

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



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NEWS CLIPPINGS

24 January 2016

Sunday

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

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

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As promised, Pia brings home real crown



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kicks off in Cebu today

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SAF commandos
to get highest honor

Pope to bishops:
Find new ways
to show God's mercy

Manitoba councilor
shot dead

Man Damon
to visit Phil

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to visit Phil

Manitoba
to visit Phil

MANILA GULLETTIN

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Palace rules out PNOY testimony



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Palace rules out PNOY testimony

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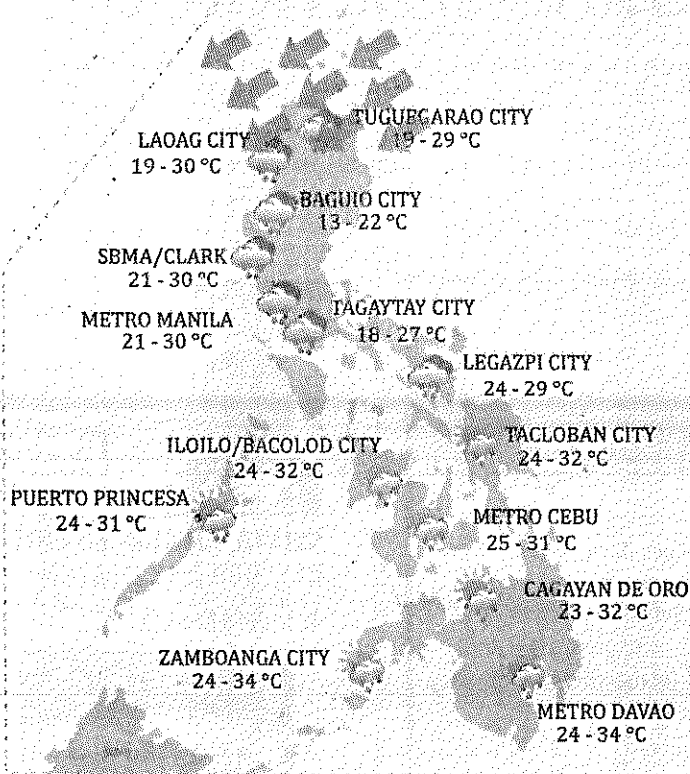
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TODAY'S WEATHER FORECAST

JANUARY 24, 2016 | SUNDAY

NORTHEAST MONSOON
AFFECTING NORTHERN LUZON
(JANUARY 23, 5:00 AM)



SUNRISE	SUNSET
6:25 AM	5:51 PM
MOONRISE	MOONSET
6:06 PM	6:13 AM
FULL MOON	LAST QUARTER
JAN 24 9:45 AM	FEB 1 11:27 AM
LOW TIDE	HIGH TIDE
5:44 AM -0.25 Meter	10:06 PM 1.12 Meter
Partly cloudy to at times cloudy with rainshowers Partly cloudy to at times cloudy with rainshowers and/or thunderstorms Cloudy skies with rainshowers and/or thunderstorms Light rains	

	JAN 25 MONDAY	JAN 26 TUESDAY	JAN 27 WEDNESDAY	JAN 28 THURSDAY	JAN 29 FRIDAY	JAN 30 SATURDAY
METRO MANILA	21 - 31 °C	21 - 31 °C	22 - 31 °C	12 - 22 °C	13 - 23 °C	13 - 23 °C
METRO CEBU	24 - 31 °C	24 - 31 °C	24 - 32 °C	23 - 31 °C	24 - 31 °C	24 - 31 °C
METRO DAVAO	24 - 33 °C	23 - 34 °C	24 - 33 °C	24 - 35 °C	24 - 34 °C	23 - 34 °C
BAGUIO						
PUERTO PRINCESA						
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24 January 2016

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER

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Miss Universe is home as promised, Pia brings home real crown

By Jeannette I. Andrade

THE LAST time she was at Ninoy Aquino International Airport (Naia), Pia Alonzo Wurtzbach barely turned heads.

But early Saturday morning, her name was on everybody's lips and people couldn't have enough of her as they wantonly clicked away at the newly crowned Miss Universe using their mobile phones.

"I was so excited, I wasn't able to sleep last night," confessed Wurtzbach during a press conference shortly after her arrival.

In an interview later aired over TV, the beauty queen said

she brought home the real crown, not a replica that was sometimes used when the Miss Universe had to visit "rough" neighborhoods.

"(The organizers said) the Philippines deserves the real deal so we brought (home) the genuine crown," Wurtzbach said, referring to the \$300,000 diadem studded with diamonds, topaz, sapphire, crystal and gold, whose design recalls the Manhattan skyline.

"In my previous interviews I always said, 'Don't worry. I'll bring home the crown, and now I (was) finally able to do it,' she added.

Wurtzbach arrived in Manila around 6 a.m. yesterday on-board Philippine Airlines flight 538 from Jakarta, Indonesia, where she performed an official function as Miss Universe. She was welcomed home with a bou-

quet and a hug by Binibining Pilipinas Charities Inc. (BPCI) chair Stella Marquez Araneta.

"Every time I think about my trip coming back here, I would tear up a little bit because I feel like it has been so long and I have so many things to share with all

MISS UNIVERSE/A15



GRAND HOMECOMING

An exultant Pia Alonzo Wurtzbach waves to well-wishers on her arrival on Saturday morning at the same Manila airport where, just a month ago, she left virtually unnoticed. The 2015 Miss Universe comes home to a grand homecoming that includes a ticker-tape parade on Monday, a courtesy call on President Aquino and a congressional medal of distinction from lawmakers. HINOJOSA/GETTY IMAGES

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of you,” said the world’s most beautiful woman who held herself back from speaking further, explaining that she was saving the stories of her experiences for today’s official press conference.

“I appreciate your taking time to come here,” Wurtzbach told the crowd of journalists, airport workers and airline passengers.

When she left for the Miss Universe beauty pageant in Las Vegas on Nov. 30 last year from Naia Terminal 2, Wurtzbach had only two TV news crew who saw her off along with BPCI representatives and a handful of supporters, some of whom wore paper cutouts of tiaras and sashes.

The beauty queen had asked for prayers and promised to do her best to win the coveted Miss Universe title.

Yesterday, the crowd screamed out her name as her car pulled out of the airport.

Worthy ambassador

Smiling and waving from the car’s open window, Wurtzbach left a trail of breathless people in her wake.

Malacañang yesterday hailed the Filipino-German beauty as a “worthy ambassador” of the Philippines and said her victory as Miss Universe united the whole country.

“It has been four decades and really, there are things that unite our society ... I think success like this is one of them,” Communications Undersecretary Manuel Quezon III said on state-run Radyo ng Bayan.

“In her interviews with the media in America, which we all followed, we saw that she’s a worthy ambassador of the country (as she) speaks very well,” Quezon added.

Wurtzbach is set to make a courtesy call this week on President Aquino, who was once romantically linked to her.

Asked what the public could expect from the Palace during Miss Universe’s courtesy call, Quezon said her visit to Malacañang “would be enough

symbolism that the people’s Palace and the leader of our government and society ... represent all of us in praising and giving respect to Ms Wurtzbach.”

42-year title drought

A ticker-tape parade that will take her through Makati and Cubao, as well as a congressional medal of distinction await Wurtzbach during her homecoming, one month after she was named Miss Universe in a highly controversial coronation in Las Vegas, Nevada.

