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OFFICE OF THE ARMY CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS NEWS CLIPPINGS

17 April 2016

Sunday

TABLE OF CONTENTS

17 APRIL 2016

PAGE NR.	TITLE	WRITER	NEWSPAPER
1	Weather Forecast		PDI p. 19
NATIONAL NEWS			
2	76 Kidapawan farmers released	Evelyn Macairan	Phil Star p.1
ARMY RELATED NEWS			
3	4 Indonesians seized off Tawi-Tawi	Jaime Laude	Phil Star p.1
4	Suspected Abus seize more Indonesians	Julie Alipala	PDI p.A2
5	Four more Indonesians kidnapped in RP waters	AFP	Daily Tribune p.1
6-7	Troops track down kidnappers of 4 Indonesians tugboat crewmen	PNA	Business Mirror p.A3
8	4 pang Indonesians binihag ng Sayyaf, 1 binaril kritikal	Joy Cantos	PM p2
9-10	Palace: Sayyaf on the run	Aurea Calica	Phil Star p.1
11	The bearers of the sword	Epi Fabonan III	Phil Star p.1
12	4 more outlaws killed as AFP starts to close in on fleeing ASG in Basilan	Nonoy Lacson	Mla Bulletin p.19
13	ASG pursued with vigor, valor - Palace	Madel Namit	Tempo p.7
14	IS alarms priest	Leslie Aquino	Mla Bulletin p.7
15	Army widens anti-insurgency drive gain in Davao	Paul Gutierrez	People Tonight p.1
16	Church leaders intervene to secure release of POW held by NPA		Mla Bulletin p.19
17	NPAs kill CAA in Albay attack	Danny Estacio	Mla Bulletin p.17
AFP RELATED NEWS			
18	Iriberry bids emotional farewell to SOLCOM	Danny Estacio	Mla Bulletin p.16
19-20	'China misunderstands Phi-US military activities	Aurea Calica	Phil Star p.1
21	Palace: China misreading PH-US military exercises	Gil Cabacungan	PDI p.A21
22-24	US shows power in Asia: carter says America's presence due to China's behavior in sea row		PDI p.A1
EDITORIAL / OPINION			


Army Core Purpose: Serving the people. Securing the land.

25-26	War in Scarborough Shoal?	Elfren Cruz	Phil Star p.13
ONLINE NEWS			
27	Abu Sayyaf death toll climbs to 37 in Basilan offensive	Roel Pareño	www.philstar.com
28	WestMincom tiniyak na nag-iimbestiga na sa torture issue sa umano'y 3 ASG sa Basilan		www.bomboradyo.com
29	Militiaman killed, another hurt in NPA Albay attack	Priam F. Nepomuceno	www.pna.gov.ph
	Abu Sayyaf sets ransom deadline	Julie M. Aurelio	www.inquirer.net
30-42	4 Indonesian crew members kidnapped	Roel Pareño	www.philstar.com
	Armed men seize 4 Indonesian crew members off Tawi-Tawi	Julie Alipala	www.inquirer.net
	WestMinCom inaalam kung saan dinala ng ASG ang panibagong mga dinukot		www.bomboradyo.com
	US defense chief visits aircraft carrier in South China Sea	Lolita C. Baldor	www.philstar.com
	LOOK: US and PH defense chiefs visit South China Sea	Frances Mangosing	www.inquirer.net
	PH to China: No US militarization of West PH Sea	Michael Bueza	www.rappler.com
	US defense chief visits US warship in South China Sea	Julie M. Aurelio	www.inquirer.net

17 April 2016


PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Page: 19

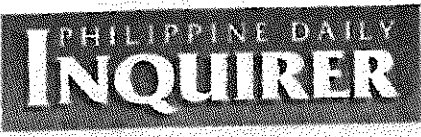


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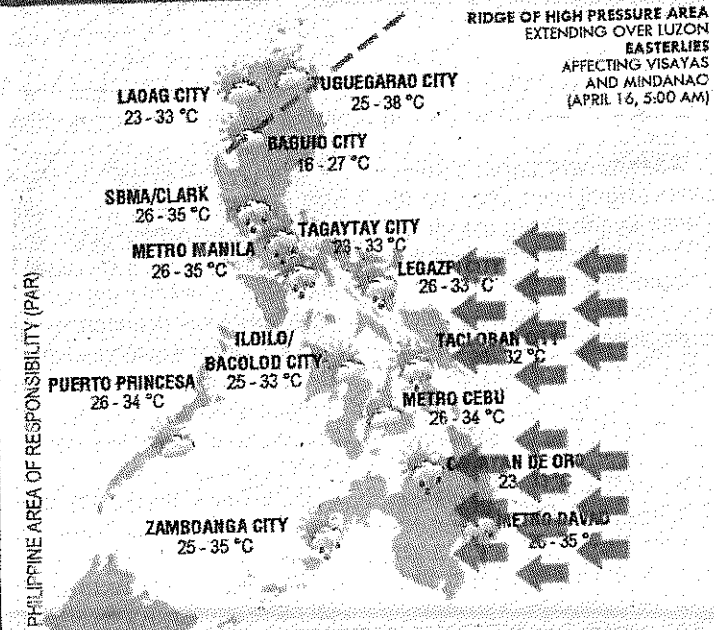


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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

TODAY'S WEATHER FORECAST | APRIL 17, 2016 | SUNDAY



PHILIPPINE AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY (PAR)

LAOAG CITY 23-33 °C

TUGUEGARAO CITY 25-38 °C

BAGUIO CITY 16-27 °C

SBMA/CLARK 26-35 °C

METRO MANILA 26-35 °C

TAGAYTAY CITY 23-33 °C

LEGAZPI 26-33 °C

ILOILO/BACOLOD CITY 25-33 °C

TACLOBAN CITY 32 °C

PUERTO PRINCESA 26-34 °C

METRO CEBU 26-34 °C

CAGAYAN DE ORO 23-33 °C

ZAMBOANGA CITY 25-35 °C

METRO DAVAO 26-35 °C

SUNRISE 5:41 AM

SUNSET 6:10 PM

MOONRISE 2:24 PM

MOONSET 2:21 AM

FIRST QUARTER APR 14 11:59 AM

FULL MOON APR 22 1:24 PM

LOW TIDE 1:45 AM

HIGH TIDE 6:38 PM

MANILA SOUTH HARBOR

0.02 Meter




0.77 Meter

Partly cloudy skies

Partly cloudy to at times cloudy with rainshowers and/or thunderstorms

	APR 16	APR 17	APR 18	APR 19
METRO MANILA	26-35 °C	25-35 °C	23-33 °C	23-33 °C
TUGUEGARAO	25-38 °C	25-38 °C	27-33 °C	26-33 °C
LAOAG	24-33 °C	24-33 °C	26-34 °C	26-34 °C
BAGUIO	16-28 °C	16-28 °C	26-33 °C	25-33 °C
SBMA/CLARK	26-35 °C	25-35 °C	26-34 °C	26-33 °C
TAGAYTAY	23-33 °C	23-33 °C	23-33 °C	23-33 °C
LEGAZPI	27-33 °C	26-33 °C	26-33 °C	26-33 °C
PUERTO PRINCESA	26-34 °C	26-34 °C	26-34 °C	26-34 °C
ILOILO/BACOLOD	26-33 °C	25-33 °C	26-33 °C	25-33 °C
METRO CEBU	26-34 °C	26-33 °C	26-34 °C	26-33 °C
TACLOBAN	26-32 °C	26-33 °C	26-33 °C	26-33 °C
CAGAYAN DE ORO	23-33 °C	24-33 °C	24-33 °C	24-33 °C
METRO DAVAO	25-36 °C	25-35 °C	25-35 °C	25-35 °C
ZAMBOANGA	25-34 °C	25-35 °C	25-35 °C	25-35 °C

Watch PANAHON.TV everyday at 5:00 AM on PTV (Channel 4).

AIR 21

SAGOT KO, PADALA MOI

17 April 2016



Page: 1

76 Kidapawan farmers released

By EVELYN MACAIRAN

The 76 farmers arrested during a protest in Kidapawan City last April 1 have been released on bail, Public Attorney's Office chief Persida Acosta said yesterday.

Acosta said the farmers were released through the efforts of the National Union of People's Lawyers

(NUPL) and Karapatan human rights group, who paid P6,000 bail for each direct assault charge filed against the 76 farmers.

Two of the farmers identified as Ruben Carlos Mangga and Ponciano de la Peña Paunil, however, are still in detention.

Turn to Page 9

76 Kidapawan From Page 1

Acosta said the two might be released anytime, saying their names were misplaced during the process of paying the bail bond.

Acosta added the hearing on the motion for reconsideration on the denial to quash the charges of direct assault, frustrated murder and illegal assembly charges

against the farmers has been scheduled on April 25.

The pre-trial of the three accused in the frustrated homicide has also been set on May 4.

NUPL lawyer Sarah Villamor said two of the farmers who were wounded in the scuffle with the police have been discharged from hospital.

Villamor said Alfie Awe and Darwin Magyao were released the other day but reportedly boarded the vehicle owned by the Mayor of Arakan.

She said the NUPL will continue to monitor the whereabouts of Awe and Magyao and their condition.

Police brought the arrested farmers to the Kidapawan City Convention Center after the violent dispersal last April 1.

On Thursday, 28 female farmers

were transferred to the North Cotabato Provincial Jail.

Police, on the other hand, confirmed the release of all the farmers.

"All the detained Kidapawan protesters were already released after they have posted bail... To date, no more protester is detained," said provincial police spokesman Sr. Supt. Jose Briones.

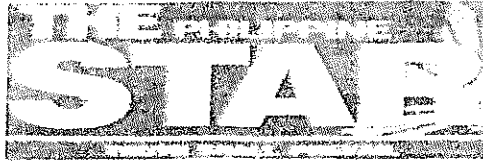
Three people were killed and scores

hurt after police dispersed at least 6,000 protesters in Kidapawan last April 1.

The farmers were demanding rice supply from the government, pointing out their lands have been affected by the severe drought brought by the El Niño phenomenon.

The lawmen involved in the violent dispersal are under investigation. – With Mike Frialde, Rhodina Villanueva

17 April 2016



Page: 1

4 Indonesians seized off Tawi-Tawi

By ROEL PAREÑO

Gunmen have kidnapped four Indonesian sailors and shot and wounded one crewmember of a tugboat near the border of Malaysia in Tawi-Tawi late Friday.

The gunmen on a speedboat intercepted the *TB Henry* with its crew of 10 Indonesians off Pondo Sibugal in Si-

tangkai, an island town of Tawi-Tawi, Maj. Filemon Tan, spokesman of Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom), said yesterday.

Tan said one of the crewmembers was wounded when the gunmen fired on the tugboat.

He said about seven

Turn to Page 11

4 Indonesians From Page 1

gunmen took four crewmembers and transferred them into their speedboat, leaving six others, including the

wounded.

The tugboat was carrying coal from Cebu to Tarakan in Indonesian Borneo when the



A handout picture made available by the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Force Agency shows its personnel helping an injured Indonesian, one of four sailors kidnapped by unidentified gunmen in Tawi-Tawi on Friday.

EPA

kidnapping occurred.

Tan said the survivors proceeded to Sabah where they were assisted by Malaysian authorities in bringing the wounded victim to a hospital for treatment.

"The incident happened late Friday in international waters. Four Indonesian seamen were abducted by the kidnappers. One man was shot and is being treated at a hospital," Sabah police chief Abdul Rashid Harun said.

No group has claimed responsibility but if the Abu Sayyaf is confirmed to be behind the kidnapping, it would be their third such hostage taking in as many weeks and comes amid a surge in such attacks.

