

The world in brief, June 27th 2024



The leader of an [apparent coup attempt](#) in **Bolivia** was arrested. General Juan José Zúñiga said the army was trying to install “a true democracy.” After confronting army putschists who had entered the presidential palace, President Luis Arce appointed a new military leadership and called for pro-democracy demonstrators to mobilise. Bolivia has been paralysed by a power struggle between Mr Arce and Evo Morales, a fellow leftist who has helped tank the country’s economy.

Rishi Sunak and **Keir Starmer** clashed in the final head-to-head leaders’ debate before Britain’s general election on July 4th. They tussled over the [Westminster betting scandal](#), immigration and Brexit. Mr Starmer, leader of the Labour Party, accused Mr Sunak, the Conservative prime minister, of being “out of touch” with voters. [Our final prediction](#) for the election points to a Tory wipeout.

America’s **Supreme Court** accidentally posted an opinion on **abortion** rights online, then took it down. It suggested that the justices did not intend to overturn an injunction to Idaho’s near-

total abortion ban issued by a district court, and would return the case to the lower courts. A spokesperson for the Supreme Court said its final decision had “not been released” and that the opinion was “inadvertently” published.

Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, the **Philippines’** president, said that while a recent incident in the **South China Sea** was not an “armed attack” by China, his country needed to “do more” than protest about it. On June 17th a Filipino sailor was injured after the Chinese Coast Guard reportedly [rammed his ship](#). China claims nearly the entire sea as its territory, including bits that South-East Asian countries consider theirs.

The **yen** fell to more than ¥160 against the dollar, its weakest level in almost 40 years. Despite the finance ministry intervening to the tune of billions of dollars, the currency has been falling because of the gulf in interest rates between Japan and America. Relief is not imminent: [in March](#) the Bank of Japan raised rates by only a smidgen.

Amazon’s market capitalisation reached \$2trn for the first time, after its share price rose by more than 3% during trading on Wednesday. The valuation reflects investor excitement over [artificial intelligence](#). Apple, Microsoft and Nvidia have already passed the \$3trn mark—and are all battling to be the world’s most valuable company.

Juan Orlando Hernández, the former president of [Honduras](#), was sentenced to 45 years in prison by a judge in New York. In March Mr Hernández was convicted on charges related to drug-trafficking. Prosecutors said he accepted millions of dollars in bribes from cartels smuggling cocaine into America. Mr Hernández, who plans to appeal against the verdict, must also pay a \$8m fine.

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 slightly. 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. Still, EU economic and consumer-sentiment data, published on Thursday, will probably show that the danger is not over.

Flash consumer-sentiment figures released last week showed that households are becoming more confident. That is a start. But consumer optimism remains below the historical average. It may not be enough to give the economy the boost for which economists—and politicians—hope. Moreover, the mood among businesses is darkening. The purchasing-managers' index for June showed a decline in sentiment and 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