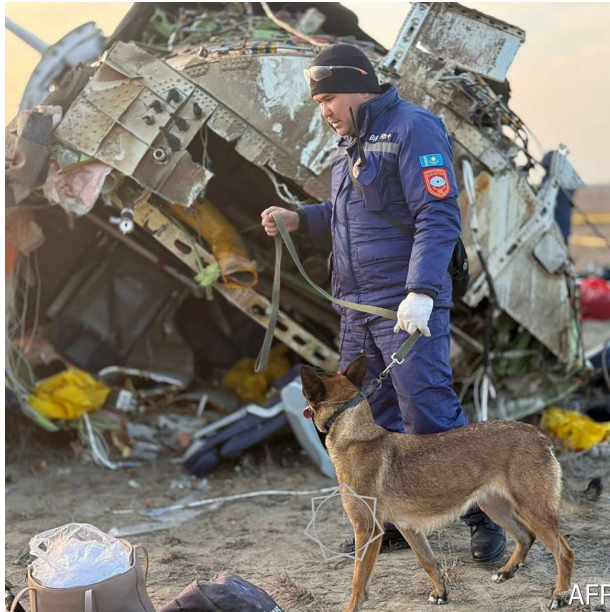


## Catch up: Russia cautions on plane-crash speculation; a crackdown in Syria



**NATO** called for a full investigation into the cause of an aeroplane crash in **Kazakhstan** that killed at least 38 of the 67 people on board. Russia has warned against “hypotheses” that it was hit by Russian air defences. The Azerbaijan Airlines aircraft had been diverted from landing in Grozny in Chechnya before attempting an emergency landing. Russian state media blamed a bird strike.

**Syria’s** new authorities said it would hunt down “militias” loyal to the ousted president, Bashar al-Assad, hiding in rural areas of the Tartus province. On Wednesday 14 of the [new government’s](#) policemen were killed in an “ambush” in the coastal area, a stronghold of Mr Assad’s supporters.

**Manmohan Singh**, a former prime minister of India, died at the age of 92. Mr Singh served two terms between 2004 and 2014. His coalition passed important legislation, including a rural-jobs scheme, a right-to-information act and Aadhaar, a digital-identity system. His second term was blighted by allegations of corruption.

**Finland's coast guard** seized an oil tanker in the Baltic Sea and escorted it to Finnish waters. Authorities are investigating whether the vessel was involved in damaging an undersea electricity cable that runs between Finland and Estonia. The tanker is registered in the Cook Islands. Finnish officials say it is part of Russia's "shadow fleet" that transports embargoed Russian oil.

The WHO said that **Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**, the agency's head, was unharmed after an **Israeli airstrike** hit an airport in Yemen. Dr Tedros was preparing to leave the country when the attack occurred, reportedly killing at least two people. Israel said that the strikes targeted military sites held by the Houthis, a militant group backed by Iran.

**China's** top legislative body broadened its purge of the **army**. Two high-ranking military officials—General You Haitao and Vice-Admiral Li Pengcheng—were reportedly fired by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for "serious violations of laws and discipline". President Xi Jinping has [struggled](#) to root out military corruption. Earlier this week the general overseeing political loyalty in the army was unexpectedly replaced.

Countries around the Indian ocean held memorials for the 220,000 victims of the deadliest **tsunami** in history. On December 26th 2004, a 9.1-magnitude earthquake off the Indonesian island of Sumatra [set off waves](#) as high as 30 metres that crashed into the coastlines of 15 countries. Indonesia suffered the highest death toll; Sri Lanka, India and Thailand were also devastated.

**Figure of the day:** 26%. Revenue growth this year at the company whose boss we have crowned as the best CEO of 2024. [Read our annual assessment.](#)

# Europe will plan for war



*Until January 2nd we are looking ahead to next year's big stories. Today, what will shape Europe, the Middle East and Africa?*

Donald Trump's return to the White House will be a bombshell moment for Europe. The continent's leaders, ministers and officials will try to persuade the new American administration to affirm its commitment to NATO and to continue sending aid to Ukraine. But they face steep odds. These discussions will probably unfold amid threats of a global trade war, including of American tariffs imposed on European goods. And although Mr Trump is unlikely to formally walk out of NATO, he could hollow it out.

As its principal security alliance withers, Europe will need to perhaps [double its goal](#) of spending 2% of GDP on defence. Rebuilding the continent's arms industries could take years. Europeans will also need to decide whether to reorientate the basis of their collective defence around other institutions, such as the European Union and regional military blocs such as the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force. It is hard to say which will be in shorter supply: [money or leadership](#).

