

KEY EVENTS 2019

JANUARY 3: China successfully lands robotic lander Chang'e 4 on the far side of the Moon.

JANUARY 29: Asia Bibi's blasphemy acquittal is upheld by Pakistan's Supreme Court.

FEBRUARY 1: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announces that the United States is suspending its role in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Russian follows suit a day later.

FEBRUARY 27: US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un meet face-to-face for the first time since their summit last year. A day later, the summit between Trump and Kim Jong-un abruptly ends over disagreement over nuclear disarmament issue.

MARCH 10: An Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737 MAX 8 from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with 149 passengers and eight crew members onboard crashes en route to Nairobi, Kenya, killing all 157 persons on board.

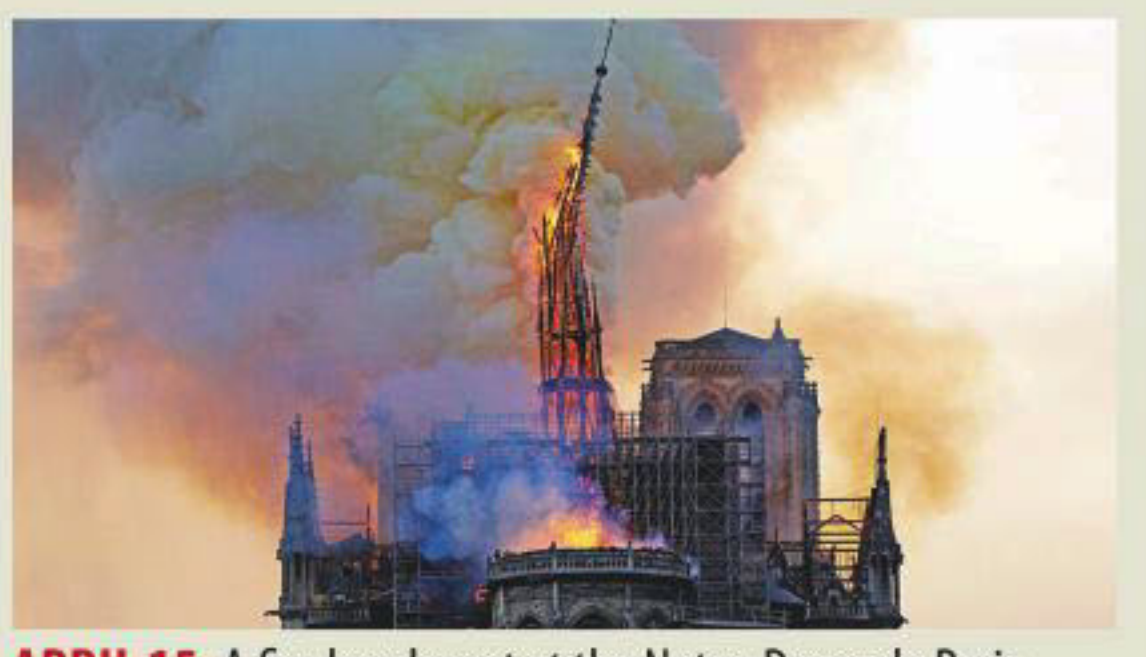


MARCH 15: At least 50 people are killed and dozens others are injured during two attacks on mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. A gunman involved in the shootings of at least one of the two mosques is identified as Brenton Tarrant, a 28-year-old Australian man.

MARCH 22: Special Counsel Robert Mueller delivers a report on his inquiry into Russian interference in the 2016 elections.

APRIL 2: Algeria President Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigns amid pressure from the public and the military.

APRIL 11: Sudan military takes over forcing president Omar al-Bashir to resign. WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is arrested in London after Ecuador withdraws asylum.



APRIL 15: A fire breaks out at the Notre-Dame de Paris cathedral in Paris, resulting in the collapse of its roof and spire and considerable damage to the building's interior.

APRIL 21: A series of explosions at churches and hotels in four cities in Sri Lanka, including the nation's commercial capital and largest city Colombo, kills at least 359 people and wounds around 500 others. IS has since claimed responsibility for the attacks.

MAY 1: Emperor Naruhito accedes to the Chrysanthemum Throne as the 126th Emperor of Japan.

MAY 23: The Bharatiya Janata Party, led by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, wins majority in Indian general election.



JUNE 7: UK Prime Minister Theresa May resigns as Leader of the Conservative Party, paving the way for a new Prime Minister to be elected.

JUNE 30: US President Donald Trump, together with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, meets North Korean leader Kim Jong-un at the Joint Security Area, becoming the first sitting US president to step foot in North Korea.

AUGUST 2: Saudi Arabia grants women the right to travel without permission from a male guardians.

