

## PHILIPPINE POLICE RAID ISLAMIC CENTRE BEFORE CATHOLIC EVENT

**MANILA:** Philippine police raided an Islamic centre in Manila and briefly detained scores of people as part of heightened security before a major Catholic festival, a spokeswoman said yesterday. Two men were arrested for illegal drugs during the raid on the Islamic Center in the heart of Manila on Saturday, as authorities warned of possible attacks by Islamic militants when the Feast of the Black Nazarene reaches its peak today.

"This is part of security preparations for the Feast of the Black Nazarene," Chief Inspector Marissa Bruno, spokeswoman for the Manila police, said. She said 82 other people at the centre had been taken to a police station but were released soon afterwards when it was found they had no warrants outstanding.

Bruno denied that police had targeted the Islamic Center, which includes a mosque, saying that other parts of the

city had also been subjected to police operations. Authorities have been on alert for possible attacks by Islamic militants to disrupt the Black Nazarene event, which is expected to attract millions of Filipinos. The annual festival sees huge numbers of barefoot devotees crowding to touch a life-size and dark-skinned statue of Jesus that is reputed to have healing powers. Two people were killed and hundreds injured during the crush of humanity at

last year's event. Security forces have said there is no report of a "direct threat" to the festival this year but they are wary that Muslim extremists may seek revenge for the killing of a pro-Islamic State militant leader last week.

Mohammad Jaafar Maguid, alias "Tokboy", founder and leader of the Ansarul Khilafa Philippines (AKP), was killed by security forces on Thursday. His group is known to be a supporter of the IS

group and has been blamed for various bombings and attacks. Investigators are still looking into whether the AKP was involved in a bombing in the southern city of Davao in September which killed 15 people gathered in a popular park. Local Muslim extremists have previously launched attacks on Christian targets, playing on longstanding tensions between the country's Christian majority and the Muslim minority.—AFP

## N KOREA SAYS CAN TEST-LAUNCH ICBM AT ANY TIME, ANY PLACE

**SEOUL:** North Korea said yesterday it can test launch an intercontinental ballistic missile at any time from any location set by leader Kim Jong Un, saying the United States' hostile policy was to blame for its arms development. Kim said on Jan 1 that his nuclear-capable country was close to test-launching an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). "The ICBM will be launched anytime and anywhere determined by the supreme headquarters of the DPRK," an unnamed Foreign Ministry spokesman was quoted as saying by the official KCNA news agency, using the acronym for the country's name.

The North is formally known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The United States said on Thursday that North Korea had demonstrated a "qualitative" improvement in its nuclear and missile capabilities after an unprecedented level of tests last year.

Experts have said that while North Korea may be close to testing an ICBM, it would likely take years to perfect the weapon. Once fully developed, a North Korean ICBM could threaten the continental United States, which is around 9,000 km (5,500 miles) from the North.

ICBMs have a minimum range of about 5,500 km (3,400 miles), but some are designed to travel 10,000 km (6,200 miles) or further.

US President-elect Donald Trump responded on Monday to Kim's comments on an ICBM test by declaring in a tweet that "It won't happen!" A US State Department spokesman said last week that the United States does not believe that North Korea is capable of mounting a nuclear warhead on a ballistic missile. North Korea has been under UN sanctions since 2006 over its nuclear and ballistic missile tests. The sanctions were tightened last month after Pyongyang conducted its fifth and largest nuclear test on Sept 9.

"The US is wholly to blame for pushing the DPRK to have developed ICBM as it has desperately resorted to anachronistic policy hostile toward the DPRK for decades to encroach upon its sovereignty and vital rights," KCNA quoted the spokesman as saying. "Anyone who wants to deal with the DPRK would be well advised to secure a new way of thinking after having clear understanding of it," the spokesman said, according to KCNA.—Reuters



**SEOUL:** This picture shows an injured Buddhist monk who set himself on fire being carried into an ambulance in Seoul.—AFP

## NINE THINGS OBAMA WILL BE REMEMBERED FOR

**WASHINGTON:** As Barack Obama prepares to leave office on January 20, here are nine things his presidency may be remembered for:

### Making history

If historians were to write only one thing about Barack Hussein Obama, they would likely note that — 143 years after slavery was abolished — a young Illinois senator became the first black president of the United States. Obama, just 47 at his 2009 inauguration, harnessed magisterial oratory to rally a diverse electoral coalition behind a message of "hope and change." In office, Obama sometimes struggled to turn that poetry into the prose of governance. Racial tensions underscored by police shootings of unarmed black men and conspiracy theories about his birthplace persisted. But the very fact of his election confirmed monumental changes in American society.

