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OFFICE OF THE ARMY CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS NEWS CLIPPINGS

28 March 2016

Monday


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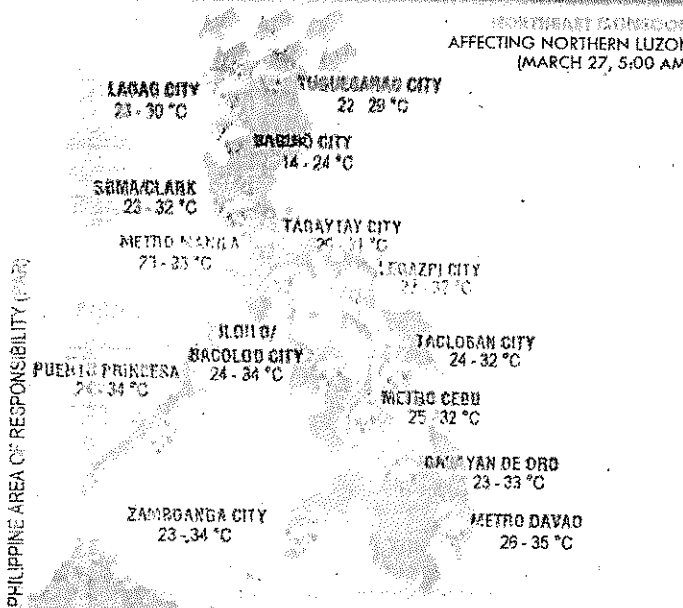
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TODAY'S WEATHER FORECAST



PHILIPPINE AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY (PAR)

City	Temperature
LAOAG CITY	23 - 30 °C
TUGUEGARAO CITY	22 - 29 °C
BAGUIO CITY	14 - 24 °C
SBMA/CLARK	23 - 32 °C
METRO MANILA	23 - 32 °C
TAGAYTAY CITY	20 - 31 °C
LEGAZPI CITY	22 - 31 °C
ILOILO/ BACOLOD CITY	24 - 34 °C
PUERTO PRINCESA	24 - 34 °C
TACLOBAN CITY	24 - 32 °C
METRO CEBU	25 - 32 °C
CAGAYAN DE ORO	23 - 33 °C
ZAMBOANGA CITY	23 - 34 °C
METRO DAVAO	25 - 35 °C

SUNRISE 5:55 AM
SUNSET 6:08 PM
MOONRISE 6:58 PM
MOONSET 9:00 AM
FULL MOON 12:31 PM
LAST QUARTER 11:17 PM


LOW TIDE 8:00 PM
HIGH TIDE 12:37 PM
0.04 Meter

MANILA SOUTH HARBOUR

Partly cloudy after
Partly cloudy to 10:00 AM
cloudy with showers
Partly cloudy to 12:00 PM
cloudy with showers
Light rain

City	Temperature
METRO MANILA	23 - 32 °C
TAGAYTAY	20 - 31 °C
TACLOBAN	23 - 32 °C
TUGUEGARAO	22 - 30 °C
LEGAZPI	22 - 31 °C
CAGAYAN DE ORO	23 - 33 °C
LAOAG	23 - 30 °C
PUERTO PRINCESA	24 - 34 °C
METRO DAVAO	25 - 34 °C
BAGUIO	15 - 25 °C
ILOILO/ BACOLOD	24 - 34 °C
ZAMBOANGA	23 - 34 °C
SBMA/ CLARK	23 - 31 °C
METRO CEBU	24 - 32 °C

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Pope slams blind terror

‘Weapons of love’ vs violence urged

VATICAN CITY—Pope Francis tempered his Easter Sunday message of Christian hope with a denunciation of “blind terrorism,” recalling victims of attacks in Europe, Africa and elsewhere, as well as expressing dismay that people fleeing war or poverty are being denied welcome as European countries squabble over the refugee crisis.

But Francis also urged the world to use the “weapons of love” to combat the evil of “blind and brutal violence,” following the attacks in Brussels.

After a week of somber religious events commemorating Jesus’ death, Francis said an Easter Sunday Mass under tight security for tens of thousands of people in a sun-drenched St. Peter’s Square.

Tens of thousands of people patiently endured long lines,

backpack inspections and metal-detecting checks to enter St. Peter’s Square. Under a brilliant sun, they listened to Francis deliver the traditional Easter noon speech from the central balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica.

To the pilgrims’ delight, Francis completed a whirl through the square, in his open-topped popemobile after celebrating Mass on the steps of the basilica.

FOPE/A17

From page A1

The Pope leaned over barriers to shake hands, as the vehicle ventured past the Vatican's confines, with his bodyguards jogging alongside on the boulevard.

'Urbi et Orbi'

Afterward, in his traditional, twice-yearly "Urbi et Orbi" (To the City and the World) message, he spoke of violence, injustice and threats to peace in many parts of the world.

Francis said, for the sake of the faithful, Jesus who rose after death by crucifixion "triumphed over evil and sin."

