

## The world in brief, June 1st 2024



The ruling **African National Congress** has lost its parliamentary majority in South Africa, after its worst electoral performance in the 30 years since the end of apartheid. With almost all ballots counted it has won just 40% of the votes, down from 58% at the previous election in 2019. The result has raised questions about the future of the ANC's leader, the country's president, **Cyril Ramaphosa**. To retain power, the ANC will need to find coalition partners.

As **Israel** continued its assault on Rafah, a city in southern Gaza, Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, vowed to keep fighting until Hamas is eradicated. Earlier, President Joe Biden had said that "it's time for this war to end". He said an Israeli proposal for a ceasefire had been sent to Hamas by Qatar. The terms include a six-week pause in fighting, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from populated areas of **Gaza** and the release of women and elderly Israeli hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

The seventh and final phase of voting in **India's** protracted **election** took place in a scorching heatwave. Exit polls suggest a resounding

victory for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, meaning that Narendra Modi would become only the second prime minister in the country's history to retain power for a third term. Official results will be released on June 4th.

**Russia** attacked **Ukraine's** energy grid on Friday night and Saturday morning, inflicting some of the worst damage in weeks. President Volodymyr Zelensky criticised Western leaders for their "indecision" over sending weapons to his country. Earlier Germany joined other NATO countries, including America, in approving Ukraine's use of its [weapons](#) to hit targets in Russia. Ukraine and Russia also swapped 75 [prisoners of war](#), the first such exchange in nearly four months, in a deal brokered by the United Arab Emirates.

Lloyd Austin, the **American** defence secretary, has said that war with **China** is neither imminent nor unavoidable. He was speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, an annual regional security powwow, where he met his Chinese counterpart, Dong Jun. That signalled some easing of tensions, but no progress was reported on differences over Taiwan and China's territorial claims in the South China Sea.

**Donald Trump** vowed to keep fighting following his [criminal conviction](#) and called the judge presiding over his case "crooked" and a "devil". His campaign said it had raised \$52.8m in donations in the hours after the verdict—and that nearly 30% of online donors were new. Mr Trump was found guilty on all 34 counts of falsifying business records to hide hush-money payments to a former porn star before the election in 2016. He said he will lodge an appeal.

**Venice** limited the size of tour groups in its historic quarter to 25, and banned the use of loud-speakers. The city, which receives an estimated 30m visitors each year, introduced a €5 (\$5.40) tourist

tax earlier this year, in an attempt to combat over-tourism. In 2021 it banned cruise ships from docking in the city centre.

**Word of the week:** *Magicicada*, the Latin word for periodical cicadas. Two broods are emerging simultaneously in America for the first time since 1803. [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.*

## Mexicans go to the polls



Nearly 100m Mexicans will vote in history-making elections on Sunday. More than 20,000 posts are up for grabs—more than ever before—and [the presidency](#) will go to a woman for the first time. Claudia Sheinbaum of Morena, the ruling party, has a large lead in the polls over Xóchitl Gálvez, her closest rival, who heads a coalition of traditional parties. Morena is likely to win a simple majority in congress, along with several of the nine governorships for which Mexicans will also cast their votes.

Much is at stake. Mexico's poverty rates have fallen under Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the current president and Ms Sheinbaum's mentor, but almost everything else has suffered. His policies have caused violence to spread—marring even the election—and he has attacked Mexico's democratic institutions. The country also needs to do more to stem the flow of drugs and migrants across its borders. It is unclear whether Ms Sheinbaum will distance herself from his policies or not.

# A legal battle over Israel's military service



On Sunday Israel's Supreme Court will hear a case demanding that [national service](#) be extended to young men from the Jewish ultra-Orthodox—or *Haredi*—community. For decades they have been exempt from compulsory military service. The court, however, recently ruled that the exemption is unconstitutional. But Israel's government has been reluctant to change its stance.

That is partly because *Haredi* leaders are strongly opposed to the idea. The parties representing them in Israel's parliament are a key element in the coalition led by Binyamin Netanyahu, the prime minister. He wants to avoid upsetting them and has been working on legislation to restore the exemption.

Such a law would be unpopular with the general public, especially during wartime. It also has opponents within the government, including the defence minister. In court, Mr Netanyahu's representatives will request more time to pass a law. If the judges are not convinced and the draft orders are issued, religious parties may quit the government, leaving Mr Netanyahu without a majority.



# China returns to the far side of the Moon



On Sunday a [Chinese lander](#) is set to touch down in a lunar basin called Apollo, where it will gather rock samples to be returned to Earth. It is a small but ambitious step in a lunar-exploration programme which has put more landers on the Moon than any since the 1970s. *Chang'e 6* will be the fourth overall, and the second to visit the Moon's far side, something no other country's spacecraft have ever done.

To send messages back from a part of the Moon hidden from Earthly eyes, the mission uses a communications satellite launched earlier this year, *Queqiao-2*, which will also serve as a relay for future missions. The next of these, *Chang'e 7*, slated for launch in 2026, is meant to land close to the Moon's south pole. The area is the planned destination for both the Artemis missions intended to return Americans to the Moon later this decade and for the manned mission which China has said it will launch by 2030.

