



**January 20, 2025**

## Headlining This Week's Brief

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## Top Stories

### **Extreme Cold Temperatures Across Central and Eastern U.S., Winter Weather Across the South**

A bitterly cold arctic airmass is gripping the central and eastern United States, setting the stage for a [rare winter storm](#) poised to sweep along the Gulf Coast and Southeast through midweek. The storm, ramping up Monday evening and into Tuesday across eastern Texas, is expected to stretch eastward along the Central Gulf Coast and impact key cities, including Houston, New Orleans, Mobile, and Charleston.

Snow and sleet accumulations of two to five inches and pockets of freezing rain are forecast along the Interstate 10 corridor and surrounding areas, likely to create dangerous travel conditions in southeastern Texas, southern Louisiana, and into Georgia, northern Florida, and lower South Carolina. Major disruptions are anticipated, with [Houston's airports](#) already announcing full closures on Tuesday and schools in Houston and New Orleans bracing for extended closures. This storm coincides with bitterly cold conditions for Monday's Presidential Inauguration, where wind chills near zero have [forced activities indoors](#) in Washington, D.C. Governors in Louisiana and Texas have declared states of emergency as the storm is expected to impact millions across the region.

The arctic airmass is delivering life-threatening [wind chills as low as -55 degrees \(F\)](#) in the Upper Midwest and Northern Plains. Sub-zero wind chills will extend as far south as Texas and the Ohio Valley through midweek, with freeze warnings in effect along the Gulf Coast and northern Florida, where exposed plumbing and vegetation are at risk. High temperatures on Monday and Tuesday will be 20-30

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degrees below average in cities like Denver, Chicago, and New York, while southern cities like Houston and Atlanta will face rare sub-freezing highs during the same period.

## **Extreme Fire Danger to Return to Southern California This Week**

Southern California is entering another period of [extreme fire danger](#) early this week as powerful Santa Ana winds, forecasted to peak at 100mph, sweep through the region starting this afternoon. The National Weather Service has issued a ["Particularly Dangerous Situation"](#) red flag warning—the highest level of alert—covering large portions of Los Angeles and Ventura counties from noon Monday through Tuesday morning. The conditions mark a dramatic shift after a quiet weekend, with the weather system driven by a sharp dip in the jet stream. This setup is funneling cold air into the region, intensifying offshore winds and creating dangerously dry conditions. Humidity levels in the single digits (2%-5%) will combine with the winds to produce an environment ripe for wildfire ignition and rapid spread.

The strongest winds, with gusts reaching up to 100mph, are expected in the San Gabriel Mountains, the Santa Monica Mountains, and along the Malibu Coast. Valley areas could experience gusts of up to 65 mph. The winds will peak Monday evening, persisting through Tuesday morning, with critical fire weather conditions extending south into San Diego County and the high deserts. These hazardous conditions are compounding efforts to contain two major wildfires already devastating the region. The [Palisades Fire](#), which has burned more than 23,000 acres and is 56% contained, and the [Eaton Fire](#), having scorched 14,000 acres and is 81% contained. Combined, these fires have destroyed thousands of structures and claimed 27 lives, marking one of the most devastating fire seasons in California's history.

The [California Governor's Office of Emergency Services](#) announced Sunday that they were collaborating with local fire departments to preposition additional firefighters and engines throughout the region. Officials are urging residents to closely follow evacuation orders and safety [recommendations](#) as the region faces its third period of extreme fire danger in as many weeks.

For more information, read AlertMedia's [situation report on the California wildfires](#).

## **Trump Administration to Launch Anti-Immigration Push**

During his inaugural address after being sworn in as the 47th president of the United States, Donald Trump [previewed](#) the executive orders he is [expected](#) to issue today across a range of issues. Taking pride of place was a series of measures aimed at closing the U.S.-Mexico border and deporting unauthorized immigrants. Among the actions planned are a surge of troops to the U.S.-Mexico border

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and a reversal of Biden-era policies, such as [humanitarian parole](#). Trump has pledged to issue “[close to 100](#)” orders, including a travel ban and additional restrictions placed on who can enter the country, although at this time it is unclear who will be affected under such measures. The return of policies from Trump’s first term is also likely, including [Title 42](#), which allows the U.S. to restrict entry on public health grounds, and the Migrant Protection Protocols (also referred to as “Remain in Mexico”), which stipulated that asylum seekers needed to stay in Mexico until their court date.

