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Britain says Reuters journalists jailed in Myanmar are innocent



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Syria, Mattis, Afghanistan, shutdown: Trump ends year in chaos

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Trump's presidency has lurched from crisis to crisis since he took office less than two years ago, but Thursday was a landmark day of chaos that appeared to test the resolve of even senior Republican backers in Washington. Defense Secretary James Mattis, a widely respected figure seen as a stabilizing influence inside the administration, handed in his resignation after arguing with Trump over foreign policy in a White House meeting. Mattis then released a letter that showed fundamental policy differences between the two men and implicitly criticized Trump's disregard for allies abroad. Also on Thursday, Trump resisted pressure to stand down from a decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria, made plans to pull American forces out of Afghanistan and pushed the U.S. government toward a shutdown over funding for a border wall. To top it all off, U.S. share prices tumbled as investors worried the looming shutdown, slower economic growth and the Federal Reserve's projections for more interest rate hikes next year. Even some of Trump's friends showed deepening worry about where his administration is heading at the halfway point of his term. Senator Lindsey Graham, a close ally and frequent golf partner, on Thursday praised Mattis, publicly urged Trump to reconsider the Syrian pullout and warned that withdrawing troops from Afghanistan could ultimately lead to another attack on America similar to the one on Sept. 11, 2001. "I believe you are on course to make the same mistake President (Barack) Obama made in Iraq ... It will turn out no better for you than it did for him." Graham tweeted of the Syria move.



Stacks of moving crates sit in a U.S. Congressional office weeks before the end of the current term on Capitol Hill in Washington

U.S. top court rejects Trump bid to enforce asylum restrictions

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Supreme Court on Friday dealt a setback to President Donald Trump by refusing to allow his administration to implement new rules prohibiting asylum for people who cross the U.S. border illegally, a key component of his policies aimed making it harder for immigrants to enter and stay in the United States. The justices on a 5-4 vote denied the administration's request to put on hold a California-based federal judge's order at least temporarily preventing it from carrying out the policy intended make anyone crossing the U.S.-Mexican border outside of an official port of entry ineligible for asylum. Conservative Chief Justice John Roberts, who last month rebuked Trump over his criticism of the judiciary, joined the court's four liberals in denying the administration's request. Trump's two Supreme Court appointees, Brett Kavanaugh and Neil Gorsuch, joined the court's two other conservatives in dissent. Trump had criticized San Francisco-based U.S. District Judge Jon Tigar, who on Nov. 19 blocked the policy. The San Francisco-based 9th U.S.

Circuit Court of Appeals then refused the administration's request to lift Tigar's order. Trump's comments led to an extraordinary rebuke by Roberts, who defended the independence of the federal judiciary and wrote in a public response to Trump on Nov. 21, "We do not have Obama judges or Trump judges, Bush judges or Clinton judges," Roberts said. The asylum restrictions were made through a presidential proclamation Trump issued on Nov. 9 alongside a new administration rule. The administration has sought ways to block thousands of Central American men, women and children traveling in caravans to escape violence and poverty in their home countries from entering the United States, with Trump calling the people in the caravans a national security threat.

Trump's proclamation stated that mass migration on the border had precipitated a crisis and he was acting to protect the U.S. national interest. Trump's policy was crafted to alter American asylum laws that have given people fleeing persecution and violence in

their homelands the ability to seek sanctuary in the United States.



FILE PHOTO: Immigrants from Central America and Mexican citizens queue to cross into the U.S. to apply for asylum at the new border crossing of El Chaparral in Tijuana

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Britain says Reuters journalists jailed in Myanmar are innocent

LONDON (Reuters) - British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said on Friday that two Reuters journalists jailed in Myanmar on charges of breaking the country's Official Secrets Act were innocent and that Britain had serious concerns about due process in the case.

Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were found guilty in September after a trial at a Yangon district court in a case that has raised questions about Myanmar's progress towards democracy and triggered an outcry from diplomats and human rights advocates.

Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi said in September that the jailing of the reporters had nothing to do with freedom of expression. She said they were not jailed because they were journalists.

In a sign of the level of concern among world powers about the case, Britain's foreign policy chief took the unusual step of recording a short video to show his support for the jailed Reuters journalists.

"We want the world to remember these two journalists, not just because we believe they are innocent, but also because this is a year when we have seen a big increase in the number of journalists who have been locked up and indeed far worse - murdered," Hunt said.

