

The world in brief, June 15th 2024



More than 50 heads of state and government gathered in Switzerland for a [summit](#) that **Ukraine's** president, Volodymyr Zelensky, said could help to bring a “just and lasting peace” for his country. Attendees include Emmanuel Macron of France, Olaf Scholz of Germany and Kishida Fumio of Japan. President Joe Biden, however, is a notable absence; America is instead being represented by his vice-president, Kamala Harris. In a meeting with Mr Zelensky, Ms Harris said that America would give Ukraine a further \$1.5bn in aid. Russia was not invited to the summit.

The **Israel Defence Forces** said that eight soldiers had been killed in an explosion in Gaza on Saturday, the most in a single incident since January. After months of talks, a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas still looks [remote](#). Gaza's Hamas-run health authority says 37,000 people have died in the strip since Israel's offensive began in response to Hamas's attack last October.

G7 leaders concluded their summit in Italy with a warning to **China** that they will continue to target actors that “materially support Russia's war machine”. They called on the superpower to

“step up efforts to promote international peace and security”. The G7 also warned **Iran** against advancing its [nuclear programme](#) and gave its full support to America’s peace plan for Palestine.

South Africa’s parliament elected **Cyril Ramaphosa** to a second term as the country’s president. The vote came after Mr Ramaphosa’s African National Congress reached a deal to form a [national unity government](#) with the Democratic Alliance, the main opposition party, and the Inkatha Freedom Party, a Zulu nationalist outfit. The ANC lost its parliamentary majority in a general election on May 29th.

Iran and **Sweden** agreed on an exchange of prisoners. The Swedes released Hamid Noury, an Iranian sentenced to life imprisonment for his part in the killing of around 5,000 prisoners in Iran in 1988. Iran freed Johan Floderus, an EU diplomat detained in 2022, and Saeed Azizi, a dual national. Oman brokered the [exchange](#), according to the Gulf state’s news agency.

A judge in Texas ordered **Alex Jones**, a conspiracy theorist, to liquidate his personal assets to pay damages to the families of victims of the [Sandy Hook school shooting](#). In 2022 juries in [defamation trials](#) in Texas and Connecticut awarded the families \$1.5bn in damages. The latest ruling allows Mr Jones’s businesses, including InfoWars, a website, to continue operating.

The **British** army delayed the introduction of badges designed to mark King Charles III’s accession to the throne because of fears that China could use them for espionage, according to the *Financial Times*. The firm chosen to make the badges uses factories in China, leading to concerns that tracking devices could be embedded in them. British security officials are [increasingly nervous](#) about Chinese snooping.

Word of the week: *Ras-le-bol*, the French word for being fed-up. [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.

Saudi Arabia's cash crunch



Saudi Arabia barely felt the global wave of inflation that began in 2022. Annual inflation peaked at 3.4% in January 2023 and has been below 2% since August. When the kingdom reports its latest numbers on Sunday, they will probably remain similar. Instead, Saudi Arabia is grappling with where to find more cash to fuel a spending binge.

Oil at \$80 a barrel is not enough to pay for a sprawling economic-diversification scheme, and foreign direct investment remains sluggish. That leaves limited options. Earlier this month [Saudi Aramco](#), the state oil giant, sold \$11bn in shares, mostly to foreign investors. [The Public Investment Fund](#), the country's main sovereign-wealth fund, raised £650m (\$829m) through its first debt sale in sterling.

The government insists its plans are unaffected by the cash crunch. But it has scaled back parts of [Neom](#), a futuristic region planned in the north-west. Consultants who work with ministries say budgets have been cut, sometimes dramatically

Securing NATO's lake



Since the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, it has been tempting to regard the Baltic Sea as a “NATO lake”. Alliance members are currently conducting their annual exercise in the Baltic, known as BALTOPS. It is the biggest demonstration of allied maritime power since the drills began 53 years ago.

Multinational task groups from 20 countries comprise more than 50 vessels, 85 aircraft and 9,000 personnel. They are honing their anti-submarine, mine-clearing and amphibious assault skills.

The scale of the exercise reflects increased fears since the invasion of Ukraine that [Russia could sabotage](#) energy and communications infrastructure lying beneath Baltic waters. Russia has turned Kaliningrad into a fortress. Since 2021 the Baltic exclave has been bristling with warships, missiles (including nuclear-capable Iskanders), fighter jets and air-defence systems.

A fiery second season of “House of the Dragon”



“Game of Thrones” once ruled television. The eight-season series, released between 2011 and 2019, won more Emmy awards than any other drama in history. But its final episode was a disappointment, receiving a rating of four out of ten on IMDb, a film and television rating site. (The series has an average rating of 9.2.) In 2022 a spin-off proved better than critics had feared. [“House of the Dragon”](#), set 200 years before the events of the original series, told a gripping tale of succession and betrayal.

Season two, which premieres on Sunday in America on HBO, is a fiery follow up. It opens on the brink of a civil war, as half-siblings Aegon and Rhaenyra Targaryen battle for the Iron Throne. A cast of formidable dragons provide plenty of pyrotechnics. Emma D’Arcy stands out for her performance as Rhaenyra, a harrowed mother and exiled ruler. The season proves that silver-haired egoists and brutal acts of revenge still make for engrossing TV.

