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Future Trends

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Institute for
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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:

- Bangladesh PM Hasina clinches election win
- Russia, Ukraine in UAE mediated prisoner swap
- Impact of global shipping's Red Sea chokepoints
- German farmers protest in Berlin
- Largest specimen of world's most venomous spider found in Australia

POLITICS

Bangladesh PM Hasina clinches election win overshadowed by boycott. The ruling Awami League and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina [won a fourth consecutive term](#) amid an opposition boycott, allegations of rigging, violent incidents and low voter turnout.

China to sanction 5 US manufacturers over arms sales to Taiwan. The sanctions come ahead of Taiwan's Jan 13 presidential and parliamentary elections, which China has cast as a [choice between war and peace](#).

Gambian ex-minister faces rape, torture charges. Switzerland will try [former Gambian interior minister Ousman Sonko](#) for crimes against humanity in a milestone case where a serial rape victim will testify after a multi-decade wait for justice.

Italian MP calls for formation of an EU army. Foreign Minister [Antonio Tajani](#) said a European military was a 'fundamental precondition' to effective European foreign policy and to enable the EU to be peacekeepers.

First Somali woman elected mayor in Minnesota. [Nadia Mohamed](#) became the US city's first Black mayor in 170 years, and second known Somali American mayor in US history after being elected mayor of St Louis Park.

CONFLICT

Russia, Ukraine in UAE mediated prisoner swap. Kyiv said 230 Ukrainian prisoners of war were returned to Ukraine, while Moscow said more than 240 Russian military personnel were released in an [exchange mediated in part by the United Arab Emirates](#).

12 Nations warn Houthis over Red Sea attacks. The [coalition](#), including Germany, Japan, UK and Australia, warned the attacks on international shipping were "illegal, unacceptable, and profoundly destabilising," and that the Houthis would be responsible for the consequences.

Tehran vows revenge after deadly Islamic State attack. Iran said it will retaliate in the wake of [Islamic State](#) claiming responsibility for two explosions that killed nearly 100 people, the bloodiest attack since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

India-Maldives row over Modi criticism escalates. One of India's largest travel platforms suspended flight bookings to the [tourism-dependent Maldives](#) after disparaging social media posts against Indian Prime Minister Modi embittered relations between the South Asian neighbours.

Israel shifts to deadlier strikes on Iran-linked targets in Syria. Israel is carrying out an unprecedented wave of [deadly strikes in Syria](#) targeting cargo trucks, infrastructure and people involved in Iran's weapons lifeline to its proxies in the region. It follows a presumed Israeli strike in Lebanon which killed a Hezbollah commander.

ECONOMICS

Impact of global shipping's Red Sea chokepoints. Amid concerns for global trade as more shipping companies extend closures of [Red Sea transit](#) routes due to attacks by Yemeni rebels, new analysis estimates up to 30% of seaborne cargo could be affected.

Chinese shadow bank files for bankruptcy. [Zhongzhi Enterprise Group](#) oversaw more than \$140 billion at its peak before succumbing to the property crisis that has wreaked havoc on the world's second-largest economy.

Boeing Max grounding goes global. The US Federal Aviation Administration ordered a temporary grounding of 171 planes, accelerating the response among other airlines after a section of a new [Alaska Airlines](#) jet blew out during a flight.

Global food prices decline from record highs in 2022. Prices for commodities like grain and vegetable oil fell in 2023 from record highs the previous year. The FAO [Food Price Index](#) was 13.7% lower last year versus 2022.

China hints at more easing with possible reserve ratio cut. To [boost lending](#), Chinese authorities indicated they may lower the amount of money banks must set aside as reserves, even after the central bank provided a massive amount of liquidity via other tools in recent weeks.

DEVELOPMENT

German farmers protest in Berlin. Farmers demonstrated against plans by Germany's government under Chancellor Olaf Scholz for the [suspension of agricultural subsidies](#).

Graphene semiconductor could revolutionise electronics. With silicon reaching its limit to meet computing performance demands, researchers have created the first functional semiconductor made from [graphene](#), a single sheet of carbon atoms held together by the strongest bonds known.

