

## Catch up: suspect in court after German market attack; Slovakia's PM meets Putin



The Saudi doctor accused of attacking a **Christmas market** in the German city of Magdeburg appeared in court. At least five people, including a child, were killed and more than 200 injured when [a car drove into crowds on Friday](#). The 50-year-old suspect arrived in Germany in 2006 and has a history of anti-Islamic posts on social media. The motive for the attack remains unclear, authorities said.

Robert Fico, **Slovakia's** hard-right prime minister, met **Vladimir Putin** in the Kremlin. Their meeting comes as supplies of Russian gas via pipelines through Ukraine are set to end on January 1st, when a [long-term deal between Russia and Ukraine expires](#). Mr Fico, an ally of Mr Putin, has criticised Ukraine for refusing to renew the agreement. Slovakia still imports lots of Russian gas via Ukraine.

**Turkey's** foreign minister met [Ahmad al-Sharaa](#), the leader of **Syria's** interim government, in Damascus. Turkey supported a number of rebel groups during Syria's civil war and welcomed the fall of Bashar al-Assad, the country's dictator, earlier this month.

Mr Sharaa also met [Walid Jumblatt](#), a Lebanese Druze leader, to reassure him that the new administration would protect Syria's religious minorities.

**Donald Trump** said the fees charged to use the [Panama Canal](#) were “ridiculous” and that it should be handed back to America unless the “rip-off” stops. America, which built the canal in the early 20th century, returned it to Panamanian control in 1999. America's president-elect also said that China—the canal's second-biggest user after America—should not be given a hand in running the waterway.

Mr Trump named **Stephen Miran**, who worked at the Treasury during the president-elect's first term, to lead the Council of Economic Advisers. The role will require him to be confirmed by the Senate. Mr Miran, who has criticised the Biden administration and the [Federal Reserve](#) for their handling of inflation, said he wanted to deliver a “booming, noninflationary economy”.

**America's** navy accidentally shot down one of its own planes over the **Red Sea**, according to America's armed forces. The two pilots, who had taken off from the *USS Harry S. Truman*, safely ejected from the jet. The friendly-fire incident took place as America launched several strikes on **Houthi** targets in Yemen. The [Iran-backed group](#) has been attacking vessels in the Red Sea and launching strikes against Israel.

**Albania** banned **TikTok** for a year, citing concerns about the [platform's influence](#) on children. The measure comes after a teenager was killed last month in a confrontation that allegedly emerged on social media. Edi Rama, Albania's prime minister, called TikTok the “thug of the neighbourhood”. The firm insisted its app was not related to the murder and requested “urgent clarity” from the government.

**Figure of the day:** 15%, the proportion of employees at Agnico Eagle, Canada's biggest mining company, who are women. [Read the full story.](#)

# A year of hellfire in Gaza



*We are looking back on 2024. On Friday we covered conflicts around the world. Today we're focusing just on the Middle East.*

It has been a year of horror in Gaza. Israel has killed at least 45,000 people, most of them civilians, since it began its assault in response to a massacre of Israelis by Hamas on October 7th 2023. Israel has destroyed 70% of Gaza's housing. Polling by Zogby, a research firm, suggests that three-quarters of Gazans have been displaced at least three times during the war. Many have paid thousands of dollars to flee the enclave.

Western attempts to broker a ceasefire have so far been futile. Hamas continues to hold around 100 of the hostages it seized. Israel killed its leader, Yahya Sinwar, in October this year. Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, has rejected any ceasefire on terms Hamas would accept. He may reckon that [Donald Trump](#) will give him free rein. Mr Trump has promised to end the war, but it is not clear how he plans to do that.

# Israel's ceasefire in Lebanon



When Israel's war in Gaza started 14 months ago, Hizbullah, a Lebanon-based militia, promised to fight in solidarity with Hamas. Thousands have been displaced on both sides of the border between the two countries. In September Israel decapitated Hizbullah's leadership and sent troops across the border, further intensifying the conflict. Israel has killed 4,000 people in Lebanon this year. But on November 26th the Israeli cabinet approved a ceasefire.

The [deal](#), which took effect on November 27th, called for a 60-day halt to the fighting. It was a rare bit of good news. But within days both sides had accused the other of violating it. And hopes that it might lead to a deal in Gaza may be misplaced. Binyamin Netanyahu's far-right allies dream of rebuilding settlements that were dismantled in 2005. Now Mr Netanyahu has broken the link between the two fronts. That makes it easier to continue his war in Gaza.



# Iran's next move?



[Iran](#) analysts live by two core assumptions: that the country wants to fight Israel through proxies, rather than directly, and that it doesn't want all-out war. Both now look fragile. Iran launched missiles at Israel in April and October, both in retaliation for Israeli attacks. Most of the missiles were intercepted.

But now Iran appears weaker: Israeli strikes on Iranian military facilities on October 26th struck a blow to its defences and its strategy. And the killing of Hizbullah's top ranks dealt a blow to the "axis of resistance", a group of militias backed by Iran. Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, needs to come up with new ideas to deter Israeli aggression. One option would be to boost Iran's own capabilities, possibly by developing nuclear weapons. But the return as American president of Donald Trump—an advocate of crippling sanctions and fan of threatening to attack Iran—may well encourage Mr Khamenei to negotiate.

# The fall of Syria's dictator



The regime of Bashar al-Assad, for decades Syria's brutal dictator, was toppled in less than two weeks. Rebels, led by an Islamist group called Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, began their offensive in the north-west on November 27th. By December 8th they had reached Damascus, the capital. Mr Assad fled to Russia.

The group named Muhammad al-Bashir, its chief administrator in Idlib, as caretaker prime minister. But real power rests with Ahmad al-Sharaa, formerly known as Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, the leader of HTS. Some Syrians worry that the group might impose its vision of Islamic rule, but it has promised to respect minorities. Moreover, HTS has no experience of running a big, diverse country.

## 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.

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



**The biggest room in the world is the room  
for improvement.**

*Helmut Schmidt*