American host Steve Harvey had misread the cue card and mistakenly declared Miss Colombia Ariadna Gutierrez as Miss Universe 2015, only to correct himself four minutes later. The Colombian beauty was actually first runner-up, while Miss Philippines was the pageant winner.

Wurtzbach’s victory ended a 42-year title drought for the Philippines in the popular pageant generally dominated by South American beauties.

The last Filipino Miss Universe was Margie Moran, who won in 1973. Gloria Diaz first won the title for the country in 1969.

Asked whether Malacañang supported a congressional move to grant Wurtzbach a tax exemption from her Miss Universe earnings amid a reminder from tax commissioner Kim Henares that her winnings were taxable, Quezon said: “Well, I’m sure Ms Wurtzbach would appreciate (that) very much (but that is within) the power of Congress, and I’m sure they are thinking of the maximum benefit for all of us.”

Wurtzbach was hailed as a “Modern Filipina whose transformation inspires young women all over the world to follow their dreams and aspirations.”

Unilever PR head, Apples Aberin, cited Wurtzbach’s previous attempts to win Binibining Pilipinas before clinching the title in 2015. “Despite the trials and tribulations she experienced along the way, she continued to believe in herself, knowing she had it in her to transform from good to great, from better to best. Her story and determination to realize her goals ... truly makes her a Modern Filipina who is confidently beautiful with a heart,” she added. *With a report from Nikko Dizon*

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24 January 2016

MANILA BULLETIN
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• **New Zambo commander**

CAMP ENRILE, Zamboanga City
– The military has installed a new commander of Task Force Zamboanga (TFZ) during a simple ceremony presided by Maj Gen Gerardo F. Barientos Jr., the Commander of the 1st Infantry Division of the Philippine Army. Army Col Juvymax R. Uy formally assumed his post over the weekend as the new commander of TFZ replacing Col. Nixon M. Fortes, who is the concurrent Deputy Brigade Commander of the 102nd Infantry Brigade. The 102nd Infantry Brigade has operational jurisdiction in the provinces of Zamboanga Sibugay and Zamboanga del Sur. (Nonoy E. Lacson)

04 January 2016



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Mission order PDEA stumps

By JANVIC MATEO

The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) will coordinate with the Armed Forces of the Philippines to clarify the claims of Marine Lt. Col. Ferdinand Marcelino that he has a mission order to conduct surveillance on a shabu laboratory in Manila where he was arrested on Thursday.

"I will ask for a copy," PDEA director general Arturo Cacdac Jr. said on Friday upon learning that Marcelino insisted he has a mission order during his inquest at the Department of Justice.

"I will ask the officer who signed the mission order, what is the nature of the job that was given to him?" Cacdac said.

Cacdac said it does not make sense for Marcelino to claim that he was conducting a surveillance of the shabu laboratory where he was arrested.

"How can a person who was tasked to conduct casing and surveillance be arrested in a clandestine laboratory?" he remarked.

Marcelino was arrested Thursday in a raid on a suspected shabu laboratory in Manila. Along with Chinese national Yan Yi Shou, lawmen seized from them some 76 kilos of illegal drugs worth P383 million.

Citing information from operatives, Cacdac said Marcelino and Yan had a key to the property, which was covered by a search warrant and has been under surveillance.

Yan was supposedly a former asset of the PDEA, where Marcelino worked as chief of a special unit.

During his inquest, Marcelino claimed he was working on a mission order as part of the operation "Oplan Moses" of the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP).

However, his former ISAFP boss and now Army chief Lt. Gen. Eduardo Año said a mission order that he issued to Marcelino had lapsed in 2014.

The Army's Intelligence Service Group (ISG) has issued

a certification signed by Col. Mario Guloy that Marcelino has been sharing intelligence information with the unit from November to December 2015 on illegal drug activities.

The current ISAFP chief, Maj. Gen. Arnold Quiapo, said Marcelino is no longer connected with his unit as he returned to the Navy following his assignment with military intelligence in 2014.

"It's been a long time that he is not with us. Ask the Navy, because he is assigned at the Philippine Navy Officers' Candidate School," Quiapo said.

He said ISAFP does not have any information regarding Marcelino's activities.

Malacañang also denied Marcelino's claim that he was detailed with the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission (PAOCC).

"Ferdinand Marcelino is not and has never been an operative detailed to the PAOCC. Our records show no ongoing PAOCC operations involving Lt. Col. Marcelino," said Undersecretary Manuel Quezon III of the Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Planning.

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Marcelino's lawyer Dennis Manalo said they have submitted a certification from the Army's Intelligence and Security Group showing that Marcelino is sharing intelligence information on alleged involvement of Army personnel in the illegal drug trade from September to December last year.

Manalo claimed Marcelino's arrest was a "misencounter."

Former PDEA director and former AFP chief Dionisio Santiago, for his part, defended Marcelino, saying the Marine officer has been working in the shadows against big drug syndicates operating in the country.

He did not deny that Marcelino was one of his trusted operatives while he was PDEA chief, describing him as a seasoned drug operative, and that if needed he would go underground.

"He is not the kind of officer who will just rely on reports coming from action agents. He himself will do the confirmation and verification, and most of the time he would just surprise me with search warrants," Santiago said.

He added that he recruited Marcelino to join PDEA be-

cause he knew he is an upright officer.

Fearing for Marcelino's safety, Santiago said that the arrested Marine officer should be kept in a well secured jail facility, saying that with what happened, it is clear that somebody out there wants to silence him.

Rogue

Cacdac reiterated an earlier statement from AFP chief Gen. Hernando Iriberry who reportedly told Interior Secretary Mel Senen Sarmiento that he has not authorized Marcelino to conduct anti-drug operations.

Cacdac said that if Iriberry specifically said that it was prohibited, why was he still given the supposed order?

"Somebody will be charged with insubordination," he said.

Cacdac said Marcelino is no longer connected with the Army as he is already detailed with the Philippine Navy.

Cacdac noted the lack of coordination with PDEA, which he said is an administrative requirement for such kind of operation.

He stressed the need for coordination to prevent misencounters.

Cacdac said the PDEA did not receive any intelligence from the AFP regarding the laboratory when they were building up the case.

A police official, on the other hand, said they might have to conduct a lifestyle check on Marcelino.

An official said the lifestyle check could help investigators gather more information about Marcelino, who served as head of PDEA's Special Enforcement Service.

"A lifestyle check is part of the full blown investigation," the source told **The STAR**. The official, however, refused to go into detail on how investigators will go about the lifestyle check.

The source said investigators could check some of Marcelino's bank accounts as a start.

Aside from lifestyle check, another source said Marcelino would have to present proof that he was working undercover.

"He cannot just claim he is on a mission. He has to satisfy all the aspects of surveillance operations and progress report on his cases," one police official pointed out.

The same official said Marcelino cannot just make up

a story on his mission since agents of PDEA and the police Anti-Illegal Drug Group are trained to sniff out illegal drug operations.

The operation that led to the arrest of Marcelino was an offshoot of a raid in Barangay Lawang Bato, Valenzuela City early this month, during which two suspected Chinese drug suppliers were arrested.

Some of the PDEA agents were reportedly confused about the presence of Marcelino at the townhouse and even thought he was with the operatives.

