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05 March 2016

Saturday

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

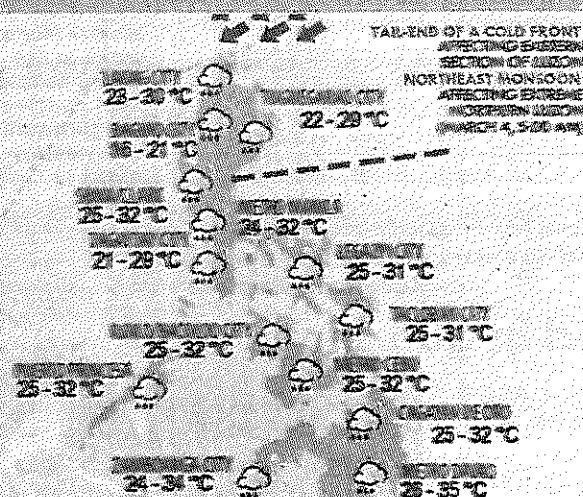
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TRAFFIC WEATHER FORECAST MARCH 05 2016 SATURDAY



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China defense spending slows down with economy

BEIJING - China's defense budget this year is likely to rise at its slowest pace since 2010, in line with the decelerating economy, by a much lower figure than had been expected, although it probably does not represent the true spending number.

Fu Ying, spokesperson for China's parliament, said the figure would increase by

about seven to eight percent from 2015, following a nearly unbroken two-decade run of double-digit budget increases.

Fu told a news conference the actual figure would be released today, when the annual session of China's largely rubber-stamp legislative body opens.

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China

From Page 1

It will be the first single-digit rise in spending since 2010, when the military budget logged a 7.5 percent increase.

Defense spending last year was budgeted to rise 10.1 percent to 886.9 billion yuan (\$135.39 billion), which only represents about one-quarter

that of the United States.

The US Defense Department budget for 2016 is \$573 billion.

China's leaders have routinely sought to justify military modernization by linking defense spending to rapid GDP growth. But growth of 6.9 percent last year was the

slowest in 25 years, and a further slowdown is widely expected in 2016.

"One simple reason for the lower increase is that double digit growth is now harder to sustain," said Bonji Obara of the Tokyo Foundation, think tank.

"But another reason is that China's anti-corruption campaign means less money is being siphoned off and spending

has become more efficient," he added, referring to President Xi Jinping's vigorous efforts to root out graft.

The defense budget had been widely expected in military and diplomatic circles to log another impressive increase.

Fu said the budget was based on China's national defense needs, the state of its

economy and the performance of its fiscal revenues.

China has been repeatedly criticized for a lack of transparency in its defense spending and its intentions.

"China needs to be transparent and explain its military spending to the international community," Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani said in Tokyo ahead of Fu's announce-

ment.

"It's crucial that China does not upset the regional balance and that it firmly contribute to international stability."

China's military build-up has rattled nerves around the region, particularly because China has taken an increasingly assertive stance in its territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas. - Reuters

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US Navy deploys strike group to South China Sea

The United States Navy has deployed a small armada to the South China Sea in what is considered a show of force as tensions rise over China's construction of artificial islands in disputed waters.

Quoting US military officials, the *Navy Times* reported that the aircraft carrier *John C. Stennis*, the destroyers *Chung-Hoon* and *Stockdale*, cruisers *Antietam* and *Mobile Bay* along with the *Blue Ridge*, command ship of the Japan-based Seventh Fleet, set off recently for the South China Sea, where Beijing has installed surface-to-air missiles and built an airstrip on reclaimed area.

The *Blue Ridge* is on its way to the Philippines for a port call, while the *Antietam*, also based in Japan, is conducting a "routine patrol" in the area, the *Navy Times* reported. It added that the nuclear-powered *Stennis* deployed from Washington state on Jan. 15.

The recent deployments come amid US accusations that China is "militarizing" the South China Sea - a charge that Beijing has disputed.

Testifying before the US Senate last month, Adm. Harry Harris, chief of the Hawaii-based Pacific Command, told the Armed Service Committee, "In my opinion, China is clearly militarizing

the South China Sea... You'd have to believe in a flat Earth to believe otherwise."

Harris also expressed concern to reporters that China would declare an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the South China Sea as he noted that Beijing had so far reclaimed nearly 3,000 acres of "military bases" in disputed waters.

An ADIZ would require passing aircraft to identify itself and declare its intentions to China's aviation authority. International law allows a nation to declare an ADIZ within its territory. But several nations including the Philippines are claiming parts of the South China Sea, which

China is claiming almost entirely as its own.

"When they put their advanced missile systems on the Paracels, and when they build three 10,000-foot runways in the Spratlys on the basis that they've reclaimed - when they do all of that, they're changing the operational landscape in the South China Sea," Harris told reporters at the Pentagon last month. "Short of war, they can rise to the level of having tactical control of the waterways of the South China Sea."

Beijing lambasted Harris for "sowing discord" and intending "to smear China's legitimate and reasonable actions" in the disputed area, adding,

"He is finding an excuse for US maritime hegemony and muscle-flexing on the sea."

Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi said "demilitarization" in the area should include the US and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. ASEAN foreign ministers, at a recent meeting in Vientiane, Laos, had expressed concern over Chinese actions in the disputed waters.

China has reportedly deployed HQ-9 anti-air warfare missiles on Woody Island in the Paracels near Vietnam while the Chinese single-seat fighter jet Shenyang J-11 was also seen in the area. A high-tech air search radar capable of detecting US stealth air-

craft may also be installed, according to reports.

Fu Ying, former Chinese ambassador to Manila and current spokeswoman for China's National People's Congress, said it was the US that was sending "the most advanced aircraft and military vessels" to the South China Sea.

She warned that accusing China of militarizing the region could lead to a "miscalculation of the situation."

Harris is asking the US Congress to approve investments in next-generation anti-surface missiles for the Navy to counter the growing capabilities of potential rivals. He also wants more attack submarines deployed in the region.

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The Manila Times

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China defense spending to rise '7 to 8%' in 2016

BEIJING: China will raise its defense spending by seven to eight percent this year, a top official said on Friday – a smaller increase than the double-digit rises of the past as Beijing seeks a more efficient military.

At the same time, the rising power is increasing its military heft and asserting its territorial claims in the South China Sea, raising tensions with its neighbors and with Washington.

"China's military budget will continue to grow this year but the margin will be lower than last year's and the previous years," said Fu Ying, spokeswoman for the National People's Congress (NPC) – the communist-controlled parliament.

"It will be between seven and eight percent."

➤ Spending A2

■ SPENDING FROM A1

China defense spending

The exact increase will be announced on Saturday at the opening of the NPC, Fu told reporters.

The reduced increase comes as China under President Xi Jinping seeks to craft a more efficient and effective People's Liberation Army (PLA), the world's largest standing military.

It unveiled a revamped military structure at the start of the year, establishing a new army general command and a Rocket Force to oversee its strategic missiles.

At a giant military parade in Beijing last year to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Japan's World War II defeat, Xi announced the PLA would be reduced by 300,000 personnel.

The parade also saw more than a dozen "carrier-killer" anti-ship ballistic missiles rolling through the streets of the capital, with state television calling them a "trump card" in potential conflicts and "one of China's key weapons in asymmetric warfare."

Analysts say that for a fraction of the cost of an aircraft carrier – for decades the mainstay of Washington's ability to project power around the world – the DF-21D missile threatens to alter the military balance in the Pacific.

