



Bangladesh girl burned to death on teacher's order

## US 'House of Horrors' parents jailed for torture and abuse



CUTUD, Philippines: Philippine Christian devotees are nailed to crosses during a reenactment of the Crucifixion of Christ ahead of Easter in the village of Cutud near San Fernando. Frowned upon by the Church, the ritual crucifixions and self-flagellation in the north of the country are extreme affirmations of faith performed every Easter in Asia's Catholic outpost. — AFP

# Extreme Easter: Flogging, crucifixions

## A blood-soaked display of religious fervor in the Philippines

**SAN FERNANDO:** A man was nailed to a cross with up to 10 more to follow while barefoot men beat themselves with flails on Good Friday, in a blood-soaked display of religious fervor in the Philippines. Frowned upon by the Church, the ritual crucifixions and self-flagellation in the north of the country are extreme affirmations of faith performed every Easter in Asia's Catholic outpost. Wilfredo Salvador stared at the sky and appeared to mumble a prayer after the slight 62-year-old with wild grey hair and a long beard became the first local zealot this year to hang from a wooden cross.

"I will not stop this for as long as I am alive, because this is what gives me life," said Salvador, a fisherman who has been volunteering to be crucified for 14 straight years since recovering from a nervous breakdown. Assistants costumed as Roman centurions drove eight-centimeter (three-inch)

spikes through each of his hands and feet before the wooden cross was raised briefly for the crowds to see. He was treated and bandaged at a first aid tent after the village square ritual - then nonchalantly walked back home.

Nine other men and a woman were set to be nailed to wooden crosses in three other villages in the region within the day, the local tourism office told reporters. Earlier Friday, hundreds of barefoot men wearing crowns of twigs and black shrouds walked silently on the side of a village road in the scorching tropical heat, flogging their backs with bamboo strips tied to a length of rope. While many of the 80 million Filipino Catholics spend Good Friday at church or with family, others go to these extreme lengths to atone for sins or seek divine intervention in a spectacle that has become a major tourist attraction.

"This is a religious vow. I will do this every year for as long as I am able," 38-year-old truck driver Resty David, who has been self-flagellating for half his life, told AFP. He said he also hoped it would convince God to cure his cancer-stricken brother. Blood and sweat soaked through the penitents' pants with some spectators grimacing with each strike of the lash. Some hid behind their companions to avoid the splatter of gore and ripped flesh.

Many in the crowds had driven for hours to witness the crucifixions - the frenzied climax of the day's gory spectacle that Catholics say is a re-enactment of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Gorman tourist Annika Ehlers, 24, was among them. "I'm a little bit overwhelmed. It's very intense. I haven't expected something like this," she told AFP after

watching Salvador's crucifixion. The bloody spectacle has played out every year in villages around the city of San Fernando, about 70 kilometers (40 miles) north of Manila, despite Church entreaties to spend Lent in quiet prayer and reflection.

"The crucifixion and death of Jesus are more than enough to redeem humanity from the effects of sins. They are once in a lifetime events that need not be repeated," Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines official Father Jerome Secillano said. "Holy Week... is not the time to showcase man's propensity for entertainment and Pharisaical tendencies," he added. Nearly 80 percent of people in the Philippines are Catholic, a legacy of the nation's 300 years of Spanish colonial rule that ended at the turn of the 20th century.— AFP

## Journalist shot dead in N Ireland's unrest

**DERRY:** A journalist was shot dead during riots in Northern Ireland in what police were treating as a terrorist incident following the latest upsurge in violence to shake the troubled region. "Lyra McKee was murdered during orchestrated violence in Creggan" in the city of Derry, also known as Londonderry, police chief Mark Hamilton said in a statement.

Republican political party Saoradh said a "republican volunteer" was trying to "defend people" from the police late Thursday when the shot was fired that "accidentally" hit McKee. Belfast-born McKee, 29, had earlier posted an image from the riots, accompanied by the words "Derry tonight. Absolute madness." Images of the unrest posted on social media showed a car and van ablaze and hooded individuals throwing petrol bombs and fireworks at police vehicles.

Saoradh said "heavily armed" police went in to Creggan "to attack republicans in advance of upcoming Easter Rising Commemorations." "The inevitable reaction to such an incursion was resistance from the youth of Creggan," added the statement. Police chief Hamilton said "a single gunman fired shots in a residential area of the city and as a result wounded Ms McKee. "We are treating this as a terrorist incident and we have launched a murder enquiry," he added. Police later said that they were hunting for more than one person.

