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OFFICE OF THE ARMY CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
NEWS CLIPPINGS

24 April 2016

Sunday

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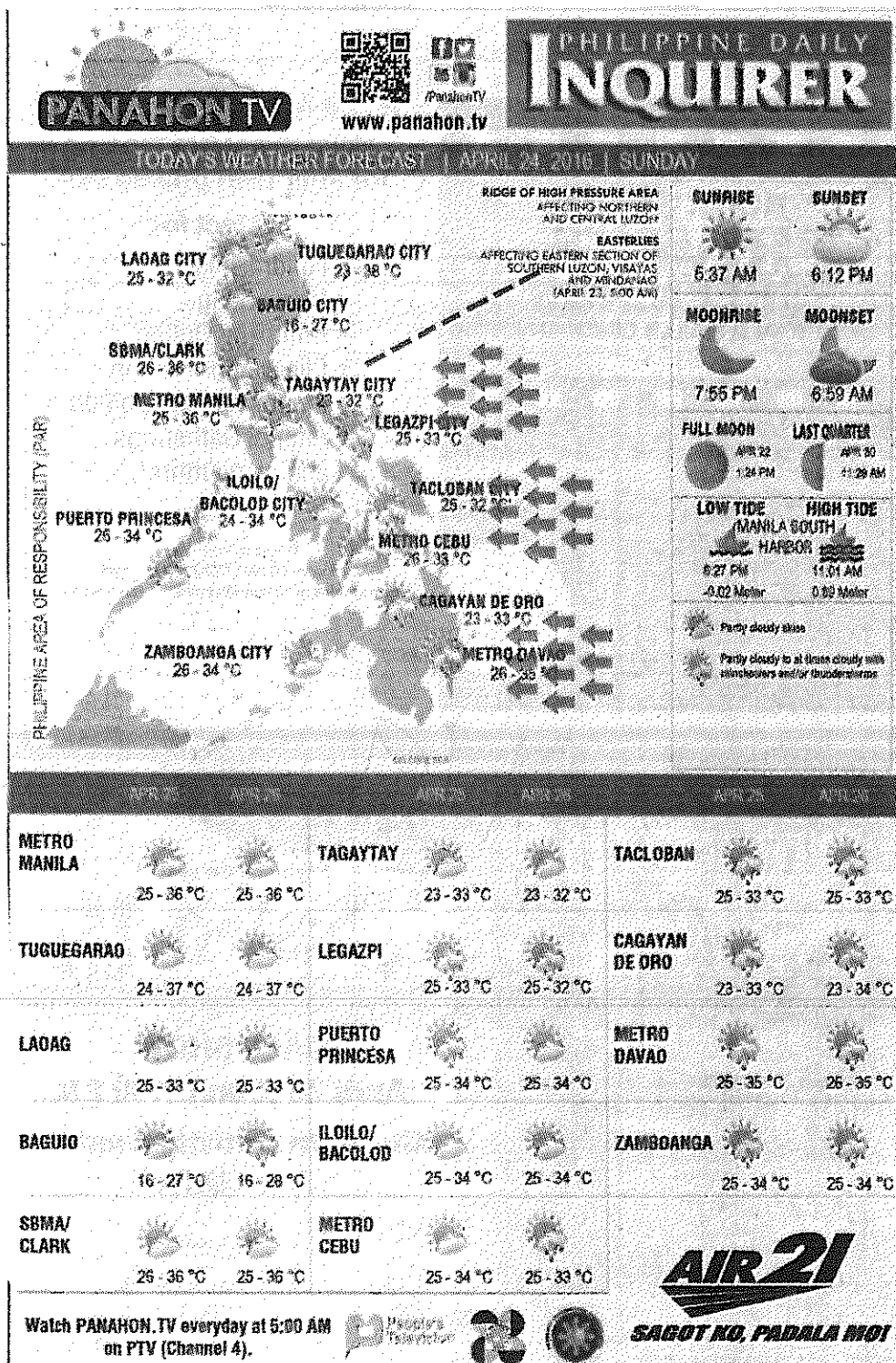
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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

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'Leaked info can't be used to rig elections'

By SHEILA CRISOSTOMO

There is no way voters' data hacked from the official website of the Commission on Elections (Comelec) can be used to rig the coming May 9 elections, poll officials said yesterday.

"That's one of the things we've always been sure of because the elections will not be run on the same servers (as the website). We will not even be using that (defaced) website," Comelec spokesman James Jimenez said.

Jimenez said the Comelec would print lists of voters with corresponding photographs to ensure quick validation of voters on Election Day.

"We will have a personal verification system on Election Day. The Comelec will not come out with polluted lists of voters coming from outside sources," he added.

Last March 27, Comelec's website www.comelec.gov.ph was defaced twice and voters' personal details were later found uploaded on various sites, including www.wehaveyourdata.com.

The website had allowed Internet users to search voters' profiles like full name, birth dates and addresses.

In some cases, passport details and even biometrics data were reportedly exposed.

According to Jimenez, the Comelec's Information Technology Department (ITD) is still verifying the accuracy of the leaked data.

"We never denied that the breach happened. What we are saying is we hadn't yet at that time verified 100 percent whether the breach was completely accurate," he clarified.

Jimenez said the Comelec database is undergoing forensic examination to determine how the hackers penetrated the system.

"We want to make sure our future steps are better suited to protect us against that kind of attack. The Comelec does not want it to happen again. It's not true our website was not protected," he stressed.

"No one in this day and age would put up a website without some sort of protection, but we have to remember that the hacking attempts were continuous attempts over time," he pointed out.

The hacking story first got public attention after the emergence of a user-friendly website that allowed Internet users to search for their personal information.

Owners of the website, <http://wehaveyourdata.com>, said they used the database dump of the LulzSec Pilipinas containing information on 70 million voters.

"The database contains a lot of sensitive information, including fingerprint data and passport information. So, we thought that it would be fun

to make a search engine over that data," they said.

Meralco, through spokesman Joe Zaldarriaga, also clarified the alleged hacker Paul Biteng is not a son of an employee. "Based on our records, we do not have an employee surnamed Biteng," he said.

'Genie out of the bottle'

But for cyber security experts, the data leaked can never be contained and will forever be in the public domain.

"Once this information is out, it's impossible to recover. It's not like 55 million Filipinos can change their fingerprints," Bryce Boland, Asia-Pacific chief technical officer of cyber security firm Fire Eye, told *Bloomberg*.

"I think it's very serious. We're talking about the personal details of about 55 million Filipinos. And it's not just names and address – their email address, their passport information, their height, their weight, their parents' names, even their fingerprint details. This is very significant," he added.

Boland noted the leak, now called Comeleak, is one of the largest data breaches of government information in the world.

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"The problem here is that it creates a lot of opportunities for malicious attacks, and we can see (possible) fraud attacks," he said. "It's just a matter of time before some criminal groups work out that they can use these information to get access to that."

