



December 9, 2024

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Top Stories

Santa Ana Winds to Promote Fire Weather Conditions Across Southern California

A strong and long-duration Santa Ana wind event will lead to critical fire weather conditions across Southern California over the first half of the week. Dry, down-sloping winds off the mountains in Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Ventura counties will gust between 50-60 mph at times, with localized damaging winds up to 80 mph possible. The forecasted strong winds combined with very low humidities have prompted widespread [Red Flag Warnings](#) from the National Weather Service (NWS). The NWS even upgraded portions of Ventura and Los Angeles counties to a rare Particularly Dangerous Situation Red Flag Warning between 10 pm Monday and 2 pm Tuesday during the worst forecasted conditions. [Pacific Gas and Electric Company](#) officials stated that public safety power shutoffs are likely between Monday and Wednesday in order to prevent downed power lines from sparking new wildfires. Energy provider [Southern California Edison](#) has announced that over 250,000 customers are being considered for shutoffs across seven counties. Any wildfires that ignite during the period will have the tendency to spread offshore, mainly southwestwards. Interests within the region should closely monitor the situation, as sudden evacuations and road closures are common near any wildfire activity.

Rebel Advances and Assad's Departure Create Power Vacuum in Syria

Since November 26, rebel forces led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) have launched a series of offensives across Syria, capturing Aleppo, Hama, and most [recently](#), Damascus on December 8, effectively ending

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Bashar al-Assad's rule. Assad has since fled to Moscow, where Russia granted him asylum. The rapid advances by HTS have left the Syrian government in disarray, and widespread celebrations have erupted in rebel-controlled areas.

The collapse of the Assad regime has raised concerns over the potential for further instability, particularly as various factions vie for control of key territories. Rebel groups have consolidated control over vast territories, with sporadic clashes **reported** near Kurdish-held areas in the northeast, raising the risk of direct confrontations between rival factions. International actors, including Israel and Russia, have already responded to the shifting dynamics, with Israeli airstrikes **targeting** chemical weapons facilities and Russia calling for an emergency U.N. Security Council session to discuss the crisis. Israel has also **moved** into the Golan Heights buffer zone, underscoring the possibility of further territorial disputes in the coming weeks.

Neighboring countries like Lebanon and Jordan have closed their **borders**, citing security concerns, while the United Nations has **emphasized** the urgency of an inclusive political transition. Germany, citing security concerns and the rapidly evolving situation, has **suspended** asylum proceedings for Syrian nationals until further notice, as has Austria.

For more information on the situation in Syria, review the [AlertMedia Situation Report](#).

South Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol Survives Impeachment Vote After Ordering Martial Law

Days after **implementing** a short-lived period of martial law in the country, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol narrowly avoided impeachment after his ruling People Power Party (PPP) **boycotted** the vote. While the PPP declined to oust the president, party head Han Dong-hoon said he would work towards Yoon's "early" and "orderly" **departure** over the coming days, although he **declined** to give an exact timetable. Yoon is facing a possible investigation for **treason**, among other charges, **prompting** authorities to place a travel ban on him and others suspected of having been involved in the decision to impose martial law. The opposition insists that Yoon be removed from office immediately and is **planning** another impeachment vote this coming weekend.

As the impeachment vote was underway on Saturday, tens of thousands of demonstrators **gathered** outside the National Assembly, with many vowing to continue protesting to pressure Yoon to step down. The U.S. Embassy in Seoul has also **warned** of increased protests and calls on social media show that both pro- and anti-Yoon groups are planning regular demonstrations in Seoul over the coming days,

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including a rally by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) on Thursday [demanding](#) the disbandment of the PPP.

There is also expected to be an increase in industrial action over the days and weeks to come, as the prominent umbrella labor group, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, has called for an [indefinite general strike](#) until Yoon resigns or is removed from office. Korean Railway Workers Union (KRWU) members working for Korea Railroad (KORAIL) began an indefinite walkout on December 5. Hyundai Motor's union is [planning](#) a full strike starting Wednesday, with other sectors likely to follow.

For more information on South Korea's ongoing political crisis, review the [AlertMedia Situation Report](#).

