

The world in brief, June 27th 2024



America's **Supreme Court** released several opinions, including one—which in effect [allows emergency abortions](#) to proceed in Idaho—that it accidentally posted online on Wednesday. It also blocked a [bankruptcy settlement](#) resolving claims against **Purdue Pharma**, an opioid-maker. The deal would have granted the firm's owner, [the Sackler family](#), immunity from civil liability for their role in the opioid crisis in exchange for up to \$6bn paid out to claimants. The court also blocked America's [environmental regulator](#) from enforcing a rule that would limit **air pollution** from power plants and factories while legal challenges play out in lower courts.

America's National Transportation Safety Board imposed sanctions on **Boeing**, the world's second-biggest [manufacturer of aeroplanes](#), for sharing with the media details of its investigation into a Boeing 737 Max door panel that blew out mid-air in January. Boeing is facing questions over safety after a number of accidents. In 2019 a 737 Max crashed near Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, killing all 157 people on board.

China's Communist Party expelled two former defence ministers who were accused of corruption. It is the first time that China has confirmed that [Li Shangfu](#), who disappeared from public for two months last year before being ousted in October, was under investigation. The [Third Plenum](#), a meeting of the Party's central committee, will confirm the removal of the two ministers and other disgraced officials next month.

North Korea said that it had successfully tested a rocket capable of carrying multiple warheads, which could overwhelm [missile defences](#). South Korean military officials dismissed the claim as “deception and exaggeration” and said that a test missile exploded in mid-air. [South Korea](#), Japan and America began co-ordinated military drills near the south of the Korean peninsula this week.

Alexander Bastrykin, who leads **Russia's** federal investigations, said that the country has sent more than 10,000 newly naturalised citizens to “dig trenches and build fortifications” in Ukraine. They were among some 30,000 new citizens who had been caught [dodging military service](#). Mr Bastrykin previously suggested that new citizens who refuse to join the army could have their citizenship revoked.

Taiwan told its citizens not to travel to China unless absolutely necessary. Last week China's government threatened to execute “diehard” supporters of Taiwanese independence in extreme cases. Tensions between the two countries have escalated since [William Lai Ching-te](#), whom China views as a “separatist”, was elected as Taiwan's president in January.

Police in the **Maldives** arrested Fathimath Shamnaz Ali Saleem, the country's environment minister. Local media reported that she was accused of using “black magic” against [Mohamed Muizzu](#), the president, who won a landslide election victory in April. Sorcery can carry a six-month jail sentence in the Maldives, according to

Islamic law. Traditional forms of magic are widely practised in the island nation.

Figure of the day: 465, the number of seats that the Labour Party is projected to win in Britain's election, according to *The Economist's* statistical analysis. [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.

America's high-stakes presidential debate



Conventional wisdom holds that presidential debates do not much influence elections. And yet they present as high-wire acts, live tests of poise and agility in which the next step might prove fatal to a campaign. Tensions are running high before [Thursday night's contest](#) between President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump, their first of the election season.

Mr Biden wants to [shake up a race](#) that has been stuck in the polls for months, with his challenger slightly ahead. Both men are given to rambling, but Democrats are particularly anxious that age [may have slowed](#) their champion. In 2020 polls suggested Mr Trump lost both debates, partly by playing the bully and endlessly interrupting. “Will you shut up, man?” Mr Biden expostulated in what, sadly, passed for the most memorable moment. [New rules](#) are meant to prevent interruptions. Whether that will favour Mr Biden or protect Mr Trump from himself is among the many questions to be answered on the night.

The world's most liveable city



On Thursday *The Economist's* sister company, the EIU, publishes its [Global Liveability Index 2024](#). It [ranks 173 cities](#) on factors such as stability, health care, culture, environment, education and infrastructure.

Unsurprisingly, cities in countries at war performed poorly: Tel Aviv, on Israel's coast, was the biggest decliner this year. Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, remained among the bottom ten. Housing was another important factor: shortages in Sydney and Melbourne, Asia's most liveable cities, pulled them down the ranking. Toronto, Canada's biggest city, is no longer in the world's top ten for the same reason.

Vienna tops the index for the third consecutive year. The regions with the biggest improvements in scores included Eastern Europe, the Middle East and north Africa. Oil-rich Gulf states have invested in health care and education in cities such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Riyadh. Overall, cities in the developing world became slightly more liveable and those in rich countries a bit less so.

Frustration for Meloni in Brussels



Giorgia Meloni will be among the leaders who meet in Brussels on Thursday for a European Council summit. They will decide who will fill the [EU's top jobs](#). This month's European elections were positive for Italy's prime minister. Her hard-right Brothers of Italy party secured its best-ever result. The bloc that it dominates in the European Parliament, the European Conservatives and Reformists, now has more seats than the liberals.

Yet she was shut out of talks in which liberal, socialist and centre-right leaders reportedly clinched a deal to share out the top jobs between their groupings. On Wednesday she railed against her exclusion in a speech to parliament. The agreement looks set to give Ursula von der Leyen another term as president of the European Commission. Ms Meloni may be able to show her anger by tripping up Mrs von der Leyen in the European Parliament, which can veto the council's choice. Mrs von der Leyen [may need the ECR's votes](#) to keep her job.

Europe's faltering economic recovery



Over the past couple of months, economic and consumer sentiment in [Europe](#) improved a bit. That was a relief for the European Central Bank, which hopes that inflation will come down from the highs of 2022 without an economic downturn. The latest EU economic and consumer-sentiment data, published on Thursday, shows that the danger is not over.

Consumer-sentiment is the bright spot: households are becoming more confident. But it may not be enough to give the economy the boost for which economists—and politicians—hope, in part because employment expectations of firms declined further. Overall, the mood among businesses is darkening. Earlier this month, the purchasing-managers' index showed a decline in new orders. Inflation rose a bit in May, which means interest rates are unlikely to come down soon. [Europe's economic recovery](#) may be over before it really began.

A riotous and fantastical Tudor romp



Lady Jane Grey ruled England for nine days in 1553 after the death of King Edward VI. Mary Tudor, Edward's half-sister, overthrew her and had her beheaded. She was just 16. [History books](#) often describe Lady Jane as a pawn, manipulated by the Tudor nobility and her malevolent mother, Frances. The teenager was so timid, the story goes, that she fainted when she found out she was queen.

“My Lady Jane”, released on Prime Video on Thursday, rewrites her story. Based on a series of young-adult novels, the costume drama depicts Lady Jane as daring and brainy. Like “SIX”, a hit musical about Henry VIII's wives, it is part of a trend for reimagining historical episodes in which women met unpleasant ends. It is a riotous (and often risqué) comedy. Yet its fantastical plot twists are sometimes jarring; one centres on humans who shape-shift into animals. Some reimaginings of history work better than others.

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.

Thursday: Which film by Martin Scorsese from 2016 concerns two Jesuit priests who travel from Portugal to Japan to spread Christianity?

Wednesday: Which rapper and country music artist was briefly married to Pamela Anderson?

The number of seats that the Labour Party is projected to win in Britain's election, according to The Economist's statistical analysis
Read the full story.

**Only against death does man cry out in
vain.**

Malcolm Lowry