

Catch up: Israel strikes over hostages; hard-right party wins in Germany



A general strike started in **Israel** as anger mounted over the government's inability to secure the release of hostages held by Hamas. The Ben Gurion international airport, as well as shopping malls, universities and government ministries, stopped working. Over the weekend Israel recovered the bodies of six captives in Gaza. That triggered tens of thousands of **Israelis** to take to the streets calling for a hostage deal.

Alternative for Germany (AfD) won an election in the eastern state of Thuringia, the first time the **hard-right party** has prevailed in a state poll. It came a narrow second in neighbouring Saxony. The party is designated as extremist in the two states. All other parties shun it, making it unlikely that it will take power in Thuringia. Parties that form the national coalition government, under Olaf Scholz, received a pounding.

Volkswagen said it was considering shutting factories in Germany for the first time after a **cost-cutting drive** under-delivered. Powerful **worker bodies** responded angrily to the news. The head of Volkswagen's works council, Daniela Cavallo, warned that the carmaker was also "questioning" its collective wage agreements and job-security programmes. The company had previously pledged to not cut jobs before 2029.

Belgium put forward its candidate for the next **European Commission**, a day after the end-of-August deadline. The country has been in political limbo as talks to form a government stalled three months after elections. Belgium's foreign minister, Hadja Lahbib, completes the lineup for Ursula von der Leyen's [top team](#). Next the nominees will be assigned portfolios—before they get grilled by the European Parliament.

A **Russian** strike on Kharkiv, **Ukraine's** second-largest city, injured at least 47 people, according to local officials. Volodymyr Zelensky, [Ukraine's](#) president, accused the Russians of targeting civilian infrastructure. Russia said that it shot down 158 Ukrainian drones in 15 regions across the country, including two over Moscow. It claimed that the UAVs had struck a power plant and an oil refinery.

Ilham Aliyev's party was projected to lose six seats in **Azerbaijan's** parliamentary election, leaving it with a one-seat majority. The autocratic president need not worry—many other seats will go to parties that back him. Mr Aliyev, who has been in power since 2003, has been [cracking down on dissenting voices](#); the main opposition party has boycotted the poll.

The Trump campaign released a statement from the families of fallen American soldiers who invited **Donald Trump** to [Arlington National Cemetery](#) last week. They defended the former president's conduct while there and said that Kamala Harris, who accused Mr Trump of “disrespecting sacred ground” by filming campaign material in the military burial ground, had “disgracefully twisted this sacred moment into a political ploy”.

Figure of the day: Around 10,000, the number of rear-end car crashes in America every day. [Read the full story](#).

Little respite in Sudan



More than 500 days have passed since Sudan's civil war began. Perhaps 150,000 people have died in the fighting and more than 10m have fled their homes. Aid agencies have been unable to deliver the food needed to prevent mass starvation. Some experts predict that hunger and related diseases could kill more than 2m people by the end of the year.

Ceasefire talks in Switzerland last month achieved little. The Sudanese national army, one of the two main belligerents, refused to even attend. On August 15th it reluctantly allowed aid agencies to resume shipments via a crucial border post between Chad and Darfur, in the west of the country, despite the fact that the crossing is controlled by the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group it is fighting for control of the state. But an extra aid route will not be enough to prevent what may become the world's deadliest famine in 40 years.

New boss, old problems at HSBC



Europe's biggest bank has a new boss. Georges Elhedery takes over HSBC on Monday, replacing Noel Quinn, whose surprise exit was announced in April. And it is not just the top job changing hands. Last week HSBC said the head of its wealth and personal banking unit, chief operating officer and human-resources boss would all step down.

The shake up is sorely needed. HSBC's share price has languished since Mr Quinn [took over in 2019](#). Profits during this year's second quarter were better than analysts predicted, but still flat year on year. HSBC's large footprint in Hong Kong leaves the bank uniquely vulnerable to shifting geopolitical winds. The bank has resisted attempts by its largest shareholder, Chinese insurer Ping An, to force it to spin-off its Asian operations. At the same time falling interest rates will crimp HSBC's profit margins. Mr Elhedery's first task will be to reassure investors he won't be blown over.

The Pope on tour



Despite being 87 and not in the best of health, Pope Francis set off on Monday on the longest trip of his papacy. He will go to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Singapore, flying some 30,000km. Plagued by back and knee problems and rarely seen out of a wheelchair, the pope will spend more than 40 hours aboard planes over 12 days.

What is the point? A central theme of Francis's papacy has been care for the marginalised. That includes isolated communities of the faithful in places like Timor-Leste, where the 1.4m population is almost entirely Roman Catholic. And visiting Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority state, will give him the opportunity to develop another: inter-faith dialogue. Clearly, despite his age, Francis has not given up on long-distance travel. In December he even said a visit to his native Argentina was also on the cards.

Turkey's economy slows down



The Turkish economy managed to grow at a respectable 4.5% last year despite the worst inflation crisis in over two decades. But data released on Monday showed the trend was beginning to taper off. GDP growth slowed to 2.5% in the three months to July, compared with the same period last year.

Growth has been weighted down by a dramatic monetary tightening cycle, in which interest rates have reached 50%, and by the government's decision not to increase the minimum wage. But there may be better news in store on Tuesday, when consumer-prices data are published. Analysts expect that inflation may have cooled to under 53% in annual terms in August, down from almost 62% in July. That is still painfully high—but the fall will be welcome to consumers whose [purchasing power has cratered](#) over the past few years.

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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 BST on Friday to QuizEspresso@economist.com. We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Monday: Gene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt were the last two people to do what?

Around 10,000

The number of rear-end car crashes in America every day.

Read the full story

**There are conditions of blindness so
voluntary that they become complicity.**

Paul Bourget