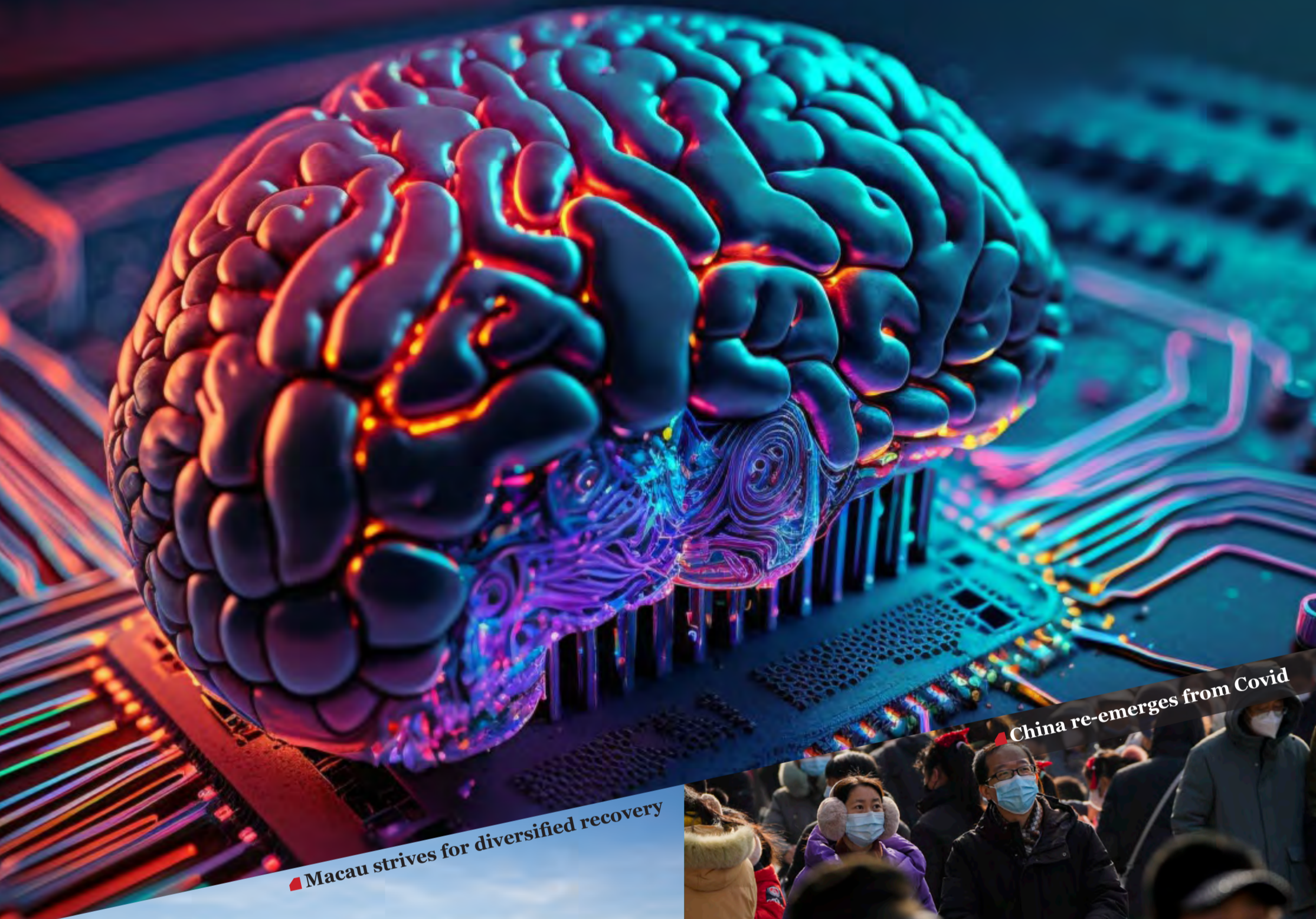


2023

Year in Review

■ Raising AI



■ Macau strives for diversified recovery

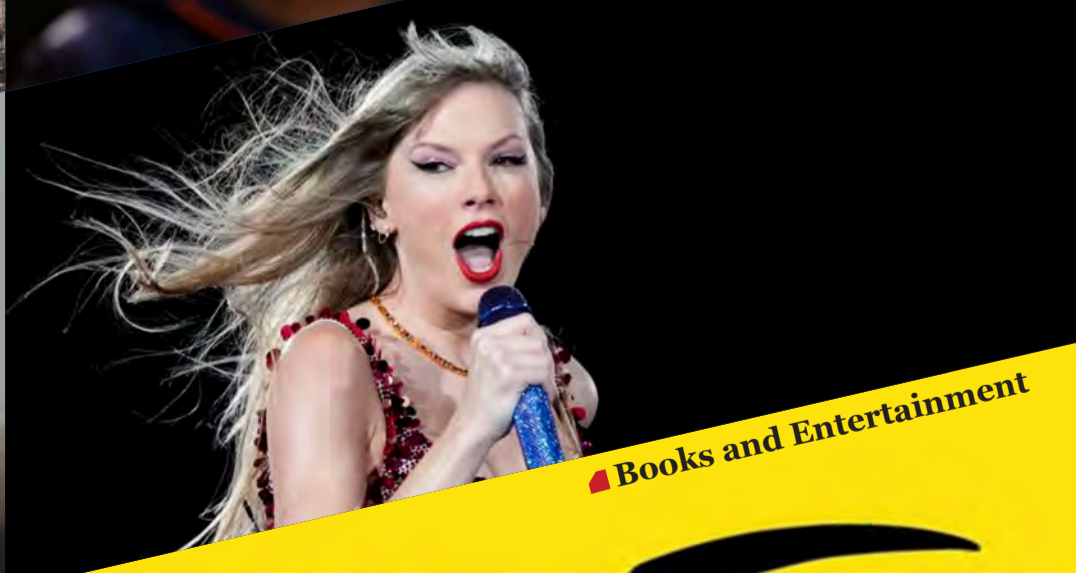


■ World Wide Wars



■ China re-emerges from Covid

■ Swift tailor of the year



■ Books and Entertainment



ANALYSIS

MACAU MAKES SOLID PROGRESS IN ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION IN 2023

DESPITE an unusual cold wave, prosperity has returned to Macau near the end of this year, with major tourist spots and business areas crowded with tourists.

During 2023, the Macau SAR government has led various walks of society to pragmatically and orderly put in place strategies for appropriate economic diversification by reviving the economy and expanding market and tourist sources, making solid progress towards economic diversification.

Efforts have also been stepped up to administer the gaming industry in accordance with the law and to advance the building of the Guangdong-Macao in-depth cooperation zone in Hengqin, neighboring Zhuhai city. A series of plans and measures have been rolled out to set clearer goals and tasks for Macau's industrial development.

LYNZY VALLES



STRIVE FOR DIVERSIFIED RECOVERY

The Macau SAR government put forward the strategy for appropriate economic diversification in its policy address for 2023 to build Macau into a world tourism and leisure center and develop its priority industries of big health, modern finance, high technology, exhibition and convention, as well as culture and sports.

In the past year, the government stepped up interactive development between the tourism industry and multiple other industries, focusing on enriching community tourism elements and revitalizing the community economy to attract more tourists to consume in old town areas with rich historical and cultural heritage.

Data showed the number of visitor arrivals to Macau during the first three quarters of this year expanded by 3.6 times year on year.

Yu Wai Hang, secretary-general of the Macau Innovation Development Research Association, said the tourism and leisure industry, a pillar industry of Macau, achieved a satisfactory recovery this year, with its industrial structure becoming more diversified. "This is very helpful to the development of different sectors, including performances, entertainment, sports and culture."

Macau also sped up developing its bond market, improving financial infrastructure, and promoting the bond market to be connected to the international market. As of September this year, outstanding bonds issued or listed in Macau reached 447.2 billion patacas (about 55.6 billion U.S. dollars).

The Micro Connect Macao Financial Assets Exchange (MCEX) officially started operation in August, becoming the world's first Daily Revenue Obligations (DRO) financial market. The exchange allows investors to directly invest in the large number of mainland small and micro firms through DRO and generate diversified steady returns. Several other licensed financial institutions also started operations.

In 2023, the Macau SAR government followed up on around a dozen investment plans on scientific and technological industries, and supported a batch of research fruits to commercialize.

"Continuous input from the government was crucial to small and medium-sized scientific and technological innovation enterprises in urgent need of transformation and upgrading after the COVID-19 pandemic," said Yu.

Macau also hosted a series of large-scale exhibitions and conventions in the past year, winning the title of Asia's best convention city in 2023. Several high-level sports events, such as the annual motorsports event Grand Prix and the World Table Tennis Champions Macau, effectively pushed for the interactive development of Macau's sports industry and related industries.

Data showed Macau's gross domestic product leapt by 77.7 percent year on year in real terms in the first three quarters of 2023, with the economy recovering to around 77.4 percent of the same period of 2019. Consumer prices remained steady. The unemployment situation continuously improved.

Ho Iat Seng, chief executive of the Macau SAR, said various walks of life in Macau have continuously increased their confidence in the city's economic development.

DRAW BLUEPRINT FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Ho stressed on various occasions that economic diversification remains the only road for solving the deep-rooted problems in Macau's socioeconomic development and the prime administrative task for the Macau SAR government.

In November, the government released a development plan for Macau's appropriate economic diversification from 2024 to 2028, the first systematic industrial development plan issued in Macau.

