public to the private sector. Towards the end of 2025 Commonwealth Fusion, a company spun-out from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, will open the [first fusion reactor](#) designed to operate at near-commercial scale. Known as a tokamak, the machine has a doughnut-shaped reaction vessel surrounded by powerful electromagnets which confine and heat a plasma of deuterium and tritium. The resulting reaction liberates helium, neutrons—and a lot of energy.

Commonwealth Fusion hopes to reach “ $q > 1$ ”, the point where a reactor releases more energy than is put into it, in early 2026. But even if it doesn’t succeed, the firm is not the only one pursuing fusion with private funding. Some startups are testing more exotic approaches than tokamaks, until now the tried-and-trusted fusion design. If Commonwealth Fusion fails to deliver, many others are lining up behind it.

## The winners of this week's quiz



*The Economist*

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

**Patricia Poels**, Heverlee, Belgium

**Katie Cho**, Palo Alto, United States

**Andy Matterson**, Ennetbaden, Switzerland

They all gave the correct answers of: Bleak House, Herald, Holly Golightly, Old Faithful and Silent Spring. The theme is Christmas carols: In the Bleak Midwinter, Hark The Herald Angels Sing, The Holly and the Ivy, O Come, All Ye Faithful and Silent Night.

The questions were:

**Monday:** Which Charles Dickens novel features the long-running court case Jarndyce v Jarndyce?

**Tuesday:** Which newspaper title is shared by publications in Miami and Scotland?

**Wednesday:** Who was the central female character in the book and film "Breakfast at Tiffany's"?

**Thursday:** What erupts roughly every 90 minutes in Yellowstone



National Park?

**Friday:** Which 1962 book by Rachel Carson described the harm to nature caused by the pesticide DDT?

# **Bossman**

*A name (originating in London slang) for those who run a small shop in Britain.*

*Read the full story.*

**If people do not believe that mathematics is simple, it is only because they do not realise how complicated life is.**

*John von Neumann*