At the parade, Xi said China's troops would "carry out the noble mission of upholding world peace," faithfully protect national security, and would never "seek hegemony."

Fu also on Friday said the country was "pushing forward military reform" to achieve those goals.

The military budget was determined by both China's defense needs and the national economic situation, she added – the country saw its weakest growth in a quarter of a century last year.

In 2015, the budget was increased by 10.1 percent, bringing it to 886.9 billion yuan (\$141.4 billion at the time).

"Xi Jinping will be determined to increase the military capabilities of the PLA in spite of the slowing growth of China's economy," James Char, a researcher at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, told

Agence France-Presse

"More money is required to facilitate the troop reduction in terms of the remuneration packages and compensation to those affected by the cuts."

Char and many other analysts believe that China's actual military spending is significantly higher than officially publicized.

'Aircraft and warships'

At the same time, Beijing is looking to increase its own naval strength and reach, and officials confirmed in December that its second aircraft carrier—the first to be entirely domestically designed and built—was under construction.

Work has started on a logistics facility in Djibouti, in the Horn of Africa, the defense ministry said last week.

Relations with US treaty ally Japan had soured in recent years in a row over disputed islands in the East China Sea controlled by Tokyo.

Most controversially, Beijing has built up artificial islands in the South China Sea—through which a third of the world's oil passes, and which it claims almost in its entirety.

Several other littoral states have competing claims, as does Taiwan.

Satellite pictures show what US analysts say are deployments of surface to air missiles and facilities with military uses, such as runways and radar.

Washington says Beijing's actions threaten freedom of navigation in the strategically vital waterway, and it has sent warships to sail within 12 nautical miles of the new islands—the normal territorial limit around natural land -- to assert that right.

Last week, US Pacific Command chief Admiral Harry Harris warned that China was changing the "operational landscape in the region," and has called for more such patrols and flyovers.

Beijing defends its actions as within its sovereign rights and denies Washington's accusations.

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The Manila Times

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ENVOY ON ATTACK VS SAUDI IMAM:

US 'looking into' any link to ISIS

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE
REPORTER

US Ambassador Philip Goldberg said Friday Washington is looking into the assassination attempt on two Saudi clerics in the southern Philippine port city of Zamboanga, and whether the incident has any links to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

In an exclusive roundtable interview with The Manila Times editors and reporters on Friday, Goldberg said no evidence has surfaced to link the shooting of cleric Aaidh ibn Abdullah al-Qarni and Sheik Turki Assaegh, the religious attaché of the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Manila to the ISIS, an international terror network that has called on followers to launch "lone wolf" attacks against ISIS targets.

"I don't think we've seen any direct link and that's why we said ... to investigate what happened in the assassination attempt is very important. Who are these people, what are their connections or do

they have anything to do with ISIS?" Goldberg said, emphasizing the need for information on whether the victim was on any ISIS hit list. "We have to have that kind of information before we can make any kind of statement."

However, there are claims that Al-Qarni is on the ISIS hit list.

The US envoy described as "troubling" the information that some clerics based in Mindanao, including Jamil Yahya, have pledged allegiance to the ISIS in Marawi City. Yahya is said to be leading more than 100 people, including women and children.

"What I do think is, we do see

➤ **ISIS A2**

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■ ISIS FROM A1

US 'looking into' any ISIS link

a troubling kind of information here. The very fact that they're claiming this allegiance is troubling. So we have to see exactly whether that is boasting of some sort [for] whatever reason, maybe they get money or, maybe, they think there [is] a lot of heightened prestige [awaiting them if they do whatever it is that they are doing] in Mindanao," he added.

The US envoy said with all sorts of claims being made in public, Filipinos should be discerning about the information that they get.

"So we follow this [assassination attempt] very closely. We are obviously concerned whenever we hear those terms used by the ISIS. But I think people have to look [at incidents like this] also realistically. I think they need to see exactly who's behind this event, the Zamboanga shooting, and what exactly happened," Goldberg added.

He admitted though that there were indeed people who tried to align themselves, at least historically, with ISIS.

"You know, you can separate [them] in two categories. One... the people who claimed some sort of connection to ISIS or al-Qaeda, who are just projecting that [con-

nection] because of their own views and [rhetoric] and say that we just did that [Zamboanga slay try] because of this connection," Goldberg said.

"We, in the United States, and [in] Europe, we've seen events that are homegrown or in some cases with some connection [to ISIS], perhaps, like in Jakarta, and so that's the second category. You look to see if there is really a connection through funding or through planning with ISIS or with al-Qaeda," he added.

Goldberg said everybody is concerned about the issue of foreign fighters and of people going to the Middle East from various countries, but said they do not have confirmation of whether the travelers include Filipinos.

"So it is more than something rhetorical and that's what we haven't seen and we [would] have to watch it closely. We have to watch that very closely here, in the region and in the world. We have to do in all our power to try to prevent that from happening, the phenomenon [of] foreign fighters [who are] going to Middle East and how [these] connections are made," he added.

Goldberg dismissed claims that

the Philippine Congress' failure to enact into law the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) has something to do with escalating attacks in Mindanao by militants fighting in the name of ISIS.

"This [claim] has been there before... I was in Mindanao last month, in Marawi [City], in Zamboanga. There are people who are very disappointed with the BBL not going through... but they are moderate in their views and look to people whether [they are from] the past, this happened in the 1990s with the other group but they continue fighting or struggl[ing]," he said, apparently referring to the Moro National Liberation Front.

The proposed BBL is a product of a peace agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

Goldberg observed that while groups such as the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) may seem to have views about supporting transnational jihadist movements, the people in Mindanao, like the Moro groups, do not like the idea of backing and linking up with such movements.

"The Moro groups are looking

[for] something different, they are not jihadist groups... The BIFF, one of those who pledge[d] allegiance to ISIS, was part of those disaffected people [from] the Moro groups," he said.

"But you do want to prevent [any] member who may want to take advantage of this situation from joining those jihadist groups," Goldberg added.

The US, according to the ambassador, is working closely with the Philippine government to monitor the threat of ISIS in the country and in Southeast Asia.

"We are already collaborating very closely, we exchange information... we have a counter-terrorism cooperation. We handled [a] joint task force operation in Mindanao last year, as well as an increase[d] capacity [of] the Philippines [to deal with terrorism]. We still work very closely with the Special Operations forces of the AFP [Armed Forces of the Philippines], the SAF [Special Action Force], through our intelligence cooperation," he said.

"So we have to work very closely with our Philippine colleagues to see what's going on," Goldberg added.

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China towed PH boat in atoll

CHINA indeed sent vessels around an atoll in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea) to tow a grounded Filipino fishing vessel, an action reported earlier as occupation of an island near Palawan, a military official confirmed on Friday.

According to Capt. Cherryl Tindog, spokesman for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Western Command, it was a Chinese rescue and salvage ship, not Chinese Coast Guard boat, that was spotted towing a grounded Filipino fishing vessel at the Quirino (Jackson) Atoll on February 22.

The unmanned fishing vessel reportedly ran aground in November last year.

Tindog said the Chinese ship has since left the area.

"Nung sumunod na mga patrols natin, mga Filipino fishing vessels na lang na nasa-sight natin [During our follow-up patrols, what we saw were Filipino fishing vessels]," he added.

It was not known where the fishing vessel was taken and the Western Command (Westcom) is coordinating with the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, the Philippine Coast Guard and the Maritime Industry Authority to determine if the owner of the vessel had reported if the ship was turned over by the Chinese.

Earlier Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said China sent vessels to the Quirino atoll to tow a grounded ship.