The document outlines specific planning and arrangements for developing Macau's industries of tourism and leisure, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and big health, modern finance, new and high technologies, conventions and exhibitions, and culture and sports, based on the second five-year plan of the Macau SAR and the city's appropriate economic diversification strategy.

Lei Wai Nong, secretary for economy and finance of the Macau SAR government, said Macau is more prepared, determined and confident than ever to achieve the goal of economic diversification thanks to the implementation of various supporting policies from the central authorities.

Liu Chengkun, director of the Institute for Sustainable Development, Macau University of Science and Technology, believed it is now basically mature for Macau

to "give its answers" to economic diversification. "With specific policies, Macau's economic diversification process has already started," Liu said.

INTEGRATE INTO OVERALL NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Last week, the Macau Medical Center of Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH), an elite hospital in the Chinese mainland, started a trial operation in Macau, focusing on the medical treatment of difficult and complicated diseases.

This largest medical facility in Macau so far marks the first large-scale public hospital built in the city since its return to the motherland over two decades ago, and the first case of such collaboration between the Macau SAR and the mainland under "one country, two systems" aiming to help with Macau's economic diversification. TCM formulations made in Macau or in the mainland have been approved to be used in hospitals in the other side.

Measures have also been taken to help Macau-registered TCM businesses to manufacture in Hengqin, effectively promoting integrated development of the health sector in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

On Thursday, China's National Development and Reform Commission unveiled plans to boost the development of the in-depth cooperation zone in Hengqin and the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation Zone in Shenzhen.

Ho said the plan sets more specific development goals for the

Hengqin in-depth cooperation zone in three stages by 2024, 2029 and 2035, and puts forward a series of policies on developing new industries and opening up new systems in the zone, expanding space and opportunities for the development of Macau businesses and for the work and life of Macau residents.

The plan will inject strong impetus into the industrial diversification and long-term development of Macau, which is significant to the long-term prosperity and stability of Macau and its integration into overall national development, said Ho.

"The Macau SAR government will seize opportunities brought by the development of Hengqin and Qianhai in alignment with Macau's economic diversification plan, and leverage Macau's location advantages to further promote coordinated development of Macau and the Greater Bay Area," added Ho.

Thanks to more convenient transportation in the Greater Bay Area and optimized customs clearance policies, more and more Macau residents choose to visit Guangdong and Hong Kong on a frequent basis, providing broader space and depth for Macau's diversified development.

Ip Kuai Peng, vice rector of the City University of Macau, suggested that Macau should fully leverage its advantages in system, location, customs policies, and language, and step up regional cooperation to make further achievements in economic diversification and contribute more to the country's overall development. **MDT/XINHUA**

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



Timeline of events

JANUARY

After nearly three years of restrictive measures due to the pandemic, Macau completely re-opened borders for all travelers.

Gaming operators commenced operation of fresh licenses following the largest gaming law overhaul. Pledges will amount to USD15 billion in the coming decade, the majority of which are for the diversification of non-gaming elements.

FEBRUARY

Following the resumption of group tourism visas, the first mainland tour groups arrived.

Masks were no longer suggested for use outdoors, although they were still required at certain indoor venues.

The government signed an agreement with the Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH) for the management and operation of the Islands Medical Center.

MARCH

The Executive Committee of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin published a series of measures to support the establishment of Macau companies in Hengqin.

A total of 300 new surveillance cameras, part of the fifth phase of the "Eyes in the Sky" program, were installed.

The local government held a conference and symposium to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the promulgation of the Basic Law of the Macau SAR, a milestone in the historical process of the 'One country, two systems' policy.

Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng made his first official trip to Portugal since becoming the city's top official. This was his first trip outside Greater China since he took office in December 2019.

APRIL

The Court of First Instance delivered its decision on the case known as the "Land, Public Works, and Transport Bureau (DSSOPT) Case," sentencing Li Canfeng and Jaime Carion, among 16 others for several crimes related to corruption, money laundering and participating in a secret society.

The casino sector continued to recover, recording MOP14.7 billion in revenue. This was the highest monthly taking since January 2020.

MAY

The SAR witnessed robust tourism recovery during the five-day May Day holiday in the mainland, receiving around 300 travel groups and nearly 500,000 visitors.

The Londoner Macao hosted a grand celebration marking completion of the integrated resort's redesign and ushering the Cotai Strip into a new chapter.

The National Security Law

Amendment Bill passed unanimously in parliament with only two questions raised by lawmaker Ron Lam.

JUNE

Au Kam San declared that candlelight vigils to shed light on the events that took place at Tiananmen Square in Beijing in what become known as the "June Fourth Incident" are not to return, after being held for three decades.

The National Security Defense Commission (CDSE), an entity created in 2018 with the mission of supporting the Chief Executive in decision-making on matters related to the SAR and in the scope of the defense of the State security, replaced the Legislative Assembly Electoral Affairs Commission (CAEAL) in the task of inspecting and evaluating the eligibility of the candidates submitting applications to run for the post of legislators.

JULY

Former junket mogul Alvin Chau was ordered to sell 36 real estate properties, which total to approximately MOP600 million in value.

An alleged stabbing occurred in a secondary school and a female student was injured, causing concern within the education bureau.

The government decided to suspend the building of a Kun Iam statue at the Hac-Sa Reservoir Park due to public opi-

nion that opposed the MOP1.6 billion project.

AUGUST

Iris-facilitated border crossing was tested on invited residents.

The Grande Hotel Macau, better known locally by its Cantonese name "Kuok Chai," reopened its doors to guests after 27 years. The closure had caused the space to devolve into almost complete ruin.

Following a nearly identical saga 12 years ago, many Macau residents rushed to purchase table salt after Japan started discharging wastewater from Fukushima's nuclear power plant.

SEPTEMBER

Happiness Street becomes a trial pedestrian zone. These streets were blocked and reserved exclusively for pedestrians from morning to evening.

Hong Kong busker Oliver Ma was deported and banned from reentering Macau as local police forces claim he posed risks to national security.

The 700-plus room Andaz Macau opened as an integral part of the Galaxy International Convention Centre (GICC).

OCTOBER

A four-month-old girl was found unconscious at Fong Chong (Taipa) Nursery during an afternoon nap, before being declared dead at the hospital.

Typhoon Signal No. 8 was hoisted for 17 hours and 30 minutes, one of the longest hoistings in years.

Macau sweltered through its

hottest October on Oct. 4, reaching 35.2 degrees Celsius, which was attributed to Typhoon Koinu.

NOVEMBER

The SAR government released a development plan for Macau's economic diversification from 2024 to 2028, the first systematic industrial development plan issued in Macau.

The government announced a new ID card design that enhances encryption technologies and security features.

The 70th Macau Grand Prix event was extended to two weekends, covering six days.

Guangdong authorities published a three-year plan to digitalize the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

DECEMBER

The Macao Union Hospital partially opened, marking a significant milestone in local healthcare services.

Ethiopian runners showcased exceptional performance at the 42nd Macau International Marathon.

A Japanese tourist died after bungee jumping from Macau Tower. The 56-year-old man became short of breath and then stopped breathing following the jump.

Macau concessionaires traded at rock-bottom valuations as operators were saddled with declines of at least 20% since the beginning of the year.

The LRT Barra station commenced operations linking passengers from Barra, on the peninsula, to the Airport and the Ferry Terminal in Taipa.

AP PHOTO



President Xi Jinping speaking to Russian President Vladimir Putin during their meeting at the Kremlin in Moscow, on March 20



President Xi Jinping delivers a speech at the closing ceremony for National People's Congress at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, on March 13



American Ballet Theater's dancers rehearse for the opening night at the Shanghai Grand Theater in Shanghai, on November 2

2023 CHINA

Country emerged from 'zero-Covid' to confront new challenges in a changed world

KEN MORITSUGU

CHINA'S prospects for 2024 look uncertain, as a year that opened free of COVID-19 lockdowns winds down without the dreamed of robust recovery for the world's No. 2 economy.

The wars in Gaza and Ukraine are straining China's ties with the West. A U.S.-China leaders' summit helped get relations back on track, but also clearly defined the stark divide between the two global powers. To counter a U.S.-led world order, China is pushing alternative visions for global security and development whose prospects depend partly on restoring its own economic vitality.

Pandemic-related restrictions ended, China still faces long-term, fundamental challenges: a falling birthrate and aging population — India surpassed it as the world's largest country in April — and its rivalry with the United States over technology, Taiwan and control of the high seas. Another: to balance the ruling Communist Party's tightening grip on myriad aspects of life with the flexibility needed to keep the economy dynamic and growing.

"This year started on a such optimistic note," said Wang Xiangwei, a China expert and former editor-in-chief of the South China Morning Post newspaper. "And now (as) we are ending 2023, I think people

are getting more worried about what ... will be in store" for next year.

A WINTER OF HOPE

As China's mask and testing requirements faded, for the first time in three years crowds thronged temples and parks last January for the Lunar New Year.

"Life is returning to normal," said Zhang Yiwen, visiting a historic Beijing district bustling with tourists. "I look forward to seeing how the economy grows in the new year and what the country can accomplish in the international market."

Hopes for warming ties with Washington were dashed with the shooting down of an

apparently off-course Chinese balloon that drifted over the United States in February. Secretary of State Antony Blinken canceled a trip to Beijing. A month later during the annual session of the legislature, Chinese leader Xi Jinping accused the U.S. of seeking to isolate and "contain" China.

