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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:

- Canada pledges to spend more on defense
- Iran's attack on Israel escalates already volatile conflict
- More companies are repeat defaulting
- Only five OECD countries hit development aid target in 2023
- Man turns 400 kilogram award-winning pumpkin into a canoe

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## POLITICS

**Canada pledges to spend more on defense.** Canada pledged [billions more for the armed forces](#) to help protect the Arctic, as well as dealing with challenges from Russia and China. Military spending is set to hit 1.76% of its gross domestic product by 2030, still short of the 2% target NATO sets for members.

**EU parliament adopts new migration pact.** The EU parliament adopted a contentious reform of Europe's asylum policies that will harden border procedures and force all the bloc's 27 nations to share responsibility. The [Migration and Asylum Pact](#) was nearly a decade in the making.

**Ex-Austrian intelligence officer accused of collusion with Russia.** [Egisto Ott](#) is alleged to have handed over phone data of former high-ranking Austrian officials to

Russian intelligence, helped plot a burglary at a prominent journalist's apartment, and wrote up "suggestions for improvement" after a Russian-ordered killing in Germany.

**Singapore chooses new Prime Minister.** 51-year-old [Lawrence Wong](#) will become Singapore's fourth prime minister in six decades, succeeding Lee Hsien Loong, the son of the nation's founding father, Lee Kuan Yew. He has been deputy PM since 2022.

**Azerbaijan asks World Court to dismiss Armenian ethnic cleansing case.** The case is part of the decades of confrontation between Azerbaijan and its Caucasus neighbour Armenia over the [Nagorno-Karabakh region](#) in Azerbaijan.

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## CONFLICT

**Iran's attack on Israel escalates already volatile conflict.** Iran launched over 300 drones and missiles, which navigated over Jordan and Iraq before reaching Israel. [Tehran's operation](#) was the first time that Iran has attacked Israel directly.

**Singapore action on arms trade to Myanmar.** Singapore has responded to UN pressure by blocking the majority of [weapons sales](#) to Myanmar, delivering a blow to Myanmar's generals, who took power in a coup more than three years ago. Russia, China and India continue to send weapons to Myanmar.

**Ukraine warns it will lose the war against Russia without US military aid.** Ukrainian authorities are becoming more anxious about the delay of a [US military aid](#) package worth \$60 billion approved by President Biden and blocked by Republicans in Congress for the past six months.

**France, Germany, EU mark anniversary of Sudan war with funding push.** Top diplomats of the three countries met in Paris to push for more funding for [Sudan's year-long war](#). The US already plans to give \$100 million in aid.

**Russia, China trade new copper disguised as scrap to skirt taxes, sanctions.** Russian and Chinese firms have avoided taxes and skirted the impact of [Western sanctions](#) by trading in new copper wire rods disguised as scrap.

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## ECONOMICS

**More companies are repeat defaulting.** The percentage of companies that have defaulted on their debt more than once has reached its second highest level since 2008. Around 35% of total global defaults in 2023 were by issuers that are “[re-defaulters](#),” a trend that is also dampening recoveries.

**Credit rating agency cuts China's outlook on growth risks.** Fitch cut its outlook on [China's sovereign credit rating](#) to negative, citing risks to public finances as the economy faces increasing uncertainty in its shift to new growth models. The downgrade follows a similar move by Moody's in December.

**Ghana fails to reach debt deal with international bondholders.** Ghana has failed to secure a [workable debt deal](#) with two bondholder groups in its push to restructure \$13 billion of international bonds as it tries to recover from a default and economic crisis.

**Nigeria inflation climbs to 28-year high.** Nigeria's inflation kept climbing in March, reaching a [28-year high of 33.20%](#) in annual terms, driven by soaring food and energy costs despite central bank rate hikes aimed at halting its ascent.

**Record debt costs mean climate spending could push nations towards insolvency.** Emerging countries will pay a record [\\$400 billion to service external debt](#) this year and 47 of them cannot spend the money needed for climate adaptation and sustainable development without risking default in the next five years, according to a Boston University report.

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## DEVELOPMENT

**Colombia drought: Bogota rations water.** About ten million residents of the Colombian capital Bogota are being forced to ration water amid shortages due to a [severe drought](#).