A batch of 10 Indonesian tugboat crewmembers were also abducted last March 26 off East Kalimantan, Indonesia while en route to Manila.

The Indonesian tugboat *TB*

Brama was recovered days later off Languyan town in Tawi-Tawi with no sign of the victims.

On April 1, four Malaysian sailors were kidnapped from a ship near Sabah's Ligitan island. It is still unconfirmed who was responsible.

Initial information indicated they may have been taken by the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu, a remote southern island that is a hideout of the militant outfit.

In a bid to curb kidnappings, Malaysia has imposed a temporary ban on the trade route between Sabah and the southern Philippines.

"The government has suspended barter trade between the two regions until a comprehensive plan is formulated to ensure the safety and security of Sabah state. It is a temporary ban," marine police chief Abdul Rahim Abdullah said.

"We have deployed marine police boats along with ships

from the maritime enforcement agency and the navy to enforce the ban," he added.

Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) executive secretary Laisa Alamia said the trade blockade imposed by Malaysia has already taken a toll on traders in Tawi-Tawi, a traditional barter trading route in the southern backdoor of the country.

Tan added Westmincom chief Lt. Gen. Mayoralgo dela Cruz will be meeting with his Malaysian counterpart next week to discuss measures to address the spate of kidnappings occurring in the border.

Tan said possible joint patrol will be among the issues that will be taken up, although both countries have been engaged in annual joint border patrol exercises.

Noel Choong, head of the International Maritime Bureau (IMB)'s Kuala Lumpur-based

Piracy Reporting Center, said the shipping community had expressed concern over the rise in attacks.

"Everyone is concerned as the attacks could hurt trade. Operating costs will go up if they were to use a longer but safer route," he said.

"IMB fears such attacks will continue to escalate. How can seamen defend themselves against militants armed with high-powered guns and fast boats?" he added.

Many Western and other embassies routinely issue warnings against traveling to most of the Philippines' Muslim-populated southern regions, which lie just northeast of Sabah, because of the risk of being abducted by the Abu Sayyaf.

In the past Abu Sayyaf has mainly targeted tourists as they can demand high ransom for foreigners.

- AFP, Jaime Laude

17 April 2016

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Page: 12

Suspected Abus seize more Indonesians

ZAMBOANGA CITY—Speedboat-riding gunmen snatched four Indonesians and shot another one aboard two tugboats in the waters between Tawi-Tawi and Sabah on Friday, authorities reported yesterday.

It was the third assault on vessels plying Southern Philippine waters this month and brought to 23 the number of persons of various nationalities abducted by suspected Islamist militants since last year.

Maj. Filemon Tan Jr., spokesperson of the Western Mindanao Command, told Reuters seven gunmen in a blue speedboat attacked two Indonesian flagged tugboats around 6:30 p.m. off Sitangkai in Tawi-Tawi, near

the border with Sabah state.

"We don't exactly know who took them but the only lawless group operating in that area is the Abu Sayyaf," Tan said, adding that 10 Indonesians and four Malaysians were also abducted in two separate incidents early this month in the south.

The Indonesian foreign ministry issued a statement saying four Indonesian crew were taken captive after the gunmen attacked the tugboats, TB Henry and TB Cristy, on their way to Kalimantan from Cebu. Six other crewmen were left behind but one was shot.

"He is in stable condition now," the foreign ministry said, adding that Malaysian water police evacuated the wounded crewmen to a hospital in Lahad Datu in eastern Sabah state, where the two tugboats were towed to safety.

The victims were identified as Indonesians Mohammad Ariyanti Misnan (boat master), Lorens M.P.S (chief master), Dede Irfan Hilmi (second officer) and Samsir (seaman). The one shot was identified as Lambas Simanungkalit.

The al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf,

which is known for extortion, kidnappings, beheadings and bombings, has stepped up its activities on the remote islands.

Last week, the terrorists linked to the Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the killing of 18 soldiers and the wounding of more than 50 others in an ambush on nearby Basilan island, prompting a massive Army offensive with artillery and aerial bombings. The military claimed 28 rebels had died in the weeklong fighting.

Other hostages

On nearby Jolo island, the militants gave a final deadline on April 25 for payment of P300 million (\$6.5 million) ransom for each of two Canadians and a Norwegian captive otherwise they would be beheaded.

Suspected Abu Sayyaf terrorists are also holding other foreigners, including one from the Netherlands and one from Japan.

There were reports the 10 Indonesian seamen kidnapped in late March were taken by an Abu Sayyaf faction to Sulu, a known hideout of the terrorist group. Someone claim-

ing to be with the Abu Sayyaf had called the vessel's owners to demand a ransom for the sailors' release.

The abductions occurring between Sabah and Mindanao prompted Malaysian authorities on April 9 to shut down cross-border trading between Sabah and the Philippines, a government official said.

The Malaysian government has shut down its Sabah border with the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to cross-border or barter trade in protest of the recent kidnapping, Laisa Alamia, ARMM executive secretary, told reporters on Thursday.

She said Malaysian authorities had put up a naval blockade between Sabah and Tawi-Tawi, the usual barter trade route.

The kidnapping activities are a major issue that is why ARMM Gov. Mujiv Hataman is currently in Manila talking to Malacañang about this, Alamia said.

Alamia said talks were being held in the hope that Kuala Lumpur would reconsider its decision. *Julie Alipala, with reports from Edwin Fernandez and Nash Maulana, Inquirer Mindanao; Reuters; AFP; AP*

17 April 2016

THE DAILY
tribune
WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

Page: 1

Four more Indonesians kidnapped in RP waters

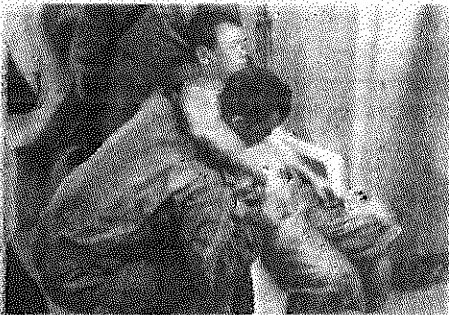
KUALA LUMPUR – Gunmen have abducted four Indonesian sailors and shot and wounded one crew member on the high seas off the east coast of Malaysia's Sabah state, waters where Abu Sayyaf bandits are known to operate, a senior police official yesterday said.

If the Abu Sayyaf is confirmed to be behind the kidnapping off Borneo, it would be their third such hostage-taking in as many weeks and comes amid a surge in such attacks.

"The incident happened late Friday in international waters. Four Indonesian seamen were abducted by the kidnappers. One man was shot and is being treated at a hospital," Sabah police chief Abdul Rashid Harun told *Agence France Presse*.

The tugboat carrying coal was sailing from Cebu back to Tarakan in Indonesian Borneo when the kidnappings occurred. Six

Turn to page 3



An undated handout by the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency shows a member of Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Force rescuing an Indonesian sailor after being shot during a kidnapping at the east coast of Malaysia's Sabah state in Lahad Datu. AFP

From page 1

other seamen, including the wounded man, managed to escape.

In a bid to curb kidnappings, Malaysia has imposed a temporary ban on the trade route between Sabah and the southern Philippines.

"The government has suspended barter trade between the two regions until a comprehensive plan is formulated to ensure the safety and security of Sabah state. It is a temporary ban," marine police chief Abdul Rahim Abdullah told AFP.

"We have deployed marine police boats along with ships from the maritime enforcement agency and the navy to enforce the ban," he added.

Concern over attacks

Noel Choong, head of the International Maritime Bureau's (IMB) Kuala Lumpur-based Piracy Reporting Center, said the

shipping community had expressed concern over the rise in attacks.

"Everyone is concerned as the attacks could hurt trade. Operating costs will go up if they were to use a longer but safer route," he said.

"IMB fears such attacks will continue to escalate. How can seamen defend themselves against militants armed with high-powered guns and fast boats?" he added.

On April 1, four Malaysian sailors were kidnapped from a ship near Sabah's Ligitan island. It is still unconfirmed who was responsible.

Several days earlier 10 Indonesian sailors were kidnapped in waters off the southern Philippines, with initial information indicating they may have been taken by an Abu Sayyaf faction to Sulu, a remote southern island that is a hideout of the militant outfit.

Someone claiming to be from Abu Sayyaf called the vessel's owners to demand a ransom for the sailors' release.

Many Western and other embassies routinely issue warnings against traveling to most of the Philippines' Muslim-populated southern regions, which lie just northeast of Sabah, because of the risk of being abducted by the group.

In the past Abu Sayyaf has mainly targeted tourists as they can demand high ransoms for foreigners.

Two Canadians and a Norwegian were kidnapped from yachts at a marina in September, with the militants setting an April deadline for a ransom to be paid.

The militants in a video demanded P1 billion for each of the three foreigners.

Since the April 8 ransom deadline passed there has been no word on the hostages' fate.

AFP

17 April 2016

BusinessMirror

Page. 63

Troops track down kidnappers of 4 Indonesian tugboat crewmembers

ZAMBOANGA CITY—The Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) has ordered its troops in the provinces of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi to monitor possible landing of a gunmen-laden speed boat bringing four Indonesian hostages.

Maj. Filemon Tan Jr., Westmincom spokesman, said the Westmincom order was issued as unidentified heavily armed men have attacked a tugboat that injured a crew member and seized four others, all Indonesians.

However, Tan said they have yet to ascertain the identities of the gunmen, as they could be pirates who are just using the names of the Abu Sayyaf Group. "There is no proof that they [Abu Sayyaf bandits] are the ones who did that [abduction]," Tan added.

He said the incident happened around 6:30 p.m. on Friday in the sea off Pondo Sibugal, Sitangkai, Tawi-Tawi. The identities of the victims were not immediately available, except that they are among the 10 Indonesian crew members of T/B (Tugboat) *Henry*, Tan said.

He added that the victims were passing the area when around seven unidentified gunmen aboard a speed boat painted gray and blue attacked them.

Tan said the gunmen seized the four Indonesians and sped off to a still undetermined direction, leaving behind the remaining six, including the wounded crewman. He said troops were sent to track down the gunmen, as well as the victims.

'Reopen border between Sabah, Sulu'

SULU—The Lupah Sug Bangsamoro Women Association Inc. based in Sulu over the weekend appealed to the Malaysian government to immediately reopen its borders in Sabah to travelers and commercial traders from the southern Philippines.

Curbing criminal activity in the cross-border area that separates Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines is not achieved by unilateral action, but requires joint policing, targeted punitive action, and the uniform application of laws against deadly shadow economies, such as piracy and kidnapping-for-ransom that plague these porous

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frontiers, the group said.

"Yet, in a perverse application of 'beggar thy neighbor policies', Malaysia imposed a blockade on Sabah in response to the kidnapping of its nationals by criminal extremists," the group said in a statement.

"This decision is arbitrary, counterproductive, and will not bring about a long-term solution to the problem of criminal terrorism that Malaysia and the Philippines both face," the statement added.

The group said the Malaysian action punishes legitimate businessmen, traders, including tourists and relatives of families living in Sabah who had no hand in the kidnapping, and are, in fact, victimized by the same piracy and other threats to their lives and livelihoods.

"By closing its borders, Malaysia succumbs to the fear and threat of criminal extremism that the perpetrators wanted to create, a threat that should unite rather than tear us apart," the women's group statement said.

The action is but a temporary

response, yet it unduly strains the fraternal and friendly relations between our countries—a solidarity nurtured too by the positive interaction and engagement between small traders, especially women, who possess strong ties of friendship with their Malaysian counterparts, the group also said.

"Communities in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi already feel the brunt of the blockade with the spike in food and petroleum prices already 70 percent to date, threatening food security in the area. This has deep economic and social repercussions to the already strained condition in Mindanao brought about by the drought and the energy crisis.