He expressed hope that "will draw us closer to the victims of terrorism, that blind and brutal form of violence."

"May he (the risen Jesus) draw us closer on this Easter feast to the victims of terrorism, that blind and brutal form of violence which continues to shed blood in different parts of the world," he said, speaking from the central

balcony of St. Peter's Basilica.

He mentioned recent attacks in Belgium, where at least 31 people were killed by Islamist militants, as well as those in Turkey, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Ivory Coast and Iraq.

"With the weapons of love, God has defeated selfishness and death," the leader of the world's 1.2 billion Roman Catholic said from the same balcony from where he first appeared to the world on the night of his election on March 13, 2013.

Defeat evil with hope

The 79-year-old Argentine Pontiff urged people to channel the hope of Easter in order to defeat "the evil that seems to have the upper hand in the life of so many people."

The Pope condemned the Brussels attacks several times during the past week, including at a Good Friday service where he said followers of religions who carried out acts of fundamentalism or terrorism were

profaning God's name.

The former king and queen of Belgium, Albert II and Paola, who is Italian, attended the Mass and the Pope greeted them afterward.

In other parts of his address, Francis expressed the hope that recent talks could resolve the conflict in Syria in order to end the "sad wake of destruction, death, contempt for humanitarian law and the breakdown of civil concord."

'Rejection' of migrants

He spoke out against the "rejection" of migrants and refugees, saying "the Easter message of the risen Christ ... invites us not to forget those men and women seeking a better future, an ever more numerous throng of migrants and refugees ... fleeing from war, hunger, poverty and social injustice."

"All too often, these brothers and sisters of ours meet along the way with death or, in any event, rejection by those who

could offer them welcome and assistance," he said.

The European Union and Turkey have agreed to stop the flow of migrants to Europe in return for political and financial concessions for Ankara.

Turkey and The Aegean islands have been the main route for migrants and refugees pouring into Europe in the past year.

Francis called for dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, and resolutions to conflicts and political tensions in Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Burundi, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Ukraine.

Don't lose hope

On Saturday night, after a bleak Holy Week, the Pope led the world's 1.2 billion Roman Catholics into Easter celebrations by urging them not to lose hope in a gloomy world.

A1 "Let us not allow darkness and fear to distract us and control us," Francis said in a homily at an evening Easter vigil Mass

in St. Peter's Basilica.

The Holy Week services leading up to Easter, already the most somber in the Christian liturgical calendar because they commemorate Jesus' betrayal and death by crucifixion, have been further dampened by the attacks in Brussels.

But hope was the theme of Saturday night's service. The Pope used the word about 20 times in his brief homily, woven around the Christian belief that Jesus rose from the dead three days after his crucifixion.

"May the Lord free us ... from being Christians without hope, who live as if the Lord were not risen, as if our problems were the center of our lives," he said.

Lesson for Christians

At the start of the service, the basilica was in darkness to signify Jesus' tomb before his resurrection. Then the Pope, cardinals, bishops and members of the congregation lit candles and finally the basilica's lights were turned on in a symbolic show of

light after the darkness of Good Friday, which recalls Jesus' death.

In his homily, Francis said the hope that Easter brought was a lesson for the Christian faithful to cast aside the pessimism that could "imprison" people inside of themselves.

"We see and will continue to see problems both inside and out. They will always be there," he said.

But he insisted: "Let us not allow darkness and fear to distract us and control our hearts."

"Today is the celebration of our hope. It is so necessary today," he said.

The Easter message recalling Christ's resurrection, he said, "awakens and resurrects hope in hearts burdened by sadness."

In his fourth Easter season since his election in 2013, Francis also baptized 12 adult converts to Catholicism hailing from China, South Korea and other countries around the world. *Reports from Reuters, AP and AFP*

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THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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More war equipment to support troops in southern Philippines

By ELENA L. ABEN

The Philippine Army expects the delivery this year of more equipment, including artillery pieces such as 155-mm howitzers, under the continuing military modernization program.

This was disclosed by Army chief Lt. Gen. Eduardo Año who vowed to ensure that troops on the ground, particularly those in national priority areas like Eastern Mindanao, Sulu and Basilan, will get the necessary equipment to allow them to continue with their combat security operations.

In his speech during the Army's 119th anniversary celebration, Año said they were expecting the arrival, this year, of additional infantry fighting equipment and fire support vehicles, including 155 mm howitzers, light utility vehicles, 60-mm mortars, 40-mm grenade launchers, rocket launcher light units and 50-watt armored vehicle-configuration radios.

These additional equipment are expected to further enhance the Army's effectiveness to support the government's campaign to end insur-

gency in the country.

In 2015, Año said the Army received its delivery of 56,843 M4 rifles, 124 armored vehicles including six with remote-controlled weapons systems, 60 field ambulances and 30 light utility vehicles which he said "will boost the capacity of ground forces in conventional and unconventional warfare."

