

The world in brief, June 29th 2024



Joe Biden acknowledged his [poor performance](#) in America's first presidential debate. He told supporters at a rally in North Carolina that he no longer debates like he "used to", but insisted he had the experience and moral bearings to take on Donald Trump. Democrats appear divided on whether the president should [give way to an alternative candidate](#). Some conceded that the party had "some decisions to make", as one congressman put it, while prominent lawmakers such as Nancy Pelosi doubled down on their support. Mr Biden's aides said he would still debate Mr Trump in a second planned debate in September.

Counting got underway in **Iran's** presidential election, which was called following the death of Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash last month. With around 8m ballots tallied so far, Saeed Jalili, a hardline conservative, is neck and neck with Masoud Pezeshkian, the only [reformist](#) candidate who has been allowed to stand. Both men have around 40% of the vote, meaning a run-off on July 5th is likely.

Having passed Federal Reserve “stress tests”, **America’s biggest banks** said they would increase dividends for shareholders.

[JPMorgan Chase](#), the largest of them, said its dividends would rise by 9% and that it would buy back \$30bn-worth of shares. Goldman Sachs, [Morgan Stanley](#), Citi, Bank of America and Wells Fargo all similarly announced plans to return more money to shareholders.

After six months of gruelling negotiations, **Argentina’s** Congress approved a watered-down version of [Javier Milei’s](#) signature [economic reform](#) bill. Among other measures, the law will privatise some state-owned entities and lower the taxable income floor. It is a big win for Mr Milei, Argentina’s president, whose libertarian party holds less than 15% of seats in the lower house.

Inflation in **America** eased according to the Federal Reserve’s preferred metric. The personal consumption expenditures index slowed to an annual rate of 2.6% in May, down from 2.7% in April. That could bolster officials’ efforts to [lower rates](#), as they are expected to do in coming months.

The number of **British** citizens paying the top rate of [income tax](#) will surpass 1m for the first time this year. A prolonged freeze on income tax thresholds and other allowances has doubled the number of people paying the 45% levy on earnings over the past three years. Labour and the Conservatives have both pledged not to change the thresholds until 2028 if [elected on July 4th](#).

Kenya’s High Court approved the use of military force to restore order in the country. At least 23 people have been killed in [protests against the government’s plan](#) to increase taxes. William Ruto, Kenya’s president, withdrew the plan on Wednesday after protestors stormed parliament. Mr Ruto, who was elected in 2022, has struggled to control inflation.

Word of the week: Mpox, a viral infection formerly known as monkeypox, has a newly discovered strain that is raising alarm.

[Read the full story.](#)

In the run-up to America's presidential election, we've launched The US in brief—a daily update to help you keep on top of the political stories that matter. Sign up here to receive it as a newsletter, each weekday, in your inbox.

Can Joe Biden be replaced?



Joe Biden wanted an unusually early [presidential debate](#) to prove that he was still fit for the job. He achieved the opposite: his bumbling performance on Thursday was a disaster, leading panicked Democrats to wonder how, with less than two months to go before the party's national convention, he might yet be replaced as their presidential candidate.

[But how?](#) Mr Biden has secured more than enough delegates to be crowned the Democrats' nominee. No one can force him to step aside. So could anyone persuade him to? If they did, his vice-president, Kamala Harris, would be the natural substitute. But only a third of Americans think she would beat Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee, according to a recent poll. Others who might make a bid for the nomination include Governors [Gavin Newsom](#) of California, Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania and Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan. This year's campaign has been unusually dull. No longer.

Islamic State's caliphate, ten years on



Saturday marks ten years since [Islamic State](#) declared its so-called caliphate in Iraq and Syria, following a campaign of rapid expansion in the region. At its peak the theocratic quasi-state ruled over 7.7m people, terrorising civilians, beheading journalists and launching a genocide [against the Yazidis](#). Varying global coalitions gradually smashed the caliphate; in 2019 [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi](#), its leader, blew himself up during a raid by American troops.

But despite losing its territory, IS and its affiliate groups still pose a threat. In 2022 thousands of fighters in Syria attempted a prison break. Meanwhile 30,000 children from liberated territories still languish in detention camps, raising concerns about radicalisation. ISIS-K, an offshoot, is operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and affiliates in sub-Saharan Africa have committed terrorist attacks across the region. A hub for foreign fighters in [the Sahel](#) is vying with groups linked to al-Qaeda for control. Even without a physical caliphate, IS ideology is still resonating.

In a troubled region, Mauritania picks a leader



On Saturday Mauritians will turn out to vote for a president. The incumbent, [Ould Cheikh Ghazouani](#), faces six other candidates, but he is favoured to win a second five-year term.

Mr Ould Ghazouani's election in 2019 marked the west African country's first peaceful transition of power. It has since become a beacon of stability in the [coup-prone region](#), where at least four countries are under military rule. Deaths from conflict in the central Sahel increased by 38% last year. Mr Ould Ghazouani has co-operated with opposition parties, rolled out anti-poverty schemes, expanded social security and sidelined his predecessor, who was jailed for corruption in December. He also helped oust al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, a jihadist group.

But disorder may loom. Clashes on the country's border with Mali, which is struggling with a jihadist onslaught, are rising. More Malians are seeking refuge in Mauritania; the UN says its main refugee camp is already overcrowded.