As the raiders were documenting evidence inside the townhouse, Cacdac arrived and reportedly blew his top when informed by PDEA agents of Marcelino's presence inside the raided unit.

The PDEA chief reportedly gave Marcelino a tongue lashing and ordered his arrest.

Both Cacdac and Marcelino are graduates of the Philippine Military Academy. Cacdac graduated at the PMA in 1978 while Marcelino belonged to PMA Class 1994.

Cacdac advised Marcelino to get a good lawyer.

– **With Jaime Laude, Cecilia Suerte Felipe, Marvin Sy**

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Marcelino to get due process – Malacañang

By **ELLSON A. QUISMORIO**

Malacañang assured yesterday that drug buster-turned-drug suspect Lt. Col. Ferdinand Marcelino would be granted due process of law in his current troubles.

“Of course, and that [due process] is the right of every Filipino, nasa poder man o hindi (whether you’re in position or not),” Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Planning Office (PCDSPO) Undersecretary Manuel Quezon III said in an interview on state-run DZRB.



MARCELINO

Known for high-profile drug arrests in years past, Marcelino found the tables turned on him Thursday in Manila when he was arrested by police in the company of a foreign drug supplier.

The ex-Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) director has denied any wrongdoing, saying he was just conducting surveillance work.

Quezon said the only way to determine the truth regarding Marcelino’s case is to observe the legal process.

“In fact, ang palaging sinasabi ng lahat ng mga kinauukulan na dapat masunod ang proseso dahil dito mialalaman ang katotohanan at ‘yon ang magiging batayan ng tamang desisyon at tamang parusa kung kailangan man (What the authorities have been saying is that only by observing the process can arrive at the truth. From there, we can make the right decisions and come up with the proper penalties, if necessary),” he said in the same interview.

If anything, the Palace official was careful not to say anything negative about the supposedly “disgraced” Marcelino.

“I would not want to prejudge or (say) anything. Alam niyo naman ‘pag magsasalita ang Malacañang or anyone from Malacañang it might be misconstrued,” Quezon said.

“But I think what we should bear in mind is lahat naman tayo ay interesado na umusad ang anti-drugs campaign ng pamahalaan; number two, na dapat din nating isipin na mahirap talaga ang sitwasyon ng lahat ng mga alagad ng batas na nakikibahagi rito (We are all interested in moving the government’s anti-illegal drugs campaign forward; number two, we should also keep in mind that this puts the law enforcers in a difficult situation),” said Quezon.

“The simple truth is it’s dangerous work and sometimes may mga temptations siguro. But that is not to say that in this particular case mayroon na tayong conclusion kaya nga may proseso,” he added.

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Page. 1

Marcelino dropped like hot potato

LT. COL. Ferdinand Marcelino is not a Palace man, neither was he detailed to the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission.

Malacanang however assured Marcelino of due process and protection of his rights, according to presidential communications undersecretary Manolo Quezon even as he stressed that the Palace is not preempting the outcome of the investigation.

"Lt. Col. Ferdinand Marcelino is not and has never been an operative detailed to the PAOCC," the commission's executive director, Gen. Reginald Villasanta, said in a statement.

"Our records likewise show that no ongoing PAOCC operations in-



MARCELINO

volve Lt. Col. Marcelino," he added in a statement sent via the Office of Executive Secretary Paquito Ochoa Jr.

Marcelino and a Chinese national were arrested Thursday by government agents who raided a drug laboratory in a townhouse in Sta. Cruz, Manila.

Marcelino, a former officer of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, was arrested along with Yan Yi Shou, 33, after PDEA agents and police barged into the drug laboratory at the corner of Felix Huertas and Batangas streets at 12:30 a.m.

At least 64 kilos of shabu or methamphetamine placed in four rectangular plastic bags with an estimated street value of P383 million, assorted

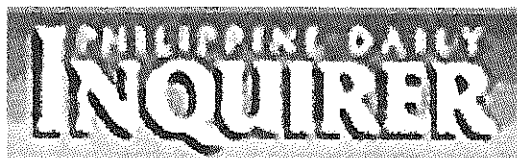
chemicals, and a beige Toyota Camry were seized during the raid authorized by the Quezon City Regional Trial Court.

Shou was said to have served as an interpreter for the PDEA in 2005. After his arrest, Marcelino said he was doing surveillance work for the PAOCC when he was arrested.

PDEA chief Arturo Cacadac said they were surprised to find Marcelino in the drug laboratory because he was not on their radar. **EM**

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Give Marcelino his due under law—De Lima

By Tarra Quismundo

WHETHER he was on a legitimate secret mission or had gone rogue, the former top antinarcotics operative arrested in a drug lab in Manila is entitled to due process under the law, former Justice Secretary Leila de Lima said yesterday.

De Lima said it was too early to conclude anything about the case of Lt. Col. Ferdinand Marcelino, the former chief operative of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), whose arrest in a drug raid before dawn on Thursday came as a shock.

Marcelino is detained while being investigated for manufacturing, conspiring to manufacture and possession of illegal

drugs—all nonbailable offenses.

The decorated Marine insisted he was in the drug den as part of a legitimate intelligence operation.

"The incident regarding Marine Col. Ferdinand Marcelino and the different versions on what actually happened, as claimed by PDEA, on one side, and by Marcelino on the other, should give everyone involved reason to pause and allow the legal process to take its course," De Lima said in a statement.

She recalled witnessing the officer's dedication to the job in antidrug operations of the National Bureau of Investigation.

"It is still too early to tell which version is the truth, al-

though presumptively the fact of Marcelino's presence at the location is a ground for his warrantless arrest and immediate inquest. However, at the same time, the story of how a well-known antidrug crusader responsible for some of the biggest drug busts and antidrug intelligence operations in law enforcement history suddenly turns rogue leaves much to be explained," De Lima said.

Gone to dark side

"Given Marcelino's impressive track record, this turn of events is not easily comprehended by those who have closely worked with him and who have seen his dedication to law enforcement, including myself, when he was instrumental

in the success of past NBI operations," she said.

If Marcelino had indeed gone to the other side, "then we have a lot to worry about," said De Lima.

"If, on the other hand, the situation is as Marcelino claims, that he was on site by virtue of an AFP mission order, then we should give him the benefit of the doubt as he clarifies his version of events during his preliminary investigation."

Turning agents like Marcelino to the dark side may not be that easy, De Lima added.

"Much to this story is yet to unfold and it will serve all parties concerned and the public to first let the legal process take its course in uncovering the truth," she said.

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BusinessMirror

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'Malacañang promised too much to MILF'

By MANUEL T. CAYON | *Mindanao Bureau Chief*

DAVAO CITY—Malacañang is to blame for “promising too much” to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) should the failure of Congress to enact the Bangsamoro basic law (BBL) become the effective recruitment cause for followers of the Islamic State (IS), which claims to have gathered a small following from the mostly young population of the Moro land, a social scientist said.

“The BBL would now become the rallying point for those who don’t really believe that the government could carry out its promise on bringing peace to Mindanao, even as the armed movement among them has agreed to try the peace process,” said Aries A. Arugay, executive director of the Institute for Strategic and Development Studies, and who also teaches political science at the Diliman campus of the University of the Philippines.

“Now that President Aquino is nearing the end of his term, many congressmen would probably just sit down as a new president takes over the problem of a more discontented, and probably more angry Moro population,” he said.

