

The world in brief, June 22nd 2024



António Guterres, the UN's secretary-general, expressed concern over [growing tensions](#) between **Israel** and **Lebanon**, warning that “one rash move” might “trigger a catastrophe that goes far beyond the border”. Israel and Hizbullah, the Lebanese Shia militia, have been exchanging rocket fire since October, though the attacks have recently [escalated](#). This week the Israel Defence Forces said that they had approved “operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon”. Earlier, Palestinian officials said that Israeli strikes in southern Gaza had killed at least 45 people. Meanwhile, **Armenia** became the fifth European country this year to recognise [Palestine as a state](#).

Toomaj Salehi, a popular Iranian rapper, has had his death sentence overturned by the country's supreme court. Mr Salehi was condemned for supporting [the demonstrations](#) that erupted in Iran in 2022 after the death in custody of Mahsa Amini. He wrote songs about Amini's treatment at the hands of the morality police who detained her for her supposedly incorrect hijab. He now faces a retrial.

Apple said it would not release its new artificial-intelligence features on iPhones in **Europe** later this year, when they are set to be launched in other regions. The tech giant blamed “uncertainties” brought by the EU’s [Digital Markets Act](#), which requires big online platforms to share more data with regulators and auditing firms. The legislation has already forced Apple to make changes to its [App Store](#).

Leading political figures in Britain have criticised **Nigel Farage** for [comments he made](#) on Friday about the war in Ukraine. The leader of the right-wing Reform UK told the BBC that Vladimir Putin, Russia’s leader, had been provoked by the EU and NATO. Rishi Sunak, the prime minister, said the statement “plays into Putin’s hands”. Sir Keir Starmer, leader of the Labour party, called it “disgraceful”.

Ukraine’s energy facilities were again the target of a substantial overnight attack by Russian missiles and drones. The assault is the eighth of its kind in three months, as Russia returns to its tactic of targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure. The attacks have left Ukraine needing to buy energy from the EU and have added urgency to its calls for allies to provide air-defence systems.

Campaigning began in **Rwanda** ahead of presidential and legislative elections on July 15th. President Paul Kagame, who has been de facto leader since 1994 and president since 2000, will be seeking a fourth term. He won 99% of the vote in 2017 and the continuation of his ruthlessly repressive, yet Western-supported, regime is in little doubt. He can potentially rule until 2034.

Barcelona’s mayor announced plans to ban the renting of apartments to tourists by 2028. Jaume Collboni says a boom in short-term rentals and an ensuing surge in rental prices means many locals cannot afford flats. Mr Collboni believes he is tackling the Spanish city’s “largest problem”. Other European cities are also

trying to curb overtourism. [Venice](#) recently introduced an admission fee.

Word of the week: *Cohabitation*, a French word that describes a political situation in the country where the president represents a different party to that which commands a majority in parliament. [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 disruptive populists



Reform UK, the party of [Nigel Farage](#), Britain's perennial populist, will hold a rally in the West Midlands on Sunday. Mr Farage's return to front-line politics as leader of the insurgent party has been the only surprise in an otherwise static election campaign. In some polls Reform UK is close to overtaking the ruling Conservative Party.

Despite their high vote share, Britain's first-past-the-post system—which elects MPs for each constituency—means that the party will win few, if any, seats. Even the most bullish forecasts give it only a handful, including Clacton, the depressed seaside town where Mr Farage is standing. But Reform UK will shape the future of the Conservatives, which must decide whether to embrace Mr Farage and his far-right politics or face him down. The rise of Reform UK will not change the outcome of this election, in which Labour are cantering to an enormous win. But it may well have a big effect on the next.

Israel's beleaguered prime minister



Israel's major ground operations in Gaza are drawing to an end, according to senior military officers. They claim to have destroyed most of Hamas's military capabilities there, and say that Israel must now focus on the growing threat from Hizbullah on its northern border. But [Binyamin Netanyahu](#), the prime minister, does not agree.

He is increasingly under pressure on the civilian front as well. On Thursday he met families of Israeli hostages who are presumed dead. Some of the families boycotted the meeting, saying that it came too late. Others demanded that Mr Netanyahu accept a ceasefire agreement with Hamas, to release the remaining hostages in Gaza. He is due for another grilling from such families on Sunday.

Mr Netanyahu appears to be avoiding the Israeli media: he has not given them an interview since the war began. (He has been interviewed by non-Israeli outlets.) On Thursday he was scheduled to appear on Channel 14, a friendly outlet. But he never showed up.

The world's other big football tournament



While [football fans in Europe](#) are glued to events in Germany, those farther west have their own international tournament to savour. The 48th edition of the Copa América began in the United States on Thursday. The 16 teams are drawn from the two football confederations of the Americas. Argentina are defending the title they won in 2021; 15-time winners Uruguay and the giants of Brazil will also be hopeful. Only once has a team from North or Central America made the final; the strength of the South American squads means this is unlikely to change in 2024.

If any team is to cause an upset it could well be Ecuador. Piero Hincapié, a defender, plays for Bayer Leverkusen, which recently won the domestic league in Germany. Chelsea paid \$147m for Moisés Caicedo, an Ecuadorian midfielder, and also signed the 17-year-old playmaker Kendry Páez. The team could face Lionel Messi's Argentina in a mouth-watering semi-final. Vamos!