Web security expert Troy Hunt – founder of website "have I been pwnd?" – also said the leaked personal information is now perpetually in the public domain.

"There's the potential to do serious damage to those involved and we need to remember that the same classes of data are held by all our governments in our respective corners of the world," he wrote in a blog post.

Despite the removal of the original website, Hunt said the original database is still being shared online.

"Not only has it been readily available for download from multiple locations on the clear web, it's been quite extensively torrented too," he added.

"The genie is well and truly out of the bottle and it won't be going back in," he added.

Hunt also debunked Comelec's claims that no sensitive information was compromised.

"This is a very large amount of data and reading through those column names, clearly many of them would be considered sensitive, personally

identifiable data," wrote Hunt.

Software security company Trend Micro has also warned about the sensitive personal information included in the leaked data.

"Based on our investigation, the data dumps include 1.3 million records of overseas Filipino voters, which included passport numbers and expiry dates. What is alarming is that this crucial data is just in plain text and accessible to everyone," said the security firm. "Interestingly, we also found a whopping 15.8 million record of fingerprints and list of people running for office since the 2010 elections," it added.

Clarification sought

Speaking over radio *dzRB*, Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Planning Office Undersecretary Manuel Quezon III said Comelec should clarify the extent of the hacking of its database as Malacañang has its own investigation into reports that its server, *mail.malacañang.gov.ph*, also downloaded information coming from the poll body's site.

Quezon also urged the public to take necessary precautions to protect their accounts.

"Having said that, what's good here, in a sense, is that the IT community – and so many Filipinos are good at this – have all been coming together

and been issuing advisories that are common sense for us all to follow," he said.

He said Executive Secretary Paquito Ochoa Jr. was immediately informed on the night of April 21 about social media screenshots that purportedly showed the Office of the President's mail server being used to torrent and seed the Comelec data.

Torrents are "peer-to-peer" file sharing systems that allow users to download files from the computers of other users on the same system.

"Now, as of (Friday) morning, there continue to be screenshots that the torrent was still being downloaded or seeded using the address. So what is being done? An investigation is being conducted by the Office of the President-MIS (Management Information Service) department," the Palace official said.

He said the subdomain *mail.malacañang.gov.ph* has been delegated to a specific mail server under the OP-MIS department since May of 2011.

"Now, they are currently reviewing their firewall and server logs, for any activity that would determine if one... the server was used to download and seed the torrent; or two, if the server was compromised or if a remote client was using the mail server to access the Internet; or three,

if the culprit intentionally forged his host name to appear as with malicious intention," Quezon said.

Meanwhile, Comelec said no significant problem was detected in its end-to-end transmission tests for 34 polling precincts across the country, except for two ballots that got swapped.

Comelec Commissioner Christian Robert Lim told reporters it was discovered that the ballots intended for Kapatagan in Digos City, Davao del Sur went to Pateros and vice versa.

To address the situation, he noted they had the 50 ballots for Pateros reprinted at the National Printing Office in Quezon City.

In Digos City, the Pateros ballots were pulled out at around 10 a.m. and delivered to Davao.

Lim said the incident is unlikely to be repeated on Election Day since there is an inventory system for the official ballots.

"They are properly labeled," said Lim, who also heads the Comelec Steering Committee for the 2016 Elections.

Karen Jimeno, head of Smartmatic's Voter Education Committee, said SIM cards from three telecommunication companies and BGAN satellite devices were used to transmit the results. – With Janvic Mateo, Aurea Calica

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THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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FINAL SHOWDOWN

All 5 presidential bets face off today in Pangasinan

By **LESLIE ANN G. AQUINO**

Expect the five candidates for the highest elective post in the land to go all-out in their third and final showdown at the Commission on Elections' (Comelec's) "PiliPinas Debates 2016," unfolding today at the Phinma-University of Pangasinan in Dagupan City.

The five candidates - Vice President Jejomar C. Binay, Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago, Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte, Sen. Grace Poe-Llamanzares, and former Interior and Local Government Secretary Manuel "Mar" Roxas III - have confirmed attendance at town hall debate at 6 p.m.

This final "PiliPinas" debate, co-organized by the Comelec with media partners - the Manila Bulletin, ABS-CBN, and the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP), will be aired live as the candidates face the nation with their respective agenda.

It will be televised by ABS-CBN in all of its media platforms and will also be shown through the live stream. ►22

ing services of the Manila Bulletin and ABS-CBN's online sites.

Today's debate is considered the most important stage of the PiliPinas debate series in which the candidates will share a common stage for the last time and try to convince undecided voters to carry them to the presidency on May 9.

Comelec Spokesman James Jimenez said the debate is crucial in the decision-making of voters especially since there are only about two weeks left before the elections.

"This debate is very important because it is an opportunity for people to gauge the capability of the candidates," Jimenez said.

Town hall format

With a town hall format, ordinary Filipinos representing different sectors in society will be asking questions to the five presidential candidates.

Their questions will touch on very relevant and pressing issues such as metro traffic, public transport, job security, and health, among others.

"The format of this debate will help voters discern because the candidates themselves get to ask other candidates the burning issues of the day regarding them... it's an opportunity to hear candid answers and that will help form the decision of voters on Election Day," Jimenez said.

Face-off

The candidates will also have an opportunity to challenge each other during the Face-Off segment. One candidate may grill a fellow candidate on this ability to govern and lead.

ABS CBN Intergrated News and Current Affairs head Ging Reyes earlier said that the Filipino people can expect all five candidates to give their best and go all-out as they try to pull away from what is shaping up to be the tightest race to the presidency in recent years.

"We encourage voters to watch the debate. Wherever they are, ABS CBN, with the Comelec, KBP and Manila Bulletin - through all its platforms - will deliver this very important event to the Filipino people. Voters still have time to make up their minds about the

candidates. Listen to their proposed policies, analyze their plans, look beyond motherhood statements, and empty promises. This final debate is the last opportunity for voters to see where candidates stand on issues and how they differ," De Villa said.

Be critical - PPCRV

But the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) said while debates are very telling, it should not be the sole reference of voters when choosing a candidate.

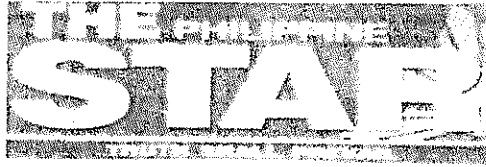
PPCRV National Chairperson Henrietta de Villa said this is because candidates are expected to put their "best foot forward" since it's the last debate. "These should not be the sole reference for voters when they finally

make their choices," she said.

"Speeches, detailed implementation of their pronounced program of governance, the PPCRV criteria of selection, track record, their off the cuff behavior and language should be factor in as we evaluate whom we should vote for," added De Villa. (With a report from Samuel Medenilla)

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Missing military exec found dead

DAVAO CITY – A military official, who was reported missing last week, was found dead on Friday.

