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15 March 2016

Tuesday

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New team of peace monitors arrives for Mindanao tour-of-duty

COTABATO CITY (PNA) — Malaysia has deployed another contingent that will monitor the peace process in Mindanao Monday, replacing a team that has completed its tour-of-duty in the southern Philippines.

Malaysian Major Gen. Datuk Wira Zamrose Bin Mohd Zain of the Malaysian Royal Armed Forces will lead the new peace monitors called 11TH International Monitoring Team (IMT-11), replacing a team (IMT-10) led by Major Gen. Dato Sheik Mokhsin Bin Sheik Hassan.

The team of monitors, which is also composed of representatives from Brunei and Indonesia, and civilian experts from Norway, Japan and the European Union, has been helping the Philippine government (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) enforce the ceasefire accord since 2003.

The agreement was signed in 1997 and with the presence of international monitors, both sides religiously obliged to the provisions of the accord, saving lives and properties.

Governor Mujiv Hataman of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) welcomed the new Malaysian peace monitors by describing its contributions to the over-all peace situation in the region.

ARMM is composed of the provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi.

"This peacekeeping mission plays a very big role in keeping peace in many areas inside the autonomous region," Hataman said.

The deployment of new peace monitors came despite the non-passage of draft Bangsamoro Basic Law that will cement the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro forged in 2014 by the GPH and MILF.

Malaysia has been working as "third party facilitator" of the GPH and MILF peace process.

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Almendras 'charm offensive' on

By Vito Barcelo

AFTER writing an open letter extolling the leadership of his predecessor Albert del Rosario, interim Foreign Secretary Rene Almendras will try to restore friendly relations with China during his brief stint as head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, but he will stand for what is right.

In his first meeting with diplomatic reporters at the DFA, Almendras stressed that the country has always been friendly to China and treated China with appropriate respect in the past.

"In my personal capacity, I tend to overextend on [friendliness]. That's me, I'm a very friendly person. But I will stand for what's right," Almendras said.

"I will put down my foot on what's right, but there's always a nice way of saying it. There's always a proper way of doing it," he added.

Almendras made the remarks in a brief initial exchange with DFA reporters when he reported for work on Monday, a day after he wrote an open letter that mentioned his experience in real diplomacy under the guidance of Del Rosario.

Noting that he will only be DFA chief for a little more than 100 days, Almendras admitted he lacked experience in foreign policy, but vowed to seek the guidance of Del Rosario and other DFA experts from time to time.

He said this will be particularly important in matters concerning the West Philippine Sea where China is pressing its claim to almost the entire South China Sea to the detriment of the claims of Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei.

If left unchallenged, Philippines and Malaysia will lose about 80 percent of their EEZ, Vietnam about 50 percent, Brunei about 90 percent, and Indonesia about 30 percent, the new DFA head said.

Meanwhile, the Philippine Navy announced that the Philippines expects to take delivery from the United States of the third Hamilton-class cutter that was pledged by US President Barack Obama last year.

The US Coast Guard cutter Boutwell is in the same class as the BRP Gregorio Del Pilar (formerly the USCGC Hamilton) and BRP Ramon Alcaraz (ex-USCGC Dallar) which were decommissioned in 2011 and 2012, respectively.

The USCGC Boutwell will be decommissioned from US Coast Guard service on Wednesday in San Diego, California after 48 years of service.

"We are expecting the delivery of this ship this year. [It will be an] additional asset for the PN and will be a big boost to our capabilities once it enters our inventory," Navy public affairs office chief Capt. Lued Lincuna said.

The US Coast Guard is working with the State Department to transfer the ship to the PN as part of a Foreign Military Sale Program through the Foreign Assistance Act.

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MINGLING WITH THE PEOPLE – A battle-tested and stern-looking Army sniper poses with this family for a selfie during the 119th anniversary of the Philippine Army which was celebrated at the Gaisano Mall in Tagum City. (Alexander D. Lopez)

Army celebrates 119th anniversary in Tagum

By **ALEXANDER D. LOPEZ**

DAVAO CITY — Residents from various provinces in Davao region attended the two-day Mindanao leg of the 119th Philippine Army Anniversary Celebration at the Gaisano Mall Tagum City, Davao del Norte that ended yesterday. It had the theme "Serving the People, Securing the Land."