"To guarantee safety of navigation and of work conditions, China urged fishing vessels near the site to leave," according to Hong.

He, however, insisted that China had indisputable sovereignty over the atoll.

Vice Adm. Alexander Lopez, Westcom commander, had denied that China occupied the atoll.

"That's not accurate. That's not true," Lopez said of the alleged Chinese occupation of Quirino atoll.

According to him, three to five Chinese ships were earlier sighted in the area but the vessels left on February 24.

"It's not true that they have control of Quirino atoll. In fact, the last time we flew there, we saw Filipino fishermen. So the report is very inaccurate," he said.

The Department of Foreign Affairs said the Chinese vessels are no longer in the atoll.

"The department received initial reports from our defense authorities that two weeks ago, Chinese Coast Guard vessels were sighted in the Quirino atoll and that there are no more sightings of Chinese vessels in the area as of today," the DFA said in a statement.

It added that Philippine officials are monitoring the situation and reiterated its call on China "to exercise self-restraint [in] the conduct of activities that could complicate or escalate disputes in the South China Sea and affect peace and stability in the region."

FERNAN MARASIGAN

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AFP declares Agusan Sur as 'conflict-manageable'

By Mario J. Mallari

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has declared Agusan del Sur province, a known operational area of the New People's Army (NPA), as a province ready for further development where armed conflict is already manageable.

Lt. Gen. Rey Guerrero, commander of Eastern Mindanao Command (Eastmincom), and Agusan del Sur Gov. Adolph Edward Plaza led the ceremony declaring the province as "conflict-manageable and ready for further development" held at the session hall of the Democrito Plaza Government Center in Prosperidad on Thursday.

Guerrero said that with the declaration, the province can now expect more investments, thus provide economic growth in the area.

"On reaching this stage of normalcy, the positive outcomes are: first, economic growth where investments can pour in to enable the people to actively participate in economic activity," Guerrero said.

"Second, political stability where we exercise are legitimacy and third, social harmony, where people

live and interact freely without fear from violence and intimidation," he added.

For his part, Plaza rallied all stakeholders in Agusan del Sur to sustain the momentum to ensure that the entire province will benefit from the stability.

"The challenge now is to sustain it. We can only do it by propelling development especially in remote communities. And we can only gain it, if all of us works together. I would really like to thank the Armed Forces of the Philippines for helping us to achieve this kind of environment," Plaza said.

A known operating area of NPA, Agusan del Sur has been venue to previous clashes between communists and government troops.

Maj. Gen. Oscar Lactao, commander of the Army's 4th Infantry Division (ID), is reaching out to the communist rebels to rejoin the mainstream society.

"The NPA has always been called and invited to join us in this peaceful endeavor. With this declaration of a Conflict Manageable Agusan del Sur, the people of the province have spoken that they do not want violence and disorder. The NPA should heed to this call," Lactao said.

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NPA also target of SAF training

ZAMBOANGA CITY—American soldiers are now training members of the elite Special Action Force (SAF) unit of the Philippine National Police on combat tactics which, a ranking PNP official said, would help in the fight against insurgents and terrorists.

Chief Supt. Randolph Delfin, deputy police director for Western Mindanao, said the 45-day training program would equip SAF members with more skills "in our fight against insurgency and terrorism."

Delfin's statements drew angry reactions from leftist groups that said the police officer's statements confirmed what they had been saying all along—US government involvement in counterinsurgency operations in the Philippines.

Intervention

"We condemn this continuing US interventionist policy," said Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate.

He said US military operations in the Philippines, "like this one disguised as a supposed training, are in fact among the causes of rebellion" by past and "present-day revolutionaries."

US Army Maj. Dustin Delcours, liaison of the Pacific Command Augmentation Team, said US troops would teach Philippine counterparts "skills that we have from years of experience."

Delcours did not confirm or deny Delfin's statement on improved counterinsurgency measures being part of the objectives of the training program.

He said only that the training program is the result of friendship between the US and the Philippine governments.

"So it's kind of a camaraderie," Delcours said.

"It's really good bonding between the two units," he said.

Unconstitutional

Kim Gargar, spokesperson of environment group Panalipdan, said the use of US forces to train policemen against insurgents is "pure and simple foreign military intervention."

"By allowing this, the Aquino government is guilty of violating the Constitution," he said.

According to Delfin, American soldiers brought in pieces of equipment for the training program.

It would be a two-way street, however, said Delcours. He said US soldiers are also expected to learn from their Philippine counterparts.

Elite group

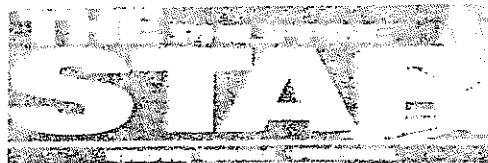
Supt. Reynard Arino, commanding officer of the 5th Special Action Battalion, said at least 60 SAF men would take part in the training program with courses on marksmanship and small unit tactics.

Last month, US soldiers also started training SAF men on tactical combat care or life-saving support, according to Chief Supt. Miguel Antonio Jr., head of the Western Mindanao police.

Antonio said the training program was held inside the Zamboanga Ecozone and Freeport Authority in Barangay San Ramon, Zamboanga City.

"They are here as consultants," said Antonio of the US soldiers. *Julie Alipala with a report from Germelina Lacorte, Inquirer Mindanao*

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Page. 1

Military: No IS presence in Phl

By JAIME LAUDE

The military yesterday maintained there is no direct link between Islamic State (IS) militants and homegrown extremists in the country.

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) spokesman Brig. Gen. Restituto Padilla said there are no

verified reports that local terrorist groups are getting support from the IS.

"Based on information at hand, there's no presence of Daesh in the Philippines. It has not been established. There's no direct relation between the group here and

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Military From Page 1

the bigger terror group Daesh out there (Middle East)," Padilla said, referring to the other name of the IS.

Padilla made the statement following reports that gunmen fighting in the name of IS are escalating attacks in Mindanao.

Rodolfo Mendoza, a senior analyst of the Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research, said the various local groups that had pledged allegiance to IS were "planning big operations, like bombings, attacks or assassinations."

The Maute group, a previously obscure group discounted by the military as a small-time extortion gang, launched an assault on a remote army outpost in Mindanao.

The attack triggered a week of fighting that the military said left six soldiers and at least 12 militants dead, and forced more than 30,000 people to flee

their homes.

The gunmen flew IS flags during the fighting, and bandanas with the group's insignia were found when soldiers overran their base, a two-story concrete building, according to the military.

At the same time about 100 kilometers away, soldiers were battling the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), a bigger and much better known group that had previously declared allegiance to IS.

But Padilla dismissed the Maute group, saying they are known to align themselves to whoever is popular.

He said the Maute was formerly identified with the now defeated regional terror group Jemaah Islamiyah.

"Our analysis remains the same. They are just trying to keep their group known by identifying themselves with the Daesh," Padilla said.

In any event, the military is on top of the country's security situation, Padilla said.

He said the AFP has been continuously monitoring the changes in the country's threat board.

Padilla said the government security sector has contingencies in place in order to address all these concerns in an event the threats are verified as true.

"Working on a worst-case scenario, we have the preparations attuned with this kind of security situation. That's what we can assure the public," Padilla said.

He cited the military action against the Maute group following the attack on a remote Army outpost.

The quick military and police action was done if only to show the will and determination of the government to address any unfolding security threats around the country, he said.