But China's re-opening brought a parade of foreign leaders to Beijing as it strengthened links with the Mideast and other developing regions and showed support for Russia, and set about mending relations with Europe, the U.S. and Australia.

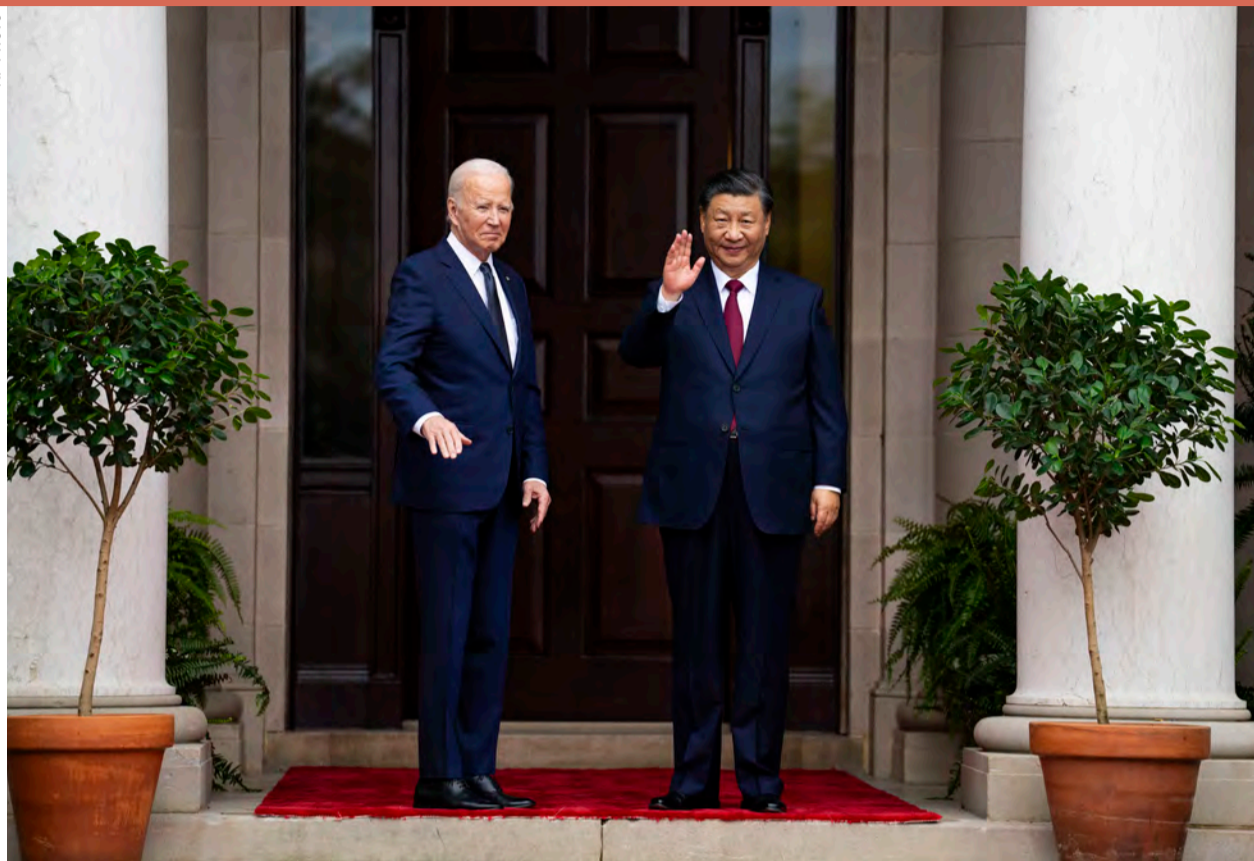
China raised its international profile when Saudi Arabia and Iran reached an agreement in Beijing to reestablish diplo-

matic relations. Shi Shusi, a regular analyst on Chinese TV, highlighted China's capacity to play a diplomatic role in the developing world.

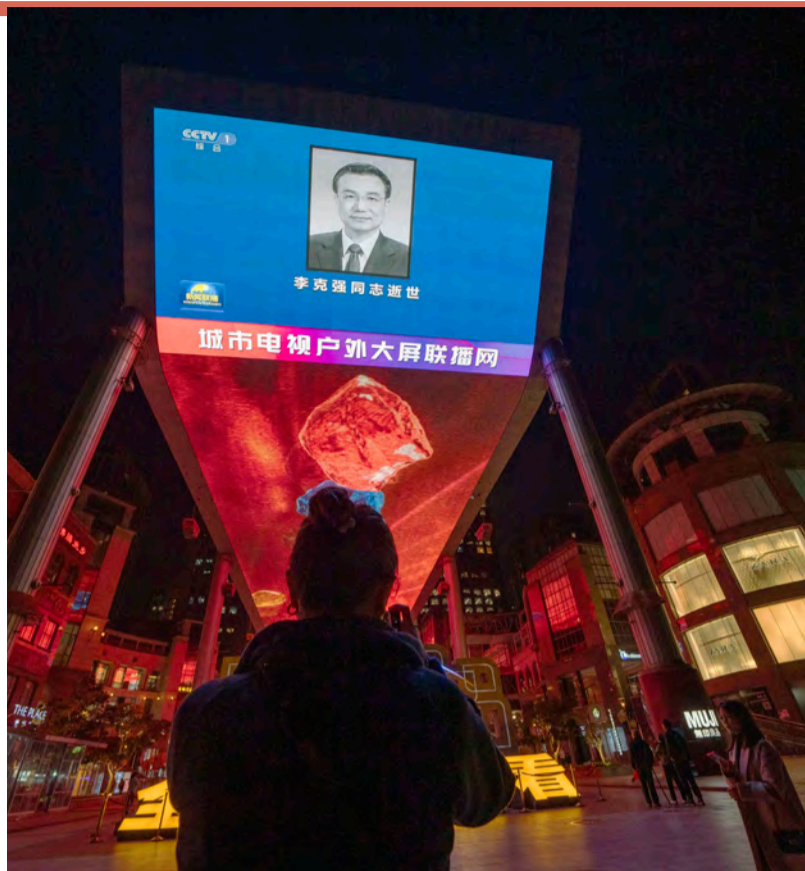
"China has traditional friendships with these countries," Shi said. "If we provide some assistance and strengthen cooperation ... it seems to be a realistic solution for China to participate in the game of great powers and in global governance."

During the National People's Congress, Premier Li Keqiang announced an economic growth target of around 5% for the year. But Li, who died in October, was on his way out, replaced by close associates of Xi as he further consolidated his hold on power.

AP PHOTO



US President Joe Biden greets President Xi Jinping at the Filoli Estate in Woodside, California, on November 15



The evening news broadcast shows an obituary photo of the former Premier Li Keqiang on a giant screen in Beijing, on October 27

XINHUA



Wang Yi, China's most senior diplomat (center) presides over a closed meeting with Iran and Saudi Arabia representatives, in Beijing, on March 11



Auto Shanghai 2023 show in Shanghai, on April 19

SPRING'S ELECTRIC VEHICLE SURPRISE

China's economic rebound was short-lived, though the Shanghai auto show showcased one gleaming bright spot: electric vehicles. Exports of EVs have soared, to the extent that by September, the European Union launched a trade investigation into Chinese subsidies to EV makers.

"The EV market is getting better year by year, even though the overall economy is not promising," said Li Jing, a salesperson at a small electric car dealer in Wuwei, a city of 1.2 million people in eastern China's Anhui province.

Li said his pay remained steady through the pandemic. Still, he was putting off plans to buy an apartment, expecting housing prices to fall amid a real estate crisis that has many Chinese cutting back on spending, hobbling efforts to tap consumer demand to drive economic growth.

A SUMMER OF ECONOMIC DOLDRUMS

Blinken made his balloon-delayed trip to Beijing,

followed by visits by U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, climate envoy John Kerry and then Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.

Meanwhile, the economy was slowing as growing numbers of property developers defaulted on debts, caught short in a crackdown on excessive borrowing that began in 2020 and has hamstrung the entire industry. The jobless rate among young Chinese surged to about one-in-five, leading the government to stop publishing that data.

"Life hasn't returned to how it was before the pandemic," said Liu Qingyu, a young worker in Shanghai's financial sector who was hoping for more opportunities but instead is fretting over layoffs at her company.

When the Zhongzhi Enterprise Group missed payments to investors, worries deepened that the real estate meltdown could spread into a financial crisis. The government began loosening restrictions on lending for home purchases and stepped up spending on cons-

truction, though housing prices kept falling.

"I think in July, the Chinese leadership realized that the economy ... was in more serious trouble than (they had) expected," Wang said. "So they started to pump more money into the economy. But all those measures were considered incremental."

AUTUMN'S CHALLENGES

Relations with the United States warmed further in the fall, though fundamental differences over technology and territorial disputes remain.

Visits by Philadelphia Orchestra members, the American Ballet Theatre, American World War II veterans and California Gov. Gavin Newsom set a friendly tone ahead of a November meeting in San Francisco between Xi and U.S. President Joe Biden.

"China has not treated its customers very well over the past five years because of geopolitical tensions," Wang said, referring to the American, European and other export markets. "Now, China

wants to focus on growing the economy. So China will have to make nice with its biggest customers."

Still, ahead of the Biden-Xi meeting, the U.S. broadened its export controls on advanced computer chips. And a collision of Chinese and Philippine ships in the South China Sea harkened to tensions that could draw the U.S. into conflict.