In the interior of the country, authorities are expected to move to deport undocumented immigrants with criminal backgrounds in major metropolitan areas, according to sources familiar with the administration’s plans cited by [national media](#). They have said that the initial focus will be on undocumented immigrants with criminal backgrounds, although “[collateral arrests](#)” are possible. Incoming “[border czar](#)” Tom Homan has said that he plans to [increase enforcement](#) of immigration rules, including [workplace roundups](#) and I-9 audits, with authorities likely to target the manufacturing, food processing, agricultural, construction, and hospitality industries.

Trump’s immigration executive orders will face legal and logistical challenges, with the incoming administration reportedly “[reconsidering](#)” whether to launch raids right away. Mexico is [bracing](#) for potential mass deportations from the U.S. under the incoming Trump administration. Emergency plans are in [place](#) in the border state of Chihuahua, and the border city of Tijuana has [declared](#) a state of emergency in preparation for potentially thousands of deportees.

## Temporary Ceasefire Begins Between Israel, Hamas

Three Israeli hostages and 90 Palestinian prisoners were set free after Israel’s cabinet met [Friday](#) to formally approve a temporary ceasefire in the conflict with Hamas. The agreement consists of a multi-phased implementation spanning 18 weeks, with the first phase lasting six weeks. Under the deal, Hamas will release 33 Israeli hostages, while Israel will free around 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israel has also agreed to withdraw its forces eastward from populated areas in Gaza and allow an increase in humanitarian aid.

There is still significant uncertainty around what happens in Gaza once phase one is completed, especially as phases two and three remain to be negotiated. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has [emphasized](#) that Israel retains the right to resume fighting, and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and his Otzma Yehudit Party [withdrew](#) from the government in protest over the agreement. Their departure leaves Netanyahu’s ruling coalition with an even thinner margin in the Knesset, one that

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could disappear entirely if Finance Minister Bezael Smotrich and the Religious Zionism Party make good on their threat to withdraw if fighting does not resume following the end of phase one.

To the north, there is also some uncertainty as to the continued status of the ceasefire deal with Hezbollah in Lebanon. Under the current terms, Israel and Hezbollah are both required to withdraw from the area south of the Litani River by January 26. However, Israeli forces [reportedly](#) continue to operate in the area and may [extend](#) their presence past the deadline, saying that the Lebanese army has failed to deploy to the region in a timely manner.

## Climate and Natural Hazards

- **Potential Storm System to Impact Ireland, United Kingdom Late This Week:** Forecast models indicate the potential for a rapidly intensifying storm system to approach Ireland and the upper United Kingdom by the weekend, driven by an unusually strong upper-level jet stream. The [U.K. Met Office](#) has issued yellow level wind warnings for Northern Ireland and western Scotland, with the possibility of wind gusts reaching 70-80mph in exposed coastal and highland areas and into Ireland on Friday and Saturday. While specific details remain uncertain, the storm's peak intensity could cause significant disruption, including downed trees, power outages, and coastal flooding along western areas. Lingering impacts may persist into Saturday. Southeastern regions, including parts of England and Wales, currently face a lower risk of disruption, though additional warnings may be needed as [confidence increases](#) in the coming days.
- **Tropical Cyclone Sean Clips Northwestern Australia:** [Tropical Cyclone Sean](#) rapidly intensified this weekend, reaching the equivalent strength of a Category 4 hurricane while moving southwest just off the coast of the northern region of Western Australia. Outer rain bands from the cyclone led to heavy rain and gusty winds, triggering cyclone emergency warnings from Barrow Island to Ningaloo. Several [main roads](#) across the region remain closed or have restrictions as of late Monday, local time. Weather conditions are expected to improve Tuesday as Sean gradually weakens while moving southwest, further offshore.
- **Other Severe Weather Events:** For a daily look at other significant weather events around the world, read AlertMedia's [Daily Severe Weather Report](#).

