

## Catch up: Devastation in the Indian Ocean; repercussions in South Korea



Hundreds of people are feared dead after **Cyclone Chido** hit **Mayotte**, a French territory in the Indian Ocean. With winds of 200kph, [the storm](#) was the worst to strike the archipelago in nearly a century. The true death toll will be difficult to ascertain given that around a third of Mayotte's 320,000 residents are undocumented migrants from nearby Comoros.

**Han Dong-hoon** resigned as leader of **South Korea's** ruling People Power Party following his decision on Saturday to support the [impeachment](#) of **Yoon Suk Yeol**, the country's president. Mr Han said his position was untenable. He was one of 12 PPP MPs to break ranks and vote with the opposition to impeach Mr Yoon for his short-lived attempt to impose martial law.

**Britain** and **America** reported having "contact" with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the [group](#) that toppled Bashar al-Assad in **Syria**, though both consider it a terrorist organisation. Britain also pledged £50m (\$63m) of humanitarian aid to Syria, while **Turkey**, which has long

backed HTS, said it stood ready to provide military training to the new Syrian administration.

**Israel** announced that due to the “extreme anti-Israel policies of the **Irish government**” it will close its embassy in Dublin. Ireland has been highly critical of the Israeli assault on Gaza, and supported the [case](#) at the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of genocide. The Irish taoiseach (prime minister), Simon Harris, said Israel’s action was “deeply regrettable”, but denied that Ireland is anti the country.

Two **Russian oil tankers**, each carrying an estimated 4,300 tonnes of oil, were badly damaged in bad weather in the Black Sea, discharging some of their cargoes into the water. One vessel sank. The accident happened in the Kerch Strait, which separates Russia from Crimea. The severity of the oil spill remains unclear.

**Britain** officially joined the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, the biggest **trade deal** for the country since it left the EU in 2020. The 12-member [pact](#) includes countries such as Japan, Australia, Singapore and Canada. Under the terms of accession, Britain can lower tariffs with eight of the members.

**Zakir Hussain**, an Indian **tabla** maestro, died in San Francisco, aged 73. In a career spanning more than five decades, he produced dozens of albums and collaborated with a wide range of musicians, from jazz saxophonists to rockstars. He was awarded the Padma Vibhushan, India’s second-highest civilian honour, in 2023.

**Figure of the day:** 3%, Spain’s expected economic growth this year, almost four times the euro-area average. [Read the full story.](#)

# Germany's election campaign kicks off



On Monday Olaf Scholz, Germany's chancellor, will ask the Bundestag to kick him out of a job. He should get his wish. The confidence vote was made necessary after Mr Scholz **ended** his dysfunctional three-party coalition last month, leaving his Social Democrats (SPD) leading a minority government. It will pave the way for an election next February.

On Tuesday the centre-right Christian Democrats (CDU) and their Bavarian CSU allies will publish their election manifesto. This week therefore marks the unofficial beginning of Germany's campaign. And unless the SPD stages an astonishing comeback Friedrich Merz, the CDU/CSU candidate, will enter the chancellery atop a fresh coalition, perhaps with the SPD or Greens.

Yet there is a wild card. Donald Trump takes office one month before Germany votes. If he **slaps tariffs** on EU exports or attempts a peace settlement in Ukraine, it will colour the final days of the campaign. Do not rule out a February surprise.

# Reviving China's lacklustre economy



At their annual Central Economic Work Conference, which finished on Thursday, China's leaders promised to “vigorously” boost consumption. New economic figures released on Monday illustrated the size of [the task](#) ahead of them. Retail sales grew by only 3% in nominal terms in November, compared with a year earlier. That was much slower than the previous month, which was boosted by an early start to the “Singles’ Day” shopping festival. Consumer-price inflation, released last week, was only 0.2%, another symptom of weak spending.

To revive consumer spirits, China's rulers have promised a looser monetary policy and a more “proactive” fiscal policy, including higher pensions and, perhaps, an expansion of schemes that encourage households to trade in their old cars and appliances for new ones. To help finance these proposals, the central government has promised to increase borrowing. The work conference is over. Their work is not.