To save seabirds, clear islands of rats



Oceanic archipelagos are [biodiversity](#) hotspots, home to more than 15% of terrestrial species. But most also host invasive rats, which are one of the main causes of animal extinctions on islands. Seabirds are especially vulnerable; rats devour their eggs and chicks. Marine scientists have modelled how eradicating rats from tropical islands could rescue some species.

Writing in *Conservation Biology*, a journal, a group of scientists say that de-ratting 25 of the Indian Ocean's Chagos Islands could increase by 18-fold populations of lesser noddies, sooty terns and red-footed boobies. This could help other species. Seabirds' droppings fertilise the surrounding coral reefs, leading to more fish biomass, which in turn sustains larger seabird populations. De-ratting an island is feasible. A big drop of poisoned bait, by helicopter or drone, would do the job.

Weekend profile: Kaja Kallas, the European Union's next top diplomat



Kaja Kallas may be the world's most disarming iron lady. Estonia's prime minister owes her reputation to her steely resolve towards Russia. She raised the alarm over Vladimir Putin's invasion plans at a time when others dismissed the possibility, and her tiny country is proportionally one of the most generous contributors to [Ukraine's](#) defence. In February Russia issued a warrant for her arrest over her government's removal of Soviet war memorials. Yet in person she is guileless and self-effacing, confessing to imposter syndrome.

Ms Kallas is now the favoured candidate to become the head of the European External Action Service, the EU's diplomatic arm, one of the bloc's four top jobs. Some leaders worry that Ms Kallas will focus too much on the conflict with Russia, to the detriment of Europe's relations with the rest of the world.

Fear of Russia runs deep for Ms Kallas. Her mother and grandmother were among thousands of Estonians deported to Siberia when the Soviet Union conquered the country in 1940. But

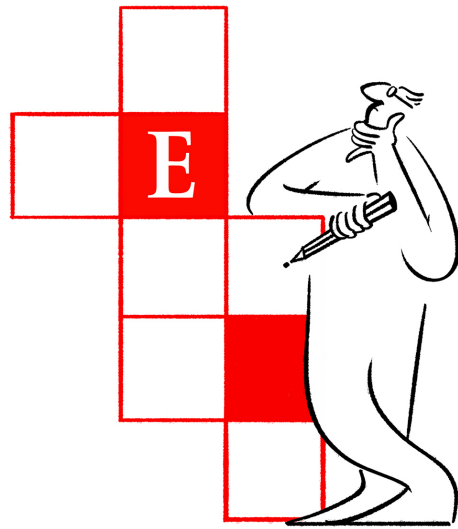
like many members of the intelligentsia, the Kallases adapted to communism. Her father, Siim Kallas, became a member of the Soviet Union's legislature. After independence he helped found the liberal Reform Party and served as prime minister in 2002-03.

At first, Ms Kallas wanted nothing to do with her family's political dynasty. But after a decade practising law, she joined the Reform Party, rising to its leader in 2018. After becoming prime minister in 2021, she came into her own. In domestic policy she managed as a technocrat and helped shape Estonia's reputation as a [pioneer of digital government](#). When Russia invaded Ukraine, her stature rose further.

In an election [last year](#), Ms Kallas trounced the populist opposition, winning 31% of the vote. Since then she has pressed ahead with her liberal agenda, passing legislation to allow gay marriage, which is unpopular in socially-conservative Estonia. But a scandal involving her husband, who held shares in a company that continued to do business (legally) in Russia, has dented her reputation. Many in the Reform Party see it as a good moment for her to move on.

Ms Kallas would probably adjust easily to being back in Brussels. But the job of EEAS chief is a frustrating one. Divisions between EU members means that there is often no European consensus to represent.

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.

Cryptic clues

1 down Drunk person, alas, is without large source of energy (5,6)

1 across Son receives endless donations of fish (6)

2 across Autocrat's portion of output I nicked (5)

3 across Legislative body consumed by old Japanese money (6)

Factual clues

1 down What will provide about 6% of the world's electricity this year (5,6)

1 across Britain's biggest food export in 2023 (6)

2 across Who is engaged in a bromance with Kim Jong Un (5)

3 across What Republicans are favoured to win (6)

The winners of last week's quiz



Thank you to everyone who took part in this week's quiz. The winners, chosen at random, were:

Peter Pendergest, Burbank, Canada

Carlos Sangil, Madrid, Spain

Joy Pinsky, Walnut Creek, California, America

They all gave the correct answers of Spencer, bacon, El Salvador, the Jackson 5 (also the Jacksons) and Pablo Escobar. The theme is 20th century artists: Stanley Spencer, Francis Bacon, Salvador Dali, Jackson Pollock and Pablo Picasso.

The questions were:

Monday: What was the family name of the late Diana, Princess of Wales?

Tuesday: The terms streaky, back and short cut are associated with what type of meat?

Wednesday: Which central American country was the first in the world to adopt bitcoin as legal tender?

Thursday: Jackie, Tito, Jermaine, Marlon and Michael were the members of which musical group?

Friday: Which drug baron was the founder of the Medellín cartel?

Cohabitation

A French word that describes a political situation in the country where the president represents a different party to that which commands a majority in parliament.

Read the full story.

Do it big, do it right, and do it with style.

Fred Astaire