



# FLASHBACK 2015

*This was the year of the great unraveling, with international orders and borders challenged or broken, with thousands of deaths, vast flows of migrants and terrorist attacks on some of the most cherished symbols of civilization, both Western and Muslim. So much uncertainty, anxiety, anomie, so many civilian victims: A crazed German pilot flew his plane into the French Alps; a Russian plane was destroyed over Sinai by what seemed to have been a bomb; attackers with automatic weapons killed 130 people in Paris in restaurants, a stadium and a concert hall. Even the Earth seemed slightly unhinged — the ice caps melting, huge snowstorms and floods, smogs engulfing cities, a major earthquake in Nepal. But not all of the memorable events of the year were about loss, violence and terrorism. The changing climate brought a historic if relatively toothless deal to cut carbon emissions. The world finally reached a deal to limit Iran's nuclear ambitions and at fag end of the year, Russia agreed to a peace roadmap for Syria. Breaking the ice, The United States at last recognised Cuba. And in Myanmar, military government seemed at last to recognize the political victory of Aung San Suu Kyi.*

2015 is a year that is leaving us with bitter-sweet memories.

SOURCE: AGENCIES, WEBSITES

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS, AP

## MAJOR EVENTS

- CHARLIE HEBDO ATTACK (JANUARY 7-9):** Seventeen people are slaughtered in attacks in Paris on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and a Jewish supermarket two days later.
- KOBANE VICTORY (JANUARY 26):** The Islamic State jihadist group is driven out of the Syrian town of Kobane on the Turkish border after more than four months of fighting.
- UKRAINE TRUCE (FEBRUARY 12):** The Ukraine government and rebels agree to a "Minsk II" peace roadmap, but the truce remains fragile. A second truce is signed on September 1.
- NETANYAHU RE-ELECTED (MARCH 17):** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud wins legislative elections. Continued settlement-building prompts renewed violence which so far killed 136 Palestinians and 19 Israelis.



- TUNISIA TERROR ATTACKS (MARCH 18):** An attack on the Bardo Museum in Tunis kills 21 foreign tourists and a Tunisian policeman. On June 26 an attack at a holiday resort kills 38 foreign tourists, most of them British, while on November 24 the bombing of a presidential guard bus kills at least 12 people. All the attacks are claimed by IS.
- GERMANWINGS PLANE CRASH (MARCH 24):** An Airbus owned by German budget airliner Germanwings crashes in the French Alps with all 150 people on board declared dead. Investigators says co-pilot Andreas Lubitz deliberately crashed the plane.

**GARISSA UNIVERSITY MASSACRE (APRIL 2):** At least 148 people, mostly students, are massacred when Somalia's Shebab Islamist group attacks Kenya's Garissa university.



- UK GENERAL ELECTION (MAY 7):** Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservatives win a general election victory that opens the door to a national referendum on EU membership.
- US CHURCH SHOOTING (JUNE 17):** A white gunman kills nine black people at a historic black church in Charleston, South Carolina.



**GAY EQUALITY IN US (JUNE 26):** The US Supreme Court rules that gay marriage is a right in all US states.

- GREECE DEBT DEAL (JULY 13):** After protracted negotiations, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras accepts a three-year 86-billion-euro (\$93 billion) EU bailout that saves it from crashing out of the eurozone.
- RUSSIA JOINS SYRIA WAR (SEPTEMBER 30):** Russia launches air strikes on Syria to fight Islamic State militants.
- US STRIKES MSF HOSPITAL (OCTOBER 3):** A US raid on a hospital in the northern city of Kunduz kills 42 during a Taliban offensive on the city.
- CHINA ENDS ONE CHILD POLICY (OCTOBER 29):** Beijing announces the end of its hugely controversial one-child policy.
- PLANE CRASH IN EGYPT (OCTOBER 31):** A Russian passenger jet is downed on its way from Egypt's Sharm el-Sheikh resort to Saint Petersburg, killing all 224 on board. IS claims attack.



**TURKEY DOWNS RUSSIAN JET (NOVEMBER 24):** Nato member Turkey shoots down a Russian fighter jet on the Syrian border, saying it had violated Turkish airspace, sparking a bitter diplomatic row between the two countries.