Climate and Natural Hazards

- **United Kingdom, Ireland, and France Recovering After Storm Darragh:** Thousands of customers remain without power across [Ireland](#), Wales, England, and France following Storm Darragh. At its peak, the storm produced over 500,000 outages across the region on Friday and Saturday. Rail services are normalizing today, though some lines are still facing disruptions across England due to downed trees and ongoing outages. Improved weather conditions are expected throughout the week.
- **Storm Headed for Northeast U.S., Additional Lake Effect Snow:** Forecast confidence is increasing regarding a large disruptive storm system expected to impact the northeastern U.S. Wednesday into Thursday. While temperatures will be too warm for snow across the I-95 corridor, gusty winds and high rainfall rates are expected to produce areas of travel disruption and power outages. As the system departs, the wind direction will be favorable for significant lake effect snow downwind of the Great Lakes.
- **Monitoring Potential Low-End Tropical Development in the Bay of Bengal:** A broad area of low pressure over the southern Bay of Bengal, designated as Invest 90B, has a low chance for tropical development over the next 24-72 hours. Regardless of tropical classification, heavy rain will impact both Sri Lanka and southeastern India between Tuesday and Friday. Localized rainfall totals between 200-300mm (eight to 12 in) are possible in the hardest-hit locations during the multi-day period; [warnings](#) are already in effect.
- **Philippines' Kanlaon Volcano Erupts, Alert Level 3 Raised:** Mount Kanlaon, located on the central island of Negros, erupted just after 3 pm local time on Monday, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said in a [statement](#). Alert Level 3 has been raised, with over [50,000 people](#) estimated to be covered by evacuation efforts. Numerous flights have been canceled due to the ash plume, and classes have been suspended at nearby schools.

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Worldwide

- **Unrest and Uncertainty Across Several Eastern European Countries:** Georgia continues to see [nightly protests](#) over the government's decision to shelve talks to join the European Union, with police continuing to [deploy aggressive tactics](#) to disperse demonstrators. Protesters have specifically opposed the growing influence of Russia in their domestic politics, a dynamic that other countries in the region are also contending with. This includes [Serbia](#), which has begun deliberating a Russia-inspired "foreign agents" bill that would jeopardize their efforts to join the EU, and Romania, where the constitutional court has [annulled](#) the results of the first round of presidential elections over allegations of Russian meddling.
- **CEOs Consider Increased Protection Following UHC CEO Shooting:** As police continue their search for the suspect of the [targeted killing](#) of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, risk management firm Kroll says that CEOs and high-level executives have [reached out](#) about increasing their level of protection. Companies have taken other measures to improve the safety of their leaders. UnitedHealth has [removed](#) webpages listing information on their other top executives, as has CVS, which owns insurer Aetna. Another risk management consultancy, [WTW](#), found that stringent security measures for executives are not the norm, with less than a quarter of S&P 500 companies reporting home or personal security as a financial perk for their executives in 2023.
- **Israeli Ground Forces Cross Into Syria for First Time Since 1973:** As Syria contends with a political vacuum and faces a period of heightened uncertainty, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) has [conducted](#) an operation to temporarily seize the Syrian side of the Golan Heights demilitarized buffer zone. Marking the first time Israel has crossed into Syria since 1973, Israeli officials say this action is part of a broader deterrent campaign against hostile threats in the region. In recent days, Israel has also begun to strike [strategic weapon systems and key institutions in Syria](#). On the domestic front, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to [take the stand on Tuesday, December 10](#), to face a possible weeks-long trial on delayed corruption-related charges stemming from 2020.
- **Mexico President Claudia Sheinbaum Launches First Major Security Initiative:** Officials have served over [20 arrest warrants](#) throughout the State of Mexico as new President Claudia Sheinbaum kicks off her first major security initiative. The effort, dubbed Operation Swarm, has thus far targeted officials allegedly involved in extortion, express kidnapping, and homicide, including the mayor and police chief of Amanalco, as well as police commanders from Ixtapaluca, Naucalpan, and Tejupilco. Meanwhile, Sheinbaum's Security Minister Omar Garcia Harfuch [visited](#) Sinaloa, where conflict between rival factions of the Sinaloa cartel has resulted in

hundreds of deaths. Garcia has been tasked with improving the security strategy in the state, although both Sheinbaum and Garcia have cautioned that pacifying the state will be a long process.

- **France Faces Political Crisis After First Censure Vote in 60 Years:** France's President Emmanuel Macron is [expected](#) to name a new prime minister in the coming days after Michel Barnier was ousted from the role in a no-confidence vote last week. France's political troubles come amid rising concerns about the country's economy, paralleled by heightened union organizing and demonstration activity against the government. Railway workers with CGT-Cheminots and SUD-Rail intend to begin an [indefinite strike](#) this Wednesday, followed by a [nationwide strike](#) by private sector workers called for by CGT, one of France's largest unions, on Thursday. The political uncertainty may affect Europe's energy markets, as France is the continent's largest electricity exporter. The state-run electricity provider EDF [relies](#) on regular investments to keep costs relatively low, and while a [stopgap budget](#) means that the 2024 budget can be carried over into 2025, the next government tasked with addressing the country's debt may have a different energy outlook.

