

The world in brief, June 8th 2024



The **Israel Defence Forces** said they had rescued four hostages from central Gaza. The hostages were kidnapped from the Nova music festival on October 7th. But the high cost of the operation in terms of casualties has been criticised. Gaza's health ministry said that at least 274 Palestinians were killed during the air and ground attack on the area from where the hostages were rescued. The EU foreign affairs chief, Josep Borrell, condemned "reports of another massacre" of civilians "in the strongest terms".

Voters in a score of European countries headed to the polls on the last day of elections for the **European Parliament**. Citizens in other EU member states have been voting since Thursday. The first provisional results will be released in the evening. Far-right parties, notably those in France, Italy and Austria, are expected to make gains. The election has been marred by several attacks on politicians and candidates, particularly in Germany.

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 the 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.

William Anders, one of the first three humans to orbit the [Moon](#), has died aged 90, in a small-plane crash in Washington state. On the Apollo 8 mission at Christmas 1968, Mr Anders took a famous photograph of the Earth rising over the lunar horizon. He later reflected on his picture’s influence: “Here we came all the way to the Moon to discover Earth.”

Word of the week: *gaokao*, China's punishingly difficult university-entrance exam. [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.*

Belgium's election: a divisive vote in a divided country



On Sunday European countries will wrap up their elections to the EU's Parliament, which began on Thursday in the Netherlands. In Belgium the EU election corresponds to a national one: voters will choose the country's federal and regional legislatures. The main ones are those of Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia.

Tensions between Flanders and Wallonia have been the main theme of [Belgian politics](#) for decades. It is not just about language. Flanders is richer and resents paying for benefits in Wallonia. Flemish politics also lean right, whereas Wallonia's lean left. Polls show that the most popular party, both in its region and in national polls, is Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest), a hard-right, anti-immigrant outfit that wants to secede from Belgium. Other parties, including the centre-right New Flemish Alliance, vow not to govern with them. But if the populists win big their resolve may weaken, and a Belgian breakup could come a step closer.

Trump goes on tour



Donald Trump, recently convicted of [34 felonies](#), is heading to Sin City. America's former president will be in Las Vegas on Sunday for his first campaign rally since a jury in New York found him guilty of falsifying records to cover up hush-money payments made to a porn star during his presidential campaign in 2016. He may endorse a Republican candidate for the Senate ahead of Nevada's primary this week.

It is no surprise that Mr Trump is jetting off to the south-west. Along with neighbouring Arizona, Nevada is one of six swing states that will decide the presidential election (and possibly which party controls the Senate). In 2020 Mr Trump lost Nevada by two points. Now polls suggest that he is nearly five points ahead of President Joe Biden. Despite Mr Trump's conviction, odds are in his favour in Nevada.

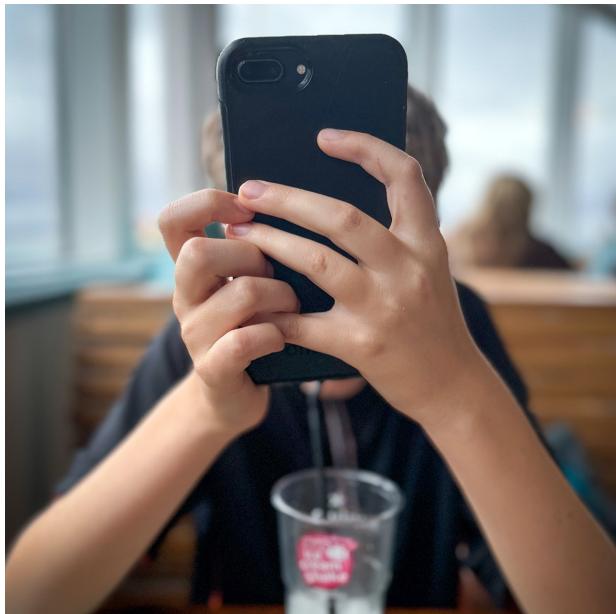
Berlin celebrates Andy Warhol



More than 20 years ago the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin hosted its first retrospective of [Andy Warhol](#) in collaboration with Tate Modern, a gallery in London. On Sunday it launches another exhibition dedicated to the pop-art icon. This show focuses on the artist's representations of (mostly male) pulchritude. Its title—"Velvet Rage and Beauty"—pays homage to "The Velvet Rage", a book by Alan Downs. Mr Downs's book is about the painful experiences of closeted gay men.

Warhol never acknowledged that he was gay. But his early drawings of male nudes, his photographs of himself in drag and his screen prints of black and Latino transgender people testify to his sympathy with marginalised subcultures. Roughly 300 works will go on display, including "Ladies and Gentlemen", a print series from 1975, and "Double Elvis", a canvas from 1963. Loans from other galleries from Germany and abroad will help to provide a comprehensive selection of his works.

How internet addiction moulds teenagers' brains



Many people worry that too much [screen time for youngsters](#) could be a bad thing. A new study sets out to examine those concerns, published in PLOS Mental Health, a journal. The authors analysed data from 12 recent studies, all of which scanned the brain activity of teenagers diagnosed with internet addiction.