# Facing down Russia



Sir Keir Starmer, Britain's prime minister, joins leaders of other north European countries in Tallinn, Estonia, on Monday to discuss the future of the [Joint Expeditionary Force](#). The ten-country grouping, a decade old, is intended as a vanguard force within 32-member NATO, to be deployed quickly to confront an external threat. Faced with hostility from Russia, NATO has positioned more soldiers in the Baltic, including hundreds of British troops in Estonia.

The leaders gather amid anxiety that a new administration in America, eager to contain China, will reduce focus on Europe and may even shun NATO. They will discuss whether JEF countries can offer spine-stiffening European leadership for the broader alliance, encourage [defence spending](#) above the current target of 2% of GDP (met by all in the group), and provide more effective military help to Ukraine. Much depends on the effort Sir Keir wants Britain, the weightiest power in JEF, to devote to the force. Talks in Tallinn could provide first answers.

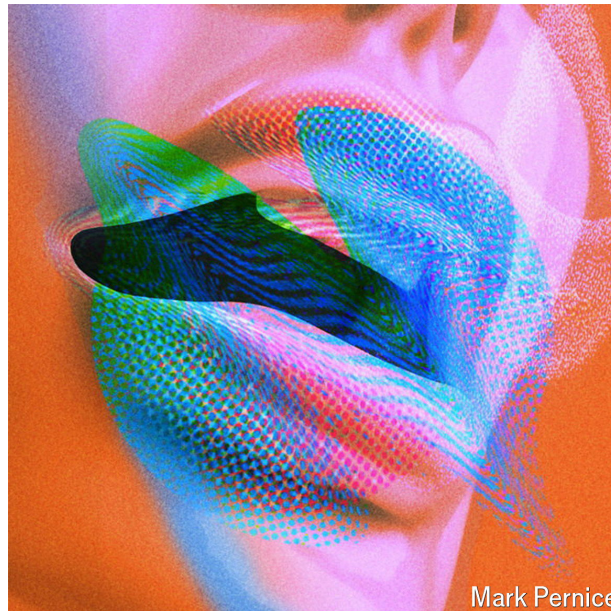
# Paddington's London listing



Canal+, the French media company behind the “Paddington” film series, will be listed on the London Stock Exchange on Monday. Its flotation is part of the break-up of its parent company, Vivendi, a Paris-based media conglomerate with interests in everything from movies to magazines. On the same day Vivendi will float its advertising group, Havas, in Amsterdam, and its publishing arm, Louis Hachette Group, in Paris. Shareholders hope the companies will be worth more separately than they were together.

This crossing of the channel by Canal+ is a fillip for the [LSE](#), which has had a flat spell. Last year Arm, a celebrated British chipmaker, decided to go public in New York rather than in London. Since then British regulators have loosened rules in a bid to make London more attractive to companies. Canal+ is expected to be valued at around £7bn (\$8.9bn), making it the city’s biggest listing in two years. Marmalade sandwiches all round.

# How AI helps with motor neurone disease



When Pedro, a former IT security specialist with advanced motor neurone disease, speaks, his lightly accented English flows with ease. His voice is generated by an artificial-intelligence model, trained on clips recorded before he lost his speech. His words, too, are generated by a large language model fine-tuned on his writing.

A [smartphone app](#) sits between Pedro and his interlocutors, transcribing what they say. It then generates three possible responses for him, playing them through headphones. A monitor resembling a sweatband sits on his forehead, waiting for an eyebrow twitch that he uses to select a response.

The system, dubbed Halo, is a project at Unbabel, a tech company based in Lisbon. Pedro's normal eye-tracking computer is bulky and finicky. In contrast, the Halo band can be worn on the go, giving him speech where he had none. Even when using eye-tracking to type, he says, he prefers to use the Halo voice—his own voice—to speak the answers.

## 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 famous singer died on Christmas Day 2016?



**No matter how many communes anybody  
invents, the family always creeps back.**

*Margaret Mead*