



## Lula wrestles with Brazil's oil dilemma

BIG READ, PAGE 17

## Britain is still lacking a credible growth plan

MARTIN WOLF, PAGE 19

## Deadly floods Storms lash central Europe

People clean the floor of a church in the village of Pechea, Romania, yesterday after it was hit by flooding from Storm Boris.

Romania, Poland, Austria, the Czech Republic and Hungary have all been affected by flooding as the low-pressure weather system drove heavy rainfall in recent days. Several people have died and thousands have been evacuated from their homes. Some bridges and dams collapsed after rivers burst their banks. Tens of thousands of households were left without power.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said that the situation in parts of his country was "very dramatic".

More rain is forecast across central Europe in the coming days, raising the possibility that conditions could worsen. The Danube in the Hungarian capital Budapest could rise to near record levels, forecasters said.



Daniel Mihailescu/AFP via Getty Images

### Briefing

#### ► Döpfner and KKR near deal on Axel Springer split

German billionaire Mathias Döpfner and KKR are nearing a deal to split the media giant that he part owns. The move would let one of the world's largest buyout firms exit news media after five years. The deal's structure will be discussed on Thursday.— PAGE 6

#### ► Manila retreats from reef

The Philippines has withdrawn a ship that was keeping watch over Sabina, a disputed reef, after a months-long stand-off with China. The vessel returned to port after the Chinese coastguard blocked and rammed it.— PAGE 2

#### ► Chief of KRX defiant

The head of South Korea's bourse has backed his country's stalling reform drive amid discontent among investors that Seoul is not replicating Tokyo's success in boosting low valuations.— PAGE 8

#### ► Chile defends green plans

Chile has played down warnings that plans to cut revenues for smaller renewable-power groups could trigger debt defaults and hit the hard-won trust it has won from foreign investors.— PAGE 4

#### ► Deloitte revenues suffer

The Big Four accountant reported its weakest revenue growth since 2010 in the past year as demand for its consulting services slowed in the Americas and Asia amid tough conditions.— PAGE 6

#### ► Eight perish in Channel

Eight people have died trying to cross the Channel from France to England by boat, adding to a high 2024 death toll over the perilous route and despite moves to stop the journeys.— PAGE 2

#### ► China economy falters

China's retail sales and industrial output eased last month as the economy lost momentum, adding to expectations that Beijing will increase stimulus efforts in the final months of the year.— PAGE 3

#### ► Crossword and Lex

The Lex column, Business Life and the FT crossword can be found inside today.— PAGE 13

# Harris maintains post-debate lead over Trump on economy, says poll

► Support builds after TV showdown ► Virtual tie in swing states ► Bullish Fed expected to cut rates

LAUREN FEDOR — WASHINGTON  
EVA XIAO — NEW YORK

Kamala Harris has consolidated her polling lead over Donald Trump on economic issues, especially among voters who watched the presidential debate last week, according to the first big economy-focused election survey since the televised showdown.

For the second straight month, the FT-Michigan Ross poll showed Harris with a slim lead over Trump on stewardship of the economy, with 44 per cent of registered voters saying they trusted the Democratic vice-president to run the economy and 42 per cent backing the Republican ex-president. Last month, she led 42 per cent to 41 per cent.

Harris fared even better with voters who tuned in to last week's debate,

which was watched by an estimated 67mn Americans, according to Nielsen.

Of the nearly three-quarters of respondents who said they watched all or part of the 90-minute debate, 48 per cent said they trusted Harris more to manage the economy, compared with 42 per cent for Trump. Among those who said they did not watch the debate, 41 per cent trusted the former president and just 35 per cent favoured Harris.

The poll was conducted in the two

'Voters also think [Harris] represents "people just like them" better, and that is important'

days after the debate. It comes just a few days before the Federal Reserve is widely expected to cut US interest rates, a signal it is confident that a period of high inflation has been vanquished.

The poll found that voters believe Harris better represents the interests of the middle class, small businesses, union members and blue-collar workers. Trump was seen to better represent the interests of large corporations and the wealthy.

"Voters also think [Harris] represents 'people just like them' better, and that is important given the tendency of people to vote for the candidate they think will do the most for them," said Erik Gordon, a professor at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business.

When asked which candidate repre-

sented "people like you", 47 per cent of respondents cited Harris while 37 per cent pointed to Trump.

Despite that, voters still said that they would be better off financially if Trump won, with 40 per cent saying they would either be somewhat or much better off under his presidency, and just 35 per cent saying they would be better off under Harris.

The survey results continued to show that Harris is trusted significantly more than her boss, US President Joe Biden, on the economy.

Since the Financial Times and University of Michigan Ross School of Business began polling on economic issues nearly a year ago, Biden never beat Trump on the question of who voters trusted more to manage the economy. Harris's sup-

port from 44 per cent of Americans is an eight-point improvement over Biden.

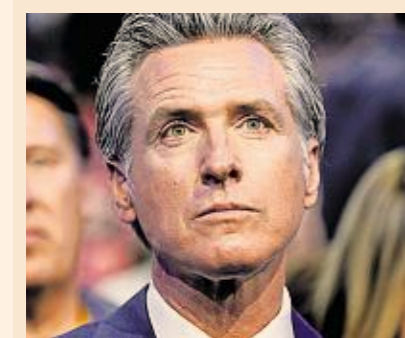
With less than two months to go until election day, the race for the White House remains close.

The FT poll tracker shows Harris with a 2.2 percentage point lead over Trump nationally, but in a virtual tie in the seven swing states likely to decide the election.

The FT-Michigan Ross Poll was conducted online by Democratic strategists Global Strategy Group and Republican polling firm North Star Opinion Research from September 11-12.

It reflects the opinions of 1,002 registered voters and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

US poised for soft landing page 4  
FT View page 18



## California bill has potential to transform AI's wild west

Causing a stir ► PAGE 7

	€4.60	Malta	€4.20	
Austria	€4.60	Din19	Morocco	Dh50
Bahrain	€4.60	Netherlands	€4.50	
Belgium	€4.60	Oman	OR160	
Croatia	€4.50	Pakistan	Rupee350	
Cyprus	€4.30	Poland	Zl26	
Czech Rep	€4.30	Portugal	€4.30	
Denmark	DKr47	Serbia	NewD550	
Egypt	€E100	Slovenia	€4.30	
France	€4.60	Spain	€4.30	
Germany	€4.60	Switzerland	SFr6.80	
Greece	€4.30	Tunisia	Din750	
Hungary	€4.30	Turkey	TL150	
India	€4.30	UAE	Dh25	
Italy	€4.60			
Luxembourg	€4.60			

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## European states offload €16bn in stocks of banks rescued during financial crisis

OWEN WALKER  
EUROPEAN BANKING CORRESPONDENT

European governments have offloaded more than €16bn of bailed-out bank stocks over the past year, as they seek to draw a line under the lingering effects of the global financial crisis.

A Financial Times analysis of corporate filings and regulatory statements showed that disposals of bank stocks have ramped up over the past 12 months as governments have capitalised on share price surges driven by higher interest rates.

Banks generate profits on the difference between the interest they receive from borrowers and pay out to depositors. These profits increase when interest rates rise.

The Euro Stoxx Banks index, which tracks the continent's biggest lenders,

has risen nearly 30 per cent over the past year. Even as the European Central Bank has started cutting interest rates, some analysts predict lenders' share prices will continue to rise.

"We believe bank equities remain too cheap and will gradually earn a re-rating higher as profitability gains are proven to be more sustainable than the market currently assumes," said Andrew Stimpson, an analyst at Keefe, Bruyette & Woods.

The sales included stakes in Commerzbank, NatWest, ABN Amro and Monte dei Paschi di Siena.

The biggest seller was the UK Treasury, which offloaded £5.5bn (€6.5bn) of NatWest stock.

Further disposals are expected in the coming months as the Greek and Italian governments aim to return their bailed-out banks to the private sector by the

end of the year, while the UK and Irish governments could divest next year.

Yet the governments are mostly recouping just a fraction of the taxpayer money they ploughed into their domestic lenders a decade-and-a-half ago to save them from collapse.

"The experience of holding stakes in banks has taught governments the importance of cutting losses early, as full recovery of investments might not be realistic," said Filippo Alloati, head of financials credit at fund manager Federated Hermes.

The sell-offs have created opportunities for banks considering takeovers of their rivals.

Last week UniCredit bought a 4.5 per cent stake in Commerzbank from the German government for €702mn, adding to a holding that it already had in the bank and raising its stake to 9 per cent.

### World Markets

STOCK MARKETS				CURRENCIES				GOVERNMENT BONDS					
	Sep 13	Prev	%chg	Sep 13	Sep 6	Sep 13	Sep 6	Yield (%)	Sep 13	Sep 6	Chg		
S&P 500	5632.76	5595.76	0.66	\$/€	1.109	1.112	€/\$	0.902	0.899	US 2 yr	3.59	3.66	-0.07
Nasdaq Composite	17687.49	17569.68	0.67	\$/£	1.315	1.318	£/\$	0.760	0.759	US 10 yr	3.66	3.68	-0.02
Dow Jones Ind	41507.16	41096.77	1.00	€/£	0.843	0.844	£/€	1.186	1.185	US 30 yr	3.99	4.00	-0.01
FTSEurofirst 300	2041.43	2027.45	0.69	¥/\$	140.650	142.310	¥/€	155.968	158.256	UK 2 yr	3.80	3.82	-0.02
Euro Stoxx 50	4840.27	4814.08	0.54	¥/£	185.005	187.563	£ index	84.326	84.612	UK 10 yr	3.85	3.86	-0.01
FTSE 100	8273.09	8240.97	0.39	SFr/€	0.940	0.936	SFr/£	1.115	1.110	UK 30 yr	4.36	4.38	-0.02
FTSE All-Share	4522.48	4501.27	0.47	CRYPTO				JPN 2 yr	0.38	0.38	0.00		
CAC 40	7465.25	7435.07	0.41		Sep 13	Prev	%chg	JPN 10 yr	0.84	0.86	-0.02		
Xetra Dax	18699.40	18518.39	0.98	Bitcoin (\$)	59587.00	57837.00	3.03	JPN 30 yr	2.01	2.05	-0.04		
Nikkei	36581.76	36833.27	-0.68	Etherum	2408.60	2355.40	2.26	GER 2 yr	2.20	2.22	-0.02		
Hang Seng	17369.09	17240.39	0.75	COMMODITIES				GER 10 yr	2.15	2.15	0.00		
MSCI World \$	3611.30	3578.65	0.91		Sep 13	Sep 6	%Week	GER 30 yr	2.43	2.42	0.01		
MSCI EM \$	1075.62	1058.69	1.60	Oil WTI \$	69.32	67.63	2.50						
MSCI ACWI \$	821.59	813.61	0.98	Oil Brent \$	72.33	71.06	1.79						
FT Wtshire 2500	7180.80	7125.62	0.77	Gold \$	2545.95	2509.55	1.45						
FT Wtshire 5000	55861.40	55429.90	0.78										

Prices are latest for edition  
Data provided by Morningstar

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PATRICK DEMPSEY

TAGHEUER.COM



## INTERNATIONAL

# Employment market proves tough for China's female graduates

Women take longer to find work than male counterparts and are paid less

ELEANOR OLCOTT  
AND NIAN LIU — BEIJING  
SUN YU — NEW YORK  
WANG XUEQIAO — SHANGHAI

It took accountancy graduate Yang Jiao four months to find a job last year in what was one of the toughest job markets in years. It took many of her 100 female classmates at Sichuan University even longer.

