

The world in brief, May 28th 2024



Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, said that [civilian deaths](#) in an **Israeli** air strike on a tent camp for displaced Palestinians in **Rafah** were a “tragic mishap”, and that Israel was investigating. Earlier, however, Israel's army insisted that the attack—which killed at least 45 people, according to Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry—targeted a Hamas compound and was carried out with “precise ammunition and on the basis of precise intelligence”. The strike appeared to start fires that spread through the camp.

Spain pledged €1bn (\$1.1bn) in [military aid](#) to **Ukraine**. The bilateral security deal was announced during a state visit by Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, to Madrid. Spain's prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, said it would help Ukraine's beleaguered air defences. A Russian air strike killed 16 people in a supermarket in Kharkiv, a northeastern city, over the weekend.

Russia criticised **NATO's** boss, Jens Stoltenberg, for saying in an [interview with *The Economist*](#) that Ukraine should be free to strike inside Russia using Western weapons. Mr Zelensky has repeatedly pleaded with the alliance's members to allow Ukraine to do that.

The Kremlin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told Russian media that, by echoing Mr Zelensky's call, NATO was "increasing the degree of escalation".

The death toll from a **landslide in Papua New Guinea** on Friday rose sharply. A government agency estimated that more than 2,000 people were buried alive; the UN had previously put the figure at 670. On Sunday the ground was still unstable from running groundwater and rescuers struggled to reach the densely populated but remote northern region by a blocked highway.

Police in **Armenia** detained more than 270 protesters calling for the resignation of Nikol Pashinyan, the prime minister. Demonstrators blocked roads on Monday—the latest in a series of protests over Mr Pashinyan's decision to return four villages in northeast Armenia to neighbouring **Azerbaijan**. The two countries are seeking to normalise relations after [decades of intermittent fighting](#), including a war in 2023.

A **Qatar Airways** flight from Doha to Dublin experienced severe **turbulence**, injuring 12 people on board. The plane landed safely and on schedule in Ireland's capital. The incident comes days after a British man died when a flight from London to Singapore hit similarly bumpy air. Such incidents remain rare, but climate change is making them more severe.

Figure of the day: \$6.6bn, the amount of money that Americans spent on deodorant in 2023, more than any other rich country. They are covering themselves in new types. [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.

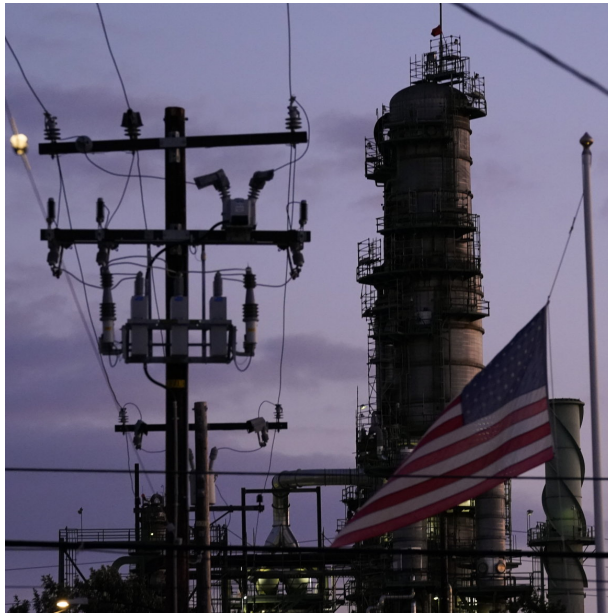
Palestine is winning more sympathy



On Tuesday Ireland, Norway and Spain will officially recognise a Palestinian state, implementing a decision they made last week. Some 140 countries [already recognise Palestine](#), but only a handful in western Europe have taken that step. It is a symbolic decision, but a powerful one, underscoring Israel's growing isolation after nearly eight months of devastating war in Gaza.

Israel faced a barrage of criticism on Monday after it carried out an air strike on a tent camp for displaced Palestinians in Rafah. It claimed it was targeting a Hamas compound. Scores of people were killed; survivors posted horrific videos that showed charred bodies pulled from burned tents. Emmanuel Macron, France's president, said he was outraged; Italy's defence minister said Israeli attacks on civilians "can no longer be justified". The top prosecutor in Israel's army said she was investigating the incident. But such investigations often come to naught. Even Israel's closest allies are now criticising its conduct of the war.

The fuss around Hess



Shareholders of Hess, an energy-exploration company, will vote on Tuesday on whether to accept a takeover proposal from Chevron, an American energy giant. The \$53bn offer is part of a [race to gain market share](#) in the Americas, where oil output is booming. In early May ExxonMobil, a rival, paid \$60bn for [Pioneer Natural Resources](#), a producer in the Permian Basin in America's south-west. Chevron's takeover of Hess would expand its operations in another of the world's fastest-growing oil regions, Guyana.