The armored vehicles included those that have been delivered by Elbit Systems of Israel and the US, which turned over refurbished APCs under its Excess Defense Article (EDA) program.

Likewise, the Army have received more than 2,000 radio and equipment for a more effective command and control system.

Meanwhile, the Army chief said that a total of 743 communist rebels, Muslim separatist guerrillas, and terrorists have been "neutralized" as a result of focused military operations in the previous year.

He said the feat is their contribution to the government's Internal Peace and Security Program (IPSP).

According to Año, the Army conducted a total of 300,000 "focused military operations" that led in the neutralization 595 New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas, 82 members of the Al Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), 10 Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) gunmen, and 56 Jemaah Islamiyah facilitators of the Maute Group.

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More troops deployed against Abus in Basilan

By Mario J. Mallari

More troops were deployed in Basilan to conduct relentless combat operations against the terrorist Abu Sayyaf group.

Maj. Filemon Tan Jr., spokesman for the military's Western Mindanao Command (Wesmincom), said that two additional companies of troops were sent to Basilan to sustain the operation against the Abu Sayyaf.

Tan, however, refused to reveal the exact number of augmentation troops.

"Our relentless operations are continuing. We inserted additional troops to sustain the pursuit operation," said Tan.

"Hopefully, we will have positive development in the coming days," he added.

Tan justified the deployment of additional troops in Basilan, saying the military does not want to move out forces from the areas that have been cleared earlier with Abu

Sayyaf terrorists.

According to Tan, the augmentation forces will come primarily from military units based in Zamboanga.

He assured that the sending of additional troops to Basilan will not result to weaken military presence in other areas under Wesmincom.

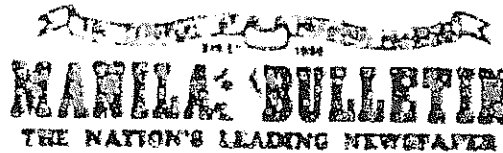
On Holy Friday, elements of the Army's 4th Special Forces Battalion (SFB) clashed with more or less 40 Abu Sayyaf terrorists in Albarka, Basilan, resulting in at least two ASG killed while six others were wounded.

"There is no letup in our operations against these lawless elements," Tan said.

Tan said that the encountered ASG band was under Isnilon Hapilon – the Abu Sayyaf commander who declared allegiance with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

Hapilon is wanted by both the Philippine and the United States governments – the US has \$5 million reward for his neutralization.

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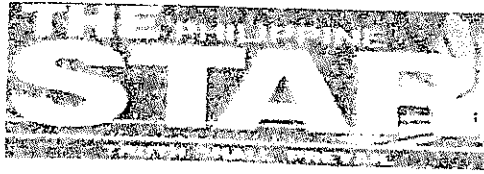
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● Fake general

HERMOSA, Bataan — A fake Philippine Army general was arrested by the agents of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) in this town, recently. Senior Superintendent Benjamin Silo, Jr., Central Luzon CIDG chief, said Salvador Escobar, who uses the alias "General Orlando Pablico," was nabbed at his hideout here based on a warrant of arrest for illegal possession of firearms and explosives. Silo said Escobar, along with his cohorts, are also wanted for extortion, falsification of military documents, illegal recruitment, and conducting a bogus army training course. (Mar T. Suphad)

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US contingent for Balikatan exercises arriving today

American troops joining the Balikatan joint military drills are expected to start arriving in the Philippines today as their Filipino counterparts kick off planning exercises designed to boost their ability to handle emergency situations.

US troops and equipment would arrive through northern Luzon, according to Capt. Frank Sayson, Philippine spokesman for this year's Ba-

likatan exercises. He, however, declined to provide specifics for security reasons.

"Based on the plan, the mobilization of the American troops and the offloading of their equipment for Balikatan 2016 will start on March 28. We are following a timeline and they should be here by tomorrow and the following weeks," Sayson said yesterday.

Balikatan 2016, a major

By ALEXIS ROMERO

event that highlights the long-standing alliance of the Philippines and the US, will be held from April 4 to 15.

The exercises, however, had a soft opening last March 16 with the launching of construction and medical activities in Panay and Palawan, the province nearest the South China Sea.

The exercises would be

held amid concerns over China's aggressive actions in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea), a busy sealane where about \$5 trillion worth of trade passes through annually. Organizers of the exercise, however, insist that the conduct of drills has nothing to do with the maritime dispute.

Military drills aimed at im-

proving the interoperability of Filipino and American troops will be held in Crow Valley in Tarlac, Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija, Clark Field in Pampanga, Subic Bay in Zambales and in Palawan.

Officials said the exercises would focus on maritime law enforcement and disaster response efforts.

The Philippines and the US are also expected to kick off

today planning exercises for emergency situations including a magnitude 6.5 earthquake in Metro Manila.

Sayson said the command post exercises would be held simultaneously at the Philippine military's main headquarters in Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City and the US Pacific Command headquarters. The exercises will be held until March 31.

