

## The world in brief, June 26th 2024



**Julian Assange** pleaded guilty on the American Pacific island of Saipan to a single charge of espionage, before heading to his native Australia a free man. The plea fulfilled his side of a deal with America, and brought to an end [a saga](#) that began in 2010, when Mr Assange's WikiLeaks website published a trove of hacked emails relating to America's war in Iraq. He had spent the past five years in a British jail fighting extradition.

William Ruto, **Kenya's** president, said he would deploy the army to quell protests across the country. On Tuesday police reportedly killed five protesters and injured scores more outside Kenya's parliament in Nairobi. Earlier parliament passed a controversial finance bill, which aims to raise more than \$2bn from taxes. Protesters called on [Mr Ruto](#) to resign; he described the demonstrations as "treasonous".

**Evan Gershkovich**, an American journalist, briefly appeared in court in **Russia** as his trial for espionage began. He and the American government deny the charges. If convicted, Mr Gershkovich could face a sentence of up to 20 years. He was

detained while reporting for the *Wall Street Journal* in March 2023. Vladimir Putin, Russia's leader, has said he is open to a prisoner swap involving Mr Gershkovich.

[Jamaal Bowman](#), a left-wing Democrat in the **House of Representatives**, lost his primary race in New York's 16th congressional district. He was defeated by George Latimer, whose campaign had the support of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, a pro-Israel group that donated \$14.5m. The result highlights the party's divisions over the war in **Gaza**.

**Volkswagen**, a German carmaker, said it would invest up to \$5bn in **Rivian**, an American electric-vehicle firm. The investment will fund a joint venture between the companies and give Volkswagen access to Rivian's EV technology. It is welcome news for Rivian—like several [EV-makers](#), it is struggling amid a slowdown in demand and supply disruptions. Shares in Rivian surged after the news.

Gabriel Attal, **France's** prime minister, debated [Jordan Bardella](#), the hard-right leader of the National Rally (RN), ahead of a legislative election on June 30th and July 7th. Mr Bardella accused Mr Attal of lacking credibility and promised French voters that he would be the “prime minister of purchasing power”. *The Economist's* [poll tracker](#) shows RN to be 16 points ahead of President Emmanuel Macron's centrist alliance.

Health officials warned that a strain of [mpox](#) spreading in east **Congo** is “incredibly worrying”. In much of the world cases of mpox have fallen in recent years because of vaccines and health education. But the outbreak in Congo is causing concern: according to the World Health Organisation, there have been about 7,900 cases in the central African country this year, and almost 400 deaths.

**Figure of the day:** 60%, the amount by which service exports have jumped in the past decade, reaching \$7.9trn (7.5% of global GDP) in 2023. [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.*

# India's new speaker of parliament



On Wednesday the 543 newly-elected members of India's parliament returned Om Birla of the Bharatiya Janata Party to the post of speaker. Mr Birla will have the power to refer bills to parliamentary committees for scrutiny, choose whose questions are discussed in the house and disqualify members who defect from their parties.

That power to punish defectors will be particularly important in the coming term. Narendra Modi, the prime minister, and the BJP **no longer have a majority** and must govern in a coalition. They will want to discourage MPs from defecting from the coalition, and perhaps encourage opposition politicians to defect to it. In theory the speaker is non-partisan, but Mr Birla will probably continue to do the government's bidding. That means he could use the power to punish defectors selectively to help the coalition. Rahul Gandhi of the Congress party, the leader of the opposition, urged Mr Birla to uphold the job's independence. If he does, that would improve the opposition's ability to keep the government in check.

# The Assange saga reaches its end



When an unwanted house-guest finally departs, the relief is palpable. So it was on Monday when [Julian Assange](#) was released from prison in London. The founder of WikiLeaks, a website that publishes classified and sensitive information, had been fighting extradition to America, where the Department of Justice had charged him on 18 counts, most under the Espionage Act. Under a deal, however, Mr Assange was flown to Saipan, an American territory in the Pacific, where he pleaded guilty to just one of those. As he has already been in prison, he will be allowed to go home to Australia.

The deal looks to be the end of a long legal drama. In 2010 Mr Assange was arrested in Britain after Sweden sought to question him over sex-crime allegations, which were later dropped. To his supporters, he is a martyr to truth-telling; to his detractors, a reckless criminal. A plea deal is a suitable ending to an unedifying saga.



# Turkey's long battle against inflation



Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's president, used to promote an eccentric monetary policy that tried to lower inflation by slashing interest rates. The experiment ended a year ago when Mr Erdogan [appointed](#) a finance minister and central-bank governor with more orthodox economic views. The central bank has raised the base interest rate from 8.5% to 50% since June 2023. Yet there is more work to do: the annual inflation rate hit 75.4% in May.

The bank is expected to hold interest rates steady when it meets on Wednesday, and officials are introducing other tough measures to cool the economy. The ministry of work and social security recently said that there would be no mid-year rise in the minimum wage, in contrast with the past two years. The treasury is increasing taxes, including the “exit stamp” that Turks pay to leave the country. It could rise from 150 lira (\$5) to as much as 1,500.

## Sunak's unending campaign woes



Just when it looked as if Rishi Sunak's [election](#) campaign couldn't get any worse, it did. Having been flayed for leaving a D-Day commemoration early, Britain's prime minister must now deal with a betting scandal. Officials in his Conservative Party are alleged to have placed money on the timing of the election, possibly with insider information. On Tuesday the party withdrew support from two who are parliamentary candidates. It is a terrible backdrop for Mr Sunak as he goes head-to-head with Sir Keir Starmer, leader of the opposition Labour Party, in a TV debate on Wednesday.

The Tories, trailing dismally in the [polls](#), are campaigning mainly to avoid a wipeout on July 4th. Mr Sunak is trying to shore up support in seats that were previously considered too safe to care about—including his own. Sir Keir, for his part, is taking few risks, content to watch the [hapless Tories](#) deliver him a huge majority on a plate.

# The NBA's uninspiring draft



In last year's annual draft the [National Basketball Association](#) anointed a superstar. The San Antonio Spurs signed Victor Wembanyama, a French phenomenon, as first pick. This year, however, fans and pundits are less excited about the league's newbies, who will be chosen on Wednesday and Thursday in New York. There is no stand-out: draft tipsters have yet to form a consensus on whom the Atlanta Hawks, who have this year's first dibs, will choose.

Not every cohort can boast a generational talent. But the loosening of rules that prevented college athletes from cashing in on their popularity partly explains the dearth of game-changers in the draft. The tweaks mean that college players can earn more from name, image and likeness deals. Joining the NBA as early as possible was traditionally the most lucrative way to begin a career. But sticking around in college for another year is increasingly profitable.



## 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](mailto:QuizEspresso@economist.com). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

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

**Tuesday:** Which 1900 rebellion was an attempt by a Chinese secret society to drive foreigners out of the country?

**60%**

*The amount by which service exports have jumped in the past decade, reaching \$7.9trn (7.5% of global GDP) in 2023.*

*Read the full story.*

**The rich are always afraid.**

*Pearl S. Buck*