# Cricket goes to America



Hosting the FIFA World Cup in 1994 helped to revitalise America's interest in football. Thirty years on, its domestic leagues are thriving and its men's team ranks just outside the top ten. The International Cricket Council hopes that as co-host of the men's T20 World Cup, which starts on Sunday, America will now [fall in love with cricket](#).

The event's organisers are taking a bold gamble. America has just one facility certified by the ICC; India versus Pakistan, the biggest match of them all, will be played at a temporary ground in Long Island. Nonetheless, the sport seems to be [gaining popularity](#). A well-funded domestic T20 tournament, Major League Cricket, had a successful debut season in 2023 and is soon to add more teams. Generous contracts are luring players from England and Australia. Cricket will return to America at the Olympic games in 2028. It has a way to go to catch soccer, but the ICC's enthusiasm is already paying off.

# Keir Starmer, Britain's likely next prime minister



If the polls prove right at the [British general election](#) on July 4th, [Sir Keir Starmer](#) will have a strong claim to be one of Britain's more accidental prime ministers.

The Labour leader came to politics late, entering parliament in 2015 at the age of 52. At the time his ambition appeared limited. A successful career in law, which culminated with Sir Keir becoming the director of public prosecution in England and Wales, stood him in good stead to become attorney-general, the government's top legal adviser.

This plan went awry when Labour lost the general election in 2019. But the party's misfortune was Sir Keir's opportunity. While other MPs had blanched at serving under Jeremy Corbyn, the party's left-wing leader, Sir Keir did so with reluctant loyalty. When Mr Corbyn stepped down, Sir Keir was perfectly placed to succeed him. In barely five years Sir Keir went from newbie MP to opposition leader, to take on the task of making the party electable after four consecutive election defeats.



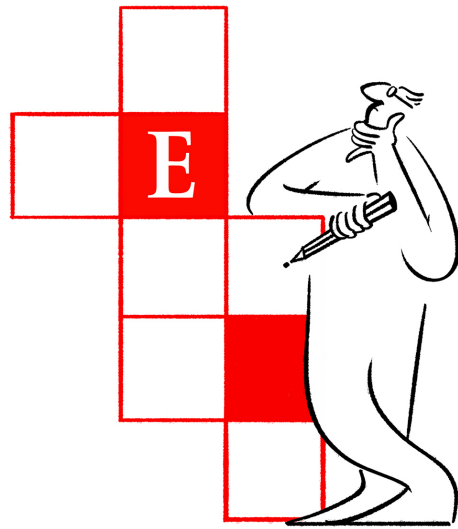
Sir Keir's [tenure](#) has been marked by a mix of cynicism and brutality. He won the leadership promising left-wing policies and competence. Once in power, he ditched his pledges and overhauled the party machinery, removing left-wingers and replacing them with people loyal to him and his team.

The party Sir Keir leads is [a different beast](#) to the one he inherited. In 2020 he suspended Mr Corbyn for playing down allegations of antisemitism in the party. Several left-wing candidates have been banned from standing in the election.

Sir Keir reached the brink of power far quicker than anyone expected. Labour's cautious programme of moderate tax increases—on private schools, for example—coupled with flag-hugging to burnish the party's patriotic credentials has reassured voters, if not inspired them.

Still, it is [the Conservative Party's collapse](#) that will probably land Sir Keir in Downing Street. The tragicomic incompetence of [Boris Johnson](#), a former prime minister, coupled with a debt crisis brought about by the policies of his successor, [Liz Truss](#), sealed the Tories' electoral fate. Cynicism and brutality are nothing without a large dose of luck.

# 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](mailto: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 Generation destroyed Bombay sober (4-7)

1 across *Animal*, without right, is bust (6)

2 across State's mineral deposit not entirely gone (6)

3 across Some use a songbook to add salt and pepper (6)

## Factual clues

1 down Who, as a group, are loaded yet stingy (4-7)

1 across What the World Health Organisation preaches is “best” (6)

2 across An American state with rent- control laws for existing tenants (6)

3 across What is about to start in America for hurricanes (6)

## The winners of this week's quiz



### 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:

**Maureen Evans**, Vernon, Canada

**Thomas Bergt**, Munich, Germany

**Sonia Lacombe**, Singapore

They all gave the correct answers of the Venerable Bede, Daniel, John Stuart Mill, Felix Baumgartner and Chris Evans. The theme was the author George Eliot, who wrote the novels Adam Bede, Daniel Deronda, The Mill on the Floss and Felix Holt, the Radical and whose real name was Mary Ann Evans

The questions were:

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

**Tuesday:** Which Old Testament book features Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?

**Wednesday:** Which 19th century philosopher wrote “On Liberty”?

**Thursday:** Who set the then world record for the highest skydive in 2012, becoming the first person to break the sound barrier without vehicular power?

**Friday:** Which actor has played both the Human Torch and Captain America on film?



# Magiccicada

*the Latin word for periodical cicadas. Two broods are emerging simultaneously in America for the first time since 1803.*

*Read the full story.*

**Time and memory are true artists; they remould reality nearer to the heart's desire.**

*John Dewey*