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

CONFLICT

Thai court gives record 43-year sentence for insulting king under lese majeste law. The Bangkok Criminal Court [found the woman guilty](#) on 29 counts of violating the country's lese majeste law for posting audio clips to Facebook and YouTube with comments deemed critical of the monarchy.

China sends more warplanes through Taiwan airspace. Eight Chinese bomber planes and four fighter jets entered the south-western corner of Taiwan's [air defence identification zone](#), leading Taiwan's air force to deploy missiles to "monitor" the incursion.

Russian police violence under review after mass arrests at Navalny protests. More than 3,300 protesters were [arrested at demonstrations](#) in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny. Police clashed with demonstrators in Moscow as tens of thousands took to the streets across the country on Saturday following Navalny's call to protest against President Vladimir Putin's rule.

India protest: Farmers breach Delhi's Red Fort in huge tractor rally. The government says the reforms that spurred the protests [will liberalise the agriculture sector](#), but farmers say they will lose income. Tens of thousands of them have been striking on the outskirts of Delhi since November, demanding the laws be repealed. Last week they rejected a government offer to put the laws on hold.

Worsening Islamist insurgency drives Mozambique humanitarian crisis. More than half a million people have [fled their homes](#) due to an Islamist insurgency in northern Mozambique, and the violence and humanitarian crisis will worsen without international help, UN officials said.

DEVELOPMENT

Electric car batteries with five-minute charging times produced. The new lithium-ion batteries were developed by the Israeli company StoreDot and manufactured by Eve Energy in

China on standard production lines. The StoreDot battery replaces graphite with [semiconductor nanoparticles](#) into which ions can pass more quickly and easily.

Enormous freshwater deposits lie dormant under the ocean floor. Freshwater is [becoming scarce](#) in many coastal areas around the world. The first global inventory estimates the volume as roughly twice that of the Black Sea.

German scientists make paralyzed mice walk again. German researchers have enabled mice [paralyzed after spinal cord injuries](#) to walk again, re-establishing a neural link hitherto considered irreparable in mammals by using a designer protein injected into the brain.

Indonesia's latest natural disasters are a 'wake-up call', environmentalists say. There have been a staggering [185 natural disasters](#) in Indonesia in the first three weeks of 2021 alone, according to the Indonesian National Board for Disaster Management Agency (BNPB).

ECONOMICS

Chinese cities reportedly go dark as country faces shortage of coal, a major Australian export. Analysts said prices of the commodity in the country have [shot up](#) due to the reported crunch and some tie the shortages and blackouts to the unofficial ban on Australian coal.

Expensive cheese, rotting seafood and other post-Brexit problems. Brexit red tape and paperwork causing delays, adding to cost of UK goods. The impact is so profound that even the UK's Department for International Trade has [encouraged exporters](#) to open offices in the EU to sidestep cumbersome and costly customs regulations.

China passes US as No. 1 destination for foreign investment, as coronavirus upends global economy. As the world struggled to contain the coronavirus crisis, foreign direct investment in the US plummeted 49% in 2020 while investment in China rose 4%, making China the largest recipient of foreign inflows [for the first time](#), according to a report released by the UN.

Car sales in Europe suffer worst fall ever in pandemic year. New car registrations in Europe plunged by 23.7%, or around [3 million vehicles](#), to 9.9 million units due in part to COVID-19 lockdowns and other restrictions to curb the virus.

POLITICS

Google threatens to withdraw search engine from Australia. Australia is introducing a [landmark law](#) to make Google, Facebook and potentially other tech companies pay media outlets for their news content. But the US tech giants have fought back, arguing the laws are onerous and would damage local access to services.

Italian PM Conte resigns in split over COVID-19 response. It is not clear if he will be able to form and lead a new coalition government. The [lack of majority](#) in the Upper House restricts government business. Parties are divided over spending in the coronavirus crisis, in which more than 85,000 Italians have died.

The end of Swiss neutrality. The country is [campaigning for a seat](#) on the UN Security Council, but taking on that role will clash with some fundamental tenets of Swiss foreign policy.

Greece extends coastal claim to Ionian Sea waters, indirectly warns Turkey. Greece's parliament has [extended its claim](#) to western waters near Albania and Italy, ahead of talks with Turkey, which has long warned against similar moves off Aegean islands.

Russia quits the Open Skies treaty. America left the treaty in November, complaining that Russia had imposed [unacceptable restrictions](#) on flights over Kaliningrad, Russia's exclave north of Poland, and had used its own flights over America to map out critical infrastructure (which is permitted).

SOCIAL

Former head of Vatican bank guilty of embezzlement, money laundering. A court convicted Angelo Caloia, [a former head of the Vatican bank](#), on charges of embezzlement and money laundering related to property sales, making him the highest ranking Vatican official to be convicted of a financial crime.

Alleged Asian drug lord arrested in Amsterdam. Police in the Netherlands have arrested the alleged head of [one of the world's biggest drugs gangs](#), on a warrant issued by Australia. Tse Chi Lop - a Chinese-born Canadian national - is said to be the head of The Company, which dominates a \$70bn illegal drugs market across Asia.

Twitter locks account of China's US embassy over its defense of Xinjiang policy tweets. Twitter has [locked the account](#) of China's US embassy for a tweet that defended China's policy towards Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang, which the US social media platform said violated its stand against "dehumanizing" people.

UNDP donates robots to help Kenya's Covid-19 fight. The three robots can detect individuals without masks, those wearing them improperly and [issue alerts](#) to the user and officials for immediate corrective measures. They will also be used to disinfect hospitals and airports and disseminate public health messages about Covid-19.

PEACEBUILDING

The [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons \(TPNW\)](#) came into force on January 22, 2021 – 90 days after the 50th state, Honduras, ratified the treaty. The treaty bans the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons as well as their development and basing. [None of the signatories have nuclear weapons, and most are economically below the global median income.](#)

The [John Mitchell Jr. Program](#) in George Mason University's [Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution](#) has been supporting the [Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) by helping research several cases. [The commission recently received a \\$300,000 Department of Justice grant](#), including \$100,000 for the communities and families of the victims for restorative justice reform and for live reconciliation-style hearings.

[NewGen Peacebuilders](#) - Metro Birmingham launched on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. The virtual program runs through May 8 and includes teams creating action peace projects. Students from nine high schools and four youth organizations are participating. In all, 25 schools are represented.

COVAX, an international effort to distribute vaccines to poor and middle-income countries, is gaining support. [President Biden halted US withdrawal from the World Health Organization](#), and Secretary of State-designate Tony Blinken said in his confirmation hearing on the 19th that the United States will participate in COVAX. On the 22nd, pharmaceutical company Pfizer committed to supplying up to 40 million doses of its COVID-19 vaccine this year through COVAX, adding to the 2 billion doses previously pledged by other vaccine producers. [India's Serum Institute has signed agreements](#) to manufacture at least 200 million doses of AstraZenica's vaccine for distribution through COVAX. China joined COVAX in October and three [Chinese vaccine producers have recently applied for COVAX approval](#) of their vaccines for distribution.