**Pregnancy may accelerate biological aging.** Women who have been pregnant looked [biologically older](#) than women who had never been pregnant, a Columbia University study said. The research of 1,735 young people in the Philippines, also showed women who had been pregnant more often looked biologically older than those with fewer pregnancies.

**China tests super fast trains in vacuum tube, eyeing 4,000 kph.** The magnetic-levitation (maglev) [high-speed train](#), which flies through tubes rather than running on

traditional tracks, clocked 623 kph in tests, almost 200 kph quicker than the fastest train in service. There are hopes it could one day reach the speeds of up to 4,000 kph.

**Scientists can't fully explain world heat records.** Leading climate scientists say there is a margin to the [extreme heat](#) the world has experienced over the past year that cannot be explained by global warming or known climate drivers. They say the coming summer in the northern hemisphere will give clues to if it's just a "blip" or part of a worrying pattern.

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## SOCIAL

**Man turns 400 kilogram award-winning pumpkin into a canoe.** The [biggest pumpkin grown in Australia](#) this year has been given a second life as an intrepid commodore paddled it down river over the weekend.

**Chechnya bans music deemed too fast or too slow.** Russia's Minister of Culture said all musical, vocal and choreographic compositions will be limited to a tempo ranging from 80 to 116 beats per minute (BPM). It means many songs in musical styles such as [pop and techno](#) will be banned.

**Court rules Swiss climate failures breached human rights.** The plaintiffs argued that [climate change-fuelled heat waves](#) undermined their health and put them at risk of dying. The European Court of Human Rights agreed, ruling the Swiss government had violated human rights due to "critical gaps" in its legislation to reduce emissions.

**Peru's dengue deaths triple as climate change swells mosquito population.** Experts say the [figures in Peru are alarming](#) because it shows the ability of the Aedes Aegypti mosquito, which carries the disease, to spread to areas where dengue had not previously been detected.

**AI-powered soccer robot falls, gets up to dribble and scores.** In matches, [deep RL-trained robots displayed emergent behaviours](#) like foot corner pivoting and spinning, challenging to script. As they played strategically, the robots learned to anticipate ball movement and block their opponents' shots.

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## PEACEBUILDING

**Several technology companies are developing wind-assisted commercial ships.** [BAR Technologies](#) is fitting new and existing ships with vertical wind wings that automatically adjust to wind speed and direction. [Berge Bulk](#) is operating one ship and the company plans to re-equip much of its 85-strong fleet, which would enable them to save 15-20 percent of the carbon they now use. Yacht designer [Windship Technology's](#) rival system, which is scheduled to be available in two years, will include clusters of three wind wings and solar panels that power an electric generator. [Wightlink](#) operates a hybrid ferry to the Isle of Wight. Commercial shipping now accounts for three percent of the world's CO2 emission.

**Uganda's efforts to deal with its past are framed in a series of transitional justice initiatives** culminating in the 2022 Transitional Justice Bill. Consultations conducted by [SaferWorld](#) across the region raised challenges with the current system and made recommendations about how to make better use of traditional dispute resolution and community-based peacebuilding: Empower local leaders and traditional mechanisms to settle disputes; ensure equitable resource distribution and conflict mediation between refugees and host communities; support reparations and reintegration; and promote the use of traditional structures and community dialogues.

**Since Hurricane Dorian devastated the Bahamas in 2019, a Rotary club in Abaco, with support from two clubs in Canada, have planted 5000 breadfruit trees.** The tree produces fruit that can withstand drought and heat and thrives in rainy conditions. A single tree can yield 300 fruits per year for up to a century. Rotary clubs are partnering with the [Trees That Feed Foundation](#), an Illinois-based nonprofit that aims to plant one million fruit trees in places dealing with food insecurity and poverty. They also have been involved in efforts to plant breadfruit trees in Jamaica, Haiti, and Pakistan.

**Johns Hopkins University has published an evaluation of the impact of Safe Streets Baltimore,** a community violence intervention program designed to reduce gun violence in neighborhoods with high levels of gun violence. The report concludes that over the first four years of program implementation across the five longer-running sites, Safe Streets was associated with a statistically significant average reduction in homicides of 32%. Over the entire study period across all sites, Safe Streets was associated with a statistically significant 23% reduction in nonfatal shootings. Eight of the 11 sites had program-related reductions in nonfatal shootings.