

Catch up: Germany's new centre-right leader; pagers explode in Lebanon



Friedrich Merz was named by Germany's centre-right parties as their candidate for chancellor in next year's general election. The chancellorship would be the first government job for [the veteran conservative](#), who was forced out of a top job in the Christian Democratic Union in 2002 by his political foe, Angela Merkel. [Olaf Scholz](#), the incumbent chancellor, has expressed an interest in running for re-election but his Social Democratic Party has not yet confirmed his candidacy.

Hizbullah, an [Iran-backed Lebanese militia](#), reported serious injuries after hundreds of the pagers used by its members exploded. The cause of the explosions remains unknown. A spokesperson for the group called the incident the "biggest security breach" since its war with **Israel** began. On Monday Israel expanded its official war aims to include the safe return of its citizens to the country's north, where more than 60,000 people have been evacuated because of [Hizbullah rocket strikes](#).

[Electric cars](#) now outnumber petrol vehicles in **Norway**, according to data published by the country's Road Federation. The country boosted its electric-car sales with tax breaks and other incentives that were supported by its sovereign-wealth fund. **Norway** aims to sell only zero-emissions vehicles by 2025—10 years ahead of the EU's target to do the same.

Ursula von der Leyen announced her new **European Commission**. The head of the European Union's executive arm slimmed it down, opting for a "leaner" [arrangement](#) made up of commissioners and executive vice-presidents (dropping the previous Commission's third tier of vice-presidents). Four out of six executive vice-presidents will be women, while representatives from Ms von der Leyen's European People's Party take important roles managing [the economy](#) and migration.

Microsoft announced a new \$60bn stock-buyback programme, replacing one of the same size that began in 2021, and boosted its quarterly dividend by nearly 10%. The world's second-most valuable company has benefited from the [artificial-intelligence boom](#) in recent years; its stock has risen by 31% in the past 12 months. The firm unveiled a range of new AI tools on Monday.

Meta, the owner of Facebook, said it would ban RT, Rossiya Segodnya and other [Russian state media networks](#) from its platforms. The social-media titan accused the news platforms of using deceptive tactics to carry out influence operations while evading detection. The decision marks a sharp escalation in Meta's crackdown on [disinformation](#) and a hardening of its stance towards Russian media companies.

Gavin Newsom, California's governor, signed a state law to help Holocaust survivors and their families recover [artwork stolen by Nazis](#). His decision came after judges ruled that a painting by Camille Pissarro would not be returned to the family of Lilly Cassirer Neubauer, who surrendered the painting to the Nazis in

exchange for her freedom in 1939. The decades-long dispute over the painting has brought attention to the broader question of how Nazi-looted art can be returned to its original owners.

Figure of the day: Seven, the number of firms among the world's ten most-valuable companies that are in the chipmaking business.

[Read the full story.](#)

Europe's class of 2024



On Tuesday [Ursula von der Leyen](#) unveiled the new team that will run the EU's executive arm for the next five years. The head of the European Commission, appointed for a [second term](#) by the EU's 27 national leaders in June, gave the important job of overseeing a green transition and enforcing competition law to Teresa Ribera, a Spanish socialist. Raffaele Fitto of the hard-right party of Giorgia Meloni, Italy's prime minister, received another of the six "executive vice-presidencies", overseeing hefty EU spending to develop its poorer regions.

Stéphane Séjourné, an ally of France's president, Emmanuel Macron, will oversee industrial strategy. Andrius Kubilius, a former Lithuanian prime minister, will become the EU's first defence commissioner, albeit with a focus on the arms industry. Maros Sefcovic, a Brussels stalwart from Slovakia, will be the new commissioner for "trade and economic security". Members of the European Parliament will now grill the candidates ahead of them taking office later in the year.

The consequences of Trump's second close shave



The [basic facts](#) were established quickly. A Secret Service agent spotted the muzzle of a rifle poking out from hedges as Donald Trump played a round at his golf club in Florida. Agents opened fire and the assailant fled. The police took Ryan Wesley Routh into custody. Soon the former president was cracking jokes, saying he wished he could have finished his game.

The next few days will be spent in search of more elusive details. Foremost will be how the [Secret Service](#) allowed a would-be assassin within a few hundred metres of Mr Trump for the second time this summer. A big question will be whether Mr Trump can capitalise on his [second close shave](#) to shift attention away from his dismal performance in his debate against Kamala Harris on September 10th. After the first Mr Trump briefly basked in adulation. No doubt, he is hoping that another wave of sympathy will help him win the presidential election in November.

Dutch budget day



Tuesday is “Prinsjesdag” in the Netherlands, the start of the political year. It is the first big chance for the Dutch to learn what to expect from their [new coalition government](#), the most right-wing since the second world war. A speech read out by King Willem-Alexander (but written by Prime Minister Dick Schoof) will indicate the general direction. Details come later, when the finance minister presents parliament with a ceremonial briefcase containing the new budget.

There will be sparks when the budget debate starts. The government has promised to slash immigration, but its plans to do so may be illegal. It has scrapped a complicated plan to buy out farmers to reduce nitrogen emissions in order to comply with EU rules. Its harder-right elements are at odds with its centrist ones, and experts warn its plans to slash education and research will hurt growth. The Dutch are wondering both how radical the government will be—and how long it will last.

Venezuela faces the facts



On Tuesday the UN published its latest annual report on the regime of Nicolás Maduro. It detailed unprecedented levels of state-sponsored repression, amounting to what it called “one of the most acute human rights crises in recent history”. The organisation’s international fact-finding mission has collected evidence of grave human-rights violations over the past five years. It has previously concluded that there are sufficient grounds to believe that the security forces have committed crimes against humanity. On top of that, since the election in late July, which Mr Maduro stole, he has forced the [opposition leader into exile](#) and jailed more than 1,000 Venezuelans.

More criticism is unlikely to change the dictator’s behaviour. Mr Maduro likes to give the impression that he does not care what outsiders think of him. Perhaps he should: the fact-finding mission’s evidence forms part of the International Criminal Court’s investigation into his lawless regime.

A new format for the Champions League



The Champions League—football’s pre-eminent club competition—returns on Tuesday, bigger than ever. Its organiser, UEFA, wanted more matches between Europe’s biggest teams, while fans were keen for more jeopardy. The concentration of wealth at the top of European football has meant that some [clubs](#) have become virtually ever-present in the quarter-finals.

To try and achieve these two aims, UEFA has scrapped the four-team group stages and added four more sides to the competition. The 36 teams have been seeded into four pots; each will play two sides from each pot in the initial stage. Their results will be collated into a league table, with the top eight teams qualifying for the knock-outs. Those between 9th and 24th will play two-legged play-offs to determine which other eight will join them. The novelty will probably capture the imagination this year, but the addition of extra matches will have coaches and players sweating on potential injuries, and exhaustion.

Daily quiz



The Economist

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.

Tuesday: Vexillology is the study of what?

Monday: *Premier cru* is a French term normally associated with which product?

Seven

The number of firms among the world's ten most-valuable companies that are in the chipmaking business.

Read the full story.

**I never panic when I get lost. I just change
where it is I want to go.**

Rita Rudner