The body of Maj. Hector Dongail of the Eastern Mindanao Command was found 200-meters deep in the waters of Samal Island and 1.8 kilo-

meters from where he and his group dived off on Saturday last week.

Dongail failed to return after a diving drill at Angel's Cove Resort in Talikud Island.

Technical divers retrieved Dongail's body yesterday.

– Edith Regalado

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Pahina. 6

Nawawalang Army major, nalunod pala

Makaraan ang halos isang linggong pagkawala sa diving training, natagpuang patay ang isang Army major sa karagatan ng Island Garden City, Samal, Davao del Norte kamakalawa.

Sa ulat ng tanggapan ni AFP-Eastern Mindanao Command (AFP-Eastmincom) Chief Lt. Gen. Leonardo Guerrero, kinilala ang nasawing biktima na si Major Hector Dongail.

Ayon sa report, ang bangkay ni Dongail ay narekober nitong Biyernes ng hapon sa bahagi ng karagatan ng Talikud Island sa

lalim na 81 metro sa ilalim ng tubig sa nasabing isla sa Davao del Norte.

Si Dongail ay dating administrative officer ni Guerrero sa nasabing command ng militar na nakabase sa Davao City.

Nabatid pa na si Dongail, miyembro ng Philippine Military Academy (PMA) Masikhay Class 1999 ay idineklarang nawawala makaraan itong mabigong makaahon sa diving training sa Angels Cove, Talikud Island noong Abril 16 ng taong ito.

Ayon kay Lt. Gen. Guerrero, ang bangkay ni

Dongail ay narekober ng mga technical divers noong Biyernes ng hapon matapos ang halos pitong araw na paggalugad sa karagatan sa isinagawang search and rescue operations.

“Eastern Mindanao Command is mourning with the death of Major Hector Dongail. In behalf of the officers, men and employees together with the family we thank everyone for your support and prayers,” pahayag naman ni Major Ezra Balagtey, Deputy Public Officers ng AFP-Eastmincom. (Armida Rico)

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Pahina. 4

3 SUNDALO SUGATAN SA AMBUSH

SAMAR—Tatlong sundalo ng Philippine Army (PA) ang sugatan nang tambangan ng mga miyembro ng New People's Army (NPA) sa Brgy. Laygayon, Pinabacdao sa lalawigan ito kamakalawa.

Ang mga biktima na nagtamo ng mga tama ng bala ay sina Lt. Zaldy Lim, Sgt. Julian Mil at Pfc. Ron Petilla, pawang nakatalaga sa PA sa nasabing lalawigan.

Ayon sa ulat, nagpapatrulya ang mga biktima nang pagbabarilin ng mga rebelde.

Nang manlaban ang tatlong kawal ay dito na mabilis tumakas ang mga NPA.

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AFP official accuses NPA of extortion, robbery

CAMP BANCASI, Butuan City – Maj. Gen. Benjamin R. Madrigal, Jr., commanding general of the largest division of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in Mindanao, yesterday described the New People's Army (NPA), armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) as "robbers" and "extortionists" for seizing more than 1,200 sacks of rice from a warehouse in Valencia City, Bukidnon province on Monday.

The Northeastern and Northern Mindanao Fourth Infantry (Diamond) Division (4th ID) chief said "their (NPAs) diabolical action must be stopped," and has called on all peace-loving citizen to help the government in putting an end to this nefarious activity.

The 4th ID chief said that owner of the stolen bulk of rice, Valencia City Councilor Helen Bernal, had previously refused to give in to the demands of the revolutionary movement for her to pay "revolutionary tax," and this was the reason why the rebels raided her rice mill.

"I described these NPAs as robbers and hijackers," Maj. Gen. Madrigal claimed.

"What do we expect from them (NPA) who now have finally transformed into a crime group? They know nothing but criminality," Madrigal said, adding: "They (NPAs) will continue to generate funds and sow terror to acquire firearms and they are only good at taking things which are hard-earned by other people".

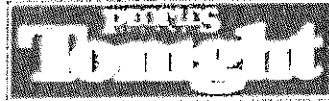
Some of the stolen sacks of rice were recovered by elements of the Eighth Infantry Battalion and Valencia City Police Station on Tuesday and Wednesday.

In a statement, the NPA said that owner of rice mill was punished for allegedly hoarding rice and that the seized rice will be distributed to the hungry farmers affected by the prolonged drought.

The NPA also accused the owner of the rice mill as "heartless trader" who allegedly abuses workers by paying them with low wages and also imposing high interest rates on farmers' loans.

Owner of the rice mill and warehouse strongly denied all the accusation hurled against them when asked by newsmen. (Mike U. Crismundo)

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PA officer toys with gun, hurt

By STEVE A. GOSUICO

CABANATUAN City -- An Army officer was wounded after he accidentally shot himself with his own pistol here last Monday.

Hurt was Army Capt. Manuel Mallare Jr., 34, single, assigned with the Army's 7th Infantry Division in Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija, of Purok 1, Bgy. Isla, this city.

Police said the alleged accidental firing occurred at 6 p.m.

The victim sustained a gunshot wound in his right leg and was taken to the Nueva Ecija Good Samaritan Hospital for treatment.

He was, however, discharged two hours later after being treated.

Police said he was toying with his government-issued cal. 45 pistol when it accidentally went off.

Meanwhile, a week after he went missing at the height of a diving training, an Army officer was found dead the other day in the Island Garden City of Samal in Davao del Norte.

Reports from Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Eastern Mindanao Command (Eastmincom) identified the victim as Major Hector Dongail.

Eastmincom Chief Lt. General Leonardo Guerrero said the body of the victim was found below 81 meters in the seawaters of Talikud Island.

The victim was a former administrative officer of General Guerrero in Davao City.

Dongail, a member of Philippine Military Academy (PMA) Masikhay Class 1999, was declared missing since April 14 in Angels Cove, Talikud Island, while undergoing diving training.

The victim's body was recovered by technical divers only last Friday.

Eastmincom deputy public officer Major Ezra Balagtey said the entire Eastern Mindanao Command mourns the death of Major Dongail. With report from Zaida delos Reyes-Palanca

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NPA reb slain by gov't troops

By **ZAIDA DELOS REYES-PALANCA**

A MEMBER of New People's Army (NPA) was killed in an encounter with government forces the other day in Barangay Datalblao, Columbio, Sultan Kudarat.

This was confirmed by Captain Rhyen Batchar, spokesman of Philippine Army's 10th Infantry Division (ID).

Batchar said the identity of the slain rebel was not available as of press time.

He said the victim belonged to Guerilla Front 72 of South Mindanao Regional Committee (SMRC).

The spokesman said the encounter occurred at around 2:30 p.m. in Bgy. Datalblao when elements of Army's 39th Infantry Battalion (IB) responded to information that rebels were harassing residents in the community.

Upon reaching the place, the soldiers were met with bullets from the enemy that prompted them to return fire. A firefight immediately ensued that resulted in the killing of the rebel.