As the year's end drew near, the passing of former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger underscored how times have changed. Kissinger helped engineer the normalization of China-U.S. ties in the early 1970s and had met with Xi in Beijing in August at age 100. But his was another era, when the two sides found common ground despite their disagreements.

The future will test the wisdom of both Chinese and Western leaders, Shi said.

"The future for all of us lies not in making a big fortune but in security, in the effort to ... avoid global conflicts," he said.

Li Yu just wants a job. He

wound up at a day labor market in Beijing in September after his family's restaurant in northeast China went bankrupt. He started out earning about 300 yuan (\$40) for a 12-hour day as a package delivery person. By December, that had fallen almost by half.

"Honestly, all are just trying to get a job, to put food on the table," he said, describing how people jostle for jobs and even end up in fights.

Analysts now think the government will achieve its 5% growth target but they expect a slowdown next year.

This matters not only for China's workers but for the whole world. The U.S. economy is the foundation of America's status as the dominant global power. Even after its auto and steelmakers faltered, Silicon Valley led the way into the 21st century.

In his second decade in power, Xi aims to restore China's global stature. That will depend largely on the Communist Party's capacity to overcome its many challenges in 2024 and beyond. **MDT/AP**



WE'RE OVER YOU, 2023

EXTREME WEATHER, GUILT TIPPING AND, YES, BARBIE

LEANNE ITALIE, MDT/AP
ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

All things Barbie, going pantless, humungo Stanley Cup bottles and pressure tipping. There's plenty from 2023 to leave behind come the new year.

Extreme weather hit historic heights. Fakeness took a huge turn with the rise of AI. The rudeness epidemic continued with the help of FaceTime. Here's a less than all-inclusive list of what we're over as we look ahead to 2024:

BARBIE, TAKE A HIKE

Barbiecore, aka all things hot pink and playful and hyper-feminine, has been around since the dawn of Paris Hilton and Britney Spears. Pierpaolo Piccioli at Valentino added some high-fashion oomph in 2022 with a buzzy Barbie pink collection. And there's Nicki Minaj, of course, and her army of fans dubbed the Barbz.

Then along came Barbenheimer and bam! July 2023 was nuts with the conflation of the films "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer." They shared an opening weekend. Big Barbie (and "Oppenheimer") money was made. It was fun. We needed that feel-good frenzy.

Now, please, let's put Babs back in her box and hop on over to some other aesthetic and spot on the color wheel to get all crazy about. Enough with the high profile for our senior gal and her pink. Pink for breast cancer awareness is a whole other story. So is millennial pink, if that ever was an actual thing people generally cared about.

On to Gen Z yellow, people!

PANTYHOSE ARE NOT PANTS

Kendall Jenner. Hailey Bieber. Ariana Grande. Rihanna. Kim Kardashian. The list goes on of celebs who decided colored but still sheer pantyhose are pants.

They're not pants. They're not tights. They're not leggings. And they're definitely not naked dresses, which make some kind of sense on a red carpet or runway for a sheer, sexy vibe.

There are lots of other ways people go pantless, for sure. Bare legged. Leotarded, like the bedazzled Marc Jacobs number Jenner wore to the Met Gala. All just look like one forgot one's pants, leaving behind a tuxedo jacket or a long bulky sweater or ill-fitting sweatshirt.

Isn't this what assistants are for? To make sure one remembers one's pants?

WE'VE HAD IT WITH YOU, EXTREME WEATHER

"The dog days of summer are not just barking, they are biting. Climate breakdown has begun."

So said U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres of the summer of 2023 and its devastating outbreak of extreme weather.

Wicked ocean storms, wildfires, flooding and droughts. The planet suffered through them all. Earth experienced its hottest Northern Hemisphere summer ever measured. The world's oceans were the hottest on record, according to the World Meteorological Organization and the European climate service Copernicus.

We know this is a big ask, in a climate change sort of way, but extreme weather, be gone!

ENOUGH WITH THE PRESSURE TIPPING

At the height of the pandemic, and during the early throes of rebuilding our lives, we were happy to tip generously and often. That included an onslaught of new tip requests from a brave new world of workers armed with little screens that prompt for tips just before we pay. Because, as you remember, we were contactless.

The problem? It never went away. The pre-pay tip prompts are still there, in our faces.

Tipping fatigue is real.

The idea of tipping isn't new, of course. But the disgruntled took to social media in protest of the guilt trip for non-traditional tipping, when we're handed coffee and a muffin, say, or cruising through a drive-through.

The new normal doesn't look or feel anything like the tip jars of yore that were easily ignored.

Let's pay workers more to begin with and stop the pressure tipping.

THE FAKENESS OF IT ALL

Fake eyelashes the size of caterpillars persisted in 2023. Lab-grown diamonds made their way into the mainstream as cheaper alternatives to the real thing. Fake marriages hit the A-list, or at least those that secretly reached expiration dates years before the world found out (looking at you Will, Jada, Meryl and Don).

The relentless onslaught of fake news and disinformation

continued in the lead-up to elections in 2024. Influencers and celebs rocked on with their "natural look" makeup tutorials that require a counter full of products. Kim Kardashian's fringe at the Council of Fashion Designers of America awards was, yes, fake.

Was 2023 a big year for fake everything? Counting AI, the answer is, definitely. Talk about creating an illusion. Let's not forget about real. Real just may get us through.

THE STANLEY CUP CRAZE

Hydration is important. Reducing water bottle plastic is a worthy cause.

HOWEVER, there's a world of reusable water bottles out there, not just the ginormous and pricey Stanley Cup kind that earned cult status on TikTok and Instagram in 2023.

People wait in lines for these things. Some come as large as 40 ounces in a variety of colors at \$40 a pop. Stans (apropos slang) put up unboxing videos. Starbucks, Target and other retailers have been selling out. And there's bling to be had: Name plates and straw tips fill the new TikTok shop, along with suspected fake Stanleys.

Stanley-related hashtags have been shared millions upon millions of times.

Who's behind it all? Social media marketing, of course. Thanks mom influencers. And score one for Stanley parent Pacific Market International. And while we're at it, score one for inventor William Stanley Jr.

He created the things in 1913 when, through his work on transformers, he hit on a welding technique to insulate his vacuum bottles with steel instead of glass.

Would he approve of all the virtue signaling, which is not unlike all the virtue signaling we

had already experienced via Hydro Flasks and their VSCO Girls? Before that it was Nalgene.

It's likely Stanley would be ecstatic.

KEEP YOUR FACETIME TO YOURSELF

FaceTime is great. FaceTime is fun. FaceTime keeps us connected. The thing is, we like our FaceTimes. Not your FaceTimes.

FaceTiming in public (along with good ole speaker phone talk) reached cataclysmic proportions on the annoyance scale in 2023. On trains and buses, in streets, stores, doctors' offices. In public restrooms. Nowhere is spared. Sometimes, the camera's not remotely pointed at the phone user's face.

What's the deal? What's the point? Is it a, "I do it because I can" thing? What you do because you fat-finger all your texts or hang up a call with your face when the phone is, um, at your face? Don't know what Bluetooth is? Can't stand things in your ears or on your head?

Don't make us rue 2010, when Apple introduced FaceTime alongside the iPhone 4. Figure something out, unless there's a legit reason you can't use your phone all the other more considerate ways in public.

OVER IT RUNNERS-UP

Weed, of the marijuana variety, is ubiquitous. Weed stinks. Somebody please genetically alter a variety that smells better. Much appreciated.

Social media speak: "I was today years old." "So let's get into it." "Yas, bestie, it's giving." Be original. You'll love it.

The comings and goings of Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce. Let them live unfettered by media drooling over their every move, presuming their romance lasts come 2024. MDT/AP

MATT O'BRIEN, MDT/AP
TECHNOLOGY WRITER

2023 AI

The year we played with artificial intelligence – and weren't sure what to do about it

ARTIFICIAL intelligence went mainstream in 2023 — it was a long time coming yet has a long way to go for the technology to match people's science fiction fantasies of human-like machines.

Catalyzing a year of AI fanfare was ChatGPT. The chatbot gave the world a glimpse of recent advances in computer science even if not everyone figured out quite how it works or what to do with it.

"I would call this an inflection moment," pioneering AI scientist Fei-Fei Li said. "2023 is, in history, hopefully going to be remembered for the profound changes of the technology as well as the public awakening. It also shows how messy this technology is."

It was a year for people to figure out "what this is, how to use it, what's the impact — all the good, the bad and the ugly," she said.

PANIC OVER AI

The first AI panic of 2023 set in soon after New Year's Day when classrooms reopened and schools from Seattle to Paris started blocking ChatGPT. Teenagers were already asking the chatbot — released in late 2022 — to compose essays and answer take-home tests.

