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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:

- Iran bans ex-President Rouhani running for Elite Assembly
- Mali junta ends 2015 peace deal with separatist rebels
- China lowers bank reserve ratio, boosting stimulus as growth lags
- Mass rally in Madrid against Catalan amnesty bill
- Meet Efruz, the terrier that loves to surf Peru

POLITICS

Iran bans ex-President Rouhani running for Elite Assembly. Iranian government banned former pragmatist [President Rouhani](#) from standing again in an election in March for the Assembly of Experts, which appoints, and can dismiss, the supreme leader, state media said.

Venezuela arrests 32 in alleged plot to kill President Maduro. Venezuelan authorities arrested 32 civilians and soldiers after an investigation into their alleged part in a US-backed conspiracy to [assassinate President Maduro](#).

Ukraine officially begins EU accession talks. Ukraine started the screening process to begin talks over its [future membership of the EU](#), following an agreement reached with EU Commission President von der Leyen at the World Economic Forum.

Three West African junta-led states quit ECOWAS regional block. [Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso](#), three states led by the military, said they are immediately leaving the

Economic Community of West African States, a regional economic bloc that has been urging them to return to democratic rule.

Bangladesh appeals court grants bail to Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus. An appeals court granted bail and an appeal hearing to [Nobel laureate Yunus](#), who had been sentenced earlier to six months in prison for violating Bangladesh's labour laws.

Kenyan court blocks police force deployment to Haiti. Kenya's high court rules that [deploying the nation's police officers to Haiti is unconstitutional](#). After the announcement Haitian radio stations were swamped with calls. Murders doubled to nearly 4,500 in Haiti, and kidnappings rose by more than 80%.

CONFLICT

Mali junta ends 2015 peace deal with separatist rebels. Military authorities said it is no longer possible to continue with the agreement due to [other signatories not sticking to their commitments](#) and "hostile acts" by chief mediator Algeria. This move could further destabilise the conflict-torn nation.

China presses Iran to rein in Houthi attacks in Red Sea. China has asked Iran [to help rein in attacks on ships in the Red Sea](#) by the Iran-backed Houthis, or risk harming business relations with Beijing. Discussions about attacks and trade are currently taking place in Beijing and Tehran.

UN agency probes staff suspected of role in Oct 7 attacks on Israel. The UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) said it had opened an [investigation](#) into several employees suspected of involvement in the October 7 attacks in Israel by Hamas and that it had severed ties with those staff.

Kremlin denies report Putin reaching out to US on Ukraine. The Kremlin denied a Bloomberg report that President Putin was "putting out feelers" to the US for possible talks on [ending the war in Ukraine](#) and might consider dropping key demands on Ukraine's security status.

Mayan historical sites unreachable due to gang violence and conflicts. Mexico's government has acknowledged that at least two well-known Mayan sites are unreachable by visitors because of a toxic mix of [cartel violence and land disputes](#).

ECONOMICS

China lowers bank reserve ratio, boosting stimulus as growth lags. China's central bank will allow more cash to be circulated in the economy by cutting cash levels commercial lenders must hold as reserves. The move is part of an expected [policy support](#) to prop up the slowing economy.

Shipping costs from Asia to US double in January. The average [cost to ship a container](#) from Asia to the US has risen from around \$US2,500 at the end of 2023 to \$5,100 in January, due to geopolitical risks in the Red Sea and extreme weather in Central America.

Germany's Scholz calls for completion of EU capital markets union. German Chancellor Scholz called for the EU to complete its creation of a [banking and capital markets union](#) so the bloc can compete with the US and China for new technologies.

Evergrande liquidation spells trouble for China and beyond. Evergrande has been ordered to liquidate in Hong Kong after failing to come up with a [restructuring deal](#) with creditors over \$US300 billion in debts owed. The liquidator will now attempt to take control of Evergrande assets outside China.

