

## The world in brief, July 4th 2024



A second **Democratic** congressman publicly urged **President Joe Biden** to [step aside](#) after his horrific performance in a debate against Donald Trump, his Republican opponent, on June 27th. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Raúl Grijalva of Arizona said that Mr Biden had the “responsibility” to “get out of this race”, though noted he would support him if he stayed in it. During a call with campaign staff on Wednesday, the president reportedly said that he was “not leaving”. Reports of [growing unease within Mr Biden’s Democratic Party](#), however, continued to swirl.

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.

**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.

Muhammed Nasser, a senior **Hizbullah** commander, was killed by an Israeli strike in the south of Lebanon; the Israel Defence Forces accused him of directing "a large number" of attacks towards **Israel**. The [Iran-backed militia](#) said it fired rockets into Israel in retaliation. For months Israel and Hizbullah have traded drones, rockets and missiles. American and European diplomats have sought to de-escalate tensions in the region as fears of [a war in Lebanon](#) grow.

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.

**General Motors**, a carmaker, will pay \$145.8m in penalties as part of a settlement with the [Biden administration](#), which found that 6m of the firm's vehicles emitted more **carbon dioxide** than it claimed. (GM admitted no wrongdoing.) The cars were sold between 2012 and 2018, violating fuel-economy standards [issued](#) by the Obama administration.

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 terrorist 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:** 0.5%, the average rate of productivity growth in Britain each year since 2010, compared to an average rate of 2% between 1980 and 2010. [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.*

# Britain votes



On Thursday Britons will vote in the country's first general election since 2019. A lot has happened since then. There have been three [Conservative](#) prime ministers: Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak. The covid-19 pandemic, double-digit inflation and scandals have made it much harder for the party to win re-election after [14 years](#) in power.

Since the last election Sir Keir Starmer (pictured) has transformed the Labour Party. It has campaigned on one word: "Change". The party's manifesto is slimline. It makes some modest promises, including more teachers and family-doctor appointments and a new unit to tackle irregular migration. More important, the party appears focused on fixing Britain's [low-growth problem](#). The shadow chancellor of the exchequer, [Rachel Reeves](#), has pledged to lead a "pro-growth, pro-business Treasury". The Tories have tried to dull voters' appetite for change. They say that a Labour government would mean higher taxes.

# Happy birthday America?



On Thursday [President Joe Biden](#) will celebrate July 4th for the 81st time. His performance in a [presidential debate](#) against Donald Trump on June 27th deepened concerns that he is too old to be in office. On Tuesday Mr Biden blamed jet lag for his drowsiness and occasional incoherence; on Friday he will reportedly sit down for a television interview to allay concerns. But the Democratic defence of the president seems to be crumbling.

On Tuesday Lloyd Doggett, a congressman from Texas, became the first Democrat in Congress to call publicly for the president to step aside. Jim Clyburn, a staunch ally of Mr Biden, said he would back Kamala Harris, the vice-president, as [a replacement candidate](#).

Why are two elderly, unpopular men running for the world's most demanding job—again? On Thursday *The Economist* will explore the legacy of the generation that has dominated American politics for four decades in our new podcast series, "[Boom!](#)".

# Hurricane Beryl is a calamity and an anomaly



In August a major hurricane laying waste parts of Grenada, pummelling Jamaica and heading on towards the Yucatán in Mexico would be terrible news—but not uncommon. At the beginning of July it is a vicious surprise.

That is the path of Beryl. Having become strong enough to be named as a tropical storm on the evening of June 28th, by the evening of the 30th it had graduated to major hurricane. That rate of intensification is unheard of this early in the year, when the level of heat in the water is still rising. On July 1st it became a category-five hurricane, with sustained winds of 260km per hour. The only previous Atlantic hurricane to reach this “catastrophic” classification in July was Emily, which did so briefly on July 16th 2005—part of one of the worst hurricane seasons on record. Experts have predicted that [2024 could be similarly atrocious](#). Beryl suggests that this may well be true.



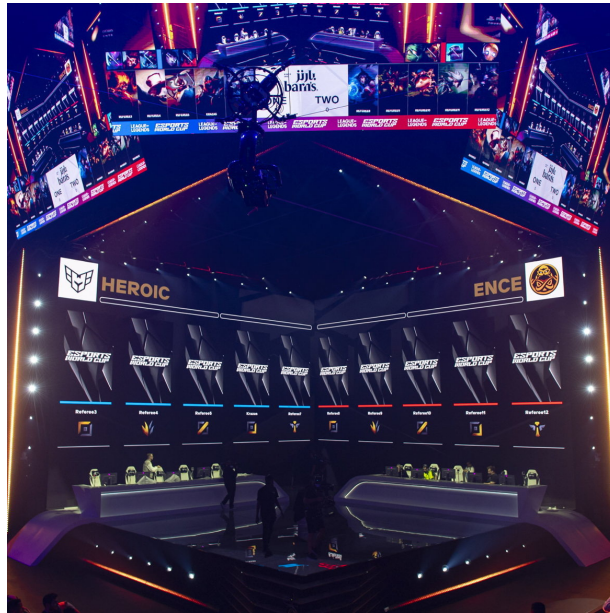
# Strikes spread across Kenya



What started two weeks ago as demonstrations against Kenya's finance bill, now scrapped, have since evolved into protests against the country's president, William Ruto. His bill sought to tackle the country's growing debt burden and meet IMF conditions for a financing programme by raising taxes. Kenyans are already in the midst of a gruelling cost-of-living crisis. Mr Ruto's administration has been accused of corruption, wasteful expenditure, and abandoning campaign promises.

Activists are calling for nationwide strikes and blockades on Thursday. Militarised responses to the [largely youth-led protests](#) have incensed crowds. Police shot protesters who stormed parliament and riot police fired tear gas at crowds. Hooligans, capitalising on the disorder, have looted shops. So far, 39 people have been reported dead and hundreds more injured. With chants of "Ruto must go!", demonstrations have continued nationwide. So, too, has the heavy-handed response of the police. Mr Ruto may struggle to put out this fire.

# The slow rise of e-sports



In the past decade a group of American owners of traditional sports franchises began to buy **e-sports teams**. They hoped that watching skilful players compete in video games would become a mainstream hobby. That has not happened. Big broadcasters—whose fees for live rights underpin many real-world sports—have yet to show interest in e-sports. Instead, events are often streamed for free on YouTube.

But Saudi Arabia smells an opportunity. At the first e-sports World Cup, hosted in Riyadh, a prize pot of \$60m will be shared by winners of tournaments in a range of games including “League of Legends”, a battle game, starting on Thursday. The country has already **spent big** to host traditional sports such as boxing. And its de facto ruler, Muhammad bin Salman, is reportedly an avid fan of “Call of Duty”, a shooter game. His country may become the premier destination for virtual sports too.



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

**Thursday:** During what event in 1204 did Latin soldiers sack Constantinople?

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

**0.5%**

*the average rate of productivity growth in Britain each year since 2010, compared to an average rate of 2% between 1980 and 2010. Read the full story.*

**He travels best that knows when to return.**

*Thomas Middleton*