

## MOTHER TERESA: A SAINT DESPITE SPIRITUAL 'DARKNESS'

**VATICAN CITY:** When Pope Francis canonizes Mother Teresa on Sunday, he'll be honoring a nun who won admirers around the world and a Nobel Peace Prize for her joy-filled dedication to the "poorest of the poor." He'll also be recognizing holiness in a woman who felt so abandoned by God that she was unable to pray and was convinced, despite her ever-present smile, that she was experiencing the "torments of hell."

For nearly 50 years, Mother Teresa endured what the church calls a "dark night of the soul" - a period of spiritual doubt, despair and loneliness that many of the great mystics experienced, her namesake St. Therese of Lisieux included. In Mother Teresa's case, the dark night lasted most of her adult life - an almost unheard of trial. No one but Mother Teresa's spiritual directors and bishop knew of her spiritual agony until her correspondence came to light during her beatification cause. The letters were then made available to the general public in a 2007 book, "Come Be My Light."

#### 'Unloved, uncared for'

For the Rev Brian Kolodiejchuk, the Canadian priest who published the letters and spearheaded Mother Teresa's saint-making campaign, the revelations were further confirmation of Mother Teresa's heroic saintliness. He said that by canonizing her, Francis is recognizing that Mother Teresa not only shared the material poverty of the poor but the spiritual poverty of those who feel "unloved, unwanted, uncared for." "That was her experience in her relationship with Jesus," Kolodiejchuk said in an interview. "She understood very well when people would share their horror stories, their

pain and suffering of being unloved, lonely. She would be able to share that empathy because she herself was experiencing it."

Tens of thousands of people are expected for the canonization ceremony Sunday for the tiny, stooped nun who was fast-tracked for sainthood just a year after she died in 1997. St John Paul II, who was Mother Teresa's greatest champion, beatified her before a crowd of 300,000 in St Peter's Square in 2003. Francis has made the canonization the high point of his Jubilee of Mercy, a yearlong emphasis on the church's merciful side. Francis has an obvious interest in highlighting Mother Teresa's mercy-filled service to outcasts on the periphery, given that her life's work exemplifies the priorities of his own pontificate.

#### Saints can be imperfect?

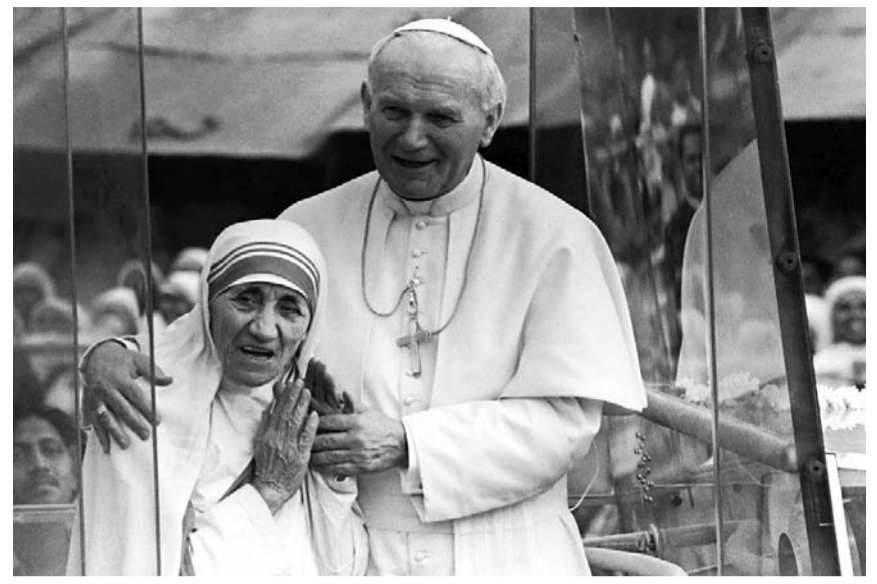
But Francis is also sending a more subtle message to the faithful through the canonization of the ethnic Albanian nun: That saints can be imperfect - they can suffer as Mother Teresa did and even feel unloved by God, said Ines Angeli Murzaku, a professor of church history at Seton Hall University in New Jersey and herself a native Albanian. "That existential periphery which is suffering and being marginalized, he wants to bring that to the attention of the world," she said in a telephone interview. Mother Teresa "is so real. She's not remote. She's not a perfect, perfect saint." That said, her blind faith in enduring the "darkness," as she called it, and persevering through it seems almost superhuman to outsiders.

