

Morales claims US orchestrated 'coup' to tap Bolivia's lithium

AFP, Buenos Aires

Former Bolivia president Evo Morales told AFP on Tuesday that he was forced from office by a United States-backed coup d'etat aimed at gaining access to the South American country's vast lithium resources.

Demand for lithium is expected to grow globally as it is one of the key components in batteries used in high-tech equipment such as laptops and electric cars.

Morales resigned as president on November 10 after almost three weeks of protests against his controversial re-election to an unconstitutional fourth term in a poll widely denounced as rigged.

His resignation came after then-chief of the armed forces General Williams Kaliman publicly stated the former trade union leader should step down.

But since then, Morales -- Bolivia's first indigenous president -- has claimed to have been the victim of a coup d'etat.

"It was a national and international coup d'etat," Morales told AFP in an exclusive interview in Buenos Aires, where he has been living in exile after claiming asylum.

"Industrialized countries don't want competition."

Morales said Washington had not "forgiven" his country for choosing to seek lithium extraction partnerships with Russia and China rather than the US.

"That's why I'm absolutely convinced it's a coup against lithium," he said.

Indonesia bus crash death toll up to at least 28

AFP, Jakarta

The number of people killed in a fatal bus crash in Indonesia has risen to 28 including eight children, police said yesterday as a rescue team continued to search a river.

The bus careered into a 150-metre (500-foot) ravine in South Sumatra province just before midnight (1600 GMT) on Monday and ended up in a river, according to police.

Local police chief Dolly Gumara said yesterday another body was found late on Tuesday, adding up the death toll to 28 from earlier 27. Eight of the killed passengers were children, said Gumara.

"We have identified 27 of the killed victims and only one body is still unidentified as of today. The victim is a woman," Gumara told AFP yesterday.

A local rescue team said it has evacuated at least 13 survivors and the search is still ongoing to find more bodies over fear that some might have been carried away in the river.

'Addict' son

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Chasing the accused for around four kilometres, locals detained him and handed him over to police, he further said.

The elderly couple died on the spot, said the OC, adding that the bodies were sent to Jashore General Hospital morgue for autopsies.

Intruders

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project for the development of Sylhet City Corporation (SCC).

He said, "It's our big success as the Nagar Express bus service was launched which I hope would be beneficial for the city dwellers."

The minister added that a new train service would be introduced on the Sylhet-Chattoogram route soon. Besides, quality carriages would be added to the existing trains.

Speaking as a special guest at the event, SCC Mayor Ariful Haque Chowdhury said, "The Nagar Express bus service will ensure better transport facilities to commuters. We aren't rivals to transport owners and workers. We want to bring discipline in the transport sector in Sylhet city and also want to build Sylhet as a model city taking people together."

The Nagar Express transport service with 41 buses will carry residents of Sylhet city and its adjoining areas. Apart from the buses, there will be a separate bus service for women.

On this day

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the primary target of the Pakistan military and their collaborators to cripple Bangladesh by killing its intellectuals, he says. Eminent journalists Sirajuddin Hossain, Shahidullah Kaiser, Nizamuddin Ahmad, Syed Nazmul Haq, SA Mannan, Golam Mostafa, Prof Munir Chowdhury of Dhaka University, Prof Mofazzal Haydar Chowdhury and many others were the victims of this fiendish crime of the Pakistani military and their collaborators.



A resident looks at a house damaged by Typhoon Phanfone in Tacloban, Leyte province in the central Philippines yesterday. Typhoon Phanfone pummelled the central Philippines on Christmas Day, bringing a wet and miserable holiday season to millions in the mainly Catholic nation.

PHOTO: AFP

Israeli army admits error

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A statement from the army said that intelligence collected ahead of the attack had indicated that the residence "was designated as an Islamic Jihad terror organisation military compound".

The army had "estimated" that "civilians would not be harmed as a result of an attack" on the site, which was not believed to be accessible to members of the public.

An army inquiry later found "that even though military activity was conducted in the compound, it was not a closed compound, and in reality civilians were present there," it said.

The army said it would learn from its "mistakes" to reduce the recurrence of similar irregular events.

It stressed it had made "considerable efforts... to reduce the

damage to non-combatants".

The military report also blamed Islamic Jihad for exploiting and endangering non-combatants "by placing its military assets in the heart of the civilian population and by deliberately acting from within densely populated civilian areas."

The three-day flare-up began when Israel killed a senior Islamic Jihad official in Gaza on November 12.

Light after ages in darkness

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He said the Prime Minister's Office had allocated a budget for the improvement of sanitation and the installation of tube wells in this remote village.

In just three weeks till January 14 this year, 55 families got access to solar power; they were provided with solar LED lights and sockets to charge their cell phones.

The village, located just 12km east of the Chattogram-Khagrachhari highway, now also has a pre-primary school and a road for easy communication to the heartland of the upazila.

