

## Politics



**France's** four main railway unions went on strike in protest against reforms planned by President Emmanuel Macron. He proposes to end railway workers' special employment status, which includes employment for life. Energy workers, rubbish collectors and Air France employees are also on strike. The stoppages are the most serious threat yet to Mr Macron's agenda of reforms.

**Italy's** president, Sergio Mattarella, launched formal coalition talks between the parties, a month after a legislative election produced a fragmented parliament. The populist Five Star Movement emerged as the largest party. But to reach a majority, a pact would be needed with other groups. Five Star has already ruled out a coalition with Forza Italia, the centre-right party of Silvio Berlusconi, a former prime minister and billionaire.

Russian police arrested Ziyavudin Magomedov, a Dagestani billionaire, on charges of racketeering. Mr Magomedov, who owns grain and construction businesses, is associated with Dmitry Medvedev, **Russia's** prime minister, and the arrest is seen as part of a power struggle within the elite. Mr Magomedov has come under fire over alleged irregularities in the construction of a football stadium in Kaliningrad for the World Cup this year.

### Banged up

**Brazil's** supreme court ruled by six votes to five that Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a former president, can be jailed while he appeals against a 12-year

sentence for accepting a bribe from a construction firm. He is currently leading in polls for October's presidential election but the conviction could make it impossible for him to run.

Carlos Alvarado won **Costa Rica's** presidential election. A former labour minister for the governing centre-left Citizens' Action Party, he beat Fabricio Alvarado (no relation), a conservative evangelical pastor, with 60.8% of the vote.

The former **Guatemalan** dictator, Efraín Ríos Montt, died while awaiting a second trial on charges that he committed crimes against humanity during the country's civil war. In 2013 he became the first former head of state found guilty of genocide by his own country's courts. The conviction was later overturned on a legal technicality.

A fire in a **Venezuelan** jail killed 68 people but elicited silence from the socialist president, Nicolás Maduro. Police sprayed tear-gas at family members who flocked to the prison for news.

### On second thoughts

**Israel** cancelled a deal with the UN to relocate African migrants who entered the country illegally, many seeking asylum. The deal would have resettled some in the West, with others granted temporary residence in Israel. Binyamin Netanyahu, the prime minister, said he still wants "to remove the infiltrators".

Speaking to an American magazine, Muhammad bin Salman, the crown prince of **Saudi Arabia**, said "the Israelis have the right to have their own land". It was a rare recognition of Israel's right to exist by an Arab leader.

Abiy Ahmed, **Ethiopia's** new prime minister, was sworn in. He immediately offered a hand of friendship to **Eritrea**. The recently-warring countries have been locked in a bitter border dispute. In stark contrast to his predecessor, Hailemariam Desalegn, who

accused Eritrea of supporting anti-government protests, Mr Abiy called for an end to "years of misunderstandings".

It was announced that **Egypt's** president, Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi, was re-elected with 97% of the vote. Some voters said they were paid to cast a ballot, yet turnout, at 41%, was six percentage points lower than in 2014, when the last election was held.



Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, the veteran anti-apartheid activist and ex-wife of Nelson Mandela, a former president, died at the age of 81. Many **South Africans** hailed her as a "mother of the nation", but others saw her as an angry and flawed individual.

Ian Khama, a retired army general, stepped down as president of **Botswana**. He handed the thinly populated but diamond-rich country to his deputy, Mokgweetsi Masisi, after a decade at the helm. The new president inherits a country that has long been heralded as a beacon of African democracy and sound economic management.

### Trumped

President Donald Trump ordered the National Guard to **America's** southern border upon hearing that a caravan of roughly 1,000 Central American migrants was travelling north through Mexico. Many of the migrants were fleeing poverty and violence in **Honduras**, a country wracked by protests after a contested presidential election.

The headquarters of YouTube, a video-sharing website, in **California** was stormed by Nasim Aghdam, a user of the

platform, who wounded three workers with a gun before killing herself. It is suspected that she held a grudge against the tech giant for filtering some of her videos.

### I'm spinning around

**China's** first space station, *Tiangong-1*, crashed into the Pacific. It was launched in 2011 and received two visits by Chinese astronauts. Scientists on the ground lost control of it in 2016.

The *South China Morning Post* says that 500 test burners have been built in order to send silver iodide particles into the atmosphere over **Tibet**. When the water-laden air of the monsoon hits the particles, ice crystals should form and boost precipitation. If the full project involving tens of thousands of burners is completed, it would be the world's largest cloud-seeding operation.