"Many female students spent six months or longer after graduation before landing a job," she said, as the economy, laid low by a property crisis, struggled to gain momentum after the Covid-19 pandemic.

By contrast, most of the 20 men on her course — even those with poor grades — found work easily, she said. "While female students in general study harder and score better in exams, they are at a disadvantage in job hunting," she said.

Yang's experience speaks to one of the biggest problems facing China's female graduates: while more and more women are graduating from university, it is

**'Females study harder and score better in exams but are at a disadvantage in job hunting'**

often much harder for them to get a step on the ladder.

In the UK and US, female students also outnumber men. But the gap is bigger in China. In 2008, women overtook the number of men enrolled at university for the first time and the gap has risen every year since 2010. In 2022, 63 per cent of students enrolled in undergraduate courses were women, according to the latest statistics from the education ministry.

Chinese state media has celebrated the high levels as evidence of China's progress on gender equality.

Last year, state broadcaster CCTV pointed to the high female participation at university as evidence that "women's right to receive higher education has been effectively guaranteed", aligning with other "continuous improvement... in women's rights and interests".

"The rising attendance reflects how young women are much more aware of how education can be a boost for them. That is especially true for young women in the countryside, where it is more acceptable for men to go straight into work and not pursue higher education," said Derek Hird, an expert in class and gender in China at Lancaster university.

But even though women outnumber men at university, they are under-represented in science, technology, engineering and maths courses. Some

courses, such as navigation and mining, are deemed unsafe or inappropriate and they are discouraged from applying. The courses with the highest female attendance include primary education, home economics, psychology, women's studies and foreign languages, according to independent data provider Gaokao.

"If you drill down into the numbers, the science and engineering schools, where students go on to have higher-paid jobs, have many more male students," said Hird.

In part as a result, greater participation in higher education has not translated into equal pay in the workplace. There are no official government statistics on the gender pay gap. But data from recruitment platform Zhaopin shows average monthly pay for women is Rmb8,958 (\$1,265), 13 per cent lower than for men.

With China's growth rate slowing, higher education is not a guaranteed ticket to employment, especially with rising youth joblessness. The rate of unemployment among young people in urban areas was 17.1 per cent in July.

Lin, a 26-year-old teacher in Shenzhen, said: "In my profession, if a man with average skills is interviewed, he will advance to the next round against a woman with a better background. Because there are so few applying, the schools prefer male candidates."

The increased push from Beijing to boost the birth rate could also contribute to employers favouring male candidates. President Xi Jinping has spoken of "actively fostering a new type of marriage and childbearing culture", after discarding the one-child policy in 2016. Married couples can now have three children.

"Gender inequality has worsened" in recent years, said Leta Hong Fincher, author of *Leftover Women*. "Xi is determined to push women back into the role of wife and mother," she said.

A "boys' club" mentality is particularly prevalent among the political and business elites, said Wang Feng, an expert on demography and inequality at the University of California, Irvine. Xi's latest Politburo, consisting of the 24 top party leaders, contains no women, he pointed out.

"The same is true for leadership positions in large state-owned enterprises and in other higher level government positions," he said.

Even though it is illegal to discriminate against applicants on the basis of gender, some employers fear looser birth control limits will lead to female staff taking multiple maternity leaves. "My current boss said there is less trouble hiring male workers as female ones may get married and have children, which may lead to lengthy maternity leave," said Yang.



'My current boss said there is less trouble hiring male workers as female ones may get married and have children'

Gender gap: in 2022, 63 per cent of Chinese students enrolled in undergraduate courses were women  
Getty Images

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### Output slowdown

## Hopes of Beijing stimulus rise as economic activity falters

JOE LEAHY — BEIJING

China's industrial output and retail sales faltered last month as the economy lost momentum, adding to expectations that Beijing will step up stimulus efforts in the final months of the year.

Industrial output grew at the slowest pace since March while retail sales, a gauge of consumption, had their second slowest month of the year, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed, despite August being the summer holiday month.

The NBS said "in general, the economy was operating smoothly in August". But it said economic activity "still faces many difficulties and challenges in its continued recovery".

Industrial output rose 4.5 per cent year on year, down from 5.1 per cent in July and missing the average forecast of analysts polled by Bloomberg of 4.7 per cent. Retail sales rose 2.1 per cent against a year earlier, compared with 2.7 per cent in July and against analysts' average forecasts of 2.6 per cent.

President Xi Jinping last week called for officials to meet the country's annual economic and social development goals, which analysts interpreted as urging them to hit this year's gross domestic

product growth target of 5 per cent year on year.

Xi has focused on industry, particularly in the high-technology manufacturing sector, to offset a three-year property slump that has hit household consumption and undermined investor confidence. The housing crisis has created what analysts call a two-speed economy, with exports increasing rapidly, especially in terms of volumes of shipments, while domestic demand has been more sluggish.

The August data also showed that fixed asset investment grew at the slowest pace since December while the housing market continued to suffer.

Fixed asset investment grew 3.4 per cent between January and August, compared with 3.6 per cent between January and July. Analysts polled by Bloomberg had forecast about 3.5 per cent.

Excluding real estate, fixed asset investment increased by 7.7 per cent year on year between January and August, with infrastructure investment up 4.4 per cent year on year and manufacturing investment 9.1 per cent higher.

The government has so far announced only incremental measures to try to stabilise the housing market and rekindle household demand.





# “You need some of that soft fluffy brand stuff,” said the hard-nosed City analyst

There is reluctance in some boardrooms to believe in the soft power of brands. It isn't a reluctance shared by City analysts. In fact, in a new report by the IPA and Brand Finance, analysts cite strength of brand and marketing as a key metric for evaluating public companies. Find out more by scanning the QR code.





## COMPANIES &amp; MARKETS

# New AI safety bill causes a stir in Silicon Valley

California governor considers 'kill switch' legislation imposing tech regulations with repercussions far beyond the state

GEORGE HAMMOND AND  
CRISTINA CRIDDLE — SAN FRANCISCO

California's push to regulate artificial intelligence has riven Silicon Valley, as opponents warn that the legal framework could undermine competition and the US's position as the world leader in the technology.

Having waged a fierce battle to amend or water down the bill as it passed through California's legislature, executives at companies including OpenAI and Meta are waiting anxiously to see if Gavin Newsom, the state's Democratic governor, will sign it into law. He has until September 30 to decide.

California is the heart of the burgeoning AI industry, and with no federal law to regulate the technology across the US — let alone a uniform global standard — the ramifications would extend far beyond the state.

"The rest of the world is certainly paying close attention to what is happening in California and in the US more broadly right now, and the outcome there will most likely have repercussions on other nations' regulatory efforts," Yoshua Bengio, a professor at the University of Montreal and a "godfather" of AI, told the Financial Times.

The rapid development of AI tools that can generate humanlike responses to questions have magnified perceived risks around the technology, ranging from legal disputes such as copyright infringement to misinformation and a proliferation of deepfakes. Some even think it could pose a threat to humanity.

President Joe Biden issued an executive order last year aiming to set national standards for AI safety, but Congress has not made any progress in passing national laws.

Liberal California has often jumped in to regulate on issues where the federal government has lagged behind. AI is in focus with California's Safe and Secure Innovation for Frontier Artificial Intelligence Systems Act, which was put forward by state senator Scott Wiener. Of the various bills filed in different states, the one in California is the most likely to have a real impact, because the state is at the centre of the technological boom, home to top companies including OpenAI, Anthropic, Meta and Google.

Bengio said: "The big AI companies which have been the most vocal on this issue are currently locked in their race for market share and profit maximisation, which can lead to cutting corners when it comes to safety, and that's why we need some rules for those leading this race."

The bill would require developers building large models to assess whether they were "reasonably capable of causing or materially enabling a critical harm", ranging from malicious use or theft to the creation of a biological weapon. Companies would then be expected to take reasonable safeguards against those identified risks.

Developers would have to build a "kill switch" into any new models over a certain size in case they were misused or go rogue. They would also be obliged to draft a safety report before training a new model and to be more transparent — they would have to "report each artificial intelligence safety incident" to the state's attorney-general and undertake a third-party audit to ensure compliance every year.

It is directed at models that cost more than \$100mn to train, roughly the amount required to train today's top models. But that is a fast-moving target:



**Dilemma:** California governor Gavin Newsom must decide whether to go forward with the AI legislation, which would have an impact on big technology groups such as xAI, Google DeepMind and OpenAI

FT montage/Bloomberg

Anthropic chief executive Dario Amodei has predicted the next group of cutting-edge models will cost \$1bn to train and \$10bn by 2026.

The bill would apply to all companies doing business in California, regardless of where they were based, which would in effect cover every company currently capable of developing top AI models, Bengio said.

It would introduce civil penalties of up to 10 per cent of the cost of training a model against developers whose tools caused death, theft or harm to property. It would also create liabilities for companies offering computing resources to train those models and auditing firms, making them responsible for gathering and retaining detailed information about customers' identities and intentions. Failure to do so could result in fines of up to \$10mn.

Wiener and his colleagues say there is strong public support for new AI guardrails. He has also won qualified support from leading AI start-up Anthropic and Elon Musk, as well as SAG-AFTRA, an actors' union, and two women's groups. Last week 100 employees at top AI companies including OpenAI, xAI and Google DeepMind signed a letter calling on Newsom to sign the bill.

Critics — including academics such as Stanford AI professor Fei-Fei Li, venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz and start-up accelerator Y Combinator — argue that the bill would hobble early-stage companies and open-source developers who publicly share the code underlying their models.

Senate bill SB 1047 would "slow the pace of innovation, and lead California's world-class engineers and entrepreneurs to leave the state in search of greater opportunity elsewhere", warned OpenAI chief strategy officer Jason Kwon in a letter to Wiener last month.