## Worldwide

- **U.S. FBI, DHS Warn of Possible Copycat Attacks:** The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a [public service announcement](#) warning of the possibility of copycat or retaliatory attacks in the wake of the New Year's Day vehicle ramming

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incident in New Orleans. The PSA comes ahead of the Super Bowl, which will be held in New Orleans on February 9, and Mardi Gras on March 4, which officials [upgraded](#) to a SEAR-1 security event, granting it federal support. The increased security and requests for vigilance come alongside reports that the FBI and DHS have [decreased](#) their efforts to disrupt extremist content online over the past two years.

- **South Korean President Yoon Officially Placed Under Arrest:** South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol was [detained](#) last week as part of an investigation into whether his declaration of martial law in early December constituted an insurrection. Roughly 3,000 police officers descended on the presidential compound to execute the arrest warrant after an initial effort was [thwarted](#) by Yoon's Presidential Security Service and the hundreds of pro-Yoon demonstrators who had camped outside the facility. After the court ruled that Yoon could be held for up to 20 days while authorities determine whether to officially charge him, his supporters [stormed](#) the Seoul Western District Court Building, resulting in dozens of arrests. Meanwhile, his impeachment hearings continue apace, with [oral arguments](#) due to be held on January 21 and 23. The ongoing crisis has created significant [uncertainty](#) for South Korea's economy.
- **State-Based Armed Conflict, Extreme Weather Headline World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report:** Ahead of the annual gathering of political leaders and business titans in Davos, Switzerland, the World Economic Forum released its annual [Global Risks Report](#). Topping the current risk landscape is state-based armed conflict, followed closely by extreme weather events. Over the next two years, mis- and disinformation move into the number one spot. Similar to previous years, environmental concerns take the top four spots in the 10-year outlook, with extreme weather events followed by ecosystem collapse, critical changes to earth systems, and natural resource shortages. Potentially [overlooked](#) risks include changes brought about by advances in artificial intelligence, economic downturns, and intrastate violence.
- **Violent Crime Increased Significantly in Chilean Regional Capitals:** A [report](#) from the Faro UDD Center for Humanities and Social Sciences analyzing crime trends in Chile's regional capitals between 2019 and 2023 found that homicides have increased significantly, highlighting a surge in organized crime-driven violence. Santiago, Puerto Montt, Valparaíso, Rancagua, and Calama recorded the highest rates, although the study also found increases in areas with lower population density, which researchers said could reflect a move by organized crime groups towards areas with less state presence.
- **Other Stories the Global Intelligence Team is Monitoring:** Germany [reported](#) a rise in crime related to the far-right in 2024, with nearly 34,000 registered cases. Most of the cases were online offenses or hate speech. On the other side of the world, officials in Australia are also [contending](#) with possible hate crimes as authorities investigate a string of antisemitic incidents, including the

vandalism of a Jewish leader's former home and arson attacks on vehicles. Russia is **facing** its own wave of arson attacks from phone scammers targeting ATMs that some in the country have attributed to Ukraine. Finally, in Colombia, at least 80 people have been **killed** and several thousand displaced after a truce between the National Liberation Army (ELN) and dissident factions of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia fell apart. The surge in violence also caused peace talks between the government and ELN to be suspended.

