

The world in brief, July 4th 2024



In a radio interview **President Joe Biden** admitted that he “screwed up” a recent television debate against Donald Trump, but said he would “get back up”. The 81-year-old’s dire performance led many [within the Democratic Party](#) (and beyond) to [question his re-election prospects](#). Two of the party’s congressmen have openly called on Mr Biden to step aside, though on Wednesday several Democratic governors declared their support for him.

Sir Keir Starmer hailed a “new chapter” for **Britain** as millions began voting in the country’s **general election**. [The leader](#) of the opposition Labour Party said he was “ready for government” and his team would “hit the ground running” should they win the election. The first exit polls are due at about 10pm on Thursday evening. *The Economist* will publish [live results](#) and forecasts through the night.

Israel is considering Hamas’s response to a ceasefire proposal for the war in Gaza, according to Mossad, the country’s security service. The long-stalled deal would include the release of Israeli hostages held in the enclave. Meanwhile, [Hizbullah](#), an Iran-backed

Lebanese militia, said it launched more than 200 rockets at Israel in response to the killing of Muhammad Nasser, a senior commander, in an Israeli strike on Wednesday.

Ukrainian forces withdrew from parts of **Chasiv Yar**, a strategically significant town in eastern Ukraine. Russian forces have been attacking the town for months; capturing it [could help them to advance](#) on larger cities in the Donetsk region. Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, recently told *Bloomberg* that some Ukrainian brigades were short of weapons because of the slow arrival of American military aid.

German factory orders unexpectedly fell in May, by 1.6% compared with April, as the country's economic recovery shows signs of [faltering](#). Economists had expected an increase of 0.5%; it was the fifth consecutive month of decline. The economy ministry said that the figures showed the "rather subdued momentum" in German industry.

Amazon signed a deal worth \$1.3bn with **Australia's** government to build three data centres for the country's [defence](#) and intelligence services. Richard Marles, Australia's defence minister, said the American firm would provide "cutting-edge technology" that would improve the army's war-fighting capacity and create 2,000 jobs. In 2021, Amazon signed a similar agreement with New Zealand.

Hurricane Beryl struck the southern coast of Jamaica. It is one of the [most powerful storms](#) ever to hit the Caribbean island. At least one person was killed, raising the death toll from Beryl across the region to at least ten. In Jamaica, the authorities reported that 400,000 people are without power. The eye of the storm is moving towards the Cayman Islands.

Figure of the day: 0.5%, the average rate of productivity growth in Britain each year since 2010, compared with 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 began voting 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.

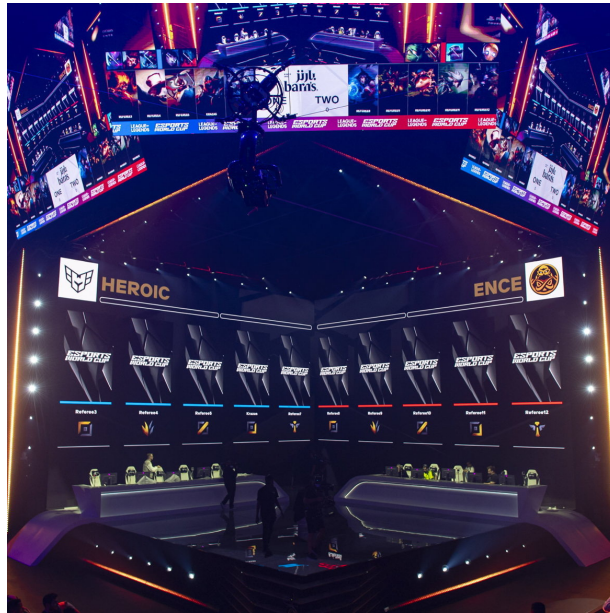
Strikes spread across Kenya



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. 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 with an average rate of 2% between 1980 and 2010.

Read the full story.

He travels best that knows when to return.

Thomas Middleton