Biggest solar flare in six years disrupts radio signals on Earth. [The sun](#) spat out the huge flare along with a massive radio burst, causing two hours of radio interference in parts of the U.S. and other sunlit parts of the world.

Apple pays out over claims it deliberately slowed down iPhones. Apple will pay aggrieved US consumers \$92 each to settle a long-running class action [over claims it deliberately slowed down certain iPhones](#). A similar case is under way in the UK.

Tesla recalls 3.6 million vehicles in China and US. The US electric car giant is recalling more than 1.6 million vehicles in China over [issues with steering software and door-locking systems](#), after recalling two million cars in the US due to autopilot software issues.

SOCIAL

Largest specimen of world's most venomous spider found in Australia. With fangs that could pierce a human fingernail, the largest male specimen of the [world's most venomous arachnid](#), the funnel-web, has found a new home at the Australian Reptile Park.

Alabama woman with rare double uterus gives birth to two children. An Alabama woman with two uteri and two cervixes has given birth to two babies after carrying one of them in each uterus. [Both she and the newborns are healthy.](#)

3D mini-organs created from human fetus' brain tissue. Researchers in the Netherlands have created [3D mini-organs](#) resembling human brain tissue, which can help them in their cancer drug research.

iPhone survives 4,900m fall from Alaska Air flight. A mobile phone, sucked out of a Boeing 737 jet after a section of the plane blew out, [remained functioning after a 4,900m tumble.](#) The Apple iPhone landed intact, unlocked and with hours of battery life remaining on a Portland, Oregon roadside.

Hearing aids may help people live longer. Adults with hearing loss who regularly used hearing aids had a [24% lower risk of mortality](#) than those who never wore them, according to a new study.

PEACEBUILDING

NBC News and Telemundo will air a [primetime special on January 12th](#) to mark the National Day of Racial Healing. The program will feature stories and moderated discussions about what individuals and communities are doing to: “Connect, Build Relationships, Bridge Divides.” The [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#) is sponsoring the special. NBC suggests that in preparation for watching the special, viewers see an NBC series, [Changing the Narrative](#), on how individuals are starting the process of healing; read stories from [Word in Black](#), a collaborative of leading US Black news publishers, and sign up to participate in a National Day of Racial Healing event in their communities.

The [Stevens Initiative](#) is increasing its funding for US institutions to expand virtual exchange programs with organizations around the world for youth enrolled in K-12 schools and universities. Stevens has announced its support for programs of 10 organizations: [AFS Intercultural Programs](#), [Educación para Compartir](#), [Global Nomads Group](#), [iEARN-USA](#), [IREX](#), [Amideast](#), [Institute of International Education](#), [PATHWAYS Institute for Negotiation Education](#), [Plugged in Band Program – Peace Tracks](#) and [Soliya](#). The [Bezos Family Foundation](#) and the US State Department will provide some funding for the effort.

[BTG Pactual Timberland Investment Group](#), with help from [Conservation International](#), is aiming to [protect and restore nature to an area in Brazil's Mato Grosso do Sul](#) roughly twice the size of Manhattan. Half of the land acquired by TIG will be protected or restored to its natural state and set aside for conservation, while the other half will be planted with commercial species, like eucalyptus. Over the next five

years, TIG plans to secure US\$ 1 billion from investors to plant, conserve and restore nearly 741,000 acres of degraded land in Brazil, Uruguay and Chile. In doing so, they hope to capture some 32 million metric tons of carbon over a 15-year period. If it succeeds, “Project Alpha” could serve as a model for a new kind of sustainable — and self-sustaining — protection for nature.

A new musical recently debuted on Broadway that focuses on the stories of seven autistic young adults as they face the challenges of leading independent lives. The characters and story are based on a 2015 HBO documentary of the same name, which captured a real-life counseling clinic for teens and young adults with autism in Columbus, Ohio. For the show, accommodations are also made for the audience, including the availability of aids and cool-down spaces for those who need to step away due to sensory sensitivities. The musical is a kind of advocacy, providing the audience with a better understanding of the autistic community and the actors with a sense they have been understood.