

The Economist

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Don't panic over plastic

Hollywood after Weinstein

Povera Italia: a dismal choice

A special report on autonomous vehicles

How the West got China wrong



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Hollywood after Weinstein

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Politics



China's Communist Party proposed the abolition of term limits for the posts of president and vice-president. The country's rubber-stamp parliament is expected to give its approval early this month. The change will make it easier for Xi Jinping to cling to power indefinitely, raising concerns in Western capitals that China will renege on promises to liberalise markets and allow limited forms of democracy.

Ashraf Ghani, the president of **Afghanistan**, offered to allow the insurgents of the Taliban to become a political party and contest elections if they agreed to a ceasefire and promised to work within the constitution. The Taliban have called for talks with America, not the Afghan government.

America announced new measures aimed at enforcing UN sanctions on **North Korea**. It blacklisted 28 ships thought to be smuggling oil to the country, and said it would ask other countries' permission to begin inspecting ships at sea.

In the latest of a series of delays, the leader of **Thailand's** military junta, Prayuth Chan-ocha, said elections to restore democratic rule that were planned for November might now be held as late as February 2019.

Authorities in **Indonesia** seized a yacht that America's Department of Justice says was bought with money stolen from 1MDB, a **Malaysian** development agency. The Americans say Malaysia's prime minister was involved in the theft, which he denies.

Baffled and bewildered

In what appeared to be an about-turn from his recent comments, Donald Trump called for strong **gun-control measures**, such as increasing background checks on buyers. One Republican senator said Mr Trump's remarks were "surreal". The Democrats were unsure what to make of them.

Hope Hicks announced that she is resigning as the White House's communications director. A confidante of Mr Trump, she was one of the few people left standing in the West Wing from Mr Trump's original team.

America's federal housing department was mocked for spending \$31,000 on a new **table and chairs** for the office of Ben Carson, the housing secretary. Mr Carson has pledged to clamp down on extravagant spending at his department, which oversees programmes offering affordable housing to poor families.

The temerity of Temer

Brazil's president, Michel Temer, put the army in charge of public safety by creating a new security ministry. He appointed one general to lead a military intervention in Rio de Janeiro state. Meanwhile, the government sacked the federal police chief after an interview in which he said that an ongoing bribery investigation into Mr Temer had found no evidence of corruption.



In **Venezuela** Henri Falcón announced plans to run against President Nicolás Maduro in April's presidential election. Mr Falcón left the ruling socialist party in 2010 to join the opposition, which is

boycotting the election and has booted him out for deciding to participate.

Police in **Honduras** arrested Rosa Elena Bonilla de Lobo, the wife of Porfirio Lobo, a former president, on charges of embezzlement. Prosecutors from an anti-corruption unit backed by the Organisation of American States allege that Ms Bonilla withdrew \$510,000 from public funds and deposited the money in her personal bank account just before her husband stepped down as president in 2014.

Mexican authorities arrested four police officers suspected of kidnapping three Italian tourists from a petrol station in the state of Jalisco. According to prosecutors, the officers have confessed to handing the tourists over to a local criminal gang in exchange for about \$50. They are still missing.

A new era under Ramaphosa?

South Africa's parliament voted in favour of a proposal to amend the constitution in order to allow the government to seize land without paying compensation. The governing African National Congress says it wants to change the law to put more farmland under black ownership. The government's detractors accuse it of not using the vast powers it already has to support poor rural people.

Nigeria's ruling All Progressives Congress reportedly renominated the country's president, Muhammadu Buhari, as its candidate for presidential elections that are scheduled to take place next year. Mr Buhari's first term has been characterised by economic crisis and a brutal insurgency in the north-east.

The UN accused North Korea of providing materials used to make chemical weapons in **Syria**. Meanwhile the Syrian army again attacked Eastern Ghouta, a rebel-held suburb of Damascus, in defiance of a resolution by the Security Council calling for a 30-day ceasefire.

That it's come to this

Campaigning ended in **Italy's** general election, which takes place on March 4th. The polls show that a hung parliament is likely, which could mean a protracted period without a government. Silvio Berlusconi, an 81-year-old former prime minister, may well emerge as a kingmaker.

Jan Kuciak, an investigative journalist in **Slovakia**, was murdered along with his partner. He had been probing the Mafia's involvement in high-level political corruption. Slovakia's prime minister has offered a €1m reward for information.

Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of **Britain's** opposition Labour Party, announced that he wants a permanent customs union with the European Union after Brexit. It was the clearest indication yet of Labour's position on relations with the EU after March 2019 and was welcomed by pro-remain Conservative MPs and business as well as Labour supporters. Mr Corbyn said a customs union would avoid a hard border in Northern Ireland, one of the thorniest issues in the Brexit negotiations.



Boris Johnson, Britain's foreign secretary and a leading Brexiteer, claimed that the Northern Irish border was being trumped up as an insoluble issue to frustrate the Brexit process. He pointed out that "there's no border between Camden and Westminster," two boroughs in London, and said that the technology behind London's congestion charge, "without any need for border checks" could be applied in the province.