

The world in brief, Aug 3rd 2021 | 经济学人早报

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The world in brief

Donald Trump has \$102m in political cash available, making him the most dominant fundraiser in America's Republican Party. The former president raised more than \$56m via WinRed, an online donations platform, in the first half of the year, more than any other Republican. Some of the donations are shared with the party, but Mr Trump also raised \$21m for political action committees that he controls directly.

America and Britain blamed Iran for an attack on the oil tanker *Mercer Street*, off the coast of Oman. Two crew were killed on July 29th when a drone carrying explosives hit the Japanese-owned, Liberian-flagged vessel, which is operated by Zodiac Maritime, an Israeli firm based in London. The Americans and British accuse Iran of threatening freedom of navigation through international waters.

Square, a digital-payments firm co-founded by Jack Dorsey, is to buy Afterpay, which offers instalment loans, for \$29bn in shares. Afterpay, which was founded in Australia in 2014, allows customers to pay in instalments without owning a credit card or paying interest. Their merger should allow retailers using Square's point-of-sale technology to offer buy-now-pay-later services.

A Belarusian sprinter alleged that her Olympic team tried to remove her forcibly from Japan on Sunday, leading to a dispute at Tokyo's Haneda airport. In the early hours of Monday she said she was in a "secure situation" at a police station there. Activists close to the athlete said she planned to apply for asylum in Austria or Germany.

Zoom, a video-conferencing firm, agreed to pay \$86m to settle a lawsuit in America. Plaintiffs had faulted Zoom for sharing personal data with third parties and accused it of making misleading claims about encryption. The company denied any wrongdoing but said it has improved security. Zoom became a household name when much of the world suddenly switched to working from home.

General Min Aung Hlaing, the military ruler of Myanmar, named himself prime minister and extended a state of emergency by two years. He also promised to hold elections. In the six months since the army seized power nearly 7,000 political opponents have been arrested and hundreds killed. A meeting today of ASEAN should finally produce an envoy who will be tasked with brokering peace.

Pfizer raised the price of its covid-19 vaccine by more than 25%, after trial data showed that the jabs were more effective than cheaper shots developed by Oxford/AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson. Contracts seen by the Financial Times, relating to the European Union's procurement deals, showed that the price of a Pfizer dose increased to €19.50 (\$23.14) from €15.50.

A look ahead

A region in crisis: covid-19 in South-East Asia

Senior officials from ASEAN, the ten-member club of South-East Asian states, meet today to discuss pressing issues facing the region. Foreign ministers are expected to select the long-awaited special envoy to Myanmar, who will have the job of brokering a diplomatic resolution to the crisis engulfing the country since the coup in February.

But they will be most preoccupied by the pandemic. Low vaccination rates and the rapid march through the region of more transmissible variants of covid-19 mean that almost every country is experiencing its worst wave yet. This month Indonesia surpassed India as Asia's hotspot. With oxygen supplies dwindling and hospitals overcrowded, some health-care systems are near collapse. Death rates are soaring: Indonesia, Malaysia and Myanmar were among the 20 countries with the most deaths per million people in the week to July 29th. Myanmar in particular is hoping that it will be able to tap into ASEAN's covid-19 fund. Just 3% of its population is vaccinated.

Take to the skies: restarting international travel

From today England will allow fully vaccinated visitors from the European Union and America into the country without having to quarantine. Some Brits might not welcome throngs of tourists around Big Ben and Oxford Street during a pandemic. But restarting air travel will help the economy's recovery. And research has shown there is a way to do it safely. One study by the Mayo Clinic, an American health-care group, suggests there is a one in 10,000 chance of a passenger infected with covid-19 boarding a plane from Britain to America and a one in a million chance of transmission on board with proper testing, mask-wearing and other protections in place.

Now there is more pressure on America to reciprocate. Governments are lobbying for a reopening. Still, once people are packed up, masked up and through check-in, they might find that the long haul to a boardroom in New York is less fun than they remembered.

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