"We are not ringing alarm bells here. We are telling people to go with your nor-



Filipino soldiers stand guard next to tanks in Butig, Lanao del Sur in this photo taken on Tuesday. Militants inspired by the Islamic State group attacked a military outpost in Butig town recently. AFP

mal lives, to live normally to continue with commerce, economic life but with the caveat that you must continue staying alert, staying vigilant, because this is a

very important participation of the community that we have been pushing all along," Padilla said.

Officials regularly said fears of growing IS influence on

local terror groups are misplaced.

They said the militants like the Maute group are just criminals interested in money, and not radical Islamist jihadists.

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

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Power tower bombed twice as Palace forms task force

KIDAPAWAN CITY—An electricity transmission tower that had been bombed in January was bombed again on Wednesday, cutting off power supply in parts of North Cotabato and Maguindanao provinces and sending a message that authorities had been hearing over and over again—the towers that help light up homes in Mindanao are not secure.

According to the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP), the private firm that maintains the transmission towers, Malacañang has already formed a task force to secure transmission facilities that had become sitting ducks for sabotage and terror attacks.

The task force would be headed by the Department of Energy, according to Elizabeth Ladaga, NGCP information officer, in a text message.

Supt. Bernard Tayong, spokesperson of the North Cotabato police, said armed men

strapped improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on the foundations of Tower No. 63 of NGCP in Aleosan town, North Cotabato, and set off the explosion past midnight on Wednesday.

Tayong, quoting investigation reports, said only one of the IEDs exploded. The other IED was found still strapped to the tower.

A village chair in Aleosan reported to police about a loud blast coming from the direction of the NGCP tower.

But while the explosion failed to topple the tower, it cut off ca-

bles that carry electricity and triggered power outages in parts of North Cotabato and Maguindanao, according to Tayong.

Tayong appealed to NGCP to make the first move in securing its towers by hiring private security contractors to guard transmission facilities.

Last month, NGCP said it is studying a proposal to form a militia-type unit to secure the towers and other transmission facilities. The proposal was made at a hearing of the House energy committee in Cagayan de Oro City.

Maj. Gen. Demy Tejares, deputy commander of the Army's 1st Infantry Division, said the proposal was welcome as the military could not possibly guard all NGCP towers in Mindanao.

Elizabeth Alabanza, NGCP spokesperson, said the propos-

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Families of Cagayan cops killed by NPA get financial aid

THE families of the six policemen killed in a treacherous New People's Army attack in Baggao, Cagayan on February 16 each received more than P400,000 worth of cash benefits, officials said yesterday.

The financial aid was part of the cash advance insurance claim from the Public Safety Mutual Benefit Fund Inc. (PSMBFI), Public Safety Savings and Loan Association Inc. (PSSLAI), National Police Commission death benefits and financial assistance from PNP chief Director General Ricardo Marquez.

Marquez personally handed P50,000 financial assistance to each family of the slain police officers when he visited them on February 23, said Police Regional Office 2 director Chief Supt. Ranier Idio.

The PNP chief also paid tribute to the heroism displayed by the fallen cops, Police Officers 1 Ryan Annang, Derel Sunico, Arjay Bautista, Rogelio Alfonso, Julius Soriano and Jaypee Aspiros.

The other benefits such as the PNP and Napolcom pension, Commutation of Accumulated Leaves and Special Financial Assistance are being process, said PNP spokesman Chief Supt. Wilben Mayor.

The slain officers were also conferred the posthumous "Medalya ng Kadakilaan" or the PNP Heroism Medal while the same medal (interim) and "Medalya ng Sugatang Magiting" were given to 17 of their colleagues from the Regional Public Safety Battalion 2, who were wounded in the NPA ambush.

Idio said that the financial claims of Insp. Angelo Pagulayan and PO2 Esteban Lugo were still being processed too.

Members of the RPSB2 bravely stood their ground and exchanged fire with the gunmen killing at least one of the rebels, who yielded an automatic rifle belonging to a member of the PNP Special Action Force commando, they killed in a similar ambush on

May 27, 2013.

According to Cagayan Police Provincial Office director Sr. Supt. Ronaldo Olay, the policemen held their line to prevent the rebels from coming nearer to burn two police vehicles and steal weapons and ammunition.

Olay said that a Ferfrans automatic M-16 rifle recovered at the site has turned out to have been issued to one of the nine SAF troopers killed in an ambush in a remote village in Allacapan, Cagayan in May 2013. The commandos were killed by the guerrillas, who used a landmine to immobilize their vehicle during the ambush. Six other SAF troopers were also wounded in that incident, which took place about two kilometers away from the Allacapan Municipal Police Station.

PNP intelligence reports showed that Baggao has 10 NPA-threatened barangays and has been a witness to a number of NPA atrocities in the past.

In 2014, suspected NPA rebels killed two members of the Army's 17th Infantry Battalion, who were on a surveillance mission in the area.

In February 2015, suspected NPA guerrillas abducted and killed two Army intelligence agents and one militiaman in Zinundungan Valley in the nearby Rizal municipality. Officials said there have been frequent NPA sightings in the town, where the NPA's Northern and Western Front Committees led by David Soriano alias "Ka Rosa" and Christina Garcia alias "Ka Senyang" are said to be operating.

A PRO2 report said that the RPSB operatives were out to take more pictures of the result of an NPA arson attack in Sitio Ngarutngut, Bgy. Tanglagan, Gattaran town on Valentine's Day when they were attacked by some 40 heavily-armed NPA rebels led by Soriano.

Alfred Dalizon

25 March 2016



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Poe asks gov't to secure NGCP towers amid bombings

By MARVIN SY and ROEL PAREÑO

Amid concerns over the failure of elections as the bombing of transmission towers continues, Sen. Grace Poe urged the government to do everything it can to stop the attacks.

Visiting Zamboanga City yesterday, Poe, who is running for president, said the bombing of transmission facilities is aggravating the power situation in Mindanao.

On Wednesday, Tower 63 of the Kabacan-Sultan Kudarat 138-kiloVolt line in Aleosan, North Cotabato was bombed anew, damaging two posts. The incident brought to 19 the

number of transmission facilities bombed since November.

Poe earlier asked the Cabinet security cluster to convene to discuss measures to address the bombings.

She said local government units should also coordinate with the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP) to settle right-of-way issues with landowners where the transmission towers are located.

Poe said the Philippine National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines should secure transmission facilities as more power plants are being constructed to ensure a stable

power supply.

"Eleven additional power plants will be operational in Mindanao in the next four years," she said.

"We need to ensure that transmission lines are up... What good will it be to have an adequate supply of power when it will not benefit the residents. These transmission grids must be checked," she said.

Poe said the government should also address the power crisis in the region by rehabilitating the Agus and Pulangi hydro-power plants and putting up renewable

energy plants.

Sen. Francis Escudero, Poe's running mate, earlier called on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to help secure the transmission towers in their areas. He said the alleged involvement of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters in the bombings could also be addressed by the MILF since many of its officials and members have relatives and friends in the BIFF.

AFP, PNP deputized

On Thursday, the Commission on Elections (Comelec) issued a resolution deputizing

law enforcement agencies to ensure the repair and restoration of damaged transmission lines in Mindanao.

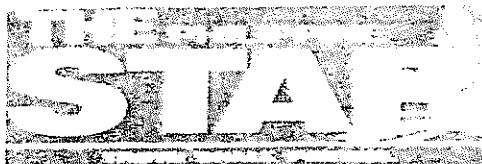
"It should be repaired because we need power to operate our automated machines during the elections," Comelec Chairman Andres Bautista said.