Take the Feb 28, 1957 letter she wrote the then-archbishop of Kolkata, Jesuit Archbishop

Ferdinand Perier. "There is so much contradiction in my soul. Such deep longing for God, so deep that it is painful, a suffering continual, and yet not wanted by God, repulsed, empty, no faith, no love no zeal," she wrote. "Souls hold no attraction. Heaven means nothing, to me it looks like an empty place. The thought of it means nothing to me and yet this torturing longing for God." "Pray for me please that I keep smiling at him in spite of everything." In another letter, she acknowledged that her smile was "a big cloak which covers a multitude of pains."

Revelations that the smile was a mask to inner doubts about God's presence fueled criticism of Mother Teresa - spearheaded most famously by the late Christopher Hitchens - that the Balkan nun was something of a fraud. Kolodiejchuk, though, says she was no hypocrite. He said that the smile was a genuine and heroic attempt to hide her private sufferings, even from God, and prevent others from suffering more. "You can be joyful even if you're suffering because you are accepting, and you are working and acting with love that gives meaning to the suffering," he said in the courtyard of one of the Missionaries of Charity houses on the periphery of Rome.

The revelations nevertheless shocked even Mother Teresa's closest confidants and friends, the original sisters who joined her Missionaries of Charity after she was inspired to found the order in 1946. Kolodiejchuk said several sisters wept when he first read them her letters after he acquired them in 1998 from the archives of the Jesuits and archbishop in Kolkata. Sister Prema, the current superior general of the Missionaries of Charity,



**CALCUTTA:** Pope John Paul II (right) holds his arm around Mother Teresa as they ride in the pope-mobile outside the Home of the Dying in Calcutta, India in this February 1986 photo. —AP

recalled being in awe of the revelation and not being able even today to fully understand the depth of Mother Teresa's pain. "It took me some time, and it still takes me time, to reflect about it and to understand it more deeply," she said in an interview.

"I think a soul who has not experienced it (the darkness) will not be able to understand what it is about. This is some mystery of the spiritual life which souls who know about it can connect with and associate with, but

souls who do not know, we stand before a mystery." Asked if she was in that latter group, the German nun paused and said quietly: "Yes." Kolodiejchuk, the postulator for the cause, says that in retrospect, Mother Teresa's "darkness" was actually a critical part of her vocation, kept hidden from the world that only saw a firm but loving mother superior who was the first in the chapel each morning and often worked herself to exhaustion at night tending to society's most unloved. —AP

## MONTENEGRO BORDER DEAL STIRS TENSIONS IN KOSOVO

NATIONALISTS PROTEST; MOUNTAIN DWELLERS WORRIED

**RUGOVA MOUNTAINS:** High in the Cursed Mountains that span Kosovo and Montenegro, lumberjack Rame Elezaj and his family have earned a living from their trees for decades. But if Kosovo's parliament approves a border deal with Montenegro today, all 4.5 hectares of Elezaj's land will be designated to be in another country, while his house will remain in Kosovo. "We have always used this land and Montenegro never had any issues, and now our government wants to give it away for free," the 61-year-old said.

For decades after World War Two, villagers never viewed the administrative lines that criss-crossed Yugoslavia as anything but notional boundaries that had little impact on everyday life. But years after that communist state was ripped apart by the Balkan wars in the 1990s, border disputes remain one of many difficulties in untangling the former Yugoslavia, along with ethnic hostility, violence and political gridlock. With no border markers in the craggy 1,700-metre mountains, Elezaj believed all his land was in Kosovo, but has no documents to prove it.

Western allies have told Kosovo that clarifying borders with its ex-Yugoslav foes, including Montenegro, is a prerequisite to getting closer ties with the European Union, in particular securing visa-free travel. But the deal between the two governments has sparked violent protests throughout Kosovo. Six people were arrested on Tuesday on suspicion of launch-

ing a rocket-propelled grenade at parliament and nationalist lawmakers have released tear gas inside the chamber several times in protest. The opposition says the agreement hands over some 8,000 hectares of territory to Montenegro, a claim the government denies.

"Kosovo is losing 8,200 hectares ... it is losing water sources and lakes," said Donika Kadaj Bujupi, a lawmaker from the biggest opposition party, Vetevendosje, and someone who has herself released tear gas inside parliament. "We will defend the land with our blood," Elezaj said. Vetevendosje has said it will do everything it can, both inside and outside parliament, to stop the assembly approving the border deal. The government also faces objections from a number of its own lawmakers who have said they will not back the deal.

#### Attention elsewhere

Kosovo broke from Serbia in 1999 when NATO bombed for 11 weeks to halt the killing and expulsion of ethnic Albanian civilians by Serbian forces trying to crush a two-year insurgency. After almost a decade as a ward of the United Nations, the majority-Albanian territory declared independence in 2008. It has been recognized by more than 100 countries, including the major Western powers, but not Serbia and its big-power ally Russia or several EU members such as Spain.