He echoed one of the most common complaints: that the senator was meddling in an area that should be dealt with

"The big AI companies which have been the most vocal on this issue are currently locked in their race for market share and profit"

at the federal level. Opponents also say it would stifle innovation by piling onerous requirements on to developers and making them accountable for the use of their AI models by bad actors. It legislates for risks that do not yet exist, they add.

Dan Hendrycks, director of the Center for AI Safety, which played a critical role in formulating the bill, said opponents "want governments to give them a blank cheque to build and deploy whatever technologies they want, regardless of risk or harm to society".

Hendrycks, who is also an adviser to

Musk's xAI, has come under fire from critics who cast the CAIS as a fringe outfit overly concerned about existential risks from AI. Opponents also expressed concerns that CAIS had lobbied for influence over a "Board of Frontier Models" that the bill would create, staffed with nine directors drawn from industry and academia and tasked with updating regulations around AI models and ensuring compliance. Wiener rejected those arguments as "a conspiracy theory".

He said: "The opposition tried to paint

anyone supporting the bill as 'doomers'," he said. "They said these were science fiction risks; that we were focused on *The Terminator* [film]. We're not, we're focused on very real risks like shutting down the electric grid, or the banking system, or creating a chemical or biological weapon."

Wiener said he and his team had spent the past 18 months engaging with "anyone that would meet with us" to discuss the bill, including Li and partners at Andreessen and Y Combinator.

One of their concerns was that requiring a kill switch for open-source models would prevent other developers from modifying or building on them for fear they might be turned off at a moment's notice. That could be fatal for young companies and academia, which are reliant on cheaper or free-to-access open-source models.

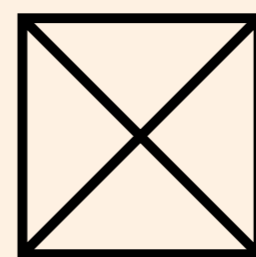
Wiener's bill has been amended to exclude open-source models that have been fine-tuned beyond a certain level by third parties. They will also not be required to have a kill switch.

SB 1047 easily passed the state's legislature. Now Newsom has to decide whether to sign the bill, allow it to become law without his signature or veto it. If he does veto, California's legislature could override that with a two-thirds-majority vote.

But, according to a spokesperson for Wiener, there is virtually no chance of that happening.

The governor is in a tough spot, given the importance of the tech industry to his state. But letting AI grow unchecked could be even more problematic.

Wiener said: "I would love for this to be federal legislation: if Congress were to act in this space and pass a strong AI safety bill I'd be happy to pack up and go home. But the sad reality is that while Congress has been very, very successful on healthcare, infrastructure and climate, it's really struggled with technology regulation... Until Congress acts, California has an obligation to lead because we are the heartland of the tech industry."



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## Healthcare

### Bausch + Lomb seeks sale instead of spin-off

OLIVER BARNES AND MARIA HEETER  
NEW YORK

Bausch + Lomb, one of the world's largest contact lens suppliers, is exploring a sale as a way out of a messy separation from its heavily indebted parent company that has been opposed by lenders including Apollo Global Management.

The eye care business — which was carved out of Bausch Health, formerly known as Valeant, in 2020 — was working with advisers from Goldman Sachs to test interest from potential buyers, said people familiar with the matter. Bausch + Lomb was likely to draw interest from private equity groups, they added.

A target sale price could not be ascertained but Bausch + Lomb's enterprise value including debt stood at just over \$10bn, based on its share price at market close on Friday.

Any deal to sell was likely to come at a sizeable premium to the current valuation as Bausch + Lomb's business had been performing well, the people said, adding that the sale process may not result in a transaction.

Bausch + Lomb's chief executive Brent Saunders is a well-known deal-

maker who oversaw Allergan's \$63bn sale to AbbVie.

Bausch Health retained an 88 per cent shareholding in the eye care subsidiary after listing the group in 2022. But it planned to offload the remainder of shares by striking a deal with its investors to exchange Bausch Health stock for Bausch + Lomb stock.

But the process became unstuck as doubts arose over whether the parent company would still be solvent after separating from its revenue-generating subsidiary because of Bausch Health's huge debt pile. Bausch Health would



Bausch + Lomb is likely to draw interest from private equity groups

have to pass a solvency test in order for any spin-off to be approved.

After a string of acquisitions, Bausch Health has accumulated a \$21bn debt pile, almost \$10bn of which is coming due by the end of 2027. A group of Bausch Health creditors, including Apollo Global Management, Elliott Management and GoldenTree Asset Management, had raised concerns about a spin-off of the eye care business because of the impact it would have on the parent company's balance sheet.

Bausch Health's top shareholders, funds run by Carl Icahn and John Paulson's fund Paulson & Co, had supported the completion of a spin-off as it would give them a large shareholding in the more profitable eye care business.

A sale to private equity could potentially find a route out of the impasse, allowing Bausch Health to settle some of its debts with the proceeds of the sale and satisfying Icahn and Paulson, both of whom have board representation at the parent company as well as its subsidiary. Bausch + Lomb said: "We don't comment on rumours and speculation." Goldman Sachs also declined to comment.

## COMPANIES &amp; MARKETS

## Equities

## KRX boss defends slow start to reforms

Only 1% of listed South Korean groups have signed up to new bourse initiative

CHRISTIAN DAVIES AND SONG JUNG-A  
SEOUL

The head of South Korea's stock exchange KRX, Jeong Eun-bo, has defended his country's stalling corporate reform drive amid disappointment among local and foreign investors that Seoul is failing to replicate Tokyo's success in boosting historically low valuations.

South Korean regulators and political

leaders have spent much of this year promoting their "Corporate Value-up" initiative, which includes a new index highlighting companies that have improved capital efficiency, as well as tax incentives for businesses that prioritise shareholder returns.

But just 1 per cent of South Korea's 2,600 listed companies have signed up or committed to signing up to the programme since it was announced in February, with leading industrial groups including Samsung and chips-to-batteries conglomerate SK Group yet to announce plans to participate.

"The Corporate Value-up programme was a politically designed stop-gap

measure designed to appease local retail investors ahead of parliamentary elections earlier this year, but it ended up as a total failure," said Park Ju-geun, head of Seoul-based corporate research group Leaders Index.

But Jeong, chief executive of Korea Exchange, which operates the Kospi and Kosdaq indices, told the Financial Times that momentum would build behind the initiative as the country's biggest conglomerates joined.

Carmaker Hyundai Motor said last month it would set new total shareholder return and share buyback targets as it announced its participation, while electronics group LG and

steel-to-battery materials conglomerate Posco are also expected to announce plans to join.

"Korea has a strong naming and shaming culture," said Jeong. "If leading companies join the Corporate Value-up programme, others are bound to follow suit." He added that Samsung, South Korea's largest industrial group, had privately communicated to him its intention to sign up for the voluntary programme by the end of this year.

But he also argued that the role Tokyo's corporate governance drive played in powering the Nikkei 225 index to historic highs this year had been "exaggerated". The revival of the Tokyo

bourse was attributable principally to a recovery in Japan's underlying industrial competitiveness, he said.

Blaming a lack of innovation at South Korea's main industrial groups for their low valuations, he said companies such as Samsung needed to address what he described as "rational" investor concerns about their intrinsic value.

"Our stock prices have not risen enough compared with other major countries, but this is a matter of our industries' growth potential," said Jeong. "The key is how each company invests and innovates, and there is not much the Korean authorities can do about this."

## Insurance

## Munich Re chief rejects 'nonsense' call for price cuts

IAN SMITH  
INSURANCE CORRESPONDENT

The chief executive of one of the world's biggest reinsurers has dismissed calls for the industry to cut the price of natural catastrophe cover as "noise" and "nonsense", arguing it has simply responded to rising costs.

Soaring reinsurance prices in recent years have been one factor in an affordability crisis for a swath of consumers looking to insure their homes and businesses against natural disasters such as severe storms and wildfires.

In an interview with the Financial Times, Munich Re chief executive Joachim Wenning rejected calls for reinsurers — who offer cover to primary insurers — to help take the pressure off businesses and consumers, now that rising prices have brought in record profits for the industry.

Munich Re itself posted record first-half profits partly because of the rising cost of property cover. It now has a €65bn market capitalisation. "I never hear the opposite of these statements, when the market cycle is a little bit softer, that they say: give the reinsurers a little more, they deserve it, because they don't make enough money," Wenning said. "This is very asymmetric, this is noise, this is nonsense."

The sector was still making up for a run of catastrophe-hit years when returns fell because of high claims costs, he added, saying that if reinsurance was

'It will be harder for corporates and for private households to pay for it'

Joachim Wenning

too expensive, primary insurers could simply choose to buy less cover.

Wenning went on to say that it would be "an increasing challenge" for consumers to find affordable property insurance in disaster-prone areas.

"Due to climate change" insurance losses were likely to rise and cover would have to be more expensive, he said. "It will be harder for corporates and for private households to pay for it. It's not a systematic impossibility, it just becomes more expensive."

Some policymakers have argued for more public-private schemes to share the cost of disasters, adding to existing programmes in some countries that cover flooding and other extreme weather.

Wenning said any further schemes needed to be carefully designed to minimise price distortion. "If you have property in a highly risk-exposed area, you should pay more. If that doesn't happen... then we socialise the risk."

Reducing the financial incentive for homes and businesses to protect themselves against natural disasters could drive up losses from future events, he added.

Reinsurers generally maintain very high solvency ratios — capital as a percentage of the minimum required by the regulator — to protect themselves against major losses.

Munich Re's solvency ratio rose to 287 per cent in the first half of the year, well above its 175-220 per cent target range, suggesting it has excess capital to deploy.

Market questions. Week ahead

## Bank of England treads carefully on rate decision

Is the Bank of England ready to cut interest rates?

The Bank of England's monetary policy decision on Thursday will be a key investor focus after the European Central Bank cut interest rates in September for the second time since the coronavirus pandemic and with the US Federal Reserve expected to start its cutting cycle on Wednesday.

Economists are discussing whether the data supports a back-to-back cut in interest rates after the BoE in August lowered borrowing costs — by a quarter of a percentage point — for the first time in more than four years. Many economic indicators appear to have opened the way for further cuts. These include services inflation, which dropped more than expected in July and economic output, which stagnated in June and July.

Moreover, wage growth has continued to ease, supporting the view of declining underlying price pressures. But, while easing, wage growth and services inflation, a key measure of underlying price pressures, are still elevated. The unemployment rate is low and economic growth was stronger than expected in the first half of the year, when the UK grew at the fastest pace in the G7.

