



**February 24, 2025**

## Headlining This Week's Brief

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- Climate and Natural Hazards
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## Top Stories

### **U.S. to Trend Overall Warmer This Week, With a Couple Nuisance-Level Hazard Areas**

The Pacific Northwest is set to endure high winds and heavy rainfall through Tuesday afternoon, with coastal gusts nearing 70 mph and waves reaching 30 ft. Multiple [wind alerts](#) are in effect, with gusts along the I-5 corridor potentially reaching 50 mph. [Power outages](#) are expected to rise through Monday evening, potentially affecting hundreds of thousands of customers. Meanwhile, Portland and Seattle could see nearly an inch of rain, leading to localized street flooding and minor travel delays in flood-prone areas. In the Washington Cascades, winter storm warnings are in effect, with Snoqualmie Pass on I-90 forecast to receive around a foot of snow, creating hazardous travel conditions and possible restrictions.

Coral Springs, Miami, and Key West are under a Level 1 severe thunderstorm risk (5-tier scale) through Monday evening. While the overall threat remains low, a brief tornado or isolated wind gusts up to 60 mph are possible. Additionally, a Level 1 excessive rainfall risk (4-tier scale) is in effect, with one to three inches of rain expected across southeast Florida and the Keys—locally exceeding five inches—through Monday night.

After several weeks of below-normal temperatures and winter storms, much of the central and eastern U.S. will see a warming trend through Saturday. While brief cool spells are expected, afternoon highs in the 50s and low 60s will be common across portions of the Central Plains, Ohio Valley, and Northeast I-95 corridor. Meanwhile, the Desert Southwest will see summer-like warmth, with temperatures approaching 90F in areas between Phoenix and Los Angeles by Wednesday.

## Germany's Next Chancellor Signals New Era of European Defense Policy; AfD Makes Historic Gains

Friedrich Merz is slated to be Germany's next chancellor after his Christian Democratic Alliance (CDU/CSU) won **just under 30%** of the vote in Sunday's federal elections. Merz's policy priorities differ from that of outgoing chancellor Olaf Scholz, whose party (SPD) had its worst election performance in the country's post-war history. Despite their differences, the CDU/CSU and SPD are the most likely pair to form a governing coalition, with Merz striving to have a working government formed by Easter. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) party doubled its vote share since the last election to over 20%; however, Merz has **reiterated** that he will not work with the party to form a coalition. The election, **marked** by polarization and protests, is expected to prompt continued demonstrations, especially if the AfD gains legislative influence.

As Europe's largest economy, Germany's next steps will influence the direction of the European Union (EU) and the continent more broadly. Merz is **expected** to support the growth of Germany's defense industry and, at the EU level, back a simplification bill for green rules and help push for legislative changes to the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). Reporting from **Politico** breaks down Merz's likely domestic and international policy pursuits.

On election night, Merz **said** he would prioritize "unity in Europe" and criticized Elon Musk's AfD endorsement, comparing it to "interventions" undertaken by Russia. Researchers from the non-profit **CeMAS found** that Russian disinformation campaigns targeted the CDU, SPD, and Green parties but expressed support for the AfD. Merz's statements came after a tumultuous week in Europe-U.S. relations, with Washington's unilateral approach to negotiations with Russia over the war in Ukraine sparking concern amongst its allies.

## As Expiration of Phase One Nears, Israel-Hamas Ceasefire Deal on Shaky Ground

With only days to go before the conclusion of the first phase of the Hamas-Israel ceasefire deal on March 2, the chances of the successful negotiation of the second phase before the deadline appear to be fading. Over the weekend, Hamas **released** six hostages, while Israel said that it was **delaying** the release of around 600 Palestinian prisoners, claiming they **would not be freed** until Hamas agreed to hand over further hostages without "humiliating ceremonies." Hamas has **said** that the delay in the release of Palestinian prisoners is an example of Israel "intentionally sabotaging" the ceasefire deal. The last set of swaps was scheduled to take place on Thursday, although it is unclear if that exchange will move

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forward. While a permanent end to the fighting appears unlikely in the near term, the pause in hostilities may extend past March 2 if the two sides are able to reach some deal over the continued exchange of captives. However, any continued pause in fighting will be tested again on March 8, the deadline for Israel to withdraw from the Philadelphi Corridor.

