

The world in brief, July 3rd 2024



President Joe Biden faced renewed pressure to withdraw from America's presidential race as several members of his **Democratic Party** voiced concerns about his re-election prospects. Lloyd Doggett, from Texas, became the first Democratic lawmaker to publicly urge Mr Biden to [step down](#) as the party's nominee following his performance in last week's debate. Nancy Pelosi, the former House speaker, said it was "legitimate" to ask questions about the president's abilities, while J.B. Pritzker, the governor of Illinois, said that Mr Biden "needs to communicate more" after his "bad debate". Mr Biden blamed jet lag for his disastrous performance in the debate, telling reporters that he "nearly fell asleep on stage".

A representative from **Apple** will reportedly take an observer role on the board of **OpenAI** later this year. According to Bloomberg, the role is part of a deal between the two companies announced last month. The agreement also allows OpenAI's [flagship product](#), ChatGPT, to be integrated into Apple devices. Microsoft secured a similar non-voting position on OpenAI's board last year.

Jeff Bezos, who stepped down as the boss of [Amazon](#) in 2021, set out plans to sell \$4.9bn-worth of shares in the company. The online retailer's share price has risen by a third this year, as investors hoped that artificial intelligence would help it grow. Mr Bezos, who now serves as Amazon's executive chair, will still hold around 8.8% of the company's shares by value.

Mel Stride became the first Conservative cabinet minister to concede that **Britain** is probably on course for "the largest Labour landslide majority" in history. Labour's campaign chief, Pat McFadden, said it was "disrespectful" to "call the outcome of the election before people have gone to the polls". As the campaign entered its final day, *The Economist's* [forecast model](#) predicted that Labour is likely to win 432 out of 632 seats in parliament.

Local media reported that **Egypt's** prime minister, Mostafa Madbouly, was set to replace some of the most senior figures in his cabinet, including the finance minister and head of the foreign ministry. The country's president, Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, said that the new government should focus on attracting investment and lowering inflation. Egypt is trapped in an [economic quagmire](#) after a decade of debt-fuelled spending.

South-East Asia's first **electric-vehicle** battery plant opened in **Indonesia**. The factory was launched by Hyundai, a carmaker, and LG Energy Solution, a battery company. Joko Widodo, Indonesia's president, said his country is becoming "an important global player" in the EV [supply chain](#). The country is home to the world's largest reserves of nickel, a critical component in EV batteries.

Religious authorities in **Dagestan**, a Muslim-majority republic in [southern Russia](#), announced a temporary ban on the niqab, less than two weeks after a deadly terror attack on synagogues and churches in the region. The ruling prohibits women from wearing the veil on security grounds. Local media reported that one of the gunmen had planned to evade capture by disguising himself in the niqab.

Figure of the day: 42%, Amazon's share of American e-commerce, far larger than the 6% captured by Walmart, its nearest online competitor. [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.

Xi and Putin meet in Central Asia



On Wednesday the leaders of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation hold a summit in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. China, Russia and several Central Asian countries founded the SCO in 2001 to discuss security and economic matters, with a focus on fighting terrorism. But it has since expanded. Its members, made up of non- or anti-Western powers, now account for over 40% of the world's population and a quarter of its GDP. India joined in 2017. Iran did so last year, and Belarus is about to.

SCO summits rarely see substantial decisions. But Xi Jinping, China's leader, and Vladimir Putin, his Russian counterpart, can use the meetings to showcase their [counter-offer](#) to a Western-led world order. Mr Putin will probably blame America and its allies for the war in Ukraine. And Mr Xi will no doubt talk up the [Belt and Road](#) Initiative, his global infrastructure program. Astana's own light rail system is being built by Chinese engineers with Chinese equipment.

Indian mobile operators eye greater revenues



This year India's [Jio](#) became the world's biggest mobile operator in terms of data use. The firm's 108m customers consumed 40.9 exabytes (roughly 44bn gigabytes) between January and March. The gorging was driven by cheap tariffs, which have helped Jio become India's market leader. The policy has also forced others to slash rates, making Indian data prices among the lowest in the world. The average cost of 1GB of data in India is just \$0.16, compared with \$0.38 in China or \$6 in America.

But the era of dirt-cheap data may soon be ending. On Wednesday Jio increased tariffs by around 20%, as did [Airtel](#), its biggest competitor. Indian operators are hoping to boost revenues after collectively splurging more than \$20bn over the past year or so to expand their 5G networks. Investors are pleased. The announcements caused shares in Reliance Industries, Jio's parent company, and Airtel to jump.

Cambodia's loot returned



“The biggest art theft in history” happened in Cambodia, claims Brad Gordon, a lawyer helping the country reclaim stolen statues. Looters hacked stone gods from temples as civil wars raged between the 1970s and 1990s. But now [several artworks](#) are being handed back. The latest delivery of 14 artefacts arrived from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York on Wednesday.

The Met says this completes the removal of all of its Angkorian sculptures known to be associated with Douglas Latchford, a British art dealer who was indicted in America in 2019 for trafficking Cambodian relics. Even so, Cambodia alleges the Met has more of its alleged loot.

Many countries want to repatriate their stolen antiquities, but Cambodia stands out among its bigger neighbours for its success. An energetic, media-savvy local restitution team helps. So do several different American [agencies](#), such as the FBI, which help to track down stolen statues. Cambodia says it has brought home 800 artefacts in the past two decades.

Politics with a twist in Northern Ireland



On Wednesday, on the eve of Britain's general election, political attention in Northern Ireland will turn elsewhere, if just for a day. [Sir Jeffrey Donaldson](#) (pictured, left) appeared in court on 18 sex charges, including rape, to decide if the case should go to a higher court. Until five weeks ago he was an MP; until three months ago, he was leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, Northern Ireland's main pro-British party.

Sir Jeffrey's trial will not help the DUP, already down by almost a third in the polls since the last general election in 2019. Sinn Féin, which wants a united Ireland (and whose MPs don't take their Westminster seats), could become the biggest party after Thursday's vote. But that will depend on the fortunes of the Alliance Party, which does not align itself as being either pro-British or for a united Ireland. Polls suggest it could win three seats for the first time in its 54-year history, including unseating Sir Jeffrey's successor as DUP leader, Gavin Robinson.

The Minions' dominion: “Despicable Me 4”



“Despicable Me”, released in 2010, is an animated movie about a supervillain (voiced by Steve Carell) who becomes a devoted adoptive father with the help of his yellow, pill-shaped, gobbledygook-spouting henchmen, the Minions. It isn’t as ingenious or as expensive as the average Disney or Pixar production, but the “Despicable Me” series is now the highest grossing animated film franchise in history. So far it has boasted two spin-off Minions prequels and three sequels.

The latest instalment, “Despicable Me 4”, released on Wednesday in America, does not have a plot so much as a collection of wacky vignettes. It certainly won’t win an Oscar—only one film in the franchise, “Despicable Me 2”, has even been nominated. But maybe the anarchic silliness is the secret of the series’ appeal. Most of Disney and Pixar’s cartoons are so earnest that the Minions’ endless flatulence jokes can seem like a breath of fresh air.

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 BST on **Friday** to QuizEspresso@economist.com. We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

Wednesday: What ancient time-telling device only worked in the daytime?

Tuesday: Which comic book character is the archenemy of the Fantastic Four?

42%

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[Read the full article.](#)*

Music inflames temperament

Jim Morrison