

Catch up: Trump offers Musk a job; Japan's largest foreign takeover rejected



Donald Trump said that, if elected, he would appoint **Elon Musk** to lead a “government efficiency commission” to slash red tape and cut expenditure. In a speech to the Economic Club of New York, Mr Trump said the commission would recommend “drastic reforms”, although he was murky on specifics. Mr Musk and Mr Trump have [drawn closer](#) over the past year, as the tech billionaire threw his weight behind Mr Trump’s campaign. Some of his businesses, such as X and SpaceX, are regulated by government agencies.

Michel Barnier, who was named as **France’s** [next prime minister](#) by President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday, promised respect for “all political forces”. 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.

Seven & i Holdings, the Japanese group that owns the 7-Eleven brand of convenience stores, rejected a takeover approach from **Alimentation Couche-Tard**, a Canadian rival. Seven & i said that while it would “sincerely” consider offers, the one on the table—\$38bn—was too low. If it had been accepted, the deal would have been the largest-ever [foreign acquisition](#) of a Japanese company. ACT owns the competing Circle K brand.

Hunter Biden agreed to plead guilty to [nine tax-related offences](#), averting a trial that was due to begin on September 5th. 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”.

China said it would stop foreigners adopting children from the country, with the only exception being blood relatives. American families have adopted nearly 83,000 Chinese children—more than any other country—with hundreds of applications pending. China did not explain its decision, but [new births](#) in the country fell by 5.7% to 9m in 2023 and its birth rate was the lowest ever recorded.

The father of a 14-year-old suspected **school shooter** was charged with second-degree murder. Colin Gray was also charged with four counts of involuntary manslaughter and eight counts of cruelty to children, which authorities said was “directly connected...to allowing [his son] to possess a weapon”. Colt Gray is accused of killing two teachers and two students at his [high school](#) in Georgia on Wednesday—the state’s deadliest school shooting.

Scientists uncovered a surprising way to turn skin see-through: [applying food dye](#). Researchers from **Stanford University** found that tartrazine, a yellow food dye used to colour everything from M&MS to Gatorade, can, if added 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.

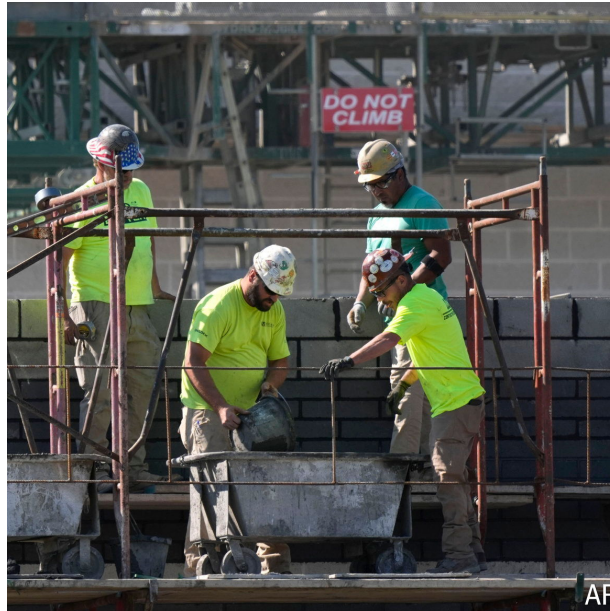
A tough task for France's new prime minister



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



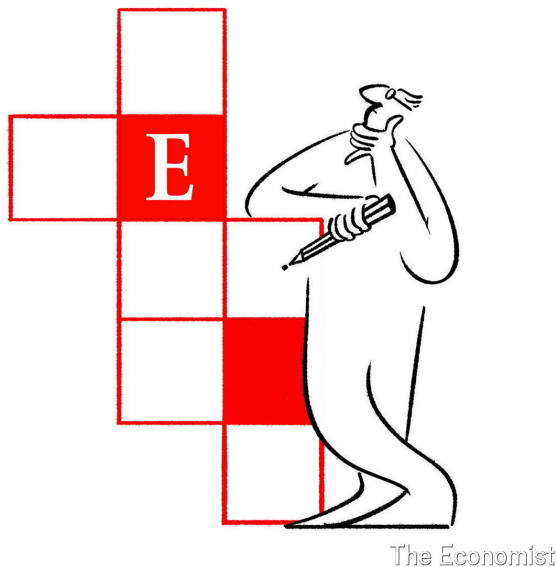
The Economist

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