

## Catch up: Gaza deal “very close”; Ukraine’s big aerial attack on Russia



**Qatari** officials said that a [ceasefire deal](#) in Gaza was “very close” as **negotiations** between Israel and Hamas entered their “final stages”. According to **President Joe Biden**, Hamas would free hostages under the agreement and there would be a pause in fighting. A hard-right Israeli minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, said he would leave Binyamin Netanyahu’s coalition if the deal was agreed.

**Ukraine** claimed to have carried out its biggest attack so far on military facilities inside Russia, as it fired drones and Western-made missiles at targets including factories, oil refineries and munition stores. Ukraine’s armed forces added that the farthest targets were some 1,100km (680 miles) beyond the border. Russia’s defence ministry said the attacks would “not go unanswered”; it also launched drone strikes on Ukraine overnight.

**America’s Department of Justice** had “sufficient” evidence to convict **Donald Trump** in a trial for seeking to overturn the presidential election in 2020, according to [Jack Smith](#), the special

counsel who led the case. Mr Smith dropped the case after Mr Trump's election victory in 2024. The DoJ delivered Mr Smith's final report on the case to Congress in the early hours of Tuesday.

**NATO's** secretary-general, Mark Rutte, said the alliance will bolster its efforts to protect critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea. Member states have reported **Russian-linked attacks** on undersea cables and pipelines. The monitoring operation, known as "Baltic Sentry", will use drones, ships and other technology to "deter future destabilising acts". In December Finland [seized a tanker](#) thought to have been involved in Russian sabotage.

**TikTok** denied reports that its Chinese owners are willing to sell the video-sharing platform to **Elon Musk**. The company faces a deadline of January 19th to either sell its American operations or [face a ban in the country](#). The Supreme Court is due to rule on the issue. Donald Trump, an ally of Mr Musk, opposes a ban.

**France's** prime minister, François Bayrou, decried the country's debt problem in a speech to the National Assembly. The [73-year-old centrist](#) said his government aims to reduce the budget deficit from 6.1% of GDP in 2024 to 5.4% in 2025. He will also put President Emmanuel Macron's controversial pension reform "back on the agenda" as he tries to get his budget through a fractious parliament.

**Cleveland-Cliffs** and **Nucor**, two American steelmakers, reportedly agreed to launch a joint bid for **US Steel**. Under the plan Cleveland-Cliffs would acquire all of US Steel before selling the struggling firm's Big River Steel unit to Nucor. The offer would probably be significantly lower than the \$14bn bid by Nippon Steel, which the Biden administration [blocked](#) earlier this month, citing national-security concerns.

**Figure of the day:** 60%, the share of Greenlanders who support closer co-operation with America, according to a survey from

December. [Read the full story.](#)

# Will Pete Hegseth run the Pentagon?



American senators started grilling Pete Hegseth, Donald Trump's nominee to be secretary of defence, in a confirmation hearing. The Fox News presenter and former platoon leader is a controversial choice. He has been accused of frequent drunkenness, sexually assaulting a woman and cheating on his wife. Mr Hegseth denies the first two claims.

Roger Wicker, the Senate armed service committee's chairman, offered Mr Hegseth full-throated support; Jack Reed, the ranking Democrat, the opposite. Mr Hegseth himself backpedalled furiously on his previous writings on women in combat, suggesting that he only wanted to ensure that standards were not lowered. He insisted that he had Mr Trump's backing to be a "change agent" at the Pentagon, restoring a "warrior ethos" based on lethality and meritocracy, a reference to his criticism of supposedly "woke" policies promoting diversity and inclusion. If confirmed, Mr Hegseth would be perhaps the [most inexperienced man ever to run the Pentagon](#), one of the largest and most important departments in the federal government.

# South Korea's impeachment drama



The impeachment trial of [Yoon Suk Yeol](#), South Korea's president, began on Tuesday. In December Mr Yoon briefly imposed martial law but retreated because of public pressure and resistance from the country's parliament. Lawmakers swiftly impeached him. But the Constitutional Court must uphold their decision for it to stand. The court has 180 days to rule, but may move quickly given the urgency of the case. The first five hearings have been scheduled over the next three weeks. Mr Yoon is also fighting separate criminal charges of insurrection.

Investigators tried to arrest him at the presidential residence on January 3rd, but the presidential security service, which has remained loyal to Mr Yoon, stopped them. Mr Yoon's lawyers contend that the arrest warrant is illegal, but police are expected to try to enforce it again, perhaps as early as this week. Mr Yoon did not attend Tuesday's hearing, which ended after four minutes, reportedly for fear that he could be arrested.

## Bayrou lays out his plans



France's prime minister outlined his government's plans to the National Assembly on Tuesday. The most urgent task facing [François Bayrou](#), a 73-year-old centrist appointed by President Emmanuel Macron on December 13th, is drafting a budget for 2025. He is set to pursue a less ambitious deficit-cutting programme than did his predecessor, Michel Barnier. The former prime minister hoped to reduce the budget deficit from 6.1% of GDP in 2024 to 5% in 2025; Mr Bayrou said he would aim for 5.4%.

Yet Mr Bayrou is [running a minority government](#), and needs to broaden parliamentary support to get the budget through and avoid losing a no-confidence vote. If he is to secure the support of Socialists, as he hopes, he may have to raise taxes on the rich and on businesses. He said he would put Mr Macron's pension reform, which raised the minimum retirement age from 62 to 64, "back on the agenda" for discussion.



# Dangers ahead for Milei



During his first year as Argentina's president [Javier Milei](#) slashed public spending and regulation. The results have been encouraging. Monthly inflation was 2.4% in November, its lowest level in more than four years. Figures released on Tuesday are expected to show that the rate rose slightly in December, but remained under 3%. Meanwhile the annual inflation rate is expected to fall to around 118%, from 166% in November. Economic growth is also expected to pick up in the last quarter of 2024.

Mr Milei's second year, however, could be more difficult. The government has signalled it will try to lift currency controls, though the president recently said it must first secure an \$11bn loan from the IMF and private banks to bolster the central bank's reserves. Lifting the restrictions could push up inflation ahead of mid-term elections in October, in which Mr Milei hopes to boost his party's position in Congress—and so make it easier to pass further reforms.

## Pope Francis's second chapter



The publisher calls it “the first autobiography in history to be written by a pope”. That is debatable. Pope Francis’s “Life: My Story through History” appeared last year. It focused on the world events through which he has lived. The new book—“Hope”, published on Tuesday—is more intimate. It includes descriptions of the sometimes-violent neighbourhood of Buenos Aires where he grew up. Advance extracts reveal that two of his schoolmates committed killings.

Francis apparently planned for “Hope” to be published [after his death](#). But factors such as this year’s jubilee, a period of celebration for the church, persuaded him to become the first pope to publish two autobiographies. It remains to be seen whether the book will shed further light on his leadership of Argentina’s Jesuits during the country’s military dictatorship. Suggestions that he failed to protect two Jesuits who were kidnapped and tortured have long provoked controversy. Francis has denied the claims.



## 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.

**Tuesday:** Which town in north-east England on the river Wear is home to a prestigious university and has a castle, and cathedral, that are UNESCO world heritage sites?

**Monday:** Sigmund Freud's book "Die Traumdeutung" is generally known in English by what title?

**It is certain, in any case, that ignorance,  
allied with power, is the most ferocious  
enemy justice can have.**

*James Baldwin*