



Children play during a lights festival at a business centre ahead of Christmas Eve in Beijing, China, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

How world leaders fared in a turbulent year

CNN ONLINE

It has been a turbulent year for many leaders across the globe, and while some benefited from 2017's geopolitical twists and turns, others suffered a series of setbacks.

CNN's international correspondents give their assessments on which world leaders are up and which are down at the end of 2017, and what might be in store next year.

FRANCE'S MACRON -- UP



2017 was the year that made Emmanuel Macron. At its start, he was a former economy minister making an unlikely presidential bid. But the improbable collapse of France's two mainstream parties -- which had shared power in France for 60 years -- paved his way to victory.

The stars aligned themselves in Macron's favor on the international stage, too. Political turmoil in London, Washington and Berlin, coupled with his own ambitious vision, led Macron to be spoken of as not simply the French President, but as the new leader of the free world. The year ahead looks as though it could be more promising still.

ANGELA MERKEL -- DOWN



It's been a tough year for Merkel, who first had to repair her relationship with US President Donald Trump and then tackle German elections amid a surge in right-wing populism. Despite Trump's apparent refusal to shake her hand at their first meeting, Merkel has crafted a good working relationship with him.

After that success, Merkel turned her attention to getting re-elected and seemed to be coasting to a September victory. But her party lost more than a million votes to the far-right Alternative for Germany. Merkel remains Chancellor, but she needs to get a working coalition up and running as soon as possible to meet the challenges of 2018.

SYRIA'S BASHAR AL-ASSAD -- UP



In 2017, Assad consolidated his hold on Syria's territory, made the best use of the war against ISIS to expand his grip and weathered a brief but symbolic US air assault. He not only remains in power, but looks more likely than ever to stay there until he chooses. The post-ISIS turmoil of Iran's face-off with Saudi Arabia has reduced the prominence of Assad and his alleged war crimes in the region.

He'll have to navigate the threat of Israeli military interventions into Syria to lessen Iran's presence, but Russia's continued backing and his opponents' collapse mean his territorial grip is only going to increase.

MYANMAR'S AUNG SAN SUU KYI -- DOWN

This year marked a fall from grace for Aung San Suu Kyi. The leader of

Myanmar's elected government went from being hailed as a democratic hope for southeast Asia to being denounced as an apologist for what the United Nations and the US call ethnic cleansing.



In mid-September, after more than 400,000 Rohingya Muslims fled across Myanmar's border to Bangladesh, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate gave a speech on the crisis during which she said "we want to find out why this exodus is happening." The refugee exodus has since swelled to more than 600,000. But despite the crisis, Suu Kyi continues to enjoy fervent domestic support.

RUSSIA'S VLADIMIR PUTIN -- UP



Putin remains extremely popular at home and is poised to win re-election as Russian president in March 2018.

But he has faced a stagnating economy and a humiliating Olympic ban over state-sponsored doping of Russian athletes.

2017 also saw Putin's hopes dashed of a better relationship with the US under Trump and, amid allegations of election meddling, US sanctions on Russia have intensified.

N KOREA'S KIM JONG UN -- UP



On January 1, Kim Jong Un declared North Korea was in the final stages of developing an intercontinental ballistic missile. The next day, President-elect Trump tweeted Pyongyang would never possess such a weapon. Eleven months, 16 missile tests and one nuclear test later, Kim defied Trump with the successful launch of North Korea's most advanced ICBM ever.

If 2017 was a battle of wills, with Trump and Kim hurling insults and threats at each other, the 30-something dictator came out on top -- for now. Kim's momentum is uncertain in 2018, with growing war fears and unprecedented sanctions taking effect.

BRITAIN'S THERESA MAY -- DOWN



After calling a snap election, May lost her party's double-digit majority. The result forced her to do a deal with the socially conservative Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland to remain in power. The move attracted criticism and added complications to the issue of the Irish border in Brexit negotiations.

May has faced plots to replace her and was rocked by a serious parliamentary sex scandal. She has since lost three cabinet ministers, including

close ally Damien Green, who admitted to lying over the presence of pornography on a computer in his parliamentary office.

However, her achievement in securing a move to the second phase of the Brexit negotiations should not be overlooked, though she faces another grueling year as the next phase of negotiations gets underway and rumors of leadership challenges continue to swirl.

KSA'S MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN -- UP



Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman has gone from being third in line to the throne to second, and faces limited challenges to his power.

At home he's scoring big points with the young, letting women drive, opening cinemas, limiting powers of religious authorities, lifting restrictive controls and raising horizons and possibilities.

Internationally, he's become the go-to Arab interlocutor for Trump and other global leaders. His 2030 vision for revamping the Saudi economy is widely applauded overseas.

But the next 12 months will be testing. His corruption crackdown is raising questions about his rule, the Yemen war is drawing global criticism and failing reforms could lead to resentment.

CHINA'S XI JINPING -- UP



2017 was a very good year for Xi. He wrapped up his first term as chairman of the Communist Party in historic fashion -- by having his "thought" inscribed into the party constitution, something only Mao Zedong had ever achieved. Xi has consolidated power in a way not seen in decades. China's GDP is poised to keep growing and the country's ascent to global superpower is all but assured.