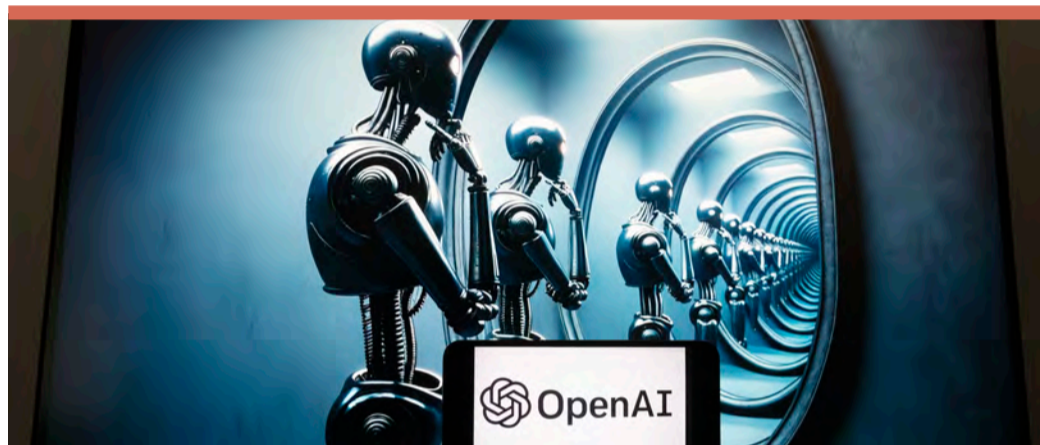
AI large language models behind technology such as ChatGPT work by repeatedly guessing the next word in a sentence after having "learned" the patterns of a huge trove of human-written works. They often get facts wrong. But the outputs appeared so natural that it sparked curiosity about the next AI advances and its potential use for trickery and deception.

Worries escalated as this new cohort of generative AI tools — spitting out not just words but novel images, music and synthetic voices — threatened the livelihoods of anyone who writes, draws, strums or codes for a living. It fueled strikes by Hollywood writers and actors and legal challenges from visual artists and bestselling authors.

Some of the AI field's most esteemed scientists warned that the technology's unchecked progress was marching toward outsmarting humans and possibly threatening their existence, while other scientists called their concerns overblown or brought attention to more immediate risks.

By spring, AI-generated deepfakes — some more

AP PHOTO



convincing than others — had leaped into U.S. election campaigns, where one falsely showed Donald Trump embracing the nation's former top infectious disease expert. The technology made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between real and fabricated war footage in Ukraine and Gaza.

By the end of the year, the AI crises had shifted to ChatGPT's own maker, the San Francisco startup OpenAI, nearly destroyed by corporate turmoil over its charismatic CEO, and to a government meeting room in Belgium, where exhausted political leaders from across the European Union emerged after days of intense talks with a deal for the world's first major AI legal safeguards.

The new AI law will take a few years to fully take effect, and other lawmaking bodies — including the U.S. Congress — are still a long way from enacting their own.

TOO MUCH HYPE?

There's no question that commercial AI products unveiled in 2023 incorporated technological achievements not possible in earlier stages of AI research, which trace back to the mid-20th century.

But the latest generative AI trend is at peak hype, according to the market research firm Gartner, which has tracked what it calls the "hype cycle" of emerging technology since the 1990s. Picture a wooden rollercoaster ticking up to its highest hill, about to careen down into what

Gartner describes as a "trough of disillusionment" before coasting back to reality.

"Generative AI is right in the peak of inflated expectations," Gartner analyst Dave Misko said. "There's massive claims by vendors and producers of generative AI around its capabilities, its ability to deliver those capabilities."

Google drew criticism this month for editing a video demonstration of its most capable AI model, called Gemini, in a way that made it appear more impressive — and human-like.

Misko said leading AI developers are pushing certain ways of applying the latest technology, most of which correspond to their current line of products — be they search engines or workplace productivity software. That doesn't mean that's how the world will use it.

"As much as Google and Microsoft and Amazon and Apple would love us to adopt the way that they think about their technology and that they deliver that technology, I think adoption actually comes from the bottom up," he said.

IS IT DIFFERENT THIS TIME?

It's easy to forget that this isn't the first wave of AI commercialization. Computer vision techniques developed by Li and other scientists helped sort through a huge database of photos to recognize objects and individual faces and help guide self-driving cars. Speech recognition advances made voice assistants

like Siri and Alexa a fixture in many people's lives.

"When we launched Siri in 2011, it was at that point the fastest-growing consumer app and the only major mainstream application of AI that people had ever experienced," said Tom Gruber, co-founder of Siri Inc., which Apple bought and made an integral iPhone feature.

But Gruber believes what's happening now is the "biggest wave ever" in AI, unleashing new possibilities as well as dangers.

"We're surprised that we could accidentally encounter this astonishing ability with language, by training a machine to play solitaire on all of the internet," Gruber said. "It's kind of amazing."

The dangers could come fast in 2024, as major national elections in the U.S., India and elsewhere could get flooded with AI-generated deepfakes.

In the longer term, AI technology's rapidly improving language, visual perception and step-by-step planning capabilities could supercharge the vision of a digital assistant — but only if granted access to the "inner loop of our digital life stream," Gruber said.

"They can manage your attention as in, 'You should watch this video. You should read this book. You should respond to this person's communication,'" Gruber said. "That is what a real executive assistant does. And we could have that, but with a really big risk of personal information and privacy." **MDT/AP**

QUOTES OF 2023

"It's like hunger or thirst. It's a feeling the body sends us when something we need for survival is missing."

— **U.S. SURGEON GENERAL VIVEK MURTHY**

"Ten years of war and struggle. And it seems like the blood has only just begun to flow, truly. I regret nothing. But, God, it's just so tiresome."

— **DMYTRO RIZNYCHENKO, UKRAINE**

"I'm feeling the goosebumps, and it's a very happy moment [Chandrayaan-3 landing on dark side of moon]... You can see the energy. It's beyond words."

— **SHRINI SINGH, INDIA**

"We are the best actors in the world. We act like people. When really, we are other beings frozen in our acutely agonizing desolation."

— **RACHEL GOLDBERG, ISRAEL**

"We were treated like cattle, they even wrote numbers on our hands. We could feel their hatred."

— **IBRAHIM LUBBAD, GAZA**

"We are here all together, all the world together, to combat climate change and really, we're negotiating for what? We're negotiating for what in the middle of a genocide?"

— **HADEEL IKHMAIS, PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY**

"There will come a point where no job is needed. You can have a job if you wanted to have a job for personal satisfaction. But the AI would be able to do everything ... One of the challenges in the future will be how do we find meaning in life."

— **TESLA CEO ELON MUSK, USA**

"They told me that this country [U.S.] was different. But for me, it's been hell."

— **KARINA O'BANDO, ECUADOR**

"What is most painful is that years after the brutalities and the stealing of our land, British companies are still in possession of our ancestral homes, earning millions from their comfortable headquarters in the U.K., while our people remain squatters."

— **JOEL KIMUTAI KIMETTO, KENYA**

"God gave me a new lease on life [surviving a 7.8-magnitude earthquake]"

— **OSAMA ABDEL HAMID, SYRIA**

"We did not die from hunger or the earthquake, but we will die freezing from the cold. It shouldn't be this way. No one is sending help."

— **AYSAN KURT, TURKEY**

"Maybe it looks the same on the surface. But when you look with a magnifying glass, you'll see the essence isn't the same."

— **ARTIST WONG KA-YING, HONG KONG**

"It is amazing to see this huge berg in person — it stretches as far as the eye can see."

— **ANDREW MEIJERS, CHIEF SCIENTIST ABOARD THE RESEARCH SHIP RRS SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH**

"There was silence and like a mist [ring of fire eclipse], as if it was dusk, but only a few minutes later the birds were singing again."

— **CARMEN JARDINES, MEXICO**

"When they asked me to open my bra [at Miss Universe contest]... I was shocked! But I couldn't speak or refuse. When I tried to cover my breast with my hand, I was even scolded and yelled at... I was totally confused, nervous and humiliated, especially when I was told to lift my left leg on the chair."

— **PRISKILA RIBKA JELITA, INDONESIA**

"May God save us."

— **PHRASE THAT NEIGHBORS USED TO GREET EACH OTHER IN A REMOTE VILLAGE IN MOROCCO'S AFTER A 6.8-MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE**

2023 BUSINESS

From AI and inflation to Musk and Swift

AI GOES MAINSTREAM

Artificial intelligence thrust itself into public consciousness this year. But the technology, while dazzling for its ability to retrieve information or produce readable prose, has yet to match people's science fiction fantasies of human-like machines.

Catalyzing a year of AI fanfare was ChatGPT. The chatbot gave the world a glimpse of advances in computer science, even if not everyone learned quite how it works or how to make the best use of it.

Worries escalated as this new cohort of generative AI tools threatened the livelihoods of people who write, draw, strum or code for a living. AI's ability to produce original content helped fuel strikes by Hollywood writers and actors and legal challenges from bestselling authors.

By year's end, the AI crises had shifted to ChatGPT's own maker, OpenAI, which was nearly destroyed by corporate turmoil over its CEO, and to a meeting room in Belgium, where European Union leaders emerged after days of talks with a deal for the world's first major AI legal safeguards.

MUSK'S X-RATED TRANSFORMATION

A little more than a year ago, Elon Musk walked into Twitter's San Francisco headquarters, fired its CEO and other top executives and began transforming the social media platform into what's now known as X.

Since then, the company has been bombarded by allegations of misinformation, endured significant advertising losses and suffered declines in usage.

Disney, Comcast and other high-profile advertisers stopped spending on X after the liberal advocacy group Media Matters issued a report showing that their ads were appearing alongside material praising Nazis. (X has sued the group, claiming it "manufactured" the report to "drive advertisers from the platform and destroy X Corp.")

The problems culminated when Musk went on an expletive-ridden rant in an on-stage interview about companies that had halted spending on X. Musk asserted that advertisers that pulled out were engaging in "blackmail" and, using a profanity, essentially told them to get lost.

"Don't advertise," X's billionaire owner said.

