

The world in brief, June 17th 2024



Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, dissolved the country's six-person **war cabinet**. The move, which was widely expected, came just over a week after Benny Gantz, a centrist, [resigned](#) from Mr Netanyahu's government. Itamar Ben-Gvir, a far-right security minister who wants Israel to escalate its [operations in Gaza](#) and against Hizbullah, a Shia militia in Lebanon, had long demanded to join the war cabinet. Mr Netanyahu will instead hold smaller informal consultations with advisers.

French bond yields stabilised after Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Rally, said she would work with Emmanuel Macron, the country's president, if her party triumphs in France's [legislative elections](#), which begin on June 30th. The ten-year yield spread over safer German bonds suffered its worst week since 1990 after Mr Macron, whose party lags Ms Le Pen's in the polls, called the vote.

China opened an anti-dumping probe into pork imports from the EU, less than a week after the bloc [hit China's carmakers](#) with hefty tariffs. China's commerce ministry said that an animal

agriculture industry group formally requested the investigation on June 6th. Any retaliatory tariffs would affect Denmark, the Netherlands and particularly Spain, which is responsible for about a fifth of China's pork imports.

The **International Monetary Fund** warned that [artificial intelligence](#) could cause widening inequality and widespread unemployment unless governments do more to prepare. Whereas previous technologies have typically led to unemployment among lower-skilled workers, the IMF said that high-skilled professions could be among those worst affected. It suggested that governments should focus on improving unemployment insurance, as well as adapting their education systems.

A court in London heard that the **Serious Fraud Office** would ask the attorney-general for permission to bring charges against former employees of **Glencore** as soon as next month. The charges will mark the latest in a series of legal cases that have ensnared the commodity-trading giant in Britain. In 2022 the firm paid £280m (\$314m) in fines after its West African oil-trading desk was accused of bribery.

Greece's coastguard was accused of causing the deaths of more than 40 [migrants in the Mediterranean](#) in recent years. An investigation by the BBC, which analysed 15 incidents and spoke to a number of witnesses, found that nine people died after being deliberately thrown into the sea. The Greek coastguard, which has long faced accusations of using aggressive tactics to stop migrants, denies the allegations.

A **Philippine** ship collided with a **Chinese** vessel near the disputed [Spratly Islands](#) in the South China Sea, according to China's coast guard. Officials claimed that the Philippine ship ignored warnings and intruded China's waters illegally; they did not state whether either vessel was damaged. China and the Philippines have recently [accused one another](#) of dangerous manoeuvres in the area recently.

Figure of the day: 5%, the proportion of biomedical therapies tested on animals that ended up being approved by America's Food and Drug Administration. [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.

China's mixed economic messages



The economic data China releases this month will be unusually significant. They may be the last hard data available to the country's leaders before they gather next month in Beijing for a twice-a-decade meeting on economic reform, known as the "Third Plenum". The 1978 edition is legendary in economic circles for kicking off China's gradual retreat from central planning.

The batch released on Monday showed industrial production growing by 5.6% in May, compared with a year earlier, while retail sales grew by 3.7%, before adjusting for inflation. The property market remained stubbornly weak: the price of new homes fell faster, year on year, in May than it did the month before. This mixed message suggests China's leaders have not done enough to rescue the economy from a [slump in confidence](#). But the data may not be bad enough to galvanise them to do more.

The EU's leaders sup together



The European Union's 27 national leaders will meet in Brussels for an informal dinner on Monday. There they are expected to give Ursula von der Leyen the nod for a second term as head of the European Commission, the bloc's powerful executive. The German incumbent's centre-right political group, the European People's Party, came top in [European elections earlier this month](#), and her centrist liberal and socialist allies did well enough to provide her a majority in the European Parliament, which must approve whomever the EU leaders chose.

Other top jobs to be decided include the president of the European Council, who chairs meetings of national leaders. António Costa, Portugal's socialist former prime minister, is heavily favoured. To provide balance, the EU's leaders would like a liberal politician from the EU's eastern fringe as its top diplomat. Kaja Kallas, Estonia's prime minister, fits the bill. But some worry about her unrelentingly hawkish stance towards neighbouring Russia.

A desolate Eid in Gaza



The Eid al-Adha holiday, which began at sunset on Saturday, is a time when wealthy families slaughter an animal and share it with the poor. But there is [little cause for celebration](#) in Gaza this year. When families gathered for communal prayers on Sunday morning, it was often amid the rubble of heavily bombed neighbourhoods. Festive meals are a forgotten luxury. In Gaza's distorted wartime economy, a single sheep costs up to \$3,000.

The Israeli offensive in and around the city of Rafah, in southern Gaza, has disrupted the flow of humanitarian aid. On Sunday the armed forces announced a “tactical pause” for 11 hours each day along a route from Kerem Shalom, the main commercial crossing in southern Gaza. That could help aid agencies pick up and deliver supplies. But that is small comfort to Gazans marking yet another holiday bereft of basic necessities, much the less traditional feasts.

Inflation all'italiana



Italy's final inflation figures for May, issued on Monday, provided further evidence of a soft landing after a post-pandemic surge. The inflation rate held steady at 0.8%, among the slowest rates in the EU. Yet unemployment is at its lowest level since 2008. And the European Commission increased its forecast for Italy's GDP growth in 2024 from 0.7% to 0.9%.

But investors fret over Italy's borrowing, which was equivalent to 137% of the country's GDP by the end of 2023. Slow growth could push that ratio higher unless Giorgia Meloni's ministers can keep an iron grip on spending. Uncertainty over Europe's future after the far right's performance in [European elections](#) this month increases investors' worries. The yield gap between German and Italian bonds, a measure of investor confidence, increased over the past month from under 1.3% to more than 1.5%.

“Outstanding” comedy



When Hannah Gadsby’s stand-up special, “Nanette”, came out in 2018, it captivated audiences and set tongues wagging. Tales of bigotry—Gadsby is a lesbian and uses “they” pronouns—were played for laughs before being re-examined for their awfulness, transmuting traumatic experiences into comic relief and back. The show offered a moving reflection on identity and a masterful analysis of comedy as an art form.

Gadsby is among the comedians featured in “Outstanding”, a new documentary on Netflix which explores the role of LGBT+ performers in the history of comedy. It tells the stories of performers such as Robin Tyler whose careers suffered after coming out. Other contributors include Eddie Izzard, Mae Martin, Wanda Sykes and Lily Tomlin, giving Netflix a chance to cheekily plug their other offerings. “Outstanding” also looks at how jokes about sexual identity went from being *verboden* to edgy to commonplace. As Gadsby says in “Nanette”, quips cannot “solve” homophobia. But they can ridicule it.

Daily quiz



We will serve you a new question each day this week. On Friday your challenge is to give us all five answers and, as important, tell us the connecting theme. Email your responses (and include mention of your home city and country) by 1700 GMT on Friday to QuizEspresso@economist.com. We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Monday: What was the family name of the late Diana, Princess of Wales?

5%

The proportion of biomedical therapies tested on animals that ended up being approved by America's Food and Drug Administration.

Read the full story.

**Out-of-date theories are not in principle
unscientific because they have been
discarded.**

Thomas Kuhn