

Catch up: Bessent set for treasury; Israel strikes central Beirut



Donald Trump chose **Scott Bessent** to lead the treasury department. The hedge-fund manager [supports tariffs](#), at least as a negotiating tool, and yet investors regarded him as a safe pair of hands considering the more extreme candidates in contention. Mr Bessent also wants to cut taxes and cancel Joe Biden's green-energy subsidies. Unlike the president-elect, he has warned about yawning government debt.

Lebanon's health ministry said that an **Israeli airstrike** destroyed an eight-storey residential block in central **Beirut**. It said 11 people were killed and 63 wounded in the attack on the Basta district. On Friday heavy fighting was reported between Israeli troops and Hezbollah in Chamaa, 5km inside the Lebanese border, one of Israel's deepest incursions [yet](#).

The Alliance of Small Island States pulled out of negotiations at **COP29**, saying that they had not "been heard". [Talks](#)—which have already overrun—appear to be on the verge of collapse. On Friday a draft text that suggested giving developing countries \$250bn per

year by 2035 was criticised by negotiators from some developing countries. Countries also disagree over how to make the transition from fossil fuels.

Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party edged towards winning state elections in Maharashtra, **India's** richest state. Congress, the opposition party, won Jharkhand, a mineral-rich state in eastern India, according to the election commission. The vote is a test of Mr Modi's clout after his party lost its majority in a general election [in June](#).

Lloyd Austin, America's secretary of defence, said that North Korean troops may enter combat in Ukraine "soon". About 10,000 are believed to be in Kursk, a Russian border region. Meanwhile President Vladimir Putin said that Russia would carry out more tests of a new intermediate-range hypersonic missile known as [Oreshnik](#), which Russia used against the Ukrainian city of Dnipro on November 21st.

At least 33 people were killed and 25 injured in clashes between Shia and Sunni Muslims in **Kurram**, a district in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province northwestern **Pakistan**. Armed men torched shops and houses, according to local officials. On Thursday a gunman killed 42 Shias in Kurram. Sectarian clashes between Shias and Sunnis, the latter a majority in Pakistan, have killed dozens in recent months.

A team of **archaeologists** discovered a 4,000-year-old network of canals in **Belize**. They used drones and Google Earth to collect data from the largest inland wetland in the country. The network was probably built by predecessors of the [Maya](#), who later used by them. The canals were paired with holding ponds, which were used to catch freshwater species.

Word of the week: DOGE, previously a meme. Now Elon Musk's "Department of Government Efficiency", a new advisory body

tasked with cutting red tape and wasteful spending in America.
[Read the full story.](#)

Trump's picks face the Senate



Donald Trump's stream of cabinet nominations range from conventional to [outrageous](#). His transition team is already lobbying senators, who approve judicial- and executive-branch nominees. The upper chamber proudly guards its role. But Mr Trump will soon test the loyalty of Republican senators: does it lie with him, or with their own institution?

Traditional choices—such as Marco Rubio, a longtime senator, for secretary of state—will easily win confirmation in the Senate, where Republicans will hold 53 out of 100 seats. But Robert F. Kennedy junior, [Pete Hegseth](#) and Tulsi Gabbard—Mr Trump's choices for, respectively, [top health](#), Pentagon and intelligence posts—are vulnerable because of inexperience, quacky views or personal indiscretions. Matt Gaetz, Mr Trump's pick for attorney-general, combined all three vulnerabilities; he dropped his bid on November 21st. The question for Mr Trump in the weeks ahead is how much political capital he wants to spend on pushing through unpopular nominees—and whether he's willing to risk a constitutional crisis by somehow [sidelining the Senate](#).

Italy's fading star



Delegates from Italy's maverick Five Star Movement will gather in Rome on Saturday for a weekend convention. The assembly is being held against the background of a [bitter split](#) between the party's founder, Beppe Grillo, and its president, Giuseppe Conte. Mr Grillo, a comedian-turned-politician, founded the party in 2009 with hopes of replacing Italy's parliamentary democracy with a new kind of direct democracy that exploited the possibilities of the internet.

Mr Conte has prodded it into becoming a more conventional parliamentary party. He has also pushed it to the left. He hopes that members will endorse his views during the assembly, cementing his leadership. But he will face resistance. Delegates loyal to Mr Grillo will probably argue that Mr Conte's strategy is not working. In each of the last three regional elections, the party has won less than 5% of the vote—pitiful results for a party that was once Italy's largest.

Poland's liberals eye the presidency



After eight grim years on the opposition benches, Poland's liberals returned to government in parliamentary [elections last October](#), forming a centrist coalition. But to consolidate their power—and to push through [stalling reforms](#)—they still need to win back the presidency. Elections are scheduled for May. The coalition's largest group, Civic Coalition (KO), unveiled its candidate on Saturday, following a poll of its members.

[Rafał Trzaskowski](#), the left-leaning mayor of Warsaw, won nearly 75% of the votes. He had narrowly lost to [Andrzej Duda](#), the incumbent president, [in the last election, in 2020](#). [Radosław Sikorski](#), a veteran foreign minister who had styled himself as a hawkish candidate, won just over 25% of the vote. Bolstered by the election of Donald Trump, he was expected to force eastern Europe into more realpolitik. But party members went for the safer bet. Early polls suggest that Mr Trzaskowski has a better chance of winning against Law and Justice, the populist-nationalist party, in the May elections.

