

The world in brief, July 1st 2024



Polls showed the far-right National Rally party [in the lead](#) after voting finished in the first round of **France's** parliamentary election. Ipsos, a pollster, put Marine Le Pen's party on 34% of the vote, with the left-wing New Popular Front on 28.1%. The centrist bloc headed by [Emmanuel Macron](#), France's president, lagged behind with around 20%. Turnout was the highest of any first-round parliamentary election since 1997. Ms Le Pen will hope to capitalise on her party's strong showing when the final round of voting is held on July 7th.

Cyril Ramaphosa, **South Africa's** president, announced the country's new **coalition** cabinet. Six of 32 ministerial positions will go to members of the Democratic Alliance, the erstwhile opposition to Mr Ramaphosa's African National Congress (ANC). The ANC lost its parliamentary majority for the first time after elections in May, forcing it to form a ["government of national unity"](#) with other parties.

Joe Biden, **America's** president, continued to resist [calls for him to give way](#) to another candidate after a terrible performance in

Thursday's presidential debate. Over the weekend senior Democrats rushed to defend his candidacy. Hakeem Jeffries, the Democratic leader of the House of Representatives, said Mr Biden's "setback" was nothing more than the "set-up for a comeback".

Boeing reportedly agreed to buy **Spirit AeroSystems**, one of its suppliers, for more than \$4bn. The American planemaker has said that the purchase would help it improve safety in its manufacturing process. [Boeing](#) previously owned Spirit, but spun it off in 2005. According to reports, America's Justice Department is set to charge Boeing with fraud soon, over two fatal crashes.

Saudi Aramco, the [world's biggest energy company](#), awarded contracts worth \$25bn to developers to expand its natural-gas projects. The contracts include \$12.4bn to increase production at Jafurah, a vast field in Saudi Arabia, with other funds being earmarked for expanding the company's gas-delivery system. The new projects are expected to supply the desert kingdom's domestic demand for gas.

Myanmar's central bank denied allegations that it had allowed financial institutions operating in the country to finance the ruling junta's [campaign](#) against pro-democracy rebels. The UN had accused the bank of helping the junta import \$253m-worth of weapons and other military kit in the year leading up to March, despite Western sanctions. The bank dismissed the report, saying it "harms" the interests of civilians in Myanmar.

Beryl, the earliest category-four **hurricane** on record in the Atlantic Ocean, is approaching the Caribbean. America's National Hurricane Centre warned that the storm could be "life-threatening" in the Lesser Antilles, an island chain. Residents in the region were ordered to stay indoors on Sunday. Beryl has intensified into a category-four storm (the strongest being category five); [hurricanes](#) of that intensity usually form in August.

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

Hungary's moment in the spotlight



Hungary takes over the presidency of the Council of the European Union on Monday, giving Viktor Orbán a platform to spread his “national conservative” credo in Brussels. The country’s long-standing prime minister intends to use his perch to “Make Europe Great Again”, though exactly how he will do this is unclear. The presidency mainly involves chairing private meetings of European diplomats and ministers.

Mr Orbán has an axe to grind with Brussels. His disregard for the rule of law has resulted in Hungary being denied part of its share in EU funds in recent years. He thinks a more assertive alliance of conservative parties could keep the bloc’s leaders in their place. Mr Orbán’s launch of a new “Patriots for Europe” group in the European Parliament on Sunday was billed as a counterweight to the centrist parties that currently dominate European politics. Alas, none of the big parties of the hard right, such as Marine Le Pen’s National Rally or the Alternative for Germany, signed up.

A grim day in Russian-occupied Ukraine



Monday is Russia's deadline for Ukrainian citizens in [occupied territories](#) to have obtained a Russian passport. The order requires swearing an oath of loyalty and is supposedly voluntary, unlike Russia's earlier "passportisation" drives that automatically granted citizenship to large numbers of Ukrainians in seized areas. But penalties for non-compliance are stiff. Ukrainians without a Russian passport can be deported or detained.

Refuseniks face additional problems. In areas held by Russia, Ukrainians without a Russian passport report losing access to insurance, pensions, schooling and medical care. Russian authorities are seizing properties owned by Ukrainian citizens. Parents have even been told they need a Russian passport to keep their children, including newborns. Yet despite the coercion, some Ukrainians in [occupied areas](#) may well decide to keep ignoring Russia's citizenship offer. Popping up on the authorities' radar as wanting to become Russian also increases a man's chances of being sent to the front to fight Ukraine.

Inflation set to slow in Germany



On Monday Destatis, [Germany's](#) statistics agency, will release provisional figures for inflation in June. After a period of high inflation following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the consumer-price index is likely to continue its gradual decline. In February prices were 2.5% higher than they were during the same month one year earlier. In March and April, the index stood at just 2.2%. In May it edged up slightly to 2.4%, but this was considered a blip. Experts at Ifo, a research institute, forecast that the rate of inflation will be below 2% by August.

Lower inflation could help Germany's [weak economy](#) to grow faster. Combined with higher wages, lower price rises would encourage consumers to spend more. Exports could also recover. For now, though, business leaders don't see things getting much better. In June Ifo's business-confidence index weakened and figures for the purchasing managers' index were poorer than expected.

Australia's ailing armed forces



Australia is trying to buttress its defences to deter [Chinese military aggression](#), but it will struggle to do so without more soldiers. Its Labor government has therefore decided to open up the Australian armed forces to recruits from other countries. From Monday, New Zealanders living in Australia will be eligible to apply. Residents from America, Britain and Canada—all members of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance—can enlist from January 2025.

Richard Marles, Australia's defence minister, claims this will help solve a 4,400-person shortfall in the military, which numbers some 60,000 full-time personnel. As an added incentive, Australia will allow foreigners who serve three months in its armed forces to apply for citizenship. Yet other Five Eyes countries are struggling to meet their own recruitment targets. It may take more than the promise of a passport to convince young people to sign up for another country's army.

Wimbledon's growing pains



Wimbledon, the English summer's quintessential sporting event, starts on Monday. It is feeling the squeeze. The tournament has been held at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in south-west London since 1877. But it is outgrowing the club's capacity. Already it is the only one of [tennis's](#) four Grand Slam tournaments that holds its qualifying rounds elsewhere because of a lack of space.

In 2018 it struck a £65m (\$85m) deal to buy the neighbouring Wimbledon Park Golf Club. It plans to use those grounds to add an additional 38 courts and an 8,000-seat show court. The planning application has been sitting on the desk of the deputy mayor of London: a local council, on whose land the golf club is located, rejected the plan in 2023. A decision is due later this summer, after the current tournament is over.

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. We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Monday: What gift is associated with the 15th wedding anniversary?

60%

the rough proportion of Iran's electorate who withheld their vote in the country's presidential election on June 28th.

Read the full story.

**Perhaps in time the so-called Dark Ages
will be thought of as including our own.**

Georg Christoph Lichtenberg