A dramatic Tour de France



On April 4th Jonas Vingegaard, a Danish cyclist, suffered a [serious crash](#) on the fourth stage of the Itzulia Basque Country, an annual cycling race. The winner of the Tour de France for the past two years broke his collarbone and suffered a collapsed lung. He was hospitalised alongside several other riders. With the Tour only three months away, many believed that Mr Vingegaard would miss the race.

Since then, he has made a miraculous recovery and will defend his title at the 111th Tour, which begins on Saturday. He faces a mighty challenge from Tadej Pogacar, a Slovenian cyclist who recently won the Giro d'Italia. They will be on slightly unfamiliar terrain. This year's Tour will start in Florence for the first time. Even more unusually, cyclists will finish in Nice, rather than Paris, as the capital prepares for the Olympics, which start just five days later.

Rachel Reeves, Britain's chancellor-in-waiting



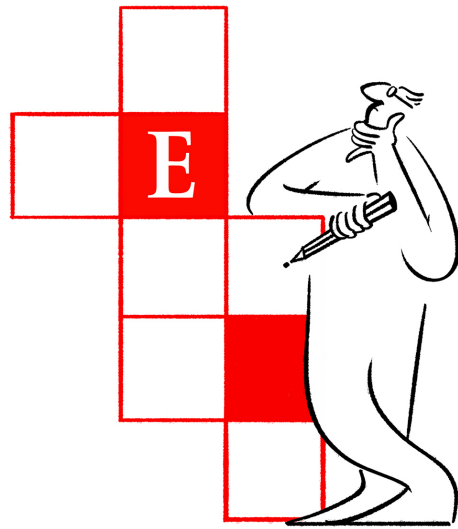
When she was a student at Oxford in the 1990s, Rachel Reeves's friends gave her a framed photograph of Gordon Brown, then the Labour chancellor of the exchequer, to hang in her room. "They knew how much I loved the Treasury," she later recalled. Barring a calamitous polling error, Labour will [sweep to power](#) on July 4th. Credit will belong, in part, to Ms Reeves's work in changing perceptions of the party as fiscally reckless and hostile to business. Her reward will be the fulfilment of a dream: becoming Britain's first female chancellor.

When [Sir Keir Starmer](#), the Labour Party leader, appointed her shadow chancellor in 2021, she was given one task: to become someone the British public could trust with their money. This was essential to a broader detoxification of the party, which has lost four successive elections largely because of its reputation for economic incompetence. That was partly an accident of history: Labour was in office when the global financial crisis struck. But it was perpetuated by the party's election of [Jeremy Corbyn](#), a far-left ideologue, as leader in 2015.

Ms Reeves has offered up several memories to indicate [the sort of chancellor she will be](#). One is of her mother at the kitchen table, ticking off receipts against her bank statements. Another is from her teens. Her school had few books; the sixth form consisted of prefabricated classrooms in a yard. Frustrated, Ms Reeves and her sister joined the party and began leafleting for their local branch. “We are both children of that Thatcherite revolution and we rebelled against it,” she says, referring to the years of Conservative rule. The belief that children should be given a decent comprehensive education is one of her strongest.

Unlike her boss Ms Reeves chose not to join Mr Corbyn’s shadow cabinet. But she shares Sir Keir’s clarity about what it takes to win. That instilled a firm discipline and work ethic. As with Sir Keir, her fear of a gaffe that could spell defeat keeps her public appearances clipped. She hews to the script; nothing is left to chance. Still, a few days into the election campaign, there was a momentary flash of confidence. “I believe we’re in touching distance of doing this,” she said.

Weekly crossword



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

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

Cryptic clues

1 down Parliament has its new term (and a little success) after reform (11)

1 across Arm originally wounded examined and pronounced ok now (6)

2 across Being held captive, by the sound of it, makes one both angry and lonely (5)

3 across Pointless edits added to left-wing website (6)

Factual clues

1 down Somewhere recently gripped by a gambling scandal (11)

1 across What it is feared Russia will soon be able to put in orbit (6)

2 across Someone not having sex (and not by choice) (5)

3 across Where users misidentified suspects behind the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013 (6)

The winners of this week's quiz



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

Kara Murphy, Salem, MA, United States

David Marion, Loulé, Portugal

José Ramón Vega, El Portillo, Dominican Republic

They all gave the correct answers of bridge, the Boxer uprising, Kid Rock, Silence and Jackie Robinson. The theme is songs by Simon & Garfunkel: Bridge Over Troubled Water, The Boxer, I Am a Rock, The Sound of Silence and Mrs Robinson.

The questions were:

Monday: The Stayman and Blackwood conventions are part of which four-person card game?

Tuesday: Which 1900 rebellion was an attempt by a Chinese secret society to drive foreigners out of the country?

Wednesday: Which rapper and country music artist was briefly married to Pamela Anderson?

Thursday: Which 2016 film by Martin Scorsese concerns two Jesuit priests who travel from Portugal to Japan to spread Christianity?

Friday: Who was the first African-American to play in a Major League Baseball franchise in the modern era?

Mpox

a viral infection formerly known as monkeypox, has a newly discovered strain that is raising alarm.

Read the full story.

Language is the only homeland.

Czesław Miłosz