

## Catch up: Israel and Hizbullah exchange fire; France's new government



**Hizbullah** fired one hundred missiles deep into northern **Israel**, with some landing near the city of Haifa. (Most of the rockets were intercepted.) Earlier on Sunday Israel launched more air strikes on hundreds of targets across southern **Lebanon**. A UN official in Lebanon warned that the region was close to “imminent catastrophe”. On Friday Israeli air strikes killed at least 37 people in Beirut, Lebanon’s capital, including two **Hizbullah** commanders.

**Israel** raided the offices of **Al Jazeera**, a Qatar-based news outlet, in the West Bank, and ordered it to close down for an initial period of 45 days. In May Israel raided Al Jazeera’s offices in Nazareth and East Jerusalem, saying that the organisation was a threat to national security. Walid al-Omari, Al Jazeera’s West Bank bureau chief, accused Israel of trying to “erase the truth”.

**Michel Barnier**, France’s prime minister, unveiled his new **government**. Mr Barnier, who was appointed by Emmanuel Macron, the president, on September 5th, picked several of Mr Macron’s allies for ministerial roles. Bruno Retailleau, a

conservative senator, will serve as interior minister. [Mr Barnier](#) will be running a minority government, which is vulnerable to a motion of no-confidence that the opposition can table.

**Sri Lanka's** presidential election went to a second round of counting after no candidate won more than 50% of the vote. Anura Kumara Dissanayake, a Marxist MP, led the first round with 42%. He will go up against Sajith Premadasa, the opposition leader who won 33%, in another tally that takes into account voters' second and third preferences. Ranil Wickremesinghe, the incumbent, was eliminated, having won just 17% of the vote.

**Donald Trump** said that it was “too late” for a second televised debate, even though **Kamala Harris** earlier accepted an invitation from CNN, a broadcaster. Ms Harris's campaign said that voters “deserve another opportunity” to see the pair face off again on October 23rd. In a [fiery first meeting](#) on September 10th Ms Harris made Mr Trump look out of his depth.

At least 51 people died and 20 were injured by a gas explosion in a coal mine in **Iran**, according to state media. The blast in the country's [South Khorasan Province](#) was reportedly caused by a methane gas leak. Masoud Pezeshkian, Iran's president, sent condolences to the victims' families.

The son of the **Ugandan** president, Yoweri Museveni, announced that he would not stand in the leadership election of 2026, clearing the way for Mr Museveni to claim a seventh term. [Contrary to previous indications](#), Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the head of Uganda's army, endorsed his father's remaining in power, even though the 80-year-old Mr Museveni has yet to confirm officially if he wants to continue. Mr Museveni has run Uganda since 1986.

**Word of the week:** Chipllets, the smaller blocks into which a silicon chip can be broken down in order to create a more compact layout. [Read the full story.](#)

## A second election win for the AfD?



Olaf Scholz, Germany's chancellor, lives in Potsdam, the capital of Brandenburg. Yet so unpopular has he become that the eastern state's well-liked premier, Dietmar Woidke, has refused to appear in public with his fellow Social Democrat. The party has run Brandenburg since 1990; Mr Woidke has been in charge since 2013. But polls suggest that the Social Democrats (SPD) could be overtaken by the hard-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the state election on Sunday.

The AfD achieved its first-ever [state-election victory](#) in Thuringia earlier this month. But no other party will form coalitions with the AfD. So even if the SPD comes second in Brandenburg, it is likely to retain control of the state. Yet in a bid to convince voters who like him but distrust his party, Mr Woidke has said he will quit if the SPD does not top the poll. Should that happen, many in the party will start to wonder if Mr Scholz should follow suit.

# An uneasy victory lap for Labour



Britain's Labour Party gathers in Liverpool on Sunday for its annual conference. It ought to be a jubilant affair: a [landslide victory](#) in July's election brought the party back to power after 14 years in opposition. But instead the mood is laced with anxiety. Sir Keir Starmer's personal polling is weakening and some senior aides are at each other's throats. Questions about the leader's decision to accept gifts of event tickets and clothes from donors are raising questions about his judgment.

Another concern for the party rank and file is the public finances. Rachel Reeves, the chancellor, is determined not to increase payroll or corporation taxes, and warns of difficult spending choices to come. Yet members overwhelmingly want to see much more spending on [public services](#) and infrastructure. Sir Keir will need to deliver a barnstorming speech on Tuesday, the penultimate day of the conference, to put the pep back into his party.