Recovered from the crime scene was one M16 rifle owned by the slain rebel.

Over in Patikul, Sulu, seven soldiers were wounded in an encounter with members of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in a remote area.

Those injured were identified as Sergeant Rodguer Bilbao, Corporals Dennis Buela,

Jonathan Natividad and Philip Jaravilla, PFCs Michael Galduen, Netlie Tangonan and Allan Guingayan.

The victims were airlifted to Camp Navaro Hospital in Calarian, Zamboanga, for treatment.

Elements of Joint Task Group Sulu and 2nd Marine Company were scouring the mountainous area of Barangay Batungan when they encountered the bandits.

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RECOVERY OPS – Major Ezra Balagtey (right) of the public information office of the Armed Forces of the Philippines' Eastern Mindanao Command, and Capt. Rhyen Batchar, chief information officer of the 10th Infantry (Agila) Division brief members of the media about the search operations that led to the recovery of the body of Major Hector Dongail who may have drowned off Talikud Island in the Island Garden City of Samal in Davao del Norte. (Alexander D. Lopez)

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Acting AFP chief visits Zamboanga

By ROEL PAREÑO

ZAMBOANGA CITY – A day after his appointment, acting Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief Lt. Gen. Glorioso Miranda flew here to oversee the ongoing military operation against the Abu Sayyaf.

Miranda had a closed door briefing with senior ground military commanders led by Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) chief Lt. Gen. Mayoralgo dela Cruz to assess the ongoing operation.

It was his first out of town visit after he was appointed acting AFP chief upon the retirement of Gen. Hernando Iriberrri on Friday.

Miranda made the visit as the deadline imposed by the Abu Sayyaf on its four hostages will lapse on Monday.

The Abu Sayyaf posted a video of its captives and demanded P300-million ransom each for Canadians John Ridsdel and Robert Hall, Norwegian Kjartan Sekkingstad and Filipino woman Marites Flor.

The gunmen set the deadline for payment on Monday, threatening to execute the four hostages.

Government troops encountered the Abu Sayyaf on Friday at Mount Tugas, Patikul town, leaving seven troops under the Special Operations Command (SOC) 10 and 62nd Marine Company wounded during the one-hour firefight.

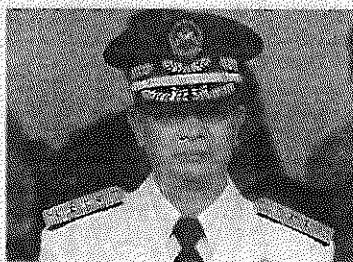
There was no immediate report if the group the government troops encountered were holding the four hostages.

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Payapa, maayos na eleksiyon, tiniyak ng acting AFP chief



Lt. Gen. Glorioso Miranda

Inihayag ni acting Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Glorioso Miranda na gagawin ng militar ang tungkulin nito upang tiyaking payapa, malinis at maayos ang idaraos na halalan sa Mayo 9.

Tiniyak din ni Miranda na mananatiling walang papanigang

pulitiko ang AFP, lalo na sa eleksiyon.

Ito ang inihayag ni Miranda nitong Biyernes, nang pormal siyang hirangin bilang kapalit ng nagretirong si AFP Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Hernando Iriberr.

Sinabi pa ni Miranda sa tututukan ng kanyang pamumuno ang pagtugis sa mga kalaban ng estado, partikular ang mga lawless element, mga grupong rebelde at mga terorista.

Bukod dito, sinabi ng bagong leader ng AFP na magiging pursigido rin ang militar sa pagbabantay sa mga teritoryo ng bansa, partikular na sa mga nakapaloob sa exclusive economic zone at sa ipinairal na freedom of navigation sa West Philippine Sea.

Fer Taboy

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The Manila Times

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7 soldiers wounded in clash with Sayyaf

ZAMBOANGA CITY: At least seven soldiers were reportedly wounded in fresh fierce clashes between government troops and members of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) late Friday night in a remote village in Patikul, Sulu, a military official said Saturday.

Major Filemon Tan, the spokesman for the military's Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom), told defense reporters that the fresh fighting erupted in Batungan village in Patikul town in Sulu, one of five provinces under the restive Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, where troops

were tracking down members of the notorious jihadist group.

Major Tan identified the wounded soldiers as Sergeant Rodguer Bilbao, Corporals Dennis Buela, Jonathan Natividad, and Philip Jaravilla, and Privates First Class Michael Galduen, Netlie Tangonan and Allan Guingayan.

They were immediately airlifted to Camp Navaro Hospital in Calarian, Zamboanga for medical treatment.

Tan said that the fighting broke out after elements of Joint Task Group Sulu and 2nd Marine Company were scouring the mountainous area of Barangay Batungan when they encountered the ASG.

The firefight lasted for several minutes after which the bandits fled towards an unknown direction bringing with them their wounded comrades.

Tan said the Abu Sayyaf that were encountered by their troops were led by ASG sub leader Hairul-

lah Asbang.

Records show that the bandits are still holding over two dozen hostages including 14 Indonesians, 4 Malaysians and 4 others they abducted in Samal Island composed of two Canadians, one Norwegian and a Filipina.

The group has demanded ransoms for their hostages and threatened to execute some of the captives if their governments fail to pay.

Government troops are conducting an ongoing search and rescue operation to save the hostages, while authorities are also investigating the recent clash in Patikul. **ANTHONY VARGAS**

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7 Marines wounded in Sulu encounter

By **NONOY E. LACSON**

ZAMBOANGA CITY – Seven Marine soldiers were wounded, while several members of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) were said to have been hurt or killed during an intense firefight Friday morning in a remote sitio in the village of Batungan in Patikul, Sulu.

A military report reaching here said members of Marine Battalion Landing Team (MBLT) 8 and 10 were on a manhunt operation to track down members of the ASG when they chance upon some of the bandits at a forested areas of Barangay Batungan about 10 am, Friday.

This sparked a firefight between the two groups that lasted for a few minutes, and resulted in the wounding of seven Marine soldiers and the undetermined number of slain and wounded ASG combatants.

The ASG militants have kidnapped Indonesian and Malaysian crewmen at gunpoint in separate attacks on three tugboats few weeks ago, sparking security concerns in the region.

It was learned that Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines plan to convene a meeting of maritime officials to discuss ways to boost security along the international sea lanes bordering the country, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The wounded soldiers were identified as Philippine Marine Sergeant Rodguer C Bilbao, Corporal (Cpl.) Dennis B Buena, Cpl. Jonathan P Natividad, Cpl. Philip R Jaravilla, and PFCs Michael M Galduen and Nestlie I Tangonan. They were all members of the MBLT-8 and PFC Allan F Guingayan of MBLT-10.

The wounded soldiers are now confined at the Camp Navarro general Hospital inside Western Mindanao Command (WesMinCom) in this city.

This developed as acting Armed Forces of the Philippine Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Glorioso Miranda arrived yesterday morning to visit the Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) headquarters where a closed door command conference was held among senior military officers in the region.