Tenth Infantry (Agila) Division chief information officer Capt. Rhyen Batchar told the media here that the Mindanao leg celebration was the third activity that was launched by the Army this month.

The first leg was celebrated in Lucena City last March 5 to 6 while the second leg was done in Tacloban City last March 11 and 12.

Representatives from the four Army divisions in Mindanao – the 10th ID, 4th ID, 6th ID and 1st ID – also arrived to join the celebration.

The residents had the chance to

view photos showing the various activities of the army in Mindanao that include the soldiers' trainings, operations and community services.

The visitors also enjoyed the feel of being inside Army facilities after they were allowed to tour a mock-up camp, sentinel post and tower post.

Army equipments, including various high-powered firearms, were also displayed, together with the Army's top gears utilized during rescue missions.

The opening day was graced by Tagum City Mayor Allan Rellon, 10th ID commander Major General Rafael Valencia and Col. Benjamin Hao of the Army Chief Public Affairs Office.

Rellon expressed gratitude to the Army for its dedication in service and for assuring that Tagum City and the rest of the region are secured.

He also thanked the residents in the area for their continued support to the army.

Valencia thanked the residents who visited the event and had the chance to personally mingle with the soldiers, view their equipments and listen to the shows that presented the continuing peace and development works of the army in Mindanao.

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NPA threat declines in Agusan Norte, Butuan

MILITARY and local government officials yesterday declared Agusan del Norte and Butuan City as “conflict manageable and ready for further development” due to decreased threat posed by the communist New People’s Army.

The declaration was made at the Agusan del Norte provincial capitol in Butuan by AFP Eastern Mindanao Command chief Lt. Gen. Leonardo Rey Guerrero.

Brig. Gen. Paul Atal, deputy commander of the Army’s 4th Infantry Division, could not immediately give the estimated number of NPAs operating in these areas but said it is already at a negligible level.

“Based on our assessment, they are declining in terms of strength, manpower, firearms. There is also a reduction in NPA-initiated violent incidents,” Atal said of the communist movement, without giving figures.

Atal said the declaration paves the

way for the greater involvement of the local government and the local police in addressing the remaining communist threat. He said the military will be playing a support role.

More than 60 provinces have been declared as already peaceful over the past years.

Butuan City Mayor Ferdinand Amante Jr. said the people of Butuan City are already enjoying the fruits of peace. “We thank the soldiers for sacrificing their lives in accomplishing this kind of environment,” he said.

Agusan del Sur Gov. Maria Angelica Rosedell Matba said the feat was the “result of our collective effort of serving our people in their communities.”

Guerrero said the declaration “is our seal of our commitment of working together to ensure a better environment for growth for the people of this province.”

– Victor Reyes

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Security forces capture 2 suspected bombers

BY RENE ACOSTA

A TEAM of policemen and military intelligence agents arrested on Sunday night in Zamboanga City two persons who were in possession of a powerful homemade bomb made of ammonium nitrate.

Chief Insp. Rogelio Alabata, spokesman for the Western Mindanao police command, identified the suspects as Allan Ajing Ajijun, 30, and Asbi Tandih Jama, 21, both of Barangay Tumulutab, Zamboanga City.

Alabata said the two were arrested by Zamboanga City policemen and members of the Naval Intelligence and Security Company, Air Intelligence Special Group and Naval Special Operation Unit at around 8 p.m. on Sunday.

Confiscated from them were six improvised blasting caps, two red colored commercial-grade time fuses and

2 kilos of a white granular substance that was later confirmed to be ammonium nitrate.

Alabata said the suspects were detained at Station 3 of the Zamboanga City police, while the homemade bomb was turned over to the Zamboanga City police headquarters for further examination.

Reports said Jama and Ajijun were bombers, but Alabata refused to confirm it, saying the two were still undergoing investigation, with the interrogators trying to determine if they are members of a terrorist or a lawless group.

Likewise, investigators were trying to ferret out other information, including the intended target of the homemade bomb.