Amid the uncertainty over the ceasefire, conflict and violence have continued outside of Gaza. In Tel Aviv, three empty buses [exploded](#) in a “suspected terror attack,” although there were no casualties. The apparent attack [prompted](#) the U.S. to ban its employees from using public buses and light rail for 14 days. Following the explosions, Netanyahu ordered “an intensive operation against centers of terrorism” in the West Bank, and on Sunday, Israel [deployed](#) tanks in the territory for the first time since 2002. Defense Minister Israel Katz reportedly said that troops would remain in parts of the West Bank for a year and that the residents who have fled the area amid ongoing anti-terror operations will not be allowed to return. A similar extended stay appears likely in Syria, where Israel is [occupying](#) a buffer zone near the Golan Heights. When discussing southern Syria at a military graduation, Netanyahu said that Israel [will not allow](#) the “[Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham] forces or the new Syrian army to enter the area south of Damascus” and demanded “the complete demilitarization of southern Syria.”

## Climate and Natural Hazards

- **Trio of Tropical Cyclones Stirring Concern in the South Pacific:** [Satellite imagery](#) reveals three active tropical cyclones stretching from waters off northeastern Australia to the island nations of Vanuatu and Fiji. [Cyclone Rae](#) is departing Fiji’s southernmost islands after brushing the region as a minimal hurricane-equivalent storm. Meanwhile, [Météo-France](#) is monitoring a developing cyclone off Vanuatu’s eastern shores, which is expected to intensify to hurricane strength. This system could threaten the southernmost islands, well south of Port Vila, through Wednesday before heading out to sea. Lastly, [Tropical Cyclone Alfred](#) could turn southwest, threatening southeast Queensland in roughly a week, though considerable forecast uncertainty remains.
- **Probability of a Volcanic Eruption Increasing in Iceland:** The [Icelandic Met Service](#) increased the volcanic risk assessment to its highest level late last week. An eruption is expected on very short notice, possibly within days or weeks, as magma accumulation has reached the same levels that were recorded before the November 2023 eruption. The most likely eruption site is between Sundhnúkur and Stóra- Skógfell, but its impact will depend on the direction of fissure expansion. If an eruption occurs, lava could reach roads and infrastructure within 1.5 hours, and gas pollution could pose a hazard.

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- **Dozens of Structures Collapse Under Heavy Snow in Upstate New York:** More than 25 structures, including several homes, reportedly [collapsed](#) after a significant lake-effect snow event in Oswego County between February 14-19. On Tuesday, the roof of International Wire, a major manufacturing plant, gave way under the weight of the snow. International Wire, which claims to be the [largest](#) non-vertically integrated manufacturer of copper and copper-alloy wire products in the U.S., confirmed the incident.
- **Other Severe Weather Events:** For a daily look at significant weather events around the world, read AlertMedia's [Daily Severe Weather Report](#).

## Worldwide

- **U.S. Issues New Foreign Terrorist Organization Designations:** Last week, the U.S. administration [designated](#) eight organized crime groups as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) that it [says](#) "pose a risk to U.S. national security, foreign policy, and economic interests." The groups include Mexican cartels and other transnational criminal organizations like Tren de Aragua and Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13). The designations will likely lead to an intensification of law enforcement efforts against these organizations and [could create challenges](#) for businesses and financial institutions operating in affected regions, requiring [heightened due diligence](#) and compliance measures to avoid potential legal and financial repercussions. Canada also [designated](#) seven of the same groups as terrorist entities.
- **Bolsonaro Charged for Alleged Coup Attempt:** Brazilian prosecutors officially charged former President Jair Bolsonaro with attempting to overthrow the government following his 2022 loss to current President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Prosecutors have [presented](#) a streamlined version of charges against Bolsonaro that could potentially lead to a final ruling in the case before the next election in October 2026, possibly barring Bolsonaro from seeking a rematch against Lula. Nationwide demonstrations by Bolsonaro's supporters calling for Lula's impeachment were already [planned](#) for March 16, and the new charges could lead to further protest activity.
- **U.S. Embassy in Burundi Authorizes Departure of Some Staff Amid Fighting in DRC:** Last week, rebel groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), led by the M23, captured the strategic city of [Bukavu](#) and now appear to have their sights set [on Uvira](#). The border city sits around 30km from Bujumbura, Burundi's economic capital and home to the U.S. Embassy. The increased fighting prompted the embassy to [order the departure](#) of family members and authorize the departure of non-emergency government employees. Despite calls from the UN Security Council for Rwanda to cease support for the M23 (an accusation Kigali denies) and return