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Pahina. 6

7 sundalo sugatan sa Sayyaf clash

ZAMBOANGA CITY — Pitong sundalo ang nasugatan sa panibagong engkuwentro sa pagitan ng tropa ng pamahalaan at ng mga bandidong Abu Sayyaf sa liblib na lugar sa bayan ng Patikul, Sulu kahapon.

Patuloy na nilalapatan ng lunas sa Camp Navarro Hospital sa Calarian, Zamboanga City ang mga sugatang sundalo na sina Sergeant Rodguer Bilbao, Corporals Dennis Buela, Jonathan Natividad, Philip Jaravilla; Privates First Class Michael Galduen, Netlie Tangonan at Allan Guingayan.

Ayon kay Major Felimon Tan, spokesman ng AFP Western Mindanao Command, bandang alas-11:00 ng umaga nang makasagupa ng tropa ng Joint Task Group Sulu kabilang ang 2nd Marine Company ang grupo ng mga armadong bandido sa Bgy. Tugas, Patikul.

Kasalukuyang ginagalugad ng tropa ng militar ang bahagi ng kagubatan ng Bgy. Batungan ng nasabing bayan nang makasagupa ang mga bandidong kidnapers na umano'y pinamumunuan ni Sayyaf Sub leader Hairullah Asbang. (Armida Rico/Al Jacinto)

ONLINE NEWS

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Rally sa ibang lugar sa Mindanao, propaganda ng NPA - Phil. Army

By Bombo Koronadal

KORONADAL CITY - Malaki ang paniniwala ng militar na panibagong propaganda ng New People's Army (NPA) ang nagpapatuloy na simultaneous rally na isinasagawa ng mga magsasaka at indigenous people (IP) sa iba't ibang lugar sa Mindanao.

Sa panayam ng Bombo Radyo Koronadal kay Captain Andre Cabales, operation officer ng CMO Battalion 10th Infantry Division, Philippine Army, nais ng grupo na ipakita sa international community na walang pakialam ang gobyerno sa pangangailangan ng mga mahihirap.

Ayon kay Cabales, ginagamit lamang umano ng mga ito ang nararanasang gutom dulot ng El Nino phenomenon upang isulong muli ang kanilang pansariling interes at idolohiya sa kabundukan.

Kung totoo umano na bigas lamang ang hiling nga mga magsasaka, bakit nasama umano sa mga placards ng mga ito ang pagpapaalis sa pwersa ng militar sa mga lugar na may presensiya ng mga rebelde.

Kaugnay nito, nanawagan ang militar sa mamamayan na maging mapagmatyag dahil ang ginagawa ng mga ito ay bahagi ng kanilang selebrasyon ng anibersaryo ng National Democratic Front (NDF) bukas, Abril 24, 2016.

Sa ngayon, nananatili ang nasa 2,000 mga raliyesta sa Regional Center, Barangay Carpenter, lungsod ng Koronadal na tatagal umano hanggang Abril 25, 2016 o hangga't hindi naibibigay ang kanilang mga hiling.

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3 sundalong sugatan sa ambush sa Samar, ligtas na

By Bombo Tacloban

TACLOBAN CITY - Nilinaw ngayon ni Lt. Col. George Domingo, Battalion Commander ng 87th IB na ligtas na sa peligro ang tatlong sundalong sugatan matapos ang pang-aambush sa Barangay Laygayon Pinabacdao Samar.

Ayon kay Domingo, nasa Maulong Hospital ng 8th Infantry Division ang mga sugatang sundalo na kinitalang sina Lt. Zaldy Lim at SSgt. Julian Mil at PFC Ronelvic Petilla.

Sa ngayon ay nagpapatuloy pa rin ang ginagawang hot pursuit operation ng mga otoridad sa pinaniniwalaang tatlo hanggang limang armadong rebeldeng miyembro ng New People's Army.

Ngayong linggo ito na ang pangalawang pang-aatake na ginawa ng mga rebeldeng grupo kung saan noong nakaraang linggo lang ay namatay ang tatlong rebelde at sugatan naman ang 5 sundalo matapos ang engkwentro sa Sitio Baryawon, Brangay San Augustine Basey Samar.

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

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1 patay sa bakbakan ng militar vs NPA; hot pursuit ops nagpapatuloy

By Bombo Koronadal

KORONADAL CITY - Nagpapatuloy ang hot pursuit operation ng mga militar sa mga rebelde na miyembro ng Guerilla Front 72 ng New People's Army (NPA).

Ito ang inihayag ni Capt. Danny Tapang, spokesperson ng 39th Infantry Battalion (IB) ng Philippine Army sa Bombo Radyo Koronadal.

Kasunod ito nang nangyaring bakbakan sa pagitan ng 39th IB at Guerilla Front 72 kahapon na nagtagal ng 30 minuto kung saan isa ang patay sa panig ng mga rebelde.

Narekober naman sa namatay na rebelde ang high powered firearm na M16 rifle.

Maaaring may kaugnayan umano ito sa anibersaryo bukas ng National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) na itinatag ng Communist Party of the Philippines–New People's Army (CPP-NPA).

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Negosyante, 'di na magsasampa ng kaso laban sa NPA na tumangay ng bigas

By Bombo CdeO

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY - Dismayado ang pulisya bagamat ginagalang ang desisyon ng negosyanteng konsehal na unang ninakawan ng saku-sakong mga bigas mula sa rice mill sa Barangay Batangan, Valencia City, Bukidnon.

Ito ay matapos hindi na maghahain ng kasong kriminal ang may-ari ng CH Bernal Milling na si Valencia City Councilor Helen Bernal laban sa nasa 60 kasapi ng New People's Army (NPA) na natangay sa 1,384 na sako ng mga bigas.

Sa panayam ng Bombo Radyo, inihayag ni acting PNP regional director Supt. Michael John Deloso na tumawag na sa kanilang mga kasamahan sa Valencia Police Station ang konsehal at nagpahiwatig na ayaw na nilang palakihin pa ang isyu.

Sinabi ni Deloso na sa katunayan ay wala na itong interes na kuning muli ang 440 na sako ng bigas na narekober ng militar at pulisya nang inilunsad ang pursuit operation laban sa mga suspek.

Napag-alaman na nasa P2.4 milyon halaga ng bigas ang natangay ng mga rebelde nang puwersahan nitong pinasok ang pribadong rice mill ni Bernal noong Abril 18.

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PNP fine-tuning preparations for polls

By CECILLE SUERTE FELIPE

With less than three weeks before the elections, the Philippine National Police (PNP) is fine-tuning its preparations, including the integration of government agencies involved in the political exercise.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the PNP earlier signed joint operational guidelines to ensure peaceful, orderly and credible elections.

The guidelines include the activation of joint security control centers, conduct of internal security and counter-terrorism operations, putting up of joint Commission on Elections (Comelec)-AFP-PNP checkpoints as well as the creation of joint task groups to dismantle private armed groups.