For advocates of war against the government, “this should be a very

strong argument to tell those who believe in the peace process that they were all wrong all along for towing the line of Malacañang.”

“The failure to pass the BBL would be the best recruiter for the ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria],” he added.

Arugay said the Aquino administration could never force representatives from Luzon to take a serious look at the problem in Mindanao because of their own concern with their respective constituencies, which has repeatedly resulted in the failure to have a quorum to decide on the BBL.

Although the leaderships of both chambers of Congress have announced that the BBL was still up for approval, legislators, particularly members of the House of Representatives, continue to be ab-

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sent from sessions.

The government Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (Opapp) has also said that it was not giving up.

“Even if we experience difficult challenges in pursuing the passage of the BBL, both parties will pursue this peace process,” said Al Julkipli, a member of the legal team of the government peace panel.

“No one is giving up. Both parties are still working toward achieving the objectives of the peace process, which is to pass a meaningful BBL that [will] address the two main problems [of keeping security and improving governance] in Mindanao,” Julkipli said.

“If these two problems would be significantly addressed, we believe the entire Philippines would ultimately benefit. That is why we are still continuously coordinating and lobbying with the legislators. We are always ready to provide our support and technical assistance in defense of and in explaining the contents of the BBL in its original form.”

Last year the Opapp also raised

similar appeal to Congress, to pass the BBL or risk heightening extremism among a section of the Filipino Muslims in Mindanao.

Julkipli was in the provincial capitol of Lanao del Sur in Marawi last week and told a multisectoral audience that “the BBL could still be passed by Congress, despite the limited time remaining before it adjourns for the election campaign.”

The Opapp also said that Centrist Democratic Party Rep. Rufus B. Rodriguez of Cagayan de Oro, has announced that the House had set the voting on the bill on January 27.

Rodriguez is the chairman of the House Ad-Hoc Committee on the BBL.

“We have set the voting on Wednesday. As long as we have a quorum, the voting will push through,” Opapp quoted Rodriguez as saying.

Julkipli added that regardless of what happens to the BBL, “[w]e should remain calm. We should approach this in the most active and most passionate way, in the most peaceful way that we can.”

“No one is giving up. Both parties are still working toward achieving the objectives of the peace process, which is to pass a meaningful BBL that [will] address the two main problems [of keeping security and improving governance] in Mindanao.”—Julkipli

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

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Peace advocates: 'Red God' is bad sign

COTABATO CITY—Peace advocates in Mindanao expressed lament over the emergence of a Christian vigilante group even as they lambasted the government for failing to provide protection to ordinary people which they said gave rise to vigilantism.

Bobby Benito, executive director of the Bangsamoro Center for Just Peace, told the INQUIRER by phone on Saturday that the formation of the so-called Red God Soldiers was "not a good development because it might revive the times of military-backed vigilante groups in 1970s."

In the 1970s, the Ilaga, a Christian group known for its bloody attacks and human rights abuses in Mindanao, was tapped to help in the war on Muslim rebels.

The existence of the Ilaga further widened the divide between Christians and Muslims in Mindanao as its members targeted even hapless civilians. Among its bloodiest attacks was the June 1971 massacre at a mosque in Barangay Manili in Carmen, North Cotabato, where 65 men, women and children were killed.

There was also the Christian vigilante group Tadtad, which targeted Muslims even if they were not armed.

But Benito said the creation of the Red God Soldiers is also proof that the government

failed to provide protection to its people.

"They lost their trust in our rule of law. If the state has provided them protection, I don't think they will arm themselves," he said.

Benito warned that the government's continued failure to provide security to its people would give rise to more vigilante groups in the future, which would be dangerous as it would further divide the people.

Fr. Eliseo Mercado Jr., of the Notre Dame University's peace studies, said the formation of the new Christian armed group showed that the police and the military could not protect the people.

"There is no place for any armed group in a safe and secure environment. Thus the emergence of any armed groups—insurgents and vigilantes or militias—reveals the failure of government and state to secure and protect all its citizens," he said.

Mercado said it also showed the "big disconnect between the peace process and realities on the ground."

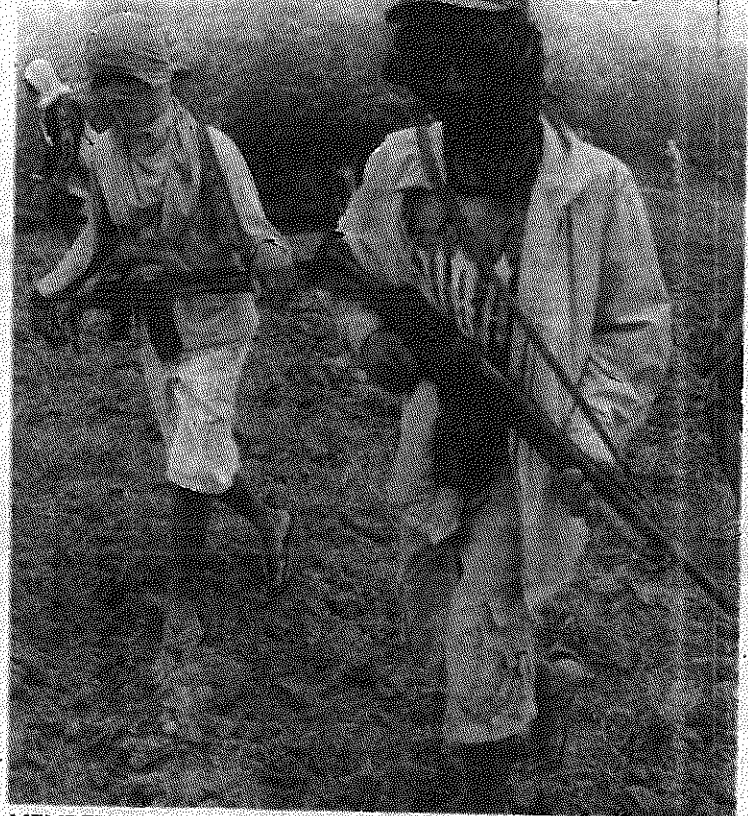
Von Al Haq, spokesperson for the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front's military wing, said he could only hope that the Red God Soldiers will not use their guns against civilians.

Members of the Red God Soldiers gathered in a hinterland area somewhere in Central Mindanao early this week, announcing their presence and saying that authorities are aware of their existence.

While they said they would be just a defensive force, a spokesperson for the group who

identified himself as Brother Asiong, said they would not cower in fear of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, which the Red God Soldiers blamed for brutal attacks on civilian communities.

*Jeoffrey Maitem,
Inquirer Mindanao*



MEMBERS of a previously unheard of militia calling itself Red God Soldiers make their presence known to the public on Jan. 19 at a clandestine press conference somewhere in Central Mindanao.

JEFFREY MAITEM/INQUIRER MINDANAO

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US forces to continue flying, sailing in South China Sea

MOSCOW (PNA/Sputnik) – US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter has stated that Beijing is taking steps which will lead to international isolation amid ongoing tensions over disputed territories in the South China Sea.

The comment by the Pentagon top official was made on Friday at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Carter offered that the US is not seeking an excuse for a clash with China, but noted that the American military will keep operating in the region.

"I am not one of those people who believe that conflict between China and the US is inevitable. It is certainly not desirable and I don't think it is likely," he said, adding that American ►10

forces, "will fly, sail and operate whatever international law permits in the South China Sea."