But there were challenges: A dangerous security situation in North Korea, an unpredictable Trump straining trade ties, and a slowing economy are Xi's top concerns. How well 2018 will go depends first and foremost on North Korea.

CANADA'S JUSTIN TRUDEAU -- UP



In 2017 Trudeau did a lot of crying. He teared up as he apologized to Canada's LGBTQ community, when apologizing to Canada's indigenous groups and again when he eulogized Canadian musical icon Gord Downie of the Tragically Hip.

Yet his year of contrition is nothing to cry about. Canada's economy is likely to grow by 3% in 2017, there's a new child tax credit for needy families and recreational marijuana will be legalized.

Trudeau might want to save his tears for 2018, when he will have to convince Donald Trump to "Make the North American Free Trade Agreement great again," and no one is betting on that.

Man missing as he jumps into river to escape assault

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

A man was missing after he jumped into the Baleswar river from a trawler in Indurkani of Pirojpur yesterday to get away from youths who were assaulting him and his friend.

His friend too jumped into the river and was fished out by locals.

The locals also held seven youths in this connection and handed them over to police.

Sources said the seven youths started beating up Khairuzzaman Sabuj, 32, and his friend Shamsul Arefin Rony, 34, a surveyor from Khulna Development Authority, on the trawler following an altercation. They allegedly used knives.

Survivor Rony was sent to Khulna Medical College Hospital for better treatment.

Divers of Morrelganj fire station were looking for Sabuj in the river.

Rashedul Alam, officer-in-charge of Morrelganj Police Station of Bagerhat, said they were trying to find out why the youths assaulted the two.

Floods

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Tubod, Salvador and Sapad are in Lanao del Norte, which is one of the provinces hardest hit by Tembin. Local police said 127 people have been confirmed dead in the province, with 72 missing.

"The people received ample warnings. But as we are rarely hit by typhoons, people living near rivers did not take them seriously," Salvador police chief Wilson Mislores told AFP.

UNFORTUNATE SO NEAR CHRISTMAS

The death toll for Mindanao's Zamboanga peninsula also rose to 28, and police said 81 people were missing after mud and rocks swept down coastal communities in Sibucu and other fishing towns.

Landslides had blocked rescue and relief convoys to the impoverished region, officials said yesterday.

Tembin hit Balabac, a fishing island of 40,000 people in the western Philippines, yesterday afternoon with gusts of 145 kilometres (71 miles) an hour, the state weather service said.

One man was killed by a crocodile while he was securing his boat as the storm closed in this week on the western island of Palawan, a police report said yesterday.

Gunmen kill

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He said law enforcers were trying to arrest the killers and Sohel.

Locals said there had been frequent fights between the two groups in the area.

Right after the attack, alleged members of Sohel's gang vandalised the house of one of the members of the rival gang in question in Sashtitola area, said local and police sources.

3 Indian soldiers

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and killed at least 210 alleged rebels, most of them local residents.

The violence was sparked by the killing of a popular young rebel leader by government forces in July last year.

The unrest, including the cross-border firing, also killed 78 Indian security forces and 57 civilians in Indian-administered Kashmir, according to officials and rights groups.

Don't burden

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Their fear soon came true.

On November 29, a Chhatra League leader of a Pirojpur school beat up a teacher.

Tenth grader Shah Amanat Shanto, also president of Chhatra League in Sreeramkathi UJK High School in Nazirpur, and four other boys assaulted the teacher when he was giving tuition to some students in his home.

The same teacher had caught Shanto, an SSC examinee, red-handed cheating in a test exam two days before the assault.

Following the incident, the school authorities decided not to allow political activities there. Later, the BCL committee there was dissolved.

Yesterday, Obaidul Quader advised the Chhatra League to strengthen the committees at college and university levels.

"In colleges and universities, there must be student politics. But the Chhatra League will have to be alert so that no chaos, which happens sometimes, can take place.

"This is an election year. Such incidents are fewer now, compared with the past. We hope they will come down to zero, to none at all. A handful of such incidents do take place. But it cannot be that the government will have to shoulder the responsibility for that," he said.

The BCL men started drawing con-

demnation for their unruly behaviour as soon as the AL returned to power in January 2009. Annoyed, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned from the post of BCL's organisational leader in April that year.

As some BCL leaders and activists continued to indulge in unlawful activities, her office the next year ordered the home ministry to take action against tender violence and other misdeeds by any organisation, even those belonging to or backed by the ruling party.

Each year since 2009, internal clashes in and outside colleges and universities claimed several lives of BCL leaders and activists.

At least 125 people have been killed in such violence in the past eight years, according to media reports.

The victims include 71 BCL leaders and activists, of whom 60 were killed in internal feuds and 11 in clashes with rival organisations. The rest were general people, including children.

According to rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra, two people were killed and 156 others injured in 20 incidents of BCL infighting from January to September this year.

BCL President Saifur Rahman Sohag and its General Secretary SM Zakir Hossain did not pick up the calls for comments.

Zakir also did not respond to the text message requesting his reaction to Quader's remarks.