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to diplomatic talks, the fighting continues, putting the region at risk of a wider regional conflict as additional countries [commit](#) troops.

- **Russia Launches Drone Attack on Eve of Ukraine War Anniversary, Diplomatic Efforts Intensify:** Yesterday, Moscow launched over 250 drones at Ukraine, the largest such attack since the war began three years ago, according to [Ukrainian officials](#). The aerial swarm came on the eve of the [war's anniversary](#) and amid [intensifying](#) diplomatic efforts to end the conflict. Another round of U.S.-Russia talks [will start tomorrow](#), again without the presence of Ukraine or other European countries. These exclusions, combined with recent [comments](#) from U.S. President Donald Trump about the war's beginning and the [resumption](#) of diplomatic relations between Moscow and Washington, have drawn concerns from European leaders, who plan to hold an [emergency summit](#) on March 6. Despite the division, Ukraine and the U.S. are [reportedly](#) nearing a deal that could see an exchange of mineral rights for security guarantees.
- **Other Stories the Global Intelligence Team Is Monitoring:** Violence involving the National Liberation Front (ELN) has continued to impact parts of **Colombia**, with an [armed strike](#) last week in Chocó Department forcing most people to stay inside and an [explosion](#) in the border city of Cúcuta prompting a 48-hour curfew. On the other side of the world, students in **Indonesia** staged [nationwide demonstrations](#) against spending cuts to education in the first mass protest campaign of President Prabowo Subianto's tenure. And the U.S. Department of State has [removed](#) many references to and resources for **transgender and queer individuals** from its online materials, including its country-specific travel advisories. A similar process appears to be underway for the Overseas Security Advisory Council's Country Security Reports.

## Cyber and Regulatory

- **Salt Typhoon Continues to Breach U.S. Telecom Companies:** China's Salt Typhoon hacking group [continues](#) to breach telecommunications firms globally despite U.S. sanctions to curb their activities. Recent reports from Recorded Future indicate that between December 2024 and January 2025, Salt Typhoon successfully infiltrated five telecom companies, including two based in the United States. The group has exploited vulnerabilities in Cisco devices, specifically CVE-2023-20198 and CVE-2023-20273, to gain unauthorized access to networks. Researchers from Recorded Future report that Salt Typhoon has also [targeted](#) devices linked to various universities, including the University of California, Los Angeles and Utah Tech, to gain access to research in fields such as telecommunications, engineering, and technology.