"Together with the Comelec, we are once again giving life and

power to this partnership... as we join forces in securing communities during the elections," PNP chief Director General Ricardo Marquez said.

"Once more, we will prove to the people... their police and armed forces remain steadfast and vigilant against all forms of lawlessness," Marquez added.

He said they would also provide text hotlines to allow the public to immediately report violations of election laws.

Marquez said telecommunications facilities, including cell sites, would be secured to ensure the fast transmission of election results.

He urged police officials to deploy special operations units to secure communication facilities. – With Miriam Grace Desacada

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US to China: Resolve sea row peacefully

By JOSE KATIGBAK
STAR Washington bureau

WASHINGTON – China has pulled out all the stops in vilifying the Philippines for pursuing arbitration to resolve their maritime disputes in the South China Sea, said Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel.

In a speech at the

University of Southern California on Friday, Russel said the United States was determined not to let China undermine the interests of other nations with conflicting maritime claims.

"We don't object to China exercising international maritime

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rights, but we do urge it to clarify its South China Sea maritime claims consistent with international law and to recognize other countries possess the same rights it exercises," he said.

Territorial claims are notoriously hard to resolve, and some disputes pre-date the creation of the People's Republic of China, he said.

Manila filed a case before the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague contesting the legality of China's nine-dash line claim over the South China Sea and the West Philippine Sea under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

China cites "historical facts" for justifying its claim to 90 percent of the sea, which is also being contested by Vietnam, Taiwan, Brunei and Malaysia. It has expressed intention to ignore the tribunal's ruling expected in the coming weeks.

"We are committed to a rules-based regional order that benefits all nations and we won't accept the division of the region into spheres of influence," he said.

Russel said from day one, the Obama administration has been clear-eyed about the potential for both conflict and cooperation with China.

Obama has had about 30 face-to-face meetings with his Chinese counterparts so far in addition to phone calls, letters and senior envoys to resolve differences and to shape China's choices to encourage responsible stewardship and contributions to global leadership.

The 1982 UNCLOS covers issues such as who has jurisdiction to fish or drill for oil in any given location. It guarantees freedom of navigation, overflight and other lawful uses of the seas.

"We don't ask China to renounce its territorial claims in the East or South China Seas, but we do ask China to renounce unilateral and destabilizing actions that change the status quo at the expense of the other claimants," he said.

"We don't object to China exercising international maritime rights, but we do urge it to clarify its South China Sea maritime claims consistent with international law," he added.

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Air patrol near Panatag part of US-Phl pact

The conduct of air operations of four US jet fighters and two attack and rescue helicopters near Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal on Tuesday was part of agreed activities between the Philippines and the US, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) said yesterday.

"These are agreed activities that will help enhance maritime security in this part of our seas and an assurance for those who navigate these sea lanes," AFP spokesman Brig. Gen. Restituto Padilla said.

Padilla issued the statement in reaction to the recent US Pacific Command's Air Contingent sortie over inter-

national waters but within the general vicinity of the Chinese-occupied Panatag Shoal.

The shoal is located 120 nautical miles off Zambales province and is well within the country's 200-nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone.

A traditional fishing ground of Filipinos for decades, the area was seized by China in 2012.

At the conclusion of this year's joint Phl-US Balikatan exercises early this month, visiting US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said that 200 US servicemen who took part in the drill, as well as some of the *USS Stennis Strike Group's*

embarked air power, will be staying behind for joint air patrols with their Filipino counterparts.

The return of US servicemen and their equipment in the country on rotation basis is in line with the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) that the two allies have forged in the wake of China's aggressive actions in pursuit of its nine-dash line maritime claim in the South China Sea.

US jet fighters that are now based at Clark Air Field in Pampanga are five A-10 Thunderbolts attack aircraft, three HH-60G Pave Hawk attack and search and rescue helicop-

ters and one MC-130H Combat Talon, an aircraft designed to perform resupply and infiltration as well as other special operations.

Panatag Shoal is strategically located along the busy international shipping lanes where billions worth of trade pass yearly. China is reportedly planning to transform the shoal into an artificial island for military purposes.

China's reclamation plan over the area is line with its continuing move to put up its second island defense chain extending from the South China Sea towards the Pacific Ocean, passing through Bashi Channel near the island prov-

ince of Batanes.

In his lecture on the China's plan in the region, Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio warned that Beijing is planning to put up a military base on its illegally occupied Panatag Shoal.

This move is part of Beijing's grand design to enable its attack submarines to sail towards the Pacific with ease and be within the striking distance of the US mainland and US military bases in Guam and Hawaii, Carpio said.

Local and foreign security and defense analysts also issued the same warning, saying China's first island defense chain in the South China Sea is already nearing

operational stage and it is now moving towards establishing their planned second island defense chain, starting from Panatag.

At present, China's air and naval facilities in its man-made islands on Kagitingan (Fiery Cross) Reef, Zamora (Subi) Reef and Panganiban (Mischief) Reef are almost complete.

Security analysts said that once China's first island defense chain becomes fully operational, this will impede the free flow of trade and commerce in the South China Sea, affecting not only the Philippines but also almost all neighboring states as well as South Korea and Japan.

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PH fishermen put up fight vs China

By Allan Macatuno
Inquirer Central Luzon

SUBIC, Zambales—Filipino fishermen last week fought off a Chinese Coast Guard vessel that was driving them away from the Scarborough Shoal, according to a crew member of a fishing vessel that had just arrived from the shoal.

The crew of FB Leslie May struck the approaching rubber boat deployed by the Chinese on April 15 after the Chinese patrol threatened to cut off the vessel's anchor, said Joely Saligan, 36, a fisherman from Barangay Calapandayan here.

The Filipinos were fishing near the shoal around 9 a.m. on April 15 when the Chinese chanced upon them.

"Their rubber boat was damaged and they immediately left us there. At that instance, we knew they called for backup,"

Saligan told the *INQUIRER* on Saturday.

Saligan, who was tasked with managing the engine of FB Leslie May, said the rubber boat returned, escorted by a Chinese Coast Guard ship. One of the ship's crew members ordered the Filipinos to leave the shoal, he said.

The shoal is located 230 kilometers from Masinloc town, Zambales province, well within the Philippines' 370-km exclusive economic zone.

It is also known to residents of this coastal town as Panatag Shoal or Bajo de Masinloc.

"Philippines go away! Go home!" Saligan said, quoting one of the Chinese coast guards.

Instead of leaving, Saligan said they turned to the other Filipino fishermen who were in the area.

"We wanted to gather together as a show of force but it enraged the Chinese coast guard," Saligan recounted.

He said several Chinese vessels also chased 11 other Filipino fishing boats, each carrying nine or 10 fishermen.

"The chase lasted for about five hours. They (Chinese coast

guards) only stopped and left us when it was almost dark," Saligan said.

