

## The world in brief, June 28th 2024



America's **Supreme Court** released several opinions, including one—which in effect [allows emergency abortions](#) to proceed in Idaho—that it accidentally posted online on Wednesday. It also blocked a [bankruptcy settlement](#) resolving claims against **Purdue Pharma**, an opioid-maker. The deal would have granted the firm's owner, [the Sackler family](#), immunity from civil liability for their role in the opioid crisis in exchange for up to \$6bn paid out to claimants. The court also blocked America's [environmental regulator](#) from enforcing a rule that would limit **air pollution** from power plants and factories while legal challenges play out in lower courts.

America's National Transportation Safety Board imposed sanctions on **Boeing**, the world's second-biggest [manufacturer of aeroplanes](#), for sharing with the media details of its investigation into a Boeing 737 Max door panel that blew out mid-air in January. Boeing is facing questions over safety after a number of accidents. In 2019 a 737 Max crashed near Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, killing all 157 people on board.

**China's** Communist Party expelled two former defence ministers who were accused of corruption. It is the first time that China has confirmed that [Li Shangfu](#), who disappeared from public for two months last year before being ousted in October, was under investigation. The [Third Plenum](#), a meeting of the Party's central committee, will confirm the removal of the two ministers and other disgraced officials next month.

**North Korea** said that it had successfully tested a rocket capable of carrying multiple warheads, which could threaten to overwhelm [missile defences](#). South Korean military officials dismissed the claim as “deception and exaggeration” and said that a test missile exploded in mid-air. [South Korea](#), Japan and America began a number of coordinated military drills near the south of the Korean peninsula this week.

Alexander Bastrykin, who leads **Russia's** federal investigations, said that the country has sent more than 10,000 newly naturalised citizens to “dig trenches and build fortifications” in Ukraine. They were among some 30,000 migrants who had been caught [dodging military service](#). Mr Bastrykin previously suggested that new citizens who refuse to join the army could have their citizenship revoked.

**Taiwan** told its citizens not to travel to China unless absolutely necessary. Last week China's government threatened to execute “diehard” supporters of Taiwanese independence in extreme cases. Tensions between the two countries have escalated since [William Lai Ching-te](#), whom China views as a “separatist”, was elected as Taiwan's president in January.

**Oklahoma's** top education official issued a directive requiring publicly-funded schools to teach the **Bible**, and suggested that the state might provide instructional materials. The state superintendent, a Republican, did not specify which grade levels would be included. The move is sure to face [legal challenges](#). Last

week Louisiana passed legislation that requires state schools to post the Ten Commandments in every classroom.

**Figure of the day:** 2,000, the rough number of trash balloons that North Korea has floated towards the south since May. [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.*

## Encircled by autocracies, Mongolia votes



Mongolians head to the polls on Friday. The ruling social-democratic Mongolian People's Party, which has a huge majority in parliament, will probably secure another term. In the run-up to the election it has touted its record on the economy and tried to woo voters by promising more social-welfare programs, including \$600m-worth of support for herders.

But a whiff of corruption mars the party, including revelations of a “coal mafia” run by officials. Critics claim that the rule of law is eroding. Unusually for Mongolia, violence has marred the campaign. On June 15th a candidate from the main opposition party was beaten to death.

The elections are the first since the legislature was expanded from 76 to 126 seats, some of which will now be allocated proportionally. That may result in the MPP losing its big majority, sparking a shift towards a multi-party democracy. Western observers will watch the country closely to see if its democratic values prevail.

## Iranians go to the polls



Viewed from an art café in downtown Tehran, [Iran's presidential election](#) is mere window-dressing for an unloved, antiquated regime. Most seem minded to boycott the affair. Masoud Pezeshkian, the sole reformist among the four candidates still in the race, calls it “a wet blanket”.

Outside the capital, the poll is captivating greater interest. People have filled football stadiums in Mr Pezeshkian's hometown of Tabriz, the capital of the north-west, to hear him speak.

Astonishingly for a presidential candidate, he has stirred minority sentiment by speaking in Turkish, the local language, rather than Persian, the official tongue. He has called for closer ties with America and an end to force to impose the mandatory veil for women. Conservatives are appalled; their vote is split between Saeed Jalili, a xenophobic ideologue, and Mohammad Qalibaf, a pragmatic military commander linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. With no candidate likely to secure a majority in Friday's first round, expect a run-off on July 5th.