There were 251 journalists jailed for doing their jobs as of Dec. 1, the Committee to Protect Journalists said in an annual study earlier this month.

At least 53 journalists were killed around the world between January 1 and December 14, 2018, according to the CPJ, a U.S.-based nonprofit that promotes press freedom.

Britain's Hunt said that at a time when people were looking forward to spending time with their families, it was time to reflect on the fate of the two Reuters journalists.

They "are both in prison this Christmas because they wanted to report of the Rakhine crisis where there has been some alleged genocide against the Rohingya people in Burma," Hunt said.

The Reuters reporters, who pleaded not guilty, said they were handed papers by police shortly before they were detained, and a police witness testified that they had been set up.



What impact will Gatwick disruption have on airlines? They had been investigating the killing of 10 Rohingya men and boys as part of a military response to insurgent attacks. "We are very worried about due process in this case - it is something that I have raised with Aung San Suu Kyi," said Hunt. He did not elaborate further on the British concerns about the case.

Lawyers for the two Reuters reporters have lodged an appeal against their conviction and sentence.



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Editor's Choice



FILE PHOTO: Aluminium bar stock inside a factory in Dongguan, China, April 10, 2018. REUTERS/Bobby Yip/File Photo



Man sits in front of an electronic board showing stock information at a brokerage house in Hangzhou



Demonstrators march during a protest against a proposed new labor law, billed as the "slave law", in Budapest, Hungary December 21, 2018. REUTERS/Marko Djurica



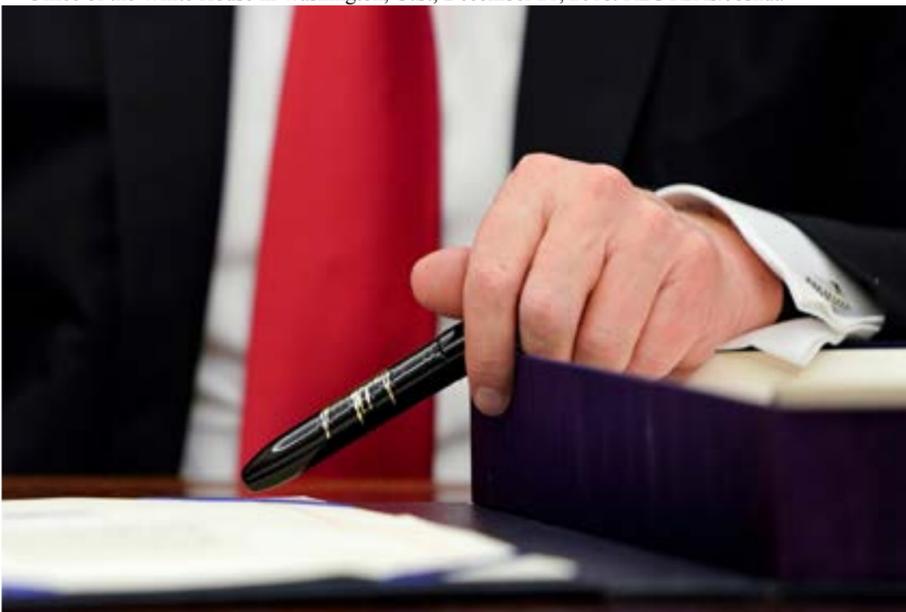
FILE PHOTO: Immigrants from Central America and Mexican citizens queue to cross into the U.S. to apply for asylum at the new border crossing of El Chaparral in Tijuana



White House senior advisor Jared Kushner speaks about criminal justice reform during a bill signing ceremony for the "First Step Act" and the "Juvenile Justice Reform Act" in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, U.S., December 21, 2018. REUTERS/Joshua



FILE PHOTO: Flavio Bolsonaro, son of Brazil's President-elect Jair Bolsonaro is seen behind him at the transition government building in Brasilia



U.S. President Trump holds his pen as he signs the "First Step Act" and the "Juvenile Justice Reform Act" in Oval Office of the White House in Washington



Workers sit at the Franz Haniel shaft during a ceremony marking the closure of the last active black coal mine in Bottrop, Germany December 21, 2018. REUTERS/Thilo Schmelgen

Southern Daily is a Division of Southern News Group - Founded June 16, 1979 | December 25, 2018 | Section C4 | John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Christmas Trees That Light Up The World

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

With the hustle and bustle of the holidays winding down, reaching its peak on this Christmas Day, it is now time to relax and enjoy this special season of happiness and joy.