The BoE has also signalled a cautious approach to lowering borrowing costs.

"The tone of the August meeting and subsequent speeches have made it clear that officials don't want markets running away with the idea that this is going to be a rapid easing cycle," said James Smith, an economist at ING.

With no new economic forecast due with Thursday's rate decision, markets expect, on balance, that the BoE will keep rates on hold before cutting them again in November, although they still ascribe a roughly 25 per cent chance to a rate cut this time. August inflation data on Wednesday, the day before the BoE meeting, could affect investors' expectations.

Economists polled by Reuters expect headline CPI inflation of 2.2 per cent in August, the same as in July. Services inflation is expected to rise to 5.5 per cent in August from 5.2 per cent in the previous month. *Valentina Romei*

How much will the Fed lower borrowing costs?

The US Federal Reserve will on Wednesday make its final interest rate announcement before the US election in early November. Traders are widely betting that the central bank will choose to



Economic cycle: markets expect the Bank of England to keep rates on hold  
Mike Kemp/In Pictures/Getty

cut borrowing costs from their current range of 5.25 to 5.5 per cent — a 23-year high. But with just days to go, they remain divided over how aggressively the Fed will move.

The latest payrolls report offered signs of stabilisation in the US labour market, with 142,000 new jobs added in August — up from a downwardly-revised figure of 89,000 for July. Consumer price index data last week also showed evidence of a further easing of inflation, with a reading of 2.5 per cent year-on-year for August — down from 2.9 per cent the month previously — albeit with some stickiness in housing and shelter costs.

But the Fed still faces a close call on whether to cut rates by 0.25 percentage points or a jumbo-sized 0.5 percentage points at its September meeting.

On Friday, former New York Fed president Bill Dudley said he saw a "strong case" for a half-percentage point cut, pointing to the restrictive impact on growth of rates at current levels.

Investors' expectations have fluctuated wildly in recent months, but by the end of last week market pricing indicated that bets on a half point cut had significantly increased. "We maintain

that a quarter-point initial cut is the path of least resistance," said Ian Lyngen at BMO Capital Markets on Friday, "although it is clear that 50 basis points is on the table and will be part of the Fed's conversation." *Harriet Clarfelt*

Will Japan raise rates?

At its monetary policy meeting in July, the Bank of Japan raised interest rates to 0.25 per cent and scaled back its purchases of Japanese government bonds.

This was momentous, given Japan had not raised rates for more than a decade, and came far sooner than most sell-side economists had expected. It was blamed, by some analysts, for the volatility that ripped through financial markets in the days that followed.

Investors are now assessing, ahead of this week's monetary policy meeting, whether the August volatility has caused the still hawkish BoJ to pause, or whether it will press ahead with another move despite the risks.

The consensus view of those same economists who — mostly — did not expect a rate increase in July is that the BoJ will unanimously vote to keep rates on hold this time.

Deputy BoJ governor, Ryozo Himino,

'Officials don't want markets running away with the idea that this is going to be a rapid easing cycle'

pointedly signalled in a recent speech that the central bank was still "examining the impact" of its July move, which raised the interest rate to "around 0.25 per cent" from a previous range of zero to 0.1 per cent.

Senior BoJ officials are privately using the same language, implying Japan is still treading cautiously into rate normalisation after many years of ultra-loose policy. The data, meanwhile, is not providing a compelling argument for a back-to-back rise, say analysts. The yen, after hitting multi-decade lows against the US dollar in July, is at its strongest since December.

Wages have been trending higher but, said Takeshi Yamaguchi at Morgan Stanley MUFG, the pass through to private-sector service prices is lagging "and the BoJ is not in a position in which it needs to raise the policy rate hastily" ahead of the ruling LDP party leadership election and consequent change of prime minister on September 27.

Many suspect a decision to keep rates on hold will be accompanied by some signal of a willingness to do so later in the year — most likely December.

Leo Lewis  
See FT View

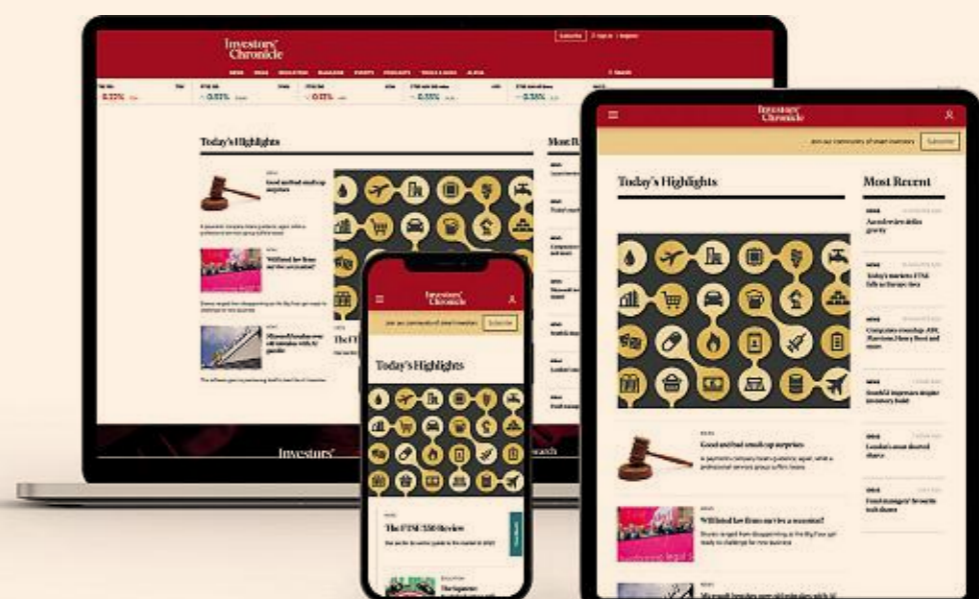
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MARKET DATA

FT500: THE WORLD'S LARGEST COMPANIES

Main market data table with columns for country, company name, price, and various financial metrics. Includes sections for FT500, FT 500: TOP 20, FT 500: BOTTOM 20, and various indices.

Table with 5 columns: Index, Price, Change, % Change, and Volume. Lists various market indices and their performance.

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**Jemima Kelly**  
Take heart, those embarrassing moments can serve a purpose

OPINION

**What, me? Retire? Just because I'm 80?**



**Pilita Clark**  
Business Life

InkedIn is normally a placid oasis in the seething broth of social media chatter. But it lit up the other week when one of its users posted a chart showing the different stages of working life that had appeared in the career advice section of the Indeed.com job listing site.

The chart claimed that, from the age of 21 to 25, you were in the "exploration" stage. By 45-55 you were "late career". And once you reached the 55-65 mark you had hit "decline".

Readers were predictably gobsmacked. "Just appalling", "shocking" and "WTF!!!" they wrote, as Indeed scrambled to take down the item and insist it should never have been published or even written.

"We deeply apologise for content that wrongly negated the important role workers play at every stage of their career," the job site told me last week. "Older workers in particular are vital and highly valued leaders, mentors and contributors to the workplace."

This, alas, is rubbish. Ageism is rife in the workplace, assuming older employees can hang on to a job at all.

Experts say the over-50s are twice as



Kenneth Andersson

likely to struggle to find a new job if they are made redundant. Those over 65 are the second most likely group to be on a zero-hours contract, after the 16- to 24-year-olds. This is frustrating considering that, despite the stereotypes, baby boomers are by no means uniformly loaded. People in England aged 60-64 have the highest poverty rates among adults of any age, says the UK's Centre for Better Ageing.

The problem shows no sign of easing, given the demographic tsunami of ageing boomers.

Also, if you ask ChatGPT, "What are the main stages you go through in a career?" it will spit out a very similar answer to the one in the Indeed chart, so don't be surprised if some clueless "content producer" uses it somewhere again.

This is one reason I have been cheered by the number of

**Many older employees stick at work for the same reason that people of all ages do – they need the money**

octogenarians I've come across recently who are not only working but insist they have no plans to retire.

"I do it because I like it," the 85-year-old financial economist Eugene Fama told one of my colleagues who asked him why he kept at it when they met in Fama's University of Chicago office.

Actor Sir Ian McKellen is also 85 and equally unpersuaded about the merits of chucking it in. "I shall just keep at it as long as the legs and the lungs and the mind keep working," he told an interviewer a few weeks ago.

Others are lining up to join them. "While I love it I'll keep doing it, definitely," the 66-year-old co-founder of the Zoe personalised nutrition programme, Professor Tim Spector, recently told a writer who had asked if he would keep working another 20 years.

These people are lucky. They are working because they enjoy it. And why not?

As the 82-year-old chair of the Rosetrees health research charity, Richard Ross, told me last week, working keeps your brain active, allows you to stay in touch with interesting people and stops you being dull. "I

don't think I would still be alive if I had retired at 65," he said.

But other older employees stick at work for the same reason that people of all ages do: they need the money.

Either way, it's best to get used to them because their presence has been steadily growing.

In 2023, there were 527,600 people aged 65 and over working full-time in the UK. That is 4.3 per cent of all people in that age group, which is up from 2.7 per cent in 2010.

Still, if you are in your twenties and reading this thinking you are never going to have a career if all these ageing job-hoggers hang around into their eighties, fear not.

Only 13,700 people aged 80 or older were estimated to be in full-time work in the UK last year. That is a piffling 0.06 per cent of all full-time workers – even if it is up from the 0.04 per cent a decade earlier.

And the more important point is this: any older worker who saw a chart describing a 55-year-old as being in decline would have stepped in and saved their bosses from the idiocy of publishing it.

pilita.clark@ft.com

**Lex.**

**Governments shouldn't be cyber insurers of last resort**



**US infrastructure sectors hit by ransomware**

Complaints to FBI's internet crime centre, 2023

Defence industrial base	2
Waste and wastewater	8
Emergency services	9
Chemical	24
Energy	30
Communications	32
Transportation	44
Food and agriculture	75
Commercial facilities	87
Financial services	122
Information technology	137
Government facilities	156
Critical manufacturing	218
Healthcare & public health	249

Source: FBI

nsurers are in the business of risk. But some perils make them nervous. Attacks on computer networks are a prime example.

Berkshire Hathaway's Warren Buffett compares them to rat poison because of the spiralling impact on policies of a single event.

The escalating global cost of such crime – expected by US officials to exceed \$23tn in 2027 – far outstrips the cyber insurance market, at roughly 800 times smaller.

Insurers argue that such a vast gap can be bridged only by governments. The case is not clear cut.

Insurer Zurich and broker Marsh McLennan are the latest to advocate state intervention. They point to precedents provided by nuclear-energy risks, natural disasters and terrorism.