## Cyber and Regulatory

- **Biden Announces New Chips Restrictions Before Departing Presidency:** During his last few weeks in office, outgoing U.S. President Joe Biden announced several new restrictions. The new **rules** aim to further stymie the flow of advanced TSMC, Samsung, and **Nvidia** chips to China. In addition, Biden effectively **banned** the sale of new smart cars from China and Russia within the U.S. and opened the door to the federal government leasing land for the development of six new data centers. The Commerce Department also **introduced** export controls on biotechnology equipment and related technology. While some allies have **moved** to align their policies with the U.S., others have **raised concerns** about not being granted preferred access to advanced AI chips. In apparent retaliation, China has **opened an investigation** into alleged dumping by U.S. chipmakers and unfair business practices.
- **Biden Also Issues Executive Order on Cybersecurity:** Outgoing U.S. President Biden **signed** an executive order securing funds to support federal cybersecurity efforts, increasing the ability to sanction individual hackers and nations, and covering the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in cyber defense. Officials identified the worst cyberattacks during the administration and crafted the order to address the core of the problem. Additionally, the order **creates** a partnership with private companies aimed at securing the energy sector using AI and making it easier to sanction entities that target the country's critical infrastructure. The executive order also mandates that software companies provide products to the federal government so that they can adopt stricter cybersecurity measures. It's unclear if the incoming Trump administration will repeal the order.
- **TikTok Back After Brief Hiatus:** TikTok **briefly** went offline in the U.S. over the weekend as a law banning the social media platform went into effect on Sunday. Users reported losing access to the app Saturday evening before the company **posted** the next day that they were in the process of restoring service after receiving assurances from incoming President Donald Trump that he would issue an executive order extending the time before the ban goes into effect. In lieu of forcing TikTok to divest completely from Chinese parent company ByteDance, Trump has **proposed** 50% ownership alongside an American company.

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- **EU Proposes Cyber Support Plan for Healthcare Sector:** The European Commission [proposed](#) a plan to create a European Cybersecurity Support Center at the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) to provide support to the healthcare sector following recent cybersecurity incidents. The plan includes services such as information sharing about vulnerabilities, as well as an early warning system and assessing hospital's cyber resilience. Additionally, the European Commission [plans](#) to make decryption tools available to the sector to help retrieve data without paying attackers in the case of ransomware attacks. A public consultation on the plan will take place throughout the year , and a progressive rollout of the plan is expected in late 2025 and 2026.
- **U.K. Cyber Proposal Extends Ransomware Payment Restrictions to Public Sector:** The UK has [proposed](#) a ban to extend the current restriction on ransomware payments to include the public sector and critical infrastructure to make them less attractive targets. Additionally, the proposal [mandates](#) that organizations outside the ban report if they intend to pay ransomware attackers to support the government's intelligence gathering and investigative efforts. The National Cyber Security Centre states that the ban will help to protect the country's critical infrastructure from further incidents and require organizations to improve their cyber defense capabilities. The proposal is [undergoing](#) a consultation process until early April.

## Infrastructure and Supply Chain

- **Mexico Unveils Economic Plan Amid Trade Tensions:** Last week, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum [unveiled](#) "Plan México," an economic plan that seeks to boost domestic manufacturing and bolster investment by encouraging local production of highly imported goods while [offering](#) incentives for nearshoring. The move appears aimed at reducing the nation's \$105 billion [trade deficit](#) with China and quelling tensions with the U.S. amid [threats](#) of steep tariffs by incoming U.S. President Donald Trump. Mexico's deepening economic relationship with China, marked by a [60% surge](#) in Chinese shipments between 2023 and 2024, could complicate its standing with its largest trading partner, the U.S., especially as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) is due for review in 2026.
- **California Issues New Measures to Address Wildfire Devastation:** In light of the devastating [wildfires](#) in Los Angeles, California has implemented measures to support affected residents and begin rebuilding the area. California Governor Gavin Newsom has [suspended](#) certain environmental regulations, including the California Environmental Quality Act and the California Coastal Act, to expedite rebuilding in communities like Pacific Palisades and Altadena. The order aims to streamline reconstruction and address the urgent housing needs of displaced residents by setting rules to slash red tape associated with receiving building permits, among other things.

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Additionally, Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara [issued](#) a one-year moratorium preventing insurers from canceling or not renewing policies for homeowners in fire-impacted areas.