The Department of Energy and the NGCP urged the Comelec to intervene to ensure that the damaged towers are repaired in time for the elections.

Energy Secretary Zenaida Monsada cited Tower 25 in Ramain, La Norte, which has not been restored since it was bombed on Dec. 24.

– With Mayen Jaymalin

05 March 2016



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2 Sayyaf men nabbed in Sulu

ZAMBOANGA CITY – Two suspected Abu Sayyaf members were arrested in Patikul, Sulu on Thursday.

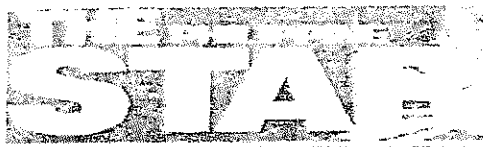
Brig. Gen. Alan Arrojado, commander of Joint Task Group Sulu, said the bandits were collared while planting improvised explosive devices along the road in Sitio Nangka in Barangay Kan Ague at 4 p.m.

The identities of the bandits were withheld pending the result of the investigation.

Arrojado said the troops recovered the bombs' triggering device.

– Roel Pareño

05 March 2016



Page 3

DOJ fails to meet deadline on SAF 44 case

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has failed to meet its self-imposed deadline to resolve the criminal charges against the Muslim rebels tagged in the killing of 44 policemen in Mamasapano, Maguindanao last year.

A total of 90 commanders and members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and armed civilians were implicated in the death of the 44 Special Action Force (SAF) commandos during an operation in Mamasapano on Jan. 25.

Acting Justice Secretary Emmanuel Caparas earlier said the resolution on the complex crime of direct assault with murder complaint that the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) filed against the suspects over the killing of 35 of the SAF operatives during the encounter would be released in February.

But this did not materialize as no resolution has been issued as of yesterday.

However, Caparas told reporters that the resolution would be released next week. No reason was given for the delay.

The preliminary investigation on the case by a panel led by Assistant State Prosecutor Alexander Suarez was concluded last Jan. 14 with only four of 90 respondents able to answer the charges.

Of the 90 respondents, only four submitted counter-affidavits and denied the charges: supposed MILF field commander Pendatun Utek Makakua, who denied the charges and claimed to be a farmer; Mustapha Tatak, a barangay chairman in Sapakan, Mamasapano; and civilians Lakiman Dawaling and Khalim Keda, who were accused of being MILF field commanders involved in the killing of 35 SAF men in Barangay Tukanalipao.

Facing the DOJ probe are 13 command-

ers of MILF and six commanders of BIFF. But the names of the respondents were not made public so as to prevent them from evading possible prosecution.

They were accused of acting "in conspiracy with one another to attack, employ force, seriously intimidate or resist the 35 SAF commandos, who were uniformed police officers and thus persons in authority."

The fact-finding team of prosecutors and the NBI agents based the report on accounts of eyewitnesses - including alias Marathon - who identified the liable

By EDU PUNAY

MILF and BIFF commanders and have been placed under the witness protection program.

The viral videos of the encounter that circulated in social media sites also helped in the investigation and their sources have been traced.

Based on the results of the probe, the killings of the SAF commandos appeared to be "spontaneous and not an institutional act of the MILF."

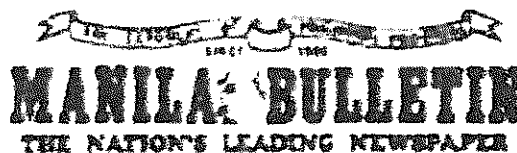
The charges covered the cases of 35 slain SAF men who belonged to the 55th SAF Company that engaged

MILF and BIFF fighters and armed civilians in the cornfields of Barangay Tukanalipao.

Last October, the fact-finding team released its second report involving the cases of the nine other slain commandos

from the 84th SAF company in Barangay Pidsandawan as well as the five civilians and 18 MILF fighters who were also killed during the clash. No one was charged because probers failed to secure witnesses to identify the killers.

05 March 2016



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PAF chief to be replaced 11 days prior to turning 56

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

The retirement of outgoing Philippine Air Force (PAF) chief, Lt. Gen. Jeffrey Delgado, will be done on a much earlier date than his 56th birth anniversary, it was learned yesterday.

Colonel Enrico Canaya, PAF spokesman, told the Manila Bulletin that the retirement date of Delgado has been adjusted 11 days earlier than his birthday on March 20.

A member of Philippine Military Academy (PMA) "Sandigan Class" 1982, Delgado is supposed to reach the mandatory age of retirement from the military service of 56 later this month.

But Canaya said: "Sa March 9 ang turn-over ceremony pero March 20 pa iyung birthday mismo ni sir Jeff (The turnover ceremony will be on March 9 although Delgado's birthday is not until March 20)."

Asked why the date was moved earlier, Canaya said: "Yung reason behind, honestly I don't have those information."

Delgado assumed the position as the 33rd PAF chief on Apr. 30, 2014.

As of press time yesterday, President Aquino has not yet made known his choice of Delgado's replacement.

Among the contenders for new PAF chief are Maj. Gen. Julius Cesar Guillermo of the 2nd Air Division; Maj. Gen. Conrado Parra, Jr. of the 3rd Air Division; Maj. Gen. Emerald Magnaye, the current PAF Vice Commander; and Maj. Gen. Isagani Silva of the Air Logistics Command.

05 March 2016

BusinessMirror

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Presence of Chinese military vessels at Quirino Atoll on and off–Wescom

By RENE ACOSTA

THE military finally admitted on Friday that it has monitored the irregular presence of Chinese military and paramilitary vessels in the Quirino (Jackson) Atoll in the West Philippine Sea, after no less than China and even the United States reported the presence of Chinese ships in the area.

The admission was made by the Armed Forces Western Command (Wescom) through its spokesman, Capt. Cherry Tindog, after two days of sticking to its original line that Chinese ships have never been or were not in the atoll, part of the features in the Kalayaan Island Group owned by the country, but is being claimed by Beijing.

"To say that China has effectively taken over the Quirino Atoll is not accurate and not true. While Chinese vessels have been sighted on and off the area, Filipino fishing vessels are monitored conducting economic activities unhampered,"

Tindog said in statement.

"Quirino Atoll is about 133 nautical miles [246 kilometers] from the nearest tip in Rizal, Palawan, and is, without a doubt, part of the Philippine EEZ [exclusive economic zone]," she added.

Wescom, the military's area command that has responsibility over the defense of the West Philippine Sea, was forced to make the admission, after China officially confirmed that it has sent ships and made its presence in the atoll to remove a Filipino fishing vessel that has remained grounded in the area, posing dangers to maritime navigation.

The US also issued a statement, saying it has been monitoring the presence of Chinese ships in the area and, at the same time, cautioned Beijing not to harass Filipino fishermen in the area, a traditional fishing ground for Filipinos.

Earlier, Vice Adm. Alexander Lopez, Wescom chief, has denied that Chinese military and paramilitary

SEE "WESCOM," A2

Wescom...

CONTINUED FROM A1

vessels has ever been present in the atoll, even branding a report carried out by one newspaper about the presence of Beijing in the atoll as a "lie." While China admitted its extended presence in the atoll, Tindog said the presence was only "on and off."

"While it is true that Wescom has monitored Chinese vessels' on and off presence in Quirino Atoll, following the grounding of a Filipino carrier boat in the area due to bad weather and discrepancy of the vessel, the reported permanent or prolonged Chinese presence in Quirino Atoll is inaccurate," she said.

However, the Wescom spokesman admitted that the military only irregularly carried out its Maritime patrol.