### Too big to fail

Obama's first term in office was dominated by economic freefall. A real estate crisis spawned a financial meltdown that torpedoed Wall Street banks and lenders, and was metastasizing into an economic crisis of global proportions. Outgoing president George W. Bush and the Federal Reserve had kicked off the government's first panicked efforts at containment, but Obama faced down ideological opposition to large fiscal stimulus, extending government spending by \$831 billion and providing ballast to the economy. As he leaves office, the political and social aftershocks of that financial cataclysm are still being felt, but the economy has added jobs for 75 straight months.

### 'Justice has been done'

"Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama bin Laden." With those words on May 2, 2011, Obama exorcised the anger and frustration of millions of Americans — that the most powerful country on earth could not hold the man accountable for the 9/11 attacks. The risky special forces operation was also illustrative of Obama's controversial drone-and-raid approach to counterterrorism. As he leaves office, Al-Qaeda offshoots and affiliates remain potent, but their leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan has been decimated.

### Legislative toil

"It's one of the few regrets of my presidency — that the rancor and suspicion between the parties has gotten worse instead of better," Obama said in his final State of the Union address. From the moment Obama was elected, Republicans in Congress vowed to oppose him tooth and nail. Efforts to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay and enact gun controls — even after the massacre of young students at Sandy Hook, the emotional nadir of his presidency — would fall victim to partisan rancor.

### A deal with a half-life

For more than two decades, the United States had rolled out sanctions and covert actions to prevent arch foe Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Obama tried a different tack, engaging in secret talks with the Islamic Republic. That gambit ultimately yielded a deal that saw Iran halt its sprint toward a

nuclear weapon, in return for substantial sanctions relief and a dollop of international legitimacy. The pact would strain US relations with Iran's enemies Israel and Saudi Arabia, but prevented a nuclear arms race in the Middle East and defused tensions between Iran and the United States that have simmered since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

### No turnabout on Syria

No international crisis tested Obama's foreign policy or his high bar for US military intervention like Syria. Even when Bashar al-Assad defied Obama's red line on chemical weapons use and killed countless thousands of civilians — along with Russian and Iranian forces — the man who came to office on an anti-war ticket rejected calls to step in. Syria will likely be in crisis for years to come. Critics will long argue about whether Obama's policy was sensible and to what degree his decision damaged America's reputation, allowed the Islamic State group to grow, fueled an immigration flow that destabilized Europe and allowed Russia and Iran to extend influence in the region.

### Change the climate

After the climate skepticism of Bush, Obama's eight years in office resulted in a tidal wave of environmental legislation, protecting marine ecosystems, curbing carbon emissions and boosting renewable energy. In a bid to engrain environmentalism into America's body politic, Obama hiked Alaskan glaciers, snorkeled at Midway Island and rushed through ratification of the Paris Climate Accord. But Obama's environmental agenda is likely to come under sustained assault from his successor, putting the durability of that legacy into question.

### A very big deal

Democrats had tried and failed for decades to provide Americans with universal health care. Obama wasn't quite able to do that but he extended insurance coverage to tens of millions of citizens who previously had none. Republicans decried the "Obamacare" plan as socialism incarnate, at one point claiming it would even create "death panels." But they failed to stop it from passing. They may yet have a crack at repealing it under Donald Trump's watch.

### Meet the neighbors

Obama's trip to Cuba may be remembered in the same way as Richard Nixon's visit to China, but in truth it was the capstone of a much broader effort to improve US relations with Latin America. Resurgent left wing populists in the region had rekindled past memories of "yanqui imperialism" — US-led coups, death squads and heavy-handed intervention. Barely 100 days after Obama took office, he told regional leaders at a Summit of the Americas that the United States had changed. The approach was to deny leaders like Hugo Chavez any excuses for sideshow anti-Americanism. He shook Chavez's hand, met Nicaraguan firebrand Daniel Ortega and visited the tomb of a popular Salvadoran priest killed by US-linked death squads. Obama alluded to "mistakes" in a coup that installed dictator Augusto Pinochet in Chile, released documents about involvement in Argentina's dirty war and, of course, visited Havana.—AFP

## S KOREAN MONK SETS HIMSELF ON FIRE AT ANTI-PRESIDENT RALLY

'MONK URGED AUTHORITIES TO ARREST THE PRESIDENT FOR TREASON'

**SEOUL:** A South Korean Buddhist monk is in critical condition after setting himself on fire during a mass protest against the impeached President Park Geun-Hye, officials said yesterday. The monk, in his 60s and whose name was not released, set himself alight late Saturday night in central Seoul where hundreds of thousands returned to the streets for the eleventh week to demand Park's ouster. He left a note urging authorities to arrest the scandal-hit president for committing "treason," the Yonhap news agency reported.

Park was impeached by parliament last month over an influence-peddling scandal that sparked a storm of public fury and nationwide protests, and the Constitutional Court now has

to decide whether to confirm the impeachment. The monk also slammed Park as a "traitor" for forging a deal with Japan to settle compensation for women forced into sexual slavery for Japanese troops during the World War II, according to Yonhap. Critics say the 2015 deal did not go far enough in holding Japan responsible for wartime abuses.

