

## 4 grave robbers killed by poison



The crime scene. [Photo/gywb.cn]

Four of 10 grave robbers who managed to break into a tomb built during the Song Dynasty (960-1297) died from the poisonous air wafting from below the graveyard in Xishui Town, Guizhou Province, on March 7, 2017.

The grave they attempted to loot has been preserved as a county-level cultural heritage relic.

Around 1:00 am last Monday, a man brought to a local hospital claimed he'd inhaled deadly gas while working underground in a mining area. However, when the doctors tried to rescue the man as he fell into coma, three of his friends outside the emergency room collapsed.

Realizing the complexities of the issue, the doctors called police.

Until the arrival of the police and local officials, the men who were still conscious admitted that they tried to break into an ancient tomb with the help of an old generator, the emission of which had made them feel uncomfortable. They rushed to the hospital after several fainted inside the grave.

According to the local government, three of the 10 men involved in the grave robbery died inside the mausoleum, while another died after being hospitalized. Four were in stable condition and two were arrested.

A cave going eight meters deep into the grave has been capped and restored. It is highly assumed that the robbers who tried to reach the mausoleum were

obstructed by rocks, so they switched on the generator hoping to break their way through. But when attempting to mitigate the noise of the rumbling machine, they covered the entrance with quilts and caused the poisonous air to condense.

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## [UN agriculture agency warns of water scarcity in North Africa and Near East](#)

9 March 2017 – Accessible fresh water in North Africa and the Middle East has fallen by two-thirds over the past 40 years, posing a huge challenge requiring “an urgent and massive response,” the head of the United Nations agriculture agency said today.

Access to water is a fundamental need for food security, human health and agriculture, and sustainable water use for agriculture requires transforming food systems and diets, said Jose Graziano da Silva, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in a news release on his visit to Egypt.

Per capita availability of fresh water in the region is now 10 times less than the world average, he said, underscoring the need for a significant overhaul of farming systems.

A recent FAO study showed that higher temperatures may shorten growing seasons in the region by 18 days and reduce agricultural yields a further 27 per cent to 55 per cent less by the end of this century.

The rising sea level in the Nile Delta is exposing Egypt to the danger of losing substantial parts of the most productive agriculture land due to salinization.

Moreover, “competition between water-usage sectors will only intensify in the future between agriculture, energy, industrial production and household needs,” he said.

Mr. Graziano da Silva attended a high-level meeting on FAO’s collaboration with Egypt on the ‘1.5 million feddan initiative,’ the Government’s plan to reclaim eventually up to two million hectares of desert land for agricultural and other uses.

Policy advice and best practice ideas on the governance of irrigation schemes is a key offering in FAO’s Near East and North Africa Water Scarcity Initiative, backed now by a network of more than 30 national and international organizations.

The initiative has gained momentum, buoyed by its endorsement by the League

of Arab States as well as donor support, Mr. Graziano da Silva said, noting that urgent actions supporting it include measures aimed at reducing food loss and waste and bolstering the resilience of smallholders and family farmers.

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## Americas region adopts 'historic' disaster risk reduction plan at UN-backed forum in Montreal

9 March 2017 – Around 50 countries and territories of the Americas at a United Nations-supported conference in Montreal, Canada, agreed a Regional Action Plan today to better protect their citizens from the destruction caused by natural and man-made disasters.

The plan, which is the centerpiece of the Montreal Declaration outcome document, marks the end of three days of deliberation and discussion by close to 1,000 government delegations and officials; non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society and other representatives, under the umbrella of the UN-backed Fifth Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas.

The conference, supported by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), aimed to put into action the principles and priorities agreed by more than 180 countries across the world in the 2015 Sendai Framework on disaster risk reduction, named after the Japanese city in which it was adopted.

That enshrined the same priorities outlined by the Canadian Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Ralph Goodale, who chaired and hosted the Montreal Conference, when he summarized the thrust of Thursday's Regional Action Plan.