"Worse, the competition over local and more expensive resources will have ominous implications to existing grievances and conflict dynamics in the Sabah-Sulu corridor, the statement said.

The group also called on the Philippine government to dialogue with Malaysia to take collaborative and nuanced actions to address security and economic issues in its shared borders. *PNA*

17 April 2016



Pahina. 2

4 pang Indonesians binihag ng Sayyaf, 1 binaril kritikal

Apat pang Indonesians ang kinidnap habang isa naman ang nasa kritikal na kondisyon matapos na barilin ng manlaban sa mga pinaghihinang bandidong Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) sa panibagong insidente ng kidnapping sa karagatang malapit sa Pondo Sibugai, Sitangkai, Tawi-Tawi nitong Biyernes ng gabi.

Ayon kay Major Filemon Tan, Spokesman ng AFP Western Mindanao Command, taliwas sa unang napaulat na Malaysians sa isinagawang beripikasyon ay mga tripulanteng Indonesian ang panibagong biktima ng kidnapping na naganap sa lugar bandang alas-6:30 ng gabi.

“Actually yung isang nabaril ay nasaklolohan ng Malaysian authorities at dinala sa Semporna Hospital sa Malaysia nandun siya ngayon”, ani Tan na hindi naman makumpirma ang kumalat na balitang namatay ang nabaril na Indonesian dahil sa pagkakaalam niya ay kritikal lamang ito at inaalam pa kung pumanaw na.

Base sa inisyal na ulat ang mga biktima na nasa sampu ang bilang ay pawang Indonesian ay mga tripulante ng bangkang TB Henry na napadaan sa lugar

nang harangin ng 5-7 mga armadong bandido na sakay naman ng kulay asul na speed boat. Iniwan ng mga kidnapper ang anim, isa rito ay binaril pa at apat lamang ang tinangay.

Walang nagawa ang apat na biktima matapos na tutukan ng baril at puwersahang tangayin ng mga bandido patungo sa hindi pa malamang destinasyon habang ang anim ay inabandona

na sa Semporna, Malaysia.

Magugunita na noong Abril 4 ng taong ito ay apat na Malaysian na sakay ng isang tugboat ang hinarang ng mga bandido sa Tapul Island sa pagitan ng karagatan ng Tawi-Tawi at Sulu.

Bukod dito ay sinasabing bihag din ng Abu Sayyaf ang sampung Indonesian crew na hinarang din ng mga bandido

sa karagatan noong Marso 26. Ang mga bihag ay sinasabing itinatago umano sa Sulu at humihingi ng P 50-M ransom ang mga kidnappers kapalit ng kalayaan ng mga ito.

Sa pinakahuling insidente ng kidnapping, sinasabing nagsasalita umano ng putol-putol na English ang mga kidnappers na nagpakilalang miyembro ng mga bandidong Abu Sayyaf. Patuloy naman ang search and rescue operations. (Joy Cantos)

17 April 2016



Page: 1

Palace: Sayyaf on the run

Malacañang yesterday confirmed that government security forces are relentlessly pursuing the Abu Sayyaf bandits, but refused to comment on the alleged kidnapping of four Indonesian sailors in the waters between Sitangkai in Tawi-Tawi and Lahad Datu in Sabah, Malaysia on Friday.

The bandits reportedly wounded one of the sailors.

"We have ongoing operations against the Abu Sayyaf and they are on the run. They are fighting hard but we are giving them a very hard fight as well," Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Planning Office Undersecretary Manuel Quezon III said over radio *dzRB*.

The Department of National Defense or Foreign Affairs will provide information when necessary, Quezon said, referring

Turn to Page 9

Palace

From Page 1

to the Indonesians' kidnapping.

"The Armed Forces is pursuing the bandits with vigor and valor and we should not assist the enemy in terms of spreading any disinformation or rumors that have not been verified by the authorities," he said.

The large-scale operation in Sulu was meant to locate and rescue the hostages held by the Abu Sayyaf, as the military is taking seriously the bandits' ultimatum on the four hostages.

"Lives are at stake and we are not lowering our guards," said Maj. Filemon Tan Jr., spokesman for Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom).

In a video recently uploaded on social media, the bandits gave the families and governments of Canadians John Ridsdel and Robert Hall, Norwegian Kjartan Sekkingstad and Filipina Marites Flor until April 25 to pay ransom.

The kidnappers said they would harm one of the victims should their demand not be met.

The four were seized in September last year from a resort on Samal Island off Davao del Norte and were believed taken to the

jungles of Sulu.

The Abu Sayyaf reduced the ransom to P300 million from P1 billion for each of the foreign captives.

The military said the spate of kidnappings have brought to 29 the number of captives including two Canadians, a Norwegian, a Dutch, a Chinese, 14 Indonesians, four Malaysians and six Filipinos.

Tan said they could not confirm whether all the victims are being held in Sulu, noting there were only two instances when they were shown on video together with their captors.

He said there could be other pirate groups operating in the Sulu waters that could be behind the recent kidnapping of a Malaysian and Indonesian.

Meanwhile, the number of slain bandits killed in the continuous military offensive has climbed to 37 as government troops were closing in on their targets in the hinterlands of Tipo-Tipo, Basilan.

The latest figure came after the recovery of the remains of five bandits, who have been validated and identified on the ground, Tan said.

The five were killed after the troops overran the bandits' training camp in Barangay Baguindan in Tipo-tipo town and an encoun-

ter in Barangay Amaloy in Ungkaya Pukan town on Wednesday.

"We can have better results before the weekend," he said, adding reports had it that Abu Sayyaf leader Furuji Indama, who was critically wounded, could have died from injuries.

Meanwhile, more than 3,000 villagers have been displaced in the military offensive.

The social welfare office of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) said the 700 families from Tipo-Tipo town were provided with relief assistance.

The town is greatly affected by the military operation that has been running for a week now.

ARMM Social Welfare Secretary Rahima Alba said the families came from the villages of Baguindan, Silangkum and Bohe-Piang.

At least 260 sacks of rice had been distributed to the families by the regional government.

The fighting broke out on April 9 in Baguindan when elements of the Joint Task Group Basilan caught up with a group of bandits led by Indama, Isnilon Hapilon and Moroccan bomb expert Mohammad Khattab.

Khattab was killed in the encounter.

- Aurea Calica

17 April 2016



Page: 1

The bearers of the sword

By EPI FABONAN III

As we spent the previous weekend sunbathing in Boracay, or watching our favorite noontime show, or strolling with the family at the local mall, machinegun fire echoed through the forests of Tipo-Tipo, Basilan as government troops and members of the Abu Sayyaf clashed over the weekend.

The gunfight erupted around 8 a.m. of Saturday after some 120 Abu Sayyaf members ambushed government troops that were

sent as reinforcements for an offensive against the terrorist group in a remote village in the town. The gunfight, which lasted for 10 hours, was so close it involved hand-to-hand combat between soldiers and terrorists.

Eighteen soldiers from the 44th Infantry Battalion, 4th Special Forces Battalion and the 4th Cavalry, as

Turn to Page 11

The bearers From Page 1

well as five Abu Sayyaf members, were killed. The terrorists beheaded some of the soldiers.

Meanwhile, among the terrorists who died in the encounter was Moroccan bomb expert Mohammad Khattab. The jihadist was trying to link up Abu Sayyaf with the Islamic State.

The encounter at Tipo-Tipo is déjà vu for government forces. The encounter echoed the same scenario nine years ago when Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) forces engaged them in a firefight in the same town, killing 14 Marines. The Philippine STAR captured the tragedy in its July 12, 2007 front page.

Just like what happened over the weekend, Abu Sayyaf members, who the military were pursuing when they encountered the MILF, were alleged to have beheaded the soldiers in 2007. Before the encounter happened, the military was conducting a check of the area after reports surfaced that kidnapped Italian priest Giancarlo Bossi was spotted in the area.

Abu Sayyaf is known to still be holding several hostages, including a Norwegian, two Canadians and a Filipina. The terrorist group, now under the leadership of Isnilon Hapilon — a wanted terrorist with a \$5-million bounty on his head —

pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) last year.

The group's allegiance to the Islamic State is a sign that the group is returning to its ideological roots. It was originally founded in 1991 as an offshoot of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Believing that the MNLF has lost its credibility in the fight for an independent Muslim homeland in Mindanao, Abdurajak Janjalani, a former MNLF fighter who experienced fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan, founded the group. The group's name means "bearer of the sword" in Arabic.

In its early days, Abu Sayyaf was a fierce and relentless group. In 1994, it launched a series of bombings in Zamboanga City that killed 71. The

following year, it attacked the town of Ipil, where they robbed banks, looted stores, burned the center of the town to the ground and killed 53 people. A Saudi Islamist bankrolled the group's operations through a bogus Islamic foundation. It also received funds from al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

But after the death of Janjalani in an encounter with police in 1998, the group fell into disarray and was inactive for a time. It was only until sometime in 2000, when Abdurajak's younger brother, Khaddafy Janjalani, succeeded him, did the group surface again, and began kidnapping foreigners from tourist islands in nearby Malaysia.

It was also responsible for

the Dos Palmas Resort kidnappings that included missionary couple Martin and Gracia Burnham. The Burnhams were among the longest held in Abu Sayyaf captivity; they were held until Philippine Special Forces launched a rescue in 2002 that resulted in the death of Martin.

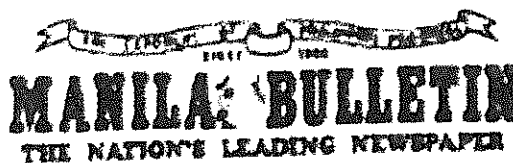
Khaddafy's Abu Sayyaf also established links with Southeast Asian terror group Jemaah Islamiyah. The terror group provided Abu Sayyaf with bomb making skills that led to the bombing of *Superferry 14*, which killed 116, making it the deadliest terrorist attack in Philippine history.

The leadership of the Janjanis proved to be the most prolific and most destructive era in Abu Sayyaf history. But after

Khaddafy's death in 2006, the organization again fell into disarray due to lack of competent leadership. Much of its funding and links with the Jemaah Islamiyah have been severed by Indonesia's crackdown on JI. After 2006, the group decayed into a mere kidnap-for-ransom group of bandits than a band of rebels driven by ideological fervor.

With Abu Sayyaf's resurgence under the tutelage of the Islamic State, the group has come full circle, enlivened with new extremist ideas to commit more gruesome acts of terror. A bolder, fiercer Abu Sayyaf will definitely become one of the major headaches of the new administration that will takeover on June 30.

17 April 2016



Page: 19

4 more outlaws killed as AFP starts to close in on fleeing ASG in Basilan

By **NONOY E. LACSON**

ZAMBOANGA CITY – Four members of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) were killed, while several others were believed wounded, in an encounter with the military in Ungkaya Pukan, Basilan province Thursday night.

Former Tipo-Tipo mayor Joel Maturan yesterday disclosed that the latest clash between the ASG and the military happened about 10 p.m. Thursday at the coastal village of Amaloy in Ungkaya Pukan, Basilan.

According to Maturan, the bandits, who were already on-the-run

from relentless military operations in the island, were chanced upon by soldiers belonging to the 18th Infantry Battalion (18th IB) that immediately engaged them in a fierce encounter.

Government troops recovered the body of an ASG member when the smoke cleared at the encounter site while the chairman of Barangay Amaloy said another member of the outlawed group was buried post-haste Friday following Muslim burial tradition.

The military also said residents of the barangay saw some ASG combatants carrying with them two more slain comrades, while dragging their

wounded.

The military recovered a 30-caliber machine gun (Minimi or K3) and an M-16 Armalite rifle at the encounter site, he said.

