

The world in brief, July 6th 2024



In a high-stakes television interview **President Joe Biden** insisted that all is well with his re-election campaign. Asked by ABC News whether he would [step aside](#) if Democratic grandees urge him to, he said “they’re not gonna do that”. Pressed whether he has a viable shot considering his approval rating of 36%, he replied: “that’s not what our polls show”. He also refused to commit to taking a cognitive test.

Masoud Pezeshkian, a reformist candidate, won **Iran’s presidential election**. The [former health minister](#) secured 16.5m votes, around 3m more than Saeed Jalili, a hardliner. Mr Pezeshkian has promised to pursue better relations with the West and ease enforcement of the country’s mandatory headscarf law. He was helped by greater voter turnout, which jumped to around 50% compared with a record low of 40% in the first round.

Sir Keir Starmer held the first meeting of his newly appointed **Labour** cabinet. [Angela Rayner](#) is the deputy prime minister, [Rachel Reeves](#) Britain’s first female chancellor of the exchequer, David Lammy foreign secretary and Yvette Cooper home secretary.

Sir Keir seems intent on a flying start. He is to visit all four nations of the United Kingdom, before heading to Washington for a NATO summit.

The leaders of three military governments in **West Africa** are meeting in Niamey, Niger, to establish the “Alliance of Sahel States”. The governments in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have all been established by coups since 2020. In January they [withdrew](#) from the Economic Community of West African States, the region’s main bloc, which is to hold its own summit in Nigeria on Sunday.

Donald Trump’s lawyers asked the judge overseeing his [classified-documents case](#) in **Florida** to consider whether the [Supreme Court’s ruling](#)—that presidents are entitled to “presumptive immunity” for official acts—affects the case. They requested that she pause proceedings while they prepare arguments. The immunity ruling recently prompted a judge in **New York** to delay Mr Trump’s sentencing hearing for his 34 felony convictions.

China anchored its biggest coastguard vessel within the **Philippines’** exclusive economic zone, according to the Philippine Coast Guard, which accused its Chinese counterpart of “intimidation”. China’s expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea have long caused frictions with other littoral countries. The Philippine government recently began highlighting China’s actions as part of a “[transparency initiative](#)”.

The **Vatican** banished Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò for refusing to recognise the authority of Pope Francis. The archbishop, the Vatican’s former ambassador to America, has long criticised the pope—whom he once described as a “servant of Satan”. In 2018 he called on the pope [to resign](#) after accusing him of covering up the sexual misconduct of a once-powerful American cardinal (the Vatican denied these claims).

Word of the week: *umrah*, a Muslim pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia that takes place all year round. [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.

A potential breakthrough for Israel and Hamas



Ceasefire negotiations between Israel and Hamas to end the war in Gaza and release Israeli hostages have been going on [for months](#). So far they have failed to produce a deal. But earlier this week negotiators finally received from Hamas an updated response to an Israeli proposal sent in May.

Hamas had opposed one of Israel's conditions: holding a six-week truce to release some hostages before more comprehensive ceasefire talks could continue. It has now dropped that objection, which may lead to a breakthrough.

Obstacles still remain, including the timetable of an Israeli withdrawal from parts of Gaza and the identity of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners to be released. Clinching a full deal will still take weeks at best. Even then, Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, will struggle to sell it to his far-right coalition; it may bring down his government. But for now, there is a rare glimmer of progress.

Threads, one year on



Last summer Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk agreed via social media to take part in a cage fight. The [showdown](#) between the two tech billionaires never happened, but the business rivalry continues. On Saturday Mr Zuckerberg will mark the first birthday of Threads, a social network he launched to take advantage of the chaos at Twitter, a social app that Mr Musk had bought in 2022 and has since renamed X.

So far Threads has failed to get X in a chokehold. The upstart has 175m users—not bad for a newcomer, but only about a third as many as X claims to have. Nor has Threads yet made any money: Mr Zuckerberg says it will sell ads only when it is bigger. The clearest difference between the two apps is their content. Threads has embraced celebrities and shunned news—“not at all worth the scrutiny”, its manager declared. For those seeking information fast, X still marks the spot.

A year as if living on Mars



On Saturday four volunteers will end a 378-day stay in a Mars-like habitat at NASA's Johnson Space Centre in Houston. Within their 1,700-square-foot, 3D-printed structure, the crew will have completed the first of three "Crew Health and Performance Exploration Analog", or CHAPEA, missions. These are field tests in locations similar to the extreme environments of space.

The CHAPEA crew's mission features a lot of closely monitored mission activities—they conducted "Marswalks" inside a sandbox filled with red sand to simulate the Martian landscape. They also used a technology similar to indoor home-gardening systems to grow and harvest crops such as tomatoes. Overall, the insights gained from CHAPEA will help NASA prepare for future (non-simulated) [missions to Mars](#).

As the tenants of Mars Dune Alpha move out, two more different volunteer crews will take their place for year-long missions, each time bringing scientists closer to the ultimate goal: sending astronauts to Mars.

