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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:

- Court allows razor wire cuts on US-Mexico border
- Pakistan missiles strike Iran in retaliatory bombing as tensions soar
- EU adopts new law banning greenwashing and misleading information
- Battery prices are forecast to fall 40% by 2025
- Largest deep-sea coral reef mapped by scientists off US

POLITICS

Court allows razor wire cuts on US-Mexico border. A divided US Supreme Court allowed Border Patrol agents to resume cutting razor wire that Texas installed along a stretch of the [US-Mexico border](#) at the center of an escalating standoff between the Biden administration and Texas state over immigration enforcement.

Somalia rejects mediation efforts with Ethiopia over port deal. Ethiopia was considering recognizing Somaliland's independence in return for gaining access to the Red Sea, partly through the port lease. But Somalia says there is [no space for mediation](#) unless Ethiopia retracts its illegal MOU and reaffirms the sovereignty and integrity of Somalia.

German farmers converge on Berlin to protest higher taxes. Some 3,000 tractors, 2,000 trucks, and an estimated 10,000 people crammed the avenue leading to Berlin's Brandenburg Gate. The government is facing fierce backlash after [cutting agricultural subsidies](#) to fix its budget deficit.

Felix Tshisekedi sworn in as DRC's President after a contested election victory. His inauguration speech was attended by several African presidents and made [sweeping promises](#) to fix the many challenges faced by his nation.

Modi inaugurates Hindu temple on site of razed mosque in India. More than 30 years after militant Hindu radicals razed a mosque in the Indian town of Ayodhya, Indian PM Modi has inaugurated the [new Hindu temple](#) that will stand in its place.

CONFLICT

Pakistan missiles strike Iran in retaliatory bombing as tensions soar. Pakistan has hit Iran with what it described as "highly coordinated" [military strikes](#), a little more than 24 hours after Iranian air raids in Balochistan, further raising tensions between the neighbours amid fears of a broader conflict.

Ecuador police capture Colombian rebel leader. Ecuador's police said they have captured the leader of Colombian armed group [Oliver Sinisterra](#) and he will be returned to Colombia. It comes amid a government military offensive to combat criminal gangs.

African leaders call for an immediate end to hostilities in Gaza during Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) meeting. The NAM is a collection of [120 countries](#) not officially connected to major global blocs. This call was accompanied by a criticism of Israel's actions in the conflict.

US base in Iraq attacked after Iran vows revenge. US military said "multiple ballistic missiles and rockets were launched" at its Al-Assad based in western Iraq. [The attack](#) came after Iran vowed revenge and blamed Israel for a deadly attack on a building housing its elite forces in Syria

North Korea ends policy of reunification with South Korea. Kim Jong Un called for the [constitution to be revised](#) to say that the South is the country's "primary foe and invariable principal enemy."

ECONOMICS

EU adopts new law banning greenwashing and misleading information. Members voted in favour of the directive which aims to protect consumers from [misleading marketing practices](#) and help them make better purchasing choices.

Suez Canal diversions add pressure on Egypt's distressed economy. After Yemen's Houthis sea attacks, [Suez Canal](#) revenue sees a sharp downturn. Nearly all of Egypt's main sources of foreign currency have come under severe pressure.

Top economists predict global growth will weaken. The International Monetary Fund predicts a [0.1% fall compared to 2023](#). Geopolitical rifts and world fragmentation continue to grow while global economic activity and financial conditions remain slow and tight.

Billionaires say they would be proud to pay more taxes. In a letter penned by more than 250 of the mega-rich, the group has asked global leaders gathering in Davos, Switzerland for the World Economic Forum to [tax "extreme wealth"](#).

WHO reports global decline in use of tobacco. [One in five adults worldwide](#) currently uses tobacco, compared to one in three in 2000. This is despite interference by the tobacco industry.

DEVELOPMENT

CHART: [Battery prices are forecast to fall 40% by 2025](#).

African Swine Fever hits Borneo's people and forests, near 100% fatality. ASF wreaks havoc among domestic and wild swine populations, threatening ecosystems, food security, and centuries-old cultural practices. It has quietly become one of the most [devastating viral diseases](#) globally.