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- **Apple Removes Cloud Encryption for U.K. Users After Reported Backdoor Request:** Apple is [removing](#) its Advanced Data Protection (ADP) feature in the United Kingdom after the government reportedly ordered it to create a backdoor for user data under the Investigatory Powers Act (IPA). ADP provides extra encryption for iCloud backups, photos, notes, and messages. Apple [said](#) it was “gravely disappointed” that the protections provided by ADP would no longer be available in the U.K. but did not officially blame London. The company had, however, previously [criticized](#) the IPA, calling it an “unprecedented overreach by the government.”
- **FEMA Halts Flood Standards, EPA Targets California Emissions Rules:** The U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has [paused](#) enforcement of federal flood protection standards for public buildings, citing executive orders from President Donald Trump. Supporters argue this may streamline rebuilding efforts, though some experts caution it could increase long-term costs and pose safety risks. In other regulatory news, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [submitted](#) California’s vehicle pollution rules to Congress for review under a law that lets lawmakers overturn certain regulations. California uses these waivers to set stricter emissions standards than the federal government. The state and a federal watchdog argue the review process doesn’t apply here, but Congress may still try to block the rules. California is expected to defend the rules in court.
- **Phishing Campaign Targets International Travelers:** Threat actors are [targeting](#) international travelers attempting to navigate the immigration systems of several countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom. The social engineering campaign, which was first observed targeting travelers to Singapore in 2023, exploits the online submission process for immigration arrival cards and has been aimed at high-level executives. The scam begins with an email that purports to be from the destination country’s immigration authorities and instructs the target to take urgent action, directing them to a page designed to mimic the government’s immigration site and instructing them to enter their personal information. It is particularly effective during peak travel seasons and other scenarios when people are likely to act quickly without verifying legitimacy.
- **Palo Alto Networks Identifies Bug Being Actively Exploited:** Palo Alto Networks [warned](#) of an active attack being used to breach PAN-OS firewalls involving a file read vulnerability (CVE-2025-0111) that was being chained with two other flaws (CVE-2025-0108 with CVE-2024-9474). Palo Alto Networks has [said](#) that the vulnerabilities could be used to allow “unauthorized access to the management interface of affected firewalls, potentially leading to system compromise.” The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (CISA) [added](#) CVE-2025-0111 to its Known Exploited Vulnerabilities catalog and instructed federal agencies to address it by March 13.

## Infrastructure and Supply Chain

- **Teamsters Strike at Major USPS Contractor Threatens Mail Delivery Timelines:** Over 500 Teamsters drivers at 10 Roads Express, a key contractor for the U.S. Postal Service (USPS), have [gone on strike](#) across eight states over alleged unfair labor practices and contract disputes. The strike, which began this past Tuesday, could disrupt USPS deliveries, as 10 Roads Express plays a significant role in moving mail nationwide. It adds pressure to an already strained USPS system that is facing delays from [severe weather](#) and staffing issues. A timeline for an end to the strike is unknown. Yesterday, the Teamsters [said](#) they had extended picket lines to multiple locations and demanded that 10 Roads return to the negotiating table.
- **Cuba Power Crisis Deepens, Impacting Schools and Industry:** Cuba's power crisis continues, with some rural areas [experiencing](#) blackouts of up to 20 hours daily. The situation is better in the population- dense capital of Havana, but residents there have [reportedly](#) seen outages between six and 10 hours per day in recent weeks. The electricity struggles, stemming from persistent fuel shortages and an aging electrical grid, have forced [school and business](#) closures this month. On Friday, Cuban officials [heralded](#) the opening of a solar park in Havana, the first of 55 that they are developing in partnership with China in hopes of gradually reducing daytime blackouts; however, the grid's status is likely to remain in a [precarious state](#) for the foreseeable future.
- **European Officials Investigating Another Undersea Cable Incident:** Swedish and Finnish authorities are [investigating](#) suspected sabotage of the C-Lion1 undersea telecom cable between Germany and Finland, [marking](#) the third incident impacting the line in recent months. This time, the damage was limited, and the cable remained operational, but the event highlights persistent concerns over the security of the regional undersea infrastructure. The same day that the event occurred, the European Commission [announced](#) plans to boost cable surveillance and create a fleet of repair vessels to respond quickly to future incidents. The investment comes on top of NATO's [Baltic Sentry mission](#) aimed at enhancing the security of the infrastructure.
- **U.S. Eyes Further Tariffs, Announcements Expected in Coming Months:** Last week, U.S. President Donald Trump [said](#) his administration is planning new double-digit tariffs on imported automobiles, semiconductors, and pharmaceuticals. He also [suggested](#) that lumber and forest products may be added. While details are limited, measures are expected in early April. Amid the week's tariff talk, the president issued a [memorandum](#) asking his U.S. Trade Representative to examine [digital services taxes](#) (DSTs) imposed on American companies, indicating that [tariffs](#)



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[could be on the horizon](#) for those nations levying such taxes. In related news, the end of the one-month pause on U.S. tariffs on Mexico and Canada is fast approaching on March 4 and it remains unclear how the administration will proceed.

