

# The world in brief

Catch up quickly on the global stories that matter



Photograph: Getty Images

**Donald Trump** said he authorised a covert Central Intelligence Agency [operation](#) in **Venezuela**. Confirming a report from the *New York Times*, he said, “we are certainly looking at land now, because we’ve got the sea very well under control.” Mr Trump has [expanded his war on drug traffickers](#) in the southern Caribbean but he declined to say whether the CIA was authorised to “take out” Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela’s dictator.

Aid trucks began entering **Gaza**, but **Israel** said that the number of vehicles would be reduced or that help would be delayed because of Hamas’s slow return of deceased hostages. The militant group said it needed help to retrieve the remaining bodies, which are buried [under rubble](#). Hamas has returned seven of 28 bodies; two that were repatriated on Wednesday are yet to be identified.

A federal judge in California blocked the **Trump** administration from [firing 4,100 federal workers](#) during a partial government shutdown. Unions had argued that slashing jobs across more than 30 federal agencies was illegal. The judge noted that the layoffs seemed to unlawfully target Democrats. Her ruling will probably be quickly appealed.

**Scott Bessent**, America's treasury secretary, said he was working to put together a \$20bn package to support **Argentina's** [economy](#). He said the "private-sector solution" would be separate from a \$20bn swap line the Treasury already promised to Argentina's central bank, adding that some banks and sovereign wealth funds have signalled interest in participating. The Treasury also recently bought Argentine pesos.

[Ahmed al-Sharaa](#), **Syria's** president, met **Vladimir Putin** in Moscow, hoping to "redefine" his country's relationship with Russia. Mr Putin harbours Bashar al-Assad, Syria's former dictator, whom he backed against Mr al-Sharaa's rebel forces during the country's civil war. Mr al-Sharaa suggested he would allow Russian military bases to remain in Syria; Mr Putin promised energy expertise and humanitarian aid.

**Pakistan** and **Afghanistan** agreed to a 48-hour ceasefire after deadly fighting broke out last week along the countries' contested [border](#). Earlier on Wednesday Pakistan reportedly launched air strikes on the Afghan cities of Kabul and Kandahar, although Pakistan denies it initiated the latest round of violence. Both sides reported civilian deaths.

**United Airlines** forecast its highest-ever revenue in the fourth quarter, boosted by rising travel demand. [The American airline](#) expanded its flying capacity by 7% in the third quarter, while rivals scaled back because of an oversupply of flights earlier in the year. Last month Scott Kirby, United's boss, said the carrier's bet on improved amenities like onboard Wi-Fi was paying off.

**Figure of the day:** \$7m, the daily cost of maintaining the American navy's drug-gang-busting flotilla in the Caribbean. [Read the full story](#).



Photograph: AP

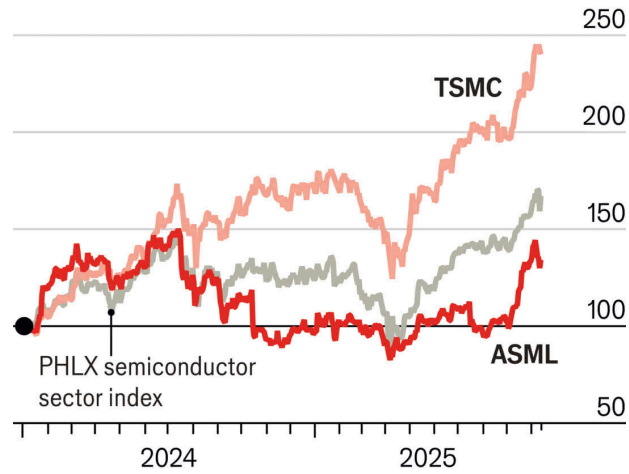
## Caught in the chip-wars crossfire

On Wednesday [ASML](#), a Dutch manufacturer of chipmaking equipment, reported orders worth €5.4 bn (\$6.3bn) in the third quarter, exceeding analyst expectations. The firm leads the market for lithography machines, which are used by chipmakers such as [TSMC](#), a Taiwanese firm, to make advanced AI processors. Large AI deals in recent months—all dependent on access to advanced chips—have buoyed both firms. [ASML](#)'s shares have surged by more than 40% since August; [TSMC](#)'s have climbed by more than 28%.

