

Catch up: Barnier named as France's PM; more bad news for American jobs



President Emmanuel Macron named **Michel Barnier** as France's [next prime minister](#), as he tries to end two months of political paralysis. The EU's former Brexit negotiator will face the daunting task of [stitching together a government](#) after inconclusive legislative elections in July. [Mr Barnier](#), a veteran of the conservative Les Républicains party, has served as a cabinet minister four times.

More [weak jobs data](#) landed in **America**. The private sector added 99,000 jobs in August, down from 110,000 last month and the fewest since 2021, according to ADP, a payroll firm. The disappointing numbers come a day after American job openings were reported to be at their lowest level in over three years. A cooling labour market adds to pressure on the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates in September.

Andriy Sybiha became Ukraine's foreign minister in the largest cabinet reshuffle since Russia's invasion in 2022. The career diplomat replaces Dmytro Kuleba, who had used the office to get

more [military aid from Western allies](#). Volodymyr Zelensky, the president, wants a revamped government to bring “new energy” to his country’s war effort—and, no doubt, his own falling popularity.

The **Biden** administration secured the release of 135 political prisoners from **Nicaragua**. They were flown to Guatemala, where they will be able to apply for legal status in America. Among the Nicaraguans jailed by [Daniel Ortega’s authoritarian regime](#) were evangelical Christians, Catholic laypeople, students and others. Eleven are pastors who worked for an evangelical group based in Texas.

Hunter Biden agreed to plead guilty to [nine tax-related offences](#), averting a trial that was due to begin on Thursday. The president’s son, who is accused of failing to pay \$1.4m in taxes over several years, earlier proposed an unusual plea. It would have maintained his innocence yet acknowledged that prosecutors had enough evidence to convict him. Prosecutors rejected the “special terms”.

America’s government accused six **Russian hackers** of committing [cyber attacks](#) in Ukraine ahead of Russia’s invasion in 2022. The defendants, five of whom were military intelligence officers, allegedly hacked, leaked and destroyed information from computer systems associated with Ukraine’s government and probed those of 26 NATO countries, among other crimes. The revelations arrive a day after America indicted and imposed sanctions on several Russians for spreading [disinformation](#) campaigns.

Scientists uncovered a surprising method of turning skin see-through: [food dye](#). Researchers from **Stanford University** found that tartrazine, a yellow food dye used to colour everything from M&Ms to Gatorade, can, if applied to the skin of a live mouse, make the tissue transparent. The discovery, to be reported in a paper published in *Science* on Friday, could help scientists better understand and study animals.

Figure of the day: 50.7%, the share of electric and hybrid vehicles in new car sales in China. [Read the full story.](#)

Ukraine's quest for air defences



On Friday the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, a 50-member coalition of the country's international supporters, meets again at Ramstein Air Base in Germany. Ukraine wants to speed up deliveries of air-defence systems. On Tuesday Russian Iskander ballistic missiles hit a military academy and a hospital in the central town of Poltava. It was the deadliest attack of the year so far, killing at least 51 people. The next day another strike killed seven people in Lviv to the west. [Volodymyr Zelensky](#), the president, noted that Western air-defence systems were no use "sitting in storage".

Meanwhile, Russia continues its slow, costly advance on [Pokrovsk](#), an important logistics hub. But there are signs that Ukraine's incursion into Russia's Kursk region is forcing the Russians to redeploy forces from the front line, including some earmarked for the Pokrovsk offensive. Ukrainian analysts expect Russian troops to reach Pokrovsk by mid-September, but claim they will struggle to capture it.

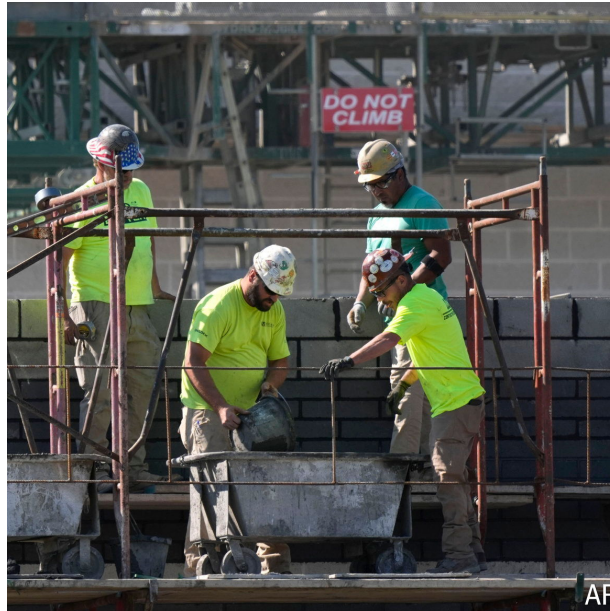
A tough task for France's new prime minister