Bucking Canucks



A million visitors are expected at the world's biggest cowboy festival, the ten-day Calgary Stampede in Alberta, Canada. Held annually since 1923, the self-proclaimed “Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth” is run by volunteers. The rugged part of the stampede features classic rodeo fare: chuckwagon and wild-pony racing, steer riding and bareback relay. Look out, too, for First Nations pageantry, prize horticulture, stage performances, fancy fireworks and drone displays.

An ever-bigger draw, however, is music, with live shows from rap to country spread across four venues. Saturday will see a crush of talent, from Cash Cash, a world-renowned electronic music trio, to KYLE, a rapper, and TOBi, a singer with several Juno Awards. Kuzi Cee's high-energy pop/R&B will also get the prairie grass swaying. But one crowd-hungry dancer is staying home this year: languishing at the polls, [Justin Trudeau](#), the prime minister, can't face the music.

Weekend profile: Jill Biden, defender-in-chief



Moments after Joe Biden's [excruciating performance](#) in the first presidential debate on June 27th, his wife tried to make things better—and made them worse. “You did such a great job!” Jill Biden yelled at the 81-year-old. “You answered every question!” The sight of the leader of the free world being patronised as if by a nurse in an old people’s home made commentators speculate that Mrs Biden, who is 73, was exerting a malign influence on him. Did she like being First Lady so much that she failed to see that [he should stand down](#)?

She may simply be so protective of her husband of 47 years that she has failed to realise how dodderly he has become. Many Democratic leaders and donors would like to [replace Mr Biden](#) as their candidate (though some do not say so in public). But only the president can release delegates who have pledged to vote for his nomination at the Democratic convention in August. The person who probably has the most influence over that decision is his chief confidante.

Mrs Biden apparently had no political ambitions when she met her husband in 1975. Mr Biden's first wife and baby daughter died in a car crash when he was 30, leaving him the single father of two sons. His older son, Beau, died of cancer aged 46 in 2015. His younger one, Hunter, was [recently convicted](#) of buying a gun illegally. Mrs Biden, his stepmother, attended most days of the trial. Mrs Biden's highest priority has been the well-being and defence of her family.

She is also the only First Lady who has worked full time while living in the White House, as an English teacher at a community college. Education, unsurprisingly, has been her chief cause. Like most women in or anywhere near American politics, she has been the butt of misogyny. Commentators have mocked her insistence on using the title "Dr", even though, as holder of a doctorate in education, she is perfectly entitled to do so.

Adversity has fostered in the Bidens qualities of perseverance and resilience, a point that both make frequently. Speaking at a rally in North Carolina the day after the debate, Mrs Biden declared: "When he gets knocked down, Joe gets back up, and that's what we're doing today." America needs the president to quit the race, but Mrs Biden is unlikely to be the one who delivers the message.

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:

Martin Lampa, Victoria, Canada

Marilyn Lipschultz, Folgueroles, Spain

Himmat Kalsia, Delhi, India

They all gave the correct answers of crystal, Doctor Doom, sundial, the fourth crusade, the Raiders. The theme was Indiana Jones films: "Indiana Jones and the Crystal Skull", "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom", "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny", "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade", "Raiders of the Lost Ark".

The questions were:

Monday: What gift is associated with the 15th wedding anniversary?

Tuesday: Which comic book character is the archenemy of the Fantastic Four?

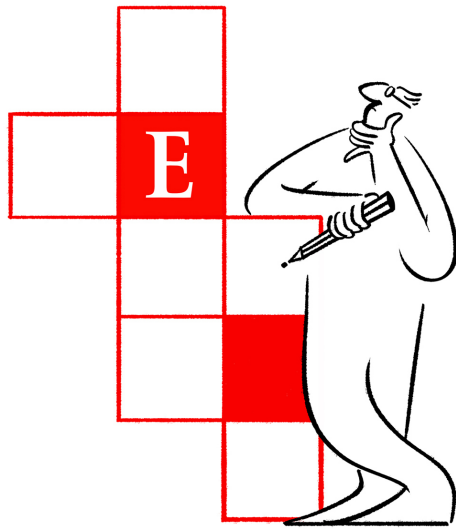
Wednesday: What ancient time-telling device only worked in the

daytime?

Thursday: During what event in 1204 did Latin soldiers sack Constantinople?

Friday: Which NFL franchise moved from Oakland to Las Vegas in 2020?

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.

July 6th edition

Cryptic clues

1 down Drink frothy cup for panic (11)

1 across Country's old money precedes introduction of the Euro (6)

2 across Proper egghead is the best (5)

3 across Egad! Look briefly in the mirror for cause of decline (3,3)

Factual clues

1 down Blended iced coffee drink (11)

1 across Election-holding country in Europe (6)

2 across America's fourth-most-watched video-streaming service (5)

3 across A stumbling block in Joe Biden's campaign (3,3)

umrah

a Muslim pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia that takes place all year round.

Read the full story.

**Fall in love with yourself, with life and
then with whoever you want.**

Frida Kahlo