Yet geopolitics is creating problems. In response to pressure from America, the Dutch government has barred exports of [ASML](#)'s most sophisticated kit to China since 2019. Last week China tightened controls on [rare-earth](#) metals that [ASML](#) needs to manufacture its tools. [TSMC](#) appears better-insulated: Taiwanese officials claim the metals in question are not vital for Taiwan's chip-manufacturing methods. But any disruption to suppliers such as [ASML](#) could ripple through global chip production, reducing [TSMC](#)'s ability to meet surging AI demand.

## Not so cheap as chips

Share prices, January 2nd 2024=100, \$ terms



Source: S&P Capital IQ



Photograph: Getty Images

## Japanese politics in limbo

After the ruling Liberal Democratic Party elected [Takaichi Sanae](#) as its leader on October 4th, many expected her to become Japan's first female prime minister. Reports suggested that the government had planned to hold a parliamentary vote to swear her in as soon as Wednesday.

Those plans are in disarray. In a surprise move last week, Komeito, the LDP's longtime junior partner, announced its exit from their coalition. The Buddhist-backed party, which champions a "clean government" and pacifism, has clashed with Ms Takaichi, a national-security hawk who has downplayed a [political-funds scandal](#) engulfing the LDP.

Japan's parliament now looks set to elect a prime minister on October 21st. Ms Takaichi still has a path to power—the LDP remains the largest party. But if fractious opposition parties join forces, their legislators could outnumber the LDP's. [Tamaki Yuichiro](#), the leader of a small party, who has populist flair, is emerging as the opposition's best hope of defeating Ms Takaichi.



Photograph: Polaris/eyevine

## The known unknowns at NATO

Meetings of NATO defence ministers used to be predictable affairs. The one in Brussels on Wednesday? Not so much. The uncertainty is over what message [Pete Hegseth](#), America's secretary of war, will deliver from his boss, Donald Trump. There are some hopes for a new spirit of cordiality: in June alliance members agreed a 5% target for defence-related spending, pleasing America. But European ministers want to know how many troops the Trump administration plans to keep on their continent as part of its National Defence Strategy, which could be published this month.

A big reduction in America's European presence seems all but certain: the strategy is expected to focus on [security](#) in the western hemisphere and protecting the American homeland. Meanwhile, attendees at the summit will look for signs that Mr Trump's recently warmer tone towards Ukraine might translate to sales of critically needed air-defence systems—or perhaps even of America's Tomahawk cruise missiles.



Photograph: Reuters

## Voting rights return to SCOTUS

America's Supreme Court is considering whether to gut Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which bans racially discriminatory voting practices. The provision was successfully invoked in a 2023 lawsuit that led to the creation of a second majority-black congressional district in Louisiana. On Wednesday the justices heard arguments in *Louisiana v Callais*, a constitutional [challenge](#) to the new district.

In 2023 a court ruled that Louisiana's congressional map violated Section 2 by diluting the voting power of black residents, who account for nearly a third of the state's voters. While the court ordered the state to draw a new map, a subsequent challenge by white voters—*Louisiana v Callais*—argued that in sorting voters by race, the redrawn map violated the [14th Amendment](#)'s equal-protection clause. The Supreme Court heard arguments in March but failed to reach a decision. If the court hobbles Section 2, Republicans may have the opportunity to redraw more than a dozen districts before next year's midterm elections.



Illustration: The Economist

## 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 [\[email protected\]](#). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

**Wednesday:** Which two-person team wrote the controversial study “Human Sexual Response”?

**Tuesday:** Which British newspaper was founded in 1785 under the initial title of the *Daily Universal Register*?



*Politics is the art of choosing  
between the disastrous and the  
unpalatable.*

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***John Kenneth Galbraith***