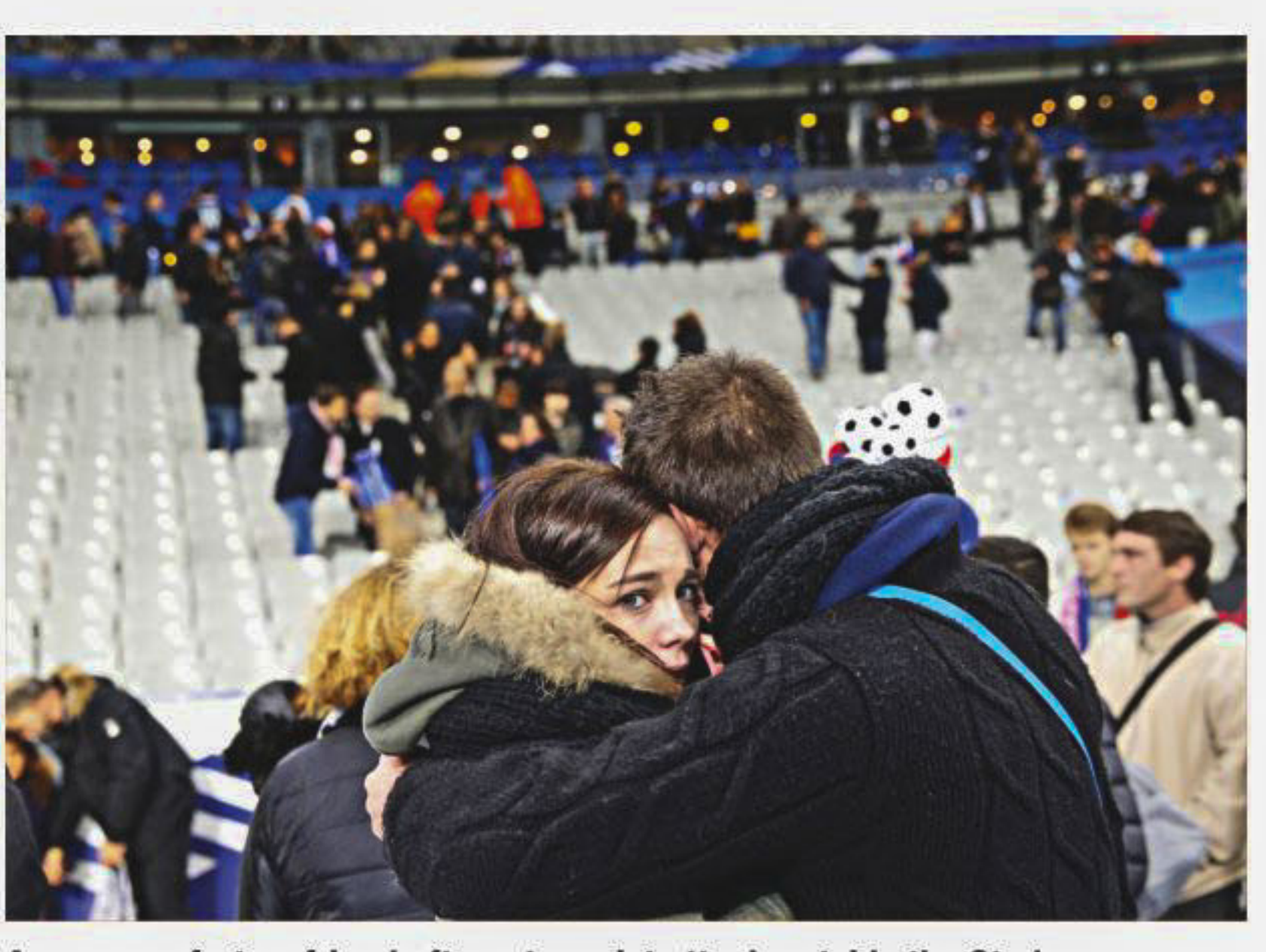
- CALIFORNIA SHOOTING (DECEMBER 2):** A radicalised Muslim couple massacres 14 people in San Bernardino, California, before they are killed in a shootout with the police.
- VENEZUELA POLLS (DECEMBER 6):** A centre-right coalition wins the first opposition parliamentary majority in 16 years amid an economic crisis in Venezuela.
- SAUDI WOMEN WIN IN POLLS (DECEMBER 12):** At least 20 women win seats for the first time in municipal polls, though many restrictions on women remain in the ultra-conservative kingdom.
- UN ADOPTS SYRIA PEACE PLAN (DECEMBER 18):** The UN Security Council unanimously adopts a resolution endorsing a peace process to put an end to the nearly five-year war in Syria, without touching on one of the most contentious issues in the peace effort: the fate of Bashar al-Assad.

## NOTABLE DEATHS

- JANUARY 23:** Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz aged around 90 after suffering from pneumonia.
- MARCH 22:** Singapore's first prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, aged 91 in hospital after suffering from pneumonia.
- MARCH 26:** Swedish poet Tomas Transtromer, who won the 2011 Nobel Prize for Literature, aged 83.
- APRIL 13:** Germany's Nobel-winning author, Gunter Grass aged 87, in hospital in the northern city of Luebeck.
- MAY 14:** BB King, the face of American blues worldwide, aged 89 in Las Vegas.
- MAY 23:** US mathematician and Nobel Laureate, John Nash aged 86. Oscar winning film 'A Beautiful Mind' was based on his life.
- JULY 10:** Egyptian-born "Doctor Zhivago" film legend Omar Sharif, of a heart attack in a Cairo hospital aged 83.
- JULY 27:** India's "people's president" and a career scientist "A P J" Abdul Kalam, of a heart attack in Shillong, India.