Cyber and Regulatory

- **FTC Charges Three Data Brokers With Violating Consumer Protection:** The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) for the U.S. filed a [complaint](#) against three data brokers, including Virginia-based Gravy Analytics, its subsidiary Venntel, and Mobilewalla. The FTC is accusing the brokers of obtaining consumer information from other data suppliers with the aim of selling the location data, including sensitive personal characteristics like political activities, religious viewpoints, potential health conditions, and the location of their residence. This is the fifth action by the FTC in 2024 to address the mishandling of location data and comes as the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) [proposed](#) a new rule to make data brokers adhere to the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), which would put them in line with traditional consumer agencies such as Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion.
- **CISA Recommends Switching to Encrypted Communications:** The FBI and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) are [advising](#) consumers, particularly those in sensitive roles, to switch to secure communications for messaging and voice calls due to ongoing Chinese hacking campaigns. For low-risk users, options like Signal and WhatsApp provide end-to-end encrypted communications, and Apple users can securely talk to others using the same ecosystem. In addition, U.S. authorities, in conjunction with those in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, [published](#) recommendations to patch vulnerable devices and secure internal communications infrastructure to reduce opportunities for threat actors.

- **Global Police Efforts Takedown Multiple Cybercrime Networks:** INTERPOL [concluded](#) a five-month operation that culminated in the arrest of over 5,500 individuals involved in cyber-enabled fraud operations and the seizure of over \$400 million. In addition, Europol took down an encrypted messaging service called [MATRIX](#). Authorities collected over two million messages sent through MATRIX associated with crimes like international drug and arms trafficking. Germany's Federal Police (the Bundeskriminalamt) also [seized](#) the country's largest cybercrime platform, which had more than 100,000 registered users. Another police operation in South Korea resulted in the [arrest](#) of six individuals associated with providing a customer with 240,000 satellite broadcast receivers capable of conducting distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks.
- **Journalists and Police Announce Departure From X Platform:** The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) announced it will stop [posting](#) to the social media platform X on January 20, 2025, when President-elect Donald Trump retakes office. The organization of nearly 300,000 journalists in 44 countries is the largest in Europe and joins media outlets like [The Guardian](#) that have left the platform. EFJ cited "disinformation and propaganda" as reasons for the switch. In addition, at least eight [police forces](#) across Britain have limited or ceased posting on X, saying that the platform has promoted violence and was used to spread misinformation that caused riots in the summer.

Infrastructure and Supply Chain

- **China, U.S. Trade Semiconductor Sector Export Controls:** The U.S. Commerce Department [expanded its list](#) of companies subject to export controls last week. Most of the 140 newly blacklisted companies are based in China, prompting criticism from the country's Commerce Ministry. A day later, Beijing [banned](#) shipments of gallium, germanium, and other critical materials to the U.S. Gallium and germanium are used in semiconductors. China's ban also extends to antimony and so-called superhard materials that have both military and civilian applications. Along with the export ban, Chinese industry associations reportedly recommended that companies buy chips locally, claiming U.S. chips are "[no longer safe](#)." Trade tensions between the world's largest economies are likely to worsen in the new year, with U.S. President-elect Trump promising to [impose heavy tariffs](#) on imported goods from China.
- **European Union, South American Countries Reach Agreement on Free Trade Zone:** EU officials and the five South American countries that make up the Mercosur trade bloc [announced](#) they had reached a free trade agreement on Friday. The deal, 25 years in the making, aims to reduce reliance on trade with China and the U.S., particularly in the face of potential trade tariffs under President-elect Trump's second term. Critics argue the agreement would lead to unfair competition for Europe's farmers, who have been some of the [loudest opponents](#). While EU-

Mercosur trade talks have concluded, the agreement still needs approval from a majority of EU member states and the European Parliament. France [intends](#) to oppose its ratification, with Austria, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland as possible allies. If approved, the deal would [create](#) one of the largest free trade zones in the world, covering nearly 25% of global gross domestic product.