- **Houthi Attacks Expected to Decrease Following Ceasefire Agreement:** Following the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, Yemen's Houthi leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi [announced](#) that the group will "monitor" the truce's implementation and [limit](#) their attacks to vessels "wholly owned by Israeli individuals or entities and/or sailing under the Israeli flag." A full cessation of hostilities would only occur upon the successful implementation of all phases of the ceasefire agreement. Despite the potential pause, shipping giants like Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd said that they have [no immediate plans](#) to return to Red Sea routes. War risk [insurance premiums](#) for ships with links to the U.S. and Israel remain unchanged.
- **Biden Issues 11th-Hour Declarations Ahead of Trump's Second Term:** In his final days as U.S. president, Joe Biden [designated](#) two new national monuments in California, barring mining and energy development in the protected areas. The designation adds to Biden's previous [executive action](#), which permanently banned future offshore drilling in a vast area of ocean and may complicate any Trump administration [plans](#) to "maximize U.S. oil and natural gas production." Additionally, Biden said that he [considered](#) the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to be ratified as the 28th Amendment to the Constitution, enshrining equal rights for women in the founding document. Legal experts note that the ERA's original ratification deadline expired in 1982, and Biden's announcement is expected to draw legal challenges.
- **U.S. Customs and Border Protection Proposes New Rules for Low-Value Shipments:** In an effort to prevent illegal goods from entering the U.S., Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has [proposed](#) new regulations targeting de minimis shipments—those valued under \$800 and exempt from duties. The proposed rules aim to strengthen data collection requirements, enabling CBP to more effectively intercept high-risk imports, namely counterfeit goods and illicit drugs. The proposal comes amid a 600% surge in de minimis shipments in the last decade, equivalent to billions of dollars. Additionally, the regulations would deny duty-free exemptions for low-value packages containing products subject to existing U.S. trade tariffs. The proposal will be open for public comment until March 17 and may require potential presidential review before being implemented.

## Health

- **Suspected Marburg Virus Disease Outbreak Confirmed in Tanzania:** On January 13, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued an [alert](#) about a suspected Marburg Virus Disease (MVD) outbreak in Tanzania's Kagera region, reporting nine suspected cases, including eight deaths, with symptoms such as fever, headache, hemorrhagic vomiting, and external bleeding. After



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Tanzania's Ministry of Health initially denied the claims, Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan [said](#) that laboratory tests had confirmed the outbreak. Both the WHO and the Tanzanian government have called for increased vigilance and international collaboration.

- **FDA Targets Nicotine Levels and Bans Red Dye No. 3:** The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed new rules to significantly reduce nicotine levels in cigarettes and other combustible tobacco products, aiming to decrease addiction and prevent smoking-related diseases. The FDA estimates the changes could lead to millions of Americans quitting smoking as well as the prevention of future addictions. Additionally, the FDA announced a ban on Red Dye No. 3 in food, beverages, and ingested drugs due to evidence in animal studies linking the additive to cancer. Manufacturers have been given deadlines in 2027 and 2028 to comply with the new regulations.
- **Progress in U.S. Healthcare Labor Disputes:** The strike involving nearly 5,000 healthcare workers at Providence hospitals and clinics in Oregon continues, with both sides now agreeing to [resume negotiations](#) through a federal mediator. As of today, the Providence healthcare work stoppage has [gone on](#) for 10 days. Separately, in New York City, over 2,500 public hospital doctors narrowly avoided a strike after reaching a tentative agreement that includes pay increases, longevity bonuses, and funding for future salary adjustments to address recruitment and retention challenges.
- **Wildfires Increase Drinking Water Contamination Risks:** Utility providers in Los Angeles County have [reported](#) concerns over drinking water contamination following recent wildfires. Damaged water systems can allow toxic chemicals, including volatile organic compounds like benzene, to enter the water supply when pressure is lost during a fire. These chemicals, often released by burning synthetic materials, pose health risks ranging from nausea to long-term cancer risks. In Pasadena, a "Do Not Drink" notice was issued to a third of customers, marking the first such warning in the utility's history. However, most areas have now been cleared following extensive testing. Utilities continue to test infrastructure repairs, emphasizing the need for vigilance as wildfires increasingly threaten urban water systems.