Maturan said the ASG members, numbering about 80, were trying to skirt military operations in the forested areas of Barangays Baguindan and Silangkum, but ran into the patrolling soldiers instead.

A fierce exchange immediately ensued before the ASG reportedly withdrew back into the forested area of the village, and left their comrade while making their retreat.

Report also indicated, that ASG

leader Furiiji Indama was wounded in the encounter, although it was only a minor wound after a bullet grazed the left side of his head.

This belied earlier reports that Indama was seriously wounded during the encounter between the ASG and military last Saturday where the government lost 18 soldiers.

"The wound was just a light burn on the left side of his head," Maturan quoted a report reaching him.

But Maturan did confirm that the ASG was already low on supply, particularly food, as the dragnet thrown by the military in the forest of Tipo-Tipo slowly closed down on its members.

12

7 April 2016



Page. 7

ASG pursued with vigor, valor – Palace

Malacañang yesterday assured that the Armed Forces of the Philippines is pursuing the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group with "full vigor and full valor" following a series of kidnappings that it allegedly conducted.

"One thing is sure: That the Armed Forces is pursuing the Abu Sayyaf with full vigor and full valor and we should be supportive of it and not assist the enemy in terms of trying to spread any misinformation or rumors," Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Planning Office Undersecretary Manuel L. Quezon III said.

"We have been having ongoing operations against the Abu Sayyaf and they are on the run, they are fighting hard, but we are giving them a very hard fight as well," Quezon said.

Quezon said reports that the ASG will behead three foreign hostages and a Filipina on April 25 just shows that it is desperate in getting ransom money.

"As you can see, nakikita mo na paano nababahala ang Abu Sayyaf. Naghahanap pa sila ng salapi," Quezon said. "Ang mahalaga dito, suportahan natin ang Armed Forces and their ongoing efforts to rescue the hostages and habulin ang Abu Sayyaf," he said. **(Madel S. Namit)**

17 April 2016

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Page: 7

• **IS alarms priest**

A Catholic priest has viewed with alarm the alleged claim made by ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) that it is responsible for the clash between government soldiers and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Basilan last weekend. Father Jerome Secillano, parish priest of Nuestra Señora del Perpetuo Socorro Parish in Sampaloc, is alarmed because "ISIS had shown in the past that they were not only vicious but also irrational in advancing their cause." "We should be alarmed at this development," he said in an interview. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) earlier already dismissed the alleged claims made by the ISIS, calling it propaganda. (Leslie Ann G. Aquino)

7 April 2016



Page. 1

Monkayo joins Davao City as 'conflict-manageable' area

Army widens anti-insurgency

By PAUL M. GUTIERREZ drive gain in Davao

THE Philippine Army, thru the 10th Infantry 'Agila' Division of the Eastern Mindanao Command (EMC), continues to widen its gains under 'Oplan Bayanihan' with Monkayo, Compostela Valley, now declared as 'conflict-manageable' area and ready for further development. ■ Page 6

ARMY... From Page 1

Just last month, the Agila division under Major Gen. Rafael Valencia, finally succeeded in ridding Davao City's tag as a "communist infested" area with the turnover of internal security operations (ISO) to the city's peace and order council (POC) under Mayor Rodrigo Duterte.

At a simple turn-over ceremony last April 13, Monkayo Mayor Joselito Brillantes and Lt. Colonel Ismael Mandanas, commanding officer of the 25th Infantry Battalion, led the signing of the memorandum of understanding (MOU)

transferring the responsibility of ensuring peace and order in the municipality from the military to the municipal peace and order council (MPOC) chaired by Brillantes.

Officials from Monkayo's 21 villages, other police and military officials as well as representatives from the provincial government of Compostela and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) witnessed the momentous event, said Agila division spokesperson, Capt. Rhyann Batchar.

Valencia stressed that the turnover "does not mean that the military is abandoning" Monkayo, which, like Davao City and other areas in the region, has long been

known as a "territory" of the communist New People's Army (NPA).

"The intent of the handover is to build confidence among the people and the different stakeholders in order to create an environment conducive to socioeconomic, cultural and spiritual development.

"This MOU establishes the fact that (both) the MPOC and the (military) recognize the need to protect the gains of the ISO.

"This also signifies the willingness and commitment of the MPOC to take the lead and make a stand in ensuring that Monkayo attains its potential to the fullest for the sake of the future generation," the military official added.

17 April 2016

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Page: 19

Church leaders intervene to secure release of POWs held by NPA

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY (PNA) – Church leaders on Friday appealed to both the military and the New People's Army (NPA) to meet halfway in order to expedite the release of military and police personnel who are still in the hands of the insurgency group.

The Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP), a body composed of interfaith church leaders who act as the third party facilitators, has expressed optimism that the NPA and the military and police would arrive at a compromise for the speedy release of the captured government law enforcers.

Bishop Felixberto Calang, of the Iglesia Filipino Independiente (IFI) and PEPP co-convenor, said they were optimistic that the parties involved would take into consideration each other's proposals so the third-party facilitators could begin working on negotiating for the release of the captives.

Calang said PEPP was confident that the parties could reach an agreement on the turnover eventually as this is not the first time that the NPA has taken police officers and soldiers as prisoners.

Members of the PEPP conveners include Cagayan de Oro Archbishop Antonio Ledesma, Bishop Melzar Labuntog, United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), and Bishop Genesis Udang, of the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC).

In an earlier statement released to the local media, the NPA wanted the police and the military to stop combat operations before considering a negotiation to free the captives.

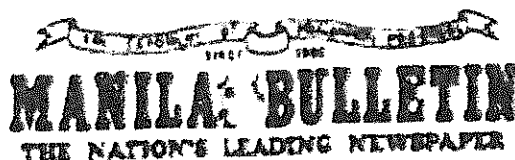
The police and military, however, maintained that it is not in the level of the regional or provincial military and police command to order a stop on military and police operations.

SPO 1 Warren Coñales, PO 3 Edwin Castor, SPO 4 Rene Rombo, and PFCs Glenn Austia and Diven Abion Tawide were captured by the NPA last April in simultaneous road blocks it set up in various parts of Misamis Oriental, Bukidnon and Agusan Del Norte.

Coñales and Castor were taken by the rebels in Capitan Bayong, Impasugong, Bukidnon; Rombo in Mandahilag, Talisayan, Misamis Oriental. Austia and Tawide, both belonging to the Philippine Army's 23rd Infantry Battalion, were captured in Purok 3, Lower Olave, Buenavista, Agusan Del Norte.

14

7 April 2016



Page: 17

NPA's kill CAA in Albay attack

By DANNY J. ESTACIO

CAMP NAKAR, Lucena City — A government militiaman was killed and one of his comrades wounded when they encountered five New People's Army (NPA) rebels while securing a farm-to-market road in Barangay Malabiga, Libon town, Albay, last Friday.

The Southern Luzon Command (SOLCOM) reported the killing of Gilbert E. delos Reyes, of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) Active Auxiliary (CAA) and the wounding of another CAA, Michael J. Ramirez.

Delos Reyes was killed in the first volley of fire when the NPA rebels attacked the squad of the army's 2nd Infantry Battalion to which he belonged. Ramirez is currently being treated at the 9th Infantry Division Station Hospital in Pili, Camarines, Sur.

17 April 2016

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Page: 14

Iriberri bids emotional farewell to SOLCOM

By **DANNY J. ESTACIO**

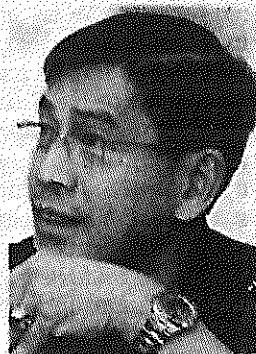
CAMP NAKAR, Lucena City — With the memory of the 18 soldiers killed in the bloody clash in Basilan last weekend in mind, General Hernando Iriberri, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff, bade an emotional farewell yesterday to the men and women of the Southern Luzon Command (SOLCOM), here.

Iriberri's visit here is his last as AFP Chief of Staff as he was set to bow out of the military service on April 22 when he reaches the mandatory retirement age of 56.

In the crowd that surrounded him were some of his batchmates in the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) Class of 1983, like Lt. Gen. Ricardo R. Visaya, SOLCOM Chief; Maj. Gen. Romeo G. Gan, 2nd Infantry Division Commander; and 9th Infantry Division Commander Maj. Gen. Ferdinand F. Quidilla.

During the prayer, Iriberri became emotional and asked for a moment

of silence dedicated to the 19 soldiers "who died as heroes" in the bloody Tipo-tipo, Basilan clash last April 9 against scores of Abu Sayyaf Group bandits.



IRIBERRI

In his address to the SOLCOM, Iriberri thanked the area command for supporting his leadership of the AFP.

Then, he left a reminder to them, saying: "The AFP is not about you and me. It is about the people we pledged to protect. It is about the communities we serve. It is about our country we defend. This is what we are. This is what we had been doing. And this is what we will always be. This is the essence of soldiery. So everyone who wears this uniform should be very proud."

18

17 April 2016



Page: 1

'China misunderstands Phil-US military activities'

By AUREA CALICA

By its strong and negative reaction to the intensified joint Philippine-US military activities in the South China Sea and West Philippine Sea,

China "misunderstands" their purpose, which is to ensure freedom of navigation and free flow of commerce, Malacañang said yesterday. "We believe that the People's Republic of China through its statements misunderstands or

perhaps does not properly appreciate the purpose of our activities with the United States. These are to ensure freedom of

navigation in the region which benefits all nations because it allows the free, unhampered flow of trade which is to the

Turn to Page 4

China

From Page 1

benefit of all the economies of the region," Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Planning Office Undersecretary Manuel Quezon III said over radio *dzRB*.

Beijing earlier said the US and the Philippines showed their "Cold War mentality" with their joint patrols in the South China Sea and the West Philippine Sea.

But Quezon pointed out the "peaceful and highly uncontroversial exercises" were meant to ensure that prosperity would be continuous under a regime of stability in the region.

"As always, this is proof of a strong and continuing alliance between our two nations," Quezon said, referring to the joint military activities.

After announcing that the US and the Philippines had started joint maritime patrols last month, US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said his country was committed to back Manila against coercion and intimidation amid China's massive land reclamation and construction activities in the South China Sea.

He issued the pronouncement before boarding the air-

craft carrier *John C. Stennis* as it sailed in disputed waters Friday.

Quezon defended the enhanced alliance between the US and the Philippines as well as the assistance Washington was providing the country.

"For example...we have a Hamilton-class cutter, which is, let's admit, a late 1960s ship. But that's already a generation or more advanced than what we used to have. So in other words, if we have a bicycle, we need to go through training wheels first," Quezon said.

"They're perfectly good vessels and we have seen how good and useful they are," he said.

He reminded China that other countries – and not only the US – were supporting the Philippines' position on the West Philippine Sea issue, including Manila's turning to international arbitration.

Quezon also pointed out the military alliance between the Philippines and the US dates back to 1951, referring to the Mutual Defense Treaty.

Carter's trip to the *Stennis* was seen as the latest effort by the US to show its commitment to maintaining security in the hotly contested waters.

Turn to Page 6

18

China

From Page 4

But China's defense ministry said the joint naval patrols only "promote the militarization of the region."

"The Chinese army will monitor this trend closely, and will resolutely safeguard China's territorial sovereignty as well as maritime rights and interests," it said.

"With each Balikatan and each cruise by the *Stennis*, with each new multilateral exercise and each new defense agreement, we add a stitch to the fabric of the region's security network," Carter said in a speech at the closing ceremonies for the Balikatan joint exercise.

"This is the network - peaceful, principled and inclusive - America continues to stand for, and stand with," he said.