# Will Khamenei and Trump meet?



When Mr Trump last took office, in 2017, Iran was not destined to clash with America. He said he wanted a better deal than the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, negotiated by Barack Obama in 2015. Mr Trump sought restraints on Iran's regional proxies, but what he probably craved most was a photo-op with [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei](#). But the 85-year-old supreme leader deemed that Mr Trump was "not worthy". Tensions spiralled: America withdrew from the JCPOA and embargoed Iranian oil; Iran accelerated its nuclear programme.

Since then Mr Khamenei has signalled readiness to be friends with America. Mr Trump recently said that America must make a deal with Iran because the consequences of not having one were "impossible". If Iran abandons its drive for nuclear weapons, Mr Trump said as he cast his vote on November 5th, "I'd like them to be a very successful country." Can Mr Khamenei now [stomach that staged handshake](#)?



# African economies will flourish



In October the IMF described a “two-track growth pattern” in sub-Saharan Africa. On one track are most of the 23 countries with sizable exports of non-renewable commodities such as oil, gold or diamonds. These include Angola, Nigeria and South Africa. As prices for their exports sagged, their GDPs per person have dropped in the past decade. Most resource-rich countries have also been focused more on dividing the spoils of the boom years than on using the proceeds to build resilient economies.

On the other track—one of faster average growth—are those countries less dependent on commodities. In 2025, the IMF says, nine of the [world’s 20 fastest-growing economies](#) will be in Africa. Most of these are non-resource-intensive states. Rwanda, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast and Tanzania, for example, are projected to grow by at least 6%. For all the faults of their politicians, it probably helps that, in the absence of a golden (or oily) goose, they have had to learn to look to other industries and services as sources of growth.

# Britain's Labour government will fight itself



The Labour Party hates two things, runs the old joke: getting its own way, and each other. With a majority of 154 in the House of Commons, Sir Keir Starmer's government is perhaps the world's least constrained executive. Is it happy? Not really.

[Labour will spend 2025 fighting itself.](#) Some battles will be over policy: backbenchers will grumble that the government ought to start dealing more with Europe; others will worry about alienating Labour's new base of Eurosceptic voters. The two-child limit for child benefit will also divide the party. And questions about Sir Keir's leadership will at some point start to rumble and a not-so-subtle battle for succession will begin. A flurry of soft-focus profiles of cabinet ministers will appear in newspaper supplements: scruffy ministers will sharpen up; tubby ones will slim down. Still, If Labour can afford to spend 2025 fighting itself, it is because under the new Conservative leader, Kemi Badenoch, the main opposition party will be fighting everyone else.

## Daily quiz



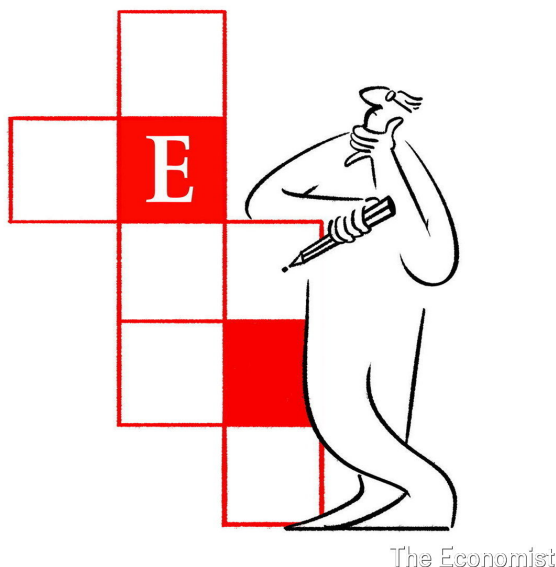
*The Economist*

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](mailto:QuizEspresso@economist.com). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

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

**Thursday:** What erupts roughly every 90 minutes in Yellowstone National Park?

# The winners of last week's crossword



Thank you to everyone who took part in our weekly crossword, published in the weekend edition of Espresso. The winners, chosen at random, were:

**Amelia Cheng**, Coquitlam, Canada

**Gareth Davies**, Burnham on Crouch, England

**Sonsoles Ruedas**, Madrid, Spain

They all gave the correct answers of [gingerbread](#), [gospel](#), [resin](#), [dinner](#). Our cruciverbalist is taking a short break before normal service resumes in January. You can also try our [special Christmas crossword](#).



**Democracy is the best revenge.**

*Benazir Bhutto*