Non-profit theatre dominates the Tony awards



What the Oscars are for Hollywood, the Tony awards are for [Broadway](#): golden trophies that confer clout and help viewers decide which tickets are worth the splurge. To qualify, plays must be staged in one of 41 designated Broadway venues; they are nominated by a 44-person committee and voted on by 836 professionals. This year's awards are announced on Sunday. Ariana Debose, an American actress, will host the ceremony.

The probable winner of the one of the two most important categories, Best Play, is “Stereophonic”, a drama about an almost-famous rock band. It has received the greatest-ever number of nominations for a play and ecstatic critical praise. Whatever happens, one group has already won: not-for-profit theatres. All five nominees for Best Play, and all those up for Best Musical, were originally produced by such organisations. Despite persistent post-pandemic money problems, they have been successful in promoting risky projects that please critics and the general public alike.

Weekend profile: Julian Nagelsmann, the Tiggerish coach of Germany's national team



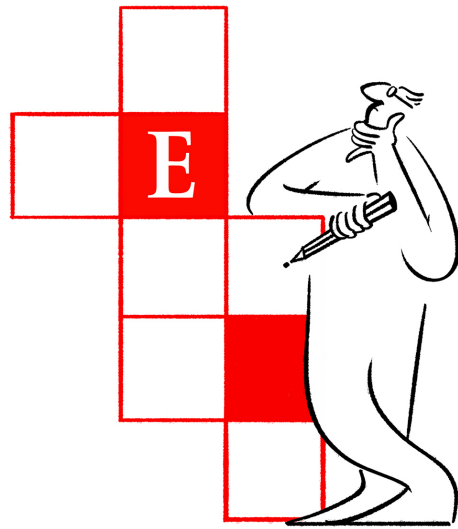
Julian Nagelsmann, the manager of the German men's national football team, has plenty of swagger. When he was coach of Bayern Munich, the country's most successful club, he once arrived at the training ground on a skateboard. On the touchline he wears bold (and rather tight-fitting) suits. In 2020 a grey, chequered number prompted jibes on social media after a match in the Champions League, Europe's premier club competition. "I wear what I like," Mr Nagelsmann retorted.

His pugnacity may stem from a sense that he has more than usual to prove. Mr Nagelsmann, who turns 37 in July, is younger than Manuel Neuer, the goalkeeper of *Die Mannschaft*, as Germany's team is known. Unlike Mr Neuer, Mr Nagelsmann has no medals to his name as a player: his career was ended at 20 by a knee injury. Mr Nagelsmann started coaching with the youth teams at 1860 Munich, the city's lesser-known second team, and Hoffenheim, from a village in Germany's south-west.

His rise was remarkable. In under six years he was managing the first team at Hoffenheim, whom he transformed from relegation candidates to Champions League qualifiers. From there he went to RB Leipzig, taking them to that competition's semi-finals for the first time. Mighty Bayern soon came calling. In 2023, less than two years into the job, the club sacked him after he failed to win the big European prize. Yet the following year *Die Mannschaft*, which had long struggled for form, identified him as the man to restore self-belief as Germany prepared to host [Euro 2024](#), which kicked off this weekend. Pundits are piling on the pressure: should his team win the tournament, it is said, it could return a sense of self-esteem not merely to football fans but also to a German public divided by political and economic woes.

This is a lot to ask of a young coach a year on from the first serious setback of his career. Yet there are reasons to be confident about Mr Nagelsmann's prospects. Coaching international football is less about developing intricate tactical systems (there is little time for that) and more about bringing the best out of a country's most talented players. To this end, Mr Nagelsmann coaxed Toni Kroos, a veteran midfielder, out of international retirement. Results have picked up since. As Germany roars on *Die Mannschaft*, the loudest supporter will be the man on the touchline.

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*:

Cryptic clues

1 down Feeling about different hospital for maternity (10)

1 across City's ambition brought about motorway (5)

2 across Tech entrepreneur companionless back at the start (4)

3 across Once untouchable surrealist painter has achievement at last (5)

Factual clues

1 down What may not carry a financial penalty, after all (10)

1 across Where Peter Navarro is currently in prison (5)

2 across Who tweeted that “the *New York Times* is pure propaganda” in March (4)

3 across Someone at the bottom of the Hindu caste system (5)

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am GMT 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.

The winners of this week's quiz



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

Kevin Conley, Espoo, Finland

Anne Hilde Hole, Horten, Norway

Kieran Scott, Birmingham, Britain

They all gave the correct answers of the Hope diamond, Al Green, Flash Gordon, paper, Switch. The theme was words ending in back: "diamondback", "greenback", "flashback", "paperback" and "switchback".

The questions were:

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?

Tuesday: Which soul singer, who later became a minister, part-wrote and recorded the hit “Let’s Stay Together”?

Wednesday: Which comic book (also TV and movie) hero battles the villain Ming the Merciless?

Thursday: What type of material was historically sold in measures such as a quire, ream or bundle?

Friday: What is the name of Nintendo’s games console?

Ras-le-bol

*the French word for being fed-up.
Read the full story.*

**Every human being is a repeated question
asked to the spirit of the Universe.**

Mihai Eminescu