

## Catch up: Assad flees to Moscow; Israel targets Syria's strategic weapons



**Bashar al-Assad**, Syria's dictator for 24 years, reportedly touched down in Moscow after rebels seized control of Damascus, the Syrian capital. Russia, which supported Mr Assad during Syria's long civil war, has granted him asylum. **Abu Muhammad al-Jolani**, the leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the group that spearheaded the surprise offensive, said Syria would become "a beacon for the Islamic nation". Some fear a [new civil war](#).

**Israel's** defence minister, Israel Katz, ordered the air force to continue strikes in **Syria**, aiming to destroy strategic weapons, including missiles and air defence systems, to prevent them from falling into rebel hands. Over the weekend Israeli air strikes targeted suspected chemical weapons sites. Israeli forces also crossed into Syrian territory from the disputed Golan Heights to prevent [rebel groups](#) from settling near the border.

**South Korean** officials imposed a travel ban on **Yoon Suk Yeol**, who is now being investigated for treason. Authorities have also arrested Kim Yong-hyun, a former defence minister, whom they

accused of helping to plan Mr Yoon's [failed coup](#) on December 3rd. Mr Yoon, who survived an [impeachment vote](#) on Saturday, remains in office, but has stepped back from "handling state affairs", according to his prime minister.

The **Chinese Communist Party** announced a shift to a "moderately loose" monetary policy for the first time since 2010, to tackle deflation and weak growth. The party also unveiled [fiscal measures](#), including easing homebuying restrictions and a \$1.4trn local government debt swap. The party will hold its annual economic conference on Wednesday to set the country's economic agenda for 2025.

**Omnicom**, an advertising giant, is reportedly in talks to buy **Interpublic Group** in a deal worth \$30bn. The merger between the American rivals would create the world's biggest advertising agency. The industry has been hit hard by falling marketing budgets and the growth of advertising tools provided by Google, Amazon and other tech firms.

**Gangs** brutally murdered at least 110 people in **Haiti's** Cité Soleil, a slum near Port-au-Prince, the capital. The massacre, carried out with machetes and knives, targeted elderly residents accused of witchcraft by a priest after a gang leader's child fell ill. Gangs control around 80% of the capital. Criminal violence has displaced thousands of people and plunged the country in a deep [political crisis](#).

The **New York Mets**, an American [baseball](#) team, reportedly recruited **Juan Soto** in perhaps the most lucrative sporting contract ever signed. According to ESPN, a sports network, Mr Soto's 15-year deal is worth \$765m. The 26-year-old outfielder was a free agent and received offers from, among other teams, the New York Yankees, for whom he starred last season.

**Figure of the day: \$839**, the average resale price of tickets for Taylor Swift's Eras tour in America and Canada. [Read the full story.](#)

# The fall of Bashar al-Assad



After 13 years of civil war, [Syria's dictatorship collapsed suddenly](#). Less than two weeks after they began their advance, rebels captured the capital, Damascus, and forced out Bashar al-Assad, dictator for 24 years. Across the country, Syrians have cheered the end of his tyranny and hope for a new start. Will they get it?

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the Islamist group that [spearheaded the offensive](#), has avoided sectarian triumphalism and promised to protect minorities. It has learned from the chaos that followed the root-and-branch destruction of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, and has asked civilian authorities to remain in post. But Syrian politics will get complicated. As well as fighting the regime, HTS battled other rebel factions that will want a hand in running the country. Moreover, the West still views HTS as a terrorist group. Many hope that foreign powers might broker a power-sharing agreement. But with so much division in Syria, finding unanimity could be hard.

# The UN continues its mission in Congo



On Monday the Security Council will renew the UN's peacekeeping mission in eastern Congo for a year. Congo's decision to support the mission marks a change of course by the government, which had been pushing for UN troops to withdraw by the end of 2024. The mission is unpopular; many think it incapable of deterring armed groups. Militias have proliferated since it began in 1999.

Anger at the UN has grown since 2022, when M23, a [rebel group backed by neighbouring Rwanda](#), conquered swathes of Congolese territory. Protests by Congolese have grown. In response, the UN agreed to a phased withdrawal. Peacekeepers left South Kivu province in June. But leaving more violent places such as North Kivu—where M23 is active—is another matter. Congo's own fight against M23 is going badly. The group controls more territory than this time last year. And although peace talks continue, few think Congo's corrupt army can fill the void should the blue helmets leave.