He said the Chinese carried long firearms.

"Despite that, we will remain resolute. We're not doing anything illegal so we will continue to insist on our rights to fish around the shoal," he said.

The shoal also serves as a midsea refuge for fishing boats during stormy weather at sea. It used to be a free zone for local fishermen until the Chinese began patrolling the area in 2012.

Another fisherman, Junmar Pumicpic, 25, captain of FB

Bubhoy, said they had no plans to avoid Panatag Shoal despite the increased presence of Chinese Coast Guard vessels there.

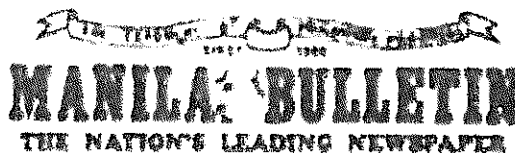
Pumicpic and his crew left this town on Friday for another monthlong trip back to the Scarborough Shoal.

On March 5, Pumicpic's boat was damaged when it was rammed by a Chinese Coast Guard rubber boat that carried three uniformed men.

In the past several months, Filipino fishermen stood their ground and showed no fear as they faced the Chinese, Pumicpic said.

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Palace keen on joint sea patrols with neighbors

By MADEL SABATER – NAMIT

Malacañang said yesterday it is keen on conducting joint sea patrols with Malaysia and Indonesia to stop abductions in Mindanao.

Indonesians and Malaysians were among recent victims of kidnappings believed to have been perpetrated by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG).

Indonesia's Coordinating Political, Legal and Security Affairs Minister Luhut Binsar Panjaitan expressed concern that the Philippine seas "will become like the Somalian waters" where piracy and kidnap for ransom activities are rampant.

Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Planning Office (PCD-SPO) Undersecretary Manuel Quezon III said the Philippine government is very much concerned about the kidnapping of foreigners, including Malaysians and Indonesians, in Mindanao.

"We are very concerned with this. Indonesia is one of the oldest and closest friends among the family of nations of the Philippines," Quezon said. "This warning is one that should be taken seriously by everyone," he said.

He said representatives from the government of the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia intend to meet together "to find ways to work together because of the dangers to the security of any sailor is a common threat to us all."

"Therefore it is a sign that there's a serious issue: it is a challenge for all three governments and their respective citizens to work together and stamp out this piracy," Quezon said.

Quezon said the joint sea patrols underline the principles of free and open navigation in the region.

"Ito ay interesting lahat at kailangan mag tulong-tulong tayong lahat para masigurado ito (This is in the interest of everyone and we need to help one another to ensure this freedom of navigation)," he said.

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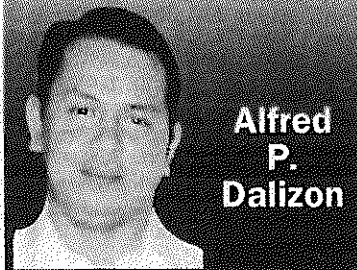
Abu Sayyaf humiliating gov't, Filipinos

ABU Sayyaf kidnappings really won't stop embarrassing not only the outgoing Aquino government and its Armed Forces but also the entire Filipino race. Nearly two weeks after I wrote that the next Philippine president must bear in mind that the notorious extremist group remains a force to reckon with in Mindanao, they struck again in the waters between Tawi-Tawi and Sabah the other Friday.

This time, the speedboat-riding gunmen snatched four Indonesians and shot another one aboard two tugboats. As the foreign news agencies Reuters and Associated Press have reported, 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. These attacks again contradict claims by Palace and military spokespersons and their Bosses that the Abu Sayyaf will be crushed or are already a 'spent force.'

If my memory serves me right, the Abu Sayyaf shot into national prominence when they snatched a mayor and his young grandson in Basilan in the early 90s. I covered military operations to rescue the Biels during that period and saw badly-wounded Marine and Army troops being evacuated by Air Force helicopters to AFP hospitals, some of them shot in the head and body, others missing a foot after stepping on improvised landmines planted by the ASG in the Basilan jungles.

CRIME FILES



Alfred P. Dalizon

Again, the US\$5 million question is why the Abu Sayyaf has continued to grow and operate with impunity more than 25 years after that Basilan incident. Nearly three weeks ago, the group is believed to have been behind the kidnappings of several Indonesians and Malaysians outside Philippine waters. And as the country was marking 'Araw ng Kagitingan' last April 9, 18 battle-hardened Army soldiers were killed by the bandits in Basilan, the latest to die in defense of our dear motherland.

The Abu Sayyaf atrocities in beautiful Mindanao not only cause fear to tourists but also setbacks the economy. Just look at reports last week that Malaysia closed its Sabah border to the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in protest over the kidnappings of its nationals by the ASG. Americans, Europeans, Asians and others from rich Middle East countries would also not dare to step into Sulu, Basilan or Tawi-Tawi and the rest of

the Zamboanga peninsula knowing they are easy prey for the Abu Sayyaf.

Reports quoted ARMM executive secretary, lawyer Laisa Alamia as saying that Malaysian authorities implemented a blockade since last week to Tawi-Tawi, an ARMM province component nearest to Sabah, thereby halting the centuries – old barter trading activity in the area between Malaysia and the Philippines. Malaysia reportedly has put up a naval blockade in the area to prevent ARMM barterers from going to Sabah.

Alamia was quoted as saying that the ASG kidnapping activities has become a 'national issue' which has promoted ARMM Governor Mujiv Hataman to seek a dialogue with the Palace to resolve the issue. The warning came as Abu Sayyaf gunmen last April 2 snatched four Malaysian nationals from a ship off the east coast of Sabah and sped-off towards the direction of the Philippine territory after the incident. Five other crew members of the ship from Myanmar and Indonesia were not harmed and left behind by the ASG abductors.

Two Fridays ago, speedboat-riding gunmen snatched four more Indonesians and shot another one aboard two tugboats in the waters between Tawi-Tawi and Sabah. 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

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year.

Amid calls for the AFP to reveal what really happened in Tipo-Tipo where 18 of our brave soldiers died and 52 others were wounded during a 10-hour encounter with the extremists, at least two ranking AFP officials have called for a thorough inquiry into the embarrassing incident, a call being supported by many in this country.

"What happened was a failure of leadership from top to bottom for lack of experience, failure of intelligence and failure of realistic planning to include intelligent mission planning," an AFP general was quoted by the Philippine Daily Inquirer as saying on condition of an-

onymity. The official said the brigade up to the Western Mindanao Command should be held liable.

The Inquirer also quoted another AFP general as saying that 'heads should roll' and even pinned the blame on Maj. Gen. Mayoralgo dela Cruz, the AFP Southern Mindanao Command chief whom he accused of 'micromanaging the operations at the expense of soldiers' lives.' "He planned it. He even went to the battalion headquarters before the troops jumped off. This is super micromanagement, a three-star general wanting to do the 2nd Lieutenant's job," the official said.