A government backstop might encourage insurers and reinsurers to extend coverage and offer extra capacity, says the Geneva Association, a global association of insurers. Such a move could improve resilience because insurers should require policyholders to install strong controls. That might create a virtuous cycle, reducing the chance the government is ever forced to step in.

But there could be unintended consequences. Knowing that a government would foot the bill might encourage more attacks – especially state-sponsored ones. Another worry

is that it could cramp the fledgling but fast-growing cyber insurance market. A badly-designed government backstop might impede innovations such as last year's pioneering cyber catastrophe bond.

Defining the threshold that would trigger a government backstop is fraught. Cash-strapped governments could find themselves on the hook for more than they bargained for, some experts reckon. Patrick Tiernan, chief of markets at Lloyd's of London, argues that the insurance industry needs to do more modelling and client education before it can ask for government help. Citing intelligence sources, he suggests that roughly nine out of 10 cyber attacks could be prevented with better cyber hygiene.

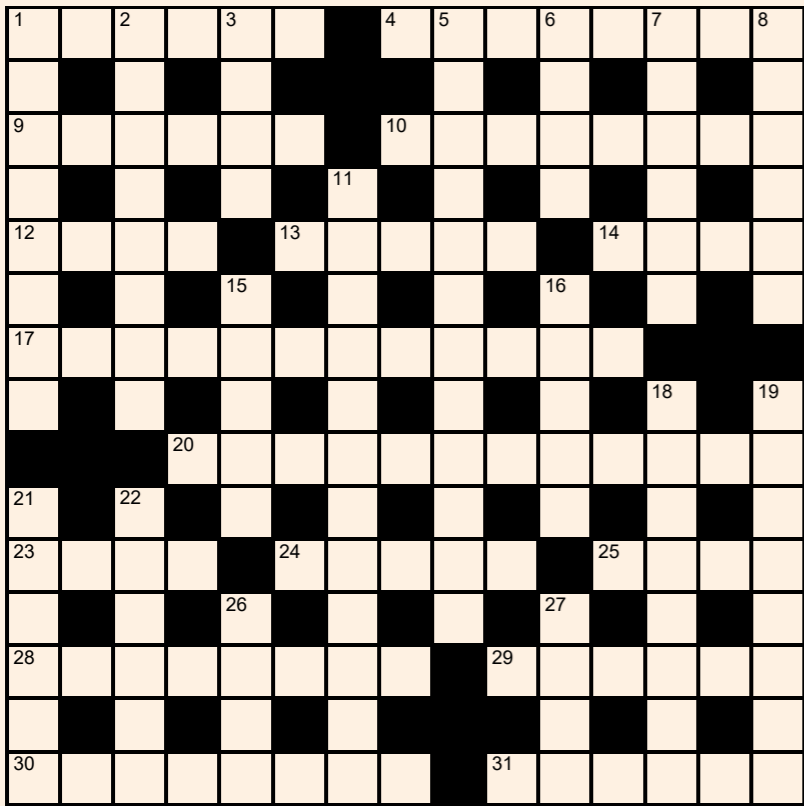
Given the poor controls in many companies, a government backstop clearly creates moral hazard. It might well make companies less motivated to shore up their protections against cyber attacks.

There is a case for state intervention to bridge the gap created by the war and infrastructure exclusions in insurance policies. But governments are rightly reluctant to write blank cheques.

As things stand, there is limited evidence that a broadly based backstop is needed. It would probably take a truly catastrophic cyber attack to change that view.

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**CROSSWORD No 17,843 by GURNEY**



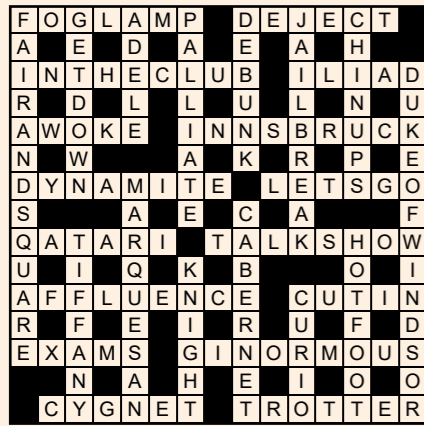
**ACROSS**

- 1 Thinly populated section at the outset: do detailed analysis (6)
- 4 Significant, the man's to appear ultimately in charge (8)
- 9 Try to sell old German currency (and French)? (6)
- 10 Where drink may be found, stop jogging? (8)
- 12 Put up with tedious person (4)
- 13 Fitting to include editor on return as expert (5)
- 14 End of street, one in France? Correct (4)
- 17 Record keepers, amazingly stoic with logs I'd studied from the start (12)
- 20 They go round where many people live (7,5)
- 23 Second horse's unexpected difficulty (4)
- 24 Country by Pacific unpleasantly cold, it's said (5)
- 25 Able to go around island (4)
- 28 Musician, a rapper originally, with Glasgow player? (8)
- 29 Sign of approval about sticky stuff is worthless (2,4)
- 30 In from France with agreement plea (8)
- 31 Reportedly more important kitchen utensil (6)

**DOWN**

- 1 Person of note's quantity of money, we hear – big offer delights you at first (8)
- 2 Improve image of broadcast before British race (8)
- 3 Discarded small piece? Not right (4)
- 5 Mysterious place, blieni prepared formerly inside (12)
- 6 Maybe eleven in the morning, note at the beginning (4)
- 7 Respond angrily referring to flipping left-winger! (6)
- 8 Restriction on movement of dog? Not many in support (6)
- 11 Warning hindmost name change is needed (12)
- 15 Pay special attention to where tennis is played (5)
- 16 Back part of boat having austere appearance (5)
- 18 Cheers the Italian firm at part of arrangement put on formally? (4,4)
- 19 Maltese maybe I caluminate (8)
- 21 Key centre of west headland (6)
- 22 Inducement of vehicle? Twaddle (6)
- 26 Formerly in abeyance, I overlooked (4)
- 27 Defend ourselves? Not entirely grim! (4)

Solution 17,841



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## WORK &amp; CAREERS

Leadership. Natarajan Chandrasekaran, Tata Sons

# Tata chair on 'painful' transitions: 'We have to do this'

As the \$365bn Indian group undergoes multiple changes, its boss tells *Anjali Raval* and *Chris Kay* how it is preparing for the future

After running the Paris marathon during the Olympics, the chair of India's Tata Sons took a 12-day trekking trip in the Himalayas to give himself time to think. "My biggest strength, if you ask me, is that I reflect a lot. That's what I'm good at," says Natarajan Chandrasekaran.

It was "a lot of time, walking all day, looking at the mountains", he recalls. He uses running and such escapes to ponder strategy, replay business decisions and ask: "Why did this happen?"

The 61-year-old Chandrasekaran, known as Chandra, has a lot to stew over. The holding company of the \$365bn Tata Group – which spans sectors from IT, automotive and financial services to consumer products and hospitality – is going through multiple transformations all at once. It is cutting debt and improving profitability, while shifting from traditional businesses, such as steel and power, to new ones including electronics manufacturing and semiconductors. Cleaning up dirtier enterprises by moving towards electric vehicles and renewables is another priority, as is offering more online products and embedding artificial intelligence into its internal processes.

"We are trying to get the group prepared for the future," Chandrasekaran tells the Financial Times in an interview in London. "However painful . . . these are transitions that need to be done." This includes Tata Steel's decision to close blast furnaces at the Port Talbot steelworks and cut jobs to move to greener forms of steelmaking.

Chandrasekaran was appointed chair in 2017 following a period of boardroom turmoil that culminated in the ousting of his late predecessor, Cyrus Mistry, who had alleged serious governance issues, which Tata denied. "I told myself not to get overwhelmed," says Chandrasekaran, as he confronted a company in crisis and pledged to "stop the

'Every company has to focus on financial fitness. Don't worry about growth, fix the fitness'

bleeding" at the group's highly leveraged companies.

"What I do is important, but how I do it is more important."

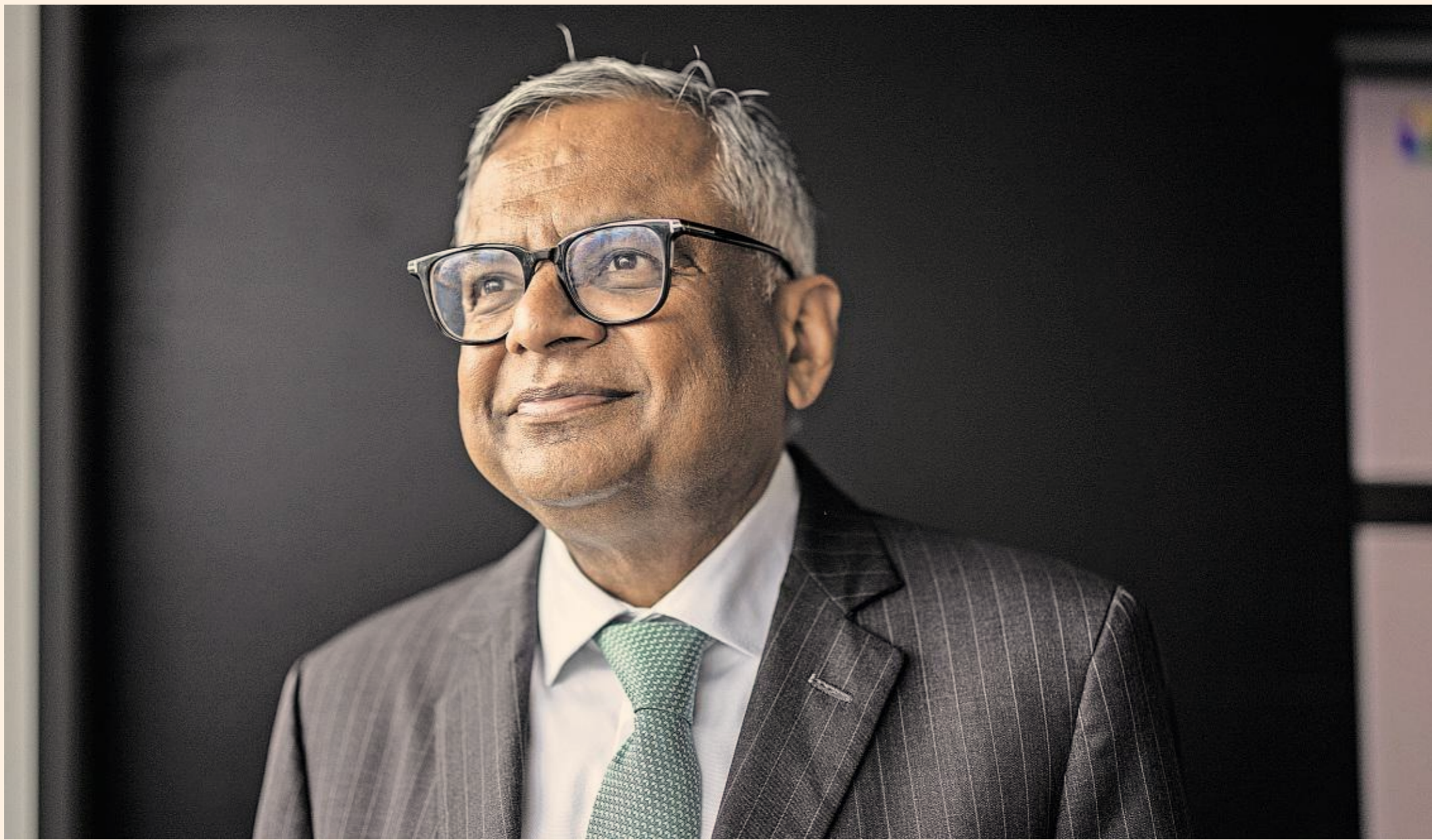
Chandrasekaran, who previously led the IT business Tata Consultancy Services, is the first head of the company who is not related through birth or marriage to its founder, Jamsetji Tata, and the first not from the Parsi community. Since Tata set up in 1868, it has expanded into 30 companies and a huge range of products, from salt and software to luxury Jaguar Land Rover cars and Tetley tea. It will soon assemble iPhones.

