

## Catch up: Blinken oversees Gaza ceasefire squabbling; Ukraine blows up another Russian bridge



Antony Blinken, America's secretary of state, arrived in **Israel** to [push for a ceasefire](#) between Israel and Hamas. Shortly after he arrived, Hamas released a statement saying that a new proposal to end the fighting was too close to Israel's position. Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, said he would not "just give and give" in the negotiations. Israel's armed forces killed at least 21 people in air strikes on Gaza on Sunday, according to the local health authority.

Ukraine's air force said that it destroyed a second bridge in **Kursk**, a border region in Russia. The attack was intended to make it harder for supplies to reach Russian forces [trying to repel](#) Ukrainian fighters, who crossed the border on August 6th. Earlier Volodymyr Zelensky said that Ukrainian troops were "strengthening" and "expanding" their positions in enemy territory.

**Kamala Harris** and her running-mate Tim Walz toured Pennsylvania, a key battleground state, ahead of the opening of the Democratic Party's national convention in Chicago on Monday. "Anybody who's about beating down other people is a coward," said [Ms Harris](#), a barb presumably directed at Donald Trump, her rival in [America's presidential race](#). Earlier, Mr Trump criticised Ms Harris's economic plans at a rally in Pennsylvania.

Coast guard ships from China and the Philippines collided again in the **South China Sea**. The Philippines claimed that the Chinese vessels engaged in "unlawful and aggressive manoeuvres". [China](#) insisted that the two Filipino boats "ignored" several warnings, moving in a "dangerous manner" to "deliberately collide". The Spratly Islands, the area where the ships clashed, are claimed by both countries.

**Canada's** freight rail transport could grind to a halt, after operators decided to lock out Teamsters, a union representing around 10,000 workers. Canadian National Railway said negotiations over labour agreements with the union had brought "no meaningful progress" and that it had "no choice" but to proceed with the lockout. Stoppages could potentially affect the whole of North America, causing billions of dollars of economic damage.

Following a mass walkout on Saturday, some doctors across **India** remained on strike in protest at the rape and murder of a female trainee doctor in Kolkata. Thousands of protesters marched in the city on Sunday evening, chanting "we want justice". In a letter to Narendra Modi, the country's prime minister, the [Indian](#) Medical Association demanded that more action be taken to protect medical workers from violence.

**Libya's** central bank halted all its operations after its information-technology director was kidnapped. Musab Msallem was taken from his home on Sunday. The bank said it would not go back to work until he is freed. Last week the bank was besieged by armed

men trying to force its governor to resign, according to Agence France-Presse.

**Figure of the day:** 35, the average age of voyagers on the Emo's Not Dead Cruise. [Read the full story](#).

*As America prepares to vote in national elections in November, keep abreast of the political news by reading [The US in brief](#), our daily update. [Sign up](#) to receive it as a newsletter each weekday.*

# The Democrats take Chicago



The mood at the Democratic National Convention, which kicks off in Chicago on Monday, will be much lighter than party members might have feared a month ago. With Kamala Harris rather than Joe Biden at the head of the ticket, the party finally has some momentum. Ms Harris is [polling well](#). States that Mr Biden had written off, including Arizona and North Carolina, may be back in play. Though he is reportedly smarting from being forced into retirement, Mr Biden will deliver a supportive speech on Monday. Barack Obama will follow on Tuesday. And Nancy Pelosi, perhaps the person most responsible for Mr Biden's withdrawal, speaks on Wednesday.

Large protests against the administration's handling of Israel's war in Gaza are planned. [Comparisons with 1968](#)—when, in Chicago, a Democratic vice-president was handed the nomination amid demonstrations against the Vietnam war—come easily. But they are facile. Gaza is not Vietnam—the war is a low-priority issue for most Democrats.

# America and South Korea start joint military exercises



On Monday America and South Korea started Ulchi Freedom Shield, one of several sets of drills designed to ensure that the allies will march in lockstep if North Korea ever attacks. The exercises were scaled back in 2018 as Donald Trump and Moon Jae-in, then presidents of America and South Korea, respectively, sought rapprochement with North Korea. In 2022, after changes of government in America and South Korea, [the drills resumed at full strength](#).

The exercises are about reassurance as much as preparedness. South Korea has long feared that America will leave it to be subsumed by its nuclear-armed neighbour. Mr Trump's possible return to office has heightened those anxieties. Talk of [South Korea getting its own nukes](#) has gone mainstream. Yet the joint drills will not simulate any scenario involving a nuclear attack by the North, despite South Korea's deputy national security adviser floating the possibility in December. Reassurance, it seems, has its limits.

# Vietnam's leader courts China



After Nguyen Phu Trong, the long-time general secretary of Vietnam's ruling Communist Party, died in July, To Lam became the country's (and the Party's) new boss. Now in China for his first foreign trip as leader, he will continue his predecessor's strategy of "bamboo diplomacy": balancing relations with competing powers. This flexible approach has been quite successful. In recent years [Vietnam](#) has positioned itself between America and China. In 2023 it was the only country to receive both Joe Biden, America's president, and Xi Jinping, China's leader, on state visits.

Trains were one of the topics on the agenda when Mr Lam met Mr Xi and other senior Chinese officials on Monday. China has built railways all over South-East Asia, including in neighbouring Laos, through its Belt and Road Initiative. Mr Lam hopes to grab a similar prize: a high-speed train going up to Vietnam's border with China to help move goods smoothly to and from Vietnam's biggest trading partner.



# The quick death of corporate do-goodery



In August 2019, with the public's faith in big business in the doldrums, corporate America was in need of a rebrand. Business Roundtable, a club of the country's biggest bosses, published a memo urging companies not to work only for the benefit of their shareholders, but for society at large. [ESG](#), standing for environmental, social and governance issues, became the most abused of American capitalism's stock of overused initialisms.

Five years on, [corporate patriotism](#) has replaced ESG. Republicans and Democrats are pushing companies to create middle-class jobs while trying to recruit them into a costly trade war with China. Democrats' expectations of corporations may become clearer at their national convention, which starts on Monday. Some bosses such as Pat Gelsinger, of chipmaking giant Intel, are happy to lap up subsidies aimed at building domestic capacity to rival China's. That is short-sighted, and will lessen America's competitiveness over time. Cats fed on cream rarely catch mice.

## Safe drinking water is scarcer than previously thought



Next month the UN convenes in New York City for the “Summit of the Future”. Delegates will reaffirm their commitment to the organisation’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, a [series of ambitious targets](#) set in 2015 to improve life in poor countries. One of those is safe drinking water for all. In 2020 the World Health Organisation estimated that 2bn people did not have access to potable water. A new paper in *Science* suggests that the real number is more like 4.4bn.

The study combined household survey data with geospatial analysis, which involved computer models based on satellite images of Earth. It concluded that vast swathes of poor countries lack the infrastructure needed to safely manage water. All too often faecal contamination, a cause of infant mortality, was the issue. Though safe drinking water should have been among the more achievable of the SDGs, for too many, it remains a pipe dream.



# 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](mailto:QuizEspresso@economist.com). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

**Monday:** Which George Eliot novel partly concerns the unhappy marriage of Dorothea Brooke and Edward Casaubon?

*The average age of voyagers on the Emo's Not Dead Cruise.  
Read the full story.*

**In his inner life each of us lives the life of a  
ghostly Robinson Crusoe.**

*Gilbert Ryle*