

## Catch up: Gaza ceasefire deal edges closer; Biden grants mass pardons



**Israel's** security cabinet approved the Gaza ceasefire deal. The government will vote on the agreement later on Friday. Hard-right members of **Binyamin Netanyahu's coalition** [oppose](#) the deal and have threatened to resign in protest. The agreement is set to take effect on Sunday, with Hamas expected to release the first hostages that day.

**President Joe Biden** said he will release nearly 2,500 non-violent drug offenders from jail, the largest-ever mass commutation by an [American president](#). The move largely pertains to inmates convicted on crack-cocaine charges. The 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act imposed harsher penalties for crack than powder cocaine, disproportionately affecting Black Americans. Mr Biden said the decision corrects historical wrongs in the justice system.

**Scott Bessent**, Donald Trump's nominee for treasury secretary, told American senators that renewing tax cuts introduced by the president-elect was the "most important economic issue of the day". At a confirmation hearing he also backed tougher sanctions

on Russian oil; his comments pushed up crude prices. Wall Street sees [Mr Bessent](#), a hedge-fund titan, as a sensible pick for treasury secretary.

**China** reported that its **economy** grew by 5% in 2024, meeting the [government's](#) ambitious target for the year. Recent stimulus measures and a surge in export orders helped push the annual growth rate in the fourth quarter up to 5.4%, from 4.6% in the third quarter. Some economists, however, doubt whether growth is as strong as official numbers suggest.

A [court in Pakistan](#) sentenced **Imran Khan**, a former prime minister, to 14 years in prison for corruption. The charges were linked to the Al-Qadir Trust, a charity he founded while in office. Mr Kahn has been in jail since 2023 on separate charges. His wife, Bushra Bibi, was also convicted and handed a seven-year sentence for her role in the case. Mr Khan said the charges were politically motivated.

**Rio Tinto** and **Glencore**, two [mining giants](#), reportedly held recent talks about a possible merger. According to Bloomberg, it is unclear if the discussions are still ongoing. Should the merger go through, it would probably be the biggest-ever deal in the industry. There has been a spate of mergers and acquisitions in mining as firms look to secure the metals needed to harness renewable energy.

**SpaceX's** seventh test flight of its [Starship rocket](#) failed minutes after launch. The upper stage exploded because of a suspected fuel leak, but the Super Heavy booster successfully landed back on its launchpad at the firm's base in Texas. American aviation regulators briefly rerouted flights over the Gulf of Mexico. **Elon Musk**, SpaceX's boss, said improved versions of the rocket were ready for future tests.

# Will the Gaza ceasefire go ahead?



The [ceasefire deal](#) between Israel and Hamas, agreed on Wednesday, is supposed to go into effect on Sunday. The first stage is to be a six-week truce during which Hamas will release 33 Israeli hostages in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. During this stage, final talks are to be held over a more lasting ceasefire.

However, Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, delayed a cabinet vote on the deal, blaming Hamas for adding unrealistic demands. The group had asked for the release of a number of prisoners sentenced to life in prison for murder and terror charges, which Israel vetoed. But negotiators have seemingly solved that impasse. On Friday Mr Netanyahu said approval for the agreement was imminent. Meanwhile hard-right parties in Mr Netanyahu's coalition want the prime minister to say Israel will resume fighting at the end of the six-week truce. If he refuses and sticks with the agreement, they are threatening to leave his government.

# China's economic priorities



In March China's government announced an economic-growth target of "around 5%" for 2024. Most forecasters described it as ambitious. The target seemed in jeopardy by the middle of the year, as China's property crisis festered, retail sales flagged and cash-strapped local governments tightened their belts. But GDP figures released on Friday showed that the economy has revived since then, meeting the government's ambitious goal of 5% growth after all. The economy has benefitted from recent stimulus measures, as well as from a surge in export orders, prompted by expectations that America will raise tariffs.

Some prominent economists, even within China, [doubt](#) whether growth is as strong as the official numbers suggest. Inflation, for example, is strangely subdued. Consumer prices rose by only 0.2% in 2024. Friday's figures also suggested that the GDP deflator, a broader measure of prices, fell for the seventh quarter in a row. Getting out of that deflationary slump should be the government's ambition for the year ahead.



# The growing partnership between Iran and Russia



Iran's president, Masoud Pezeshkian, is in Moscow on Friday to meet his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin. They will sign an agreement for a strategic partnership, military included. Mr Pezeshkian wants to show that Iran still has alternatives to a deal with the West in the face of [Donald Trump's threat](#) to apply “maximum pressure” on the Islamic republic. Buddying up to the Kremlin signals that Iran is not isolated, despite its proxies' bloody defeat in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon.

But [close ties with Russia](#) carry costs, namely irking the West. In September America imposed more sanctions after Iran supplied close-range ballistic weapons that it said Russia used in Ukraine. European powers share such concerns and have threatened to reintroduce UN sanctions, in effect dooming Iran's wish to resurrect an old nuclear deal. Many Iranians will be nervous of relying on Russia, too. Last month Mr Putin stood aside when another Middle East ally, Bashar al-Assad of Syria, was ousted.

## Kristi Noem's moment



Outside of South Dakota, people may mainly know Kristi Noem (pictured) because she killed her dog. The state's Republican governor was considered a contender to be Donald Trump's running mate before she [published a memoir](#) in May containing an account of shooting Cricket, the ill-behaved, ill-fated animal, scuppering her chances. Still, Mr Trump has now nominated her to run the Department of Homeland Security. On Friday she appears before a Senate committee for a confirmation hearing.

Much attention will be on immigration, which is part of DHS's remit. Ms Noem has hardline views on the topic. She has been a vocal critic of "[sanctuary cities](#)", which seek to be accommodating to migrants. On several occasions she has sent South Dakota National Guard troops to the southern border. The secretary of homeland security also oversees some work on Native American affairs. Senators might ask her about being banned from most of South Dakota's tribal land after accusing local leaders of profiting from drug cartels.

# A payday for women's basketball



America's female basketball players **earn much less** than the men do. Athletes in the Women's National Basketball Association receive about 10% of the league's total revenue. Men who play in the National Basketball Association get around 50% of their competition's (much higher) revenue. WNBA players often play abroad in the off-season to supplement their income.

A new competition, Unrivaled, could boost their earnings. The league, which starts play on Friday in Miami, consists of three-person teams who face off on a half court, a format known as "3x3" basketball. The Unrivaled season will finish in February, well before the WNBA resumes in May. Many WNBA stars, including Brittney Griner, Sabrina Ionescu and Angel Reese (pictured), have signed up. And the wages are good. Unrivaled's president, Alex Bazzell, has said the total salary pool will exceed \$8m. This is enough to pay each player \$222,000. That is more than the average wage for a full WNBA season, which is far longer.

## 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.

**Friday:** A pack of *canis lupus* would be better known by what name?

**Thursday:** What is the term for the cap placed over the head of a trained falcon?



# The winners of last week's crossword



Thank you to everyone who took part in our weekly crossword, published in the weekend edition of Espresso. The winners, chosen at random, were:

**Peter Grodzinski**, London, Britain

**Laura M. Linger**, Winnetka, Illinois, America

**Teniola Olowookere**, Ibadan, Nigeria

They all gave the correct answers of [Los Angeles](#), [local](#), [Navy](#) and [sober](#). Check back tomorrow for this week's crossword.

**Love your enemies, for they tell you your faults.**

*Benjamin Franklin*