

The world in brief, June 11th 2024



A senior official of **Hamas** said the group accepted a plan by the UN Security Council for a ceasefire with **Israel**. He said that Hamas was ready to negotiate the details, but that the group's leadership inside Gaza is yet to [endorse](#) it. Antony Blinken, America's secretary of state, who is on his eighth trip to the Middle East since October 7th, said it was "a hopeful sign". Israel is unlikely to accept any arrangement that leaves Hamas in control of Gaza.

Hunter Biden, President Joe Biden's son, was convicted of three felony counts of lying on federal forms to purchase a gun. In 2018 Hunter, who has admitted to [struggles with addiction](#), had falsely claimed that he did not have a drug problem. The charges carry a maximum of 25 years in prison; as a first-time offender, he may not receive jail time.

Britain's **Conservative Party** launched its [election manifesto](#), promising to cut £17.2bn (\$21.9bn) a year in taxes by 2030. **Rishi Sunak**, the prime minister, said he would scrap the main rate of national insurance for self-employed people, and cut it for

employees by 2p. *The Economist's* [election forecast](#) suggests the opposition Labour Party is extremely likely to beat the Conservatives.

The leader of **France's** centre-right party called for an alliance with the National Rally, a far-right party led by **Marine Le Pen**, ahead of a [snap legislative election](#). Other members of Les Républicains rejected Éric Ciotti's comments, and called on him to resign. Ms Le Pen said that he had made a "courageous choice". Earlier, France's left-wing parties agreed to form an alliance.

India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, announced his new cabinet. He reappointed top ministers from his previous term, including those responsible for finance, home affairs and defence. Mr Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party won India's recent [election](#), but failed to retain its majority in parliament, meaning it must govern in coalition. Still, the appointments suggest Mr Modi holds a firm grip on power.

Apple unveiled several generative AI products and services, including a plan to integrate **ChatGPT** into its devices and partner with the chatbot's creator, OpenAI. Tim Cook, Apple's boss, also announced the firm's own generative AI system, "Apple Intelligence". The iPhone-maker plans to deploy AI in a smarter Siri voice assistant, among other uses. Apple had been [taking its time](#) to incorporate generative AI.

Singapore Airlines offered \$25,000 compensation payments to the passengers who suffered significant injuries on a flight from London last month that encountered extreme turbulence. Those with minor injuries were offered \$10,000. The flight dropped 54 metres in altitude in less than five seconds while flying over Myanmar. A British man died during the incident, and dozens suffered serious brain and spinal injuries.

Figure of the day: 9%, the percentage of Chicago’s residents who consider the city’s mayor to be doing an “above average” job, according to a poll conducted in late April. [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.

Israel's war cabinet after Gantz



On Sunday Benny Gantz [announced that he would quit](#) Israel's emergency war government and return to opposition with his centrist party. The decision followed the refusal of Binyamin Netanyahu, the prime minister, to present a comprehensive post-war plan for Gaza. Mr Gantz's move will probably not change Israel's policies in the short term, nor will it topple the government. But Mr Netanyahu remains under pressure, this time from his right-wing partners.

They are adamantly opposed to a [ceasefire proposal](#) that Israel made to Hamas last month, backed by Mr Gantz and the Israeli security establishment. Instead, they are demanding that he escalate the war, both in Gaza and against Hizbullah in Lebanon. On Tuesday America's secretary of state, Antony Blinken, is in Israel to urge officials to go forward with the deal. Without Mr Gantz in the war cabinet, it may prove even harder than before to achieve that aim.

A conference for Ukraine's recovery



The World Bank and other international bodies estimate that [rebuilding Ukraine](#) after Russia's invasion will cost at least \$486bn. On Tuesday a conference opened in Berlin to consider how to pay for that reconstruction and foster economic growth. The president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, is attending, along with many Western foreign ministers and officials from the World Bank and other donors.

The focus in the German capital is on keeping Ukraine's economy going and making it a success after the war. Insurance for trade and investment, fighting corruption, rebuilding the power system and meeting EU-accession requirements are all on the agenda. Volodymyr Zelensky is also expected to address the Bundestag to ram home the message. The run-up has been testing for Ukraine's president. On Monday Mustafa Nayyem, the minister of reconstruction, resigned. He said the government had undermined him—in part by not letting him attend the recovery conference.

Macron's election gamble



Campaign-planning gets under way in France on Tuesday for snap parliamentary elections, to be held on June 30th and July 7th. Emmanuel Macron took even his own legislators by surprise [when he announced](#) on Sunday the high-risk decision to dissolve the National Assembly. France's president suffered a crushing defeat that day in elections to the European Parliament. Marine Le Pen's hard-right National Rally trounced his centrist party, Renaissance.

All parties, including the president's, are scrambling to draw up plans and lists of candidates for what will be a short campaign. Stéphane Séjourné, the foreign minister and head of Renaissance, says his party will not put up candidates against opposition "republican" contenders, meaning those who do not represent the political extremes. The idea is to forge a front to stop Ms Le Pen's party from forming a government. But such arrangements may be tough to make: this is a campaign for which nobody prepared.

Russia hosts the BRICS' top diplomats



On Tuesday foreign ministers of BRICS countries conclude a two-day meeting in Nizhny Novgorod, around 400km east of Moscow. The hosts hope the bloc might form the basis of an anti-Western alliance: Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, has said the BRICS could help create a "more just" world order.

Achieving that [looks difficult](#). This year's meeting is the first since the bloc expanded its membership from five countries to nine. Newcomers such as Egypt and the United Arab Emirates are keen on maintaining good relations with America. Meanwhile the Gulf state is wary of Iran, another new BRICS member. (Iran's archrival Saudi Arabia is also considering an invitation to join). That all complicates the crafting of shared anti-Western policies. Still, the shindig allows Russia to show that it retains diplomatic heft despite its isolation from the West. The discussions may also help the Kremlin devise more workarounds to Western sanctions and keep its economy going.

The world's oldest privately owned book



The Crosby-Schoyen Codex makes the Gutenberg Bible look like a new release. A monk in what is now Egypt copied the 136-page codex around the beginning of the fourth century. With writing on both sides of the page, the book was in effect a new technology: it was easier to read than the scrolls generally used at the time and contained more information. The monk scribe was a recent phenomenon, too. Christians had only just started retreating into the north African desert.

The tome, which Egyptian farmers dug out of the sand in the 1950s, includes copies of theological texts such as the Book of Jonah and the first epistle of Peter. It is the world's oldest book in private hands. Its current owner, Martin Schoyen, a Norwegian businessman, is now selling his collection: on Tuesday the codex went to auction at Christie's in London. The newest owner of the oldest book paid more than £3m (\$3.9m).

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 BST on Friday to QuizEspresso@economist.com. We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Tuesday: Which soul singer, who later became a minister, part-wrote and recorded the hit “Let’s Stay Together”?

Monday: Which precious stone, supposedly the subject of a curse, was once owned by Louis XIV of France and now resides in the Smithsonian Museum?

9%

The percentage of Chicago residents who consider the city's mayor to be doing an "above average" job, according to a poll conducted in late April.

Read the full story.

**Life is but a web spun of ghosts and
dreams and illusions.**

Robert E. Howard