

Catch up: Syrian rebels attack Aleppo; Trump picks Kash Patel as FBI head



Russian warplanes joined Syrian armed forces in attacking rebels attempting to seize **Aleppo**, the country's second-biggest city. The fighters, who are led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an Islamist group, have now taken control of a majority of Aleppo, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring group. It is the first time [Syria's](#) opposition has captured territory from the regime in years.

Donald Trump said he would appoint **Kash Patel**, an inexperienced loyalist, as director of the **FBI**. Mr Patel, who advised the secretary of defence during Mr Trump's previous administration, has railed against the "deep state" and vowed to strip the FBI of its intelligence-gathering role. Mr Trump and his appointees seem intent on [dramatic reforms](#) in spy agencies and at the FBI.

Justin Trudeau, Canada's prime minister, reportedly met **Donald Trump**, America's president-elect, at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida. Earlier this week Mr Trump said he would impose a 25% [tariff](#) on imports from Canada and Mexico until fentanyl and

irregular migrants stopped coming into America across either border. Canada, the world's fourth-largest oil producer, sells most of its supply to America.

China's factory activity expanded for a second consecutive month in November. The Purchasing Managers' Index, published by the National Bureau of Statistics, rose to 50.3, a seven-month high. (Anything above 50 indicates an expansion.) [Stimulus measures](#) by the government, including fiscal spending and monetary easing, are going some way to boost domestic demand. However, new export orders shrank for the seventh consecutive month.

William Ruto, Kenya's president, and Yoweri Museveni, his Ugandan counterpart, will mediate a dispute between **Ethiopia** and **Somalia** over a port deal with Somaliland. Last year Ethiopia signed an agreement with the breakaway republic to build a naval base in exchange for recognising its sovereignty, angering Somalia, which claims [Somaliland as part of its territory](#). The conflict risks destabilizing the Horn of Africa and strengthening jihadist groups.

An exit poll in **Ireland** put the three main parties neck and neck after an election on Friday. The survey put both Fine Gael, the party of Simon Harris, the prime minister, and Sinn Féin, the main opposition, on 21%, with Fianna Fáil just behind on 20%. A repeat of the previous coalition government between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is the most likely outcome.

Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, suggested the war could end if areas under **Ukraine's** control were placed "under the NATO umbrella". In an interview with Sky News, he said that Russian-occupied territory could then be reclaimed through diplomacy. The plan is unlikely to materialise: Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, would reject it, and NATO countries are divided over [Ukrainian membership](#).

Word of the week: Securonomics, a buzzword coined by Britain's chancellor, Rachel Reeves. It has not appeared in her speeches since she entered office. [Read the full story.](#)

Mixed fortunes for Spain's Sánchez



Pedro Sánchez, Spain's prime minister (pictured), will strengthen his already firm grip over his Socialist party when it holds a congress in Seville this weekend. Loyalists are set to replace several regional party leaders who are critical of him. This month [Mr Sánchez's minority government](#) secured preliminary approval from the fragmented parliament for tax rises. That should allow the government to comply with European fiscal rules without sharp spending cuts next year.

But a corruption scandal has the Socialists worried. José Luis Ábalos, formerly the party's number three, is under investigation by the Supreme Court in connection with graft allegations at the transport ministry, which he used to run. (Mr Ábalos denies wrongdoing.) The businessman at the heart of the scandal claims to have bribed other party figures, though he has yet to present proof. Officials insist that Mr Sánchez can see out the remaining three years of his term. His opponents are not so sure.

Cheap but not cheerful: America's budget airlines



More than 3m stuffing-filled and family-weary Americans will trudge through airports on Sunday, the busiest travel day of the Thanksgiving weekend. But bosses at America's often-derided low-cost airlines are unlikely to cheer. Passenger numbers in America are forecast to hit 2.2bn in 2024, up by 7% on 2023, but that has not translated into profits. In November [Spirit filed for bankruptcy protection](#)—the first big carrier to go bust since American Airlines did in 2011.

Budget airlines have struggled in part because legacy airlines are increasingly offering cheap fares while still attracting passengers willing to pay more for extra pampering. In 2022 a judge struck down a planned merger between Spirit and Frontier, another low-cost airline, deeming it anti-competitive. Such a deal could have given the two a fighting chance against America's legacy airlines—and ensured that travellers always have a cheap option, even if they check in with gritted teeth.