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BusinessMirror

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US to show off, fire missiles in military exercise

BY RENE ACOSTA

MANILA and Capas, Tarlac—American troops, who will take part in this year's bilateral military exercise with their Filipino counterparts, would start arriving in Northern Luzon on Monday along with their equipment, some of which would be seen and used for the first time in the 30-year history of the war games.

Capt. Celeste Frank Sayson said the US forces should start disembarking in the operational areas of the Armed Forces Northern Luzon Command in preparation for the *Balikatan*. Sayson, *Balikatan* public affairs officer, said the war training component will be held for 10 days in selected areas around the country and involves live-fire exercises.

The war games will formally open on April 4 and will run until April 14, although its command and planning component or what the participants called "table top exercise" will begin at Camp Aguinaldo on March 28.

A total of 4,904 US troops will join the actual exercises, along with 3,773 Filipino troops.

For the first time, the US will showcase what it calls the high-mobility artillery rocket system (Himars) on top of the 55 various aircraft and at least five warships that it would use. The Himars will be used in the live-fire exercises at the Crow Valley Gunnery Range in Barangay Santa Juliana in the municipality of Capas, Tarlac, and later on will be transported to Palawan, according to Sayson.

The Himars is the newest member of the multiple-launch rocket system (MLRS) family. It is a highly mobile artillery rocket system offering the firepower of MLRS on a wheeled chassis.

Himars engages artillery, air-defense concentrations, trucks, light armor and personnel carriers, as well as support troop and supply concentrations. Himars launches its weapons and moves away from the area at high speed before enemy forces locate the launch site, documents provided by Sayson said.

"Part of the live-fire exercises in Crow Valley is the Himars, which is for air protection," Sayson earlier said. "It is also an anti-ship warfare, ground warfare asset. Later

on it will be brought to Palawan although it will not be doing some live-fire exercises in Palawan.”

Aside from the rocket system, the US side will also use 55 various aircraft, including Ospreys.

On the other hand, the Armed Forces will fly its various assets, including its two brand new FA-50 lead in fighter jets and S-211s. It would also sail two battleships. Likewise, for the first time, around 80 Australian military personnel will join the military exercises.

“Australia will be bringing in one aircraft which could be used for HADR [humanitarian assistance and disaster response] and civil military operations,” Sayson said.

This year’s training will also have military observers from Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, India, Japan, South Korea and Timor Leste.

Pinatubo closed

IN view of the *Balikatan*, the Capas Municipal Tourism Office (CMTO) in Tarlac has announced that trekking to the world-renowned crater of Mount Pinatubo will be temporarily suspended until April 15.

Barangay Santa Juliana is where Crow Valley is located and also the takeoff point for novice trekkers to the Pinatubo crater, which formed a scenic emerald-colored lake or caldera 2 kilometers in diameter.

In an earlier CMTO advisory, the Mount Pinatubo trek was temporarily suspended from March 23 to 26 spoiling the vacation of scores of tourists all set to make the trek to the crater.

The CMTO advisory said “trekking to the Pinatubo crater is temporarily suspended effective March 23 due to the imposition of additional fees of P700 per person pursuant to an amendment to Botolan, Zambales, Municipal Ordinance (MO) 1-2015,” which municipal officials here said is “arbitrarily being collected from tourists and guests.” Marissa Velasquez-Vidal, acting Municipal tourism officer, signed the advisory which she said was a directive from Mayor Antonio Rodriguez.

Department of Tourism (DOT) Central Luzon Regional Director Ronnie Tiotuico had to intervene after the CMTO prevented a German television crew from trekking to Mount Pinatubo on March 23.

Tiotuico said the German TV crew was on its last day of gathering footage for a documentary to be shown in Germany when the advisory took effect, preventing them from going to the crater.

Vidal said the imposition of the additional fees is being contested by the indigenous people (IPs) of Zambales, who are the legal private owners of the Pinatubo crater area by virtue of a Certificate of Ancestral Domain title. According to Vidal, the IPs’ complaints prompted the CMTO to issue the advisory.

However, Vidal said they lifted the suspension on March 26. The Sangguniang Bayan (SB) of Botolan, Zambales’s resolution imposed an additional P350 environmental fee and P250 ancestral domain preservation fee on top of the P100 ecotourism fee earlier imposed by MO 1-2015 for a total of P700. The SB resolution said a fine of P2,500 will be imposed on anyone who refuses to pay the additional fees, which is being collected by employees of the Botolan, Zambales, local government unit at the boundary of Capas, Tarlac and Botolan, Zambales.

With reporting by Ashley Manabat

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Pre-Balikatan exercises start in Camp Aguinaldo

BY VICTOR REYES

FILIPINO and American military forces are due to start today command post or tabletop exercises, part of the annual Balikatan training exercise which formally opens on April 4.

Today will also mark the start of the arrival in undisclosed areas in Northern Luzon of US forces and equipment participating in the Balikatan, said Capt. Celeste Frank Sayson, Balikatan public affairs officer.