"Together you rehearsed maritime interdiction operations so we can respond more quickly to threats at sea and together you simulated the recovery of oil and gas platform for possible forces in the South China (Sea)," Carter told US and Philippine troops. - With Jaime Laude

7 April 2016

INQUIRER

Page: 121

Palace: China misreading PH-US military exercises

By Gil Cabacungan

CHINA has misinterpreted the Philippines' joint military exercises with the United States near disputed territory in the South China Sea, Malacañang said yesterday.

"We believe that the People's Republic of China through its statements misunderstands or perhaps does not properly appreciate the purpose of our activities with the United States," Communications Undersecretary Manolo Quezon said in a radio interview.

"These are to ensure freedom of navigation in the region, which benefits all

nations because it allows the free, unhampered flow of trade," Quezon said.

"These are peaceful and highly uncontroversial exercises meant to ensure that prosperity is continuous under a regime of stability through the participation of all countries," he added.

Carter's visit

US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter's visit to an American aircraft carrier sailing near the disputed islands in the South China Sea came at the end of this year's Balikatan war games between Filipino and American troops.

China has blasted the US for "militarizing" the West Philippine Sea with its move to deepen its defense ties with the Philippines through joint patrols in the contested waters.

The Chinese defense ministry on Thursday said strengthening US-Philippine defense ties reflected "Cold War mentality."

Hamilton-class cutters

But Quezon said the war games underscored the historic relations between the Philippines and the United States, which date back to 1851.

"Our moves and our ongoing projects

with our foreign allies show that we are on a steady and sensible path," he said.

Quezon also defended the sale by the United States of its decommissioned Hamilton-class cutters to the Philippine Coast Guard.

The Philippines has three Hamilton-class cutters capable of patrolling its territorial waters in the South China Sea.

Quezon said while the cutters were built in the late 1960s, they were still "a generation or more advanced than what we used to have"—World War II-era vessels.

"In other words, if these were bicycles, we need to go through training

wheels first. Once we get acquainted with these, we can then invest in more modern engines (with 1990 to 2000s technology)," he said.

Quezon said critics should understand that the Philippines has to balance its need to improve its defense requirements with its limited resources that are also needed for other public services.

"[They're] not junk because there are other nations that have also taken on the Hamilton-class cutter. They're perfectly good vessels and we have seen how good and useful they are," he said.

17 April 2016

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Page: 11

US shows power in Asia; Carter says America's presence due to China's behavior in sea row

ABOARD THE USS JOHN C. STENNIS—For the second time in five months, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter landed aboard a US aircraft carrier in the bitterly contested South China Sea, sending a deliberate message to China on American power in the region.

With a key Asia-Pacific ally at his side on the USS John C. Stennis on Friday, Carter said the only reason America's presence in the region came up as an issue was because of China's behavior in the South China Sea

over the past year.

"That's a question of Chinese behavior," Carter told reporters as he and Philippine Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin watched US Navy F/A 18 "Hornet" fighter jets launch into the vivid

US SHOWS/A21

From page A1

net" fighter jets launch into the vivid blue skies, about 126 kilometers west of the main Philippine island of Luzon.

"What's new is not an American carrier in this region. What's new is the context of tension [that] exists, which we want to reduce," Carter said.

China late on Thursday reacted defiantly to Carter's announcement of joint US-Philippine patrols in the South China Sea and the rotation of more US troops with combat aircraft and equipment to the Philippines under a new security agreement.

"US-Philippine joint patrols in the South China Sea promote regional militarization and undermine regional peace and stability," the Chinese defense ministry said in a statement.

"The Chinese military will pay very close attention to related developments, and firmly safeguard China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests," it said.

Sweeping claims

China claims nearly the whole of the 3.5-million-square-kilometer South China Sea, even waters close to the shores of its Southeast Asian neighbors, and has over the past year built artificial islands in the Spratly archipelago to assert what it insists is its "undisputed sovereignty" over territory in the sea also claimed by the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan.

The Chinese defense ministry's statement also referenced China's longstanding opposition to US military alliances in

the region. It regards those as a form of unwelcome interference that stymies its desired status as the preeminent military power in the Asia-Pacific region.

"Strengthening the US-Philippine military alliance ... is a sign of a Cold War mentality that is unbeneficial to peace and stability in the South China Sea," it said.

On Friday, Carter emphasized the United States would back up the Philippines and other allies in the region.

"At a time of change in this dynamic region, and democratic transitions in the Philippines and the United States, we will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder," Carter said at the closing ceremony for Balikatan 2016, the annual war games between US and Philippine troops, at Camp Aguinaldo, the Philippine military's headquarters in Quezon City.

"We will continue to stand up for our safety and freedoms, for those of our friends and allies, and for the values, principles and rules-based order that has benefited so many for so long," he said.

Carter's visit aboard the Stennis underscores persistent complaints from the United States and its allies in the region about China's military buildup in the South China Sea.

Later in the massive gray ship's hangar bay, Carter said his message in making the trip was that the United States "intends to continue to play a role in keeping peace and stability in this region."

Rear Adm. Ronald Boxall, the commander of Carrier Strike Group 3, told reporters that the Stennis and the ships in the carrier's strike group "regularly

have a (Chinese) ship or two operating with us or near us."

So far, he said, the Chinese vessels have been operating very professionally.

"We've been very pleased with the interactions we've had," he said. "They are operating where they think they should, we're operating where we think we should. They generally have professional discussions over the bridge about where we are."

Flight to the carrier

Accompanied by Gazmin, Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff Gen. Hernando Iriberry and Defense Undersecretary Emmanuel Bautista, Carter rode to Villamor Air Base in Pasay City after the Balikatan closing ceremony and took a Boeing C-17 Globemaster aircraft for a flight to Palawan.

From Palawan, the closest Philippine landmass to the Spratly archipelago, they took a Bell Boeing V-22 Osprey military helicopter for a short flight to the Stennis, which was in Philippine-claimed waters.

Under a blazing sun, as the heat index pushed past 37 degrees Celsius, Carter and the Philippine officials landed on the Stennis.

Carter spent about two hours on the ship, watching a number of fighter jets shoot into the sky off the flight deck, do circles around the Stennis and then land again, roaring to a stop as their tailhook caught the arresting wire.

He later spoke to several hundred sailors in the hangar bay, including one who asked why the United States allows China to participate in the

large annual military exercise in the Asia-Pacific region.

Carter said the United States wanted to work together with China, and added that Beijing should not isolate itself.

Not aimed at anyone

The United States insists that the increasing American presence in the South China Sea and the broader Asia-Pacific region is meant to show support for allies and is not aimed at any one nation.

But the US military presence also reinforces Carter's assertion that America will continue to fly and sail throughout the region, despite China's claims of sovereignty over the vast South China Sea.

China's foreign ministry statement on Thursday said "military exchanges by relevant countries should not target third parties, much less support a few countries in challenging China's sovereignty and security, inciting regional contradictions and sabotaging regional peace and stability."

And on Friday, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lu Kang said that, "Before the US returned to the Asia-Pacific region, relevant countries had sought to control the disputes and handle the conflicts through friendly negotiations, despite the disputes having existed for over four decades."

He told reporters during a press conference that if the United States wanted a peaceful solution to disputes, "I hope it can practice what it has preached and that their actions

can really help to peacefully solve the disputes."

The Philippines has challenged China's sweeping claims in the South China Sea at the United Nations Permanent Court of Arbitration.

China has refused to take part in the arbitration, and said it would not recognize any ruling by the court.

The tribunal has proceeded to hear the case, though, and is expected to hand down a ruling in coming weeks.

The United States has said it does not take a position on the territorial disputes, but wants them settled legally.

Message of solidarity

But Carter's visit to the Philippines last week, and Gazmin's presence on the Stennis sent a more pointed message of solidarity.

The visit to the Stennis came a day after Carter announced new military aid to the Philippines that spurred protests from China.

This was the second time that Carter had flown onto a carrier while it was embarked in the South China Sea. Last November, he was on the USS Theodore Roosevelt as it sailed northwest of Borneo.

That visit came just a week after a US Navy destroyer, the USS Lassen, challenged China's claim to a 21-km territorial limit around Zamora Reef (international name: Subi Reef) in the Philippines' part of the Spratlys, about 270 to 360 km from where the Theodore Roosevelt was sailing on Thursday. *Reports from AP and AFP*

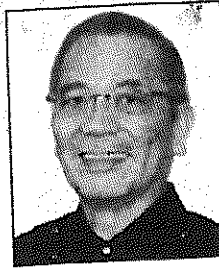
17 April 2016



Page: 13

Breakthrough

By ELFREN S. CRUZ



War in Scarborough Shoal?

The announcement that there will be joint US-Philippine patrols in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea) is the result of China's plan to build a base in the Scarborough Shoal located only 123 miles from the Philippine island of Luzon.

US Senator John McCain, chair of the US Senate armed services committee believes that China's plan to build on Scarborough is meant to secure existing gains in the region and pursue new forms of coercion. In a recent op-ed published in the London based *Financial Times*, McCain said: "This [plan] could include further reclamation and militarization at strategic locations such as Scarborough Shoal, attempts to expel another country from a disputed territory, or the declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone in all or part of the South China Sea."

There is a report that Secretary of State John Kerry raised the issue of Chinese activities in the Scarborough shoal during a recent meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Washington D.C. According to the report, Wang told Kerry that Chinese expansion in the Scarborough would take place.

China's plans for the Scarborough shoals were actually confirmed when a Chinese website posted a detailed dredging plan for Scarborough including a runway, power systems, residences and harbor capable of supporting Chinese navy warships. I have seen the graphic of the website. The airport and runway are on the northern end of the proposed artificial island. There is also a water treatment plant with three Chinese guided missile frigates at a wharf at the southern opening of the Shoal.

One of the first to voice concern was Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Richardson who told *Reuters* last month: "I think we see some surface ships activity and those sorts of things, survey type of activity going on. That's an area of concern...a next possible area of reclamation."

China's rapid expansion plan is also in anticipation of an international court's ruling on the Philippine claim to parts of the Spratlys. The ruling is expected to be in favor of the Philippine claim. China clearly intends to defy any favorable ruling and establish de facto control over disputed territories.

The US-Philippine joint patrols now bring to the forefront another hot button issue. If Philippine naval vessels and personnel are attacked by Chinese maritime vessels, will the United States actively support and protect those Philippine vessels and personnel?

China has accused the United States and the Philippines of starting a new Cold War. This argument is clearly disingenuous. China's territorial aggressions and its refusal to follow international rule of law has triggered this renewal of Cold War mentality. Hopefully, this cold war will not lead to a "hot war" especially over the Scarborough Shoal and Philippine territory.

Japan: Awakening of sleeping giant

Japan is the third largest economy in the world. It has the capability to become a major force far beyond its present role now. In the 1970s and up to the 1980s, Japan was considered as the next Pacific superpower. But during the past quarter-century, Japan turned insular and isolationist while the world struggled with crisis

in the Middle East; genocides in Africa; NATO-Russian confrontation in Eastern Europe and Chinese aggression in the South China Sea. While most of the world became targets of extremist terrorist violence and suicide bombers, Japan remained a calm and peaceful society.

This is not new in Japanese history. Until the 19th century, Japan remained a closed society and relationship with the outside world was limited and severely controlled. During the first half of the 20th century, Japan became an imperialist power and suffered a humiliating defeat during the Second World War. In 1947, its constitution abolished the right to wage war and the country became an economic superpower.

Today, Japan is facing security challenges that are posing as immediate threats to its political and economic stability. The preservation of two vital sea lanes of transportation and communication - East China Sea and South China Sea - is forcing Japan to assume a bigger burden in defending the area from further territorial aggressions by China.