Meanwhile, in Agusan del Norte government troops also clashed on Sunday with suspected members of the New People's Army, who were out to collect supplies from small businesses in the province.

1Lt. Ryan Layug, civil-military operations officer of the Army's 30th Infantry Battalion (IB), said the firefight happened at Barangay Amontay, San Francisco, Surigao del Norte.

Layug said a resident reported about the plan of the rebels to collect supplies in the outskirts of the barangay, which prompted the 30IB to send a platoon of soldiers to the area.

However, as the soldiers were approaching the designated pickup area, the rebels reportedly fired at the troops, triggering 10 minutes of firefight.

A rebel was reportedly wounded during the gun battle, but was allegedly taken by his companions in their withdrawal.

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• **Appeal for NPA rebels to surrender**

PATIN-AY, Prosperidad, Agusan del Sur — The remaining regular fighters of the New People's Army (NPA), armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) have been urged to "come down now and join the peace and development program of the government. The NPAs have also been asked to surrender their firearms to the government to avail of the benefits under the government's "Balik-Baril, Bayad Agad" program. When they surrender, the rebels will also receive other cash and livelihood assistance under the Comprehensive Local Integration Program (CLIP) of the government. "All concerned line agencies of the government are now helping one another for them (NPAs) to receive assistance in their new way of productive life, instead of continuous running in the mountains without receiving nothing from the CPP-NPA movement," appealed Agusan del Sur Gov. Adolph Edward G. Plaza yesterday. (Mike U. Crismundo)

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'Ex-NPA rebel leads authorities to missing lumad's grave in Surigao

By **MIKE U. CRISMUNDO**

BUTUAN CITY — A former fighter of the New People's Army (NPA) led authorities to the unmarked grave of a Manobo tribe member Sunday, two years since the lumad was abducted and killed by communist rebels in Cantilan, Surigao del Sur.

This was disclosed yesterday by First Lt. Jan S. Devaras, 41st Civil Military Operations (Magkahiusa)

Company commander, as he said that the ex-NPA rebel led authorities to the site where the lumad was buried at the vicinity of Kilometer 9, Mamon, Barangay Tubo-tubo in Cagwait, Surigao del Sur.

"The skeletal remains of the lumad were retrieved thru the revelation of a former NPA who has just surrendered to military and police authorities in Surigao del Sur," Devaras said.

He added that the victim was abducted by NPA rebels last April 12,

2014 from a highland Manobo community in Anas, Barangay Cabangahan in Cantilan town.

The Magkahiusa commander, however, refused to reveal the identity of the ex-rebel nor that of the murdered lumad for security reasons.

Devaras also said the NPAs executed the tribesman after he refused to join the revolutionary movement.

He said the remains of the lumad were brought under the custody of government authorities in Surigao del

Sur for further forensic examination and identification.

Meanwhile, Lt. Col. Randolph Rojas, commander of the 36th IB based in Tago, Surigao del Sur condemned the NPAs for killing another lumad.

"We condemn the NPAs for killing another lumad who did not want to join or cooperate with them. They must also stop occupying some Indigenous People communities in Surigao del Sur as their guerrilla bases," he said.

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2 bomb suspects nabbed in Zambo

By Francisco Tuyay

TWO suspected bombers, who were found in possession of a key ingredient in bomb-making, were arrested by combined security forces at a port in Zamboanga City Sunday night.

The authorities said they nabbed Allan Ajing Ajijun, 30, and Asbi Tandih Jama, 21, both residents of Zamboanga City, on Saturday at the Sangil Port and seized two kilos of ammonium nitrate, six improvised blasting caps and two time fuses.

This developed as Zamboanga City Mayor Maria Isabelle Salazar commended intelligence units from the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines for

the arrest of the suspected and the seizure of the bomb component.

"I commended the intelligence communities, the Task Force Zamboanga and the Zamboanga City Police, but I also want to look deeper into identities and background of the suspects," Salazar said.

Chief Insp. Rogelio Alabata, spokesman of the Zamboanga Peninsula regional police, said the suspect were caught by Naval Intelligence and Security Company, Marine Battalion Landing Team, Air Force Intelligence Special Group Field Station Western Mindanao and Naval Special Operation Unit.

