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Future Trends

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Introducing another week of Future Trends — *tracking current global news stories that provide insight into the future.*

Welcome to this week's Future Trends—the must-read weekly briefing covering the changing face of global politics, economics, development, social factors, and conflict.

Here's what you need to know this week:

- Israeli Supreme Court rejects Bibi's judicial overhaul
- Russia launches drone strike over Ukraine amid aerial attacks
- India and IMF clash over rupee stability
- Ethiopia secures access to sea after deal with Somaliland
- Google settles \$5 billion consumer privacy lawsuit

CONFLICT

Russia launches drone strike over Ukraine amid aerial attacks. The aerial strikes follow a series of heavy aerial bombardments that began when Russia unleashed an [18-hour attack](#) that one air force official described as the biggest aerial barrage of the war.

Sudan's RSF leader in Ethiopia amid cease fire efforts. The leader of Sudan's paramilitary visited Ethiopia for discussions on the [end of the war between the RSF and Sudan's army](#) after more than eight months of conflict.

Mali: UN peacekeeping mission ends. UN peacekeepers finished their withdrawal from Mali, after a long-running mission lasting a decade. [MINUSMA](#) began in 2013 after an armed rebellion but has been asked to leave by the country's ruling military government.

Israel's military seeks full control of Gaza-Egypt border. Israel must take full control of the [Gaza Strip border corridor](#) with Egypt to ensure a "demilitarization" of the area, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said, as Israel's military pushes deeper into central and southern Gaza.

India, Iran send warships to key shipping lanes. A drone attack on an India-bound ship carrying oil has provoked a sharp response, with India's defense minister deploying three warships to the Arabian Sea. [Rising tensions around key shipping routes](#) has also seen Iran's Alborz warship enter the Red Sea amid the Israel-Hamas war and attacks on vessels by forces allied to Tehran.

Turkey conducts air strikes in northern Iraq, Syria after 12 soldiers killed. Targets hit included bases, shelters, and oil facilities believed to be used by [PKK militants](#), a designated terrorist group by Turkey, the U.S., and European Union.

DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia secures access to sea after deal with Somaliland. Ethiopia and the self-declared republic of Somaliland have signed a “historic” initial agreement that will allow landlocked Ethiopia to have [access to the Red Sea](#), Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s office announced.

Niger suspends cooperation with International Francophone organization. Niger has announced the suspension of all forms of cooperation with the International Organization of La Francophonie, marking a potential [shift in its diplomatic relations](#) with the country’s former colonial ruler, France.

Burundi: President advocates for stoning of gay people. President Evariste Ndayishimiye intensified the crackdown on sexual minorities by making a controversial call for the stoning of gay people. The country currently has some of the [harshest laws against the LGBTQ community](#).

Vatican announces approval of blessings on same sex marriages. Pope Francis formally approved letting Catholic priests bless same-sex couples, a radical shift in policy that aimed at [making the church more inclusive](#) while maintaining its strict ban on gay marriage.

World Bank approves new Tanzania loans worth \$1.14 billion. The [two separate loans](#) are to support the country’s private sector and develop its commercial capital while fighting the effects of climate change, the bank said.

China develops “world's most powerful” hypersonic engine. The [new air-breathing engine](#) should carry an aircraft to 18.6-mile (30 km) altitudes and travel around Mach 16. Intercontinental flights could take only hours and consume far less fuel compared to conventional jet engines.

ECONOMICS

India and IMF clash over rupee stability. The International Monetary Fund and India are at odds over the [management of the rupee](#), which risks destabilizing international financial markets. The IMF says India has intervened excessively in the exchange rate, which India denies.

Angola to quit OPEC, reducing membership to 12 countries. Angola's departure leaves the [oil cartel](#) with 27% of global crude oil production, further reducing its market share which stood at 34% in 2010. Angola's move follows Qatar (2019) and Ecuador (2020).

U.S. buys oil for strategic reserve. President Biden's administration finalized deals to buy 3 million more barrels of oil, taking its total purchases last year to 14 billion barrels as part of its efforts to help [control oil prices](#) after Russia, a large crude exporter, invaded Ukraine.

Rice prices surge to 15 year-high. Vital to the diets of billions of people in Asia and Africa, [rice prices](#) have been fuelled by strong demand and supply concerns, with fears the El Niño weather phenomenon will further tighten supplies.

Euro property giant, Signa Development, files insolvency. Debts amassed to 1.16 billion euros. It follows the holding company of [Signa](#)—a group of over 1,000 companies—last month filing for insolvency with 5 billion euros in debt.

Rating agency Fitch cuts Ethiopia's Eurobond to “default” after missed payment. Fitch downgraded the [rating on Ethiopia's only international government bond](#) to "default" from "near default" after the east African country failed to make a \$33 million payment. Ethiopia became Africa's third country in as many years to default.

POLITICS

Israeli Supreme Court rejects Bibi's judicial overhaul. The dramatic ruling could thrust Israel back into a [constitutional and political crisis](#) amid the war in Gaza and concerns about a potential war with Lebanon.

US supreme court under pressure on Trump ballot bans. Court faces pressure to rule after Maine and Colorado banned Trump from appearing on [presidential ballots](#) in the two states.

Felix Tshisekedi re-elected as president of DR Congo. President [Tshisekedi](#) has been re-elected for a second five-year term, securing more than 70% of the total votes in the December 20th elections.

Chadian opposition leader Succes Masra appointed transitional PM. Masra, a [former leading opposition leader](#) who recently returned from exile, has been appointed prime minister by Chad's transitional president General Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno.

Japan approves record defense budget for 2024. The cabinet of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio approved [\\$55.9 billion \(7.95 trillion yen\) defense spending](#) for fiscal year 2024, amid the increasingly tense security environment in the Indo-Pacific region.

China names new defense minister. China has named former navy chief [Dong Jun](#) as its new defense minister, replacing the previous defense minister who disappeared from public view four months ago. A crucial part of his job will be to engage with the U.S. to avoid war over Taiwan.

SOCIAL

Google settles \$5 billion consumer privacy lawsuit. Alphabet's Google has agreed to settle a U.S. lawsuit claiming it [secretly tracked the internet use](#) of millions of people who thought they were browsing privately.

The New York Times is suing Microsoft and OpenAI. The legal complaint says the bots' creators have refused to recognize [copyright protections](#) by using *New York Times* articles to train the AI engines.

New Covid variant driving nearly half of all cases. Infections and hospitalizations are rising mostly in people who have had the virus before. It is believed that the [new JN.1 variant](#) is either more transmissible or better at evading immune systems than previous ones.

NASA transmits the first video to earth using a laser from deep space. The 15-second video, [beamed to Earth from NASA's Psyche spacecraft](#) 31 million kilometers away, showed the three-year-old Taters cat chasing a red laser beam on a couch.

Endocrine disrupting chemicals present in almost everyone. Research shows [more than 800 chemicals were known or suspected EDCs](#) that may mimic, block or interfere with the body's hormones. The chemicals are in plastics, linings of canned food, and even in shopping dockets.