

The world in brief, June 19th 2024



America approved the sale of [drones and missiles to Taiwan](#) for around \$360m. The sale includes loitering munitions such as the 720 Switchblade, which hovers near its target before attacking, and other weapons systems. Taiwan's president, **William Lai Ching-te**, thanked America for approving the deal. Since his inauguration in May, China has increased its military activities near the self-governing territory.

Cyril Ramaphosa, **South Africa's** president and the leader of the [African National Congress](#), was sworn in for another term after forming a power-sharing alliance with the Democratic Alliance, a centrist party. Mr Ramaphosa led the ANC to a bruising election result last month, when the party lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since the end of apartheid in 1994.

Sergeant Gordon Black, a serving **American** soldier, was sentenced to nearly four years in prison in **Russia**. Sgt. Black is accused of stealing money from his Russian girlfriend and threatening to murder her while staying in [Vladivostok](#), a city in

Siberia. Prosecutions for domestic violence, which was partially decriminalised in 2017, are rare in Russia.

Explosions at a munitions depot in **Chad** killed at least nine people and injured dozens of others, according to the country's health minister. Both soldiers and civilians are reported to have died. Chad's president, [Mahamat Idriss Déby](#), travelled to the site of the explosion and visited the wounded in hospital. He ordered an investigation "to determine the cause of events".

Sara Duterte, the vice-president of the **Philippines**, resigned from her posts as education minister and vice-chair of an anti-insurgency taskforce. The daughter of Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippines's former president, Ms Duterte is a key figure in one of [the country's two main political families](#). Her resignation is a sign that a shaky alliance with the president, Ferdinand Marcos, is breaking down.

Britain's annual **inflation** rate fell to 2% in May, down from 2.3% in April, reaching the Bank of England's target for the first time in three years. The core inflation rate, which strips out food and energy, fell to 3.5% in May, down from 3.9% in April. The [news](#) will buoy the struggling election campaign of Rishi Sunak, the prime minister.

Two climate protesters were arrested for spraying **Stonehenge**, an ancient monument in the south of England, with orange paint. Just Stop Oil, a campaign group, said that the paint was cornflour-based and would wash away. Visitors to the UNESCO world heritage site were aghast; some tried to intercede. Rishi Sunak, the prime minister, weighed in despite [his busy election schedule](#), calling it a "disgraceful act of vandalism".

Figure of the day: 400m, the number of Africans who get electricity from solar home systems. [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 SNP feels the heat



The [Scottish National Party](#) launched its general-election manifesto on Wednesday in Edinburgh. In 2019 the party won 45% of Scotland's vote and 48 of the nation's 59 seats in the British Parliament in Westminster. It is likely to lose many of those. *The Economist's* [poll tracker](#) suggests that the SNP is seven points behind the Scottish Labour Party.

That would be a severe blow to the separatist SNP, which has dominated Scottish politics for nearly two decades. To recover ground, it is trying to show that it is more Labour than Labour. Ahead of the launch, it said it would publish "the only left-wing manifesto of the campaign". The manifesto promises to end "Westminster austerity" and accuses Labour of supporting Brexit and the privatisation of the NHS. If Labour wins the election, its desire to contain Scottish separatism will be one factor that keeps it close to the left.

Failing to deliver



The [food-delivery business](#) is in a rut. The four biggest standalone, publicly-listed delivery firms in the West—Deliveroo, Delivery Hero, DoorDash and Just Eat—never made much money. But their sales soared during the pandemic, when many people were stuck at home and flush with cash. Then, as inflation rose and consumers reined in their spending, the firms' earnings slowed. Analysis by the *Financial Times* and theDelivery.World, an industry analyst, found that the four firms' combined losses since 2017 are \$20.3bn.

The industry's woes are likely to dominate discussions at Delivery Hero's annual meeting on Wednesday. The Frankfurt-listed firm is starting to slim down: it recently sold the Taiwanese arm of its struggling Asian delivery business, foodpanda, and a stake in Deliveroo. That may improve its profitability for a while. But the food-delivery business still has big problems, including high advertising costs and ever-tighter regulation. Delivery Hero's investors will hope to hear what more can be done to turn things around.

Women's role in the slave trade



On Wednesday Americans commemorate [Juneteenth](#) (a portmanteau of “June” and “19th”). The country’s newest federal holiday marks the day when news of emancipation reached slaves in Galveston, Texas—more than two years after Abraham Lincoln decreed it.

The South’s “peculiar institution” remains a rich source of study for historians, who long agreed that slavery was largely the business of men. [Research published last month](#) shatters that narrative. Economists at Ohio State University found that women were buyers or sellers in 30% of all transactions at the slave market in New Orleans, and 38% of those that involved female slaves.

Women were required by law to relinquish property and money to men when they married, but exceptions were made for slaves. Women put slaves to work selling cakes or dresses, and pocketed the profits in secret. White Southern women were not shielded from the slave trade’s horrors, nor were they oblivious to the ways they could profit from it.

Lula's economic choices



On Wednesday Brazil's central bank will decide whether to alter its key interest rate, currently 10.5%. Economists expect policymakers to hold steady, ending a series of cuts dating back to last summer. The pause would reflect concerns over inflation, which hit an annual rate of 3.9% in May. The economy grew by a surprisingly robust 0.8% in the first quarter, also discouraging a cut.

Since the central bank's last meeting the real, Brazil's currency, has slipped to its lowest against the dollar since January 2023. Markets lost confidence in April after the government said it could not meet its budget-surplus target. [President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva](#) called a meeting last Monday to consider cutting government spending. Yet he may not be willing to do so. His Workers' Party undertook a spending spree which in 2014-16 resulted in Brazil's deepest recession. Before Monday's meeting, he quipped: "What many people think is spending, I think is an investment."

The faces of Henry VIII's queens



The rhyme is familiar: “Divorced, beheaded, died; divorced, beheaded, survived”. Every British schoolchild knows that it refers to Henry VIII’s six wives. In the 1860s crowds gathered to see their waxen forms in Madame Tussauds in London. Today performances of “SIX”, a musical that brings the [Tudor women](#) together as a girl band, sell out around the world.

In each new age the queens are re-imagined. An exhibition opening this week at the National Portrait Gallery in London assembles more than 140 works to explore their “agency, influence and cultural impact both in life and afterlife”. From demure 16th-century portraits to the glitzy mini-skirts of “SIX”, the images reflect changing views about women. The show searches for the real queens among their many representations. Some are impossible to find: portraits of Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, who were accused of treason and beheaded, have been difficult to identify since the 17th century.

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

Wednesday: Which central American country was the first in the world to adopt bitcoin as legal tender?

Tuesday: The terms streaky, back and short cut are associated with what type of meat?

400m

The number of Africans who get electricity from solar home systems.

Read the full story.

The greatest ideas are the simplest.

William Golding