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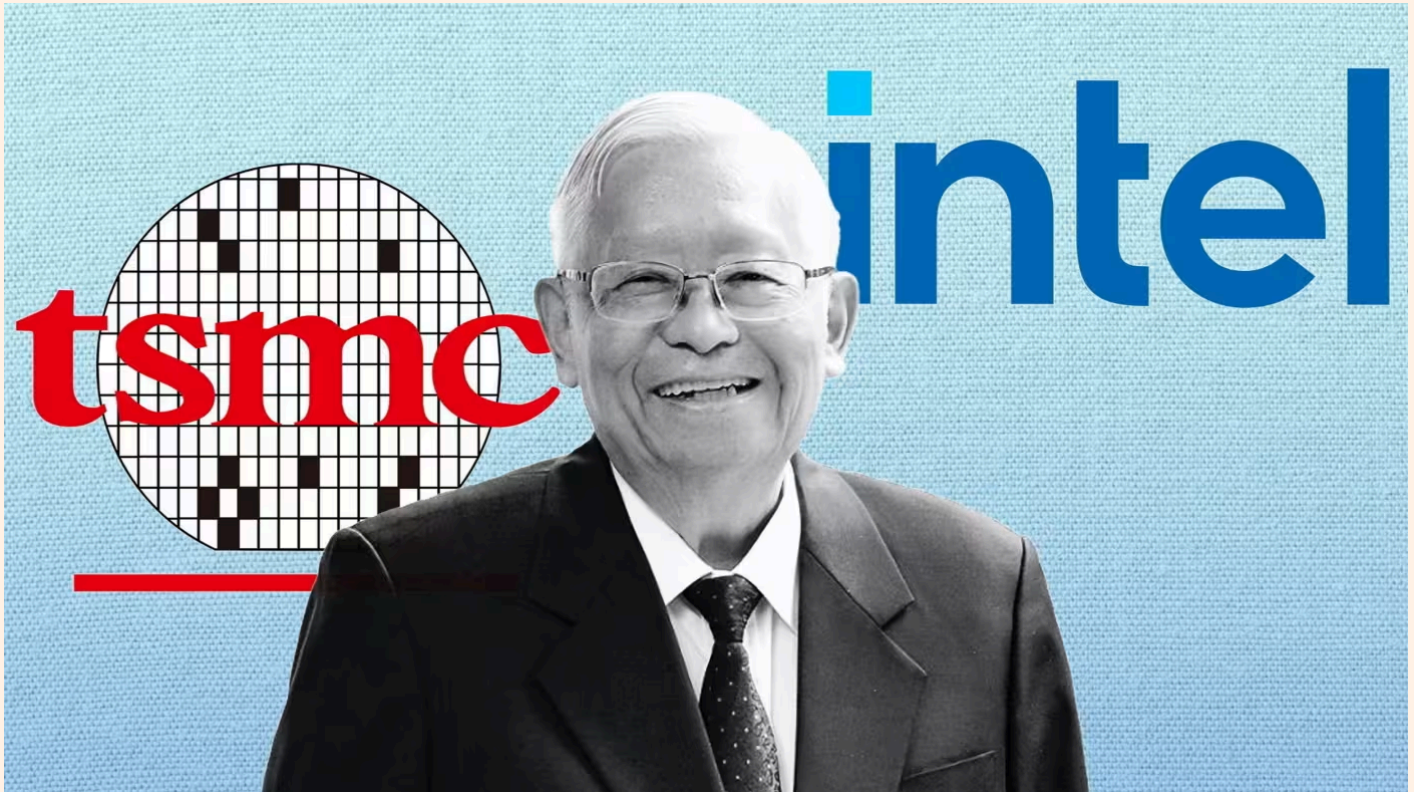
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Semiconductors

TSMC sues former top executive who joined US rival Intel

Case highlights the fierce competition in the race to manufacture the most cutting-edge semiconductors



Lo Wei-Jen oversaw research and development for several of the 21 years he spent at TSMC © FT montage

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Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company is suing a former top executive who has recently joined US rival Intel, as it moves to protect its dominance as the world's largest maker of chips.

[TSMC](#) said on Tuesday it had filed a lawsuit in Taiwan's intellectual property and commercial court, which will seek damages for breach of contract from former vice-president Lo Wei-Jen, who retired from the company in July.

“There is a high probability that Lo uses, leaks, discloses, delivers, or transfers TSMC's trade secrets and confidential information to Intel, thus making legal actions (including claiming damages for breach of contract) necessary,” TSMC said.

Lo and Intel did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The case highlights the geopolitical pressures that are intensifying the race to manufacture the most cutting-edge semiconductors. TSMC, which supplies companies including Nvidia, AMD, Broadcom and Apple, makes more than 90 per cent of the world's most advanced chips and has in recent years widened its lead over rivals Samsung and Intel.

In August, the US government agreed to [invest \\$8.9bn](#) into Intel, giving it a 10 per cent equity stake, as part of a push to strengthen America's semiconductor industry and protect against risks such as a cut in supplies from Taiwan.

Lo, who holds a PhD in solid state physics from UC Berkeley and a physics degree from National Taiwan University, oversaw research and development for several of the 21 years he spent at TSMC.

Having joined from Intel in 2004, he led core R&D teams and its advanced process technology programmes. He was later put in charge of TSMC's overall technology development strategy.

In March last year, he was transferred to head strategic planning. But TSMC on Tuesday alleged that Lo had continued to convene meetings with R&D staff to "provide information for him to understand the advanced technologies currently, and planned to be, under development by TSMC".

TSMC claimed that during an exit interview to prepare for his retirement in July, 75-year-old Lo had told the company's general counsel that he would join an academic institution and had not mentioned plans to join Intel.

Intel has previously rejected the idea that Lo could use TSMC trade secrets to help the US company. "It's rumour and speculation. There's nothing to it. We respect IP," chief executive Lip-Bu Tan said at an industry event in California last week, according to Bloomberg.

Taiwan's economy minister recently voiced concerns that Lo's transfer to TSMC's US rival could create risks to national security. Taipei views its dominant position in global semiconductor manufacturing as a key factor to ensure support from other democracies against Chinese annexation threats. China claims the island as part of its territory and has threatened to attack it if Taipei refuses to submit under its control indefinitely.

TSMC's legal action against Lo comes just months after Taiwan started [investigating](#) several former TSMC staff for allegedly transferring the chipmaker's technology to Japanese semiconductor toolmaker Tokyo Electron.

The chipmaker has also fought and won legal cases against former executives who joined Chinese rival Semiconductor Manufacturing International (SMIC) and South Korean competitor Samsung.

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