Carter blamed Beijing for mounting tensions in the region and reiterated that Washington is not fueling the conflict, while urging no one to "take sides."

"China is taking some steps that I fear are self-isolating, driving towards a result that none of us wants," Carter said, referring to China's activities in the region.

China has recently constructed airstrips on artificial islands built in territories it has arbitrarily claimed in the South China Sea. The islands are being tested for new military and civil aviation facilities. Beijing has repeatedly claimed it doesn't intend to militarize the region, but suggested that it is ready to defend its South China Sea facilities, if necessary.

The disputed South China Sea territories include the Spratly and the Paracel Islands, as well as certain maritime areas crossed by important international trade routes. Powers including China, Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam have launched overlapping territorial claims on areas across the region.

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Stay away from politics, soldiers asked

DAVAO CITY – Do not get involved in partisan politics, Armed Forces Eastern Mindanao Command chief Maj. Gen. Rey Leonardo Guerrero urged soldiers under his command.

"Soldiers must remain objective and focused on their sworn duty to the country," Guerrero said.

He reminded the soldiers of President Aquino's direc-

tive for government troops to ensure order and remain apolitical during elections.

Guerrero said more soldiers would be deployed to Eastern Mindanao for counterinsurgency operations. He said two battalions had just arrived in Tandag, Surigao del Sur and Compostela Valley.

He said the military is also doing its best to secure power

transmission towers. The National Grid Corp. of the Philippines has recorded at least 18 attacks on its transmission facilities in Mindanao since November.

Guerrero said they have launched the Bayanihan Investment Protection Security Operation to protect vital installations and facilities from attacks by lawless elements.

– Edith Regalado

Navy seizes P6-M smuggled sugar

ZAMBOANGA CITY – Navy personnel seized a cargo vessel loaded with more than 1,500 sacks of smuggled sugar worth P6 million off this city before midnight on Thursday.

Rear Admiral Jorge Amba, commander of Naval Forces Western Mindanao, said a team led by Lt. Reynyleo Ball-

esteros was patrolling the area when they chanced upon *M/L Alkaswar*, which came from Sandakan, Sabah.

Amba said the sacks of sugar were turned over to the Bureau of Customs after the crewmembers could not present any document of the shipment.

– Roel Pareño

24 January 2016



Pahina. 2

Pulis, sundalo bakal magsuot ng t-shirt, sumbrero ng kandidato

Bawal magsuot ng t-shirt, polo shirt, sumbrero o pulseras na goma (wrist band) at iba pang mga paraphernalias na gamit sa pangangampanya ng mga kandidato ang mga pulis at sundalo kaugnay ng nalalapit na lokal at pambansang halalan sa bansa sa Mayo taong ito.

Ayon kay Supt. Rogelio Simon, deputy assistant for Diplomatic Protection Unit ng Police Security and Protection Group (PSPG), mahigpit na ipinagbabawal ang anumang uri ng paglabag sa Omnibus Election Code.

Sinabi ni Simon, alinsunod sa direktiba ni PNP Chief Director General Ricardo Marquez ay ba-

wal ang 'partisan political activity' o pakikisawsaw sa pulitika ang mga pulis.

"Even the police escorts is prohibited from wearing campaign materials t-shirts, polo shirts and other election paraphernalias of a certain candidates," ani Simon.

Maging ang pagbibitbit ng mga election materials ng mga police security escorts ng mga kandidato, pagdidikit at pamamahagi ng mga pamphlets, leaflets at iba pa ay mahigpit rin nilang ipinagbabawal.

Sinabi naman ni AFP Public Affairs Chief Col. Noel Detoyato na bawal isuot sa loob ng mga kampo ng militar ang nasabing mga t-shirts, polo shirts, sombrero at iba pang gamit sa panga-

ngampanya ng mga kandidato dahil nagpapakita ito ng pagpanig sa isang kandidato na mahigpit na ipinagbabawal ng AFP.

"Kung matutulog sila at magsusuot sila ng mga t-shirts, poloshirts at iba pa ng mga kandidato basta walang makakakita walang violation, pero mabuti pang huwag na lang nilang gawin para hindi sila sumabit," ani Detoyato.

Sinabi pa ni Detoyato na hindi saklaw ng pagbabawal sa nasabing mandato ang pamilya at mga kamag-anak ng mga sundalo.

Binigyang diin pa ng mga opisyal na sinuman ang mahuhuli ay papatawan ng kaukulang parusa. (Joy Cantos)

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The Philippine Times

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NGCP Mindanao power line torched

BY AL JACINTO SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

ZAMBOANGA CITY: Electricity supply was cut off in several areas in Sultan Kudarat and Maguindanao provinces on Friday after a transmission pole was burned down by unidentified suspects, reports said.

The privately-owned National Grid Corporation of the Philippines (NGCP) which operates the transmission line said the torching of the pole late Friday affected power distribution in the provinces.

"Initial findings indicate sabotage," the NGCP said, adding, electricity was fully restored on Saturday.

"NGCP is doing all it can to ensure continued, uninterrupted power transmission services all

over the country, however, power interruptions caused by force majeure events like sabotage and tower bombings, are beyond our control," it added.

The burning of the transmission pole occurred on the same day that suspected New People's Army rebels swooped down at about 8 p.m., on the compound of AJ Construction Company in Barangay Edwards in T'boli town,

South Cotabato and torched its heavy equipment.

About 10 to 15 armed men reportedly disarmed the guards before setting on fire a dump truck, a backhoe, and grader truck, including a road roller. The raid was allegedly triggered by a failed extortion, police said.

Meanwhile, NGCP has appealed for faster resolution of "right of way" (ROW) issues between landowners and government-run National Transmission Corporation (Transco) so that repairs of its toppled steel pylon could be done the soonest possible.

Exactly a month after unidentified men set off improvised explosive devices on a vital steel tower in Ramin, Lanao del Sur, NGCP is yet to repair toppled Tower No. 25 in Ramin town, Lanao del Sur.

Melfrance Capulong, NGCP

corporate communications officer said the dilemma NGCP was facing in Ramin was compounded by another bombing incident, on January 18 of steel Tower No. 50 in Barangay Pantar, Bubong town also in Lanao Sur.

The power provider earlier issued alarm of the possible collapse of its grip with the continued delay of restoration works on its towers, compounded by the recent bombing incidents in their facility.

Capulong pictured a worse case scenario saying "zero reserves" is likely to happen if the Agus 1 power plant remained isolated from the Mindanao grid that may eventually result to longer power outages in southern Mindanao, including Davao and Gen. Santos City.

WITH ANTHONY VARGAS

24 January 2016



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Marcelino: From hero to villain?

CRIME FILES



Alfred P. Dalizon

IE is now fighting the greatest battle of his life, facing the prospect of being fired from the military service, stracized by his peers and colleagues, stripped of his savings and properties by the Anti-Money Laundering Council and jailed for life and way from his family unless he can prove that he happened to be just at the wrong place at the wrong time.

I'm referring to Lieutenant Colonel Ferdinand 'Mars' Marcelino who has been slapped with non-bailable charges by the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency and the PNP Anti-Illlegal Drugs Group before the Department of Justice last Friday.

Many of my friends in the PDEA and the PNP-AIDG expressed belief that they have the goods on Marcelino, a bemedalled member of PMA Class 1994 who was arrested along with a self-proclaimed former PDEA interpreter Yan Yi Shou alias 'Randy' inside a major shabu laboratory in Manila.