For the tabletop exercise, Sayson said Filipino generals and other officials will be gathering at the AFP general headquarters

in Camp Aguinaldo today to simulate responses to calamities, including a 6.5 magnitude earthquake in Metro Manila.

"We will know how our generals will react when a crisis happens, how the AJP will deploy its array of forces as a reaction to the scenario," Sayson said.

In Hawaii, American forces will also be holding their own command post exercise today at the US Pacific Command headquarters.

"The US forces will also be doing their own tabletop exercise on how to help the Philippines... They will be aware of the Philip-

pine preparations so they'll know when to enter, how to provide support," he said.

The drill will run until March 31.

The Americans will be using around 4,900 US forces, 55 aircraft, and five ships in this year's Balikatan exercise. On the other hand, the Philippine military will use some 3,700 troops and several air and naval assets.

The field training exercises will be held in the traditional sites including Clark Air Base in Pampanga, Palawan, Subic Bay in Zambales, Crow Valley in Tarlac, and Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija.

Air Force to stockpile P69M chopper parts

BY VICTOR REYES

THE Philippine Air Force is buying P68.92 million worth of spare parts for its eight multi-purpose helicopters which were acquired from Augusta Westland of Italy as part of the military's modernization program.

Air Force spokesman Col. Enrico Canaya said the acquisition of the spares does not mean that the AW-109 choppers, which were delivered last year, are facing problems.

He said the aircraft "are in good condition."

"We do the procurement as programmed. This is to make sure that our assets are in top condition, in good shape," said Canaya. "These (spares) are for future use. It takes a long time to process procurement so we do advance programming."

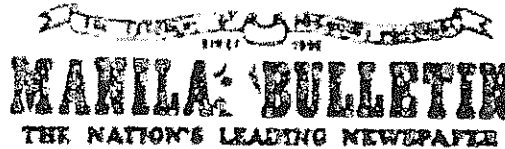
The acquisition of spare parts is divided into two lots – one worth P37.50 million and the other P31.42 million. A pre-bid conference was held in Villamor Air Base in Pasay City last

March 14 and the opening of bids will be on Thursday.

The helicopters were acquired from Augusta Westland for P3.44 billion under the military's modernization program. Two of the aircraft were delivered in August last year while the six others were delivered in December, also last year.

The Air Force is using the AW-109s as "attack helicopter aircraft," complementing the MG-520 choppers in the inventory of the 15th Strike Wing.

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DOST's R&D experts tapped by DND to build military drones

By **EDD K. USMAN**

Research for building drones or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) is now in the line of fire of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST).

But the DOST's Philippine Council for Industry, Energy and Emerging Technology Research and Development (PCIEERD) has made it clear that research and development (R&D) for UAVs does not include making of war materials.

PCIEERD Executive Director Dr. Carlos Primo David confirmed last Friday that the program of possible drone building opened up after Department of National Defense (DND) Secretary Voltaire Gazmin

approached the PCIEERD for a possible partnership.

"Anything that will keep our troops safe," said David as an assurance of the PCIEERD's readiness in conducting R&D on drones for various applications, including potentially for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

However, David emphasized that the discussion is still in progress and that the PCIEERD has a limitation on its R&D, with reservation on the making of firearms and explosives.

He said that his view is that the military has many community activities for which a

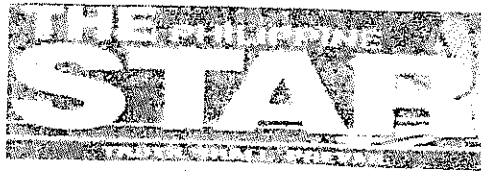
drone would come in handy.

He said a UAV Consortium is presently being formed, as he invited the academe, the private sector, and other interested parties to join.

The PCIEERD head also called on other government agencies to partner with the DOST so that every research could be tailored according to their needs.

David said sometime in April, DOST-PCIEERD will sign a Memorandum of Agreement with the DND for the UAV program under planning, a two-year tie-up that is open to renewal as the need demands.

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PAF to buy P70-M spare parts for attack helicopters

The Philippine Air Force (PAF) will spend close to P70 million to acquire spare parts for its AW109 attack helicopters to ensure that the air assets will remain in good condition.

Bid notices uploaded from the Philippine Government Electronic Procurement System website showed that the acquisition of spare parts was divided

into two projects or lots.

The first lot costs P31.42 million, while the second has an approved budget of P37.5 million.

PAF spokesman Col. Enrico Canaya over the weekend said the spare parts would be acquired "for future use," noting that the procurement process takes time.

"This is to make sure that our assets are in top condi-

tion," he said.

Canaya clarified that the eight AW109 helicopters in their inventory remain in good condition.

The bid documents did not state what specific helicopter spare parts will be acquired.

To be qualified, prospective bidders should have completed a similar project within the last five years.

The deadline for the submission of bids for the two projects is on March 31 at the Air Force Procurement Center Conference Room, Villamor Air Base in Pasay, the PAF said.

