



FLASHBACK 2024

You are not alone if 2024 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 meetings between global leaders became news headlines even though their talks yielded little tangible progress. In all, good news has been in short supply.



MIDEAST WAR SPREADS

More than a year into the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip, there has been no let-up in the violence. The conflict expanded as Israel turned its focus on the Iran-backed Hezbollah militia and extended its offensive into Lebanon. The conflict has killed at least 3,768 people in Lebanon since October 2023, according to the health ministry, most of them since September 2024.

The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said the death toll from the offensive there has reached over 45,235 people, the majority of them civilians. On December 8, Syrian rebels had ousted President Bashar al-Assad after seizing control of Damascus, forcing him to flee and ending his family's decades of autocratic rule after more than 13 years of civil war.



Ukraine war escalates

After a failed counteroffensive in 2023, following Russia's invasion on February 24, 2022, Ukraine in August launched a surprise incursion into Russia's Kursk region. Russia has responded with deadly strikes and Kyiv's outgunned and outmanned troops have struggled to hold back steady advances from Russian forces, notably in the eastern Donetsk region. The West, Ukraine and South Korea say thousands of North Korea soldiers are in Russia. In November Ukraine for the first time used Western-supplied long-range missiles against Russia, after getting US and British clearance. Russia responded by hitting Ukraine with an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) without a nuclear warhead.

Social media scrutiny

In 2024 social media titans faced growing scrutiny of their practices. In France in August, Russian-born founder of the controversial Telegram app, Pavel Durov, was arrested and charged with failing to curb extremist and illegal content on his network. TikTok, meanwhile, was in the crosshairs of US Federal Trade Commission, which accused it of violating child privacy laws. But it was arguably Elon Musk and his social media platform X that drew the most fire. In August, X was banned for 40 days in Brazil -- its largest Latin American market with 22 million users -- in a legal tussle over disinformation.

Russia tightens grip

Vladimir Putin began his fifth term as Russian president in May after winning a presidential election that the West slammed as a sham. His nemesis Alexei Navalny died in February in murky circumstances in the Arctic prison where he had been serving a



19-year sentence for leading an "extremist" organization. Since his death, Russian authorities have escalated a campaign against the Kremlin critic's backers, allies and family -- arresting journalists who covered his court hearings and adding his wife, Yulia Navalnaya, to a "terrorists and extremists" blacklist.



Chinese decline

Beijing launched a salvo of measures aimed at boosting its economy. The world's second-biggest economy has been hit by a property crisis and sluggish household consumption. It has also been locked in bitter trade disputes with the US and the EU after the entry into force of steep increases in US customs duties on electric cars, batteries for electric vehicles. In response Beijing has slapped "temporary anti-dumping measures" on imports from the EU of products including cognac. With Trump's US election win China also fears the imposition of increased customs duties on all its goods imported into the US.

Deadly flooding

The summer of 2024 was the hottest ever recorded on Earth. Relentless global warming provoked heatwaves, droughts and deadly flooding, with the wet weather proving particularly dramatic. An unusually intense rainy season in West and Central Africa unleashed a humanitarian crisis killing hundreds of people. In a September of wild weather, Hurricane Helene pounded the southeast US. Typhoon Krathon slammed into Taiwan and Storm Boris brought floods and devastation to Europe. Typhoons Yagi and Bebinca left a trail of destruction in Asia while deadly floods hit Nepal, Bangladesh, Japan and west and central Africa.



A deadly year for aviation

A string of devastating aviation disasters in 2024 has left hundreds dead and shaken public confidence in air travel safety. The most recent and deadliest crash occurred on December 28, when a Jeju Air



passenger aircraft crashed while attempting to land at Muang Airport, South Korea. The impact ignited a fierce fire that engulfed the aircraft, killing at least 179 of the 181 people aboard. December 25 saw an Embraer ERJ-190AR aircraft operated by Azerbaijan Airlines crash near Aktau Airport in Kazakhstan, killing 38 out of 67 passengers.



Far-right gains in Europe

European elections in June confirmed nationalist and far-right parties rising in France, Germany, Belgium, Austria, Italy and the Netherlands. This also translated at the national level. Austria's far-right Freedom Party won a historic victory in legislative elections. In France, a republican bloc prevented the far-right National Rally from coming to power in snap parliamentary elections, but fell out swiftly after the vote. The AFD in Germany won a regional election for the first time. And meanwhile in England and Northern Ireland dozens of towns were rocked by anti-immigration riots fuelled by far-right agitators.