- **New U.S. Maritime Proposal Targets China, Potentially Affecting Global Shipping:** The U.S. has [proposed](#) significant port charges targeting Chinese maritime interests, potentially adding millions in costs for ocean carriers calling at American ports. The fees, aimed at countering China's dominance in maritime industries, follow a U.S. Trade Representative investigation that determined Beijing uses unfair practices to dominate global shipping and shipbuilding. While the measures [could](#) boost U.S. shipbuilding and benefit South Korean and Japanese shipyards, carriers would [likely pass costs to shippers through surcharges and higher rates](#), ultimately raising prices for imported goods. Public comments on the proposal are [open](#), with a hearing planned next month.

## Health

- **São Paulo State Declares Emergency Over Dengue as More Countries Battle Outbreaks:** Health authorities in Brazil's most populous state declared a [public health emergency](#) for dengue after more than 225 municipalities recorded an incidence rate of 300 cases per 100,000 residents. The response to the situation has been hampered by vaccine shortages. Dengue cases are rising elsewhere as well. In the **Philippines**, Quezon City has [declared](#) an outbreak, and several other areas have seen a "concerning rise" in cases. **Tonga** has also declared an outbreak, **French Polynesia** is [combating](#) rising case counts, and **Townsville, Australia**, [recorded](#) its first locally acquired case of dengue in five years.
- **U.S. Administration's Health Priorities Come Into Focus After RFK Jr Confirmation:** Following his [confirmation](#) as Health and Human Services (HHS) secretary, Robert F Kennedy Jr reportedly told staff that he intends to [investigate](#) the schedule for childhood vaccinations, as well as antidepressants and several other products and medications that he believes may be contributing to "chronic disease" in children. To this purpose, the White House has [established](#) a "Make America Healthy Again" commission, which must present a plan to address the issue within 180 days. The commission's recommendations could have far-reaching impacts, particularly in areas like [food production](#). Following RFK's confirmation, HHS also narrowed its [definition](#) of male and female. Health experts have [said](#) that the change will likely result in more limited care for transgender and intersex individuals.



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- **U.S. Measles Outbreak Continues to Grow:** Nearly 100 cases of measles have now been confirmed in [West Texas](#), at least 77 of them in children, with most cases occurring in Gaines County. Across the border, [New Mexico's](#) case count has increased to nine, all of them in Lea County. There are concerns that the disease could spread further. Texas health officials issued a measles exposure alert after an individual from Gaines County who tested positive for the disease [visited Texas State University in San Marcos](#) and the [University of Texas at San Antonio](#), as well as the San Antonio Riverwalk. Despite the outbreak to the west, Louisiana has said that it will [stop](#) promoting vaccines, saying that it was government overreach.
- **Illness From Contaminated Food Increased in 2024, Deaths Doubled:** A [report](#) from the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) Education Fund found that the number of illnesses from contaminated food rose 25% last year to 1,392, with the number of deaths doubling to 19. Recalls due to Salmonella, Listeria, and E. coli also increased by 41%. The overwhelming majority of all illnesses, 98%, were linked to 13 outbreaks. Hospitalizations also rose from 230 to 487. One of the issues identified by the authors was the lag time between when illnesses are first reported, products are recalled, and consumers are made aware of the contamination.
- **Other Health Stories We're Watching:** Uganda [discharged](#) all eight Ebola patients after testing negative twice for the virus. So far, the country has only recorded one death related to this outbreak, the index patient. Ebola Sudan typically has a fatality rate of around 40%. Elsewhere in Africa, Sierra Leone has [declared](#) a state of emergency after recording its second case of mpox in less than four days. Meanwhile, in China, researchers say that they have found [another bat coronavirus](#) that uses the same pathway to enter cells as SARS-CoV-2, raising the possibility that it may too develop the ability to infect humans; however, the study authors say that the virus has several factors that make it suboptimal at this point for emerging in human populations.