Tensions between the two countries spiked on Friday when Tokyo recalled its ambassador over a statue of a "comfort woman." The monk suffered third-degree burns across his body and remains unconscious, according to police and staff at Seoul National University Hospital where he is being treated.

Self-immolation is not unheard of as a means

of protest in the South, and was particularly common during the pro-democracy movement of the 1980s and early 90s when a number of activists set themselves on fire during public demonstrations.

Park is accused of colluding with her secret confidante, Choi Soon-Sil, to coerce top local firms to "donate" tens of millions of dollars to non-profit foundations which Choi then used as her personal ATMs.

The president is also accused of letting Choi, the daughter of a shady religious figure who was also close to Park for decades, meddle in state affairs including nomination of top officials. Both Park and Choi — who is currently on trial — have denied any wrongdoing.—AFP



**FLORIDA:** In this file photo, actor and model Fabio, right, talks with Sean Spicer, President-elect Donald Trump's choice for White House press secretary, at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida.



**CLEVELAND:** In this file photo, actor Scott Baio gives two thumbs up after addressing the delegates during the opening day of the Republican National Convention in Cleveland.—AP Photos

## TRUMP CELEB CREW AWAITS HIS TURN IN SPOTLIGHT, AND THEIR OWN

**WASHINGTON:** Fabio, the golden-haired model who graced the cover of hundreds of romance novels, was wrapping up Thanksgiving dinner at Donald Trump's South Florida club when the president-elect began making the rounds to greet his guests. Fabio, who goes by his first name only, said he hit it off with the newly elected Republican, who asked the brawny model how he stays in shape. On a second visit to the Mar-a-Lago club around New Year's, Fabio huddled with incoming White House press secretary Sean Spicer and offered his assistance on veterans' issues. "I want to help," said Fabio, who plans to be in Washington for Trump's Jan 20 inauguration.

Fabio's embrace of Trump puts him in an exclusive and eclectic club: celebrities who not only support the president-elect, but are willing to do so publicly. The entertainment industry's liberal bent, combined with election-season outrage over Trump's controversial comments on women and minorities, left Trump persona non grata with many A-listers, particularly those who have rolled in President Barack Obama's circles. While most modern presidents have had a celebrity clique, Obama's crowd has been especially glitzy. Beyoncé performed at both of his inaugurations. Ellen DeGeneres and John Legend hobnobbed at his 55th birthday party.

A slew of famous faces attended the president and first lady Michelle Obama's farewell bash Friday night at the White House, and some

shared social media posts about partying with the Obamas well into the morning. Trump, a celebrity in his own right from his days as a New York tabloid fixture and reality television host, has attracted a motley crew. Actors Scott Baio and Antonio Sabato Jr. spoke at the Republican National Convention and former Indiana University basketball coach Bob Knight appeared with Trump on the campaign trail. Actor Stephen Baldwin was among Trump's earliest celebrity endorsers, despite having been twice fired from Trump's reality show "Celebrity Apprentice."

"Let's just say, when he fired me the second time, it was between me or Gary Busey, so I was a little pissed off for a couple of weeks," joked Baldwin, who starred in 1995's "The Usual Suspects" and 1996's "Bio-Dome." Baldwin took the role of celebrity endorser seriously. Before doing interviews during the election, he said he would contact the campaign and see if there were any talking points he should emphasize. Baldwin, whose older brother Alec plays a snarling Trump on "Saturday Night Live," also stays in touch with the president-elect's son Eric, who attends the same Manhattan cigar club.

### 'A' list celebrities

Always image conscious, Trump has bristled at the notion that the entertainment industry's elite has rejected him. In December, he tweeted that "so-called 'A' list celebrities" were all seeking

tickets to his inauguration, yet few headline-making stars have been announced for the events surrounding his Jan. 20 swearing in. "They've tried to hire some of the top people in the business and nobody's interested," Hollywood publicist Howard Bragman said. "Everybody's told them no." One celebrity who has said yes? Wayne Newton, the popular Las Vegas entertainer and "Danke Schoen" singer.

Newton, who has performed for seven presidents, said he's discussed the inauguration performance with Trump, though he's not certain exactly what his role will be yet. Newton said he was disappointed that many in the Hollywood establishment are giving the inauguration a cold shoulder. "I certainly agree with their right to do and handle that in any way they choose to, but they have no idea, truly, what they're missing," Newton said. "When they look back on this at some point in time in their life, they're going to realize that they missed a truly important and magnificent moment in American history." Trump was a frequent target of celebrities throughout the campaign, particularly after the release of a video tape in which he was heard making predatory comments about women.

Hollywood kept piling on after Trump won the election, with some stars appearing in a television advertisement to encourage members of the Electoral College to switch their votes to Democrat Hillary Clinton.—AP