

The world in brief, May 25th 2024



Hamas launched eight rockets from **Rafah**, a city in southern Gaza, towards Tel Aviv, Israel's largest city. It is the first such attack in four months. A number of the rockets were intercepted; no injuries were reported. Meanwhile Israel continued its assault on Rafah despite [an order](#) on Friday by the International Court of Justice, a UN court, to halt operations.

Michael McCaul, the chairman of the House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Committee, arrived in **Taiwan** with a group of American lawmakers two days after China conducted military exercises around the island. On Monday they will meet [William Lai Ching-te](#), Taiwan's new president, to discuss regional stability and trade. On Saturday America's State Department denounced the Chinese drills as "military provocations".

Russian aircraft bombed a home-improvement store in **Kharkiv**, a city north-eastern Ukraine, killing 16 people, according to Ukrainian officials. Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, said as many as 200 people may have been inside. He called the attack "another manifestation of Russian madness". Russia has been

trying to [capture the Kharkiv region](#) since launching a surprise attack on May 10th.

Rishi Sunak, **Britain's** prime minister, promised to bring back **national service** if the Conservative Party wins the election on July 4th. He said that serving a year in the armed forces or volunteering one weekend a month would give young people a “shared sense of purpose”. A Labour Party spokesperson called the move “desperate”. *The Economist's* [election forecast](#) suggests that the Conservatives have reasons to feel desperation.

Pakistan's counter-terrorism chief said the authorities had arrested 11 people suspected of being involved in a suicide bombing that killed five Chinese engineers and a Pakistani in March. The detainees are members of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, a Taliban-affiliated Islamist group that seeks to overthrow Pakistan's government. The TTP has repeatedly denied involvement in the attack.

The Houthis, a militant group [backed by Iran](#), released 113 prisoners they captured during their decade-long war with Yemen's government. The rebels claim that those released were captured soldiers; Yemen's government says that they are kidnapped civilians. In December both sides agreed to participate in a UN-backed mediation process, but progress stalled after the Houthis stepped up their attacks on ships in the Red Sea.

“Anora”, a drama about a sex worker who marries the son of a Russian oligarch, won the Palme d'Or, the top prize at the **Cannes film festival**. Sean Baker, its American director, dedicated the award to “all sex workers past and present”. It was presented by George Lucas, of “Star Wars” fame, who also received an honorary award.

Word of the week: *Oshikatsu*, a Japanese word that refers to particularly avid support for a celebrity. [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.

Macron's grand tour of Germany



On Sunday [Emmanuel Macron](#) embarked on the first state visit to Germany by a French president in 24 years. The three-day trip will see Mr Macron criss-cross the country, from Dresden in the east to Münster in the west. It will be a largely formal affair, full of grand dinners, prize-giving ceremonies and set-piece speeches. Mr Macron's host is Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Germany's (mainly ceremonial) president, rather than [Olaf Scholz](#), the chancellor. That may be no bad thing: the leaders of the EU's two largest countries have a [rotten relationship](#).

Still, the last day of the trip, when the two men and their ministers convene for a joint meeting near Berlin, offers some hope of political co-operation. Discussions will focus on areas of potential progress, such as joint defence projects and harmonising Europe's capital-markets rules. Messrs Macron and Scholz might also reflect on their shared political predicament: both leaders can expect a thumping in June's European elections.

A rare trilateral summit in East Asia



Chinese, Japanese and South Korean leaders gathered in Seoul on Sunday. Over the course of two days they will hold bilateral talks and their first trilateral meeting since 2019. Annual pow-wows between the three East Asian neighbours began in 2008, but were put on hold during the covid-19 pandemic. Meanwhile ties [between Japan, South Korea](#) and their mutual ally, America, strengthened, much to China's chagrin; those between China and the others frayed.

That diplomatic talks between the three countries are restarting at all may prove to be the summit's biggest achievement. The gathering could lead to action on areas of mutual interest, such as climate change and ageing populations. But progress on contentious security issues, such as the fate of Taiwan and North Korea's nuclear programme, will be more difficult. Moreover, China will be represented by its premier, Li Qiang, rather than its president and highest leader, Xi Jinping. That will surely limit the summit's prospects.

Birds soar at the Natural History Museum



Swooping in and out of landscapes and warbling from treetops, birds are not often seen up close. “Birds: Brilliant and Bizarre”, a show at the Natural History Museum in London, brings the remarkable animals into view. The exhibition reveals how birds [evolved from dinosaurs](#), got their feathers and learned to fly. It features the jawbone of a *Tyrannosaurus rex* and the oldest known fossil of a modern bird.

The show, created with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, is optimistic. It wonders how conservation efforts might help bird populations to soar. In one exhibit visitors listen to what Britain’s dawn chorus could sound like by 2050 under such a scenario: it is loud and harmonious. That vision of the future may appeal to Britons, who seem to care a great deal about birds. The RSPB has some 1.2m members, which is more than all of the country’s political parties put together.

