

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. Mr Trump declined to say whether the CIA was authorised to “take out” Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela’s dictator.

Hamas said it had handed over all the bodies of deceased hostages that it can access without special equipment. The militant group has returned seven of 28 deceased hostages, with two more, returned on Wednesday, yet to be identified. **Israel** has limited the flow of aid into the enclave, accusing Hamas of releasing the bodies too slowly.

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 the Argentine central bank, adding that some banks and sovereign wealth funds have signalled interest in participating. The Treasury also recently bought Argentine pesos.

A group of companies, including **BlackRock**, an asset manager, and **Nvidia**, an artificial-intelligence chipmaker, said it would buy Aligned Data Centers for \$40bn in the largest acquisition of its kind. The group hopes to pool resources and skills to secure the computing capacity needed to [build the biggest AI models](#). Despite fears of an AI bubble, firms continue to spend liberally.

[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. Yet Mr al-Sharaa suggested he would allow Russian military bases to remain in Syria, and Mr Putin promised energy expertise and humanitarian aid.

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

Morgan Stanley's third-quarter profit jumped 45% from a year earlier to \$4.6bn, beating expectations. It overtook Goldman Sachs in equities trading for the first time since 2022, generating \$4.1bn in revenue from that business. Investment banking rose 44%, and wealth management attracted \$81bn in net assets. Other big Wall Street banks also reported [strong earnings](#) this week.

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

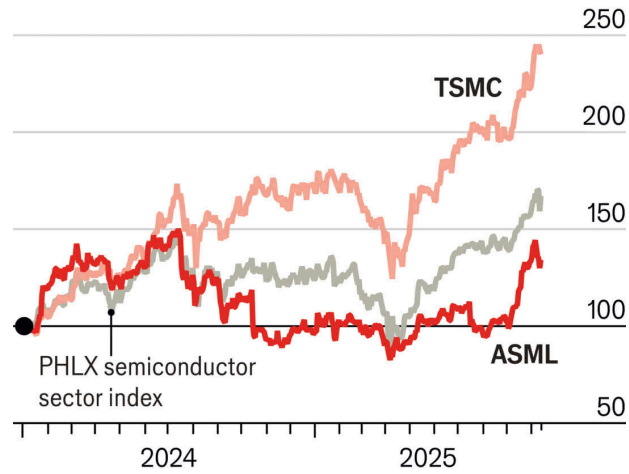
Caught in the chip-wars crossfire

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.*

John Kenneth Galbraith