HOUSING'S MISERABLE YEAR

Remarkably, the U.S. economy and job market largely avoided pain in 2023 from the Fed's relentless campaign against

AP PHOTO



inflation — 11 interest-rate hikes since March 2022.

Not so the housing market.

As the Fed jacked up borrowing rates, the average 30-year fixed-rate mortgage rate shot up from 4.16% in March 2022 to 7.79% in October 2023. Home sales crumbled. For the first 10 months of 2023, sales of previously occupied homes sank 20%.

Yet at the same time and despite the sales slump, home prices kept rising. The combination of high mortgage rates and rising prices made homeownership — or the prospect of trading up to another house — unaffordable for many.

CRYPTO CHAOS (CONTINUED)

If 2022 was the year that the cryptocurrency industry collapsed, 2023 was the year of the spillover from that fall.

The year's headlines from crypto were dominated by convictions and legal settlements as Washington regulators adopted a much more aggressive stance toward the industry.

A jury convicted Sam Bankman-Fried, the founder and former CEO of the crypto exchange FTX, of wire fraud and six other charges. Weeks later, the founder of Binance, Chengpeng Zhao, agreed to plead guilty to money laundering charges as part of a settlement between U.S. authorities and the exchange. Among the other crypto heavyweights that met legal trouble were Coinbase, Gemini and Genesis.

Yet speculation that crypto may gain more legitimacy among investors helped more than double the price of bitcoin. After years of delays, regulators are eventually expected to approve a bitcoin exchange-traded fund. Whether that would prove sufficient to sustain bitcoin's rally over the long run remains to be seen.

BANKING JITTERS

Historically, high interest rates benefit banks; they can charge more for their loans. But in 2023, higher rates ended up poisoning a handful of them.

The industry endured a banking crisis on a scale not seen since 2008. Three midsized banks — Silicon Valley Bank, Signature Bank and First Republic Bank — collapsed.

For years, banks had loaded up their balance sheets with high-quality mortgages and Treasuries. In an era of ultra-low rates, those mortgages and bonds paid out puny interest.

Enter the specter of inflation and the Fed's aggressive rate hikes. As rates jumped, the banks' bonds tumbled in value because investors could now buy new bonds with much juicier yields. With pressure on the banks mounting, some anxious depositors withdrew their money. After one such bank run, Silicon Valley collapsed. Days later, Signature Bank failed. First Republic was seized and sold to JPMorgan Chase.

Investors remain concerned about midsized institutions with similar business models. Trillions of dollars in commercial real estate loans that remain on these banks' books could become problematic in 2024.

GLOBAL MARKETS RALLY

From Austria to New Zealand, stock markets rallied through 2023. As inflation eased, stocks climbed despite sluggish global economic growth.

A tumble in crude oil prices helped slow inflation. A barrel of Brent crude, the international standard, dropped 14% through mid-December on expectations that the world has more than enough oil to meet demand.

An index that spans nearly 3,000 stocks from 47 countries returned 18% in U.S. dollar terms as of Dec. 11. Healthy gains for Apple, Nvidia and other U.S. Big Tech stocks powered much of the gains. So did the 45% return for the Danish pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk, which sells the Wegovy drug to treat obesity and the 33% return for the Dutch semiconductor company ASML.

The bond market endured more turbulence. Bond prices tumbled for much of the year, and their yields rose, over uncertainty about how far central banks would go in raising rates to curb inflation.

The yield on the 10-year U.S. Treasury briefly topped 5% in October to reach its highest level since 2007. Yields have since ea-

sed on the expectation that the Fed is done raising rates.

WORLD ECONOMY'S RESILIENCE

Over the past three years, the global economy has absorbed one hit after another. A devastating pandemic. The disruption of energy and grain markets stemming from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A resurgence of inflation. Punishing interest rates.

And yet economic output kept growing in 2023, if only modestly. Optimism grew about a "soft landing" — a scenario in which high rates tame inflation without causing a recession. The head of the International Monetary Fund praised the global economy for its "remarkable resilience."

The United States has led the way. Defying predictions that high rates would trigger a U.S. recession, the world's largest economy has continued to grow. And employers, fueled by solid consumer spending, have kept hiring at healthy rates.

Still, the accumulated shocks are restraining growth. The IMF expects the global economy to expand just 2.9% in 2024 from an expected 3% this year. A major concern is a weakened China, the world's No. 2 economy. Its growth is hobbled by the collapse of an overbuilt real estate market, sagging consumer confidence and high rates of youth unemployment.

THE U.S. ECONOMY (TAYLOR'S VERSION)

Taylor Swift dominated popular culture, with her record-shattering \$1 billion concert tour, her anointment as Time magazine's Person of the Year and her high-profile romance with Travis Kelce, the Kansas City Chiefs football star.

The Swift phenomenon went further yet. It extended into the realm of the national economy. Her name came up at a July news conference by Fed Chair Jerome Powell, when Powell was asked whether Swift's blockbuster ticket sales revealed anything about the state of the economy. Though Powell avoided a direct reply, Swift's name came up that same month in a Fed review of regional economies: Her tour was credited with boosting hotel bookings in Philadelphia.

Economist Sarah Wolfe of Morgan Stanley has calculated that Swifties spent an average of \$1,500 on airfares, hotel rooms and concert tickets to her shows (though it's perhaps worth noting that Beyonce fans spent even more — an average \$1,800).

MDT/AP

2023 YEAR OF WARS

Worst-ever Israel-Hamas combat as Russian attacks on Ukraine grind on

A boy, his face coated in fresh blood, screams as rescuers try to pull him out of the rubble of a destroyed building following an Israeli airstrike in Gaza. A bruised, elderly Israeli hostage is taken away by Hamas in a golf cart as a man clutching a machine gun sits behind her, smiling. A 10-year-old girl cries next to the body of her brother as he is buried near Kyiv, Ukraine.

This year as in years past, The Associated Press was there up close to document the world's conflicts and their toll on civilians.

From the Israel-Hamas war to Russia's grinding battles against Ukraine, 2023 has shown the dangers of armed conflicts breaking out into region-wide combat. But behind their long shadows, the world faces strife in countries stretching both the globe and the alphabet from Afghanistan all the way to Yemen.

Coups and violence across Africa upended life in nations there. Myanmar in Southeast Asia faces what some experts describe as a slow-burning civil war. Drug-trade-fueled violence continues in Central and South America.

Nuclear-armed India and Pakistan remain suspicious of each other. North Korea's atomic arsenal continues to grow. And Iran now enriches uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels.

"Conflicts have become more complex, deadly and harder to resolve. ... Concerns about the possibility of nuclear war have re-emerged. New potential domains of conflict and weapons of war are creating new ways in which humanity can annihilate itself," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in July.

Here's a look at where some of the world's major wars stand now.

THE DEADLIEST-EVER ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

The bloodiest war between Israel and Hamas began Oct. 7, when militants broke through the walls surrounding the seaside enclave of the Gaza Strip. Its fighters killed some 1,200 people in Israel and took more than 200 others hostages, spiriting them back into the territory. The attack, described as the worst one-day mass killing of Jews since the Holocaust, stunned an Israel that had believed its border wall, technologically advanced mi-



Palestinian militants, some with guns raised in the air, celebrate by an Israeli tank at the border fence of the Gaza Strip on Oct. 7

litary and intelligence services broadly protected them from all but harassing militant rocket fire.

Israel's embattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, already reeling from months of protests over his hard-right government's attempts to overhaul the country's judiciary and corruption allegations, launched a massive campaign of retaliatory airstrikes.

Israeli troops also entered the Gaza Strip for the first time in years, moving into Gaza City and fighting intense street-to-street combat. The offensive killed over 18,700 people in the Gaza Strip, home to more than 2 million residents also facing an Israeli siege largely blocking food, fuel, water and medicine shipments.

Meanwhile, the mass killing of Israelis and Palestinians sparked protests across the world, many sympathetic to the Palestinians after years of deadlock over them obtaining their own state.

Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanon's Hezbollah, fired on Israel. The U.S. sent in two aircraft carriers, troops and other weaponry to the region to try and deter a wider regional war from breaking out. But Israel's repeated stated goal — the destruction of Hamas — guaranteed a long

military campaign ahead, raising risks.

RUSSIA, UKRAINE REMAIN LOCKED IN COMBAT

The fast pace of the Israel-Hamas war overshadowed Russia's war on Ukraine in late 2023. But in the months prior, little had changed on the battlefield for either side.

Ukraine received tanks, weapons and Western training before launching a renewed counteroffensive believed to be aimed at reaching the Sea of Azov and splitting the Russian lines in the country's south. But Ukrainian forces faced dug-in Russian troops, multiple defense lines, minefields and other hazards, making gains either slowly or not at all. And while Western nations remained publicly unified behind Ukraine, polls including the U.S. presidential election next year could affect just how much aid Kyiv will get in the future.

Russia faced difficulties as well, including a march on Moscow by the leader of the private military firm Wagner, Yevgeny Prigozhin, that represented the greatest challenge yet to President Vladimir Putin's yearslong rule. Prigozhin backed off the

march, only to die weeks later in a mysterious, fiery plane crash.

AFRICAN UNREST

Sudan, a big East African nation that had been teetering since the overthrow of longtime ruler Omar al-Bashir, collapsed into civil war in April. The war pits the country's military against a powerful paramilitary force known as the Rapid Support Forces, long linked to atrocities in Darfur. The fighting saw crossfire set airplanes ablaze at Khartoum's international airport and nations rush to try to evacuate their nationals by land, sea and air. The fighting has killed some 9,000 people so far.