It still struggles with the legacy of war. Corruption and

poverty are rife, and a gradual improvement in relations with Serbia, mandated by the EU, is fraught with setbacks. EU officials have used a policy of 'carrots and sticks' to guide governments both in Pristina and in Belgrade towards closer integration with the EU, with the Montenegro border deal just the latest requirement.

But EU diplomats say Kosovo may have to wait longer to win visa-free travel, even if the agreement is ratified in time for a September debate in the European Parliament. The bloc's attention is focused elsewhere, diplomats say, with some hoping to lift visas for Georgians ahead of an election there in October, while others want to focus on Turkey, crucial to stemming migrant flows to Europe. "Nobody really talks about Kosovo all that much," one EU diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The huge numbers of Kosovars claiming asylum in the EU - from where they are invariably deported - does not help its case to get visa-free travel and it is the last of the former Yugoslav republics still to win that privilege. In the first quarter of 2015, nearly 50,000 Kosovars claimed asylum in the EU, mostly in Germany, more in that period than Syrians fleeing their civil war. EU countries consider most of them economic migrants, ineligible for asylum. Border issues between Yugoslav republics remain unresolved 17 years since nearly a decade of wars ended in 1999. Even two EU member states-Slovenia and Croatia-still dispute over one part of the border going through the Adriatic Sea. —Reuters

## 'ONLY WEEKS LEFT' FOR BOKO HARAM, NIGERIA ARMY SAYS



**BANGKOK:** A man walks past a government building adorned with a poster of Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej and his wife Sirikit as clouds move over Bangkok yesterday. —AFP

## THAILAND EMBARKS ON A PROGRAM TO ENSURE CITIZENS SPEAK ENGLISH

**BANGKOK:** With just one hour of English classes per week in primary schools, it's no surprise that most Thais have little to no ability to speak the language. The government wants to change that. The Ministry of Education has embarked on a program to ensure that all primary school-children are able to speak enough English to handle everyday situations within 10 years. Deputy Education Minister Teerakiat Jareonsettasin unveiled a plan this week that calls for drastic changes to the English language curriculum in schools, including more classes, new textbooks and an intensive training program for top teachers who will become "master trainers" for other teachers.

A ministry official confirmed to The Associated Press the details of the plan, published in Thai media. The official cannot be identified under government rules. Teerakiat was not immediately available for comment. "We picked 350 teachers who are considered to be the cream of the crop for English boot camp training," said the official. From there, the best 28 teachers will be chosen as master trainers and will be spread

out around the country to 18 English-teaching facilities where school administrators and educators in the nearby area can receive training from the centers.

The millions of tourists who visit Thailand each year usually face little difficulty in communicating because they mostly interact with hotel staff, salespeople in malls and markets, and other tourism-related staff who would have learned the language on the job. Some Thais who work for foreign companies also pick up English over the years. But the vast majority of Thais, especially in government offices, have virtually no English language skills.

Among 16 Asian countries surveyed, Thailand is ranked 14th in English abilities and 62nd out of 70 countries worldwide, according to the Education First Language Institute's 2015 English Proficiency Index. This poses problems for Thailand as it seeks to achieve greater integration with the ASEAN Community, which was launched earlier this year and aims to increase business, social, cultural and employment opportunities among Southeast Asian countries. —AP

**MAIDUGURI:** Nigeria's army expects to seize Boko Haram's last few strongholds in the northeast over the next few weeks, the commander in charge of crushing the jihadist group's seven-year insurgency said yesterday. The army missed a December deadline set by President Muhammadu Buhari to wipe out the group, which wants to set up an Islamic caliphate in the area around Lake Chad, but has retaken most of its territory - at one point the size of Belgium.

Major General Lucky Irabor, commander of the operation, said the jihadists were now holed up in a few pockets of the Sambisa forest - where more than 200 girls kidnapped from the town of Chibok in 2014 are believed to be held - and two areas near Lake Chad and would be flushed out "within weeks." Despite the setbacks, Boko Haram still manages to stage regular suicide bombings in Nigeria and neighboring Chad, Niger and Cameroon. Since 2009, more than 15,000 people have been killed, 2.3 million displaced and the local economy decimated.

"Almost all of the locations held by the Boko Haram terrorists have been reclaimed. We are talking only of a few villages and towns," Irabor said in an interview at his base in Maiduguri in Borno state, birth place of the insurgency. Much of the success is down to better military cooperation with Nigeria's neighbours, especially Chad, whose forces have been attacking Boko Haram fighters fleeing across the border. "There are joint operations. My commanders have an exchange with local commanders across the borders. Because of the collaborations we've had Boko Haram has been boxed in and in a few weeks you will hear good news," he said.