- **Indonesia Bans Sale of Latest iPhone Until Apple Increases Domestic Investment:** Indonesia's ban on the sale of Apple's iPhone 16 [remains in place](#), but negotiations are occurring to allow for its possible sale. Indonesia has banned the marketing and sale of the model due to its failure to meet stringent [domestic investment regulations](#) requiring that 40% of phones be made from locally sourced materials. Under current negotiations, Indonesian officials are seeking to leverage the ban to push Apple to invest significantly more in their domestic manufacturing facilities. Apple is said to have recently offered one billion dollars for production-related investment, up from a recent 100 million dollar offer to lift the ban.
- **Netherlands Imposes Temporary Land Border Controls:** Today, the Netherlands began to [impose](#) land border controls with Germany and Belgium due to what it is calling "irregular" migration. Netherlands' ruling Party for Freedom (PVV) is following [similar actions](#) taken in other EU states in response to a [rise in political support](#) for more hardline policies related to immigration and asylum seekers. Although immigration has dropped slightly recently, 51,000 people have [applied](#) for asylum in the Netherlands over the last year. The country was one of the first signatories to the 1985 Schengen Agreement, which allowed goods and people to move freely among member states. The new border controls will include spot checks on trains and roadway crossings among the three countries for the next six months.
- **European Union Postpones Deforestation Law:** The EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), a landmark part of the European Green Deal, will [come into effect](#) 12 months from now after pushback from countries within and outside the bloc. The law, previously expected to take effect at the end of 2024, will be [implemented](#) next year without reductions to its environmental checks, despite an attempt from EU lawmakers to change them. The delay gives large operators and traders until December 30, 2025, to comply with the law's environmental obligations, notably its ban on importing commodities linked to deforestation or forest degradation.

Health

- **Authorities Investigate Fatal Mystery Disease in the Democratic Republic of the Congo:** A mysterious flu-like illness has emerged in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) Kwango province, resulting in at least [143 deaths](#) and approximately 380 infections since November 10. Symptoms of the disease include high fever, severe headaches, coughing, breathing difficulties,

and anemia. Public health authorities, including the World Health Organization, are on alert and have [dispatched](#) teams to collect samples and identify the pathogen. The outbreak comes as the DRC is still grappling with the [Mpox epidemic](#) that has led to over 1,000 deaths and 47,000 cases reported.

- **Food and Drink Industry to See Ad Restrictions in U.K.:** The U.K. government [announced](#) it would institute a ban on television advertisements and paid online advertisements of “junk food” shown before 9 pm. The measure, which has drawn public criticism, is part of the government’s efforts to curb childhood obesity, which has increased in recent years, and to alleviate pressure on the country’s healthcare system. Under the new requirements, food classified as “less healthy”— like certain fast food, soft drinks, pastries, cereal bars, and sweetened yogurts— [will fall](#) under the ban based on a scoring system. Advertisements that do not show the restricted products [will not apply](#).
- **Poliovirus Detected in Wastewater Samples in at Least Three European Countries:** Germany, Poland, and Spain have detected poliovirus in sewage samples. The virus was found in wastewater samples in Barcelona, Bonn, Cologne, Hamburg, Munich, and Warsaw during the fall of 2024. No cases of the highly contagious fatal disease poliomyelitis, known commonly as polio, have been reported in any of the countries. Though the region was declared polio-free in 2002, the recent detection of the virus comes as vaccination rates reportedly lag in several countries, including Poland, Austria, Romania, and Ukraine.
- **Key Developments in Major U.S. Healthcare Policy Cases:** The Supreme Court appears poised to [uphold](#) Tennessee’s ban on gender-affirming care for minors. Meanwhile, in Idaho, a federal appeals court has largely [upheld](#) a law that criminalizes assistance to minors seeking abortions without parental consent. Finally, healthcare access has been [expanded](#) to tens of thousands of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients who are now eligible to enroll in Affordable Care Act marketplaces until January 15, 2025.
- **Malaysian Health Authorities on High Alert After Following Severe Flooding:** Following severe floods in Malaysia’s Kelantan state, health volunteers are on high alert for waterborne disease outbreaks. Government data [shows](#) that over 40,000 people remain in temporary shelters due to concerns over a potential second wave of flooding. As waters receded, nearly 5,000 cases of infectious diseases — including stomach flu, respiratory infections, and skin conditions—have been reported in relief centers. The Malaysian Medical Relief Society has stated that the number of reported cases has been “manageable.” The Meteorological Department forecasts a monsoon surge from this week, potentially bringing continuous rain to the east coast and parts of Borneo Island.