Meanwhile, a wave of military coups roiling Africa in recent years continued. In Niger, a former French colony that's a key uranium exporter, soldiers toppled the country's democratically elected president in July. A month later, troops similarly staged a coup in Gabon overthrowing its long-term ruling president.

LATIN AMERICA'S DRUG WARS

Drug cartel violence raged across portions of Mexico as they fight over territory and supply

routes into the United States. But the conflict isn't limited to there. Violence has surged in other Central American nations, like Honduras and even in once-peaceful Costa Rica, now believed to be a major warehousing and transshipment point for drugs heading onto Europe. Colombia meanwhile has reached an all-time high for its production of coca, the leaf from which cocaine is made.

STALEMATES AND MILITANCY ELSEWHERE

In the Southeast Asian nation of Myanmar, some U.N. experts say a civil war is underway between rebels and the army since a coup overthrew the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Afghanistan, two years after the Taliban topped Kabul's Western-backed government, faces militant attacks from an offshoot of the Islamic State group as girls remain barred from secondary education.

And in Yemen, that country's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels and a Saudi-led coalition battling them have yet to reach a permanent peace deal, which has seen the militants begin to again step up their attacks in recent weeks. MDT/AP



2023 IN BOOKS

Protests, bannings and the rise of AI helped shape the story of publishing

BOOK publishing in 2023 was a story of cooling sales and rising conflict, marked by legal action, protests, censorship and the impact of forces well beyond the industry.

Print book sales continued to recede following the pandemic-era surge, but fiction remained strong, thanks in part to the young readers on BookTok. Colleen Hoover, one of BookTok's signature authors, continued her reign as the country's top-selling author, even without releasing a new book in 2023. Three of her novels were among the top 10 sellers as tracked by Circana, with other popular releases including novels by two authors, Sarah J. Maas and Rebecca Yarros, regarded as leaders of romantasy, a newly branded genre that combines romance and fantasy.

Literary highlights included Justin Torres' inventive narrative on the hidden history of gay sexuality, "Blackouts," winner of the National Book Award for fiction. Critics also praised James McBride's multiethnic crime story "The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store," R.F. Kuang's satirical "Yellowface," Paul Murray's family drama "The Bee Sting" and such nonfiction releases as Jonathan Eig's Martin Luther King biography "King," Naomi Klein's Internet saga "Doppelgänger" and another National Book Award winner, Ned Blackhawk's "The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History."

Book news was otherwise shaped by courtrooms, boardrooms, palace gossip, technological advances and growing divides in the U.S. and abroad:

CELEBS BOUND AND UNBOUND

The year was bracketed by million-selling tell-alls from ce-

lebrities estranged from their families: Prince Harry's "Spare" and Britney Spears' "The Woman in Me." Both were stories of confinement and repression, from the palace life that Harry feared might drive his wife — Meghan, Duchess of Sussex — to take her own life, to the conservatorship that gave Spears' father power over everything from her finances to her ability to have children. Harry framed his life as a kind of reckoning, opening the book with William Faulkner's famed observation: "The past is never dead. It's not even past." Spears looked back hopefully to a youthful promise she made to herself: "I can make my own way to life. I can make my dreams come true."

AI RISING

ChatGPT is not yet a major force in the book market, but real-life writers are worried enough to take legal steps to prevent it, or at least control it. Numerous lawsuits were filed in 2023, including a class-action lawsuit brought by the Authors Guild and George R.R. Martin and John Grisham, among other authors. The plaintiffs allege ChatGPT is a "massive commercial enterprise" reliant upon "systematic theft on a mass scale."

Authors Guild CEO Mary Rasenberger told The Associated Press that she thinks the industry is on the verge of an "explosion" of AI-generated books that could well cut into the earnings of authors, most of whom already make little from their work.

"We have to get some money back into the system," says Rasenberger, who has advocated that authors receive compensation for copyrighted books used in AI programs.

DONE DEAL

Simon & Schuster, the home to Stephen King, Hillary Clinton

and many others that turns 100 in 2024, serves as a kind of parable of a corporate-owned publisher unable to control its own destiny.

Sold in 1975 to Gulf & Western, Simon & Schuster has since been part of various leadership structures, most recently Paramount Global. The company had solid growth in 2023, but once Paramount decided it was "a non-core asset," its future was a matter of market calculations and antitrust law. After a federal judge halted Penguin Random House's acquisition of its longtime rival, citing the likely shrinkage of competition, Paramount sold Simon & Schuster to the private equity firm KKR.

Paramount's farewell statement had all the poetry of a quarterly balance sheet: "Simon & Schuster is positioned well for future growth, and the transaction itself demonstrates significant value capture for Paramount and meaningfully advances our de-levering plan."

BANNINGS AND BOOK FAIRS

The publishing industry's push to offer more diverse books continued to clash with a surge in bannings and attempted bannings that the American Library Association reports has reached levels not seen in decades, with Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" and John Green's "Looking for Alaska" among those removed from shelves. Near the end of 2023, Green was among the authors signed on to a Penguin Random House lawsuit over Iowa's restrictions on sexual content and depictions of gender identity.

Even attempted middle ground proved unstable. When Scholastic isolated some diverse books into a separate package that communities could preemptively reject for school fairs, authors were enraged and

the children's publisher apologized. It has since announced a new strategy that incorporates diverse books into the overall catalog while letting schools "make their own local merchandising decisions, as they have always done, just like any bookstore or library."

RUSHDIE SPEAKS

After being hospitalized following a horrifying knife attack in August 2022, Salman Rushdie reemerged publicly, although under increased security. He was honored in person during PEN America's annual spring gala in Manhattan, received the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade during October's Frankfurt Book Fair and was awarded the first-ever lifetime Disturbing the Peace prize in November at Manhattan's Vaclav Havel Center. His publishing return comes soon: He's writing a book about the attack, "Knife," scheduled for April.

NETFLIX FLAK, DREW WITHDRAWN

The Hollywood strikes didn't only upend the film and television industries. Netflix CEO Ted Sarandos, whose company was a key player in the writers strike, decided against attending the PEN America ceremony, where he was to receive a Business Visionary Award. Drew Barrymore was dropped as host of the National Book Awards after she started taping her talk show while its writers were still on strike. Her replacement was the actor and literacy advocate LeVar Burton.

CONFLICT AT HOME

The wars in Ukraine and Gaza divided the literary community in ways that mirrored other public debates.

The Russian author-activist Masha Gessen resigned as vice president of the PEN board after

the literary and human rights organization canceled an event that was to have featured both Russian and Ukrainian panelists. (The Ukrainians had objected to the Russians' participation.) Bestselling author Elizabeth Gilbert announced she would postpone her novel "The Snow Forest" because some Ukrainians had objected to the story taking place in Russia. Gilbert called her decision "a course correction."

Officials at the Frankfurt fair canceled a tribute to the Palestinian author Adania Shibli, who had been scheduled to receive a prize for female writers from Africa, Asia, Latin America or the Arab world. A sponsor of the National Book Awards, author-publisher-podcaster Zibby Owens, withdrew her support when she learned that some finalists would read a statement about the war. Owens feared that the authors would "collectively band together to use their speeches to promote a pro-Palestinian, anti-Israeli agenda," but the actual statement condemned antisemitism, along with Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian bias.

The 92nd Street Y in Manhattan dropped an event with Pulitzer winner Viet Thanh Nguyen because he had signed a petition opposing Israel's invasion of Gaza. With authors condemning the decision and several staffers resigning, the Y put its fall literary schedule on hold. Nguyen, meanwhile, was invited to appear instead at the independent bookstore McNally Jackson.

"I spoke about my book, yes, but also about how art is silenced in times of war and division because some people only want to see the world as us vs them," Nguyen later wrote on Instagram. "And writing is the only way I know how to fight. And writing is the only way I know how to grieve." **MDT/AP**

JOCELYN NOVECK, MDT/AP

2023 (TAYLOR'S VERSION)

The year in pop culture

IN weather terminology, they call it “rapid intensification” — the process by which a storm strengthens dramatically in a short period.

In pop culture terminology, they call it Taylor Swift.

It's not like Swift didn't have big — huge! — years before this. But 2023? This was ridiculous.

From the blockbuster “Eras” tour that conquered the United States before a planet-vanquishing international leg, to the re-release of more albums on the road to reclaiming her catalog, to the record-smashing concert film, to becoming a billionaire — and yeah, that thing with “the guy on the Chiefs” — it all made for a year you could reasonably call “2023 (Taylor's Version).”

There were, of course, non-Swiftian developments in pop culture. Beyoncé, ever the superstar, had a huge tour herself, and ruled the box office with “Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé.” Speaking of renaissance, look no further than Barbie — technically age 64 but now living her most fantastic life in plastic, thanks to Greta Gerwig's record-shattering “Barbie.” Through mere coincidence of timing, Gerwig's candy-colored creation paired with “Oppenheimer” to fuel “Barbenheimer,” a phenomenon that singlehandedly revitalized the multiplex.

There were comebacks, as always. The Rolling Stones never left, surely, but produced their best new music in decades. Even the Beatles released a new song. On TV, Samantha even made it back — for a minute — to the “Sex and the City” franchise. A pregnant Rihanna soared (literally) at the Super Bowl, and again showed us that nobody makes a more glamorous, more fashionably late Met Gala entrance.