He said the jihadists, who pledged loyalty to Islamic State last year, were still controlling Abadan and Malafatori, two towns near Lake Chad, apart from their main base in the Sambisa forest, south of Maiduguri. The army was planning a new

push into Sambisa after abandoning an attempt due to torrential rain, he said. "Earlier on this year we had a major operation in the Sambisa," he said. "Gains were made but unfortunately the weather conditions became such that we to pull out waiting for more favorable conditions." He said the army had rescued some 20,000 people from Boko Haram, a fraction of the 2.2 million UNICEF said last week remained trapped in the region around Lake Chad.

#### Leader 'wounded'

Irabor's base on the outskirts of Maiduguri, a sprawling military complex with rows of residential blocks for officers, is the most visible sign of a shake-up introduced by Buhari, a former military ruler. Under his predecessor, Goodluck Jonathan, the army had a reputation for being poorly equipped and running away in the face of Boko Haram assaults. Britain and other countries have recently increased military assistance, and two Westerners wearing flat jackets could be seen jogging in the compound. US officials told Reuters in May that Washington, which blocked arms sales under Jonathan amid concerns about rights abuses, wants to sell up to 12 A-29 Super Tucano light attack aircraft to Nigeria although Congress needs to approve the deal.

Irabor has set up a human rights desk to address the issue. "The code of conduct is quite clear. Human rights issues are taken quite seriously," he said. He said that Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau had recently been wounded, but backed off an Air Force statement this month suggesting he had been killed in an airstrike. "Shekau was wounded. That's what I can confirm, but as to whether he is dead that I cannot at the moment confirm." Boko Haram, which normally communicates via video or audio clips posted on the Internet, has said nothing since the Aug 24 Air Force statement about Shekau being hurt. —Reuters

## News

in brief

#### Taiwan jails 14 over railway sex scandal

**TAIPEI:** Taiwan has jailed 14 people for up to 17 years in a corruption scandal which saw railway officials accepting sex services and visits to hostess clubs in exchange for business contracts. In the biggest ever graft case to hit the state rail sector, seven Taiwan Railway Administration officials were convicted and sentenced for corruption. They were found to have received perks as a reward for helping firms secure contracts for eight rail projects, worth more than Tw\$1.1 billion (\$34.7 million), in the past six years. A construction broker and six businessmen-including the head of a construction company and the head of a plastics company-were also jailed for up to five years for bribing officials. All were convicted and sentenced by Taichung district court in central Taiwan on Tuesday.

#### Monk on the run: 'Killer' becomes temple abbot

**BEIJING:** A suspected murderer on the run for 16 years in China found refuge in Buddhist temples, eventually rising to become an abbot, state media said yesterday. Zhang Liwei was detained by police earlier this month on suspicion of stabbing three people to death with accomplices in 2000, the Beijing News reported. After the killings in his home province of Heilongjiang, deep in northeastern China, Zhang fled nearly 2,000 kilometers south to Anhui, changing his name and finding work as a temple cook and ticket-seller, it said. Later he moved to the Longxing temple in Fengyang county, shaving his own head and proclaiming himself a monk. He became a member of a local political consultative congress-an organ of the county government-and two years ago the monks elected him abbot on the recommendation of his predecessor, according to the report.

#### Romania to expel Pakistani over 'jihadist propaganda'

**BUCHAREST:** A Pakistani national in Romania has been declared persona non grata for allegedly spreading "jihadist propaganda" in online forums and will be expelled from the country, authorities said yesterday. The suspect, who entered the European Union country illegally in late 2015, is "in police custody and proceedings are under way to send him back (to Pakistan)," an immigration official dealing with the case said. The man will be banned from re-entering Romania for 10 years, the official added. In a statement released late Tuesday, secret service officials said the man had drawn attention after spreading "online propaganda backing several terrorist groups active in his home region, supporting Islamist extremism, and calling for global jihad."



**An overturned bus lays in the middle of the Kasserine District, western Tunisia yesterday. At least 14 people were killed and 15 cars caught fire after a truck crashed into a public bus near an open-air market. —AP**

#### Tunisian road accident leaves at least 14 dead

**TUNIS:** At least 14 people were killed and another 51 injured yesterday when a lorry crashed into a bus in central Tunisia, the interior ministry said. Those killed in the dawn accident near Kasserine included the lorry driver, the ministry said, adding that around 15 cars also caught fire. Initial findings showed the truck driver was unable to brake and his vehicle hit the bus and several cars as he sped out of control before slamming into an electricity pylon. Dozens of injured were taken to hospital in Kasserine, as emergency crews worked to extract others still trapped in the wreckage. Photos shared on social media showed columns of thick black smoke rising from the scene of the accident, and national television broadcast images of burnt cars. As of the end of May, 528 people had died in road accidents in the North African country of some 11 million inhabitants since the beginning of the year.