# Falling inflation in America



It is best not to overreact to a single month of economic data, good or bad. But it may be hard to contain optimism about the [American numbers](#) due out on Friday. The price index for personal-consumption expenditures is forecast to have remained unchanged in May from April. Core PCE, which strips out volatile food and energy prices, is thought to have risen by just 0.1% month on month. These figures would suggest that inflation is slowing down again after accelerating early this year.

The Federal Reserve pays particularly close attention to core PCE. A slower rise could prompt speculation that the Fed will start cutting interest rates in September. Encouragingly, easing price pressures may also come alongside evidence that consumption is resilient. Personal spending is thought to have increased by 0.3% month on month in May. That would make May a very good month for the American economy.

# Belarus and Russia's strained economic union



The Vitebsk region in northern Belarus has undergone a flurry of reconstruction work ahead of the Forum of Regions between [Belarus](#) and Russia. The talking-shop, supposedly focusing on “inter-regional co-operation in building an innovative economy”, culminates in a plenary session on Friday. But like the host cities, the bilateral economic relationship needs some urgent touching-up.

Since it invaded Ukraine in 2022, Russia has been hit by European sanctions. Its underling, Belarus, has avoided sending soldiers into Ukraine. But it has [helped Russia's economy](#), serving as a backdoor for trade that might otherwise be blocked. That has put it in the European Union's crosshairs. On June 26th European diplomats agreed to extend punishments to Belarus to close “the biggest loophole of our sanctions regime”. Some of the EU's eastern members are pushing for more, insisting that Belarus should face the same punishments as Russia. Extolling the economic relationship between the two isolated states will only become harder.

# How Glastonbury stopped rocking



[Glastonbury](#) was once the world's most celebrated rock festival. But now—if its line-up of acts for this weekend is any indication—its organisers view rock as a minority interest. This isn't an entirely new development. What is novel is the lack of pushback.

Previous headline sets by Beyoncé in 2011 and Kanye West in 2015 sparked complaints by Glastonbury traditionalists (and counter-claims that their objections contained an element of racism). This year the principal headliners are SZA, Dua Lipa and Coldplay—a female hip-hop artist, a pop princess and a middle-of-the-road rock band. Meanwhile, the rise of [Afrobeats](#) will be attested to by Burna Boy, a Nigerian singer, who is getting a prime slot on the main Pyramid stage.

Glastonbury's musical diversity is no token gesture. It reflects how festival-goers have broadened their tastes. If anything, Coldplay's presence now feels like a nod to the festival's past.



## Daily quiz

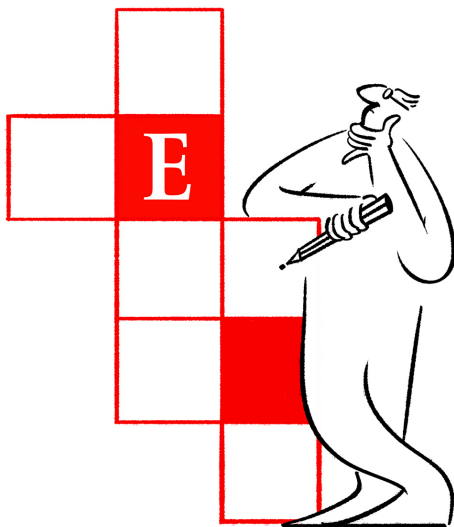


We will serve you a new question each day this week. On Friday your challenge is to give us all five answers and, as important, tell us the connecting theme. Email your responses (and include mention of your home city and country) by 1700 GMT on Friday to [QuizEspresso@economist.com](mailto:QuizEspresso@economist.com).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

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

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

## The winners of last week's crossword



Thank you to everyone who took part in our weekly crossword, published in the weekend edition of Espresso. The winners, chosen at random, were:

**Sunil Chhabra**, Mississauga, Canada

**Xiaochen Su**, St. Paul's Bay, Malta

**Nicolas Riveros**, Città Della Pieve, Italy

They all gave the correct answers of [solar panels](#), [salmon](#), [Putin](#), and [Senate](#). Check back tomorrow for this week's crossword.

**2,000**

*the rough number of trash balloons that North Korea has floated towards the south since May.*

*Read the full story.*

**If men were angels, no government would be necessary.**

*James Madison*