"I made sure I never repeated the words 'we used to do it like this at TCS,'" says Chandrasekaran. "I recognised and wanted everyone to appreciate that I respect that every business is different and operates in different contexts. I shouldn't be transporting lessons from one business to another blindly. I would have ticked a lot of people off."

Under his leadership, Tata, which employs 1mn people, has streamlined its operations – selling off and merging businesses – curtailed cross-shareholdings, cut costs and strengthened its financial position. Tata Sons has reported a 10-fold growth in profit after tax since 2016.

Chandrasekaran says he told the heads of Tata businesses that "every company has to be focused on financial fitness . . . don't worry about growth, fix the fitness. Performance will come."

Chandrasekaran, who lives in Mumbai with his wife and son, says he hates to talk about himself. Friends and peers say he shuns the ostentatious lifestyles of other tycoons and is humble to a fault. When asked for an assessment of his leadership performance, he deflects and speaks about business metrics and reels off a list he believes shows his approach is working. Among his highlights are a doubling of production at Tata Steel; cutting Tata Motors' \$10bn debt pile to zero, a turnaround at Indian Hotels Company and simplifying defence



Chandrasekaran says how businesses like Tata handle mistakes 'is what differentiates between a good and bad company. I don't like putting things under the carpet' — Charlie Bibby/FT

business Tata Advanced Systems.

"He's very focused, so he's able to provide very clear advice [to management teams]," says Sanjiv Bajaj, the billionaire chair of Bajaj Finserv, who participated with Chandrasekaran in the business forum that ran alongside the G20 meetings in India last year. "He's put the group on a strong track for future growth."

Chandrasekaran says he has largely relied on intuition to set the direction for Tata and validates his approach with data. He says he would not "do anything differently", although "not everything goes at the pace . . . you want". He has been disappointed by Tata's progress towards selling more digital products to consumers, which "is taking time". The integration of brands into a single super shopping app "could have been faster".

Meanwhile, at carrier Air India, which Tata acquired two years ago, Chandrasekaran notes supply chain challenges have hit aircraft deliveries even as losses have narrowed. He hopes the company will be more competitive domestically within a year, and internationally by 2026, once its orders of Airbus A350s and Boeing 787s arrive. It would mark a change in gear for Air India after its reputation has been hit by events including cabin crew strikes and an incident in which a male passenger allegedly urinated on an older woman in business class. Chandrasekaran admitted last year that the company had fallen short, which was "a matter of personal anguish". With a consumer brand such as Tata "you get a lot of love" from the public, he says. "But people also don't expect anything to go wrong."

Other failures have included a scandal at TCS, in which senior officials were alleged to have accepted bribes to influence hiring decisions, and, at Tata Steel, the sacking of 38 employees for breaking the company's code of conduct, three allegedly for sexual misconduct.

Chandrasekaran says that with such a large organisation, such issues are unavoidable. He splits mistakes into two categories: those that happen because of a lack of organisational process or training and are not intentional, and those that occur "when someone cheats, behaves wrongly or where there is negligence or ill intention". With the former, the company can improve and move on but how the business handles the latter circumstances "is what differentiates a good and bad company", he says. "I don't like putting those things under the carpet."

Some observers say Chandrasekaran, who travels a week a month, is stretched too thin.

Proxy adviser Institutional Shareholder Services has criticised his various chair appointments, saying they represent significant commitments and could "compromise" his ability to give sufficient time to any one company. Chandrasekaran, who balances work

and his personal life with a daily to-do list that emphasises home commitments or professional ones depending on the day, acknowledges the criticism. But he says: "I don't believe in switching off. Your mind is always working. You just shouldn't get worked up . . . I always have a smile, no one can make out if I'm going through a tough day."

People who work for him say Chandrasekaran is not someone who is brought down by negativity and that he encourages staff to "look forward and don't look back".

He says he had no choice but to pursue drastic action at Tata: "We can either wait for the next 10, 15, 20 years or you make the transition [now] . . . we have to do this. If we don't . . . we don't create a future," he says.

The deal agreed with the UK government last week is one example. Tata Steel will invest £750mn alongside £500mn of taxpayer funds to build an "electric arc furnace" in Port Talbot. It will provide a greener way of making the

'You shouldn't get worked up. I always have a smile, no one can make out if I'm [having] a tough day'

commodity but at the expense of 2,500 jobs. Tata, he says, has taken a loss of £4bn-£5bn on the steelworks since it bought them as part of the 2007 Corus Group acquisition but he still backs the pursuit of greener products. To understand modern supply chains and run a consumer company well, "it's about finding out what the customer wants and then figuring out how to make it".

As for his management style, Chandrasekaran says he is less interested in being the one with all the answers. He sees himself as the person who asks the right questions, helps management teams formulate strategy and suitable governance structures and find the best people. "I feel all of us should run in the same direction," he says. He has high standards and wants people to move at his speed but says: "I give space and don't get into the nitty gritty. I see things slightly broader. Who am I to think I know more about any business than the management teams of [Tata's] respective companies?"

Chandrasekaran is known to adapt to people who work for him – for example, avoiding calling colleagues who are not early birds, like he is, first thing in the morning. If he has been tough on an employee or had an issue with one of his team, he ensures he is on good terms with them by the end of the day.

"You don't have to be the one that's right, you just have to get it right," he says.

Additional reporting by Sylvia Pfeifer and Kana Inagaki

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## ARTS

# Mission to make rock great again

POP

**Jack White**

 Islington Assembly Hall, London  
 ★★★★★

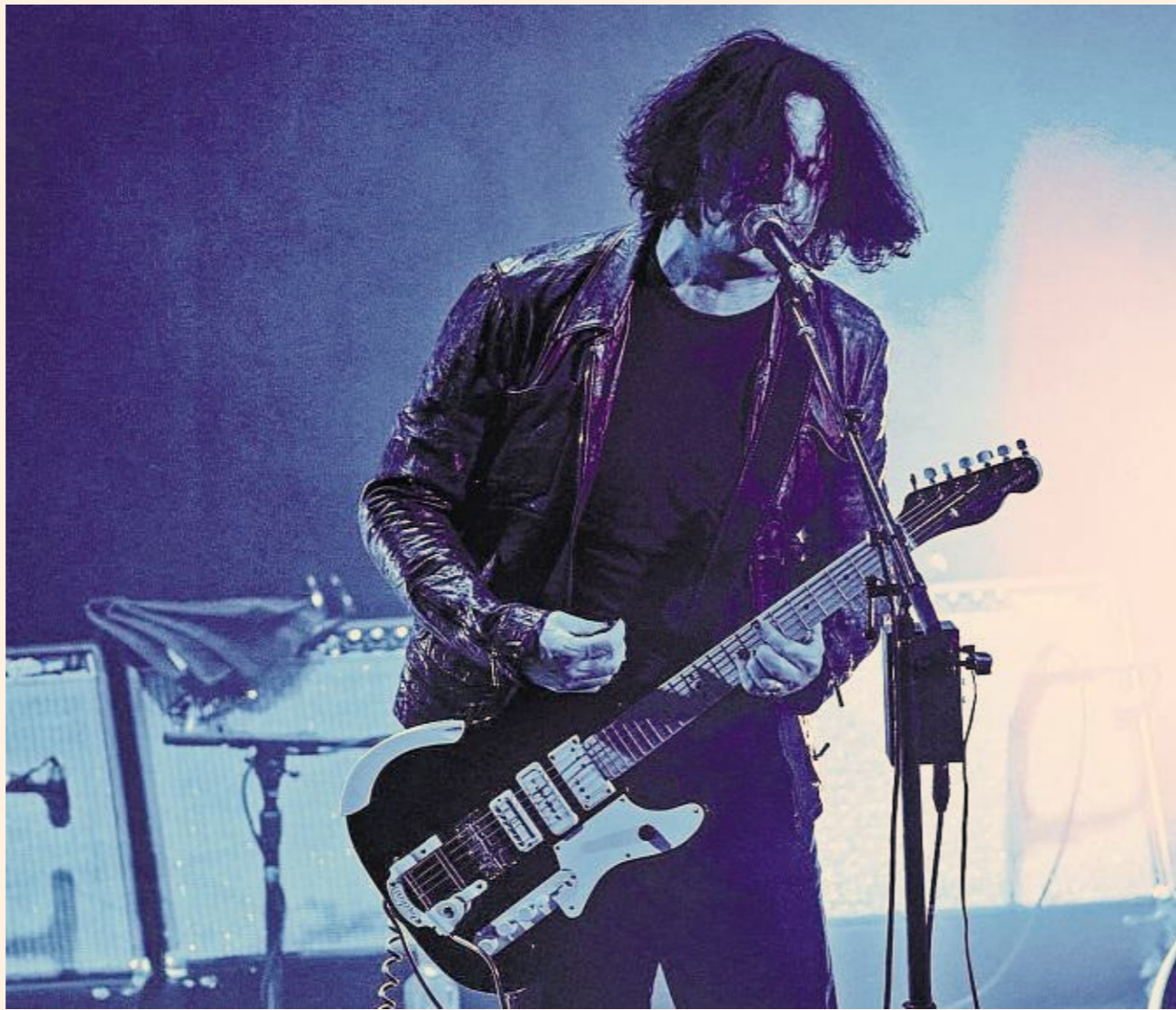
Ludovic Hunter-Tilney

Donald Trump's legal team, the hardest-working people in lawbiz, have another case to add to the teetering pile of charges and appeals. This one arrives from the world of rock music — a copy-right infringement suit filed by the two former members of the White Stripes, Jack White and Meg White, who are suing Trump for the alleged unauthorised use of their hit "Seven Nation Army" in a since-deleted campaign video.