Previously, they had to haul their paddy by walking for three kilometres through the muddy roads in the hills to the nearest kitchen market. Villagers say the new road has made life so much easier for them.

Now they spend time chitchatting in the evenings at tea stalls under solar-lit lamps.

The children go to school and they can take the sick and elderly to the Upazila Sadar Hospital using the newly built road.

Sachin Tripura, the village head of Tripura Palli, told The Daily Star on November 30 that the change was unprecedented.

"Now our children have the opportunity to study. We can move around at night, no matter the time, we have access to drinking water, thanks to the tube wells, and we can travel to the upazila sadar in case of an emergency."

"Sometimes, when it is cloudy, the solar lamps dim down. We hope to get connected to the national grid in the near future."

Sitting in front of her home, Santo Lakshi Tripura, a housewife, said her five-year-old son is now going to school.

"He wants to be a doctor when he grows up. We never thought it would be possible for us to dream about our future."

UNO Ruhul Amin said, "We have instructions from the district magistrate to eradicate every crisis being faced by this community. We recently built the road so that they can commute easily, installed three deep tube wells to address the water crisis, and built 10 toilets."

The administration also built disaster-resistant homes for six families who are exposed to landslides. It has worked towards improving the lives of the 373 villagers over the last one year.

The connecting road was built at a cost of Tk 4 lakh, funded by the Chattogram district administration and Hathazari upazila administration, he added.

It will be turned into a brick road in the near future with a budget of Tk 78 lakh, with funds from the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief.

The toilets and tube wells were funded by the Prime Minister's Office at a cost of Tk 9.5 lakh.



Battling hard to regain

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He added that television owners nowadays consider only the business value of a programme and rarely prioritise its relevance for mass culture. He was also critical of BTV for not "evaluating this group properly".

Since its inception in 1976, BYC has performed in more than 60 programmes on BTV and other satellite TV channels, with more than 700 performances, according to Toufique Alam Tipu, founder and lifelong general secretary of BYC.



Tipu, founder of Bogura Youth Choir



Tipu, 74, who devoted his life to seeing BYC's works spread to every nook and cranny of the country, said the biggest blow was in 2011 when BTV stopped telecasting the programme due to a lack of sponsors.

"We don't have a proper room to train. There are around 20 artistes still training at the Nawab Bari road house," Tipu said, adding that most of the artistes come from low-income families.

"They are training hard but what's the point in training if they don't get a TV platform to showcase their skills?" asked a frustrated Tipu, who said he has never charged anything from his

students.

Masudur Rahman Helal, a local freedom fighter and president of the Socheton Nagorik Committee's Bogura chapter, said, "They performed their songs, dances and other art forms not just to entertain but also to create awareness against fundamentalism and suppression of vice in every form."

Reflecting on the choir's heyday, Tipu said the group frequently appeared in public awareness programmes for organisations such as Lions

International, UNICEF, the World Health Organisation, the Rotary Club, the Bangladesh Army, and Bangladesh Police. They also worked with many famous film directors and choreographed around 50 film songs.

"But when vulgarities were injected into film songs, I stopped working in the film industry and returned to Bogura in the beginning of the 90s," said Tipu.

He also bemoaned that many TV channels run his songs, but he does not get royalties because he has no copyright registration of those.

Tipu once dreamed of establishing

a national youth choir, a platform through which local artistes from every district would be able to perform their own cultural and art forms in regional languages.

The people of Bogura as well as members of various local cultural organisations refer to Tipu as a selfless motivator and a versatile artist. They believe the composer, singer, lyricist, choreographer and music director deserves proper recognition from the government.

Tipu appealed to the government,



7 killed in Nigeria jihadist attack on Christmas eve

AFP, Kano

Boko Haram jihadists have killed seven people on Christmas Eve in a raid on a Christian village near the town of Chibok in northeast Nigeria's Borno state, local militia and residents told AFP yesterday.

Dozens of fighters driving trucks and motorcycles stormed into Kwarangulum late Tuesday, shooting fleeing residents and burning homes after looting food supplies.

Boko Haram and its IS-affiliated Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) faction have recently stepped up attacks on military and civilian targets.

"They killed seven people and abducted a teenage girl in the attack," local vigilante David Bitrus said.

"They took away food stuff and burnt many houses before leaving," he said, adding that a church was also burnt.

The jihadists were believed to have attacked from Boko Haram's nearby Sambisa forest enclave, said Chibok community leader Ayuba Alamson who confirmed the toll.

In April, Boko Haram raided Kwarangulum, 16 kilometres (10 miles) from Chibok, stealing food and burning the entire village.

Residents had managed to flee before the arrival of the jihadists following tip-off from people who saw the gunmen heading toward the village.

Chibok is the scene of the mass kidnap of 276 schoolgirls in 2014 by Boko Haram which sparked global outrage and drew international attention to the group's notoriety.

Fifty-seven of the girls escaped shortly after the kidnap. Another 107 have been either rescued or released after negotiations while 112 remain in captivity.