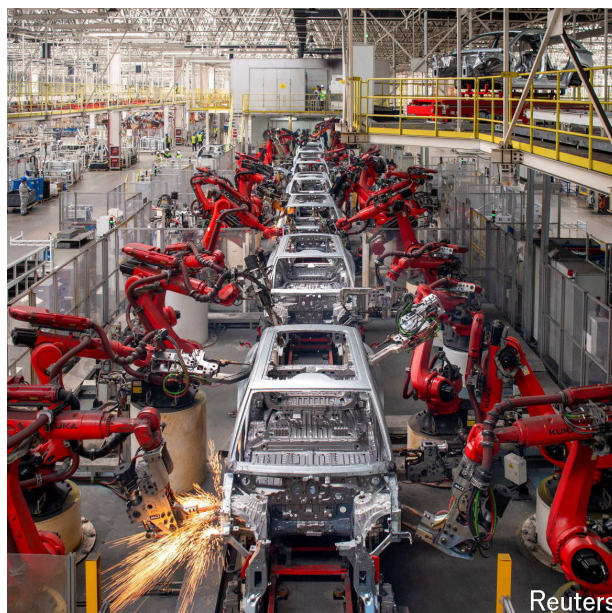
# Cloud computing's sky-high growth



Oracle, a technology giant, announces its quarterly results on Monday. Once better known for its database software, the company has invested heavily in its cloud-infrastructure business. Bloomberg Intelligence, a data provider, estimates that Oracle's capital spending could reach around \$14bn in fiscal 2025 (ending in May), with the majority going towards its cloud operations. That level of spending could position Oracle as the fourth-largest cloud provider, trailing just Amazon, Microsoft and Google.

The company's push into cloud services is shrewd. The [artificial-intelligence boom](#) has boosted demand for such services, helping to offset declines in Oracle's older database products. In the past year the firm's share price has risen by 67%, compared with 39% for the gains of the Nasdaq, an index of tech-heavy stocks. This surge has made [Larry Ellison](#), the company's co-founder, one of the world's richest people. And Oracle is well-placed to keep thriving: Mr Ellison is a vocal supporter of Donald Trump, America's president-elect.

## How low inflation adds to China's woes



Later this week China's leaders are expected to hold their annual Central Economic Work Conference, at which they will ponder their policy targets for [the year ahead](#). The growth target (which will probably remain secret until March) attracts most attention. Thanks to a [late stimulus push](#), the economy will probably come close to this year's 5% target: "a little to the left or right of 5% is acceptable," according to state-run media.

But China will fall far short of another, less prominent goal: its inflation target of 3%. Consumer prices in the first ten months of this year were only 0.3% higher than last year. And figures released on Monday showed an increase of only 0.2% in November, compared with a year earlier. Low inflation may seem like a blessing. But it reflects inadequate spending and increases the real cost of borrowing. Inflation is far to the left of where it should be.

## An audacious adaptation of a great Colombian novel



“One Hundred Years of Solitude”, published in 1967, is often referred to as the greatest novel ever written. It is also regarded as “unfilmable”. Part of the problem is its complexity: [Gabriel García Márquez’s](#) tale follows several generations of the Buendía family, many of whom have confusing variations of the same name. Another is its idiosyncratic style. It relies heavily on narration; dialogue makes up only about 5% of the book. And it includes sudden magical-realist flights of fancy, which can be enchanting on the page but risk looking strange on screen.

Undeterred, Netflix has taken up the challenge. The streaming service has turned Márquez’s book into 16 hours of television; the first tranche of episodes is released this week. Filmed in Colombia in Spanish, the show is a faithful adaptation and draws much of its script verbatim from the novel. Netflix has spared no expense in bringing the Buendías and the town of Macondo to life, either. It has spent more on “One Hundred Years of Solitude” than on any other [Latin American production](#).



## 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 two provinces suffered repeated transfers of power between France and Germany from 1871 to 1945?

**Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and  
to argue freely according to my  
conscience, above all liberties.**

*John Milton*