Today is the day for family, friends and being together or keeping in touch with friends a world away.

Please join us on a brief journey around the globe and see how the humble tree of Christmas continues to light up peoples' spirits over the entire global.



The world's largest Christmas tree display rises up the slopes of Monte Ingino outside of Gubbio, in Italy's Umbria region. Composed of about 500 lights connected by 40,000 feet of wire, the 'tree' is a modern marvel for an ancient city



A Christmas tree befitting Tokyo's nighttime neon display is projected onto the exterior of the Grand Prince Hotel Akasaka.



Illuminating the Gothic facades of Prague's Old Town Square, and casting its glow over the manger display of the famous Christmas market, is a grand tree cut in the Sumava mountains in the southern Czech Republic.



Moscow celebrates Christmas according to the Russian Orthodox calendar on Jan. 7. For weeks beforehand, the city is alive with festivities in anticipation of Father Frost's arrival on his magical troika with the Snow Maiden. He and his helper deliver gifts under the New Year tree, or yolka, which is traditionally a fir.



The largest Christmas tree in Europe (more than 230 feet tall) can be found in the Praça do Comércio in Lisbon, Portugal. Thousands of lights adorn the tree, adding to the special enchantment of the city during the holiday season.



'Oh Christmas tree, oh Christmas tree': Even in its humblest attire, aglow beside a tiny chapel in Germany's Karwendel mountains, a Christmas tree is a wondrous sight.

Merry Christmas From the Staff of Southern Daily Please send your comments to the Southern Daily Editor at john4252@gmail.com

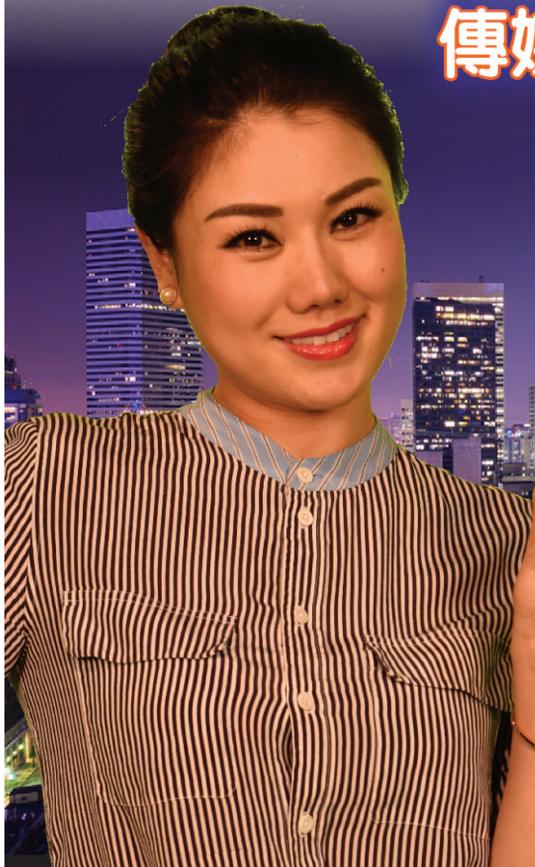
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Alibaba Founder Jack Ma Sees A New 'Beginning' In His Retirement

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



Jack Ma, chairman of Alibaba, prepares to ring the bell at the New York Stock Exchange on Sept. 19, 2014. Ma, China's richest man, plans to retire from his e-commerce company to focus on philanthropy. (Photo/The New York Times)

na known as Teacher's Day. The retirement makes Ma one of the first founders among a generation of prominent Chinese internet entrepreneurs to step down from their companies. Firms including Alibaba, Tencent, Baidu and JD.com have flourished in recent years, growing to nearly rival American internet behemoths like Amazon and Google in their size, scope and ambition. For Chinese tycoons to step aside in their 50s is rare; they usually remain at the top of their organizations for many years.

The departure of Ma is likely to jolt China's internet industry, which has been reeling from the arrest last weekend of Liu Qiangdong, the billionaire founder of the online retailer JD.com. Liu, who goes by Richard Liu in the English-speaking world, was arrested on a rape allegation in Minneapolis during a business trip. He was released and has since returned to Beijing, where JD.com is based.



Post-founding meeting in Jack Ma's

Lakeside Gardens apartment in Hangzhou, China, 2000.

