

KEY EVENTS 2020

PLANE CRASH IN IRAN

On January 8, a Ukrainian International flight crashed in Iran, killing all 176 people on board. On January 11, it was revealed that the crash was due to missiles launched by Iran. Tehran said they mistook the airliner for enemy jet.

US-TALIBAN ACCORD

The US and the Taliban signed a deal in Doha on February 29, with all foreign forces to quit Afghanistan by May 2021 after nearly two decades of war. Talks between the Afghan government and insurgents started in September, but fighting raged on as the Taliban launched attack after attack and a string of civil society figures were assassinated. The Pentagon is due to pull 2,000 of 4,500 US soldiers out of the country by January 15, 2021.

SHOOTING IN THAILAND

On February 8, a disgruntled Thai soldier started a shooting spree at a mall in Nakhon Ratchasima that left 30 people dead and 57 wounded. The shooter was shot and killed.

RIOTS IN DELHI



Starting from February 23, a 5-day riot killed at least 53 people in the worst violence the Indian capital witnessed in decades. The violence erupted after a mob led by a ruling party leader targeted sit-ins in New Delhi against a new citizenship law, which critics say goes against the secular ethos of the country. Besides Muslims, at least a dozen Hindus died in the violence.

PAKISTAN PLANE CRASH

On May 22, a Pakistani plane carrying 99 passengers and a few crew members crashed after the pilot reported technical difficulties. At least 2 people have survived. This is one of Pakistan's first flights since the coronavirus lockdown. Later a probe blamed Pilot's mistake for the tragedy.

THAIS RISE UP AGAINST ELITES



Students spark pro-democracy protests in July that rolled on for the rest of the year calling for a new constitution, reform of the untouchable monarchy, and for Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha to resign.

CRISIS IN BELARUS

Belarus strongman President Alexander Lukashenko's disputed victory in August 9 elections sparked four months of anti-government protests, centred on his main rival, political novice Svetlana Tikhonovskaya. Opposition leaders were jailed or driven into exile.

THE NAVALNY AFFAIR

Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny was flown to Berlin on August 22 in a medically induced coma after becoming violently ill 2 days earlier. Tests reveal he was poisoned with the Soviet-era nerve agent Novichok. Navalny accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of trying to kill him and later released a recording where he appears to trick the alleged agent responsible into telling him the poison was put in his underpants.

JAPAN PM RESIGNS

On August 28, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan announced his resignation, citing health concerns. Abe, Japan's longest serving prime minister, suffers from colitis, an incurable bowel disease.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH



Heavy fighting for the Armenian-populated region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which broke away from Azerbaijan after a war in the 1990s, went on for 45 days starting from September 27. Several thousand died before a Kremlin-brokered peace deal on November 9, with Armenians losing swathes of territory to Azerbaijan forces.

ETHIOPIA: TIGRAY CONFLICT

In early November, Ethiopian Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize winner Abiy Ahmed ordered a military response to attacks on federal army camps in the dissident northern Tigray region. The Tigray People's Liberation Front -- which has dominated Ethiopian politics for nearly three decades -- denied responsibility and said the reported attacks are a pretext for an "invasion". Federal forces took control of the Tigrayan capital on November 28.

FARMERS PROTEST IN INDIA

Since late November, tens of thousands of farmers from across India launched a mass protest against government reforms on farming laws in the country. There has been a lot of anger against these three new laws, as farmers believe that they are not in their best interests and will harm their business. Farmers say they will continue to protest until the government changes back the reforms carried out in September.



FLASHBACK 2020

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

It was a year like no other. The world has seen many wars, ground shaking political unrests, revolutions and devastating natural calamities. But in no point in modern history, mankind, with all its scientific advancements, was so helpless against a global crisis created by one of the tiniest organisms. In the last 12 months, the novel coronavirus has paralysed economies, devastated communities and confined nearly four billion people to their homes. From Paris to New York, from Delhi to Lagos, and from London to Buenos Aires, streets fell eerily silent, except for all too frequent wail of ambulance sirens, a reminder that death loomed close. Social inequalities, which for years had been growing, were exposed like never before. Human interaction took place behind plexiglasses, face masks. Social media replaced human touch. Though the pandemic dominated the news and lives of people, the year also saw some major conflicts, political upheavals, natural disasters, social unrests all around the world. Here is a look back at some of the major events of the year.



Rampaging virus

On January 11, less than two weeks after it alerts a cluster of pneumonia cases "of unknown cause", Beijing announces its first death from an illness which will become known as Covid-19. By March a pandemic has been declared and a month later half

of humanity is in lockdown as governments scramble to halt its spread. Massive state aid programmes are rolled out to save jobs as the International Monetary Fund predicts recession, with the global economy shrinking by 4.4 percent. In November, drug

companies announce positive results for several vaccines as a second wave of cases lashes the planet. Within a month, the first shots are being given but by Christmas some 1.76 million people are dead, with the US the worst hit.



