

The Economist

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China and Russia: unlikely friends

The dotcom flop that's back on top

In defence of childlessness

Sunscreen, science and serendipity

Venezuela in chaos

What the world should do



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Principal commercial offices:

25 St James's Street, London SW1A 2BC
Tel: +44 20 7830 7000

Rue de l'Athénée 12
1206 Geneva, Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 966 2570

750 3rd Avenue, 56th Floor, New York, NY 10017
Tel: +1 212 541 0500

1300 Cityplaza Four,
12 Tai Koo Wan Road, Tai Koo Shing, Hong Kong
Tel: +862 2585 3888

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Politics



America imposed sanctions on 13 Venezuelan officials ahead of a planned election to a constituent assembly, which will have the power to rewrite Venezuela's constitution. The sanctions freeze the American assets of the army chief, the interior minister and the head of the electoral commission among others and bar American companies from doing business with them. Critics of the Venezuelan regime say it will use the proposed constituent assembly to snuff out democracy. The opposition called a 48-hour strike to protest against it.

A show of force

Chinese and Russian warships staged a joint exercise in the Baltic Sea, their first together in those waters. Their navies have stepped up co-operation in recent years. They have also staged war games in the South China Sea and the Mediterranean. China wants to show that its navy can operate far afield; both countries also share a resentment of American naval power.

Hong Kong said that officials from mainland China will enforce immigration law inside a new railway station in the city that is due to open late next year. The move was condemned by pro-democracy campaigners, who fear it is a further encroachment on the territory's autonomy.

Martial law in Mindanao, the second-largest island in the Philippines, was extended until the end of the year. The army is battling insurgents linked to Islamic State in the

city of Marawi. Meanwhile, Rodrigo Duterte, the country's fiery president, said he was calling off peace talks with Maoist rebels. He has threatened to launch air strikes at schools that teach children from the Lumad tribe. He said the schools were a breeding ground for communists.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for a bombing in Kabul in which at least 31 people died. The insurgents also killed dozens of soldiers in an attack on an army base near Kandahar. Over 1,600 civilians were killed in Afghanistan in the first half of the year.

Australia's minister for resources stepped down after learning that he holds dual nationality, which the constitution forbids for legislators. Matthew Canavan said he had no idea he was also an Italian citizen: his mother registered him in 2006. Two Green party senators recently resigned because they also hold dual nationality.

Honourable worship



Israel's government tried to diffuse tension over access to the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem by removing metal-detectors it had installed there. But their replacement by high-tech cameras is not likely to prove acceptable to Palestinians.

The European Court of Justice ruled that Hamas, an Islamist group that runs the Gaza Strip, should remain on the European Union's terrorist list.

Libya's two internal rivals, the UN-backed prime minister in the west and the military commander of the east, met in Paris and agreed to a ceasefire.

Ntibo Ntaberi Sheka, a warlord accused of overseeing mass rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo, gave himself up to UN peacekeepers in the east of the country.

They'll see you in court

Following a week of street protests against planned changes to the judiciary, Poland's president, Andrzej Duda, vetoed two of three bills seeking to limit the independence of the courts. Despite the veto, the European Commission issued a formal warning, giving Poland one month to address concerns over the government's efforts to nobble the judiciary.

Sweden's government faced a political crisis following a data breach at the transport agency. Leaders from the centre-right opposition called for a no-confidence vote against three ministers from the ruling Social Democratic Party.

The European Court of Justice's adviser recommended that it should dismiss a legal case brought by Hungary and Slovakia against refugee quotas. The European Commission sent a formal request to Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to respect the quotas, which aim to ease pressure on Greece and Italy.

The EU rejected Turkey's request for new accession talks. The EU has condemned the Turkish government's security crackdown following an attempted coup in July 2016. A trial of 17 journalists on terrorism-related charges and the detention of Amnesty International activists have only fuelled tensions with Brussels over human rights.

The separation of power

The House of Representatives voted by 419-3 to impose new sanctions on Russia, Iran and North Korea and to give Congress the power to thwart any attempt by the White House to ease sanctions against Russia. The bill now moves to the Senate where it has a similar level of support: enough to override a veto by Mr Trump.

At a closed-door meeting in the Senate, Jared Kushner, Mr Trump's son-in-law, who is a senior adviser to the president, denied collusion between the Trump campaign and Russian officials.

With much of Washington consumed by the Republicans' wrangling over a health-care bill and amendments to pass a "skinny" repeal of Obamacare, Mr Trump took to Twitter to announce a ban on transgender people serving in the armed forces.



After just six months in the job, Sean Spicer quit as White House press secretary in a disagreement over Mr Trump's appointment of a new communications director. Mr Spicer's tenure was a troubled one. He had a feisty relationship with the media from the start, defending Mr Trump's exaggerated claims about the size of his inauguration crowd. But he was shut out of the president's inner circle; the appointment of Anthony Scaramucci, a financier and broadcaster known as "The Mooch", to the top communications job was the final straw.

A seminal study

Research led by American and Israeli scientists suggested that sperm counts among men in rich countries have fallen by around 50% in four decades. Other studies have made similar claims in the past, but have been criticised for being unreliable. The latest analysis combines results from 185 other papers and strongly suggests that the trend is real. Scientists do not know what is causing the decline: one candidate is hormone-disrupting chemicals used widely in industry.