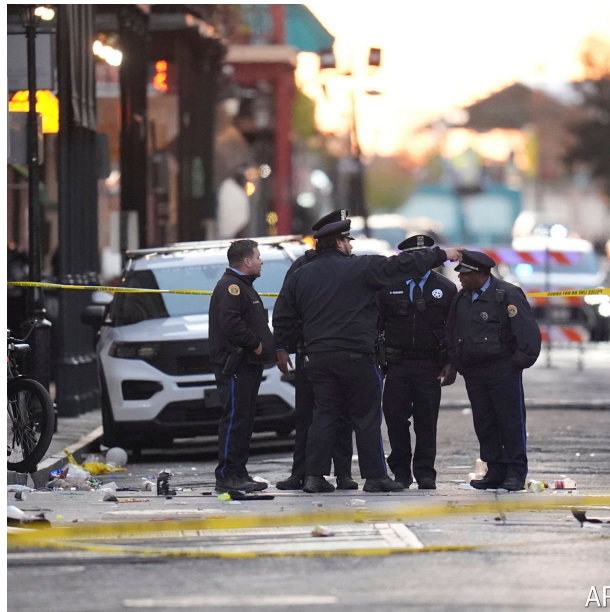


Catch up: 15 killed in New Orleans vehicle attack; Taiwan to spend more on defence



The FBI identified the suspect who drove a pick-up truck into a crowd in **New Orleans**, Louisiana, killing at least 15 people and injuring another 35. The agency said that Shamsud Din Bahar Jabbar, a 42-year-old American citizen from Texas, was killed in a shootout with police, and that an Islamic State flag, a possible improvised explosive device and other weapons were found in the vehicle. The FBI is investigating the incident as an act of terrorism. Earlier the city's police chief said that the suspect "was trying to run over as many people as he could".

Taiwan's president, Lai Ching-te, promised more military spending to strengthen the island's defences, citing the danger that China, Russia and North Korea pose to the "international order". China has been increasingly aggressive towards Taiwan, which it lays claim to despite the island enjoying 75 years of autonomy. On Tuesday Xi Jinping, China's leader, said that **no one could prevent** "reunification".

Nearly 37,000 **migrants** crossed the **English Channel** [by boat](#) to Britain in 2024, according to the government, a 25% increase from 2023. It was the second-highest tally since records started in 2018. France recorded at least 77 migrant deaths in the past 12 months. Sir Keir Starmer, Britain's prime minister, has vowed to "smash" the people-smuggling gangs that facilitate such trips.

Israeli strikes on northern Gaza killed at least eight people, according to local officials. Israel Defence Forces did not comment on a strike on Gaza city, though they said they had targeted militants in Bureij, a refugee camp in the enclave's centre. Hopes for a breakthrough in ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas were raised last month, but have faded yet again.

Alibaba said it would sell its shares of Sun Art Retail Group, a supermarket chain, to a Chinese private-equity group for up to HK\$12.3bn (\$1.6bn). The [Chinese e-commerce giant](#), which paid \$3.6bn to double its stake in Sun Art in 2020, is shedding its bricks-and-mortar businesses. In December the firm said it would sell Intime, a department-store chain, also for a big loss.

Ivory Coast's president, Alassane Ouattara, asked the 600 French troops stationed in the West African country to leave. They will begin to decamp this month. Meanwhile Senegal's president, Bassirou Dioumaye Faye, said that France's military presence in his country would end "from 2025". France [has been](#) slowly drawing down its military presence in Africa for several years.

Yoav Gallant, whom Binyamin Netanyahu [sacked as Israel's defence minister](#) in November, gave up his seat in parliament. He and Mr Netanyahu, the prime minister, feuded over strategy in Israel's multi-front war and Mr Netanyahu's desire to exempt ultra-Orthodox Jews from army service. Mr Gallant has called their enlistment a "military necessity" and said his own "journey is not yet complete".

Figure of the day: 3%, the amount by which American share prices have increased since Donald Trump's election. Read the full story.

China's export push



China-watchers find themselves in a holding pattern as they await two announcements that will determine the economy's fortunes in 2025. One concerns the tariffs that Donald Trump, America's president-elect, has threatened to [impose on Chinese goods](#). The other is about the size and style of the fiscal stimulus that China's legislature should approve in March. Reuters, a news agency, suggests that China may aim for an official budget deficit of 4% of GDP, higher than its customary limit of 3%.