The bids will be opened on the same day.

The military bought eight AW109 Power helicopters from Anglo-Italian firm

AgustaWestland for P3.44 billion two years ago.

The helicopters are now being used for internal security operations and surveillance.

AgustaWestland previously said the helicopters would feature a mission package and equipment with a combination of weapon systems.

According to the company,

each helicopter is an eight-seat twin-engine helicopter with a spacious cabin that can be fitted with a number of modular equipment packages.

AgustaWestland is the same aircraft manufacturer that won the contract for the acquisition of five AW 109 Power naval helicopters worth P1.3 billion.

– Alexis Romero

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Malaya

The National Newspaper

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NDRRMC: 13 dead in Holy Week incidents

BY VICTOR REYES

THIRTEEN people died while 42 were injured in incidents of drowning, fire, and vehicular incidents during the Holy Week, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council reported yesterday.

Five of the fatalities drowned in Calaca town in Batangas while

swimming in Barangay Sinisian last Thursday, said NDRRMC executive director Alexander Pama in a situational report.

The five were Lorenz Kyle Boa, 11; Jimson Boa, 17; Lazaro Boa, 20; John Joseph Mendoza, 23; and Herminigildo de Castro, 21.

Lorenz was the first one to

See NDRRMC > Page B6

NDRRMC

drown. The four others tried to save him but suffered the same fate. All were declared dead on arrival at the Don Mayuga Provincial Hospital in Lemery town.

Two others died of drowning in Batangas – seven-year-old girl, Pearl Yvanna Baldea, in Taal town last Friday, and Gilbert del Rosario, 46, in San Juan town last Thursday.

In Quezon, there were three fatalities. One was 12-year-old Arlene Neponuceno who drowned in a river in Calauag town last Thursday. Her body was retrieved the following day. The two others were identified as Sherwin Paraiso, 20, who drowned in Lopez town Thursday and Christian Asitre, 19, who drowned in Sariaya town also Thursday.

In Cagayan, Dennis Guillermo, 34, drowned at the boundary of Lasam and Gattaran towns last Friday "while crossing a river to collect food shells."

In Ifugao, Kcey Joyce Campol, 13, drowned last Wednesday while swimming with her friends in Lamut town.

In Benguet, Lebino Sama Espara Jr., 32, died when the boat he and his companions were riding during a picnic capsized when it bumped wooden debris in Bokod town last Thursday. Espara's body recovered the following day.

The NDRRMC also said 42 others were injured in 13 incidents. Eleven of the incidents were vehicular accidents which occurred in Tarlac, Batangas, Quezon, Camiguin, Ifugao, and Kalinga provinces, and in Baguio City.

The two the non-vehicular incidents left two people injured – SFO3 Andres Lipao Jr. who suffered first degree burns while responding to a fire incident in Baguio City last Wednesday, and Christian Mark Vergara, 15, who was with the five drowning victims in Calaca, Batangas last Thursday.

NDRRMC spokeswoman Romina Marasigan said the agency has yet to receive a final report from field offices.

"It's sad that we have reported casualties and injuries due to fire incident, vehicular accidents and drowning. Pero mukhang

peaceful naman yung observance and marami naman in action na government agencies, kahit na grabeng traffic and inabutan ng mga travelers lalo na nung Thursday," said Marasigan.

The Philippine National Police said the observance of Holy Week was not as peaceful as in the past years.

PNP spokesman Chief Supt. Wilben Mayor said at least 21 people drowned from Holy Monday to Good Friday, including a Japanese. Two persons were also reported missing, and seven vehicular accidents recorded, in which three were killed and 44 were injured.

Mayor did not give details, even as to where the incidents occurred.

Also without details, Mayor said seven Army soldiers were hurt, while three Abu Sayyaf bandits were killed in an encounter. Mayor also said there was a grenade-throwing incident in Surigao del Norte but no one was hurt as the grenade failed to explode.

He said a bus robbery incident was also reported in Makati City.