Some officials blamed Thursday's unrest on the "New IRA", a republican paramilitary group opposed to the shift towards non-violent tactics to bring about a united Ireland. The Saoradh party denies claims it is the political wing of the New IRA. McKee had written for The Atlantic magazine and BuzzFeed News and was named

by Forbes Magazine in 2016 as one of their "30 under 30" outstanding figures, according to her literary agent Janklow & Nesbit. Her partner Sara Canning paid tribute, saying "our hopes and dreams and all of her amazing potential was snuffed out by this single barbaric act."

### 'Truly senseless'

Thursday's unrest raised memories of past decades of violence in Northern Ireland. "We cannot allow those who want to propagate violence, fear and hate to drag us back to the past," said Ireland's Prime Minister Leo Varadkar. "This was an act of fear. This was an act of hate. This was an act of cowardice. Those who carried it out do not share the values of our nation, nor our Republic," he said.

British counterpart Theresa May said the killing was "shocking and truly senseless". Visiting US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi joined in a minute's silence, saying it was "especially poignant" on Good Friday. The violence erupted in the run-up to the Easter weekend, when Republicans opposed to the British presence in Northern Ireland mark the anniversary of a 1916 uprising against British rule. A car-bombing and the hijacking of two vans in Londonderry earlier this year were also blamed on the New IRA.

Michelle O'Neill, the deputy leader of Irish republican party Sinn Fein, condemned the killing. "My heart goes out to the family of the young woman shot dead by so-called dissidents," she wrote on Twitter. "This was an attack on the community, an attack on the peace process." Arlene Foster, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, which is in favor of Britain's presence in Northern Ireland, described the death as "heartbreaking news". "Those who brought guns onto our streets in the 70s, 80s & 90s were wrong. It is equally wrong in 2019. No one wants to go back," she wrote on Twitter.

### History of Troubles

The Good Friday Agreement in 1998 largely brought an end to three decades of sectarian bloodshed in Northern Ireland between republican and unionist paramilitaries, as well as British armed forces, in a period known as "the Troubles". Some 3,500 people were killed in the conflict-many at the hands of the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Some have expressed fears that recent attacks could be a sign that paramilitaries are seeking to exploit the current political turbulence over Northern Ireland and its border with the Republic of Ireland caused by Brexit. Derry was the scene of one of the darkest episodes in the Troubles in 1972, known as Bloody Sunday, when British troops opened fire on a civil rights demonstration and killed 13 people. A 14th victim later died of his wounds. A former British soldier was charged with murder last month over the killings. — AFP



DERRY: A picture shows an Irish Republican Army (IRA) sniper warning sign over-looking the Bogside area of Derry in Northern Ireland yesterday. Two teenagers have been arrested over the killing of journalist Lyra McKee shot dead in Derry, Northern Ireland. — AFP

## Indian amputates finger after voting for wrong party

**NEW DELHI:** An Indian man chopped off his index finger in desperation after voting for the wrong party in the country's national election. Pawan Kumar became confused by the symbols on the electronic voting machine and voted for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party instead of its regional rival in Uttar Pradesh state on Thursday, his brother told AFP. Distraught, the 25-year-old Kumar went home and chopped off his finger with a meat cleaver. Even though votes are cast electronically at polling stations, the index finger of every voter is marked with indelible ink after they cast ballots, to make sure they do not vote again.

"He was very happy that he was voting for the first time ever," Kumar's brother Kailash Chandra told AFP by phone. "But once he realized his mistake, he was so distraught that he chopped off his inked finger." "Every time he saw his ink-marked finger, he felt angry," Chandra said the family rushed Kumar to the hospital, and videos circulating online showed the first-time voter sporting a bandaged hand standing over the butcher's knife outside a toilet.

"I wanted to vote for elephant but it went to flower," Kumar says on one video, adding that he had not been pressured to cast his ballot for a particular party. The lotus is the symbol of the Bharatiya Janata Party while the Bahujan Samaj Party, part of an alliance fighting Modi in the northern state, uses the elephant. The party symbol is used on voting machines along with the candidate's photographs. Thursday was the second day of India's marathon election which started on April 11 and runs through to May 19. — AFP