On nearby Jolo island, the militants gave a final deadline on April 25 or until tomorrow for payment of P300 million (\$6.5 million) ransom for each of two Canadians and a Norwegian captive other-

wise they would be beheaded. Suspected Abu Sayyaf terrorists are also holding other foreigners, including one from the Netherlands and one from Japan.

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

Take it from Senator Bongbong Marcos who minced no words in condemning the Abu Sayyaf for their latest atrocities. Sen. Marcos has called on the AFP to disclose the details of the Basilan encounter and said the entire nation and most especially the families of the slain soldiers deserve full trans-

parency in the military operation against the international terrorist group.

"We need a full picture of the encounter. We should not hide these details. The Filipino people and most especially the families of the soldiers killed and wounded deserve to know the whole truth," the young Marcos said. The grieving AFP has a lot of explaining to do here actually. One question that should be answered is who gave the go-signal for the troops to assault the Abu Sayyaf territory?

Again, this is another question. Where are the tanks, the artillery and the air support? The April 9 killings also brought back horrifying memories of the Al-Barka clash in Basilan on October 18, 2011 where 19 Army Special Forces were killed, some of them mutilated during a day-

long firefight with about 400 gunmen from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the ASG and private armed groups.

Just like in the infamous Mamasapano, Maguindanao operation that left 44 PNP Special Action Force commandos dead in January last year, it seems that our soldiers were unprepared that tragic day. Could it be lack of accurate intelligence? Could it be a 'double-cross' in which they were lured by some contacts to enter the mouse trap? A ranking intelligence officer also told me that for him, could it be some AFP officials were after the \$5 million reward offered by the U.S. government for the capture dead or alive of their main target named Isnilon Hapilon?

As I have previously pointed out, the next Philippine president should

prioritize a program that would 'finish off the Abu Sayyaf' since four of our past presidents have failed to arrest the problem that has negatively put Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and Sulu in the world map for the past 26 years. What we need here is a 'whole-of-government and a whole-of-a-nation' approach.

This year, the ASG has really gone on a kidnapping spree and bringing the number of their hostages to 14. Still in their hands are Dutch Ewold Hurn, Canadians John Ridsdel and Robert Hall and Norwegian Kjartan Sekkingstad. If this government will allow the payment of ransom for the foreign hostages, the kidnappings would stop for sure as it would give the Abu Sayyaf all the money they need to buy more weapons, collect in-

telligence and launch more kidnappings with their neighbors turning a blind eye on each illegal activity since they themselves are earning from the trade.

As I have been repeatedly saying, the government, the whole intelligence community, the AFP and the PNP must be fully prepared to counter threats posed by the ASG, the ISIS and other terror groups in Mindanao and other urban parts of the country. Metro Manila included. Although my friends from the intelligence community have been telling me that the ISIS still has no actual presence in Mindanao except for local terror groups who have pledged allegiance on them, WE should not be complacent and must be ready always to thwart plots of these determined terrorists.

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MODERNISASYON NG MILITAR NG MGA BANSANG SA SOUTHEAST ASIA LABAN SA AGRESIBONG CHINA

NAKAALERTO sa lumulinaw na paninindigan ng China sa South China Sea, pinatigting ngayon ng mga gobyerno sa Southeast Asia ang mga pagsisikap upang mapalitan ang mga lumang fighter aircraft, kaya naman umaalagwa ngayon ang mga multi-bilyong dolyar na kasunduan sa kapakinabangan ng mga gumagawa ng warplanes.

Sa kabila ng limitadong budget ng mga bansa sa rehiyon, inihayag ng mga sales executive na abala sila sa nakalipas na mga linggo makalipas ang limang taong pananamlay ng industriya – at sinabi ng mga source mula sa industriya at sa mga gobyerno na sa mga susunod na buwan ay may posibilidad na magkaroon ng ilang multi-bilyong dolyar na transaksyon mula sa Malaysia hanggang sa Vietnam.

Sa isang trade conference na idinaos sa Kuala Lumpur ngayong linggo, dumagsa ang mga interesadong mamili at mga nagbebenta mula sa mga kumpanyang Russian, French, British, Chinese, Pakistani at American. Idinaos kada dalawang taon, iniulat ng mga dumalo na ngayong taon na marahil ang pinakaabala para sa kanila.

Pangunahing bebentahan ang isa sa pinakamalaki ang gagastusin sa rehiyon: ang Malaysia, na papalitan na sa wakas ang Russian 1990s-era MiG-29 fighters nito makalipas ang ilang taong pagpapaliban. Ayon sa industry sources, plano ng Kuala Lumpur na bumili ng hanggang 18 jet, isang transaksyon na aabot ang halaga sa mahigit \$2.5 billion.

Kabilang sa mga pagpipilian ang Saab Gripen, ang Eurofighter Typhoon, ang Russian Sukhoi Su-30, at ang Sino-Pakistani JF-17. Kumpanya ang France na makakukuha ito ng order para sa Dassault-built Rafales, ngunit positibo rin ang iba pang bidder.

"We are hoping to make Malaysia the ninth country to buy the Typhoon," sabi ni John Brosnan, na namumuno sa transaksyon sa Asia para sa BAE Systems, isa sa mga katuwang ng Eurofighter consortium.

Tumanging magkomento sa usapin ang kagawaran ng depensa ng Malaysia.

Pumapangalawa sa listahan ng mga mamimili ang Vietnam, na handa nang sumugal sa alternatibo sa matagal na nitong supplier na Russia. Una na itong nakipag-usap sa Saab at sa Dassault ng France upang bumili ng 12 fighter jet, ayon sa mga source mula sa industriya.

"They seem to be keen on moving away from Russia, but it has been dormant so far," sabi ni Kaj Rosender, regional director para sa Gripen exports ng Saab. "It looks like the next call will be on Vietnam."

Bibihirang magkomento ang Vietnam sa mga usaping gaya nito.

Bagamat nagdadalawang-isip na isapubliko ang komento, sinabi ng mga opisyal sa mga bansa sa Southeast Asia, kabilang ang Indonesia at Vietnam, na ang biglaang interes nila sa pagbili ng mga bagong fighter jet ay bunsod ng pagiging agresibo ng China sa pinag-aagawang South China Sea.

Iniulat ng Chinese state media noong nakaraang linggo na lumapag ang military plane ng Beijing sa Fiery Cross Reef, isa sa mga bagong runway na itinayo sa mga artipisyal na isla, at tumindi ang espekulasyon na magpapalipad na ang China ng mga fighter jet nito sa maraming bansa sa Southeast Asia na nakikipag-agawan sa mga isla sa South China Sea.

"Rising tensions in (the Asia Pacific region) have seen a long overdue process of military modernization move up the political agenda in a number of countries," saad sa report ni Craig Caffrey, principal analyst sa IHS Jane's. "The Philippines, Indonesia, Japan and Vietnam are all following China's lead and we see no sign of this trend coming to an end."

Reuters