

## Filipino nailed to cross prays for Belgium, Philippines

By Rene Casibang  
The Associated Press

**S**AN PEDRO CUTUD, The Philippines — A Filipino devotee was nailed to a cross for the 30th time in an annual Good Friday ritual, which he dedicated to peace in Belgium and other countries targeted by Islamic extremists.

Ruben Enaje and 14 other men, some screaming in pain, were nailed to wooden crosses by actors dressed as Roman centurions in San Pedro Cutud and two other rice farming villages in Pampanga province north of Manila, according to organizers.

Thousands of foreign and local tourists snapped pictures of the devotees, who re-enacted Jesus Christ's suffering and death in scorching heat. Other devotees flogged their own bloodied backs with whips while walking barefoot around the dusty villages.

The gory spectacle reflects the Philippines' unique brand of Catholicism, which merges church traditions with folk superstitions. Many of the mostly impoverished penitents undergo the ritual to atone for sins, pray for the sick or for a better life, and to give thanks for what they believe were god-given miracles.

Enaje, a 55-year-old sign painter, began the annual ordeal after he fell from a three-story building in 1985 and survived nearly unscathed.

Asked what he was praying for this year, Enaje said he was saddened by the recent bombings at the Brussels airport and subway station and other



**THE PENITENT PAINTER.** Filipino penitents are nailed to wooden crosses during a re-enactment during Good Friday rituals at Cutud, in Pampanga province, the Philippines. The Filipino devotees had themselves nailed to crosses to remember Jesus Christ's suffering and death. (AP Photo/Linus Escandor II)

attacks in the Middle East that hurt innocent people.

"What are they fighting for?" Enaje asked, referring to Islamic State group militants who have claimed responsibility for the Brussels attacks. "Even the innocent are not spared. They want to lord over the world, but that can't be allowed to happen."

He expressed concern over reports that Islamic State extremists may have already influenced Muslim militants in the southern Philippines.

The Lenten rituals are frowned upon by church leaders in the Philippines, Asia's largest Roman Catholic nation, especially if the religious spectacle is used to boost tourism. The event, however, has persisted and has become an awaited tourist

attraction in San Pedro Cutud village, about 45 miles north of Manila.

After 30 years, Enaje said he has thought of ending his involvement in the crucifixions in the next few years, although he remains physically fit to endure the experience, which has deepened his faith.

The intensity of the pain, he said, has never changed in each of the years that the four-inch stainless steel nails were hammered through the same spots in his palms and feet. When the cross is hoisted up, the movement adds to the suffering, he said.

"The only thing in my mind is that god went through worse," Enaje said.

Associated Press writer Jim Gomez in Manila, the Philippines contributed to this report.

## Zuckerberg's run in Beijing's toxic air stirs Chinese public

By Didi Tang  
The Associated Press

**B**EIJING — A photo of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg jogging in downtown Beijing's notorious smog prompted a torrent of amusing comments and some mockery on Chinese social media.

Zuckerberg is a favorite personality among the Chinese public, despite Facebook being banned in the country alongside other overseas social-media platforms. He's also become somewhat notorious for persistent yet so far futile efforts to woo leaders enforcing China's strict online censorship.

The young tech tycoon was in Beijing to attend an economic forum, where some of the world's business and finance leaders rub shoulders with senior Chinese politicians.

Zuckerberg posted the photo to his Facebook page of him and five others running through Tiananmen Square with the famous gate to the Forbidden City's imperial palace in the background. None wore the air-filtering face masks that are ubiquitous in Beijing and other Chinese cities.

At the time the photo was taken, Beijing's air pollution index was well into the hazardous zone at about 15 times the level considered safe by the World Health Organization. Health experts urge people to avoid any outdoor activities on such heavily polluted days.

Chinese residents wondered aloud whether Zuckerberg's jog was yet another gesture aimed at pleasing the Chinese authorities, who claim they are gradually winning the battle against air pollution.

Previous efforts include Zuckerberg's telling China's top internet official on a visit to Facebook's California headquarters in 2014 that he was engrossed in Chinese President Xi Jinping's collected speeches. The same year he famously engaged his audience in halting Chinese at a forum at prestigious Tsinghua University while avoiding mention of the government ban on Facebook.

"Kissing up?" commented Tom Wang, a Chinese environmentalist, who reposted Zuckerberg's running photo and added a graphic of Beijing's air quality readings from

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