"Maritime patrol conducted on February 19, 2016 revealed that...there were no Chinese vessels sighted on that day. After five Chinese vessels [two Chinese Coast Guard, one Maritime Security Administration, one Rescue and Salvage ship and one barge were sighted on February 21, only one Filipino fishing vessel was sighted at the atoll on February 24," Tindog said.

"No vessel was sighted in Quirino Atoll and its immediate vicinity on the patrol on March 2," she added.

In the past, the Wescom has been hit for withholding reports about Chinese presence in the West Philippine Sea and even Beijing's harassments of military resupply mission to troops in the Ayungin Shoal.

It not only withheld information, but even drove away Filipinos who saunters into Pagasa, like the students who took the "freedom voyage" last December, but takes no action against Chinese ships that loiters and patrol the area.

05 March 2016



Page. 7

Comelec directs AFP, PNP to help NGCP access towers for repair

THE Commission on Elections has deputized the military and police forces to help the National Grid Corporation of the Philippines to get inside private properties, where damaged transmission powers are located.

In a resolution, the Comelec en banc said the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police, along with other government agencies for security and energy, will help the NGCP implement clearing of the nationwide transmission facilities.

The AFP and PNP were particularly directed to secure the area of Tower 25 located on Agus-2 Kibawe 138kV line in

Ramain, Lanao del Sur, which was bombed by lawless elements in December 2015.

Comelec Chairman Andres Bautista said they are hoping to address both issues on security of the towers and the urgent need for the repair.

"Ayaw raw pumayag ng private owners kasi meron raw mga issue on non-payment. Pero sabi ko nga, dahil napakahalaga ng kuryente sa ating halalan, kumbaga, ayusin muna natin 'yung mga tower, then later on na 'yung contractual things. Puwede nilang pag-usapan 'yan, either formally or in court," he said.

Lee Ann Ducusin

05 March 2016



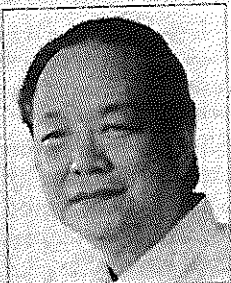
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Search For Truth

By ERNESTO M. MACEDA

5 ex-congressmen charged

Due to separate complaints filed by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) and lawyer Levito Baligod, Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales has ordered the prosecution of former Reps. Rozzano Rufino Biazon of Muntinlupa, Marc Douglas Cagas IV of Davao del Sur, Arrel Olaño of Davao del Norte, Arthur Pingoy Jr. of South Cotabato and Rodolfo Valencia of Oriental Mindoro, affirming the findings of probable cause to charge them with graft, malversation and direct bribery charges in connection with the Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) scam.



Also charged were officials of the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC), Department of Budget and Management (DBM), Technology Resource Center (TRC), National Business Corporation (Nabcor) and representatives of non-governmental organizations including Janet Lim-Napoles.

According to the Ombudsman, Biazon endorsed P3 million of his PDAF to an NGO, Philippine Social Development Foundation Inc. (PSDFI), operated by Napoles and her girl Friday, Evelyn de Leon in 2007. Biazon's pork barrel projects, coursed through the TRC, turned out to be "ghost" projects since no deliveries were made.

Cagas endorsed P11 million of his pork barrel funds, from 2007-2009, to two so-called Napoles NGOs.

Pingoy transferred P20.91 million of his pork barrel also to PSDFI, receiving commissions and kickbacks in the total amount of P7.05 million.

Olaño endorsed P7.97 million worth of PDAF funds to Napoles' NGOs, receiving commissions and kickbacks amounting to at least P3.175 million.

Valencia endorsed P7 million worth of pork barrel funds, receiving total commissions, rebates or kickbacks amounting to at least P2.4 million.

Other personalities charged were former Pampanga Rep. Zenaida Ducut, DBM Undersecretary Mario Relampagas, TRC officials Derris Cunanan and Antonio Ortiz; National Agri-Business Corp. (Nabcor) officials Allan Javellana, Victor Roman Cacal, Jesus Castillo, Margarita Guadinez, Ireneo Pirater, Jocelyn Deiparine, John Raymond De Asis and Noel Macha.

As directed by Ombudsman Morales, copies of the resolution and orders in the five cases will be forwarded to the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) for immediate action on possible violations of the Anti-Money Laundering Act.

Poe, Binay tied

The latest Pulse Asia survey, conducted Feb. 15-20, showed Grace Poe and Jojo Binay statistically tied in first place. Poe got 26 percent while Binay got 25 percent of the 1,800 respondents.

Rody Duterte and Mar Roxas were tied in third place, with 21 percent each.

In the vice presidential race, Chiz Escudero and Bongbong Marcos statistically shared the second place. Escudero received 29 percent of the vote while the latter got 26 percent. Leni Robredo was third at 19 percent.

ISIS militants in Mindanao

Militants fighting in the name of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) are escalating attacks in Mindanao, analysts said.

Their influence is growing, according to former police General Rodolfo Mendoza, a senior analyst of the Manila-based Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research.

An assassination attempt in Zamboanga City on visiting Saudi Arabian preacher Sheikh Aidh al-Qarni, who was on an ISIS hit list, and Saudi Arabian diplomat Sheikh Turki Assaegh, after Al-Qarni spoke at the Western Mindanao University Auditorium (WMUA). Both survived.

Gunmen, who have pledged allegiance to ISIS, have instituted a series of deadly battles with the military. The latest, being a five-day battle with the Philippine Army in Butig, Lanao del Sur where six soldiers and 12 militants were killed, as reported by the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

As the ISIS invade Mindanao Island, almost 30,000 people have been displaced by the fighting, so far.

Bohol united opposition

Nationalist People's Coalition Rep. Aris Aumentado of Bohol and 27 mayors have expressed their support for United Nationalist Alliance (UNA) presidential candidate Vice President Jejomar Binay.

Binay proposed the creation of a National Education Council, composed of government and private sector representatives, which will coordinate and advise schools of the necessary skills needed by employers.

Binay campaigned in Romblon, Aurora, and Bulacan.

Mar Roxas claimed that 20 NPC officials have expressed support for him, among them Rep. Pedro Acharon Jr. of General Santos and Rep. George Arnaiz of Negros Oriental. Roxas and Robredo were in four towns of Bohol with President Aquino.

Grace Poe campaigned in Angeles and San Fernando, Pampanga, did not favor a burial of former President Ferdinand Marcos at the Libingan ng mga Bayani.

The Poe camp expressed confidence that the Supreme Court will not disqualify their candidate for president.

Rodrigo Duterte visited Gov. Amado Espino in Lingayen, Pangasinan. He said, in a speech at the Lingayen town plaza, that the "Daang Matuwid" of Mar Roxas is just a fantasy created by President Benigno Aquino Jr. He then proceeded to Ilocos Sur.

OFFICE OF THE ARMY CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS – Email add: oacpa.army2012@gmail.com – Tel no. (02) 845-9555 Local: 5285, 5295

Gabriela endorses Poe

Gabriela Women's Party is supporting Grace Poe, not Rodrigo Duterte, according to Gabriela spokesperson Arlene Brosas.

Earlier, Rep. Luz Ilagan had said Gabriela is supporting Duterte and even defended the Mayor's flirting and kissing women in his campaign, and his alleged womanizing.

Brosas said Ilagan's support for Duterte is a personal choice and is not the Gabriela's position.