The lower house of **Malaysia's** parliament passed a bill that would impose prison sentences and fines on those who spread "fake news".

**India's** government, however, retracted new rules that would have rescinded the credentials of journalists found to have published falsehoods.



Rodrigo Duterte, the president of the **Philippines**, acted on his threat to close the island of Boracay, a beach resort that is one of the country's most popular tourist attractions. From April 26th, he said, tourists will be turned away for six months while the authorities extend and repair the inadequate sewage system. Infrastructure problems have left the tropical paradise more of a "cesspool", as he tactfully described the island.

## Business

A **trade war** seemed ever more likely. The Trump administration identified over 1,300 Chinese products, including car parts and television sets, that it would whack with tariffs of 25%. It plans to implement these after a period of consultation. In response China threatened to slap duties on 106 American goods. Donald Trump's demands to cut its trade surplus with America by \$100bn were, it said, "impossible".



Tough talk on tariffs spooked American investors. The **Dow Jones Industrial Average** fell by 2%, before recovering. Firms with the most to lose were the worst hit: the share price for Boeing, an aeroplane-maker and a big exporter to China, fell by nearly 5% on the news before regaining ground. The price of **soybeans**, which account for a large share of American agricultural exports to China, tumbled.

### Going postal

Mr Trump took several shots at **Amazon**. He accused the e-commerce giant of enjoying unfair advantages over conventional retailers, alleging that it underpays the US Postal Service for delivery and that it does not pay all its sales taxes. The company's share price fell by around 5% when the president first aimed fire. Amazon made no comment.

Another privacy scandal hit the tech world. Researchers discovered that **Grindr**, a dating app aimed at gay people, had been sharing its users' HIV status with two third-party firms. Facing a backlash, the firm agreed to stop. **Face-**

**book** raised its estimate of the number of people affected by the Cambridge Analytica data breach, from 50m to 87m.

Shares in **Tesla** fell after news emerged that one of its cars had crashed in semi-autonomous mode. Regulators rebuked it for publishing details of the incident while an investigation was going on. The firm also reported its production figures for the Model 3, its mass-market electric car, which remain well below target. In an effort to calm concerns about its finances, Tesla insisted it would not need to raise funds this year.

**Spotify**, a music-streaming service with over 70m paying users, listed its shares in New York. The Swedish firm opted for an unconventional direct listing, allowing existing investors to trade shares freely instead of issuing new stock. The share price ended the first day of trading at \$149, above levels at which it had traded in the private market. That valued the company at \$26.5bn, making it the largest listing since Snap, the parent of Snapchat, floated last year.

**Alibaba**, a Chinese e-commerce firm, gobbled up Ele.me, China's biggest food-delivery

company, in a deal valuing it at \$9.5bn. The purchase reflects a battle between Alibaba and **Tencent** for the "online-to-offline" market.

**Disney** stepped into a standoff between **Rupert Murdoch** and British regulators. The authorities had held up Mr Murdoch's acquisition of Sky, a television network, on the ground that it would give him too much power over the media. Disney, which is also in talks to buy parts of Mr Murdoch's firm, 21st Century Fox, offered to buy Sky's news channel whether its purchase of Fox goes ahead or not.

**CBS**, an American broadcaster, made a bid for a struggling sibling, **Viacom**. The offer was rejected as too low. Viacom had originally acquired CBS in 2000 before spinning it off in 2006, but the fates of the two networks have since diverged.

### Carmakers rejoice

America's Environmental Protection Agency said that **emissions standards** for cars and light trucks planned by the Obama administration were unrealistically high and would be revised. Scott Pruitt, the EPA's chief, also backed a single national standard for emissions, which could spark

a confrontation with the state of California, where rules are stricter than in the rest of the country.

### Marketing misery

**WPP**, an advertising group, announced it was investigating whether its chief executive, Sir Martin Sorrell, misused company assets. (He rejected the allegations.) The probe adds to the company's woes: it is under pressure from clients to cut costs and is fighting off competition from digital rivals.

More than 10,000 British employers complied with a deadline to report their **gender pay gaps**. The declarations put the average median differential between male and female earnings at 12%. Gaps were widest in the construction and finance sectors, and narrowest in food and accommodation services.

John Williams was appointed the president of the **New York Federal Reserve**, a role that comes with a standing vote on America's monetary-policy body. Those hoping for a fresh face were disappointed: Mr Williams was previously the chief of the San Francisco Fed.

For other economic data and news see **Indicators section**