AUGUST 5: India revokes Jammu and Kashmir's special status amidst increased regional tensions. The Indian government moved additional troops into the sensitive area before banning assemblies, closing schools, restricting tourism and announcing a plan to split the state into two union territories.

AUGUST 19: Outrage flares across the world over raging fires in the Amazon Forest. At this point, fire was raging for at least 15 days.

AUGUST 31: India releases the final version of the National Register of Citizens for the state of Assam. Up to 1.9 million residents risk losing their citizenship if they can't prove their residency.

SEPTEMBER 7: US President Donald Trump calls off peace negotiations with the Taliban.

NOVEMBER 13: Israeli airstrikes leave 22 Palestinians dead and dozens injured. More than 200 rockets are fired into Israel from Gaza.

NOVEMBER 18: The Trump administration announces that the United States no longer considers Israeli settlement of the West Bank as illegal per se under international law.

DECEMBER 11: India passes a controversial amendment to the Indian nationality law that would expedite citizenship for religious minorities from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan excluding Muslims. Myanmar's leader Aung San Suu Kyi defends military and denies all charges of genocide.

DECEMBER 12: Boris Johnson wins UK general election securing a large majority. December 18: The United States House of Representatives impeaches President Donald Trump.

DECEMBER 23: A court in Saudi Arabia sentences five people to death for the 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.



TRUMP IMPEACHED

"Quid pro quo" may be the phrase of the year. Progressive Democrats began 2019 pushing for President Trump's impeachment. Despite the April release of the Mueller Report, which did not establish that the Trump campaign colluded with Russia during the 2016 campaign but which explicitly declined to exonerate the president on obstruction-of-justice charges, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi refused to open an impeachment inquiry. That changed when an anonymous whistleblower alleged in August that Trump "is using the power of his office" to pressure Ukraine into investigating Democratic frontrunner Joe Biden and his son. On September 24, Pelosi launched a formal impeachment probe. The next day, the White House released a rough transcript of Trump's July 25 call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. The House voted on October 31 to hold public hearings, which opened in mid-November. On December 18, the House voted along party lines to approve two articles of impeachment. As 2019 ended, it was unclear when Pelosi would send the articles to the Senate, which looked poised to quickly dismiss them.

It was a year of high anxiety and little hope. Depressing facts about climate kept coming. Too many rulers, even in the world's most stable democracies, forgot their job was to serve the ruled, not to kill, repress them. Division, separation and isolation were recurring themes in a global landscape scarred by fear. And there were standoffs threatening wars. Yet there were sparks of hope. Many countries saw massive protests, led by youth, against corrupt, undemocratic regimes, some of which were toppled. Here are the highlights:



Tensions flare in the Persian Gulf

War in the Persian Gulf seemed imminent at several points in 2019. In May, four commercial ships were attacked while anchored just outside the Strait of Hormuz, through which about a fifth of the world's oil passes. The United States accused Iran of being "directly responsible" for the attacks, a charge Iran denied. On June 6, Houthi rebels shot down a US drone in Yemen with help from Iran. Two weeks later, Iran shot down a US drone it said had violated Iranian airspace, a charge the United States denied. On September 14, drones struck two major Saudi oil refineries, temporarily knocking half the country's oil production offline. Houthi rebels claimed responsibility for the attack, but the Western powers concluded Iran was responsible. President Donald Trump said "US is locked and loaded" to strike but it eventually didn't happen. Since then US has sent thousands of additional forces and military assets in the region.

India embraces Hindu nationalism

Where is India headed? That was a popular question as 2019 came to a close. In May, Narendra Modi won a stunning victory in India's parliamentary elections, as his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) increased its majority amidst the highest voter turnout in Indian history. The size of the victory prompted speculation that Modi would push an aggressive Hindu nationalist agenda. It soon became clear he would. In August, he rescinded the autonomy that Kashmir had enjoyed since independence and that was enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The move was accompanied by a compulsory curfew and blackout, and the arrests of more than 5,000 people

in the Muslim-majority region. Modi argued that the new policy would "boost economic development, fight corruption, and end gender caste and religious discrimination" in Kashmir. His critics dismissed that talk as cover for seeking the region's "Hinduization." Those complaints gained greater credence in December when the Indian Parliament passed a controversial law creating a path to citizenship for non-Muslim migrants from elsewhere in South Asia. The consequences of India's potential transformation from a secular state into a Hindu one are hotly debated, especially since Muslims account for 15 percent of the country's population.



