

The world in brief, June 24th 2024



Josep Borrell, the EU's chief diplomat, warned that “no help is entering into **Gaza**” as much of the aid arriving at the border is “not used”. Philippe Lazzarini, the head of [UNRWA](#), the UN's refugee agency for Palestinians, said that the breakdown in civil order in the enclave has made aid delivery more difficult. Earlier **Israel's** tanks pushed further into **Rafah** as Israeli forces continued their offensive in southern Gaza. To the north, an Israeli strike on Gaza City killed a senior Palestinian health official, according to the enclave's health ministry, which is run by Hamas.

An explosion in a [lithium battery](#) factory in **South Korea** killed at least 22 people, according to local officials. One other is still missing. The cause of the explosion is unclear; the factory in Hwaseong city, an industrial centre south-west of Seoul, the country's capital, reportedly held about 35,000 battery cells.

Gunmen in Dagestan, a Muslim-majority republic in Russia, killed at least 20 people in a series of “terrorist attacks”, according to Russia's counter-terrorism agency. Street fights erupted after the attacks on churches and a police checkpoint in Makhachkala, the

region's largest city. A synagogue in Derbent, a coastal city, was set aflame. The victims included police officers and a priest; at least five attackers were reportedly shot dead.

The **European Union** adopted a 14th package of [sanctions](#) against Russia. The new restrictions are the first by the bloc that attempt to limit Russia's revenues from liquefied natural gas. The EU will ban its ports from reselling Russian LNG, and will prohibit new investment in some Russian-linked LNG projects. Russia accused the EU of "political, economic and military escalation".

The **European Commission** said that Apple's app-store rules are in breach of the [Digital Markets Act](#). The American company is the first big-tech firm to be charged for violating the law, and could be fined up to 10% of its annual global revenue. Apple said last week that it had been unable to launch new artificial-intelligence features in Europe because of "regulatory uncertainties".

America's Supreme Court will decide whether states can limit medical treatments for transgender minors, including puberty blockers. President Joe Biden's administration asked the court to consider the case, arguing that similar treatments can be used for other conditions, such as [precocious puberty](#). Roughly 25 states have passed laws restricting such treatments for transgender minors.

The [European Public Prosecutor's Office](#) is investigating Werner Hoyer, a former president of the **European Investment Bank**, for alleged corruption, abuse of influence, and misappropriation of funds. The case is reportedly related to a compensation package Mr Hoyer paid to a departing employee. Mr Hoyer retired as president in December, after a two-term tenure. He denies the allegations.

Figure of the day: €74bn, National Rally's total yearly spending pledges, excluding a plan to nationalise motorways, ahead of France's elections, as estimated by Allianz. [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.

Two years on from Dobbs



Monday marks two years since America's Supreme Court overturned the right to an abortion, reversing the 50-year-old protection established in *Roe v Wade*. The decision in 2022, known as *Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organisation*, thrilled anti-abortion activists but was broadly unpopular. The court split along ideological lines, with the six conservative justices outvoting the three liberals.

Donald Trump, who as president appointed half of those conservative justices, often takes credit for undoing *Roe*. Yet 17% of American voters blame Joe Biden, who was president at the time of *Dobbs*, for the result. On Monday Kamala Harris, the vice-president, will try to correct the record at a campaign event in Arizona. The battleground state is one of as many as 16 that could hold referendums on abortion this November. Some seek more protections for women, others more restrictions. [Democrats are hoping](#) that the issue inspires Americans who support abortion rights to turn out and vote for Mr Biden too.

Russia's failing offensives



Russia's offensive against the Kharkiv Oblast appears to be petering out, some 40 days since it began. There were fears that [Ukraine's front line](#) might collapse. Some worried that to reinforce it Ukraine might have to move troops from other parts of the line, which would open up offensive opportunities for Russia elsewhere.

Neither has happened. Russia has made small territorial gains in Donetsk. But the overall picture is of Ukraine—bolstered by improving weapons supplies from its allies—stabilising the line. Largely unsuccessful Russian mini-offensives are also coming at unsustainable cost in men and equipment. Vladimir Putin's visit to North Korea on June 18th to secure fresh supplies of munitions and missiles indicated the strain on Russian military production.

The situation for Ukraine is far from easy. Missile attacks on its infrastructure have done huge damage; manpower shortages persist. But it may have better prospects than many had feared.

Filling Britain's fiscal hole



On Monday the Institute for Fiscal Studies—a think-tank that acts as Britain's unofficial assessor of sums bandied around by politicians—is due to issue its final verdict on the parties' [election manifestos](#). The conclusion is unlikely to be pretty.

The IFS says both the [Conservatives](#) and Labour are engaging in a “conspiracy of silence” around the hard choices facing the next government. The budget set out in March by Jeremy Hunt, the Tory chancellor, implies up to £20bn (\$25bn) in cuts to public services. Rachel Reeves, his Labour shadow, is proposing only minor tweaks to these plans. Given the feeble state of Britain's public services, making those savings in full will be difficult. Mr Hunt and Ms Reeves have both kept vague about whether they would borrow more or raise taxes. Both their parties have said they will not raise income tax, national insurance, value-added tax or corporation tax. No matter who wins, economists still expect [taxes to go up](#) after the election.

Germany's gloomy businesses



Ifo Institute, a research firm, published its monthly “Business Climate Index” on Monday. It showed that the mood of German bosses dipped in June compared with May. Despondent business leaders are concerned with the rise of the far right, the war in Ukraine, red tape and the shortage of skilled labour. An increasing number of Mittelstand firms are shifting production abroad or even closing.

But there are some reasons to be upbeat. [Europe's largest economy](#) is beginning to show signs of recovery. Ifo recently raised its forecast for economic growth this year to 0.4%, from 0.2% in March, because of a pick-up in global trade and industrial production, as well as robust domestic consumption. Employment is near a peak and Germany's public debt remains among the lowest of any rich economy. Inflation is forecast to keep falling, and the European Central Bank is therefore expected to keep cutting interest rates. Still, a stronger recovery will be needed to persuade Deutschland AG to cheer up.

How to make history fun



Spitfires and cold-war tanks will once more besiege the quiet hills of Wiltshire, in western England, on Monday. The Chalke History Festival has become one of the world's largest such fairs since its founding in 2011, attracting a record 55,000 visitors last year. Legions will flock to see the star act: a live rendition of "The Rest Is History", a podcast hosted by Dominic Sandbrook and Tom Holland, two historians, that has been downloaded nearly 200m times.

But the festival does not just attract history wonks. Tens of thousands of schoolchildren have attended over the years, reflecting a growing interest in studying the subject. The number of students taking it at GCSE (exams at 16) and A-level (at 18) rose in 2023. The festival will further encourage that with fun like Iron Age forts; as will the podcast, which wittily capers through the ages. Both show why studying history is unlikely ever to go out of date.

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

€74bn.

National Rally's total yearly spending pledges, excluding a plan to nationalise motorways, ahead of France's elections, as estimated by Allianz.

[Read the full story.](#)

Conservative, n. A statesman enamored of existing evils, as opposed to a Liberal, who wants to replace them with new ones.

Ambrose Bierce