



Israel's offensive in Gaza

Since October 7, an Israel offensive has reduced the Gaza Strip into rubble. The relentless bombardment by the Israeli forces has killed 21,507 Palestinians - about 1 percent of the enclave's population - with thousands more bodies feared unrecovered in the ruins. The United Nations says many thousands more may die from severe shortages of food, medicine, clean water and

adequate shelter. Nearly 2 million of Gaza's 2.4 million populace has been displaced. The bombardment also destroyed around 60 percent of the enclave's infrastructures. Defying international calls for ceasefire, Israel continues to pound the enclave and says the offensive will continue for months. It is to be seen when and how the conflict will end in the coming year.

UKRAINE'S laboured fightback

Sixteen months after Russia invaded its neighbour, Kyiv launches a highly anticipated counteroffensive after amassing billions in powerful Western-made weapons and training new recruits. But the pushback fails to make much of a dent in Russia's deep defensive lines. In late November, Ukraine announces it has made inroads along the Russian-held left bank of the Dnipro River, its first major success in months. But as winter sets in, both sides still appear largely dug in.



Inflation BITES

Central banks for the world's biggest economies have served notice that they will keep interest rates as high as needed to tame inflation, even as two years of unprecedented global policy tightening reaches a peak. The so-called "higher for longer" mantra is now the official stance of the US Federal Reserve, European Central Bank and the Bank of England, as well as being echoed by monetary policy-makers from Oslo to Taipei. Due to Israel-Hamas war, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank warn of rising oil prices and inflationary pressure amid a "new cloud" darkening not-the-sunniest horizon for the world economy.



Devastating quakes

In the early hours of February 6, one of the deadliest earthquakes in a century flattens entire cities in southeast Turkey, killing at least 56,000 people, with nearly 6,000 others killed across the border in Syria. Two images come to define the devastating 7.8 magnitude tremor: that of a father holding the hand of his dead 15-year-old daughter, protruding from under a collapsed building in Kahramanmaraş, the epicentre, and that of a newborn baby rescued from the rubble while still umbilically attached to her dead mother. Seven months later, on September 8, Morocco suffers the deadliest quake in its history, centred on the Atlas mountains. Nearly 3,000 people are killed.

FLASHBACK 2023

You are not alone if 2023 has you feeling worn down. It has been a trying year on the world scene, as the forces of disarray grew stronger. Ongoing wars ground on, while new ones erupted. Geopolitical competition increased, to the point where a meeting between rival heads of state became front-page news even though their talks yielded little tangible progress. In all, good news has been in short supply.



Caucasus exodus

The breakaway republic of Nagorno-Karabakh winds up its three-decade push for independence in September after being recaptured by Azerbaijan in a lightning offensive that empties the mountainous region of most of its ethnic Armenian population. Karabakh residents flee to Armenia, fearing violence and not wanting to be ruled by Turkic-speaking Azerbaijanis with whom ethnic Armenian separatists fought two wars over the territory since the 1990s.



The year goes out with a sizzle, with the European Union's climate monitor predicting 2023 will be the hottest on record. Drought made worse by climate change was cited as one of several factors behind the deadliest wildfire in the US in a century that claimed at least 115 lives on the Hawaiian island of Maui in August.

Tourists and residents also fled huge fires on the Greek islands of Rhodes and Corfu but the worst-affected country, in terms of area consumed by fire, was Canada, with over 18 million hectares of forest going up in smoke. To tackle this climate crisis, government ministers representing nearly 200 countries agreed to a deal that calls for a transition away from fossil fuels.

MOON the new frontier

The space race heats up in 2023, with rising star India becoming the first nation to successfully land an unmanned craft on the Moon's south pole in August, just days after a Russian lunar vehicle crashed into its surface. Over half a century after US astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon, several countries are jostling to return humans to the celestial body. Nasa is aiming for a crewed mission by 2025, China for 2030 and India for 2040.

More coups in Africa

The spate of coups that have marked a brutal democratic backsliding in francophone Africa continues in 2023, with Niger and Gabon the latest countries to overthrow an elected president. An unpopular France is forced to withdraw both its ambassador and counter-terrorism troops from Niger - the third time its forces are sent packing by a former African colony in under two years. In August, meanwhile, Gabon's president Ali Bongo Ondimba, heir to a dynasty that ruled for 55 years, is deposed after a presidential election which the army and opposition declared fraudulent.



Far right rises in Europe, LatAm

The far right is on the rise in Europe. In Germany, the far-right German party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) made strong gains in elections in Hesse and Bavaria - expanding its footprint from its stronghold in the former east. Far-right parties are also either in government or supporting the government from within parliament in Italy, Poland,

Finland and Sweden. Undoubtedly, there is some truth to the analyses pointing to a backlash against multiculturalism, "woke" culture wars, or the ever-deepening cost of living crisis as the reasons behind the far right's entry into mainstream politics across the continent. In November, Argentina lurches to the right with the election of libertarian wild card candidate, Javier Milei, on a promise to "blow up" the central bank, dollarise the economy, privatise health and education and hold a vote on repealing abortion laws.

NOTABLE DEATHS OF 2023

February:
Pervez Musharraf, 79, Pakistan's former military ruler



May:
Tina Turner, 83, US rock icon famed for her electrifying stage presence



June:
Silvio Berlusconi, 86, larger-than-life scandal-tainted former Italian premier and billionaire media mogul



August:
Yevgeny Prigozhin, 62, head of Russian para-military group Wagner, killed in a plane crash



September:
Ian Wilmut, 79, British embryologist who led team that in 1996 created cloned sheep Dolly



October:
Bobby Charlton, 86, English football hero, World Cup winner, Manchester United legend



November:
Henry Kissinger, 100, a former US secretary of state and national security adviser



This picture taken on October 11, 2023 shows an aerial view of buildings destroyed by Israeli air strikes in the Jabalia camp for Palestinian refugees in Gaza City.

PHOTO: AFP