

The world in brief, May 30th 2024



Fourteen pro-democracy activists and politicians were found guilty under **Hong Kong's** national-security law. They were among the “HK47” arrested in 2021 under [legislation](#) imposed by China’s central government the year before. (Hong Kong got a second national-security law this year.) The defendants were accused of trying to overthrow the government by holding an unofficial primary in 2020 to help them win seats in a (later postponed) election. Two people were acquitted; 31 pleaded guilty before the trial. They could face life in prison.

Israel's army took control of the “Philadelphia Corridor”, its term for a buffer zone along **Gaza's** border with Egypt. The capture means Israel is now in effective control of Gaza’s entire land border. Earlier Israel’s national security adviser, Tzachi Hanegbi, said he expects his country’s offensive in [Gaza](#) to last for at least another seven months.

Early results in **South Africa's** election suggested that the ruling [African National Congress](#) was on track to lose its parliamentary majority. After 20% of the polling stations had completed counting,

the ANC's share of the vote stood at 43%. The party has recently presided over economic stagnation, rampant crime and epic corruption. Final [results](#) are expected by Sunday.

Unemployment across the **euro area** fell to 6.4% in April, from 6.5% in March, reaching the lowest level since 1999. The figures suggest that the bloc's economic prospects are [brightening](#). The euro area emerged from a recession during the first quarter; inflation has also been brought to heel. A strong labour market is likely to aid the recovery.

As part of an executive reshuffle, **UBS**, a bank, divided responsibility for its wealth management business between the two main candidates to succeed Sergio Ermotti, the chief executive. He will probably step down in 2027. On Friday UBS and **Credit Suisse** will merge into one legal entity. UBS [rescued](#) its former rival from the brink of collapse last March.

Xi Jinping, China's president, met with leaders from Egypt, the UAE and other Arab nations in Beijing. Mr Xi said he wants to strengthen ties with Arab countries. He also expressed support for a "two-state solution" for Israel and Palestine. China has previously called for an immediate ceasefire in the [war in Gaza](#). Mr Xi pledged to provide 500m yuan (\$69m) in emergency humanitarian assistance.

BHP, a mining giant, pulled out of its attempted \$49.5bn takeover of **Anglo American**, a competitor. BHP said it was denied "key information" from Anglo during negotiations. [Anglo](#) rejected three offers from BHP, which was attracted by Anglo's copper assets. [The deal](#) would have been the latest in a string of mining mega-mergers.

Figure of the day: 40%. The share of breast procedures in all plastic-surgery operations in America in 2021. [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.

Britain's Parliament dissolves



Following months of speculation, last week Rishi Sunak, Britain's prime minister, called a general election for July 4th. On Thursday Parliament was dissolved: all the seats in the House of Commons have become vacant, and MPs have ceased to be MPs. Many are retiring; others will fight on the campaign trail to keep their jobs. It will be up to the next parliament to decide whether to pick up unfinished business, such as Mr Sunak's plan to phase out the sale of tobacco.

The first week of the campaign has been marked by cautious speeches from Labour, which has a 22-point lead in the polls, and bold policy announcements from the Tories. That pattern will probably continue. The intensity will ratchet up with television debates and manifesto launches. *The Economist's prediction model* has Labour heading for a landslide. Much can still happen in a six-week campaign, but a turnaround is unlikely.

SCOTUS's busy season begins



A frenetic month lies ahead for America’s Supreme Court. Some three dozen cases—many of them highly significant—await rulings before July. Some judgments are due on Thursday. These could be for any of the unresolved cases, which include state and federal attempts to shape [social-media companies’ moderation policies](#); judicial deference to federal agencies; and whether cities can punish homeless people for sleeping outdoors.

Other important conflicts involve access to [mifepristone](#), a widely used abortion medication, and emergency abortion bans that could endanger women’s health. Two gun cases are also pending: one concerns a federal ban on “bump stocks”, the device used in the Las Vegas shooting in 2017; the other asks if domestic abusers slapped with restraining orders have a right to own a gun. And there is the matter of whether former presidents should be [immune from criminal prosecution](#) for acts they undertook while in office—a ruling that could thwart the case against Donald Trump for conspiring to steal the election in 2020.

Hong Kong's biggest national-security trial



On Thursday 14 opposition figures were found guilty in the biggest political trial in Hong Kong's history. They were among the “[Hong Kong 47](#)” charged in 2021 under the national-security law imposed by the central government in 2020. Thirty-one of the cohort pleaded guilty before the trial. Two, Laurence Lau and Lee Yue-shun, became the first to be acquitted under the law. On leaving the court, a shaky Mr Lau, who like most of his co-accused has spent the past three years behind bars, said he was looking forward to spending time with his family.

It is a tumultuous time for Hong Kong. On Tuesday the first arrests were made under a second national-security law imposed in March. Six suspects were detained for advocating “hatred” of Hong Kong’s and China’s governments, seemingly in relation to social-media posts about next week’s anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. On Wednesday police arrested a seventh. Officials claim only wrongdoers have cause for concern. Hong Kongers fear otherwise.

Costco mixes clicks with bricks



The world's third-largest retailer reports its latest quarterly results on Thursday. Analysts expect [Costco](#) to say its revenues grew by a high single-digit percentage, compared with the same quarter last year, driven by increased foot traffic and robust income from membership fees. Costco has over 130m members and its membership-renewal rate exceeds 92% in America and Canada. The company, which operates over 870 stores or "warehouses" globally, also has 31 new stores planned for 2024.

The big-box retailer is also investing in its online business to defend its market share from competitors like Walmart, Kroger and Amazon. Costco has recently improved its mobile shopping platform and added grocery deliveries. This month it announced a partnership with Uber Eats, a food-delivery service, that allows users to order Costco's products through Uber Eats' app. The retailer is betting that its unique offerings—such as gold bars and silver coins along with its own-brand products—will give its digital storefront an edge over the competition.

A new novel remembers Nigeria's civil war



Collective memory of the worst moments of human brutality fades all too quickly, lost between the pained silence of people who experienced them and the blissful ignorance of those who were not born when they happened. The Biafran war, a separatist conflict in Nigeria that killed almost a million people between 1967 and 1970, is one such horror. As the survivors die decades later, so too does memory of the conflict.

Into that gap steps [Chigozie Obioma](#), whose novel “The Road to the Country” is released on Thursday. It seeks to realise the Igbo proverb that “the story of a war can only be fully told by both the living and the dead”. Mr Obioma’s prose, stained with the blood and viscera of battle, rages against the possibility of forgetting or ignoring a conflict that devastated his native Nigeria, leaving wounds that still fester. “The Road to the Country” offers a stark warning of how nation-building can fail—and of the dire consequences when it does.

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.

Thursday: Who set the then world record for the highest skydive in 2012, becoming the first person to break the sound barrier without vehicular power?

Wednesday: Which 19th century philosopher wrote “On Liberty”?

40%

The share of breast procedures in all plastic-surgery operations in America in 2021.

Read the full story.

Do not destroy what you cannot create.

Leo Szilard