He said there were 16 specific actions arising, covering four key areas, namely understanding risk better; improving governance when it comes to dealing with disasters; improving on resilience at all levels regarding risk reduction efforts, and finally, better preparedness.

According to UNISDR, while disaster deaths have gradually fallen around the world expect in anomalous years marked by mega-disasters such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami or the 2010 Haiti earthquake economic impacts have skyrocketed and are now estimated at \$500 billion a year.

Hurricane Matthew alone caused damage estimated at \$15 billion when it ripped across Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, the Bahamas, the United States and the Canadian Maritimes last October.

UNISDR chief Robert Glasser gave *UN News* more details of the 16-point action plan, saying “there are things like cooperating on science and technology research; on developing early warning and building back better after disasters; on embedding risk in core economic planning, on building coherence between disaster risk, climate risk and sustainable development more broadly.”

Mr. Glasser said the Montreal Declaration was an “historic” moment for the Americas, and marked the first time that Member States in the region had come together and agreed a collective plan to make the Sendai Framework a reality.

“This is the number one issue that affects both less developed and highly developed countries alike. It is an issue that results in huge loss of life each year and that is causing at least \$500 billion a year in economic losses that is all money that could be used to fight poverty, increase access to education or healthcare or promote economic development.”

“So this is not a hypothetical subject. It is a subject that is a matter of life and death and prosperity,” added Mr Glasser.

The Regional Action Plan now goes forward to the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction, taking place in Cancun, Mexico, in May.

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## **Burundian authorities ‘shut doors’ to engagement, cooperation – Security Council told**

9 March 2017 – Nearly two years after the political impasse started in Burundi, national authorities are reducing their cooperation with the United Nations system which risks undermining efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the crisis and cutting assistance to a population in need, the Security Council was told today.

Presenting the first Secretary-General’s report on the situation in Burundi, the Special Adviser on the topic noted that “the report is factual and speaks for itself.”

Jamal Benomar told the Council the UN has tried to constructively engage with the Government and support the people of Burundi in their search for peace and stability, to no avail.

“We have engaged quickly, refrained from public criticism and encouraged modest, small steps to build confidence with the parties. Despite this modelled approach, the doors to engagement and cooperation have been largely

shut by the authorities,&#8221 Mr. Benomar said.

In the past several months, the Government has decided to withdraw from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, suspend cooperation and collaboration with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and refused cooperation with the commission of inquiry mandated by the Human Rights Council.

The Government has also avoided signing a document with the African Union that would allow human rights observers and military experts to be deployed, to aid Burundians.

These actions were taken as &#8220human rights violations and abuses continue to be reported on a worrying scale,&#8221 according to the report.

In addition, at the end of February, President Pierre Nkurunziza suggested that he might seek a change to the Constitution allowing him to seek a fourth term in office. The move, as written in the report, &#8220has the potential to plunge the country into an even deeper crisis.&#8221

Referring to the report, Mr. Benomar called on the Burundian Government &#8220to fulfil its moral obligation and political responsibility to return the country to a path of peace.&#8221

He noted that most Burundians do not want to continue on the track of &#8220international isolationism, violence and repression.&#8221

The UN envoy urged the international community &#8211 guided by the Security Council &#8211 to do its part to support those who seek a peaceful resolution of this crisis, and underscored the UN's continued commitment to helping the Burundian people.

The Security Council also heard by video-conference from former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa, who is facilitating discussions between the Government and the opposition in accordance with the Arusha Agreement. Mr. Benomar stressed in his statement that Mr. Mkapa has the UN's full support in his work.

Also speaking to the Council today was Jurg Lauber, the Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission. Mr. Lauber will visit Burundi at the end of this month to get first-hand impression of the situation and meet with the Government, opposition and civil society representatives.

In his statement, Mr. Labuer echoed Mr. Benomar's call to the international community to remain active in Burundi: &#8220Abandoning Burundi now would mean wasting past efforts and putting the country and its people at risk of recurring conflict.&#8221