Perhaps Jack White was ranting about the ex-president at the start of his solo gig at Islington Assembly Hall in London. I caught the words "will get arrested", but the rest was indecipherable due to the tumult around him. A drummer, bassist and keyboardist were getting into the groove in the bish-bash-bosh style of a battering ram. Meanwhile White marched around the small stage like an angry man with a point to prove. Feedback howled from his guitar in a costive wall of noise. "Scream, audience, scream!" he cried — a syntactic echo of Trump's rally slogan "Drill, baby, drill!"

The ex-White Stripes leader is on the campaign trail too. It's in support of his new album, *No Name*, the sixth he has released as a solo artist since the duo disbanded in 2011. A surprise release, it was initially given away, Willy-Wonka-style, as an unlabelled vinyl gift for shoppers at stores owned by his label, Third Man Records. Now he is touring it with pop-up shows in small venues, starting with a bar in his adopted hometown of Nashville last month.

His London date took place in an Art Deco hall with a sprung floor used in the 1930s for tea dances. Its capacity of 890 people was a fraction of the numbers that White could draw. "This isn't the kind of rock and roll you're going to get at Wembley Stadium for £400," he



**Gonna fight 'em off:** Jack White mixed new material with songs by the White Stripes. He and former bandmate Meg White are suing Donald Trump for the alleged unauthorised use of "Seven Nation Army" —

barked at one point, in a swipe at Oasis's expensive reunion shows. His own fans might reasonably complain that playing venues at the other end of the scale means only the lucky few get to see him. But it fits the purpose of his current campaign, as became clear from the full-tilt, no-safety-net staging that he put on.

The tone was set by a blaring version of "Looking at You" by MC5, the garage-rock radicals from White's original hometown, Detroit. A series of songs from *No Name* followed, including blues-rock piledriver "Old Scratch Blues" and the pell-mell punk rock of "Bombing Out". Their affinity with the raw sound

of the White Stripes was highlighted by a choice selection of tracks by White's old group, from the minimalist blues-punk of "Little Bird" to the majestic Led Zeppelin routines of "Ball and Biscuit".

Bathed in flashing blue lighting — White's current signature colour, although his clothes and hair tonight were back-to-basics black — the 49-year-old was joined by Dominic Davis on bass, Bobby Emmett on electric organ and Patrick Keeler on drums. White used various guitars, sometimes impatiently changing them mid-song. Wah-wah pedals and slide effects gave him a wide palette of tones, while fast and furious solos erupted in songs like electrical storms.

The throwback style of new tracks such as "It's Rough on Rats (If You're Asking)" and renditions of White Stripes classics such as "I'm Slowly Turning into You" gave the evening a nostalgic pull. But White was determined to resist it. Songs were shaken up with improvised jams and extended breakdowns.

The audience was worked as hard as Trump's legal team, with the singer demanding ever-louder responses. The venue's curfew prompted a disbelieving cry from him about the state of rock and roll in London, while its sprung dance floor was tested by the mass jump-around to "Seven Nation Army". To purloin a phrase, White is on a mission to make rock great again.

jackwhiteiii.com

# Underwhelming concert caps successful season

CLASSICAL

**Last Night of the Proms**

Royal Albert Hall, London

Richard Fairman

After eight weeks and more than 90 concerts, the 2024 BBC Proms season reached its conclusion on Saturday. However much some people may fight against it, the Last Night of the Proms never seems to change. There were just as many balloons this year, though not quite as many large flags, only three Ukrainian and none at all from either side of the war in Gaza (were their flags banned?).

It has been a fine season in almost every way. The BBC Proms is building on its admirable initiative to take concerts to the regions of the UK. As for the Royal Albert Hall, final figures are expected to show two-thirds of the concerts there were sold out — don't forget that this venue holds almost 6,000, twice most concert halls.

Those who were successful in the ballot for the Last Night, entrusted again to the safe hands of conductor Sakari Oramo, were served a disjointed programme of short snippets, often separated by long gaps. There was a typically exuberant new work from Carlos Simon, *Hellfighters' Blues*, which invited the BBC Symphony Orchestra, brass especially, to show off its virtuosity. Iain Farrington's *Extra Time*, getting its premiere, hit the spot by putting together a medley of theme tunes from TV sports programmes.

The only salient feature that distinguishes one Last Night from another is the guests. This year, American soprano Angel Blue sang with such beauty in two Puccini arias that one really wanted

more of them. Her Zarzuela number from Chapi's *Carceleras* showed off a delightful personality as she threw flowers to the Prom-naders and she also sang movingly in a pair of spirituals.

These were arranged by the evening's other soloist, pianist Stephen Hough, though the scale felt rather too intimate for the occasion. Hough made amends with the atmospheric slow movement from Saint-Saëns's Piano Concerto No 5, "Egyptian" (though why could we not have the rest of the concerto?). Even better was his encore, his own scintillating *Mary Poppins* arrangement — truly supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.

It is ironic that the Last Night of the Proms should attract a primarily middle-aged audience, when the other concerts are often filled with younger faces of the kind other concert halls would love to see. Where do they all go in the winter months? ★★☆☆

As the BBC Proms finishes, so the Wigmore Hall season gets under way. A hero's welcome greeted countertenor Jakub Józef Orliński for the opening concert even before he had opened his mouth. In a varied programme of Baroque arias from Cavalli to Bononcini he lived up to the celebrity status by chatting to the audience, acting out some of the parts and — most important — singing with an exceptional purity of sound that puts him at the top of his game. A single note, gently swelling in volume and falling back, was haunting every time. He was accompanied by Il Pomo d'Oro, whose instrumental interludes, highly ornamented, were a major bonus, not just padding. A very good start to the season. ★★★★★

bbc.co.uk/proms



Angel Blue's two Puccini arias made you want more — Mark Allan

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# Landmark case in human trafficking

PODCASTS

**Fiona Sturges**


When Josephine Iyamu was arrested in 2017 at Heathrow airport after stepping off a flight from Lagos in Nigeria, she was carrying eight mobile phones and 20 SIM cards. While searching through her luggage, police also found a pouch containing small bones and clumps of human hair. "We described it at the time as a mobile juju ritual kit, so that was a bit of an eye-opener," recalls Paul, one of the arresting officers.

A year later, Iyamu, a British-Nigerian nurse from London, was jailed for 18 years for trafficking five Nigerian women to Germany where they were forced to become sex workers. Iyamu had struck fear into the women by performing a ritual which involved stripping them naked, cutting them with razor blades, forcing them to eat raw chicken hearts and invoking the spirit of an ancient deity fabled for putting curses on individuals and their families.

The new podcast, *Cursed*, tracks the police investigation which involved German, Nigerian and British authorities working together to expose Iyamu, the first person to be convicted under Britain's Modern Slavery Act. The series is hosted by Femi Oke, a British-Nigerian presenter and journalist, and is the work of Raw, the

production company behind last year's exceptional *The Second Victim*, about a Black woman adopted into a white family and her efforts to find her biological parents.

*Cursed* is similarly characterised by smart, sensitive and detailed storytelling. The series spans 10 episodes and it's a reflection of the superior writing and reporting that none of them feel like filler. It helps that Oke and her team have secured remarkable access to police evidence, including wiretap recordings and interrogations, which are woven into the narrative alongside the testimony of investigators and witnesses.

Oke also digs deep into Nigerian culture and belief systems as she explains how Iyamu, known to the women and her associates as "Madam Sandra", exerted control over her victims. Motivated by a desire to make enough money to support their families back home, each of the women

submitted to the "juju" ritual, after which they were transported to Europe, making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean by dinghy, and then harassed daily by Iyamu to pay back their travel costs, which she claimed ran into tens of thousands.

Central to *Cursed* is the figure of Iyamu herself who, prior to her arrest, lived a scarcely believable double life. In London, she resided in a modest flat on a Bermondsey estate with her husband and son, while in Benin City in Nigeria she owned a gated mansion with her own staff and private security. There she dabbled in local politics and presented herself as a pillar of the community. To hear this woman, a nurse who had caused untold suffering and pain, blankly intoning "no comment" to British police as they read out the charges against her is to be chilled to the bone.

audible.co.uk



Custody image of Josephine Iyamu — NCA



## FT BIG READ. SOUTH AMERICA

Lula has a goal for Brazil to become the world's fourth-largest petroleum producer, but he has also staked his international reputation on the environment. Can both aspirations be achieved?

By Michael Pooler

In front of the modernist architecture of Brasília's presidential palace, a triumphant Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva contemplated the complex balancing act that lay before him.

"The world expects Brazil to once again be a leader in tackling the climate crisis," he told crowds gathered for his inauguration in January last year. "And an example of a socially and environmentally responsible country, capable of promoting economic growth."

The election that returned Lula to power was billed as pivotal for the fate of our planet. His defeated rival, former president Jair Bolsonaro, had been accused of turning a blind eye to the surging destruction of the Amazon — the world's largest rainforest and a bulwark against global warming owing to its capacity to absorb and store huge amounts of carbon dioxide.

Lula, a former trade unionist who was also in office between 2003 and 2011, cast himself as an environmental champion. This term he has already achieved a significant drop in Amazon deforestation and outlined wide-ranging green economy plans. However, an uneasy tension sits at the heart of Lula's aspirations for global climate leadership. It can be summed up in one word: oil.

His government has a goal for Brazil to become the world's fourth-largest petroleum producer, up from eighth place. Lula sees oil as a central pillar of Brazil's strategy for economic growth.

There is a push to identify new deposits under the seabed — including one controversial plan to drill for oil in the sea off the mouth of the Amazon.

The proposals have been criticised by campaigners who say they clash with Lula's sustainability claims. "There's no coherence at all," says Suely Araújo, public policy co-ordinator at the non-profit Climate Observatory. "You can't be a leader on the environment and climate and at the same time become a mega-producer of oil."

As Brazil prepares to host next year's UN climate conference, or COP, the issue threatens to overshadow its leftwing leader's crowning moment of ecological diplomacy.

Yet while Lula has staked his international reputation on the environment, at home he needs to deliver on pledges to alleviate poverty. Many in his Workers' party (PT) and beyond view Brazil's oil riches as a key ingredient for national development.