Nobel laureates call on EU to ease rules on genetic modification. In an open letter, 34 Nobel Prize winners called for lawmakers to [embrace new gene code-editing techniques](#). This would make crops more resistant to disease and more likely to survive extreme weather events.

ExxonMobil sues investors to block climate petition. Oil giant ExxonMobil has sued [climate activist investors](#) in a bid to prevent their climate proposal from going to a vote at its annual investor meeting.

SOCIAL

Largest deep-sea coral reef mapped by scientists off US. Scientists used new [underwater mapping technology](#) to create 3D images of the ocean floor, allowing them to map the largest coral reef stretching hundreds of miles off the US Atlantic coast.

German parliament approves easing rules for dual citizenship. Restrictions on holding [dual citizenship](#) dropped after this decision, with people being eligible for it after five years in the country or three in case of “special integration accomplishments.”

Zero-waste air purifier removes over 99% of viruses. Engineers at the University of Bath have revealed a [zero-waste air purifier](#) that uses FOAM3R technology to achieve 99.999% virus removal efficiency. The foam, made up of high-temperature polymer and active media, uses selective adsorbents to capture contaminants and antibacterial agents to combat microbes.

China’s population falls for 2nd straight year as births drop. The number of deaths rose by 690,000 to 11.1 million in 2023, [more than double](#) the previous year’s increase. Demographers said the rise was driven by population aging and widespread COVID-19 outbreaks that started in late 2022.

Zambia cholera outbreak leaves 400 dead, 10,000 cases. Cholera has been detected in [nearly half of the country’s districts](#) and nine out of 10 provinces, and the nation of about 20 million people has been recording more than 400 cases a day.

Russia’s aging heating system causing dissatisfaction with Kremlin. With temperatures reaching below minus 20c there is a growing chorus of complaints on social media about [infrastructure issues](#) are affecting almost every corner of the country.

PEACEBUILDING

A new initiative, [Press Forward](#), has committed \$550 million to support innovative local news outlets in markets across the US. [Some news organizations are experimenting with new non-profit models](#) to return local news to US “news deserts.” The *Baltimore Banner* is run in part by alumni from the *Baltimore Sun* and has signed partnership agreements with NPR affiliate WYPR and CBS-owned WJZ-TV. The [Texas Tribune](#) is a member-supported, digital-first, nonpartisan media organization. Americans, regardless of political party affiliations, hold local news in higher regard than national news, according to [a new poll from Gallup and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#).

Journalist Michelle Norris's new book, *Our Hidden Conversations: What Americans Think About Race and Identity*, is based on her NPR Race Card Project, where she asked people around the world to send her postcards with their thoughts about identity and race – in just six words. She used these postcards as a tool to understand what was happening in the US outside of the headlines. Most of the cards she has received so far have come from white Americans, which she told NPR have given her a new perspective since they involve conversations she normally can't access. She is continuing the project; her own six words now are: "Still more work to be done."

Cameroon is the first country to routinely give children a new malaria vaccine, developed by GlaxoSmithKline. The country plans to vaccinate about 250,000 children this year and next. The Gavi vaccines alliance is helping Cameroon secure the shots. Gavi is also working with 20 other African countries to help them get the vaccine and hopefully immunize more than 6 million children by the end of 2025. Successful trials of the drug were conducted in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi between 2019 and 2021. A second malaria vaccine developed by Oxford University and approved by WHO in October may soon be available to supplement the GSK vaccine, according to [AP](#).

CI Ventures investee **Coast 4C, a seaweed trading company in the Philippines, encourages seaweed farmers to adopt practices that increase the supply of high quality, more climate resilient seaweed** and ensures they are fairly paid. They are also helping communities set up marine protected areas that integrate seaweed farms within them – creating safe and healthy places for farming and incentives for communities to support these protected areas. In the past decade, seaweed production has surged as researchers and investors eye its potential as a sustainable superfood, a biodegradable replacement for plastic packaging and a feed supplement to cut cows' methane emissions, [according to the New York Times](#).