The problem for Japan is that the gap between the military capabilities of the two nations has become extremely wide. The recent Chinese military budget estimate was \$216 billion while Japan's budget was \$45.8 billion. China's coercive behavior in Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea and the building of artificial islands and bases in the South China Sea has seriously endangered the freedom of navigation in these lanes through which most Japanese trade and energy sources pass.

25

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In a recently passed legislation - March 29, 2016 - Japan now has set three new conditions where it is allowed to use force. The most relevant measure states: "When an armed attack against Japan occurs or *when an attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result threatens Japan's survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people's right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.*

Japan now must confront the realities of the new world order with an aggressive China as a new military superpower. Japan can either continue to depend on the United States and its allies to defend Japanese interests in the region or it can contribute its fair share of the burden by joining an alliance of countries, including the Philippines, that seeks to preserve international law in the conduct of geopolitical affairs. Like Germany in the European Union, it is my conclusion that Japan will eventually have no choice but to accept a greater share of leadership in this part of the world.

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256

ONLINE NEWS

17 APRIL 2016

www.philstar.com

Abu Sayyaf death toll climbs to 37 in Basilan offensive

By Roei Pareño (philstar.com) | Updated April 16, 2016 - 5:25pm



A big number of forces was deployed to ensure the no let-up operation against the Abu Sayyaf group. Philstar.com/File/photo

ZAMBOANGA CITY, Philippines – The death toll on the side of the Abu Sayyaf climbed to 37 as troops continue its offensive operation against the group in Tipo-Tipo town, Basilan.

The latest figure of Abu Sayyaf casualty came with the recovery of remains of five Abu Sayyaf members, according to Maj. Filemon Tan Jr., designated spokesman of the ground military operation in Basilan.

Tan said the fatalities were validated and identified on ground.

According to Tan, the increase in death toll was the result of offensive operations conducted since last Saturday.

The military official said the offensive operation is ongoing and there is no let-up in going after the Abu Sayyaf bandits.

There are reports that Abu Sayyaf leader Furuji Indama, who was critically wounded during the encounter might succumb from his serious injuries, Tan said.

"This will be a no let-up operation we are already nearing the target and we are trying to push the momentum. So we are trying to hit them the soonest possible so we could finish them the soonest possible," the military official added.

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www.bomboradyo.com

WestMincom tiniyak na nag-iimbestiga na sa torture issue sa umano'y 3 ASG sa Basilan

By Bombo Mars deSanPosted in Latest NewsSaturday, 16 April 2016 10:28

ZAMBOANGA CITY - Sinimulan na ng militar ang imbestigasyon ukol sa reklamong torture laban sa ilang sundalo matapos mahuli ang hinihinalang mga kasapi ng Abu Sayyaf sa kasagsagan nang bakbakan nitong nakalipas na Huwebes sa may munisipyo ng Tipo-Tipo sa lalawigan ng Bailan.

Ito ang tiniyak ni Mayor Filemon Tan, ang tagapagsalita ng Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom).

Ayon kay Tan, hindi umano ligtas sa isinasagawang imbestigasyon ang mismong commander ng 104th Brigade at ang iba pang opisyal ng Philippine Army (PA) sa Basilan.

Una na ring inalis muna sa lugar ang mga isinasangkot na sundalo sa sinasabing torture na nagmula sa tropa ng 44th Infantry Battalion (IB) na namatayan ng 18 mga sundalo sa unang araw ng madugong bakbakan sa Tipo-Tipo noong araw ng Sabado na nagkaroon ng direct contact sa paghuli sa tatlong hinihinalang Abu Sayyaf.

Sinasbaing inaresto ang tatlong lalaki matapos silang makitang umaaligid sa lugar kung saan nangyayari ang engkuwentro.

Makalipas ang isang araw ay napaulat na binawian ng buhay ang isa sa tatlong suspek dahil umano sa grabeng torture na tinamo nito.

Napag-alaman pa na isa sa tatlong naaresto ay ang miyembro umano ng Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) monitoring team kaya umano siya nandoon sa lugar ng engkuwentro.

Ang magiging resulta ng kanilang imbestigasyon ay ipapadala umano nila sa kanilang higher headquarters na siyang magrerekomenda kung ano ang susunod na hakbang na gagawin.

Sinabi ng opisyal na hindi kukunsintihin ng Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) ang mga sundalo kung talagang nangyari ang torture sa tatlong hinuli nila dahil mahigpit itong ipinagbabawal hanay ng militar.

Pero nilinaw din nito na dapat ding bigyan ng pagkakataon ang mga sundalo para ibigay ang kanilang panig ukol sa totoong nangyari dahil ang tanging hangarin din lamang ng mga ito ay mabigyan ng kapayapaan ag mga residnete sa Basilan kaya pati buhay nila ay binubuwis laban sa Abu Sayyaf.

www.pna.gov.ph

Militiaman killed, another hurt in NPA Albay attack

By Priam F. Nepomuceno

MANILA, April 16 (PNA) — A member of the CAFGU Active Auxiliary (CAA) was killed while another was hurt when five New People's Army (NPA) rebels opened fire at a squad of the 2nd Infantry Battalion in Libon town, Albay Friday evening.

The incident took place 6 p.m. at Barangay Malabiga, of the above-mentioned locality.

Southern Luzon Command (SOLCOM) spokesperson Lt. Col. Angelo Guzman identified the slain militiaman as Gilbert E. Delos Reyes.

His remains was taken to St. Peter's Chapel in Legazpi City, Albay while his wounded companion, Michael J. Ramirez is now undergoing treatment at 9th Infantry Division Station Hospital in Pili, Camarines Sur.

Guzman said SOLCOM strongly denounces the attack. The squad was on a mission of securing the construction of a farm-to-market road in the barangay.

"The attack delays the opportunities and benefits for the barangay," he added.

"Our unit there has intensified its security measures so that the construction can resume early," Guzman said. (PNA)

RMA/PFN

www.inquirer.net

Abu Sayyaf sets ransom deadline

By: Julie M. Aurelio

@inquirerdotnet

Philippine Daily Inquirer

05:50 AM April 16th, 2016

The Abu Sayyaf group has given the families of the three foreigners and Filipino woman seized from Samal island last year until April 25 to pay a much lower ransom in exchange for the victims' freedom.

In a new video uploaded on YouTube on Friday, the hostages appealed to the victims' families and their governments to pay P300 million for each of the victims. The abductors had earlier demanded P1 billion each.

A man who introduced himself as John Ridsdel, a Canadian, said they were told it was the "final, absolute warning."

"This is an urgent appeal to our governments and families, if P300 million is not paid for me by 3 p.m. of April 25, they will behead me," said the gaunt-looking Ridsdel.

The other men, who introduced themselves as Robert Hall of Canada and Kjartan Sekkingstad of Norway, made similar appeals while a long knife was held to their neck.

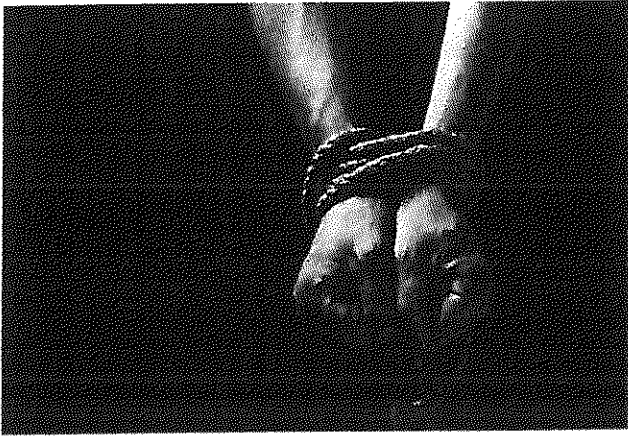
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www.philstar.com

4 Indonesian crew members kidnapped

By Roel Pareño (philstar.com) | Updated April 16, 2016 - 2:00pm



The series of kidnappings prompted the Malaysian government to shutdown shipping routes going to Sabah to prevent intrusion by kidnappers. Philstar.com/File photo

ZAMBOANGA CITY, Philippines - Gunmen seized four crew members of an Indonesian tugboat and wounded another Friday night near the border of Malaysia in Tawi-Tawi, according to security official.

The armed men, aboard a speedboat, intercepted the tugboat identified as TB Henry with ten Indonesian crew members about 6:30 p.m near Pondo Sibugal, Sitangkai, an island town off Tawi-Tawi.

Maj. Filemon Tan Jr., spokesman of the Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) said a crew member was hurt when gunmen fired at the tugboat.

"The tugboat was shot and unfortunately one of the crew was hit and wounded," Tan said.

Around five to seven armed men took four crew members from the tugboat and transferred them into the speedboat, leaving six others, who include the injured member.

The suspects with their fresh captives fled towards unknown direction.

According to Tan, the survivors aboard their tugboat fled towards Sabah. They were assisted by the Malaysian authorities while the injured survivor was brought to the Sempornah Hospital for treatment.

Tan said no group claimed responsibility for the abduction and has not yet considered the Abu Sayyaf since there are many other pirate groups operating in Sulu waters.

The fresh kidnapping incident came barely weeks when armed men also abducted four Malaysians off Sempornah, Sabah last April 1.

Ten crew members of an Indonesian tugboat were also abducted last March 26 in the border of East Kalimantan, Indonesia while en route to Manila aboard TB Brama.

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30

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The TB Brama was recovered three days later off Languyan town in Tawi-Tawi, without signs of the victims.

According to Tan, military forces have been alerted to be on the lookout for the presence of the victims and suspects.

The series of kidnappings prompted the Malaysian government to shutdown trade in the border of Tawi-Tawi, a component province of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

ARMM executive secretary Laisa Alamia said the blockade was implemented by the Malaysian authorities since last week.

The closure has taken its toll to traders in Tawi-Tawi, which has a traditional barter trading route in the southern backdoor of the country.

The incident also prompted ARMM Gov. Mujiv Hataman to initiate meeting with Malacañang to look into the situation.

Meanwhile, Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) chief Lt. Gen. Mayoralgo dela Cruz will set a meeting with his Malaysian counterpart next week to discuss security coordination to address the spate of kidnappings occurring in the border.

Tan said a joint patrol might be among the solutions to be discussed though Malaysia and Philippines have a yearly joint border patrol exercise.

www.inquirer.net

Armed men seize 4 Indonesian crew members off Tawi-Tawi

By: Julie Alipala

@JulietSAlipala

Inquirer Mindanao

07:42 AM April 16th, 2016

ZAMBOANGA CITY – At least four more foreigners had been forcibly taken by still unidentified armed men in the waters of Tawi-Tawi, authorities said Saturday.

The fresh abduction came barely 15 days after the Abu Sayyaf abducted four crew members of a Malaysian tugboat, also off Tawi-Tawi; and about a month after the bandit group snatched 10 Indonesians manning another tugboat.

The abductions occurring between Sabah and Mindanao had prompted Malaysian authorities on April 9 to shut down cross-border trading between Malaysia and the Philippines.

Maj. Filemon Tan Jr., spokesperson of the Western Mindanao Command, said the fresh abduction of the foreigners, whom he initially identified as "Malaysian nationals" took place around 6:30 p.m. Friday near Pondo Sibugal in Sitangkai town.

He said the victims were on a tugboat marked TB Henry when at least seven armed men on a speedboat boarded their vessel.

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31

Another report said the victims were Indonesians from Banjarmasin, the capital of South Kalimantan. The Tawi-Tawi police confirmed the nationalities of the victims.

The armed men, the police said in a report, took Indonesians Moh. Ariyanti Misnan (boat master), Lorens M.P.S (chief master), Dede Irfan Hilmi (second officer), and Samsir (seaman), and shot at another crew member—identified as Lambas Simanungkalit—who resisted the kidnapping.

A separate report from the Philippine Coast Guard said five crew members were unmolested and that the suspects fled toward a still undetermined direction.