Those in favour of tapping Brazil's hydrocarbon wealth say that even with the global consumption of crude expected to fall in the shift to cleaner energy, it will still be a part of the worldwide mix for decades. They argue that proceeds from oil and gas sales can assist in funding Brazil's transition, boosting its low-carbon credentials.

The country leads the G20 in renewable electricity, which provided 89 per cent of its power in 2023, according to energy think-tank Ember. The Lula government has pledged to end all deforestation by 2030 and revised up its emissions reduction targets. "There is no contradiction in our national energy policy," says mines and energy minister Alexandre Silveira, who argues Brazil must be "pragmatic".

"We are putting transition policy into practice, but we cannot pay the price alone," he adds. "Why can the US and Saudi Arabia continue being oil suppliers and not Brazil? It's a mismatch and often there's a hypocritical demand from countries that don't have oil. For example, France."

A series of extreme weather events in Brazil over the past year linked by scientists to climate change — including drought, floods and heatwaves — have injected greater urgency to the debate. Massive wildfires have cast smoke across large swaths of the country in recent weeks.

Carlos Nobre, a renowned Earth systems scientist at the University of São Paulo, says with global temperatures rising faster than previously predicted, "it makes no sense" to pursue new hydrocarbon exploration, in Brazil — or anywhere else.

"If we continue with existing fossil fuels, then we get to 2050 with large emissions, and then the temperature will go beyond 2.5 degrees [centigrade above pre-industrial levels]," he adds. "This is an ecocide for the planet."

Lula's connection with oil traces back to his first term in office, when in 2006 state-controlled company Petrobras made a blockbuster discovery off the coastline of Rio de Janeiro.

As deep as 7km below the ocean surface, the enormous reservoirs are called the "pre-salt" layer because they are trapped beneath a thick crust of sodium chloride. Billed as one of the largest finds this century, Lula declared that it proved "God is Brazilian".

While oil money helped fund social



## The contradiction of Brazil's oil ambitions

'It wasn't always a foregone conclusion that Brazil would be an oil superpower. Development costs of pre-salt assets were enormous'

programmes under PT-led governments, the euphoria did not last. First a commodities slump punctured Brazil's economic boom. Then a corruption scandal centred on Petrobras jailed dozens of businessmen and politicians including Lula, whose convictions were quashed in 2021. Under PT rule, the company also suffered political interference and mismanagement.

Today, crude oil is Brazil's second-largest export, after soybeans, with China the largest buyer. The sector accounts for about 10 per cent of GDP.

Daily output was 3.4mn barrels in June, about 3 per cent of the world total. Most is from the pre-salt layer, dominated by Petrobras in partnerships with international majors such as Shell, TotalEnergies and China's Cnooc.

"It wasn't always a foregone conclusion that Brazil would be an oil superpower," says Schreiner Parker at consultancy Rystad Energy. "The development costs of pre-salt assets were enormous, requiring a huge capital outlay. We're starting to see the fruits of that."

Energy experts say future oil supply will need to be cheap and have a smaller carbon footprint in order to remain competitive. Pre-salt proponents say it is ideally suited.

Floating platforms connected to

deepwater wells enjoy massive economies of scale that bring down unit costs. The process to extract a barrel of pre-salt oil emits 8-9kg of CO<sub>2</sub>, or about half the global average, according to Rystad.

"If oil is demanded by the world, [Brazil] can say, 'Why should I not be the one producing it when we have really good emissions compared to other producers?'" says Francisco Monaldi, a Latin America energy expert at Rice University in Houston.

With Brazil's crude output forecast to peak by the end of this decade and then fall, both Petrobras and Brasília are keen to replenish the reserves. The great hope is the so-called Equatorial Margin: a 2,200km stretch of the Atlantic off the country's northern coast, facing some of Brazil's poorest states.

The five basins within this new frontier may contain 10bn recoverable barrels of oil, requiring \$56bn of investment, according to the Ministry of Mines and Energy. This could increase Brazil's proven reserves by more than a third and result in \$200bn in tax revenues, it estimated.

Petrobras has dedicated two-fifths of its \$7.5bn exploration budget over five years to the zone. It began exploratory drilling in deep waters in one of the basins this year and confirmed oil there.

Yet there are obstacles to the most prized section: the Foz do Amazonas basin — literally, the mouth of the Amazon river — which lies 500km from the river's estuary and 170km from the coastline of Amapá state.

"It is believed to be one of the most promising regions in the Brazilian Equatorial Margin, as it shares geology with neighbouring Guyana, where ExxonMobil is developing huge fields," says Adriano Pires, founder of consultancy Centro Brasileiro de Infra Estrutura.

After a request by Petrobras for a licence to drill an exploratory well there was rejected by regulators last year, it has become a flashpoint for the wider controversy. Activists say the biodiverse area, home to mangroves, a coral reef and dolphins, is ecologically sensitive. They say any spills could be carried far by currents.

The environmental agency, Ibama,

cited a lack of in-depth studies into the effects on the region, including possible impacts on nearby indigenous communities and insufficient plans to safeguard wildlife. An appeal by Petrobras is under consideration.

Ibama's head, Rodrigo Agostinho, says one concern is the block's remote location: "In a possible emergency, being so far away was unacceptable."

Industry analysts point out Petrobras's long experience and expertise on the high seas. The company, which declined interview requests, insists it can conduct the activity safely.

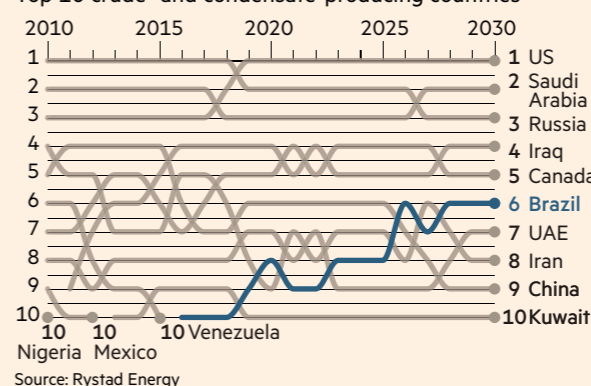
Its new chief executive, Magda

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has touted his efforts to cut deforestation, but some argue the president's green credentials are undermined by his support for the oil industry

FT montage/Bloomberg

### Brazil is expected to rise further in world oil production rankings

Top 10 crude- and condensate-producing countries



Source: Rystad Energy

Chambriard, recently said 10 years had already been lost, since the block in question was auctioned off by the oil regulator in 2015.

TotalEnergies and BP held interests in the basin but gave them up after abandoning efforts to obtain drill permits.

With development expected to take several years from first drilling approval, the fear is that the moment could slip away. Brazil's offshore prospects take longer and more capital to get up and running compared with US or Argentine shale plays, notes Monaldi.

"By the time they develop the Equatorial Margin, it could be the demand for oil has weakened and not many investors are willing to risk stranded assets."

Officials insist the Foz do Amazonas well request will be decided by regulators on technical rather than political

grounds. But to those on both sides of the debate, it will prove an acid test either of Lula's environmental bona fides or his commitment to drive economic progress.

"Is it contradictory? It is, because we are investing a lot in the energy transition. But as long as the energy transition doesn't solve our problem, Brazil has to make money from this oil," the president himself said in June.

But within the administration there are differing views. Environment minister Marina Silva wants a more cautious approach: "Even if we manage to eliminate CO<sub>2</sub> emissions due to deforestation, if the world does not stop emitting CO<sub>2</sub> due to the use of coal, oil and gas, forests will be destroyed in the same way. So it is a challenge for humanity."

A life-long green campaigner, Silva served in the same role under Lula during his first stint as president and was credited with reducing Amazon deforestation. However, she quit government in 2008 and accused Lula of being in lock with agribusiness.

Silva avoids stating a position on the new oil front in the Atlantic. She says the debate cannot be reduced to one country and calls for wealthy nations to help finance the developing world's green shift, but is clear about the collective obligations: "A commitment was made during COP28 [in 2023], together with all signatory countries, that we must transition to the end of fossil fuel use."

At the same summit, Brazil faced an outcry from activists after announcing it was to align more closely with the oil cartel Opec, though as an observer not subject to its production quotas. Lula justified it as a way to influence petrostates to invest more in renewables.

Brazil already directs some pre-salt revenues into a fund for social purposes which could be expanded to include ecological projects, says Silveira.

"If [Lula] takes a significant amount of those resources to reduce emissions from agriculture and deforestation, he could achieve a better net result," says Monaldi, referring to the origin of most of Brazil's greenhouse gases.

But given the country's strained public finances, to be credible there will need to be clear limits on how the proceeds are used, he adds.

Petrobras says it is investing in greener alternatives and doubled its pot for low-carbon projects to \$11.5bn over five years. But critics argue the sum is dwarfed by the \$73bn dedicated to exploration and production over the same period.

Inspecting an overturned tractor caked in mud, Otavino Vedovatto recounts the impact of the worst natural disaster in the history of Brazil's southernmost state, Rio Grande do Sul, a few months ago.

Extreme flooding washed out rice fields on his farm in Eldorado do Sul, outside state capital Porto Alegre. All the chickens and pigs drowned.

"Nature has given us signs," says the 57-year-old resident of a settlement established by the leftwing Landless Workers' Movement. "She is exacting a price for the actions of human beings."

It was the fourth significant flood to hit the region in less than a year. One estimate put the reconstruction bill at \$110bn (\$20bn) and there are warnings that households, businesses and whole towns at risk from future occurrences may need to move.

Climate change made rainfall more likely in Rio Grande do Sul, according to a study by the World Weather Attribution research group, an academic collaboration. It made similar findings in relation to an exceptional drought in the Amazon river basin and fires in Brazil's Pantanal tropical wetlands.

The episodes have renewed calls for Lula to reconsider his bet on black gold. Raissa Ferreira, campaign director at Greenpeace Brazil, says if the country is serious about its commitment to limit global temperatures to within 1.5C, there needs to be a "radical change" in its policies towards fossil fuels.

In the meantime, the pending drilling appeal by Petrobras will hang over the countdown to COP30, due to take place in the Amazonian city of Belém in November 2025. "For Brazil to lead COP30, [it] could not be a country still defending increasing emissions by fossil fuels," says Nobre, the scientist.

Although an official from the environment ministry has suggested that the licence decision could be delayed until after the conference, Silveira, the mines and energy minister, tells the FT he believes it will be resolved this year.

In his inauguration speech, Lula said that "no other country has the conditions like Brazil to become a great environmental power". But as he tries to balance environmental preservation and economic growth, he will soon have to convince the world what this means.

Additional reporting by Beatriz Langella









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