Michel Barnier (pictured) begins his [first day as France's prime minister](#) on Friday. The appointment on Thursday of the 73-year-old centre-right politician, formerly the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, was a surprise. It took President Emmanuel Macron two months, and endless talks, to find a figure who might survive in the country's new hung parliament, dominated by three minority blocs.

Mr Barnier now faces a task as tough as those Brexit negotiations. He needs to form a government and put together a budget by October. Yet France's public finances are worsening; savings will be necessary. The budget deficit is expected to reach 5.6% of GDP in 2024, well above the EU's limit of 3%. Meanwhile the left-wing alliance in parliament will make Mr Barnier's job as difficult as it can. It won more seats at the general election in July than any other bloc, and is enraged that the post has gone to the centre-right. Street demonstrations are planned for Saturday.

America's employment worries



Investors always closely watch America's monthly jobs report. When new numbers come out on Friday they will pay even more attention than usual. Worries have been mounting about the health of the economy, unsettling global markets. Last month, unanticipated weakness in the jobs report for July contributed to a big sell-off in stocks. If that occurs again with August's data, the sell-off may well be even worse.

Analysts believe that the economy added 160,000 jobs last month, up from 114,000 in July. Moreover, they think the unemployment rate ticked down to 4.2% from 4.3%. Such figures would help inspire confidence that the American economy remains resilient and that July's soft patch was an aberration. But weaker figures would be alarming and could persuade the Federal Reserve to [start its interest-rate cutting cycle](#) this month with a big reduction.

Should Google be broken up?



In recent years America's antitrust regulators have waged war on big tech. The saga continues on Friday, when Judge Amit Mehta is expected to hold a hearing on what to do with [Google](#), the owner of the world's dominant internet search engine. Last month he ruled that it had illegally maintained its monopoly, in particular by paying billions of dollars to Apple and other companies to be the default search provider on their devices.

But don't expect a clear steer on what will happen to Google. Even America's Department of Justice, which brought this case against Google, is not sure what to do. Possible remedies range from the draconian, such as splitting up Google, to the probably inconsequential, such as telling it to stop making such payments. Whatever the remedy, Google is sure to appeal. Once things are finally settled in a few years, the decision may no longer matter in an ever-faster moving industry.

A Mormon scandal on television



Mormonism is America's homegrown religion. Yet less than 2% of the country's population belong to it. This is in part because it has fostered controversial practices. (In the 19th century the church taught that polygamy was central to salvation.) In recent years discussion of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has spread on social media. Some Mormon housewives have gone viral on TikTok, a video-sharing platform, with clips of domestic work and daily scriptures.

In 2022 some were the centre of a scandal. A TikToker revealed that one popular group of Mormon housewives were “swinging” (exchanging husbands). On Friday Hulu will release a docuseries about the affair—“The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives”. It tells the story of the scandal and its aftermath. The women challenge traditional gender roles prevalent in Mormon culture by disregarding many of the church's rules. No doubt viewers will be gripped.

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.

Friday: The Sandhill, Wattled and Whooping are all varieties of which type of bird?

Thursday: The University of Georgia football team and the US Marine Corps both use which animal as a mascot?

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:

Rosalie Schmitt-Degenhardt, Mistelbach, Germany

Dibyendu Roy Choudhury, Kolkata, India

Pawel Karolczak, Cleveland, Tennessee, America

They all gave the correct answers of [deportation](#), [donate](#), [runway](#), [nickel](#). Check back tomorrow for this week's crossword.

50.7%

*The share of electric and hybrid vehicles in new car sales in China.
Read the full story.*

In a mad world, only the mad are sane.

Akira Kurosawa