The results were clear: all of the studies showed significant disruption to the neural networks of internet-addicted teens. Moreover, all of them found that this disruption directly contributes to negative tendencies that are strikingly similar to those of drug addicts. These include compulsions, cravings and lying about use. The studies had one more thing in common: all of them were conducted in Asian countries. But this is probably because Asians fret more than Westerners about internet addiction, rather than because Western teens are any less hooked.

Weekend profile: Bill Ackman, activist vs activists



Bill Ackman is not a man who shies away from a public spat. The investments the hedge-fund manager has made throughout his career follow a pattern. First he investigates, uncovering some flaw in a firm's structure or management, and takes a financial stake. He then [agitates for change, usually in public](#).

After studying at Harvard University, Mr Ackman got his start as an investor at Gotham Partners—a fund he set up with another Harvard graduate. In the early 2000s he caught the attention of Wall Street when he campaigned against MBIA, a municipal-bond insurance firm that issued credit-default swaps against mortgage-backed securities, arguing the firm had too little capital. He purchased derivatives that would pay off if the firm's creditworthiness came into doubt and shorted its stock. Both bets paid off handsomely in 2009, during the global financial crisis.

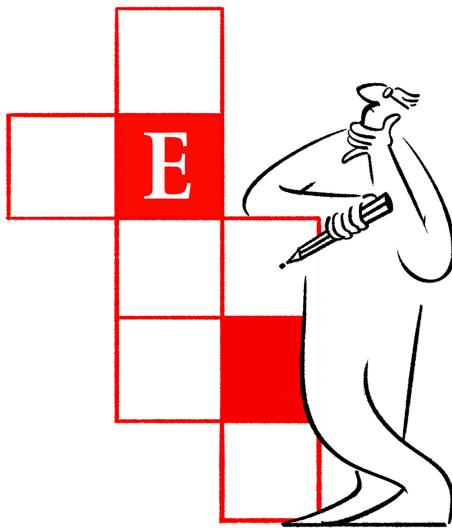
A feud with Carl Icahn, another investor, made him more famous. In 2012 Mr Ackman started a crusade against Herbalife, a supplements company. Mr Icahn admired the firm, but Mr Ackman

described its marketing strategy—recruiting customers to sell its products—as a pyramid scheme. When he and Mr Icahn appeared on television in 2013, the conversation quickly devolved into name calling. Mr Icahn called Mr Ackman a “crybaby” and a “loser”. Mr Ackman ultimately took losses on his short position in Herbalife, which is still in business.

Over the past year Mr Ackman’s crusades have focused more on Harvard than on big firms. He has taken to X (formerly Twitter) to denounce students who blamed Israel for Hamas’s bloody assault on the country on October 7th. He was a vocal critic of Claudine Gay, now the university’s former president. His campaign gained him almost half a million new followers (and probably just as many detractors). He is rumoured to be [mulling an endorsement](#) of Donald Trump, the front-runner in America’s presidential campaign.

Still, Mr Ackman’s taste for controversy appears not to have hurt his bottom line. On June 3rd Pershing Square Capital Management, his hedge fund, sold a 10% stake for \$1.1bn, valuing it at more than \$10bn, as it prepares for an IPO in 2024. His firm could be the first major hedge fund to go public in more than a decade.

Weekly crossword



Our crossword is designed for experienced cruciverbalists and newcomers alike. Both sets of clues give the same answers, all of which feature in articles in this week's edition of *The Economist*.

Email all four answers by 9am BST on Monday to crossword@economist.com, along with your home city and country. We will pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners in next week's edition.

Cryptic clues

1 down Broken Audi cars every so often go warm—they produce oil (5,6)

1 across Shut-eye is swollen on both sides with gunk (6)

2 across Record article left behind (5)

3 across Hope, naively, to hide tech firm (6)

Factual clues

1 down The world's biggest energy firm (5,6)

1 across What few chief executives claim to do in the morning (6)

2 across A musical format that is coming back into fashion (5)

3 across A company that gave up on robotics a few years ago but has now changed its mind (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:

Quentin Wittrock, Coon Rapids, Minnesota, America

Kobchai Kingchatchaval, Bangkok, Thailand

Corina Roeder, Oslo, Norway

They all gave the correct answers of Seth, John Jay, Carson City, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Conan the Barbarian. The theme was late night American talk show hosts: Seth Meyers, Jay Leno, Johnny Carson, Stephen Colbert and Conan O'Brien.

The questions were:

Monday: Cain and Abel were the first two sons of Adam and Eve in Genesis. But what was the name of the third?

Tuesday: Who was the first chief justice of America?

Wednesday: What is the capital of Nevada?

Thursday: Who, as finance minister of Louis XIV in France, proclaimed that “the art of taxation consists of so plucking the goose as to obtain the largest number of feathers with the smallest possible amount of hissing”?

Friday: Which muscular hero was created by Robert E Howard and brought to life on screen by Arnold Schwarzenegger?

gaokao

*China's punishingly difficult university-entrance exam.
Read the full story.*

**I succeeded by saying what everyone else
is thinking.**

Joan Rivers