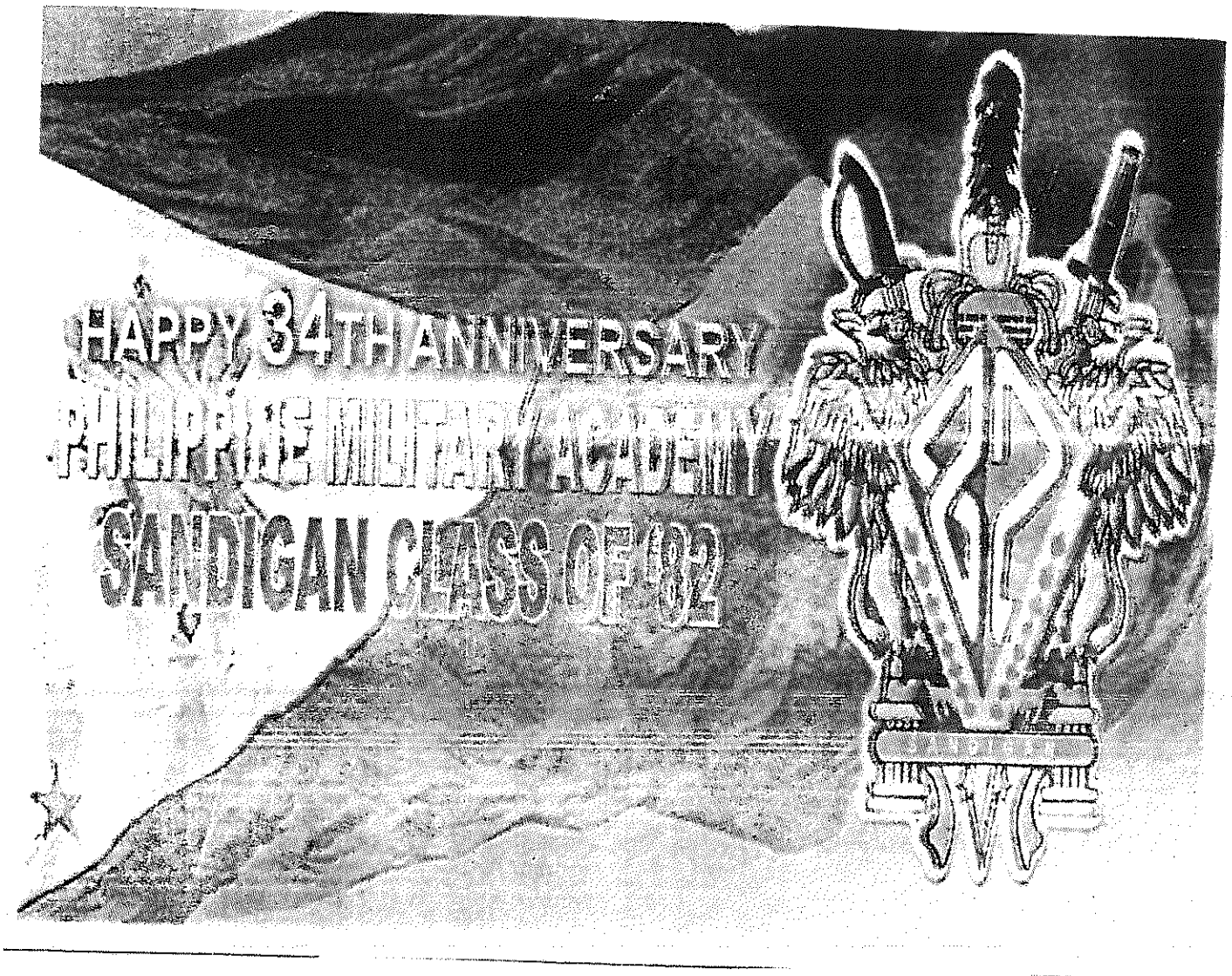
– With Raymond Africa

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Tax exemption for uniformed personnel as a token of appreciation

THE CHAIR of the House committee on labor and employment, Davao City Rep. Karlo Nograles, has appealed to the Bureau of Internal Revenue chief, Kim Henares, to waive the withholding tax on the provisional allowance given to military and uniformed personnel. He said that the BIR might have the discretion to forgo the same; after all, the allowance is provisional in nature. He is positive that this tax exemption will not encounter any legal complication even if it is not specified by Republic Act No. 9040.

I am very pleased that someone from Congress has finally taken the initiative to request this kind of tax exemption for the defenders of our country. If the BIR chief does have dis-

cretion over this matter, I hope she would see how it can boost the morale of our military and uniformed personnel. The amount of tax exemption is nothing compared to the service our military has been giving to our country.

What is it compared to their will and determination to keep our country a safe place to live in? What is it compared to the risks they face every day? What is it compared to the fears they choose to ignore? What is it compared to the worries their families back home experience while they are away? What is it compared to the anxieties about their making it home alive? What is it compared to the life that they are willing to lay down to defend and protect

our motherland?

My point here is, in their profession, it is their life that is placed at stake. Wouldn't it be great if we show gratitude through simple things like this?

In my opinion, they deserve more than the salary and benefits they get from government. This proposed exemption may not be exactly a big deal (in monetary value) but to them, it means a lot. By choosing to exempt their provisional allowance, the BIR will show them that they are appreciated.

We all know how hard it is to live in a country where salary is low but the cost of living is high.

—ANASTASIA KUZ,
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ONLINE NEWS

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Air Force to buy spare parts for attack helicopters

By Alexis Romero

MANILA, Philippines - The Air Force will spend close to P70 million to acquire spare parts for its AW109 attack helicopters to keep them in good condition.

Bid notices uploaded on the Philippine Government Electronic Procurement System website showed that the acquisition of spare parts was divided into two projects or lots.

The first lot is estimated to cost around P31.42 million while the second lot has an approved budget of P37.5 million.

