

Daily briefing | The Economist

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Daily briefing

Take five minutes to catch up on today's essential news

The world in brief

The **World Health Organisation** called for a two-month moratorium on **booster shots** because of concerns over vaccine hoarding by rich countries. France, Germany and Israel plan to triple-jab the elderly and immunocompromised, even as poor countries struggle to source enough first shots. The WHO wants to see at least a tenth of the population of every country fully vaccinated by the end of September.

In an effort to reopen **America's borders**, the White House is developing a plan to require that all foreign arrivals have been vaccinated. Most visitors are currently banned. The European Commission has huffed at a ban on arrivals from **Europe**; the bloc opened to Americans in June. Elsewhere, **England** loosened entry requirements from **France** so tourists vaccinated in Britain, the EU or America will no longer have to quarantine.

People booked \$21.9bn-worth of **Ubers** during the past quarter, double the figure for the same period last year—a portentous sign that rich-world economies are quickly opening up again. Nonetheless the ride-hailing-cum-food-delivery firm posted a loss of \$509m. That is mainly because tight labour markets are forcing it to take a lower share of drivers' fares.

Mexico sued 11 American gun manufacturers and suppliers, alleging that negligence by the companies facilitated the flow of weapons over the border. The Mexican government argues that the guns have ended up in the hands of drug cartels and fuelled violence throughout the country. An American law passed in 2005 shields gunmakers from most civil lawsuits such as this one.

Brazil increased its **key interest** rate by a percentage point, its largest upward yank for 18 years. The country's central bank hopes that by raising the Selic rate to 5.25% it can curb inflation, which has surpassed 8% over the past 12 months. The Brazilian real has fallen by more than 20% against the dollar since the start of the pandemic.

Robinhood's share price soared before slipping back a bit in afternoon trading. The online brokerage, which spawned the meme-stock phenomenon, disappointed at its own listing last week. But news that Cathie Wood of ARK Invest, a closely watched fund, had bought lots of shares probably aided its ascent. It has risen 50% since Tuesday and now trades above its offer price.

American bankruptcies in the year through June fell to their lowest level since 1985, defying predictions of a covid-induced spike. Filings were down 18% among firms and 33% among individuals from the previous year. Generous unemployment benefits and an eviction freeze eased pressure on households, while businesses borrowed heavily and leaned on government support to stay afloat.

Fact of the day: One, the percentage of newly hired bureaucrats in Argentina who must be transgender. [Read the full article.](#)

Today's agenda

Trouble mounts: Andrew Cuomo on the brink

New York's attorney-general, Letitia James, delivered a political body blow to Andrew Cuomo, the state's governor. An inquiry by her office found that he sexually harassed 11 women, corroborating allegations that have circulated for months. The long-awaited report recounts instances of groping and lewd comments. Among the accusers were an aide nearly 40 years his junior and a trooper handpicked by the governor for his security detail. The report describes how a culture of fear and intimidation in Mr Cuomo's office enabled his misbehaviour. After a former staffer publicised her claims, his allies released her private information to discredit her, according to the report.

The governor denied the allegations, maintaining that he never touched anyone inappropriately. The question now is whether the state legislature will impeach him—and possibly remove him from office. The speaker of the assembly, who would start the process, said the report portrayed someone “not fit for office”. President Joe Biden and Nancy Pelosi, the House Speaker, have called on Mr Cuomo to resign.

Game over? Troubles for Tencent

Chinese regulators obliterated the country's for-profit online-tutoring industry last week, rendering several listed companies no longer commercially viable. Could the authorities be coming after the gaming industry this week?

All signs point to yes. Yesterday Tencent, one of the world's largest gaming and social-media companies, said it would put in place restrictions on how long children can play video games. The move is an apparent response to an attack from Chinese state media that called gaming “spiritual opium” (which since has been deleted).

Whether the comment signifies a broader crackdown is unclear. But it is not a stretch. The Communist Party is concerned about gaming addiction and these days the party's concerns often manifest in onslaughts of regulation that can instantly wipe hundreds of billions of

dollars from stockmarket capitalisations. Yesterday Tencent's shares fell by 6.1%. The company has lost nearly \$400bn in market value since February. The Communist Party's games could be only just beginning.

Doing the splits: Brazil's economy

Brazil's central bank will today decide whether to move its key interest rate, currently at 4.25%. Stakes are on an increase of a full percentage point, the biggest in 18 years. The goal is to curb inflation, which has surpassed 8% over the past 12 months. The Brazilian real has fallen by more than 20% against the dollar since the start of the pandemic, while unemployment has been above 14% since the end of 2020. A drought has caused energy prices to soar by more than 10% in some cities. The future looks worrying.

Essential economic reforms, such as a revamp of the tax system, are stalled in Congress. Yet Ibovespa, the main stockmarket index, hit a record in June on news that Brazil's GDP grew by 1.2% in the first quarter, fuelled by demand for commodities. A roundup of forecasts for this year's GDP has been rising for 15 weeks—now it's 5.3%, to the joy of the markets.

No end in sight: the Beirut blast one year later

It felt apocalyptic at the time. Yet the explosion was far from the rock-bottom of Lebanon's collapse. A year has passed since the blast, caused by the explosion of a cache of ammonium nitrate stored at Beirut's port. It killed more than 200 people and left the Lebanese capital in ruins. There has been no accountability. Lawmakers are shielding officials from punishment. The prime minister, who resigned a week after the explosion, remains in his post as a caretaker.

While politicians bicker, the country sinks further into economic crisis. The currency has lost 90% of its value since 2019. Year-on-year inflation in June was 101%. Pharmacies are short of medicine, and petrol stations of fuel. The state provides only a few hours of electricity each day. Foreign powers are reluctant to help without serious reforms, which Lebanon's corrupt politicians are unlikely to implement. What lies ahead for the people of Lebanon may be worse still.

How to get fit quick: sweating fat

When scientists engineered obese mice to overproduce a protein called TSLP, it was intended to target diabetes. But, as recently described in the journal *Science*, within a month the mice's visceral fat vanished, their weight plummeted and they were healthier all round than untreated mice. All this without eating less or exercising more.

Alas, any quick-fix diet comes with a catch. For the mice it was a distinctly greasy appearance. The TSLP-treated mice's shinier coats led to speculation that they had secreted lipids through their skin. A few mousy haircuts later, this was confirmed. Their fur was high in sebum, the fatty substance that causes acne. Sloughing off calorie-dense oil through skin glands reduced the mice's average weight from a chunky 45 grams to a svelte 25. The experts say that ramping up sebum release is feasible in humans. Whether or not people would want greasy skin and hair in return for a slimmer figure is another question.

Summer quiz: week three

Up for another battle with our baristas in a summer quiz? For week three, we'll again serve up a daily question. On **Thursday**, your challenge will be to **give all four answers and tell us the connecting theme**. Email your responses (and include mention of your home city and country) by 1700 BST on Thursday to [\[email protected\]](#). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown one winner per continent on Friday.

Wednesday: Which date in the Christian calendar is also known as Epiphany Eve?

Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar.

Percy Bysshe Shelley