Our very selective (and this year, very Swift-centric) stroll down pop culture memory lane:

JANUARY

If anyone needs a comeback, it's the GOLDEN GLOBES. The year begins with comic JERROD CARMICHAEL deftly navigating host duties, quipping, “I'm here because I'm Black” — a nod to the diversity scandal plaguing the awards. Speaking of scandal, nobody does it better than the royals: PRINCE HARRY'S “Spare” sells more than 3.2 million copies in one week. Also breaking records: SHAKIRA'S “BZRP Music Session #53,” in which she bitingly sings of her ex, former soccer star GERARD PIQUÉ. January (Taylor's version): U.S. senators grill Ticketmaster about its mega-breakdown selling SWIFT tickets.

FEBRUARY

At the Super Bowl, RIHANNA floats above the 50-yard line



in a bright red jumpsuit ... and reveals a baby bump! It's her first solo performance in seven years and her first since becoming a mother nine months earlier. Now's the time to learn things we didn't know about PAMELA ANDERSON, whose memoir “Love, Pamela” drops, joining a Netflix documentary. At the GRAMMYS, it's a decidedly mixed bag for BEYONCÉ, who breaks the record for career wins, but is shut out in the top categories. HARRY STYLES bests her for album of the year, stoking controversy with his acceptance speech.

MARCH

It's OSCAR time! And nobody gets slapped! “Everything Everywhere All at Once” lives up to its title, sweeping nearly every major category. This feel-good night proves a huge moment for Asians and Asian Americans in Hollywood. “My journey started on a boat. I spent a year in a refugee camp,” says an emotional KE HUY QUAN, winning best supporting actor. Some may have skipped the Oscars entirely — namely PEDRO PASCAL fans, catching the finale of “The Last of Us.” Longtime Bravolebrities Tom Sandoval and Ariana Madix break up when it's revealed Sandoval has been having an affair with their “Vanderpump Rules” co-star, a development soon dubbed “Scandoval.” In a Utah courtroom, GWYNETH PALTROW wins a battle over a ski collision, but also nabs the “quiet luxury”

fashion award. And the “Eras” era begins: SWIFT opens her tour in Arizona.

APRIL

Back to the courtroom for a sec: have you seen “JURY DUTY”? The TV sleeper hit sticks the landing. Somehow, regular guy RONALD GLADDEN never figured out that everyone else doing jury duty was an actor, including JAMES MARSDEN, playing a deliciously conceited ... JAMES MARSDEN. And back to SWIFT watch: Neither confirms it, but reports say she and longtime boyfriend JOE ALWYN have split.

MAY

If Samuel Beckett had attended the MET GALA, he'd surely have written “Waiting for Rihanna.” Most guests come in time for cocktails; RIHANNA shows up closer to dessert, but makes it worth the wait. This is the year JARED LETO dons a giant cat suit, but still the animal world is most memorably represented by ... a COCKROACH! A real one, who walks the carpet and entertains media waiting for Rihanna, until, squish! Bye, cockroach — and bye also to the ROY kids, aka KENDALL, ROMAN and SHIV, who self-destruct gloriously in the final episodes of “Succession.” Leave it to Hollywood's writers, now striking, to have the cleverest signs: “HBO Max Pays HBO Minimum,” reads one. They will remain on strike for nearly 150 days, joined by the actors in July.

JUNE

We'll keep this one brief: Heard of the GRIMACE SHAKE at McDonald's? It's all the rage on TikTok. A new group of luminaries is invited to join the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, among them DAVID BYRNE, AUSTIN BUTLER, KEKE PALMER, KE HUY QUAN — and yes, SWIFT.

JULY

Take one famous doll with a complicated history. Add a talent like GERWIG, get MARGOT ROBBIE to star, bring in RYAN GOSLING to chew the scenery, and you have “BARBIE,” the biggest movie of 2023 and a milestone for female directors. Now stir in CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S superb “OPPENHEIMER,” and the rest is box office history. Speaking of history, one famous bird is no more — ELON MUSK drops a longtime logo and decrees TWITTER will henceforth be called “X.” Also history: SWIFT now has more No. 1 albums than any woman, eclipsing BARBRA STREISAND. From eclipse to earthquake: Scientists report they've detected seismic signals roughly akin to a 2.3 magnitude earthquake under Swift's Seattle show.

AUGUST

Guess who has 277 million Instagram followers? You know who. Guess who has almost double that? LIONEL MESSI, that's who, with 493 million. The Argentine soccer god, in his first month with Inter Miami, thrills fans and gives a jolt of adrenaline to soccer in

the United States. KIM CATTRALL makes a very quick return to the “Sex and the City” reboot.

SEPTEMBER

Now that summer is over, let's inspect the damage — by which we mean all the recent celebrity splits: JOE JONAS and SOPHIE TURNER, ARIANA GRANDE and DALTON GOMEZ, BRITNEY SPEARS and SAM ASGHARI, SOFIA VERGARA and JOE MANGANIELLO, among others. But hey, someone's looking for love: Retired widower GERRY TURNER, “The Golden Bachelor,” begins his search on ABC. Also, jersey sales rapidly intensify this month for one TRAVIS KELCE, tight end for the Kansas City Chiefs, by some 400%. So weird, any idea why? In unrelated news, SWIFT attends a Chiefs game.

OCTOBER

It's a good month to be 80! MARTIN SCORSESE becomes a TikTok star via daughter Francesca's silly videos and presents one of his most ambitious films yet, “Killers of the Flower Moon.” Also 80, MICK JAGGER joins slightly younger ROLLING STONES bandmates KEITH RICHARDS (79) and RONNIE WOOD (76) in producing the crackling new album “Hackney Diamonds.” In a much-awaited memoir, BRITNEY SPEARS details her heartbreaks and her struggles, her relationships and her nearly 14-year conservatorship. SWIFT reaches billionaire status — and throws a Hollywood premiere for her “Eras” movie, which will become the most successful concert film of all time.

NOVEMBER

Hollywood's writers and actors are thankfully back, back to where they once belonged. Which brings us to the BEATLES: No, they aren't getting back together. But six decades after Beatlemania ruled, a new and final tune, “Now And Then,” is released, thanks to artificial intelligence. Cast members of “Friends” gather to mourn co-star MATTHEW PERRY at his funeral. The “Eras” tour goes international, packing stadiums in Argentina, then Brazil, with more to go in 2024.

DECEMBER

SPOTIFY announces 2023's most-streamed artist — it's SWIFT, dethroning BAD BUNNY. BEYONCÉ conquers the box office on opening weekend with her “Renaissance” film. Is it a foregone conclusion, finally, that SWIFT would close out her year staring at us from magazine covers as Time's person of the year, in a year her fame achieved something akin to “nuclear fusion”? Which brings us to our final question: How long can a storm rapidly intensify? Fact is, though, SWIFT seems to always be rewriting the rules.

AP PHOTOS



A Kashmiri Muslim bride looks through her veil during a mass wedding in Srinagar, Indian controlled Kashmir, June 15



Indonesian Muslims perform an evening prayer called 'tarawih', Indonesia, March 22



A Kashmiri Muslim bride looks through her veil during a mass wedding in Srinagar, Indian controlled Kashmir, June 15



Elena Rybakina during her semifinal match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne



Dancers wait to perform during the opening of Bali Arts Festival in Bali, Indonesia, June 18



A U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter transports a M777 howitzer during a joint military drill between South Korea and the United States



Supporters of the Move Forward Party display mobile phones with flash lights on during a protest in Bangkok, Thailand



People dance and throw colors at each other to celebrate Holi, the Hindu festival of colours, in Hyderabad, India, March 6

ASIA 2023 IN PHOTOS

Photographers in Asia capture the extraordinary, tragic and wonderful

INDIVIDUALLY, the photographs are the product of a moment, capturing glimpses of joy, grief, rage, hope, and resilience.

As a whole, the work this year of Associated Press photojournalists in Asia forms a visual patchwork quilt, an extraordinary reflection of the varied panoply of human experience in one of the world's most fascinating regions.

Some of these pictures delight. Some horrify.

Some, even after repeated examination, retain a sense of mystery.

Take an American ballerina, clad in shimmering white, caught in a blur of revolving motion as she rehearses in China. Or a Muslim bride who gazes pensively through a saffron-colored veil during a mass wedding ceremony in Indian-controlled Kashmir.

Or footprints left in a patch of green moss after prayers in New Delhi.

In Malaysia, a base jumper dives from a tower above the sparkling city lights of Kuala Lumpur at night. Blood splatters like raindrops from the tattooed body of a Filipino penitent as he flagellates himself to atone for sins.

There is violence and tra-

gedy here, too.

An enraged young man leaps onto the fallen body of a security officer in Bangladesh. Ethnic Rohingya wade through the surf, their meager belongings clutched in their hands, after being denied refuge in Indonesia.

As with many great news photographs, a single image is often all it takes to illustrate the complex political and social currents that sweep through the region.

A blurred double image shows Russian President Vladimir Putin as he delivers a speech in China.

Some of this year's most powerful photos reveal the beautiful, often deadly power of nature.

A vast ocean of stars glitters in the night sky over traditional sheepskin tents in remote Mongolia. Whales dive in a harbor near Sydney, their tails poised above the water in lovely synchronicity.

A veil of sand and dust seems to envelop a man wearing a green mask as he walks among Beijing's office buildings.

And in the Philippines, lava flows like red icing down the black slopes of a volcano.

MDT/AP