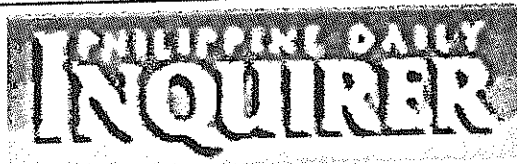
Former Bulacan Gov. Obet Pagdanganan, who joined the UNA campaign in San Rafael, San Miguel and Baliwag, said Vice President Jejomar Binay would win in Bulacan, as he did in 2010 when he defeated Mar Roxas by over 150,000 votes.

Albay Gov. Joey Salceda announced his support for Francis Tolentino for senator.

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

15 March 2016



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DAVAO MAYOR Rodrigo Duterte sharply rebuffed the idea that presidential candidates should disclose their medical condition: "I won't reveal my medical records. *Ano ako, tanga* (Am I stupid)?"

Whatever malady Duterte may be suffering from, it is unlikely to be hoof-in-mouth disease. His comments, however provocative, do not appear to come from slip of tongue or mind; they seem intentionally spoken for effect.

Duterte's response implied that voters were *tanga* to expect him to reveal any infirmity. But he has discovered that such comments do not invite censure; they attract amusement, media coverage, and free advertising. His approach is not likely to change. Behavior that is rewarded tends to be repeated.

Duterte is not alone in scattering sound bites that insult the electorate. With weeks of campaigning to endure, we can expect more outrageous comments directly from candidates or exposed by their critics. I propose a Gall Meter to rate which candidates produce the most galling statements that provoke among the public the sharpest spike in blood pressure or acid reflux pain.

The commemoration of the 30th anniversary of Edsa I gave ample opportunity to score on the Gall Meter. Sen. Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. did not disappoint. Responding to P-Noy's remarks on Edsa I, Bongbong said: "Let the people judge who did something for the people, things that we still enjoy up to now...."

The statement reverts to Bongbong's repeated claim that the reign of Ferdinand Marcos marked a golden age for the Philippines, which was lately challenged by the Ateneo de Manila faculty. The statement would actually be accurate if, by "people" and "we," Bongbong meant the Marcos family. The conservative estimate of the wealth plundered by Ferdinand Marcos ran to at least \$10 billion, less than half of which has been recovered.

In his memoir, Gen. Jose Almonte narrated how

A Gall Meter

BUSINESS MATTERS

Edilberto C. de Jesus



Bongbong, using public phones to guard against wiretaps, gave instructions to the Swiss bank where the plunder had been deposited. At the launch last week of "Never Again," Raissa Robles' book on martial law, former senator Rene Saguisag reminded the audience that Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos opened their Swiss bank accounts under the names of William Saunders and Jane Ryan in 1968, when Marcos had not yet completed his first presidential term—proof of proactive planning for plunder.

Raissa Robles also alluded to instructions from Marcos for his wealth to pass on to his children in equal portions. Sen. Alan Cayetano could thus challenge Bongbong to skip any apology to the victims of martial law—just return the money.

Especially when juxtaposed with his recent statement that "*wala naman kaming sinasabi na hindi totoo* (we have not lied)," an earlier Bongbong comment, retrieved by Robles, merits a perfect Gall Meter 10: "Some of the people who are claiming to be human rights victims have never been victims except [of] their own greed." Aside from repeating his assertion of zero human rights violations during the Marcos regime, in "blaming the victim," Bongbong also adds insult to injury.

Sen. Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan contributes a quote that arguably deserves an equal score: "When I worked as a soldier and comparing their first six years, Marcos [vs. Cory Aquino] was the better president." A 1971 Philippine Military

Academy graduate, Honasan must be comparing the first six years of martial law, after Marcos had already served as president for eight years, with Cory Aquino's term from 1986 to 1992. Honasan excluded from his review the latter years of the Marcos regime, which he reportedly recognized as "a time marred by deaths, torture, disappearances, cronyism and the loss of civil liberties."

This careful distinction projects Honasan's observation as the clinical, academic judgment of a governance expert—except that Honasan was a player, and not a detached, neutral observer, in the period he analyzes. He was a faithful soldier of Marcos in the early years of martial law and the leader of violent coup attempts against the Cory administration. And he has the gall to critique Cory for being, tsk, tsk, less effective than Marcos?

At one of the rallies leading to Edsa II, I remember a RAM (Reform the Armed Forces Movement) leader admitting that the attempt to overthrow the Cory administration was wrong. For his involvement in the 2003 Oakwood Mutiny, in which Honasan was also implicated, Sen. Antonio Trillanes served over seven years in jail. I do not recall Honasan even expressing regret at how his failed but bloody coup attempts derailed the country's development trajectory.

We cannot prevent politicians and pundits from making brazen statements outrageous in their cynicism. But we can at least record their utterances and judge who has the lowest opinion of, and the highest contempt for, the Filipino voter.

Send in your nominations!

Edilberto C. de Jesus (edcdejesus@gmail.com) is professor emeritus at the Asian Institute of Management. Prof. Rofel Brion's Tagalog translation of this column and others earlier published, together with other commentaries, are in <http://secondthoughts.ph>.

05 March 2016

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

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Save the 'lumad'

IT TOOK US President Ronald Reagan six years to say something about the AIDS crisis that first made its appearance in America in 1981, and then rapidly developed into a national health emergency. As thousands of gay men in major cities such as San Francisco and New York succumbed to the mysterious disease, and thousands more cases of infection were reported, the Reagan administration, which drew support from the religious Right, responded with a combination of indifference and outright hostility to the idea of helping a subset of the American population that had long been despised by the "moral majority."

EDITORIAL

The official silence at the top meant, at the very least, that there was no funding for research into the disease's nature and origins in the critical first months and years of its spread. By the time Reagan made his first remarks about AIDS in 1987, in the twilight of his term, the stark consequences of his inaction were clear: nearly 21,000 Americans dead and over 36,000 living with the disease, which had now spread to 113 other countries. The episode is now remembered as a shameful chapter in his presidency.

AIDS in America and the plight of the *lumad* in Mindanao may be unrelated topics, but the silence and apathy that characterized Reagan's response to a humanitarian crisis during his watch appear to be similar to what President Aquino is displaying in the face of the persistent oppression and injustice that the *lumad* are undergoing. The atrocities inflicted on the indigenous people, on top of the daily miseries they have had to endure since fleeing their communities to escape the war between government forces and rebels, include seeing their educators and leaders murdered in front of their eyes by vigilante groups said to be funded by the military, and the torching of their houses, schools and refugee centers.

Lumad groups are firm in saying it was members of the paramilitary group Alamara that set fire to an evacuation center in a church compound in Haran, Davao City, last Feb. 26. Five people, four of them children, were injured. The compound itself has been home for more than a year now to some 700 *lumad* displaced from their communities by heavy fighting. But even in this temporary sanctuary, they were not safe from the depredations of politicians and other groups out to exploit their circumstances for vested ends.

From accounts, the most outrageous of these machinations against the *lumad* has been their attempted "rescue" by North Cotabato Rep. Nancy Catamco last year. Catamco, the chair of the House committee on indigenous peoples who had earlier called the displaced *lumad* "stinky" and urged them to return to their homes, barged into the compound with cops and other armed men in tow, allegedly because the evacuees inside were being held by communist rebels against their will. The appalling irony of a lawmaker tasked to speak for indigenous people's welfare choosing to disbelieve her own constituents' plight and spearheading instead their further oppression was compounded only by a greater sin: an icy silence emanating from Malacañang.

