

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



**Lebanon's** health minister said that at least 11 people had been killed and nearly 3,000 wounded when pagers used by [Hizbullah](#), an Iran-backed Lebanese militia, [exploded in Lebanon and Syria](#). 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](#).

**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.

The **S&P 500** index of American firms hit an all-time high, breaking a record that it set in July. The **Dow Jones Industrial Average**, an index of 30 big American companies, also briefly notched up a new record. The rally follows a [rocky August](#) in the country's equity markets and comes as investors prepare for the [Federal Reserve](#) to cut interest rates for the first time in more than four years on Wednesday.

[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—ten 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.

A terrorist group linked to **al Qaeda** claimed responsibility for attacks in Bamako, the capital of **Mali**. Militants stormed a military-police school and an air base hosting military aircraft and mercenaries from the Wagner Group, a Russian outlet working in [several African countries](#). Mali, which since 2021 has been ruled by a military junta, has been battling Islamist insurgents for over a decade.

Betting companies that have not applied for authorisation in **Brazil** will be suspended from operating in the country next month, the government said. Companies must pay 30m reais (\$5.5m) for a five-year licence required to remain open. Last year Luiz Inácio

Lula da Silva, Brazil's president, introduced [new gambling regulations](#) as part of a broader effort to raise cash.

**Figure of the day:** 291, the number of pages in a self-published tract by Ryan Wesley Routh, Donald Trump's would-be assassin. [Read the full story.](#)

# The Fed kicks off an easing cycle



One thing is certain: on Wednesday the Federal Reserve will [cut interest rates](#). The central bank has signalled for months that it is ready to lower borrowing costs in order to support the slowing American economy. Investors are desperate for the reversal of the Fed's series of interest-rate hikes beginning in 2022—the fastest such climb since the 1980s. The question is whether it will cut by a quarter-point or a half. Market pricing indicates that nearly two-thirds of investors think the Fed will opt for the larger cut.

The risk in cutting by a half-point is that it could fuel a stockmarket rally and make the Fed's job in quelling inflation harder. But the central bank may be willing to bet that inflation is yesterday's problem and focus on the deterioration in the job market. Given that it takes a while for rate changes to work their way through the economy, there is a strong case for starting boldly.

# Elections in Kashmir, finally



On Wednesday, for the first time in a decade, the people of Jammu & [Kashmir](#) in India's far north will begin voting in regional elections. The Muslim-majority region has been in political limbo since India's Bharatiya Janata Party-led government stripped it of its statehood and took over its administration in 2019. The BJP insisted that decision, which was accompanied by a security clampdown, would herald peace and development after years of separatist violence.

In recent weeks, though, militant attacks have spiked. Nevertheless, many in J&K see these elections as a chance to restore normalcy. Contesting parties include the BJP and the Congress, the national opposition. Several regional outfits, and even separatist leaders, are in the fray. But more than the winner, it is the turnout that could reveal the most about J&K's future. In the general election earlier this year, 58% of voters cast their ballot. A similarly healthy showing this time would suggest that the region still holds faith in democracy.



# Big Food repackages its offering



On Wednesday [General Mills](#) reports earnings for the first quarter of its financial year, which began in late May. The Minnesota-based packaged-food giant—which owns brands such as Betty Crocker cake mixes and Old El Paso taco kits—has had a tepid year so far. Sales were crimped by inflation as consumers tightened their belts. The company’s boss, Jeff Harmening, said “value-seeking” shoppers had ditched its products for cheaper alternatives.

But General Mills’ shareholders appear undeterred. The company’s stock has risen by a healthy 12% since the start of 2024—and even another weak earnings report may not shake investors. Under Mr Harmening the firm has entered the booming [market for pet food](#) and offered high-protein meals to users of [weight-loss drugs](#). It has winnowed out lagging segments: last week it said it would sell its yogurt brands. Shareholders are betting that after lean times may come a feast.

# Argentina's lacklustre economy

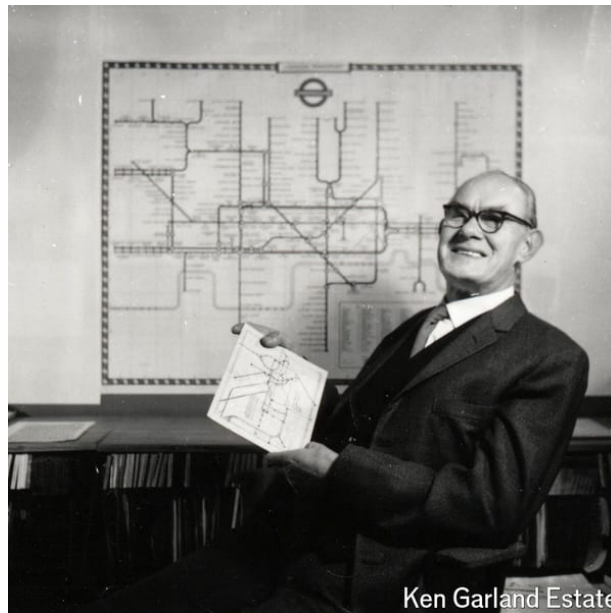


President Javier Milei recently assured Argentines that the worst of the economic pain they have been suffering was over. Second-quarter growth figures to be published on Wednesday will give some evidence of whether that is true. Earlier estimates suggested that the economy contracted by 1.3% year on year.

If official data shows that there has been a smaller decline, that would be a sign that wages, employment and tax revenues might soon pick up. That would make it easier for the [libertarian leader](#) to keep his promise of a “zero deficit” in the government’s budget. When he presented the plan to Congress on Sunday, he railed against “miserable rats” in the opposition who want to spend more money. Markets cheered the speech.

Argentina’s recession has lessened one sort of pain: soaring inflation. In the month before Mr Milei took office, monthly inflation was 13%, it has now fallen to a still high 4% in August. Welcome as stronger growth would be, it could push inflation up again.

# The map that redrew London



Many people navigate Britain's capital using the clean lines of the London Underground map. Indispensable below ground, if misleading above, it shows London through a convex lens. Central sections are enlarged to make interchanges clear; distant stations are equally spaced out. When the design was proposed in 1931 to show commuters how to conveniently swap lines, it felt at once intuitive and revolutionary. Every major subway system has followed this geometric approach.

But its inventor, [Harry Beck](#), who died 50 years ago on Wednesday, has never received the credit he deserves, argues a new play at the London Transport Museum. The play shows how the electrical draughtsman re-imagined geography as a circuit drawing. Beck devoted decades to adapting his diagram as London's network expanded (to 272 stations today). He is portrayed as having sacrificed his family life for his obsession, and having felt robbed when other designers were commissioned to update his template. Mind that historical gap.



## 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](mailto:QuizEspresso@economist.com). We'll pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners on Saturday.

**Wednesday:** Saxony, twist and woven are types of which household product?

**Tuesday:** Vexillology is the study of what?

*The number of pages in a self-published tract by Ryan Wesley Routh, Donald Trump's would-be assassin.  
Read the full story.*

**My office hours are any and all hours of the day and night.**

*Susan La Flesche Picotte*