Biden beats Trump

Deeply-divided Americans voted in record numbers in the November 3 presidential election between outgoing Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden after a nasty election campaign. After four days of nail biting because of record early voting, Biden took the White House by 7 million votes. Biden secured 306 electoral votes against Trump's 232. Trump cried fraud without evidence and has yet to concede defeat. Electoral College confirmed Biden's win on December 14.

INDIA-CHINA BORDER TENSIONS

On 5 May, the first standoff began as a clash between Indian and Chinese soldiers at a beach of Pangong Tso, a lake shared between India and Tibet, China, with the Line of Actual Control (LAC) passing through it. Many were wounded. After a number of skirmishes, on June 15, at least 20 Indian soldiers and an undisclosed number of Chinese soldiers were killed in a fierce fight using fists, rocks and clubs. But no shot was fired as troops from both sides respected a long held agreement. Tensions have subsided after several rounds of military and minister-level talks.



Iranian roulette

The world held its breath after top Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani was killed in a US drone strike in Iraq on January 3, days after pro-Iranian protesters storm the US embassy in Baghdad. Iran retaliated by launching a volley of missiles at bases in Iraq housing US troops. The same day, it shot down a Ukrainian passenger plane "in error" shortly after take off from Tehran, killing all 176 people on board. Tensions flared up again at the end of November when top Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was assassinated, with Tehran blaming Israel.



BlackLivesMatter protests

The killing of George Floyd, a 46-year-old African American, by white police officers on May 25 in Minneapolis sparked protests across the US and inspired anti-racism rallies across the world. The Black Lives Matter movement led to a major debate about race and the toppling of statues of figures linked to slavery or colonisation. After months of unprecedented protests, Covid-19 pandemic fears finally dampened the fierceness of the movement. Secluded protests are still on going in some parts of the US.



Hong Kong clampdown

On June 30, a year after a massive wave of demonstrations, China imposed a sweeping new security law on Hong Kong that opponents say undermines the semi-autonomous city's liberties, promised under its handover from Britain in 1997. Pro-democracy lawmakers were ousted, harassed and arrested. In December, three prominent Hong Kong activists were jailed including Joshua Wong.



Beirut blast

A massive explosion on August 4 destroyed much of Beirut's port and devastated swathes of the capital, killing more than 200 and injuring at least 6,500. The blast from a vast stockpile of ammonium nitrate fertiliser devastated an already teetering Lebanese economy and the credibility of its governing elite.

China-US tensions

2020 saw US-China relations nosedive, with Trump calling Covid-19 the "China virus" and saying Beijing was responsible for "a mass worldwide killing". They also clashed over the repression of Turkic speaking Uighur minority in the Chinese region of Xinjiang, as well as the national security law imposed on Hong Kong. News of tit-for-tat sanctions, crackdown on IT sector, closure of consulates and war of words has dominated the whole year.

Fires and hurricanes

A record-breaking Atlantic hurricane season, flash floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and wildfires plagued already reeling communities from Australia to Turkey this year. Thousands of people lost their lives. The year began with Australia experiencing its worst fire season on record, with some six percent of the country in flames and nearly three million animals killed. The western United States faced similar

record-breaking wildfires later in the year. Other parts of the United States, Central America, and Southeast Asia were hit with numerous destructive tropical storms.



Israel's new friends

The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain normalised ties with Israel on September 15 as Palestinians condemned the move as a "stab in the back". The next month Donald Trump

announced that Sudan is joining them, while in November unconfirmed reports of a secret trip to Saudi Arabia by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sparked speculation

that the kingdom is set to follow. In another twist, Morocco "resumed relations" with Israel on December 10 in return for the US recognising its claim to Western Sahara.

Brexit endgame

Britain became the first country to leave the European Union on January 31 following its 2016 Brexit referendum. But crucial talks on future ties and trade with the bloc dragged on for months, breaking deadline after deadline as negotiators try to avert a hard Brexit before a last-gasp deal on Christmas Eve. While British PM Boris Johnson claimed victory, Scotland's anti-Brexit leader Nicola Sturgeon said its future is "an independent, European nation".

NOTABLE DEATHS



Egypt's former president **Hosni Mubarak**, who was swept from power by the Arab Spring in 2010, dies in a military hospital aged 91 on February 25



John Lewis, a pioneer of the civil rights movement and long-time member of the US House of Representatives, dies July 17. He was 80.



US Supreme Court judge and feminist icon **Ruth Bader Ginsburg**, dies aged 87 on September 18.



Kuwait's ruling Emir **Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah** died September 29 at age 91.



Saeb Erekat, one of the most experienced and high-profile advocates for the Palestinian cause over decades of dispute with Israel, died on November 10. He was 65.



Bahrain's Prince Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa, the world's longest-serving prime minister, dies aged 84 on November 11.



Former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who legalised abortion and brought the country high-speed trains, dies aged 94 from Covid-19 on December 2.