- **U.S. Department of Agriculture Introduces New Testing for Milk to Combat Bird Flu:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture [announced](#) that it will begin testing the milk supply for H5N1 (avian flu), with the first round of testing beginning the week of December 16. The testing marks a move away from the current voluntary program, which many dairy farms have reportedly not complied with. Under the new program, the agency will test samples of unpasteurized milk from storage tanks at dairy processing facilities, and farmers with infected herds will be required to provide information to help identify cases of H5N1. The move comes as a California farm is [recalling](#) raw milk due to multiple retail samples tested positive for H5N1. In response to the positive tests, the California Department of Food and Agriculture suspended the farm from distributing multiple products produced on or after November 27.

Demonstrations and Industrial Action

- **Climate Activists to “Blockade” U.S. Energy Department During Week of Action:** Climate Defiance, an environmental activist group known for its [direct protest style](#), is [calling](#) on supporters to “blockade” the U.S. Department of Energy in Washington, D.C., on Thursday. The action is part of a week of demonstrations to urge the Biden administration to deny permits for new natural gas export terminals. The group has announced protests in seven major cities in the run-up to Thursday’s action, including New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. While none of the calls to action note specific locations within these cities, each appears to be targeting Senate representatives.
- **Farmers Returning to Europe’s Streets:** This week, multiple European countries are set to face protests by farmers [spurred](#) in large part by the [EU-Mercosur trade deal](#). In France, the National Federation of Agricultural Workers’ Unions has [called for](#) mobilizations “everywhere” in the country between Monday and Tuesday. Meanwhile, farmers will [gather](#) in neighboring Spain in Valladolid on Tuesday, with further [actions](#) expected in the days ahead. In Poland, farmers are threatening widespread action beginning Tuesday, including at [border crossings with Ukraine](#), unless they see concessions from the government. Finally, while the U.K. is not a party to the Mercosur agreement, farmers opposed to a [recent tax change](#) will converge on central London on Wednesday.
- **Italy to Face Major Strike Actions This Week:** Rail workers in Italy’s Emilia-Romagna region today kicked off what’s expected to be a disruptive series of strikes over the coming days. While the Emilia-Romagna action, sparked by safety concerns after a train conductor was attacked earlier in December, has now ended, unionized workers are gearing up for a nationwide general strike on Friday. The strike will [reportedly](#) mainly affect rail and other forms of public transport, though taxi drivers are also expected to engage in a work stoppage. Additionally, the nation’s

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major airports will be [disrupted](#) by strikes by air navigation service staff and air traffic controllers on Sunday.

- **Former Prime Minister of Pakistan Threatens Civil Disobedience Movement:** Imprisoned former leader of Pakistan Imran Khan has [threatened](#) to launch a “civil disobedience movement” in the country beginning Saturday if the current government does not agree to investigate the deaths of those killed during [protests](#) in November. The present administration does not appear likely to do so as of this writing, denying that the deaths have occurred. Ahead of the potential protest movement, Khan and his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), have called on supporters to gather for a demonstration in Peshawar on Friday. Renewed demonstration activity by the PTI is likely to result in significant countermeasures from authorities and transport disruptions and violence in areas where major actions occur.
- **Other Demonstration Activity the Global Intelligence Team Is Watching:** A number of notable protests are planned this week across the globe. On Tuesday, transport unions in Peru will hold a [large demonstration](#) in Lima over [organized crime and extortion](#) impacting the sector and country. On the same day, activists opposed to Puerto Rico’s grid operator, LUMA Energy, will [march](#) in San Juan. Also on Tuesday, climate activists holding a series of actions against an energy conference in Berlin are expected to hold their largest protest of the week near the Brandenburg Gate in Pariser Platz. Later in the week, on Friday, unions in Belgium will host a [demonstration](#) in Brussels’ Place Poelert to bring attention to their concerns amid government formation talks.

Upcoming Events

- December 10: Constitution Day (Thailand)
- December 12: Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Mexico)
- December 14: Martyred Intellectuals Day (Bangladesh)
- December 16: Victory Day (Bangladesh)
- December 16: Day of Reconciliation (South Africa)
- December 16: National Day (Bahrain)
- December 24: Christmas Eve (Global)
- December 25: Christmas (Global)
- December 26: Boxing Day (Global)
- December 29: Parliamentary Elections (Chad)
- December 29: Presidential Election (Croatia)
- December 31: New Year’s Eve (Global)
- January 1: New Year’s Day (Global)
- January 6: Counting and Certification of Electoral Votes (United States)
- January 7: Orthodox Christmas (Global)