Modi slams

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secure environment.

"To get a safe environment is our right, and it is our duty to respect the law-and-order machinery that is responsible for our security. I want to tell every resident of Uttar Pradesh that after Independence, we only insisted on our rights. But the time has come to also put emphasis on our duties," he said, praising the Uttar Pradesh police for doing a "good job".

Uttar Pradesh witnessed some of the bloodiest clashes across the country after the parliament passed the Citizenship Amendment Act, with 15 people being killed across the state so far. After critics accused the state police of using lethal force to quell agitations, officers have now admitted to shooting at protesters.

In his address, Modi cited how his government had resolved several contentious issues in a peaceful manner. "The Ram Janmabhoomi issue was resolved peacefully. Article 370 was an old disease, and it was our responsibility to resolve it," he said, referring to the scrapping of Jammu and Kashmir's special status earlier this year.

"We should always remember our rights and obligations. While good and accessible education is our right, we also have an obligation to respect our teachers and safeguard the security of our educational institutions," Modi said, in what was viewed as a critique of ongoing agitations against the controversial law in universities across the country.

The agitation against the Citizenship Amendment Act had gone nationwide after a protest at Delhi's Jamia Millia University ended in a clash with the police.

Modi had earlier yesterday tweeted

out a tribute to Atal Bihari Vajpayee, one of his predecessors, on the latter's 95th birth anniversary. "Many good things can be said about the life of Atalji... He knew when to speak and when to stay silent. That's amazing power," he said, adding that "his silence held more power than his words".

The Citizenship Amendment Act, for the first time, makes religion the test of citizenship in India. The government says it will help minorities from three Muslim-dominated countries to get citizenship if they fled to India because of religious persecution. Critics say it is designed to discriminate against Muslims and violates the secular principles of the constitution.

Benin jails journo over Facebook post

AFP, Cotonou

Benin sentenced an investigative journalist to 18 months in prison on Tuesday for comments he posted on social media, his lawyer told AFP.

Ignace Sossou quoted on his Facebook and Twitter pages comments made by Benin's public prosecutor Mario Metonou at a media event to discuss fake news on December 17.

The comments made by the official appeared to criticise the government's attitude towards freedom of expression.

"The internet outage on (legislative) polling day on April 28 is an admission of weakness on the part of those in power," the prosecutor reportedly said.

Sossou "has been convicted of harassment through electronic communications", his lawyer, Prisca Ogoubi told AFP.

Jihadists kill 35 civilians

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forces backed by the air force drove the militants back, the army said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but jihadist violence in Burkina Faso has been blamed on militants linked to both Al Qaeda and Islamic State groups.

560,000 DISPLACED

Leaders of the G5 Sahel nations held summit talks in Niger earlier this month, calling for closer cooperation and international support in the battle against the Islamist threat.

Militant violence has spread across the vast Sahel region, especially in Burkina Faso and Niger, having started when armed Islamists revolted in northern Mali in 2012.

The Sahel region of Africa lies to the south of the Sahara Desert and stretches across the breadth of the African continent.

There are 4,500 French troops deployed in the region as well as a 13,000-strong UN peacekeeping force in Mali to fight insurgents.

The G5 group is made up of Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, whose impoverished armies have the support of French forces as well as the UN in Mali.

In Burkina Faso, more than 700 people have been killed and around 560,000 internally displaced, according to the United Nations.

Attacks have targeted mostly the north and east of the country, though the capital Ouagadougou has been hit three times.

Prior to Tuesday's attack, Burkina security forces said they had killed around a hundred jihadists in several operations since November.

An ambush on a convoy transporting employees of a Canadian mining company in November killed 37 people.

New species of monkey

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part of the "ashy black titis" species when they were discovered in 1914.

However, Adrian Barnett, a biologist who worked on confirming the new species, told the New Scientist that a report by the researcher who first discovered the monkeys showed he was "clearly in doubt" about their classification.

The Parecis monkeys, which are known as "otôhò" by local indigenous people, are distinguished from the dark grey ashy black titis by their chestnut brown backs and large white patches on their chests.

When the research team compared DNA from the Parecis monkeys with 10 other species, including the ashy black titis, they found it was distinctly different.

Researchers have argued the new species of monkeys should be considered "near threatened" under

the criteria set out by the IUCN Red List for endangered species.

"The range is small and the population restricted," Barnett told the New Scientist.

He added that the Parecis monkey was the third new species found in Brazil this year and the 20th monkey species discovered there since 2000.

MariLuze Messias, a biologist who worked on the research project after coming across the new species in 2011, was also involved in the discovery of the Mundurucu marmoset in the southeastern Amazon earlier this year.

Barnett said the new discoveries may be due to deforestation making access to parts of the Amazon easier.

"One thing about deforestation is that it gives everyone access to remote areas, so sometimes scientists get to areas that have never been properly explored just before the chainsaws," he said.