

Catch up: Iran's supreme leader defends missile strike; America's robust labour market



Trump returns to Butler



On Saturday Donald Trump returns to Butler, Pennsylvania, to hold a rally at the same spot where he narrowly survived an [assassination attempt](#). Elon Musk will attend as his support act. The shooting on July 13th left one Trump supporter dead and three people, including Mr Trump, wounded. The assassin was killed by the Secret Service, the agency charged with protecting the former president. In its worst security lapse in decades, it allowed the shooter to set up a firing position just 400 feet away from the rally stage. A committee in the House of Representatives set up a task force to investigate what happened.

The Secret Service's leadership has since changed. The election has, too. In July Mr Trump was leading Joe Biden by six or seven points in some [swing states](#). Now he and Kamala Harris are [neck-and-neck](#). But Mr Trump—who faced a [second assassination attempt](#) in September—is only more determined, his campaign vows, “to see his mission through to the end”.

Bleak news for Ukraine



A week after Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, attempted to sell his "victory plan" to a sceptical Biden administration, news from the front [remains grim](#). On October 2nd Ukraine announced it had withdrawn its troops from Vuhledar, about 50km south of occupied Donetsk, to avoid their encirclement by advancing Russians. The town has withstood countless Russian attempts to take it since the invasion began in 2022. Its loss will be keenly felt.

But it is of less significance than Pokrovsk, a logistically important hub to the north and the main focus of Russia's offensive. Ukraine hoped that its incursion into Kursk, a Russian border region, would compel its enemy to divert resources from Pokrovsk. In the past few days, however, Russia's assault has intensified.

On a more positive note, Ukraine is claiming that Russia's overwhelming advantage in artillery fire has been reduced, thanks to strikes on munitions depots, more shells arriving from allies and the efforts of its own fast-growing defence industry.

The rise of gravel biking

Gravel biking—bike racing on off-road paths—is having a moment. By popular demand Strava, an exercise app, added an option to log gravel-biking journeys in 2022; activity shot up in 2023. Advocates say that gravel is a less intimidating prospect than [road cycling](#), partly because it has a more adventurous spirit and welcoming culture. The Union Cycliste Internationale, cycling's governing body, has taken notice. It now organises a world championship for the sport. The third edition takes place in Leuven in Belgium this weekend.

Elite competitors are split between established road racers, such as Mathieu van der Poel and Marianne Vos, two Dutch superstars, and gravel specialists, such as Ted King, an American, and Tiffany Cromwell, an Australian. Last year two road racers—Slovenia's Matej Mohoric and Poland's Kasia Niewiadoma—took the honours. But as the discipline matures and more gravel-specific skills emerge, roadies will probably find it harder to keep pace.

A festival by and for black authors



On Saturday London hosts the “Black British Book Festival”, the largest celebration of black literature in Europe. The line-up includes stars from TikTok and television, an award-winning rapper and Diane Abbott, the first black woman to become a member of Britain’s parliament.

Founded in 2021 by Selina Brown, a children’s author, the festival aims to help black authors navigate the publishing industry. Attendees can enjoy workshops on crafting stories, hiring a literary agent and understanding their rights as an author. It also encourages more people to read black literature. Only around 10% of school students in Britain study a book by an author of colour, according to Penguin, a publishing house. Panel discussions on young-adult fiction and the [legacy of James Baldwin](#), an American author, will celebrate writers old and new. Squeezing these sessions into a line-up of popular figures is smart; tickets for the festival are sold out.

Weekend profile: Michael Kovrig, former hostage of the Chinese state



The sensation of being shackled was familiar. China's security machine had worked to break Michael Kovrig's spirit from the moment he was snatched from a Beijing street by black-clad agents in December 2018. He was blindfolded, manacled and strapped into a wheelchair every time his captors moved him from his cell.

But in late March 2021, as Mr Kovrig's captors delivered him to a windowless courtroom in south Beijing for a closed-door, one-day criminal trial, China's "zero covid" controls added an extra twist of horror. The lanky Canadian, a former diplomat turned policy researcher, was ordered to don a stifling white hazmat suit, booties, face-mask, gloves and plastic goggles before entering the courtroom.

Mr Kovrig was undaunted. He told the judges that he was a political hostage. He had been [detained](#) shortly after Meng Wanzhou, an executive of Huawei, a giant Chinese technology firm, was arrested by Canadian police while changing planes in Vancouver on a warrant from American prosecutors. He did not

expect for a moment that the judges would agree. Instead, he hoped to confront his audience in that Chinese courtroom with their own lack of autonomy.

In September 2021 Mr Kovrig, with another similarly abducted fellow Canadian, Michael Spavor, was finally allowed to fly home to Canada, on the same day that Ms Meng was permitted to leave. She had reached a deal with American prosecutors, in which she avoided criminal charges over alleged breaches of sanctions on Iran.

Three years after his release, Mr Kovrig, now 52, [has spoken](#) for the [first time](#) to *The Economist's* Drum Tower podcast about his ordeal, and his life. The son of a university professor, he grew up in Toronto in a family of eastern European emigrés. In his 20s he moved to Budapest, where he worked as a journalist and sang in a punk band. In a painful irony, his stage name was Michael K, a homage to Franz Kafka's novel "The Trial".

And as he planned for his own trial he was guided by family tales of his grandfather, Janos Kovrig, who was detained and tortured by Hungarian communist authorities in 1949. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc the family was able to obtain Janos's file. Mr Kovrig hopes that by refusing to confess and by making his court statement for the record, he left a trace of his resistance for posterity.

"They're going to file this away somewhere. One day somebody will know."

wEEKLY

Our crossword has two sets of clues, one for seasoned cruciverbalists and the other for less experienced solvers. Both give the same answers, all of which feature in articles in this week's edition of *The Economist*:

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am GMT on Monday to crossword@economist.com. We will pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners in next week's edition.

October 6th edition

Cryptic clues

1 down Young spelling student misplaced trophy with occasional hasty error (5,6) (HARRY POTTER)

1 across Focus on growth mostly vanity (6) (HUBRIS)

2 across Hope a celebration is somewhat calm (5) (PEACE)

3 across Country's war and corruption (6) (RWANDA)

Factual clues

1 down Film series in which Maggie Smith's character could turn into a tabby cat (5,6) (HARRY POTTER)

<https://www.economist.com/obituary/2024/09/27/maggie-smith-the-dowager-countess-of-comic-timing>

1 across One danger now facing Israel (6) (HUBRIS)

<https://www.economist.com/leaders/2024/10/03/the-year-that-shattered-the-middle-east>

2 across The category of Nobel Prize awarded to Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopia's prime minister (5) (PEACE)

<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2024/10/03/a-dangerous-dispute-in-the-horn-of-africa>

3 across The preferred deportation destination of Britain's Conservatives (6)