Security forces in Mindanao has launched a wide-scale intelligence

monitoring for potential bombing activities by local terrorist groups following reports that 100 Muslim recruits trained by foreign militants are out to conduct bombings in Mindanao.

The recruits are said to have been graduated from a clandestine school of bomb-making somewhere in Liguasan Marsh near Tacurong, Sultan Kudarat.

The recruits, sources said, were trained by Salahudin Hassan, a member of the Al-Khobar group supporting the Jemaah Islamiya, and Mumanda Ali, alias Mauwiya, a former military officer from Singapore, who became of JI leader responsible for the 2001 Bali, Indonesia bombing. He fled to Mindanao in 2002.

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New AFP inspector general named

BY VICTOR REYES

A SENIOR Army general has been designated as new AFP inspector general, replacing Maj. Gen. Benito de Leon who is due to reach the mandatory retirement age of 56 on Monday next week.

Maj. Gen. Oscar Lactao, incumbent commander of the Army's 4th Infantry Division based in Cagayan de Oro City, will assume his new post on Thursday in rites to be held in Camp Aguinaldo.

Lactao will be replaced by Army chief of staff Maj. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal, who will take over the 4th ID on Wednesday. There is still no word as to who will succeed Madrigal as the military's No. 3 man.

Last week, the military's No. 2 man was named head of the Northern Luzon Command, a lower position in the military hierarchy but the Armed Forces said it was not a demotion. The Armed Forces looks at a command post as a better assignment than an office job.

Lactao is a member of the Philippine Military Academy Class 1984 while Madrigal is from Class 1985.

Col. Noel Detoyato, chief of the AFP public affairs office, said Lactao's new assignment is a higher position because it is a three-star position, meaning Lactao may be promoted to the higher rank of lieutenant general.

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A publication of the Philippine Army

Military still clueless on where Abu Sayyaf took kidnap victims

BY VICTOR REYES

THE military remains clueless as to the whereabouts of three foreigners and a Filipina kidnapped by members of the Sayyaf group in Samal Island, Davao del Norte last year.

Maj. Filemon Tan, spokesman of the AFP Western Mindanao Command, made the declaration a few days after a third video circulated on social media, showing the hostages appealing again to authorities to heed their captors' demand for ransom.

Tan appealed to the public to help authorities in determining the whereabouts of the kidnap victims and their captors.

"We have yet to pinpoint their whereabouts. Our intelligence units are still trying to confirm if they are indeed in Sulu," he said.

He reiterated the government's stand against negotiating with kidnappers and paying them ransom.

The Abu Sayyaf is seeking a P1 billion ransom for each of the hostages – Canadians John Ridsdel and Robert Hall, Norwegian Kjartan Sekkingstad, and Filipina Marites Flor. They were seized last September 21 during a raid of the Holiday Oceanview resort.

In the video, Sekkingstad said they are being held by the Abu Sayyaf in the island province of Sulu. He said authorities have one month to meet the demand of

their captors, otherwise they will end up dead.

One of the kidnappers, shown on the video with his face covered, said authorities have until April 8 to pay the ransom.

The first two videos came out in October and November last year. Aside from ransom, the captives appealed to authorities to stop military offensives.

Tan said the military does not believe the group is in Sulu.

"There is a chance that they are just misleading our troops because of continuing operations in Sulu. They could be using it (video) to tell us they are in Sulu when they are, for example, in Basilan," said Tan.

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Pahina. 2

PNP at AFP tintyak ang seguridad sa Semana Santa

Handa na ang pamunuan ng Philippine National Police (PNP) at Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) sa ipatutupad na seguridad para sa ligtas na paggunita sa Semana Santa sa susunod na linggo.

Ito ang inihayag ni PNP Chief P/Director General Ricardo Marquez, na bahagi ng kanilang Oplan Ligtas Semana Santa 2016 na inoobserbahan kada taon.

Partikular namang mahigpit na tututukan ay ang mga terminal ng bus, pantalan, paliparan at iba pang mga matataong lugar.