Tackling the world's plastic problem



On Sunday UN negotiations over the future of plastic come to an end in Busan, South Korea. The world will produce around 500m tonnes of the material this year, estimates the OECD, a club of mostly rich countries. Only about a tenth of that will be recycled and a fifth incinerated; the rest will end up in landfill or be dumped into waterways or oceans. Making and disposing of plastic also accounts for about 3% of global greenhouse-gas emissions—more than aviation.

Delegates hope to lay the groundwork for a binding treaty, to come into effect next year. But questions remain over whether the deal will cap plastic production and if the biggest polluters will be asked to pay. Multinational businesses are hoping for an agreement, too. A third of plastics are used for packaging. International rules would make the globe-spanning operations of companies such as Nestlé, Unilever and Danone easier. Meanwhile firms are exploring [sustainable alternatives](#) made from seaweed, mushrooms or agricultural waste.

Killer whales' latest prey



Killer whales are living up to their name. There has been a spate of recent attacks by the whales on yachts, notably around the Iberian peninsula. Meanwhile South African scientists observed an [orca hunt a great white shark](#). Now it seems killer whales have set their sights on another prey: whale sharks. Scientists recorded a series of co-ordinated killer-whale attacks on young members of the world's largest fish species in the Gulf of California. The area is a feeding site for them.

The vulnerability of juvenile sharks makes them an ideal target for killer whales, who appear to immobilise the creatures by flipping them over. They seem to be after the shark's lipid-rich livers. The latest observations, published in *Frontiers in Marine Science*, a journal, may help scientists to better understand the development of complex behaviours among these highly intelligent marine predators.

An artistic double bill in eastern India



The first week in December brings a festival to the Sun Temple of Konark, on the Bay of Bengal in the Indian state of Odisha. Visitors are drawn in by its striking setting: the 13th-century temple is a masterpiece of Hindu architecture, gawped at by almost 2.5m tourists a year. It is a monumental representation of a giant, 24-wheeled chariot, symbolically bearing the sun god Surya, carved from black stone. Between its massive stone wheels, panels of carvings in deep relief depict lions, dancers, musicians and erotic scenes.

Another draw to the event is the interplay of artistic genres. At the temple India's top classical dancers perform traditional forms including Odissi, which originated in Odisha. Meanwhile at nearby Chandrabhaga Beach teams from around the world compete to create vast and imaginative sand sculptures, be they of animals, gods or elaborate palaces. The two art forms, one in motion and the other still, create an intriguing dialogue with the temple's stone-built chariot.

The winners of this week's quiz



The Economist

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

Rob Blair, Harare, Zimbabwe

Zoe Hill, Oxshott, Britain

Peter Nicklin, Naivasha, Kenya

They all gave the correct answers of: Down Under, A Hat, Newport News, Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, the Grand Canal. The theme is words ending in stand: understand, hatstand, newsstand, bandstand and grandstand.

The questions were:

Monday: Which hit song by Men at Work has a title usually associated with Australia and New Zealand?

Tuesday: What did a man mistake his wife for, in the title of a book by Oliver Sacks?

Wednesday: Which Virginia town, on the James river, is noted for its marine terminal and military bases?

Thursday: Which Beatles album has a cover featuring a montage

of people the group admired? (Hint: the full title is needed to guess the theme)

Friday: Which Chinese waterway, more than 1,000 miles long, has sections that were built as far back as the 5th century BC?

The 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*.

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.

November 30th edition

Cryptic clues

1 down “President Valerie—I, Jim, reformed!” (6,5)

1 across Some maharaja panhandled land (5)

2 across Planet's poverty without leader (5)

3 across Regularly find cashbox in a state (5)

Factual clues

1 down Another president idolised by Trump fans (6,5)

1 across Where the share of eligible men taking paternity leave reached 30% in 2023 (5)

2 across What plays host to three trillion trees (5)

3 across What 13 counties in Oregon recently said they'd rather join (5)

Experience is simply the name we give our mistakes.

Oscar Wilde