For Alibaba, Ma's retirement completes a transition of power to other executives. Ma stepped down as Alibaba's chief executive in 2013; the company's current chief executive is Daniel Zhang, who is a candidate to succeed Ma. Yet Ma had remained active as the face of the e-commerce firm, as well as an architect of its long-term strategy. He owns a 6.4 percent stake of Alibaba, according to securities filings, but has considerably more sway over the company thanks to its complicated legal structure.

Ma, a natural salesman and charismatic leader, co-founded Alibaba with 17 others — some of them his students — out of his apartment in Hangzhou in eastern Zhejiang province in 1999.

Alibaba started as an online marketplace for businesses to sell their products to other businesses. But it did not take off until it began the Taobao marketplace in 2003, which merchants used to sell goods directly to consumers. Alibaba later rolled out Alipay, an online payment service, to facilitate transactions in a country where few people had credit cards. Alipay later became Ant Financial, the financial sub-

siary that Ma also controls.

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Today, Alibaba's empire encompasses e-commerce, online banking, cloud computing, digital media and entertainment — and even a corporate messaging service similar to Slack. The company owns or holds stakes in some of China's most important media assets, including the Twitter-like social media site Weibo and the Hong Kong-based English-language newspaper The South China Morning Post.

Among China's biggest companies, Alibaba is viewed as one of the firms with the deepest ranks of management talent. Many of the co-founders are still around, and professionals who joined the company later are now in charge.

Last month, Alibaba reported a 60 percent increase in quarterly sales, even as profits fell. The company's annual revenue totals about 250 billion yuan, or \$40 billion. While Alibaba has become dominant in China, it has faced a tougher time expanding internationally. The company has increased its presence outside China by investing in e-commerce and online finance companies in India and Southeast Asia. But its efforts to muscle into the United States largely have not been successful.



Even after Ma met with President-elect Donald Trump in early 2017 and promised to bring 1 million jobs to the United States, the federal government rejected Ant Financial's bid to acquire the American money transfer company MoneyGram this year over national security concerns. As Beijing has increased its involvement in the private sector, Ma has shifted what he has said about China's government. He used to say that businesses should be in love with the government but never get married to each other, indicating that an arms-length relationship was preferred.

At a conference in November, Ma was more positive. "There's no country like China in the world," he said. "With political stability, social safety and 6 percent-plus economic growth, we have the best business environment."

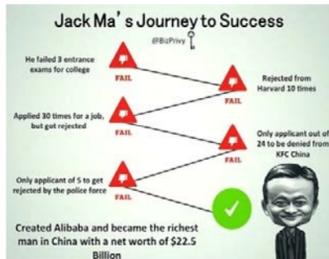
As Alibaba has flourished, Ma has talked many times about how he did not want to spend his whole life at the company, saying he would retire one day and go back to teaching.

In 2014, he created the Jack Ma Foundation, which has worked to improve education in rural China. Ma's Weibo social media handle is "spokesman for village teachers — Jack Ma." Within Alibaba, he is known and referred to as "Teacher Ma."



In an interview with Bloomberg TV this week, Ma signaled he was thinking about focusing more on philanthropy. He cited Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Bill Gates as an example.

Ma said he could never be as rich as Gates — but that he could retire earlier than Gates. Gates stepped down as Microsoft's chairman in 2014, at the age of 58. (Courtesy <https://www.wral.com>)



"He's a symbol of the health of China's private sector and how high they can fly whether he likes it or not," Duncan Clark, author of the book "Alibaba: The House Jack Ma Built," said of Ma. "His retirement will be interpreted as frustration or concern whether he likes it or not."

In an interview, Ma said his retirement is not the end of an era but "the beginning of an era." He said he would be spending more of his time and fortune focused on education. "I love education," he said.

Ma will remain on Alibaba's board of directors and continue to mentor the company's management. Ma turns 54 on Monday, which is also a holiday in Chi-

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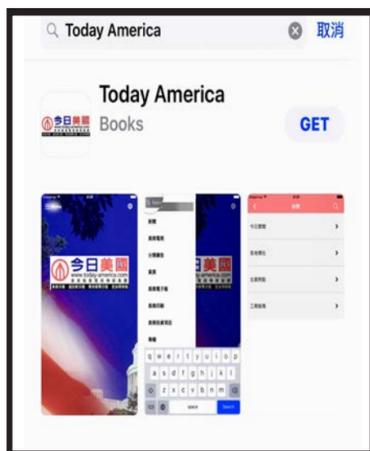
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