Asahan na rin ang pagtataas sa full alert status ng PNP bago mag-Semana Santa upang matiyak ang kaligtasan ng publiko partikular na ang mga debotong Katoliko na dadagsa sa simbahan para sa tradisyunal na Visita Iglesia at magtutungo sa mga probinsiya.

Sinabi ni Col. Noel Detoyato, Chief ng AFP Public Affairs Office, nakahanda rin silang mag-deploy ng mga tauhan partikular na ang Joint Task Force –National Capital Region (JTF-NCR) sa ilalim ng superbisyon ni Chief Supt. Apolinario Alobba upang tumulong sa PNP sa pagpapatupad ng seguridad para sa Semana Santa.

Bukod dito ay nakahanda rin ang kanilang tropa sa mga probinsya para sa ilalatag na seguridad partikular na sa mga lugar na balwarte ng mga grupong banta sa pambansang seguridad na maaaring magsamantala sa paglulunsad ng karahasan. - Joy Cantos-

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NPA offers discount to candidates

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
Inquirer Southern Luzon

LUCENA CITY—It's cheaper by the dozen, even in terms of campaign fees collected by communist rebels in certain areas in Quezon province.

Candidates wanting to court voters unhampered in villages un-

NPA OFFERS / A7

From page A1

der the control of the communist New People's Army (NPA) in Quezon may resort to getting group discounts in permit to campaign (PTC) fees so they can save money for the coming elections, according to an Army general.

"Aside from demanding PTC fees from individual candidates, the NPA now offers a 'one slate collection' for candidates of a political party [in a particular town]," said Brig. Gen. Erick Parayno, commander of the Army's 201st Infantry Brigade here.

Demand letter

A candidate for councilor in one of the towns in central Quezon confirmed Parayno's information.

The politician, who asked not to be named due to security concerns, said his group's campaign manager had received a demand letter, supposedly from the NPA, asking their political party to settle the PTC fees of all municipal candidates in its slate.

"The letter advised the party to settle the PTC fees of all candidates in one payment in exchange for a discount of an unspecified amount," he said.

But the candidate had said his group was caught in a bind as some of his party mates refused to pay, "as a matter of principle."

"They just don't want to submit themselves to the extortion scheme of the rebels," he said. "Our group faces a dilemma because the party wants us to settle the problem by ourselves."

Protection

In past elections, rebels had sought from candidates not only cash but also goods, like rice, other foodstuff, medicine, communication equipment and even mobile phone load credits, military and local officials said.

Parayno said candidates had been sending feelers that they want to avail themselves of military and police protection during their sorties.

"And we expect more politicians to come to us before the official campaign period starts," he said.

The campaign period for local candidates starts on March 25 and ends on May 7. Campaign activities are prohibited on March 25, Good Friday.

Parayno reiterated that the military would not give candidates individual security escorts but would only clear the campaign site of any threat from communist rebels or other armed groups.

"We won't be acting as their personal bodyguards," he said. "But in case of any clear threat on the ground, we're always ready to come to their aid."

'Revolutionary tax'

Parayno said the NPA rebels were also asking candidates with business interests to pay a "revolutionary tax" on top of the PTC fee.

They have been targeting construction companies working on government infrastructure projects, he said.

A source in the local construction business said the rebels were asking for "millions of pesos" in exchange for unimpeded work in their project sites.

"Failure to settle means [contractors] are putting their heavy equipment and workers in the field in constant danger," said the source.

No amount specified

The candidate said the rebels had not specified any amount for the PTC covering a party slate for a town.

"It will be discussed during the negotiation. But based on our understanding, the group fee will be cheaper," he said.

In a previous interview, a former NPA leader, who now works as a consultant for a local government in Quezon, confirmed that a PTC fee demand letter contained no specific demand to a candidate.

But he said some candidates would not be asked to pay if the local NPA leadership would be convinced that they were sincere in serving the people and they did not have money.

A politician, who served for three terms as municipal councilor and later as vice mayor, said he paid the PTC fee through cash and goods.

"They asked for cell phone load, grocery items, rice and assorted medicines. I think it only cost me around P70,000," he said. He also gave the rebels P30,000.

Asked if the PTC fee payment helped him win, he said: "I'd like to think that it helped because I won."