But Chevron's bid faces obstacles, including a legal challenge from ExxonMobil, which argues that it has the right of first refusal to buy Hess's stake in a lucrative oil project in Guyana. Institutional Shareholder Services, an advisory firm, has recommended that Hess's investors wait for a better offer. High-profile investors have come out against the deal. Ultimately, its success hangs on the decisions of Vanguard, State Street and BlackRock, which collectively own about 23% of Hess.

The finale of Trump's courtroom drama



Donald Trump's first [criminal trial](#), now in its seventh week, is nearly over. On Tuesday come closing arguments, then the jury's deliberations. A conviction or a hung jury—one that does not reach a unanimous verdict among its 12 members—appears much more likely than an acquittal. This is Manhattan after all, where Mr Trump is reviled. Still, the defendant would spin a hung jury as vindication: a sign that the district attorney in this case, who was elected as a Democrat, had waged a meritless political crusade.

The question is whether any of it matters. Should Mr Trump be convicted, a prison sentence seems improbable since the charges are minor: they concern whether he mislabelled business records to hide a payment to a porn star before the election in 2016. Prosecutors say that hush money constituted an illegal campaign contribution. (Mr Trump denies wrongdoing.) The other three criminal cases against him are far weightier. But none is expected to produce a verdict before November.

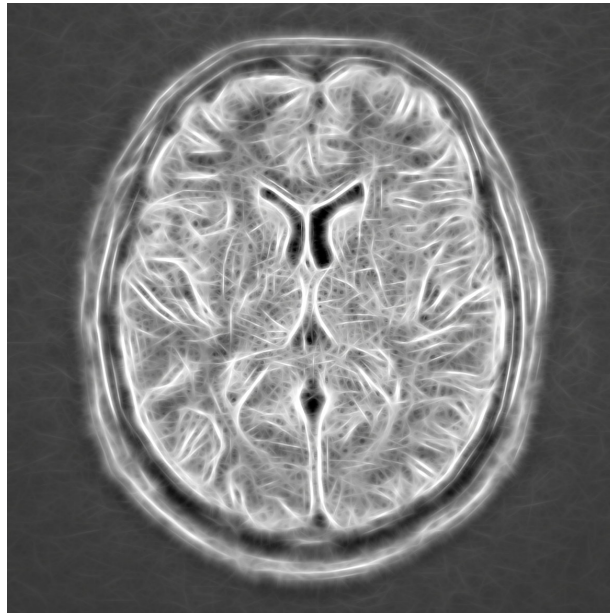
Unclogging America's finances



The plumbing of the [financial system](#), much like a bathroom's, rarely attracts attention until it is blocked. Tuesday will prove an exception, as finance types eagerly inspect America's pecuniary pipes as they get upgraded. That is when settlement periods (the gap between agreeing to purchase an asset and receiving it) for stocks, corporate bonds and exchange-traded funds will be shortened from two days to one.

The change is intended to cut risk. The less time between transaction and settlement, the less chance that a counterparty defaults. That should lower trading costs, as both buyer and seller must earmark less capital as insurance against such a loss. But the changes will introduce other risks. There will be less time to correct errors or to recall assets that have been lent out (to short-sellers, for instance). And it requires banks to do more work overnight, which makes mistakes more probable. Do not be surprised by the odd nasty smell.

How to train your AI



Large language models such as ChatGPT [arguably pass the Turing test](#), meaning they are indistinguishable from people in conversation. But whereas humans grasp whole sentences, LLMs mostly work by predicting one word at a time. Now researchers from Hong Kong Polytechnic University have tested if a model trained to both predict words and judge if sentences fit together better captured human language.

The researchers fed the model stories that were either coherent or full of non-sequiturs. Then they compared how it processed them with brain-scan data from people reading the same text. The model's processing was more like real brain activity than that of an ordinary LLM. It especially aligned with activity in the right hemisphere, suggesting that part of the brain is more important in language comprehension than previously thought.

AI is increasingly giving scientists [insight into the brain](#), such as [how babies acquire language](#). Judging by this study, the right training regime is key.

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.

Tuesday: Which Old Testament book features Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?

Monday: Which saint wrote the “Ecclesiastical History of the English People”, one of the earliest histories of the nation?

\$6.6bn

the amount of money that Americans spent on deodorant in 2023, more than any other rich country. They are covering themselves in new types.

Read the full story.

Once is happenstance. Twice is coincidence. Three times is enemy action.

Ian Fleming