An intimate portrait of displacement



Es Devlin's work has appeared on the world's biggest stages. She has won Olivier awards for her designs on the West End and Tony Awards for her backdrops on Broadway. She collaborated with Adele and Beyoncé on their concert tours and designed ceremonies for the Olympic games in London and Rio. Her latest project, however, is both grand and intimate.

“FACE to FACE: 50 Encounters with Strangers” opens at Somerset House in London on Saturday. The show features “CONGREGATION”, an installation for which Ms Devlin invited 50 people from 28 countries to sit for her. At first, she knew only each individual's name and that they had come to London after being forcibly displaced from their homes. (The artwork was created in partnership with UNHCR, the UN's refugee body.)

“CONGREGATION” brings together portraits, sound design and projections as Ms Devlin's subjects speak about what London has provided them: shelter, anonymity, acceptance and opportunity.

Weekend profile: Priyanka Gandhi, hope of India's opposition



Just two years ago Priyanka Gandhi's political career seemed to have hit a wall. The scion of India's foremost political dynasty, whose father, grandmother and great-grandfather were all prime ministers, had been put in charge of the Congress party's campaign for an election in Uttar Pradesh, or UP, the nation's most populous state. And she bombed: Congress won two seats in the state assembly in its worst-ever performance there. Not long afterwards, she resigned as the party's leader in UP.

Yet in the wake of an [unexpected general-election result](#) in June 2024, Ms Gandhi is making a remarkable comeback. Her efforts on the campaign trail are now widely credited with helping to strip the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP, of its parliamentary majority. And though she did not run for a seat initially, on November 13th she stood in a by-election for one in the southern state of Kerala after her brother, Rahul, gave that up to take another that he won in UP (candidates can run for up to two seats in India but occupy only one). *On* November 23rd India's election commission announced that she won.

The victory marks her long-awaited debut in India's lower house of parliament. Priyanka, who at 52 is two years younger than Rahul, has long been considered the more natural politician. Some think she could even be a prime-ministerial candidate. But she has often expressed ambivalence about politics, not least because of her tragic childhood. She was 12 in 1984 when Indira, her grandmother, was shot dead by her Sikh bodyguards. Seven years later her father, Rajiv, was assassinated by a Tamil suicide-bomber.

Recently, though, her appetite for politics appears to be growing. That is partly because her children are now grown up. But family friends say Priyanka has also been energised by the pursuit of the BJP's Hindu-nationalist agenda by Narendra Modi, the prime minister, as well as his erosion of secularism and of democratic institutions, and his use of state agencies to target political opponents, including the Gandhis, with corruption probes. For the general election she campaigned in some 16 Indian states, attending 108 rallies.

Her anticipated debut in parliament is not without controversy. BJP leaders cite it as evidence of Congress's continued dynasticism. And they accuse the Gandhis of deceiving voters in Kerala's Wayanad constituency (which Rahul had represented since 2019) by putting forward Priyanka as his replacement after the recent election.

Priyanka is unlikely to eclipse Rahul, who was appointed in June as leader of the opposition, in the short term. Still, her public profile is bound to rise in the coming years. Congress supporters say they relish the prospect of seeing the siblings join forces in parliament to challenge Mr Modi. But if Priyanka's popularity continues to grow, the party will have to confront a question it has long sought to avoid: might she stand a better chance than Rahul of one day leading India?

Weekly crossword



Our crossword has two sets of clues, one for seasoned cruciverbalists and the other for less experienced solvers. Both give the same answers, all of which feature in articles in this week's edition of *The Economist*:

Cryptic clues

1 down Oily, succulent merguez partly eaten by German politician (9,4)

1 across Can ref rebuild team? (6)

2 across Rank wind exits insides (5)

3 across City finds zero upside reinvesting in clearing house initially (6)

Factual clues

1 down Leader of the Christian Democrats (9, 4)

1 across Country that has recently been training Ukrainian troops (6)

2 across A weighted average of prices, say (5)

3 across Largest city in Switzerland (6)

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am GMT on Monday to crossword@economist.com. We will pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners in next week's edition.

The winners of this week's quiz



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

Iskriyana Vasileva, Berlin, Germany

Stan Seltzer, Trumansburg, New York

Giedrius Kazakevicius, Vilnius, Lithuania

They all gave the correct answers of: "The Master and Margarita", The Duke of Edinburgh, "The Lovely Bones", "Happy" and Sealed With a Loving Kiss. The theme is songs by Stevie Wonder: "Master Blaster (Jammin')", "Sir Duke", "Isn't She Lovely", "Happy Birthday" and "Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I'm Yours".

The questions were:

Monday: Mikhail Bulgakov is best known for which novel, oft cited as a 20th century classic?

Tuesday: What title is most associated with Prince Philip, the late husband of Queen Elizabeth II?

Wednesday: Which novel by Alice Sebold is narrated by a 14-year-old girl who is murdered in the first chapter?

Thursday: Which hit song by Pharrell Williams came from the soundtrack of the film “Despicable Me 2”?

Friday: For what words does the acronym SWALK stand?

Train hard, fight easy.

Alexander Suvorov