

## The world in brief, May 27th 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. America's State Department denounced the Chinese drills as "military provocations" on Saturday.

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 took 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.

**Figure of the day:** 52%, the percentage of America's net worth owned by baby boomers, who make up only 20% of the population.

[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.*

# The small but mighty island states

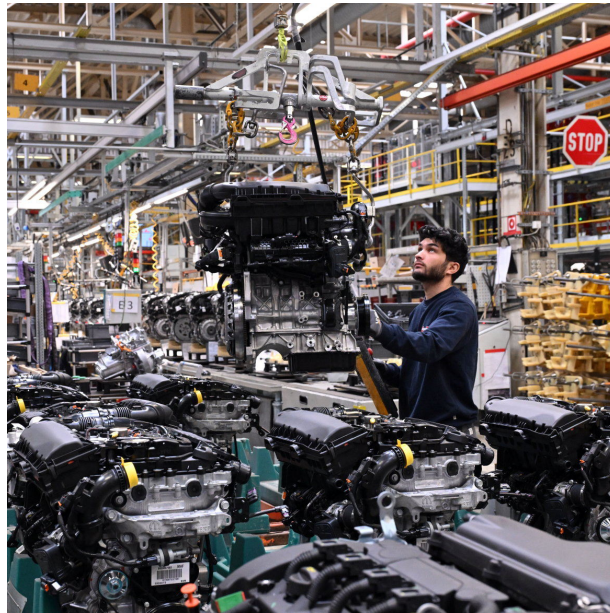


Starting on Monday, amid Antigua and Barbuda's candy-bright buildings and sandy beaches, representatives from the Small Island Developing States will spend three days mulling less idyllic matters—mostly the threats posed by climate change. It is the fourth gathering of the 39-member club since 1994.

Despite generating just 0.2% of the world's carbon emissions, SIDS are especially exposed to rising sea levels and extreme weather, and so are affected by global warming earlier and more severely than other countries. And their economies often rely on at-risk sectors like tourism and fishing. Managing the dangers they face while developing their economies is the theme of this year's summit.

As canaries in the climate-change coal mine, SIDS play an [outside role](#) in setting the agenda at international climate negotiations. Expect their discussions and decisions—especially demands for rich countries to cough up more cash—to reverberate at COP29, the UN climate conference, in Azerbaijan in November.

# Germany's industrial spirit



On Monday the Ifo Institute, a German economic think-tank, publishes its business-climate index, a monthly gauge of corporate optimism. German businesses have been under a cloud recently. The country's growth [has lagged](#) behind the rest of Europe for several years. Heavy dependence on Russian gas left Germany exposed when flows were cut off after the invasion of Ukraine. Meanwhile the manufacturing sector, famed for producing high-quality cars, faces competition from Chinese electric vehicles. And automakers worry they may be excluded from the lucrative Chinese market as Europe attempts to “decouple”.

But confidence is returning. Energy prices have fallen and the economy is picking up. Economists forecast that the business-climate index will climb to 90.3 in May, up from 89.4 in April (100 equals the average for 2015). That would be the highest reading since this time last year, when industry was ticking along nicely, working through a backlog of pandemic orders.



## Georgia forces through an illiberal law



On Monday the demonstrators who have filled the streets of Tbilisi, Georgia's capital, for weeks will have renewed cause to protest. The government plans to overturn a presidential veto of a bill, originally passed on May 14th, that would force many foreign-funded organisations to register as "bearing the interests of a foreign power". [Critics fear](#) that the law will be used to silence critical voices and undermine the country's [efforts to join the EU](#). America is already moving towards imposing travel bans on the bill's champions. The EU may follow.

If Georgia's liberals return to power after parliamentary elections in October they will probably scrap the law. But the main opposition party, the United National Movement, is distrusted by other liberal parties because of some very nasty scandals the last time it was in power, between 2004 and 2012. Salome Zourabichvili, the president, has urged Georgia's liberals to unite. They will struggle to heed her call.

# The African Development Bank annual meeting



When shareholders of the African Development Bank meet in Nairobi, Kenya on Monday there will be little time for small talk. Africa's most important development institution, which turns 60 this year, mainly invests in roads, ports and other infrastructure with the aim of reducing poverty in a region that is home to 70% of the world's extremely poor people. The bank estimates that around \$130bn-170bn is needed a year for infrastructure development on the continent.

This year African countries are facing an acute funding squeeze. Capital flows are at their lowest levels since the global financial crisis of 2007-09, according to the International Monetary Fund. [The AfDB](#) hopes to use these meetings to convince other development institutions, such as the World Bank and the IMF, to direct more resources to the continent and to back bigger projects over longer periods of time. Don't bank on them having much luck.

## Caravaggio's lost masterpiece



The picture's name fits the occasion. On May 27th “Ecce Homo”—Latin for “behold the man”—will be shown in public for the first time since Michelangelo Merisi, better known as Caravaggio, painted it four centuries ago. The painting, of Christ being paraded before his crucifixion, spent all those years in private hands, and was eventually mis-attributed to an obscure artist rather than to the Italian Baroque master.

Only in 2021, when an auction house in Madrid put the scuffed and weathered work under the hammer with a starting bid of just €1,500 (\$1,627), did the city's Prado National Museum call in experts to check its provenance. They were unanimous: this was a lost work by Caravaggio, whose paintings are prized for their rarity—barely 60 have survived—as much as for their quality. A Brit snapped “Ecce Homo” up for €36m and has loaned the now-restored painting to the Prado until October.



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

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

**52%**

*The percentage of America's net worth owned by baby boomers,  
who make up only 20% of the population.*

*Read the full story.*

**Art is the triumph over chaos.**

*John Cheever*