

# The world in brief, June 10th 2024



**Emmanuel Macron**, France's president, dissolved the national assembly and called snap legislative elections, after exit polls for elections to the **European Parliament** showed significant gains for [far-right parties](#) in France, as well as several other countries. In Germany, the Alternative for Germany party took second place behind the opposition conservatives with 16.5% of the vote, up from 11% in 2019. In Austria, the Freedom Party is predicted to win the most seats. If confirmed, it would be the party's first victory in a nationwide election. Mr Macron said the results were not good "for parties which defend Europe".

**Benny Gantz** resigned from Israel's war cabinet in a dispute with the prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, over post-war plans for Gaza. The centrist politician had been expected to resign on Saturday, but delayed after the successful rescue of four Israeli hostages from Gaza. Mr Gantz said that Mr Netanyahu's conduct of the war was preventing Israel "from moving forward to a real victory".

**Narendra Modi** was sworn in as India's prime minister for a third consecutive term at a ceremony in Delhi. Mr Modi won elections that concluded on June 1st, although his Bharatiya Janata Party failed to retain its outright majority, contrary to the predictions of several opinion polls and an exit poll. So to stay in power Mr Modi needs the support of parties in his coalition, the National Democratic Alliance.

The **Philippines** said it would continue to operate its outposts in the South China Sea and “not be deterred by foreign interference or intimidation”. The statement, made by Eduardo Ano, the country's national security adviser, came after China suggested that the Philippines should notify Chinese officials before accessing the outposts. Mr Ano called that demand “absurd, nonsense and unacceptable”.

**South and North Korea** are intensifying a (so far) peaceful but smelly and noisy confrontation. The North has stepped up its campaign of sending balloons carrying rubbish to South Korea, with more than 300 detected this weekend. In response, the South said its loudspeakers will blare propaganda broadcasts across the border for the first time in six years.

The **IMF** said **America** and other rich countries should “invest in fiscal consolidation” to reduce their **debts**. In an interview with the *Financial Times*, Gita Gopinath, the IMF's second-in-command, said growth in America gave it “ample” room to cut spending and raise taxes. She added that America's fiscal deficit, estimated to be 7.1% of GDP in 2025, poses “significant risks” for the global economy.

At the **cricket** T20 World Cup in America, India beat their great rival Pakistan by a perilously slim margin, just six runs. And in **tennis**, Spain's **Carlos Alcaraz** beat Alexander Zverev of Germany to win the French Open championship. It was a match of

undulating fortunes, stretching to five sets. Mr Alcaraz, just 21 years old, has already won the US Open and Wimbledon.

*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.*

# Japan's faltering economy



When the Bank of Japan ended its negative interest-rate policy in March, the country's economy appeared to be poised for a fresh start. The bank promised a “virtuous cycle” of moderate growth in both wages and inflation. But the economy shrank at an annualised pace of 1.8% in the first quarter of 2024, according to government data released on Monday.

The biggest drag was private consumption, which accounts for around 60% of total GDP. It fell by 0.7% from the previous quarter, marking the fourth consecutive quarter of decline. The weak yen is driving up prices. April was the 25th successive month in which real wages fell, and consumers have been tightening their purse-strings.

But the effects of some one-off factors might diminish soon. For example, car sales slumped owing to a data-rigging scandal at Daihatsu, a subsidiary of Toyota.

# Sanctions on Russia start to bite



On Monday Raiffeisen, an Austrian bank, will stop making dollar payments out of Russia. The decision suggests that America's campaign against financial firms accused of aiding the Kremlin's war effort is paying off.

In December the Biden administration issued an executive order exposing foreign banks to secondary sanctions if they facilitate transactions involving Russia's military-industrial complex. Raiffeisen, the largest Western bank still operating in Russia, argues it does no such thing.

But the bank may have strayed too close when it pursued a deal to swap some of its Russian assets for a stake in an Austrian construction firm owned by Oleg Deripaska, an oligarch under sanctions. Soon after America's treasury threatened to curtail its access to the country's financial system. A few days later Raiffeisen dropped the deal, and is now suspending outbound dollar transfers to placate America's concerns further. It is not yet clear whether that is enough to get the bank out of Uncle Sam's crosshairs.

# Hey Siri, are you finally getting an upgrade?



When Apple first unveiled Siri, the virtual assistant was a breakthrough. Over a decade later, it has become more frustrating than fascinating. But from Monday through to Friday, an upgraded Siri will take centre stage at Apple's annual Worldwide Developers Conference. The event looks likely to be the most significant for several years.

Siri's overhaul will see it powered by generative AI. The integration of [large language models](#) will help the assistant handle complex requests and quick back-and-forth dialogue—rather than the stilted conversations users are accustomed to. Apple will also introduce generative AI into web browsing, emoji creation and more in its operating-system updates.

This suite of new features is part of Apple's broader foray into AI, a lucrative field in which it has lagged behind its competitors. Investors are optimistic. Ahead of the event Apple's share price has climbed to its highest since last December after falling by as much as 15% earlier this year.

# Little is left to chance in Iran's election



Ebrahim Raisi, Iran's president, [died](#) in a helicopter crash on May 19th. The country's leaders have ensured that the election campaign that begins on Monday to choose his successor will be as predictable as possible. On Sunday, the Guardian Council, the Supreme Leader's electoral vetting body, excluded all but one of the many heavyweights who submitted their candidacy, virtually awarding victory to the clear front-runner, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (bottom-right in picture). A former military commander, he is a relative of the ageing Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The foregone conclusion is likely to prompt the lowest-ever turnout on June 28th, lower even than at the [election](#) three months ago, itself a record. But behind the scenes, a power struggle rages. In the past the presidency was a stepping stone to the post of supreme leader. But Mr Qalibaf, unlike Mr Raisi, is not a cleric. His selection will bolster speculation that Mr Khamenei is grooming his son, Mojtaba, for a dynastic succession.

# Australian swimming's deep pool of talent



Olympic finals usually bring together the best athletes from around the globe. Occasionally, though, one country's depth of talent can skew that outcome: Australia's in swimming, for example. In the women's 100m freestyle, five currently-competing Australians have recorded one of the 25 fastest times in history. Yet countries can only enter two athletes per Olympic event. Consequently Australia's national trials, which began on Monday in Brisbane, could see faster times than [the Olympics](#) this summer.

The contestants in Brisbane include Emma McKeon, the current Olympic champion; Cate Campbell, the fourth-fastest woman ever; and Mollie O'Callaghan, last year's world champion. Whatever happens, at least one of them will be excluded from the Olympic team—more if other decorated swimmers, such as Ms Campbell's sister Bronte or Shayna Jack (a five-time world champion) spring a surprise. Olympic rules mean that more countries have a greater chance to win medals. But they also mean some world-class athletes are left out.

## 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](mailto:QuizEspresso@economist.com). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

**Monday:** Which precious stone, supposedly the subject of a curse, was once owned by Louis XIV of France and now resides in the Smithsonian Museum?

**11m**

*The approximate number of Americans getting high on marijuana every day.*

*Read the full story*

**We are going to emancipate ourselves  
from mental slavery because whilst others  
might free the body, none but ourselves  
can free the mind.**

*Marcus Garvey*