Catamco, a member of the ruling Liberal Party, has not been sanctioned, neither for her conduct vis-à-vis the *lumad* nor for her documented involvement in the pork barrel scam. The President, meanwhile, has spoken but once about the *lumad* problem ever since their torment came to light, and it was in the most perfunctory way: "There is no campaign to kill anybody in this country," he said last September. "There is a campaign to go after the culprits of these crimes regardless of who they are."

If there is, indeed, a campaign to bring to justice those who murder the *lumad* and burn their dwellings, then that campaign is an epic failure. Specific paramilitary group members have been tagged in the killings and other crimes committed against the *lumad*, but no one has been charged, let alone arrested by the military forces that reportedly arm them and abet their activities in the region in the name of counterinsurgency.

In the weeks and months that Mr. Aquino has kept silent even as the *lumad* cry out for help, the numbers have only mounted. As of September 2015 when he last addressed the matter, if barely, the tally was 68 victims of summary killings, 53 of them *lumad*. More will die if he does not put a stop to this murderous spree. As in Reagan's case, it will be to the lasting shame of his presidency.

05 March 2016



Pahina. 5



Dear Sir,
Nakakatuwa na mabasa sa mga dyaryo na isa na namang bayan sa Leyte ang insurgency-free o isa sa mga "Stable Internal Peace and Security" areas. Ito ay ang bayan ng Kananga. Nakakarami na ang Leyte, labing-anim na. Ibig sabihin nito ay may pakakataon ng umasenso ang nasabing bayan kasi nawala ang mga kinatatakutang rebelde.

Ang deklarasyong insurgency-free na ang Kananga ay dahil sa rekomendasyon ng 19th Infantry Battalion at nangako ang kasundaluhang naka-assign doon na hindi iiwan ang lugar at suportahan ang mga pulis upang mapanatili ang kaayusan at kapayapaan ng lugar.

Sana ay dumami pa ang mga lugar na maging insurgency-free. Napakasarap mamuhay na walang kinakatakutan at inaalala na baka may mangyaring masama. Sana ay makapag-isip ng maayos ang mga kapatid nating rebelde.

Cynthia B. Carlos
Oroquieta City

Dear Sir,
Bumabanat na ang mga New People's Army. Nangyayari na ang panghihingi ng permit to campaign o PTC sa mga kandidato na pumapasok sa kanilang lugar. Pero salamat at marami na ang nag-iisip na hindi na magbigay ng PTC bagkus lumalapit sa mga sundalo para sa kanilang proteksyon. Sana lahat ganito ang utak para matigil na ang gawain ng mga rebeldeng ito.

Gaya ng nangyayari sa Quezon, nakapag-isip-isip na ang mga pulitiko na hindi na magpapadala sa mga rebelde. Ayaw na nilang magbayad ng PTC. Lalapit na lang sila sa mga kasundaluhan at kapulisan upang humingi ng tulong kapag mangangampanya sa lugar. Nangako na-

man sila na tutulong sa pagtiyak na maayos ang kapaligiran.

Nagpaalaala ang kumander ng 201st Infantry Brigade ng Army na nakabase sa Calauag, Quezon na si Brigadier General Rhoderick Parayno sa mga kandidato na kapag nagbayad ng PTC sa mga NPA, baka balikan sila kapag nanalo at hihingi ulit ng pera. Ano na ang mangyayari gastos na naman, masasaid na ang pera niyo. Ito ay nangyayari na sa mga nakaraang eleksyon. Pag-isipan niyo sana itong maigi mga kapatid na kandidato.

John Carlo Agomencilla
Lanang, Davao City

Dear Sir,
Nakakatuwa na may isang kongresista na nagmamalasakit sa kapakanan ng ating kasundaluhan gaya ni Davao City Rep. Karlo Alexei Nograles. Hiniling niya sa BIR na huwag patawan ng buwis ang mga provisional o pansamantalang allowances ng mga sundalo gaya ng gustong mangyari ni BIR chief Kim Jacinto-Henares.

Kailangan bang patawan ng tax ang allowances ng mga sundalo? 'Di man lang maisip ng ating gobyerno na mahirap ang ginawang serbisyo ng ating sundalo lalo na kapag malayo sa kanilang pamilya. Laging nasa pangangailangan ang buhay. Nagungulila sa pamilya. Alam ko ito kasi may bayaw akong sundalo at sa malayo naka-assign. At alam ko rin na nagkukulang ang sahod niya para sa pag-aaral ng kanilang mga anak at sa pang-araw-araw na pangangailangan.

Alam ko maluhungkot ang ating kasundaluhan 'pag nangyari ang pagbubuwis na ito. Sana ay huwag naman para makaluwag-luwag ang buhay nila lalo na ng aking mga pamangkin.

Zenaida Corpuz
Laoag City

Mahal na Patnugot, Nagsagawa na naman ng rally ang grupong Bayan Muna laban sa Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) na kasunduan ng Pilipinas at Amerika. Nais ng grupo na paalisin na ang tropang Kano na nang-aalipin umano sa atin.

Sa panahon na inangkin na ng China ang ating teritoryo sa West Philippine Sea (WPS) ay abala naman ang Bayan Muna sa pangongontra sa pagpapalis ng presensya ng US na sumusuporta sa atin para mas mahasa pa ang mga kasundaluhan at maprotektahan ang teritoryo na lantaran ng kinukuha sa atin. Anong klaseng mentalidad ba mayroon ang Bayan Muna?

Kung nais talaga nila (Bayan Muna) tulungan ang ating bayan ay mas uunahin nilang bigyan ng pansin ang malaking isyu na kinakaharap ng ating bansa gaya ng WPS. Doon sila sa tapat ng embahada ng China magrally, doon nila isigaw na umalis sila sa teritoryo natin at sila ang tunay na nang-aalipin sa ating karapatan at kalayaan.

Ngayon pa nga ay kumakandidato sa pagka-senador ang isa sa dalawang representative ng Bayan Muna partylist.

Nakakadismaya sa pagkat wala namang batas na naibalangkas ang kanilang partylist upang matulungan na maprotektahan ang ating teritoryo o yaong mga taong nagpoprotekta sa ating kasarinlan gaya ng mga pulis o sundalo.

Kung sabagay ay hindi na rin naman iyon katakataka dahil mas panig pa sila sa mga rebelde sa tuwing may masasawi o masusugatan sa tropa ng gobyerno.

Sana ay alam lahat ng botante ang kabulukan ng grupong Bayan Muna upang hindi na muli pa silang makapanlinlang o makakuha ng boto sa Kongreso o Senado man.

Danica Joy M. Banlaolao

05 March 2016



Pahina. 5



Dear Sir,
Nakakatuwa na mabasa sa mga dyaryo na isa na namang bayan sa Leyte ang insurgency-free o isa sa mga "Stable Internal Peace and Security" areas. Ito ay ang bayan ng Kananga. Nakakarami na ang Leyte, labing-anim na ibig sabihin nito ay may pakakataon ng umasenso ang nasabing bayan kasi nawala ang mga kinatatakutang rebelde.

Ang deklarasyong insurgency-free na ang Kananga ay dahil sa rekomendasyon ng 19th Infantry Battalion at nangako ang kasundaluhang naka-assign doon na hindi iiwan ang lugar at suportahan ang mga pulis upang mapanatili ang kaayusan at kapayapaan ng lugar.

Sana ay dumami pa ang mga lugar na maging insurgency-free. Napakasarap mamuhay na walang kinatakutan at inaalala na baka may mangyaring masama. Sana ay makapag-isip ng maayos ang mga kapatid nating rebelde.

Cynthia B. Carlos
Oroquieta City

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