1 Inside the 1 January edition

Next phase of the robot revolution; kitchen gadgets and conspiracy theories; the passing of time and a new year

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It's a funny time of year, the gap between Christmas and the new year. In many parts of the world, things stutter, shutter and slow. The pace of news can feel less frantic. It's as if the world itself is taking a moment for quiet reflection before annual renewal.

Still, there's a newspaper to produce! And it can be challenging at this time of year to find a front-page lead.

So I was pleased to see a piece penned by tech-savvy journalist Charles Arthur about the robot revolution. Did paranoia and panic about AI peak in 2015? And, if so, what's next as technology and artificial intelligence reframe the legal and ethical debates in this realm? Arthur's well-informed article sits comfortably on the front page as we hurtle through a decade of change.

There's lots of coverage in this edition from Asia, where the Christmas break takes less of a toll. From Tokyo, there was quite surprising news that Japan and South Korea have reconciled over the issue of second world war sex slaves. Long a stumbling block to improved relations, an apology by the Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, is meant to acknowledge and compensate, and allow both nations to move on. Japan also passed its biggest-ever defence budget, with an eye on China. We bring you both stories.

In Taiwan, voters are preparing for an election this month. We meet the heavy metal rocker who wants a seat in parliament. From Bangkok, meanwhile, the military junta releases a public opinion poll that shows some 99% of Thais are happy with its rule. So, all good then!

In Europe, an election in Spain yielded a stalemate. We consider the implications in full in our Comment section. In Poland, the government faced criticism after the president enacted constitutional measures described by many as authoritarian.

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From the Middle East, Iran offered to "join hands" with the west in the fight against Islamic State, and western interests focused, yet again, on Helmand province in Afghanistan, where the Taliban is showing renewed strength.

From North America, we return to our series on America's poorest towns (having taken a break from this in our expanded 18 December edition). Our third instalment visits the Texas border townships where the American dream seems nothing but a fantasy.

In Britain, flooding in the north has dominated the news as the rain just keeps on coming. We look at the impact. We also take in thoughts on the UK economy for the months ahead.