## New York's climate congestion



Traffic in New York reaches a nightmarish peak for several days every September. The cavalcades of politicians attending the high-level segment of the UN General Assembly block the streets, and activists flock to the city for “climate week”, an annual jamboree meant to encourage environmental action, which starts on Sunday.

This year the jams may be even worse than usual thanks to a new event, the “Summit of the Future”, at which world leaders are meant to hash out a pact of “multilateral solutions for a better tomorrow”. Doing so, the organisers claim, will help the UN system “manage the challenges we face now”. This presumably includes long-standing issues such as how to balance environmental action with [development](#). But here too gridlock looms: participating countries, including oil producers, can’t decide whether to call for “transitioning away” from fossil fuels—language already agreed upon at last year’s COP28.



# How pregnancy changes the brain



The female body undergoes a [remarkable transformation](#) in preparation for motherhood. But what exactly goes on from the neck up remains unclear. New research published in *Nature Neuroscience*, a journal, makes the most headway on the question yet. One of the paper's authors, Liz Chrastil, a neuroscientist, used her own pregnancy to study how her brain changed. Examining 26 MRI scans—carried out before, during and after her first pregnancy—Dr Chrastil and her co-authors found that her brain's volume shrank by about 4%. However, the reductions in grey matter—the main bodies of nerve cells—and cortical thickness were accompanied by fine-tuning of white matter, which consists mostly of the nerve fibres linking cells together. Practically no cerebral region was unaffected. Dr Chrastil's brain remained altered two years postpartum, when the final scan took place.

The study opened the Maternal Brain Project, an international effort to understand the neurology of pregnancy. Its results are keenly awaited, and—given biomedicine's past neglect of women's health—overdue.

# Red Bull needs a sharp turn



In recent years [Max Verstappen](#) has dominated Formula One. Between the start of 2022 and this season's Spanish Grand Prix (which took place in June), Red Bull's driver won 41 out of 54 races. (Only five others have won as many races in their entire careers.) The talk in the paddock was that the races had become processions.

But Mr Verstappen hasn't won since Spain. Other teams have finally caught up with Red Bull's adaptations to car-design rules introduced in 2022. And the Austrian-British team's modifications during this season have failed. Mr Verstappen recently described his car as an "undriveable monster". Now two drivers from McLaren, Red Bull's nearest rival, are breathing down Mr Verstappen's neck in this year's world championship. They have another chance to reduce his lead at this weekend's race in Singapore. McLaren's engine isn't purring perfectly, either. The team has yet to make the final call on which of its drivers should be its title contender.

# The winners of this week's quiz



The Economist

Thank you to everyone who took part in this week's quiz. The winners, chosen at random, were:

**Rob Saar**, Blue Mountains, Canada

**Ailsa Green**, Choma, Zambia

**Tomas Rosenthal**, Hod Hasharon, Israel

They all gave the correct answers of: wine, flags, carpets, light and herring. The theme is words associated with the colour red: red wine, red flag, red carpet, red light and red herring.

The questions were:

**Monday:** *Premier cru* is a French term normally associated with which product?

**Tuesday:** Vexillology is the study of what?

**Wednesday:** Saxony, twist and woven are types of which household product?

**Thursday:** What takes around eight minutes and twenty seconds to travel from the Sun to the Earth?



**Friday:** What type of fish is a kipper, a breakfast delicacy in some parts of the world?

# This week's crossword



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 BST on Monday to [crossword@economist.com](mailto:crossword@economist.com). We will pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners in next week's edition.

## September 21st edition

### Cryptic clues

- 1 down Disorganised, I shop in clinic for computer part (7,4)
- 1 across Heavenly body evacuated sauna with wind (6)
- 2 across Academic institution somewhat unorthodox for degrees (6)
- 3 across Corrupt a sport minister (6)

### Factual clues

- 1 down The product for which the area around Palo Alto,

California, is nicknamed (7,4)

*1 across* A planet which Earth may once have more closely resembled (6)

*2 across* A favourite university of the British elite (6)

*3 across* The profession of David Lin, the American recently released by China (6)

# Chiplets

*The smaller blocks into which a silicon chip can be broken down in order to create a more compact layout.*

*Read the full story.*





**Fortune sides with him who dares.**

*Virgil*