I'm mentioning his PMA Class in the spirit of fairness amid criticisms by many officials that sometimes, the media is unfair in reporting cases involving graduates of the PNP Academy who go astray but won't mention the PMA Class of Cavaliers being accused of major crimes.

Many of his AFP colleagues have vouched for the integrity of Marcelino who said 'I will never betray my country' and insisted he was on a mission when arrested inside the secret shabu facility in Sta. Cruz, Manila. His former boss at the PDEA, former AFP chief and now senatorial candidate, retired General Dionisio Santiago also described the jailed official as 'very passionate when it comes to fighting drugs' and is 'incorruptible.'

However, his words will be against the word of the PDEA and the PNP-AIDG as well as the other law enforcement agencies which have denied he is working for them or approved a 'comprehensive plan' to smash a secret drug facility in the country.

Marcelino may have obtained a certification from the Army's Intelligence Security Group that he was indeed working as an Army intelligence agent but as far as the PDEA and the PNP-AIDG, that paper is immaterial since it was too broad. Besides, the Armed Forces, the PDEA, the NBI and the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission have all denied having authorized the official to conduct any secret drug mission specifically against the busted shabu manufacturing syndicate.

Marcelino may be a known drug-buster during his stint with the PDEA as head of its Special Enforcement Service but as PDEA chair, Undersecretary Art Cacdac Jr. and PNP-AIDG director, Senior Superintendent Tony Gardiola Jr. have said, they will implement the law without fear or favor. An angry Cacdac also brushed off claims that Marcelino is a victim of a 'frame-up.'

Both Cacdac and Gardiola happened to be Peemayers too with Cacdac belonging to PMA Class 1978 while Gardiola is from PMA Class 1986. But being Cavaliers won't be a factor in the investigation of the case. Both officials said that they work on evidence and thus, filed the charges against Marcelino since he was inside the raided drug lab.

I learned that Cacdac was told by some senior AFP officials that they did not authorize Marcelino to conduct any secret drug mission when he called them up shortly after he was arrested, dealing a big blow to the officer's claim. On Friday, the PAOCC also disowned him amid an order from government prosecutors for him to present evidence he was on a covert operation inside the raided shabu lab.

"Lt. Col. Ferdinand Marcelino is not and has never been an operative detailed to the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission. Our records likewise show that no ongoing PAOCC operations involve Lt. Col. Marcelino," said PAOCC Executive Director, retired Gen. Reggie Villasanta of PMA Class 1981.

Although Marcelino is vehemently denying the charges against him and is claiming he was doing surveillance work when arrested inside the drug facility which yielded nearly P400 million worth of shabu, he needs all the help and certification he can get to wiggle out of the case. "I doubt if he can produce papers," said a PDEA official who was surprised after finding out that the man slouched in a sofa inside the raided lab was Marcelino.

The same official said that Marcelino's

case could not be compared to that of another Peemayer who was sentenced to life after being found guilty of protecting a 'shabu' laboratory in Naguilian, La Union smashed by authorities in 2008. "There's a very big difference since Marcelino was arrested right inside the raided shabu laboratory while the other was not apprehended inside the La Union drug facility."

He referred to the case of Superintendent Dionisio Borromeo, another bemedalled officer from PMA Class 1989 who was sentenced to life imprisonment and ordered to pay a P10 million fine in June 2013. The noted crime-buster has been dismissed from the police service and is now serving his prison term at the national penitentiary simply because the court found strong evidence against him, citing in particular testimonies made by the lab caretaker. Borromeo's case is already on appeal, I heard.

In the case of Borromeo, the court said that the pieces of evidence presented by the prosecution panel were 'overwhelming.' That's the same predicament being faced by Marcelino. By the way, all Filipinos must thank the PDEA and the PNP-AIDG for a string of major accomplishments this year.

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Special credit goes to Cacdac and his men from the PDEA-SES headed by the tireless Director Ismael Fajardo Jr., a former PNP Superintendent recruited by Cacdac to the Agency and Fajardo's former colleagues from the PNP-AIDG led by Gardiola. The PNP-AIDG is formerly known as the PNP Anti-Illegal Drugs Special Operations Task Force.

PNP chief, General Ric Marquez was right in describing them as our 'unsung heroes,' the faceless men who risk their lives and limbs in order to rid the country of big-time drug manufacturers and traffickers. The PNP chief had cited some of the officers and men the other Monday for their role in the arrest of two Filipino-Chinese drug suspects and the seizure of 36 kilograms of high-grade shabu valued at P180 million.

He won't be surprised to give them medals anew for busting the Sta. Cruz lab. I will mention the names of Gardiola, Chief Inspector Lorenzo Bacia Jr., Inspector Conrado Caragdag Jr., Inspector Lito Pirote, Senior Police Officer 4 Leah David, SPO4 Gerry Liwanag, SPO3 Ronald Parreño, SPO2 Jerry Barit, SPO1 Emmanuel Docena, SPO1 Annalyn Quintana and PO3 Alejandro Flores and PDEA's Fajardo and Agent Joseph Atila. May your tribe increase!

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Pahina. 5

MAY ILAN PANG COL. MARCELINO?

NAKADIDISMAYA na ang isang mahusay at hinangaang drug buster noon ay mahuhuling sangkot pala sa droga.

Nahuli si Ex-Marine Lt. Col. Ferdinand Marcelino sa isang sinalakay na shabu lab sa isang townhome sa Sta. Cruz, Maynila, kasama ang isang Chinese national.

Si Marcelino na sinasabing nakatalaga ngayon sa ISAFP ay dating opisyal ng PDEA na sobrang hinangaan maging ng kanyang mga kasamahan dati sa husay niya sa paglalansag ng mga sindikato sa droga.

Ang kasama niyang nadakip na si Yan Yi Shou ay dati namang PDEA interpreter para naman sa mga nahuhuling Chinese druglords.

Hindi na natin maiaalis ang mga naging "accomplishments" ni Marcelino noong nasa PDEA pa siya. Sinasaluduhan natin siya sa anggulong iyon.

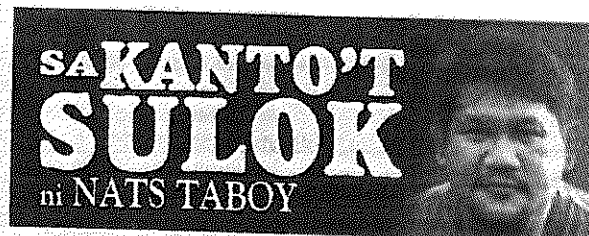
Pero ang mahuli siya sa akto habang nasa isang shabu laboratory gayong wala naman siyang "opisyal na misyon" o wala nang kinalaman sa pagbaka laban sa droga ay isa talagang malaking kwestiyon.

Ang katuwiran ni Marcelino na naging "passion" na niya ang paghuli ng malalaking sindikato ng droga ay nakatataas ng kilay.

Ika nga e, "weh, hindi nga?"

Anoman ang palusot ni Marcelino ay ipaliwanag na lang niya sa korte.

Ang sabi nga ng mga kaututan natin sa kanto't sulok, e, "sa presinto ka-



na magpaliwanag".

Ang malinis at kahanga-hanga niyang trabaho noong una laban sa drug syndicate ay nabahiran na ng pagdududa.