## IS GOES GLOBAL

From the blood spilled in the streets of Paris to the San Bernardino shootings, the world in 2015 showed its vulnerability to the brand of terror perpetrated by Islamic State jihadists. Over the past 12 months, the group that took root in Iraq and in the chaos of the Syrian war has turned its focus from territorial gains to hitting at "distant enemies". It hit Europe, Africa besides its self declared caliphate in the Middle East. In Afghanistan, it challenged Taliban. Numerous terrorist groups around the world also pledged allegiance to it and carried out attacks on its name.



A man comforts a friend after a terrorist attack outside the Stade de France stadium on Nov 13, 2015.

## Terror in Paris

France was stung with tragedy this year following separate attacks in its capital Paris by Islamist militants. The first attack in January saw 12 people killed when terrorists opened fire in the office of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo. Last month IS terrorists killed 130 people in a string of bombings and shootings in Paris.

## IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL



After a decade of diplomatic efforts that frequently appeared on the verge of collapse, the United States and its international partners, the UK, France, Germany, Russia and China — collectively known as the P5+1 — reached a historic accord with Iran to limit Tehran's nuclear ability in return for lifting international oil and financial sanctions. The goal of the agreement is to limit the country's nuclear activities to peaceful purposes, and to block Iran's ability to construct a nuclear bomb.

## REFUGEE CRISIS IN EUROPE

It was the year of a migration crisis unprecedented in modern times, the greatest movement of refugees in Europe since the Second World War. Fleeing bloodshed and chaos at home, they have made extraordinary journeys that have tested the human spirit almost to destruction. More than one million refugees and migrants arrived in the European Union in 2015, while almost 3,700 died or went missing in perilous journeys which reaped huge profit for smugglers, according to the International Organisation for Migration.

## MAKKAH HAJJ STAMPEDE

The deadliest accident to befall the hajj pilgrimage in a quarter-century occurred this year with an estimated 717 (official Saudi figures) pilgrims from around the world killed and more than 850 injured. The stampede was the latest in a series of crises that plagued the pilgrimage this year. Two weeks earlier, a crane collapsed on the Grand Mosque in Makkah killing more than 100 visitors. In December, the AP placed the stampede death toll at 2,411.



Raul Castro and Obama break the ice of US-Cuba ties in 2015.

## US-CUBA RE-ESTABLISH TIES

Fifty-four years of hostilities between the United States and Cuba officially ended this year, at least symbolically, when the Stars and Stripes was raised over the newly opened US embassy in Havana. There have been years of embargo and tensions since diplomatic relations were broken off in early 1961.



## Climate accord

One hundred and ninety-five nations reached a landmark accord that will, for the first time, commit nearly every country to lowering planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions to help stave off the most drastic effects of climate change in Paris. The accord, which UN diplomats have been working toward for nine years, changes that dynamic by requiring action from every country, rich or poor. Supporters of the deal are calling it "the end of the era of fossil fuels". Scientists say it will cut global greenhouse gas emissions by half as is necessary to stave off an increase in atmospheric temperatures of 2-degrees celsius (3.6-degrees Fahrenheit). That is the point at which, scientific studies have concluded, the world will be locked into a future of devastating consequences, including rising sea levels, severe droughts and flooding, widespread food and water shortages and more destructive storms.

## GAME CHANGERS

- ANGELA MERKEL** The German chancellor's open-door policy brought around a million refugees to Germany over 2015. Merkel's authority as the de facto leader of Europe was also on display during Greece debt crisis. Merkel was also voted Time magazine's Person of the Year.
- VLADIMIR PUTIN** He was shunned by world leaders and put under sanctions for Russia's role in the 2014 standoff in Ukraine. But Putin was still able to impose himself on this year's most pressing problems, returning to the diplomatic centre stage over the Syrian conflict.
- DONALD TRUMP** Despite making headlines all around the world often for making highly controversial comments on rivals, race and religion, the provocative businessman seems unshakable from the top of the Republican polls. For any other candidate, any one of these would have spelled political suicide. Yet he seems unstoppable, leaving many wondering whether the "laws of political



## Suu Kyi wins Myanmar election

Myanmar's Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi spent nearly 18 years under house arrest, she is barred from being president because her husband was British, and the military is keeping a quarter of seats in parliament for itself -- and even so, her National League for Democracy won so many seats in parliament she looks set to be calling the shots. She also won the last free vote in 1990, but the military ignored the result. The NLD won 887 seats, or 77.1%, providing Suu Kyi with a majority in both houses of parliament. The military-aligned USDP won only 117 or 10% of the seats.



## Deadly tremors hit Nepal

Deadly earthquakes twice rocked the top of the world in April, killing more than 8,000 people in Nepal, India and China, in the worst natural disaster of the year. Nepal saw the worst damage and nearly all of the casualties when the 7.8-magnitude earthquake hit on April 25 near its capital, Kathmandu. The shaking triggered an avalanche on Mount Everest that took the lives of 19 people at base camp. The recovery effort turned tragic after less than three weeks, when a 7.3-magnitude rocked the area on May 12, killing dozens more.