The tugboat, which sailed from Banjarmasin, was being manned by 10 crew members, the PCG report added.

"TB Henry managed to cross towards the Malaysian waters and asked for help. The remaining crew on board were assessed to be in a great shock and traumatized," the PCG report added.

The Tawi-Tawi police said it was the survivors, who informed Malaysian authorities of the incident. Tan said they were not certain where the victims had been brought to amid speculations they were brought to Sulu, where the Abu Sayyaf has been holding over two dozen captives.

On April 1, suspected Abu Sayyaf bandits also boarded a Malaysian tugboat and took with them four Malaysian crew members.

In March, the bandit group also snatched 10 Indonesians manning another tugboat as it was sailing in Philippine waters.

The Abu Sayyaf's extremism and kidnapping in the southernmost part of the country has taken its toll on the centuries-old barter trade system between the Philippines and Sabah, Malaysia, a government official said.

"The Malaysian government has shut down its Sabah border with the autonomous region to cross-border trade in protest of the recent kidnapping of Malaysian nationals by suspected Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)," Laisa Alamia, executive secretary of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), told reporters here on Thursday.

She said Malaysian authorities had put up a naval blockade between Sabah and Tawi-Tawi, Mindanao's springboard to Malaysia, which effectively prevented travel between the two territories.

"The ASG kidnapping activity is now a (major) issue that is why (ARMM) Governor Mujiv Hataman is currently in Manila talking to Malacañang about this," Alamia said.

Alamia said talks were now also being held in the hope that Kuala Lumpur reconsiders its decision.

Sabah Chief Minister Musa Aman was quoted by Malaysia's official news agency, Bernama, as saying the decades-old barter trade activity in Sandakan and other east coast towns had indeed been shut down as part of security measures agreed upon by the Sabah Cabinet in the wake of the abductions.

Asked why barter trading had to be stopped, Musa said: "We do not know who these people (the barter traders) are bringing in."

Aside from the barter trading, the transshipment of petroleum and gas products in Eastern Sabah had also been stopped, he said.

Musa said a curfew from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. was also being implemented in seven Sabah districts and any foreign vessel sailing in the restricted areas would be seized while Malaysian merchant vessels sailing in high-risk areas would be provided protection.

Musa said the plan to put up ferry services between Kudat and Palawan had also been deferred because of the kidnappings.

Even with the new development, the ARMM said it was seeking to expand the Polloc Freeport in Maguindanao as the number of foreign vessels docking there had increased.

Hexsan Mabang, port manager, said the Polloc Freeport has been the port-of-call to 167 domestic and foreign vessels in 2013; 189 in 2014; and 211 last year.

Ishak Mastura, executive director of the ARMM's Regional Board of Investments (RBOI), said the increase in frequency of ship-calls and in the volume of cargo traffic showed signs of the improving economy, through growing domestic and foreign business investments into ARMM, amid peace and order problem in some parts of the region.

Because of the growing traffic, Mabang said the ARMM proposes to expand the port's berthing area to twice longer than its present berthing area of 400 meters.

He said expanding the port's berthing area required the national government's approval, particularly on its funding requirement.

Don Mustapha Loong of the ARMM's Department of Public Works and Highways said bidding has been set for later this year for the conduct of a full feasibility study on the expansion of the port. ***With reports from Edwin Fernandez and Nash Maulana, Inquirer Mindanao/CDG***

www.bomboradyo.com

WestMinCom inaalam kung saan dinala ng ASG ang panibagong mga dinukot

By Bombo Mars deSanPosted in Latest NewsSaturday, 16 April 2016 13:34

ZAMBOANGA CITY - Todo monitor na ngayon ang militar sa Western Mindanao para alamin kung saan dinala ng mga kidnapper na hinihinalang mga kasapi pa rin ng Abu Sayyaf group (ASG) ang apat na mga Indonesian crew na panibagong dinukot kagabi malapit sa karagatan ng Pondo Sibugal sa isla ng Sitangkai, lalawigan ng Tawi-Tawi.

Isa rin ang napaulat na sugatan matapos mabaril ng mga suspek na ngayon ay nasa ospital sa Sabah.

Kung ibabase ang report mula kay Major Filemon Tan ang tagapagsalitan ng Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom), inihayag nito na mga Malaysian national ang mga dinukot na foreign crew pero lumalabas naman sa international news na mga Indonesian ang mga ito.

Hindi rin nito kinumpirma ang report nang pamamaril sa isa sa mga foreign crew.

Nabatid na dakong alas-6:30 kagabi habang sakay ng isang tugboat na may pangalang Henry ang nasa 10 Indonesians at pabalik na sana sa Banjarmasin sa South Kalimantan, Indonesia mula sa bansa nang umatake ang nasa lima hanggang pitong mga armadong kalalakihan.

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32

Lumaban umano ang isang hindi nakilalang crew kaya binaril siya ng mga suspek na maluba nitong ikinasugat.

Apat lamang ang kanilang nadala habang nakaligtas naman ang lima pang ibang foreign crew.

Tumakas umano ang mga armado kasama ang apat nilang bihag sakay ng speedboat papunta sa hindi pa malamang direksyon.

"They were abducted by a group of 5 to 7 amred men. The group was using gray ang blue speed boat," pahayag ni Tan.

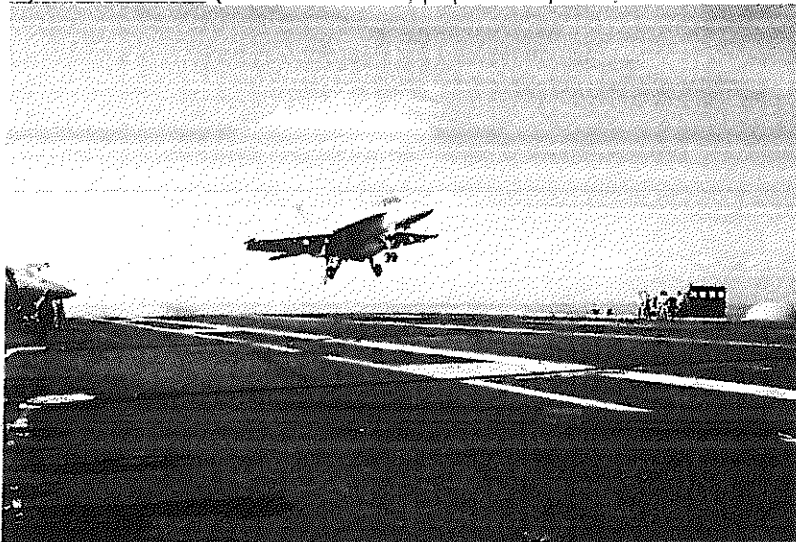
Na-rescue ang limang nakaligtas kasama ang sugatan nilang kasamahan ng Malaysian authority nang makapasok na ang mga ito sa Malaysian boarder.

Ang pangyayari kagabi ay pangatlong insidente na nang pagdukot sa mga Malaysain at Indonesian crew simula lamang nitong nakaraang buwan na isinasangkot ang grupo ng Abu Sayyaf.

www.philstar.com

US defense chief visits aircraft carrier in South China Sea

By Lolita C. Baldor (Associated Press) | Updated April 16, 2016 - 9:43am



An FA-18 jet fighter takes off on the USS John C. Stennis, aircraft carrier in the South China Sea on Friday, April 15, 2016. U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter visited the aircraft carrier during a trip to the region. **AP/Lolita C. Baldor**

ABOARD THE USS JOHN C. STENNIS — For the second time in five months, Defense Secretary Ash Carter landed aboard a U.S. aircraft carrier in the bitterly contested South China Sea, sending a deliberate message to China on American power in the region.

With a key Asia Pacific ally at his side, Carter's visit aboard the USS John C. Stennis underscores persistent complaints from the U.S. and its allies in the region about China's military build-up in the South

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China Sea. Beijing has been creating man-made islands, and equipping many with runways, fighter aircraft and other weapons.

Carter stood alongside Philippine Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin as they watched U.S. Navy fighter jets launch into the vivid blue skies, about 70 nautical miles west of the island of Luzon.

Later in the massive gray ship's hangar bay, Carter said his message in making the trip is that the United States "intends to continue to play a role in keeping peace and stability in this region."

He said the only reason America's presence in the region comes up as an issue is because of China's behavior over the last year— and "that's a question of Chinese behavior."

"What's new is not an American carrier in this region. What's new is the context of tension which exists, which we want to reduce," he said.

Rear Adm. Ronald Boxall, the commander of Carrier Strike Group 3, told reporters that the Stennis and the ships in the carrier's strike group "regularly have a (Chinese) ship or two operating with us or near us."

So far, he said, the Chinese vessels have been operating very professionally. "We've been very pleased with the interactions we've had," he said. "They are operating where they think they should, we're operating where we think we should. They generally have professional discussions over the bridge about where we are."

Under a blazing sun, as the heat index pushed past 100 degrees, Carter landed on the Stennis in a Marine V-22 Osprey helicopter. He spent about two hours on the ship, watching a number of fighters shoot into the sky off the flight deck, do circles around the Stennis and then land again, roaring to a stop as their tailhook caught the arresting wire.

He later spoke to several hundred sailors in the hangar bay, including one who asked why the U.S. allows China to participate in the large annual military exercise in the Asia Pacific. Carter said the U.S. wants to work together with China, and added that Beijing should not isolate itself.

The U.S. insists that the increasing American presence in the South China Sea and the broader Asia Pacific is meant to show support for allies and is not aimed at any one nation.

But the U.S. military presence also reinforces Carter's assertion that America will continue to fly and sail throughout the region, despite China's claims of sovereignty over the vast South China Sea.

China's Foreign Ministry already issued a statement criticizing increased U.S. military support for the Philippines, saying Thursday that, "military exchanges by relevant countries should not target third parties, much less support a few countries in challenging China's sovereignty and security, inciting regional contradictions and sabotaging regional peace and stability."

And on Friday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said that, "Before the U.S. returned to the Asia Pacific region, relevant countries had sought to control the disputes and handle the conflicts through friendly negotiations, despite the disputes having existed for over four decades."

Army vision: By 2028, a world-class Army that is a source of national pride.

He told reporters during a press conference that if the U.S. wants a peaceful solution to disputes, "I hope it can practice what it has preached, and that their actions can really help to peacefully solve the disputes."

The Philippines is one of several countries that have overlapping land claims with China. The U.S. has said it does not take a position on the claims, but wants them settled legally.

But Carter's visit to the Philippines this week, and Gazmin's presence on the carrier sent a more pointed message of solidarity.

The visit to the Stennis comes a day after Carter announced new military aid to Philippines that spurred protests from China.

This will be the second time that Carter has flown onto a carrier while it is embarked in the South China Sea. Last November, he was on the USS Theodore Roosevelt as it sailed northwest of Borneo.

That visit came just a week after a U.S. Navy destroyer, the USS Lassen, challenged China's claim to a 12-mile territorial limit around Subi Reef in the Spratly Islands, about 150 miles to 200 miles from where the Theodore Roosevelt was sailing Thursday.

Earlier in the day on Friday, Carter spoke at the closing ceremony for a joint U.S.-Philippines combat exercise called Balikatan or shoulder-to-shoulder.