## Demonstrations and Industrial Action

- **Trump's Inauguration, Impending Executive Orders Prompt Widespread Demonstrations:** In the U.S., nationwide demonstrations against the inauguration of Donald Trump will continue through the evening. Thousands of demonstrators [joined the People's March](#) in Washington, D.C., and hundreds of other protests against Trump's inauguration took place over the weekend. Demonstrations are almost certain to continue in the coming weeks as numerous groups with a wide range of affinities have indicated their intent to "fight back" against Trump's agenda. Groups

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in Aurora, CO, Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Portland, OR, already have demonstrations against Trump planned for this coming weekend, though in part due to organizers' postponing today's gatherings due to extremely cold weather. Further demonstration activity will likely be organized in response to the enactment of several executive orders that Trump has promised to issue on his first day in office.

- **Opposing Demonstrations in Central London to Draw Large Crowds:** On Saturday, February 1, far-right activist [Tommy Robinson](#) is calling on his supporters to march in London from Waterloo Station to Downing St. at noon to demand his release from prison. In response, several labor and civil society groups, including Stand Up to Racism and the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Union, are organizing a counterdemonstration. Robinson, whose real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, organized a [similar event](#) in October that attracted thousands of supporters, a significant police presence, and counterdemonstrators. Police [arrested](#) four people—two Robinson supporters and two counterdemonstrators—at the October protest.
- **Demonstrations Against Arms Sales to Israel Planned at England Arms Show:** Heightened security and demonstration activity are expected near the Farnborough International Exhibition & Conference Centre in Hampshire, England, this week during the [International Armoured Vehicles Conference](#) (IAVC). Activists affiliated with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the Campaign Against Arms Trade are calling on supporters to gather outside the conference venue on Wednesday at 8 am and again at 5 pm to protest the IAVC and the sale of weapons to Israel. Last January, demonstrators [sprayed paint](#) on Twickenham Stadium to protest the IAVC being held there.
- **Australian Activists to Hold Invasion Day Demonstrations on Sunday:** Large crowds and localized traffic disruptions are likely in major cities across Australia this Sunday during [Invasion Day](#) rallies, which are held annually to protest Australia's national day. January 26 marks the arrival of European colonists to Sydney in 1788, [signifying](#) the beginning of the colonization of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders and making the public holiday's date a contentious choice. Notable Invasion Day demonstrations are planned in Brisbane (Queens Gardens), Geelong (Little Malop St.), Melbourne (Parliament House), and Sydney (Belmore Park).
- **Serbia Sees Education Disruptions as Student-Led Demonstrations Escalate:** The Independent Union of Serbian Educators called for a nationwide strike across the educational system today, with a "[significant number of primary and secondary schools](#)" expected to be affected by the one-day work stoppage. The strike comes amid continued demonstrations against the government over the [fatal train station collapse in Novi Sad](#) in November. University students have organized blockades at higher education institutions since the collapse, with the ongoing protests punctuated by large demonstrations in Belgrade. Student-led groups

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organized a gathering at the University of Belgrade's Faculty of Philosophy earlier today, and widespread demonstrations are expected to continue in the coming weeks as educational and civil society groups express support for student demonstrators.

## Upcoming Events

- January 13-February 26: Maha Kumbh Mela (Prayagraj, India)
- January 20: Presidential Inauguration (United States)
- January 20-24: World Economic Forum (Davos Switzerland)
- January 21-23: International Armoured Vehicles Conference (Farnborough, United Kingdom)
- January 25: Anniversary of January 25 Revolution (Egypt)
- January 26: Australia Day (Australia)
- January 26: Republic Day (India)
- January 26: Presidential Election (Belarus)
- January 26: Liberation Day (Uganda)
- January 28: Spring Festival Eve (China)
- January 29: Lunar New Year (China and Taiwan)
- January 29: Tet Holiday (Vietnam)
- January 30-February 2: Lunar New Year Holiday (Taiwan)
- January 30-February 4: Golden Week (China)
- February 1: Anniversary of Military Coup (Myanmar)
- February 5: Kashmir Day (Pakistan)
- February 6: Waitangi Day (New Zealand)
- February 8: Military Foundation Day (North Korea)