## Demonstrations and Industrial Action

- **Ver.di to Relaunch Strike Actions Across Germany This Week:** After holding a public transport [strike](#) in six German states on Friday, the Ver.di Union plans to host another round of work stoppages this week. The union began statewide actions in the North Rhine-Westphalia state on Sunday, including a strike at the Cologne and Dusseldorf airports. In the coming days, participating workers plan to hold strikes at hospitals, daycares, and other facilities in cities like Cologne, Dusseldorf, and Essen. Actions are also reportedly being planned in other states like [Hesse](#).

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- **Strike Actions Planned in Argentina Across Various Sectors:** Teaching unions [began](#) a nationwide strike today to demand the resumption of government negotiations over increasing the education sector's minimum wage rate. Classes were canceled during the walkout, which coincided with the beginning of the academic year for most provinces. Separately, unionized customs workers went on a partial [strike](#) last week and are planning to hold another work stoppage this Thursday and Friday, potentially impacting some international cargo.
- **Greek Unions to Hold Nationwide Strike on Friday:** In Greece, various groups and unions, including the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) and the Civil Servants' Confederation (ADEDY), have [announced](#) that they will hold a 24-hour nationwide strike on Friday. The action is meant to commemorate the two-year anniversary of the [Tempi train crash](#), with unions calling for improved work safety conditions. Flights will be impacted nationwide as air traffic controllers have [joined](#) the walkout, as will [train and ferry operations](#). Demonstrations are [reportedly](#) planned in over 150 cities alongside the strike, and officials intend to bolster security in urban centers nationwide.
- **Several Latin American Countries to See Strikes, Protests:** Teachers in multiple states across Mexico have [gone on strike](#) to oppose a proposed reform to the Institute for Social Security and Services for State Workers (ISSSTE). Walkouts have occurred in Quintana Roo, Baja California, Chihuahua, and Sonora, with participants holding rallies in multiple areas. To the south, in Panama, union demonstrations are also expected this week. The Single Union of Construction and Similar Workers (SUNTRACS) has vowed to hold protests nationwide after the government allegedly [closed](#) its bank accounts. Meanwhile, in Bolivia, civic groups have [threatened protests](#) if the government does not cancel lithium mining contracts signed with Chinese and Russian companies by Tuesday.
- **UC Health, Research, and Technical Employees Authorize Strike:** Thousands of unionized employees in the health, research, and technical spaces in the University of California (UC) system voted to [strike](#) starting after midnight on February 26 and ending on February 28. The call to strike comes amid [staffing shortages](#) and [failed contract negotiations](#) between UC and the University Professional and Technical Employees (UPTe) union and the American Federation of State County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) union. UC [stated](#) it would attempt to reduce the effects on patients and facility operations, but efforts to [track avian influenza](#) and food safety are likely to be impacted in California.

## Upcoming Events

- January 13-February 26: Maha Kumbh Mela (Prayagraj, India)
- February 24: Anniversary of Russia-Ukraine War (Ukraine)

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- February 25: People Power Anniversary (Philippines)
- February 25: National Day (Kuwait)
- February 25-26: General Election (Anguilla)
- February 27-March 4: Carnival (Global)
- February 28-March 29: Ramadan (Global) *dates approximate*
- March 1: First Phase of Gaza Ceasefire Deal Expires (Israel, Gaza)
- March 1: Independence Movement Day (South Korea)
- March 2: Parliamentary Elections (Tajikistan)
- March 4: General Election (Micronesia)
- March 4: Start of "Two Sessions" Meetings (China)
- March 4: Mardi Gras/Shrove Tuesday (Global)
- March 5: Ash Wednesday (Global)
- March 6: Independence Day (Ghana)
- March 8: International Women's Day (Global)
- March 9: Daylight Savings Time Starts (United States, Canada)
- March 11: General Election (Greenland)
- March 12: Legislative Elections (Belize)
- March 21: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Global)
- March 21: General Elections (Curaçao)
- March 26: Independence Day (Bangladesh)
- March 28: Parliamentary Elections (Tajikistan)
- March 29: Day of the Young Combatant (Chile)