The economy seems to be benefiting already from some extra government spending and lending. Construction picked up in December, according to the latest official surveys of purchasing managers. A similar survey by *Caixin*, a business magazine, comes out on Thursday. Recent figures have shown an improvement in export orders for manufacturers. Many are rushing to fulfil demand before Mr Trump's tariffs hit. China-watchers may be in limbo, but China's exporters are in a rush.

Russian gas stops flowing through Ukraine



The last shipment of Russian gas flowed through Ukraine to Europe on Wednesday, after a [contract for its transit](#) expired. Ukraine had warned in advance that it would allow the agreement to lapse. Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, said he would not give Russia "the opportunity to earn additional billions on our blood".

The decision has annoyed Hungary and Slovakia, which together import 4bn cubic metres of Russian gas per year through Ukraine. They are scrambling to respond. Slovakia's prime minister, Robert Fico, has threatened to stop supplying power to Ukraine during blackouts caused by Russian bombing. Hungary's strongman, Viktor Orban, has suggested that it might purchase gas inside Russia, "so it would be Hungarian gas" by the time it crossed into Ukraine. The two leaders were already Ukraine's most vocal critics in the EU. Expect them to become louder.

A bleak start to the year in Gaza



Like so many times in the past year, optimism that fresh talks would result in a breakthrough in Gaza has dissipated. In December some hoped that a last push by the outgoing Biden administration, coupled with pressure from the incoming Trump one, would secure a ceasefire deal and the return of 100 Israeli hostages still held by Hamas. (Israel believes a third of them are already dead.) But old obstacles remain insurmountable. The militant group demands that Israeli forces withdraw from Gaza and won't commit to releasing all the hostages. Israel refuses to lay down arms while Hamas still controls parts of the territory.

So Israel's military campaign continues. The armed forces are trying to wipe out the remaining Hamas fighters in the northern part of the strip. Meanwhile more than 1.7m refugees are huddled in a "humanitarian zone" to the south. As winter sets in, babies are dying of hypothermia.

Georgian nightmare



On New Year's Eve demonstrators in Tbilisi, Georgia's capital, held a *supra* (a traditional feast) outside the parliament. They were not only welcoming in 2025 but expressing, yet again, their outrage at the ruling Georgian Dream party. In November, after winning a dodgy election, it halted EU-accession talks. The protesters, who will probably assemble for a 36th consecutive day on Thursday despite attempts to dissuade them with beatings, water cannon and tear gas, want a fresh vote to get Georgia back on a pro-Western track.

Meanwhile a constitutional crisis is intensifying. On Sunday Mikheil Kavelashvili, a hard-right Georgian Dream ally, was inaugurated as Georgia's president. But his pro-Western predecessor, Salome Zourabichvili, is refusing to step aside, claiming that the parliament that helped to install Mr Kavelashvili is illegal. Last week America introduced sanctions against Georgian Dream's founder, Bidzina Ivanishvili, a billionaire who made his fortune in Russia. [International pressure is welcome](#), but unlikely to sway the government.

Lockerbie re-examined



In 1988 Pan Am flight 103 exploded over Lockerbie, a town in Scotland, killing 270 people. Twelve years later three Scottish judges convicted Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, a Libyan, of mass murder. But doubts persist about the official account of Britain's deadliest terrorist attack. Jim Swire lost his daughter, Flora, in the bombing. Now 88 years old, the former doctor has spent decades investigating, eventually concluding that Megrahi was innocent and that a Palestinian militant group based in Syria were behind the attack.

"Lockerbie: A Search for Truth", a five-part series released on Sky Atlantic in Britain and on Peacock in America on Thursday, dramatises Dr Swire's search for answers. Colin Firth plays him as a man driven both by grief and a hunger for truth. Yet Dr Swire's theories are controversial; some bereaved families believe in Megrahi's guilt. The show is cautious. It concludes that the truth may never be known.

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. We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Thursday: Which actress wrote and produced the first series of the tv show “Killing Eve” and wrote and starred in two series of “Fleabag”?

Wednesday: Which is the second most-used internet search engine?

Why not question everything?

Lynn Conway