No room for a quick fix

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the extent of the damage and trauma being suffered by Rohingya women and girls.

"The condition of women and girls is of particular concern. There is clear evidence of sexual trauma, and a focused effort to deal with this issue is required...."

"My own interviews with a group of women were a detailed and graphic account of abuse and violence, including sexual violence as a weapon of war. These allegations of crimes against humanity need to be addressed directly by the international community, and there is a need for post-traumatic measures to help those who survived this ordeal," reads his six-page report.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appointed Bob as a special envoy on October 23. Since then he has travelled to Indonesia, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Vietnam and the UN in New York and have had discussions with officials, leaders, and NGOs in those countries as well as in Ottawa.

Bob said there was the challenge of resources at the border assessing readmittance, as well as the conditions that await the returnees in Rakhine State. "The issues of political participation and citizenship loom large over the whole picture."

Bob said additional resources would need to be gathered to make sure the response was adequate to deal with the extent of the abuse and its consequences.

He hoped that he would be able to see Rakhine first hand, and return to

2 killed

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policemen - Sub-Inspector Nazrul and four constables - were injured during the "gunfight", police said.

Police arrested five members of the gang and seized a firearm along with ammunition and lethal weapons from the spot.

Monjur Alam, officer in charge of Comilla Detective Branch of police, said at a press briefing later that the deceased men were members of an inter-district gang of robbers.

Schoolgirl

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from their home in Kachari Bazar village for groceries. Her mother later left for the victim's grandfather's home, and the girl was walking back home alone.

Around 9:00pm, a young man named Sohag Mia stopped her, and four others turned up on the spot. They then tied her up with a scarf, and dragged her to a nearby sugarcane field where they raped her, police said.

Hearing the victim's screams, locals rushed to the spot and caught alleged rapists Shariful Islam, 23, and Babu Mia, 22. Sohag, 23, and the two others fled.

Around 10:00pm, locals staged a demonstration protesting the incident and ransacked the shop of Sohag's father, who is a local Jubo League leader. They found Sohag at the shop and picked him up from there. The three were then handed over to police.

The girl was taken to Gaibandha Sadar Hospital.

Officer-in-charge Borhanuddin of Sadullapur Police Station said the arrestees confessed to raping the girl and named the two others involved -- Rubel Mia, 22, and Khushu Mia, 23.

Rubel and Khushu were still on the run.

Yesterday, the victim's uncle Abdul Halim filed a case with the police station against the five people.

Sohag had been stalking and harassing his niece for quite some time, he stated in the case.

Cox's Bazar to see how conditions were evolving, as well as to have further talks with officials in Myanmar, Bangladesh and international organisations.

Referring to his discussions with officials, leaders and NGOs, Bob said, "These discussions will continue. I shall be travelling again to the region in the New Year, and will issue a final report with recommendations after my return."

His initial findings are divided into three parts: first, the humanitarian crisis in both Bangladesh and Myanmar as a result of the recent exodus of over 655,000 Rohingyas into Bangladesh, adding to the hundreds of thousands of refugees already in Bangladesh and the 120,000 in camps under virtual lockdown in Rakhine.

Second, the efforts required to ensure the secure return of refugees to their homes with full political and social rights, as well as to ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the Kofi Annan-led Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.

Thirdly, the report highlighted the need to ensure that the substantial evidence of breaches of law and human rights is investigated and assessed in a credible fashion.

Solar power

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The project is the work of the local concern Green Housing and Energy Limited, with financial assistance from the government-established Infrastructure Development Company Limited (IDCOL).

"We chose to establish a solar plant here because there is no reasonable prospect of this area being attached to the national grid," says the local managing director of IDCOL, Abul Hossain. "We supply power for four hours per day, from 6 to 10 pm."

He quotes the electricity price as Tk 30 per power unit, with a non-refundable deposit of Tk 3,000 required to get connected.

"We hope to bring new development opportunities to shoal areas which are often neglected in this regard," says Mushtaq Ahmed, Green Housing's managing director.

"Indeed we are in the process of constructing another plant of similar size on a neighbouring shoal, Char Kazol," he adds. As for the price, he states that it is not determined by Green Housing but by the government.

'Kung fu nuns'

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today and our main mission is about increasing awareness about female empowerment, the environment and human trafficking," nun Yeshe Lhamo told AFP.

Each year thousands of women and children across South Asia are lured into cities and across borders with promises of lucrative jobs but are instead sold into modern-day slavery.

Nepal has seen an upswing in the number of cases of trafficking since a devastating earthquake in 2015 left thousands homeless.

The country's human rights commission estimated that there were about 23,200 cases of trafficking or attempted trafficking last year.

The nuns said they came across several cases of trafficking while volunteering in relief efforts for earthquake victims.

"That's how we had this idea of going on this cycle yatra to all the remote places and telling people we are all girls, girls are capable of doing everything. They are not useless, they are not things to sell," said 23-year-old nun Jigme Konchok Lhamo.

The nuns will cover a 3,000-kilometre route from the hills of Nepal's capital Kathmandu, peddling through south India to Delhi and then to Darjeeling.