Hindi lang ang pangalan ni Marcelino ang nabigyan niya ng batik.

Maging ang mismong institusyong lumalaban sa proliperasyon ng nakasisirang droga, ang PDEA, ay naging kaduda-duda sa nangyari.

Tanong nga ng marami, may ilan pang kagaya ni Col. Marcelino sa PDEA?

Si Col. Marcelino lang ba ang posibleng "sabit" sa mga naglaganap na laboratoryo ng droga o may iba pang opisyal o tauhan diyan?

Dapat nga talagang magpasalamat si PDEA director general Arturo Cacdac sa "accomplishment" ng kanyang mga tauhan sa pagkakatiklop kay Col. Marcelino kasi'y pagkakataon niya ito upang linisin lalo ang kanyang hanay.

Kung ako kay Usec. Cacdac, oras na upang "purgahin" niya ang PDEA.

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EDITORIAL

Vigilantes rise again

When law enforcement is weak, some civilians take the law into their own hands. This appears to be happening in Central Mindanao, where members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters have been murdering civilians. Catholic bishops have said Christians in the region are arming themselves against attacks by armed groups led by the BIFF, supposedly a splinter group of the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

A group calling itself the Red God's Soldiers released a photo of its members burning a flag of the terrorist Islamic State. IS is feared to be influencing certain members of the BIFF and other bandit groups in Mindanao. On Dec. 23 last year, the military deployed more troops after the BIFF killed 11 civilians, most of them farmers, in Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat.

People have a right to defend themselves, especially when the government is found wanting. Such vigilante operations, however, are prone to abuse

and can create more problems. Christian vigilante cults have been organized in Mindanao in the past decades, among them the Ilaga and Tad-tad. The cults, believed created and supported by government forces, battled Muslim rebels and were later accused of committing gross human rights atrocities against non-combatants including women and children. Such abuses only fuel insurgencies.

Anyone who carries a gun without the permission of authorities is bound to use the weapon for illegal purposes. Vigilante operations to protect communities can easily expand to involvement in organized crime and wanton disregard for life and property.

Authorities can try to monitor vigilante activities to prevent abuses, but the better response is to improve law enforcement. Citizens need to be reassured by the state that peace and order can be maintained without the need for communities to take up arms in self-defense.

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MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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ON EMPOWERING THE FILIPINO PEOPLE

Cold war/hot war/peace with war???



By **FIDEL V. RAMOS**
FORMER PHILIPPINE PRESIDENT

(Last of Two Parts)

OUR first part last Sunday, titled "Dim Scenario For Asia-Pacific???", was triggered mostly by negative predictions about China's economic downturn and its continued bleak prospects (comparatively) for the year 2016 as announced by various sources.

FOR MOST MARKET ANALYSTS, THE PROXIMATE REASON FOR THE GLOBAL ACROSS-THE-BOARD DROP MAY BE SUMMED UP IN ONE WORD - CHINA. IN THE SHORT TERM, DOMESTIC CHINESE CONSUMPTION HAS NOT BEEN ROBUST ENOUGH TO COMPENSATE FOR THE GRADUAL REDUCTION OF CHINA'S EXPORTS.

IT WILL BE A STRUGGLE FOR CHINA TO HIT ITS PROJECTED SIX PERCENT PLUS GROWTH TARGET THIS YEAR - AS IT WILL BE FOR THE PHILIPPINES... THE AQUINO ADMINISTRATION, AT ITS TWILIGHT, IS AGAIN DOOMED BY MARKET FORCES, TERRITORIAL DISPUTES AND SECURITY CONCERNS BEYOND ITS CONTROL.

Security Concerns and Risks

SEVERAL GLOBAL HOTSPOTS HAVE ALSO EMERGED DURING THE PAST MONTH WHICH HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE SECURITY UNCERTAINTIES THAT IMPACT ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROGNOSTICATIONS FOR MANY COUNTRIES.

TENSIONS IN THE KOREAN PENINSULA HAVE RISEN TO NEW LEVELS SINCE 6 JANUARY WHEN NORTH KOREA CARRIED OUT ITS FOURTH UNDERGROUND NUCLEAR DETONATION TEST THAT CAUSED A 5.1 MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE. THESE DAYS, BOTH KOREAS ARE ENGAGED IN MASSIVE PROPAGANDA OFFENSIVES AGAINST EACH OTHER.

"SOUTH KOREA AGAIN TURNED ON ITS HUGE BANKS OF LOUDSPEAKERS AND THE NORTH HAS CHOSEN A DIFFERENT WAY OF EXPRESSING ITS DISAPPROVAL RATHER THAN SHOOTING AT THE SPEAKERS - WHICH IT HAD DONE BEFORE. THE OTHER DAY, NORTH KOREA SENT SOME ONE MILLION LEAFLETS ACROSS THE BORDER AT THE 38TH PARALLEL ATTACHED TO HELIUM BALLOONS," BBC NEWS REPORTED (19 JANUARY).

IN INDONESIA, TERRORISTS IDENTIFIED WITH THE EXTREMIST ISLAMIC STATE (IS) BOMBED AND STRAFED "SOFT" TARGETS NEAR SHOPPING CENTERS AND DIPLOMATIC OFFICES IN JAKARTA. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT THE I.S. HAD TARGETED INDONESIA, THE WORLD'S LARGEST MUSLIM COUNTRY AND "THE BRAZENNESS OF THE ATTACK SUGGESTED A NEW LEVEL OF MILITANCY" IN THAT COUNTRY, ACCORDING TO REUTERS (16 JANUARY) EVIDENTLY, I.S. IS NURTURING A SOUTHEAST ASIAN CONNECTION FROM WHICH IT WILL EXPAND, JUST LIKE THE AL-QAEDA BEFORE IT

Saudi-Iran Conflict

"THE BREACH IN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA IS A DANGEROUS WATERSHED IN AN ALREADY UNSTABLE, WAR-TORN REGION. THE TRIGGER WAS THE EXECUTION BY SAUDI ARABIA OF NIMR AL-NIMR, A FIREBRAND SHIA SHEIKH WHO HAD CALLED FOR THE END OF THE SAUDI MONARCHY," PROF. BERNARD HAYKEL OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY REPORTED (PROJECT SYNDICATE, 11 JANUARY).

THE TENSIONS BETWEEN SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN GO BACK MANY DECADES, BUT BECAME ESPECIALLY ACUTE AFTER IRAN'S ISLAMIC REVOLUTION IN 1979. AYATOLLAH RUHOLLAH KHOMEINI, THE REVOLUTION'S LEADER, QUICKLY POSITIONED IRAN AS A CHAMPION OF "THE OPPRESSED AGAINST THE FORCES OF AR-

ROGANCE," MEANING THE US AND ITS TRADITIONAL ALLIES, SAUDI ARABIA AND ISRAEL.

PROF. HAYKEL CONTINUES: "THE 2003 INVASION OF IRAQ LED TO THE FORMATION OF A SHIA-DOMINATED GOVERNMENT IN BAGHDAD. IN 2006, HEZBOLLAH FOUGHT ISRAEL TO A STANDSTILL IN LEBANON. THEN, IN 2014, SHIA HOUTH REBELS, ANOTHER IRANIAN PROXY GROUP, CONQUERED THE CAPITAL OF YEMEN. THEREAFTER, THE PROSPECT OF IRANIAN-BACKED UPRISINGS IN BAHRAIN, OR IN SAUDI ARABIA ITSELF, BEGAN TO LOOK ALARMING."