Air Force spokesman Col. Enrico Canaya said the spare parts would be acquired "for future use," noting that the procurement process takes time.

"This is to make sure that our assets are in top condition," he said.

Canaya clarified that the eight AW109 helicopters in their inventory remain in good condition.

The bid documents did not state what specific helicopter spare parts will be acquired.

To be qualified, prospective bidders should have completed a similar project within the last five years. The deadline for the submission of bids for the two projects is on March 31 at the Air Force Procurement Center Conference Room, Villamor Airbase in Pasay. The bids will be opened on the same day.

The military bought eight AW109 Power helicopters from Anglo-Italian firm AgustaWestland for P3.44 billion two years ago.

The helicopters are now being used for internal security operations and for airborne surveillance.

AgustaWestland previously said the helicopters would feature a mission package and equipment with a combination of weapon systems.

According to the company, each helicopter is an eight-seat twin-engine helicopter with a spacious cabin that can be fitted with a number of modular equipment packages.

AgustaWestland is the same aircraft manufacturer that won the contract for the acquisition of five AW 109 Power naval helicopters worth P1.3 billion.

www.bomboradyo.com

Tropa ng Amerikang dadalo sa Balikatan drills, darating na bukas

By Bombo Dave Vincent Pasit

Nakatakda nang dumating bukas sa bansa ang tropa ng Amerika na sasali sa taunang RP-US Balikatan Exercises.

Kinumpirma ito ni Cpt. Frank Sayson, tagapagsalita ng Pilipinas para sa Balikatan exercises ngayong taon.

"Through this military exercise, we will know how our generals react when a crisis happens," ani Sayson.

Magsisimula ang Balikatan 2016 sa Abril 4 at tatagal hanggang 15.

Layunin nito na palakasin pa ang matagal nang magandang relasyon at alyansa ng Pilipinas at Estados Unidos.

Gayundin ang hangarin na ma-develop ng dalawang bansa ang kanilang pwersa, techniques, tactics at procedures kapag ikinakasa ang mga maseselang operasyon.

Nabatid na noong Marso 16 palang ay ilang mga humanitarian activities ang sinimulan partikular sa Panay, Capiz sa Visayas, at lalawigan ng Palawan.

Isasagawa ang nasabing military drills sa Crow Valley sa Tarlac, Fort Magsaysay sa Nueva Ecija, Clark Air Field sa Pampanga, Subic Bay sa Zambales at sa Palawan.

Ayon sa mga opisyal, nakatuon ang nasabing mga exercises sa pagpapatupad ng maritime law at pagpapalalas ng mga gagawing hakbang sa panahon ng sakuna.

www.philstar.com

US troops to start arriving for Balikatan on Monday

By Alexis Romero

MANILA, Philippines - American troops joining the Balikatan drills are expected to start arriving in the Philippines on Monday as their Filipino counterparts kick off planning exercises designed to boost their ability to handle emergency situations.

US military personnel and their equipment will enter the Philippines through northern Luzon, according to Cpt. Frank Sayson, Philippine spokesman for this year's Balikatan exercises. He, however, declined to provide specifics for security reasons.

"Based on the plan, the mobilization of the American troops and the offloading of their equipment for Balikatan 2016 will start tomorrow (March 28). We are following a timeline and they should be here by tomorrow and the proceeding weeks," Sayson said in an interview on Sunday.

Balikatan 2016, a major event that highlights the longstanding alliance of the Philippines and the US, will be held from April 4 to 15. The exercise, however, kicked off quietly last March 16 with the launching of construction and medical activities in Panay and Palawan, the province nearest the South China Sea.

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

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

The exercises will be held amid concerns over China's aggressive actions in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea), a busy sea lane where about \$5-trillion worth of trade passes through annually. Organizers of the exercise, however, insist that the conduct of drills has nothing to do with the maritime dispute.

Military drills aimed at improving the interoperability of Filipino and American troops will be held in Crow Valley in Tarlac, Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija, Clark Air Field in Pampanga, Subic Bay in Zambales and in Palawan. Officials said the exercises would focus on maritime law enforcement and disaster response efforts.

The Philippines and the US are also expected to kick off planning exercises for emergency situations -- including a magnitude 6.5 earthquake in Metro Manila -- on Monday.

Sayson said the command post exercises would be held simultaneously at the Philippine military's main headquarters in Camp Aguinaldo and the US Pacific Command headquarters. The exercises will be held until March 31.

"Through this military exercise, we will know how our generals react when a crisis happens," Sayson said, adding that the situation requires coordination with other agencies.

"Of course, we also expect [help from] our allies like America. Because of our bilateral relations through the MDT (Mutual Defense Treaty), we can ask them to help us," he added.

Under the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951, the Philippines and the United States will jointly develop their security capabilities to ward off external armed attacks.

Activist groups like the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan want the MDT and related agreements like the Visiting Forces Agreement and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement scrapped, saying they keep the Philippines dependent on the US and can drag the country into US conflicts.

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