Nadal's last dance at the French Open



No athlete has dominated a competition as [Rafael Nadal](#) has tennis's French Open. The Spaniard has won 112 of the 115 matches he has played on the famous red clay at Roland Garros in Paris. That remarkable ratio has yielded him a record 14 titles. Yet at this year's tournament, which starts on Sunday, Mr Nadal is only the seventh favourite. The 37-year-old is thought to be playing his last season. He has been beset by injuries and struggled for form in recent months.

Mr Nadal's decline has opened up the field. [Carlos Alcaraz](#), a 21-year-old Spaniard considered to be Mr Nadal's successor, is the favourite. He is closely followed by Novak Djokovic, Mr Nadal's long-time nemesis and the defending champion. The state of play looks more straightforward in the woman's draw. Iga Swiatek, the world number one and a three-time champion, is the overwhelming favourite.

Weekend profile: Mojtaba Khamenei, Iran's potential next leader



When the helicopter bearing [Ebrahim Raisi](#), Iran's president, went down in the fog in northern Iran on May 19th, Mojtaba Khamenei's hopes of reaching the top [went up](#). For at least 15 years Mr Khamenei—the second son of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei—has been working towards solidifying his role as manager of the *bayt*, or household. Commanding the several thousand-strong institution, with representatives who call the shots in every institution of state, means that he is also, in effect, his father's gatekeeper. Presidents seeking direct access to the leader found that he frustrated their path.

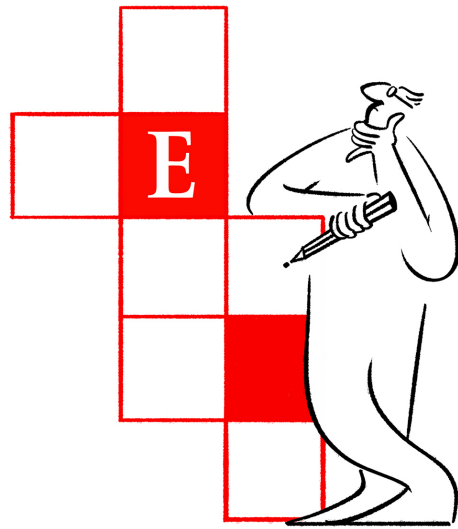
The 55-year-old largely remains in the shadows, where he has been quietly acquiring the qualifications required of a theocrat. Mr Khamenei studied in the seminaries of Qom, Iran's seat of religious learning. He sought the approval of the top clerics by teaching the course required to become a *mujtahid*, or independent legal thinker. He built an alliance with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the regime's praetorian guard. When still a teenager, he joined the Habib battalion, one of Iran's top units. As a soldier on the

frontlines during the Iran-Iraq war, he forged relationships with Iran's future intelligence and security chiefs. These friendships mean he holds powerful sway over the 88 men in the Assembly of Experts, who will select the next supreme leader. After all, he has the files on their relatives.

What he lacks is the support of his disaffected population. Many blame him for reinforcing the theocratic base that has repeatedly crushed Iran's democracy movement. He helped brutally suppress the Green Movement, which backed a reformist candidate for president in 2009, and the [women-led protests](#) against Iran's religious dress code in 2022.

But if Mr Khamanei succeeds his father as supreme leader—a likelihood that increased after the death of the ambitious Mr Raisi—his confidants believe he might still win popular favour. Some draw a parallel to Muhammad bin Salman, the young Saudi crown prince, and suggest he might lead the Islamic Republic into a programme of modernisation. Unlike Mr Raisi, who favoured Russia, he is privately said to seek better relations with the West. He reportedly joined his wife in London before the birth of his son. Iranians, says a veteran observer, might yet have another hereditary ruler and pro-Western dictator. In short: another Shah.

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.

May 25th edition

Cryptic clues

1 down Desperately, I solicit vain way of life (12)

1 across Uncle Richard disguises a holy man (6)

2 across Clown has unconscious charisma without love (5)

3 across Tech giant starts to need very intensive help changing direction (6)

Factual clues

1 down What Elon Musk reckons will collapse if birth rates keep falling (12)

1 across A particularly powerful position in Iran (6)

2 across The titular subject of a Dostoevsky novel (5)

3 across The world's leading chipmaker (6)

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:

Blakeney Lewis, Tugboat Island, British Columbia, Canada

Jane Hauffe, Champaign, Illinois, America

Jorge Ferrando, Vitacura, Chile

They all gave the correct answers of *teddy bear*, *The Devil Wears Prada*, *Lonesome Dove*, *hotel* and *Las Vegas*. The theme is Elvis Presley songs: (Let Me Be Your) Teddy Bear, (You're the) Devil in Disguise, Heartbreak Hotel and Viva Las Vegas.

The questions were:

Monday: Which stuffed toy is named after the 26th US President?

Tuesday: Meryl Streep played a fashion magazine editor in which 2006 film?

Wednesday: Which Larry McMurtry western novel won the 1986 Pulitzer prize for fiction?

Thursday: What is the term for the letter H in the NATO phonetic alphabet?

Friday: Which large US city was founded in 1905?

Oshikatsu

A Japanese word that refers to particularly avid support for a celebrity.

Read the full story.

Show frankly, as a saint would do, all your experience, your methods, tools, and means.

Ralph Waldo Emerson