He said the U.S. "will continue to stand up for our safety and freedoms" and those of America's friends and allies. And he said the U.S. is committed to insuring that the Asia Pacific remains a region where every can rise and prosper.

www.inquirer.net

LOOK: US and PH defense chiefs visit South China Sea

By: [Frances Mangosing](#)

[@FMangosingINQ](#)

INQUIRER.net

12:06 PM April 16th, 2016



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35

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US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter (second from left), Philippine Defense Sec. Voltaire Gazmin (second from right) and Armed Forces of the Philippines chief Gen. Hernando Iriberrri visit the USS John Stennis. PHOTO FROM US DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE'S FACEBOOK PAGE

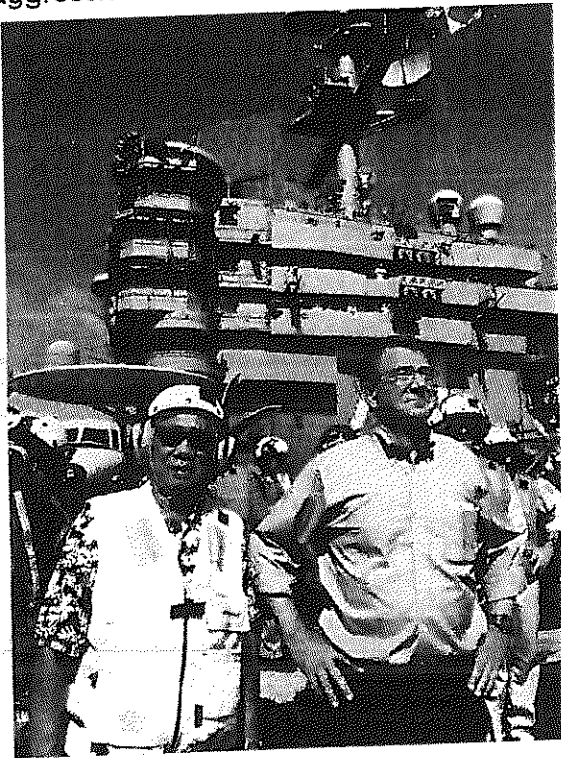
US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter on Friday visited a US carrier in the South China Sea, an increasingly assertive stance in the face of China's sweeping expansion in the disputed waterway.

Carter visited the USS John Stennis with Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin and Armed Forces chief Gen. Hernando Iriberrri. The US carrier was sailing within the exclusive economic zone of the Philippine claims in the West Philippine Sea.

They also rode a helicopter, and hovered at the gas-rich Recto Bank (Reed Bank), which is claimed by China despite being within the Philippines' 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone.

The US Secretary of Defense was in the Philippines to observe the Balikatan, the joint exercise involving troops of the US and the Philippines.

In his message, Carter said it was "standing up" for the Philippines and other countries affected by China's aggressiveness in the disputed waters.



Philippine Secretary of Defense Voltaire Gazmin and US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter aboard the USS John Stennis. PHOTO FROM THE PHILIPPINE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

"China's actions are causing anxiety and raising tensions. In response, countries in the Asia Pacific that are long standing allies and new partners are reaching out to the US to uphold the rules and principles that would allow the region to thrive, and we are answering that call, we are standing with these countries, we are standing up for those rules and principles," he said.

He also thanked the troops and sailors for their active participation in the PH-US Balikatan exercises and emphasized their importance in the region.

The visiting officials also witnessed flight deck operations aboard the US carrier.

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37

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Defense officials of the Philippines and the United States watch the operations at the USS John Stennis. PHOTO FROM THE PHILIPPINE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENSE

Gazmin also thanked the troops for taking part in the Balikatan: "This is a clear exemplification of 'honor, courage, commitment,' the core values of the US Navy.

"We are also as ever reliant on the strong bond of sympathy and mutual ideals shared by our two peoples, close friends and allies, to fight side-by-side against the threats of external aggression as we did in the past," he added.

The officials also visited the Antonio Air Base in Palawan, one of the agreed base locations under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. *IDL*

www.rappler.com

PH to China: No US militarization of West PH Sea

Malacañang also says that the 'highly uncontroversial' PH-US joint military exercises are 'meant to ensure that prosperity is continuous under a regime of stability through the participation of all countries'

Michael Bueza

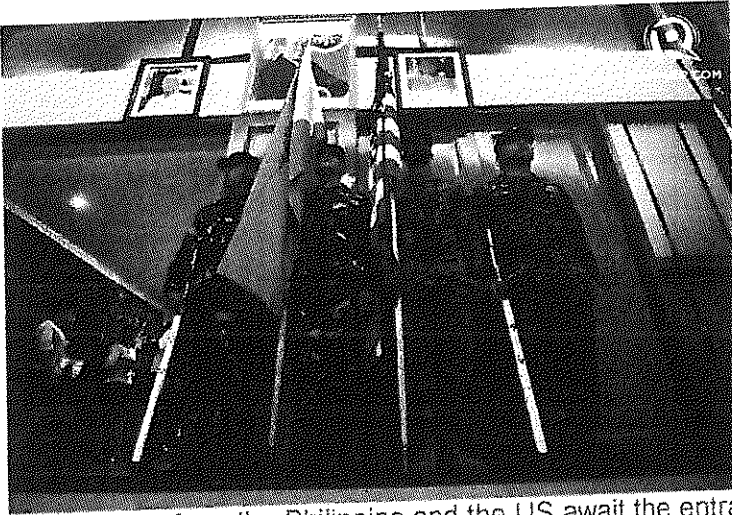
@mikebueza

Published 7:07 PM, April 16, 2016

Updated 7:08 PM, April 16, 2016

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38



Flag bearers from the Philippine and the US await the entrance of colors during the opening ceremonies for the annual RP-US Balikatan at the AFP-COC inside Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City on April 4, 2016. Ben Nabong/Rappler

MANILA, Philippines – The Philippines on Saturday, April 16, defended the United States from China's allegations that the superpower is militarizing the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea) through its presence in the disputed area.

In an interview with state-run radio dzRB, Undersecretary Manuel Quezon III, head of the Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Planning Office, said this was not the objective of the PH-US joint military exercises observed by no less than US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, which ended on Friday.

"We believe that the People's Republic of China, through its statements, misunderstands or perhaps does not properly appreciate the purpose of our activities with the United States," Quezon said.

He reiterated the position of the Philippines that the activities "are to ensure freedom of navigation in the region which benefits all nations because it allows the free, unhampered flow of trade which is to all the benefit of all the economies of the region."

"These are peaceful and highly uncontroversial exercises meant to ensure that prosperity is continuous under a regime of stability through the participation of all countries," Quezon added.

He also explained that there is "no contradiction" when it comes to the recent actions of the US in the region, especially in the West Philippine Sea. At the end of the Balikatan exercises, Carter visited a US warship in the disputed sea.

On Friday, Carter told reporters aboard the *USS John C. Stennis*, a nuclear-powered carrier that can carry about 75 planes and helicopters, that his visit to the warship "is a message to the region that the US intends to continue to play a role in keeping peace and stability in this region."

US hand-me-downs

Quezon was also asked about criticism that the country is getting only the superpower's military hand-me-downs.

At Rappler's second senatorial debate on Friday, former Akbayan party list representative and senatorial bet Walden Bello pointed out that the US has given the Philippines its old defense equipment.

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Quezon explained that the Hamilton-class cutters given by US to the Philippines is "already a generation or more advanced than what we used to have," despite it being a late 1960s ship.

He later dismissed a comment that these ships are already "like scrap," saying that "there are other nations that have also taken on the Hamilton-class cutter."

But, he argued that Philippines forces should be trained on how to use these first before taking on more modern weaponry.

"Kailangan masanay tayo sa hindi na 'yung mga antigong mga engine, for example, kung 'di mga mas modernong engine at mga mas modernong teknolohiya. Pag nasanay na tayo at bihasa na tayo doon, puwede naman tayo mag-invest sa mga pinaka-modernong bagay," Quezon said.

(We need to be trained not to use ships with old engines, for example, but those with more modern engines and more modern technology. Once we learn how to use it, we could then invest in the most modern equipment.)

He added that this move suits the country's needs because it helps in efforts to beef up the capacity of the Armed Forces and the Coast Guard while being prudent in spending public funds.

"Hindi naman tayo puwedeng maluho sa paggastos at marami ding mga bagay na kailangan bigyan ng atensyon katulad ng mga serbisyo para sa ating mga kababayan," he said.

(We can't be too extravagant in spending, and there are things that we need to attend to more, like various services for our countrymen.)

"I think *kung susuriin naman natin talaga ang mga kilos na ito at ang mga ongoing projects with our foreign allies, it shows na steady naman at may sense ang ginagawa natin,*" he added.

(I think that when we examine these actions and the ongoing projects with our foreign allies, it shows that [our alliance] is steady at what we do makes sense.) – Rappler.com

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US defense chief visits US warship in South China Sea

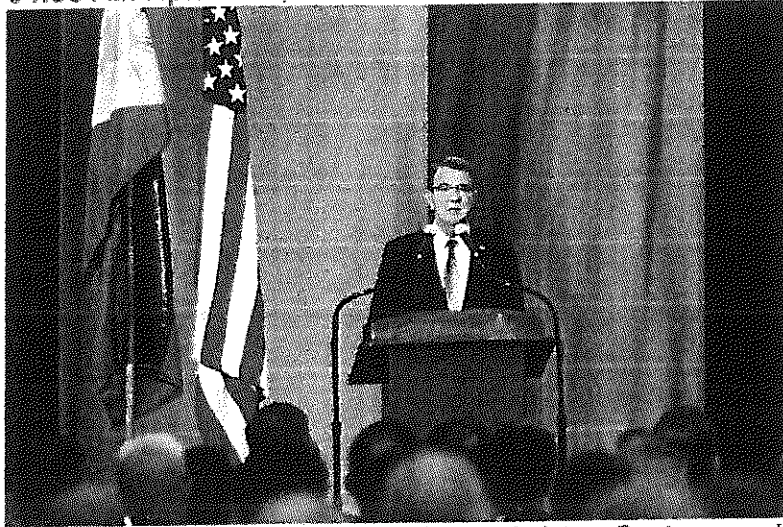
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Army Core Purpose: Serving the people. Securing the land.

04:50 AM April 16th, 2016



United States Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter speaks during the closing ceremony of Balikatan 2016 at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City. RICHARD A. REYES

US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter visited a warship close to flash-point waters of the South China Sea on Friday in a show of American commitment to maintaining stability in the hotly contested waterway amid China's increasingly aggressive behavior in the region.

"It is a message to the region that the US intends to continue to play a role in keeping peace and stability in this region," Carter told reporters aboard the USS John C. Stennis, a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier that can carry about 75 planes and helicopter.

Carter took a short flight on a Bell Boeing V-22 Osprey military aircraft to the aircraft carrier from Palawan. Palawan is the closest Philippine landmass to the Spratly archipelago, where China has constructed artificial islands on seven reefs and built airstrips on some of them that could be used by military aircraft to assert its claim to almost all of the resource-rich South China Sea.

Carter was accompanied by Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin, Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff Gen. Hernando Iriberry and Defense Undersecretary Emmanuel Bautista.

From the closing ceremony for the annual Balikatan (shoulder-to-shoulder) joint exercises between the US and the Philippine armies at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City, Carter and the Filipino defense officials rode to Villamor Air Base in Pasay City, where a Boeing C-17 Globemaster aircraft flew them to Palawan.

Philippine and American officials would not disclose exactly where the Stennis was sailing on Friday.

A US official traveling with Carter told Agence France-Presse (AFP) the Stennis was in Philippine-claimed waters.

During his time aboard the Stennis, Carter saw the launching and landing of F/A 18 "Hornet" fighter jets. Rear Adm. Ron Boxall, commander of the carrier group with responsibility for the Stennis, said one or two Chinese vessels had been following the carrier but there had been no tensions.

"They have been operating very professionally," Boxall said.

"The Stennis has sailed in these waters many times before, not just here in the South China Sea but all around the vast Asia-Pacific [region], six times in the last several years," Carter said.

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From the aircraft carrier, Carter and the Philippine defense officials flew back to Manila in the afternoon. ***With a report from AFP***

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