DEVELOPMENT

Mass rally in Madrid against Catalan amnesty bill. Tens of thousands of people protested in Madrid to reject a government plan to provide amnesty for [Catalan separatists](#) over their failed 2017 secession bid. Madrid has faced a number of protests over the proposed amnesty.

US researchers develop breakthrough EV battery that charges under 5 mins. The new findings by Cornell University could help address anxiety associated with the [charging time of electric vehicles](#) and increase their adoption globally.

EU Commission to release first space law proposal in March. European Commission officials said they were preparing a release of an [EU space law proposal](#) they said would broadly address issues of safety and sustainability.

Chinese companies pledge to invest 7 billion dollars in DRC mining industry. President Tshisekedi's government had been revisiting the deal struck by his

predecessor under which the Chinese partners agreed to [build roads and hospitals in exchange for a 68% stake](#). The revised deal gives a 70% stake to the Congolese and 1.2% royalties.

SOCIAL

Meet Efruz, the terrier that loves to surf Peru. Clad in a yellow vest, little [Efruz](#) the Jack Russell terrier balances himself on the front of the surfboard as waves foam around him and his companion in the Pacific waters off Peru.

World first: malaria vaccine rollout begins in Cameroon. 662,000 doses of the [RTS,S vaccine](#) will be administered to children in the West African country, the first to be vaccinated after successful trials of the drug in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi. Another 19 countries will follow.

EU's Court of Justice rules Ireland failed on drinking water quality. The Court upheld the European Commission's view from 2021 that Ireland had not done enough to bring down the level of trihalomethanes (THMs) in drinking water. [THMs](#) are found in water treatment systems that use chlorine to remove bacteria and may harm humans and the environment.

World's first white rhino IVF pregnancy could save subspecies. After the last male northern white rhino died in 2018, just two female members remain, under armed protection at a Kenyan sanctuary. The IVF method could potentially be used in the future to save other [endangered rhino species](#).

Airbnb donates \$10 million to world charities. Airbnb donated a total of \$10 million to [more than 120 non-profits in 44 countries on six continents](#). The short-term rental giant's latest outlays are a distribution through its Airbnb Community Fund.

PEACEBUILDING

As part of [Kenya's Peacebuilding Architecture](#), the [Life and Peace Institute convened youth leaders from Nairobi's informal settlement areas for discussions structured as a collaborative mapping exercise](#). The mapping became a storyteller, shedding light on where different groups fit within the community, where they felt safe, and what made them proud, as well as about places where they felt insecure. The Independent Panel of Advisors gathered valuable information from the youth for inclusion in a comprehensive report that will be submitted to the Office of the President as part of the Peace Building Architecture Review.

The American Museum of Natural History in New York City has closed two exhibits because it does not have explicit permission from the original indigenous owners to display the artifacts. This permission is required by the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act but new regulations enforcing the law have recently put the burden on museums to reach out to tribes to secure consent. Previously, it was the other way around. There may still be delays in returns because the provenance of the artifacts may be difficult to trace. The new regulations still do not cover private collections or auction houses.

The Dream Project is dedicated to supporting students whose immigration status may restrict their academic aspirations. The project is now giving out 100 scholarships for college-bound Dreamers, including some for students pursuing advanced degrees. It has also established a formal mentoring program. The project was started by Dreamers disappointed when the US Congress failed to pass the Dream Act in 2001. The first year, they raised enough money for four scholarships.

First year high school student Herman Bekele's Skin Cancer Treating Soap was the winning entry at the annual 3M Young Scientist Challenge. His bar of soap is charged with different cancer fighting chemicals to help treat different forms of skin cancer. Even after the soap has been washed away, the medicinal components remain stuck on the skin. Bekele plans to use most of his \$25K prize money to start a nonprofit organization to turn the soap into an equitable and available skin cancer treatment for as many people as possible. 3M also paired him with a project engineer mentor who is available to discuss technical issues and to connect him with other contacts within 3M.