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THE US AND THE OTHER FIVE PERMANENT MEMBERS OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL (PLUS GERMANY) REACHED A NUCLEAR ACCORD WITH IRAN IN LATE 2015, AGREEING TO LIFT ECONOMIC SANCTIONS WHILE ALLOWING THAT COUNTRY TO MAINTAIN ITS REGIONAL INFLUENCE. WITH IRANIAN ALLIES OR PROXIES OPERATING IN SYRIA, IRAQ, LEBANON AND YEMEN, SAUDI ARABIA'S ROYAL LEADERS HAVE FELT INCREASINGLY SURROUNDED.

The rivalry's principal battlegrounds are Syria and Yemen. In Syria, Saudi Arabia has dedicated itself to the overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad, a key Iranian ally, and has worked to unite the woefully disorganized opposition groups. Iran, for its part, continues to back Assad, with the help of Russia.

SAUDI ARABIA'S EXECUTION OF SHEIKHAL-NIMR ON CHARGES OF TERRORISM WAS PART OF A BROADER CRACKDOWN ON DOMESTIC OPPOSITION. THE REACTION OF IRAN AGAINST THE VIOLENT ANTI-SAUDI PROTESTS IN TEHRAN, IRAQ AND BAHRAIN REVEALED THE FULL DEPTH OF THE UNDERLYING BILATERAL ENMITY.

Other Developments

ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT, THE CHINA DAILY REPORTED THAT HIGHER US RATES AND THE WEAKER CHINESE ECONOMY PAINT A BLEAK PICTURE FOR THE ASIA-PACIFIC'S SCENARIO FOR 2016, THUS (7 JANUARY)

"Who would have thought that with interest rates at or near-record lows in Asia, and the price of oil continuing its march downward, economic growth in the region would be slowing down? This question was posed by Nomura's chief economist, Rob Subbaraman, at the launch of Nomura's Asia 2016 Outlook.

The problem, Subbaraman argued, is that China's investment-led slowdown is disproportionately hurting the rest of Asia more than other regions, *"simply because its trade and financial linkages with Asia are much stronger than they are elsewhere."* Nomura forecasts growth for Asia-ex Japan to decline to 5.7% in 2016, which would be its worst since 1998.

Actually, according to official China reports released this week, China's GDP grew 6.9% for all of 2015 which is the "slowest in the past 25 years." One of the hardest-hit sectors is the iron and steel industry which is reported to have suffered shrinking demand and heavy losses.

The US economy according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is projected to grow around 2.8% in 2016. China is forecast to grow at 6.3%, ASEAN-Five (namely, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam which are among the biggest economies in Southeast Asia) will attain 4.9%, and India 7.5%.

Asia economist for the Singapore-based DBS bank, David Carbon, perhaps summed it up best in this manner: "The US is 'strong' and rates there are going up. China is 'weak' and rates there are going down. The rest of Asia is caught in the middle and it's 1997 all over again, should investors want out," he said to China Daily (7 January).

Rightly or wrongly, China Daily considers Japan's defense budget among its major concerns (7 January): *"The record-high defense budget Japan's cabinet approved on 24 December 2015 is geared toward expanding the role of its Self-Defense Forces and broadening cooperation between Japan and the US."*

"JAPAN'S DEFENSE SPENDING

WAS FALLING BEFORE SHINZO ABE RETURNED TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE IN 2012. UNDER HIS WATCH, THE DECLINES HAVE BEEN REVERSED. SWEEPING CHANGES CONTINUED IN JAPAN'S SECURITY REALM IN 2015."

Misuari Spotted in Sulu??

MEANTIME, ACCORDING TO THE MANILA BULLETIN (11 JANUARY): "MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (MNLF) CHAIRPERSON NUR MISUARI, WHO HAS BEEN IN HIDING AFTER BEING IMPLICATED IN THE BLOODY ZAMBOANGA SIEGE OF SEPTEMBER 2013, REPORTEDLY RESURFACED IN SULU 8 JANUARY 2016 TO PREPARE OVER A MEETING OF MNLF FOLLOWERS AND ELEMENTS OF THE ABU SAYYAF GROUP (ASG), ELUDING GOVERNMENT SECURITY FORCES WHICH HAVE BEEN TRYING TO TRACK HIM DOWN."

"A large group of mostly heavily armed MNLF and Abu Sayyaf rebels turned up for the assembly called for by the 76-year-old Misuari in Indanan town, Sulu," said Zamboanga City-based journalist Al Jacinto (who also writes for the Manila Times)."

The Indanan assembly was reportedly called by Misuari to discuss with loyal followers and sympathizers his desire to attend an upcoming Islamic Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference in Geneva, Switzerland.

According to Jacinto, it was a "missed opportunity to arrest" the elusive Misuari, who has been charged with deadly assaults staged by the MNLF in Zamboanga City in 2001 and 2013. Hundreds of casualties were reported, especially in the attacks during the September 2013 siege which left some 190 people killed and 200 others wounded.

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Misuari, now in his late 70s, signed the MNLF's Final Peace Agreement (FPA) with the Philippine government in September 1996. A few days before, then President FVR convinced him to run for governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in the 1997 elections, which Misuari won easily with Lakas Party backing.

Under the FPA, the Philippine government was to provide a mini-Marshall Plan for economic development in ARMM areas, including livelihood and housing assistance to thousands of former rebels to improve their living conditions.

Accusing the Arroyo government of not fully implementing the intent and spirit of the FPA, Misuari with his loyal forces attacked a key military base in Jolo town.

LATER, MISUARI ESCAPED BY BOAT TO MALAYSIA, WHERE HE WAS EVENTUALLY ARRESTED AND DEPORTED TO THE PHILIPPINES. HE WAS SUBSEQUENTLY PARDONED BY THEN PRESIDENT GLORIA MACAPAGAL ARROYO. REPORTEDLY IN EXCHANGE FOR MNLF SUPPORT FOR HER ELECTION BID AND FOR HER ALLIES IN THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES IN 2004.

STILL TO BE CONNECTED – OTHER DOTS

IN THE PROJECTED 2016 PHILIPPINE SCENARIO, THERE ARE STILL OTHER DOTS TO BE CONNECTED – BUT THESE ARE FOR FUTURE STORIES. FOR INSTANCE: THE PHILIPPINE PRESIDENTIAL TURNOVER; TAIWAN-MAINLAND CHINA DILEMMA WITH THE RECENT ELECTION OF THE FIRST FEMALE PRESIDENT OF THE INDEPENDENT-MINDED ISLAND; UNRESOLVED PEACE IN MINDANAO WITH CONTENTIOUS BBL; US POLITICAL UNCERTAINTIES HIGHLIGHTED BY CANDIDATES TRUMP VERSUS CLINTON; EL NINO IMPACTS ON THE PHILIPPINES; REGULAR BROWNOUTS IN MINDANAO; REPEAT HEARINGS ON THE MAMASAPANO MASSACRE; CONTINUING NOY-ADMINISTRATION CORRUPTION; SC/COMELEC DQ CASES; UN TRIBUNAL RULING ON CHINA-PHILIPPINES WPS; PLUS MANY OTHERS.

ABANGAN!!!

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