However, the politician said he was thinking of not paying the PTC fee for his reelection bid this year.

"I'm not sure that the demand really came from NPA rebels. I only received a phone call from a male caller who introduced himself as the PTC collector in our area. But I did not believe him. He asked me to deposit P100,000 to a bank account; that's not the style of genuine PTC collectors," he said.

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The Manila Times

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China plans to begin civilian flights to, from disputed South China Sea isles

BY JESSE JOHNSON
JAPAN TIMES, TOKYO
(TNS)

CHINA is set to begin operating civilian flights to a disputed island in the South China Sea within a year, state media reported Friday as Beijing ramps up infrastructure development in the contested waters.

The official Xinhua News Agency quoted Xiao Jie, a top Communist Party official.

Xiao, mayor of Sansha City on Woody Island, which is located in the contested Paracel archipelago, said flights will be to and from Sansha.

Sansha was officially established in 2012 to administer several island groups, including the Paracels, Spratly Islands, Macclesfield Bank, and their surrounding waters in the South China Sea.

In January, Beijing carried out test flights to a newly constructed airfield on Fiery Cross Reef in the Spratly Islands. The island chain is claimed by China, Vietnam and four other governments.

Quoting Xiao, Xinhua's report said the airfields on Woody Island and Fiery Cross Reef will "improve air traffic services in the South China Sea and provide more information about weather, aeronautics, communication, navigation and surveillance."

The construction of airstrips in the area has stoked concerns that China is attempting to lay the

groundwork for an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the waters, which will effectively put it in control of vital sea lanes.

Beijing lays claim to most of the South China Sea, through which nearly \$5 trillion in trade passes each year.

Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have conflicting claims in the area.

USW Navy vessels conducted what Washington called "freedom of navigation" operations near disputed islands in the South China Sea in October and late January.

The United States, Japan and other nations in the region have urged China to halt its massive land-reclamation projects and to refrain from militarizing the waters.

In February, the United States and Taiwan confirmed reports by US media that Beijing had "recently" dispatched surface-to-air missiles and radar systems to Woody Island, which they said went against a vow by Chinese President Xi Jinping not to militarize its claims in the waters.

Some analysts have said that the radar and weapons systems could help China to establish an ADIZ, similar to the one it declared in the disputed East China Sea in November 2013. ©2016 THE JAPAN TIMES (TOKYO) / DISTRIBUTED BY TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY, LLC.

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6 months after Samal kidnapping

THE kidnapping of three foreigners from a Davao holiday resort, which a Malacañang spokesman was quick to minimize as a “a very isolated case” and no cause for concern, is turning into a major problem for the country.

Six months after the three – two Canadians and a Norwegian – were kidnapped along with a Filipina from the beach resort on the Island Garden City of Samal in the Davao Gulf, their Abu Sayyaf captors warned that if they do not get the demanded P1-billion ransom for each of the foreigners, they would be killed in one month.

It may be recalled that the kidnap victims – Canadians John Ridsdel and Robert Hall, Norwegian Khartan Sekkingstad, and Filipina Marites Flor – were seized from the beach resort last September, 2015, then taken to a stronghold of the Abu Sayyaf on Jolo island. A month later, a video appeared in local social networking sites showing the kidnap victims surrounded by their masked captors. The next report last January said government troops were pursuing the Abu Sayyaf in the jungles of Jolo.

There were no further reports until March

8 last week when the Abu Sayyaf posted a new video, this time giving the families of the kidnap victims one month to meet the demand for ransom. Government rescue operations evidently have made no progress and no ransom negotiations have been held, in line with official government policy. “If you think your policy is better than the lives of the captives, certainly we will do something terrible against them,” a masked man said in the video. The military said footage of the video has been submitted to forensic experts to determine its authenticity.

We hope, for the sake of both the victims and our country, that something is done this coming month. One of the Canadians appealed in the video to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for help in the matter of ransom.

Our principal concern lies in the repercussions execution of the hostages would have on national security and on our standing in the community of nations. Islamic State militants in Syria and Iraq – after whom the Abu Sayyaf have patterned their operations – have brought those two nations to the depths in the eyes of the world. Execution of the Jolo hostages would bring us close to those depths.