Brexit upends British politics

The United Kingdom ended 2019 with clarity about Brexit, but it took a turbulent journey to get there. The year started with the country facing a March 29 deadline for leaving the European Union (EU). Prime Minister Theresa May chose that date but couldn't persuade the House of Commons to approve the deal she struck with the EU. May was forced to delay Brexit until October 31, and then resigned after the House of Commons voted down her deal three times. New PM Boris Johnson struck a new deal that swapped the backstop for a customs barrier between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. Forced to extend the withdrawal deadline to January 31, 2020, Johnson called a snap election. British voters rewarded him; the Conservatives won their biggest victory in more than three decades. On December 20, Parliament voted overwhelmingly to exit the EU by January 31.

NORTH KOREA-US NUCLEAR TALKS STALL

Donald Trump made history on June 30 when he became the first sitting US president to set foot in North Korea. The meeting in the Demilitarized Zone came four months after Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-un met in Hanoi. Neither meeting produced much progress. Trump said he cut the Hanoi Summit short because North Korea "wanted the [US] sanctions lifted in their entirety and we couldn't do that." At the June 30 meeting, Trump and Kim agreed to resume nuclear negotiations. It wasn't until October 1, however, that the two

countries agreed on the specifics for talks, and just hours after striking that agreement North Korea launched a ballistic missile in violation of UN resolutions. Negotiators met on October 5, but the talks ended after eight hours with no agreement. In early December, Pyongyang warned the United States would have to decide "what Christmas gift it will select to get." As 2019 came to a close, no progress had been made in containing, let alone dismantling, North Korea's nuclear weapons program. The prospects for 2020 aren't any better.



Indo-Pak tensions

In an event that threatened wider military conflict between the two nuclear-armed neighbours, suspected Pakistan sponsored militants killed 46 Indian para-military troops in Pulwama district of Jammu & Kashmir on February 14. After days of nerve-racking tensions, on February 26, India launched pre-dawn airstrikes in Pakistan's Balakot, destroying a terror camp and

eliminating several terror operatives. Pakistan denied the claims. However, in retaliation, on the next day, Pakistan sent across the border its F-16 fighter jets ensuring a dogfight. In this operation, however, an Indian fighter pilot, Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, was captured by Pakistani forces and released after several rounds of negotiations, easing tensions.

The Amazon fire and climate protests

For decades, loggers and farmers have been clearing the Amazon rainforest and setting what's left on fire in order to grow crops and graze cattle. The 80,000 fires set in 2019 were the most in a decade, and they burned an area about the size of New Jersey. As the immensity of the fires became clear, critics blamed the policies of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro for allowing, if not encouraging, the wanton

destruction of the rainforest, considered the lungs of the planet. There were also a number of wildfires in US, Europe, Asia and Australia. The extreme incidents helped to galvanize opinions, especially among the youth. Schoolchildren's strike across the globe, climate groups' protests, dire warnings from scientists somewhat made climate emergency sound like an emergency in 2019.



Protestors take to the street

"The Year of Protests" may be the best summary for 2019. Hong Kong gained the most attention. The trigger was an extradition bill that critics said violated the one country, two systems pledge that governs the city's relations with mainland China. Rather than fade, the protests grew into a push for more democratic rule. Pro-democracy candidates swamped pro-China candidates in Hong Kong's November local elections, setting up a potential confrontation with Beijing in 2020. Protests rattled many other countries as well. Algerians took to the streets in February, eventually forcing president Abdelaziz Bouteflika to resign. The protests continued into the fall as Algerians demanded a complete political overhaul. In April, Sudanese protestors pushed out President Omar Hassan al-Bashir. In October, a transit-fare hike sent Chileans into the streets to protest inequality, while a proposed tax in Lebanon on WhatsApp unleashed a flood of anger. Demonstrations rocked Iraq beginning in October as protestors challenged the country's governing institutions. In November, the end of fuel subsidies sent Iranians into the street, raising questions about the Iranian regime's future. Protests also rocked Bolivia, India, Nicaragua, and Russia. For all the talk that authoritarianism is rising, millions of people continue to risk their lives to make governments responsive to their wishes.

NOTABLE DEATHS



AUGUST 5
US author Toni Morrison, the first black woman to be presented the Nobel Prize in Literature, died at the age of 88.



SEPTEMBER 6
Zimbabwe's autocratic leader Robert Mugabe, ousted by the military in 2017 after 37 years in power, died aged 95.



SEPTEMBER 26
Former French president Jacques Chirac died at the age of 86.



OCTOBER 17
US Representative Elijah Cummings, a civil rights champion, died at age 68.



OCTOBER 26
Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in his late 40s, blew himself up during a raid by US special forces in Syria.



DECEMBER 20
Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, founder of one of the world's largest NGOs, Brac, and credited with lifting nearly 150 million people out of poverty, died at the age of 83.