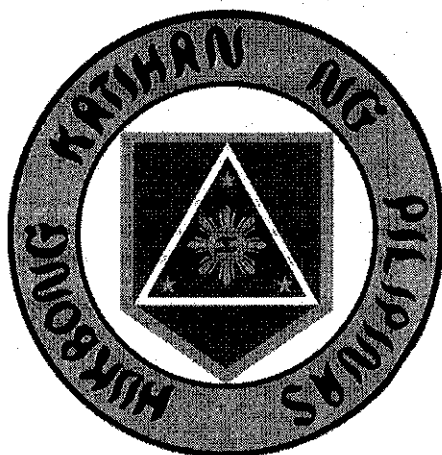


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SC seeks names of 'narco judges'

By EDU PUNAY

The hands of the Supreme Court (SC) are tied in investigating 13 judges implicated by the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) in the illegal drug trade.

The SC was supposed to initiate its probe on the judges in the latest narco list but failed, reportedly due to the lack of cooperation from PDEA.

SC officials told **The STAR** that they have requested the names of the 13 judges in the list, but the anti-narcotics agency has refused to share the information.

Had PDEA shared its list with the SC, a fact-finding and administrative investigation – including inventory of drug cases handled by these judges – would have immediately started, the SC officials lamented.

The SC had initiated an investigation on four judges linked by President Duterte to the illegal drug trade in 2016: Exequiel Dagala of Dapa-Socorro in Surigao, Adriano Savillo of Iloilo City, Domingo Casiple of Aklan and Antonio Reyes of Baguio City.

After the probe by a special fact-finding panel led by retired associate justice Roberto Abad, the SC ordered an administrative investigation of Reyes while it cleared the three other judges.

The high tribunal cited the findings of the panel that Reyes had accepted

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SC

From Page 1

money for dismissal of drug cases based on affidavits of several witnesses and litigants involved in the alleged payoffs.

Reyes had denied the allegations, saying the acquittals were based solely on evidence.

On the case of Dagala, while he was cleared by the SC panel in the narco list, he was dismissed from the judiciary over another administrative case in 2017.

Dagala was found guilty of immorality and gross misconduct after being caught on video brandishing an M-16 rifle while shouting invectives at his neighbors over dispute in property and also after it was found that the judge had children with another woman.

Meanwhile, the Department of Justice (DOJ) said it will also look into the alleged involvement of several prosecutors in illegal drug trade in

the country.

A fuming Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra said he plans to personally lead the fact-finding investigation against 10 prosecutors included in the so-called narco list of PDEA.

"Once identified and there's scintilla of evidence, I myself will lead the investigation against them. That (involvement of prosecutors in illegal drug trade) is just unacceptable," Guevarra said.

He stressed the Duterte administration implements a zero tolerance policy when it comes to involvement of government officials in illegal drugs – especially in his department that is tasked to prosecute drug suspects.

Guevarra said his office would coordinate with PDEA director general Aaron Aquino for the conduct of a parallel investigation by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI),

the fact-finding and law enforcement arm of the DOJ.

"PDEA and DOJ can do parallel investigations if PDEA is willing to share its initial intelligence information with us at this time," he said.

The PDEA revealed last week that its narco list includes 10 prosecutors and 13 judges, but did not release their names pending verification and further validation of their alleged involvement in drug trade.

Aquino aired frustration that their efforts were wasted with the dismissal of cases they have filed.

But he said the judges and prosecutors on the list are not yet a priority as they are focusing their validation efforts on the case build-up against the 46 politicians named by the President.

Aquino said the list of judges, prosecutors and other drug personalities – including 31 celebrities – would still undergo validation, which he said would take time.

SEARCH FOR TRUTH URGED IN NEGROS KILLINGS

STORY BY JHESSET O. ENANO

Peasants' and rights groups and the Catholic Church urge an independent investigation, saying the 14 victims of military-backed police operations in Negros Oriental on Saturday were farmers and not communist rebels.

FROM A1

By Jhesset O. Enano
@JhessetEnanoINQ

Human rights and farmers' groups and the Catholic Church on Sunday condemned the killings of 14 farmers in Canlaon City and two towns in Negros Oriental province, denying police claims that the victims were communist rebels who had violently resisted arrest.

The Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (UMA) called for an independent investigation after the Philippine National Police insisted that the 14 were communist rebels who were killed when they opened fire on security forces who were serving warrants of arrest on them on Saturday.

Responding quickly, the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) ordered an investigation of the killings in Canlaon City and the towns of Manjuyod and Santa Catalina, saying it wanted to ascertain the truth behind what the police called "legitimate operation."

Police blamed

UMA also called on Negros Oriental Gov. Roel Degamo and independent bodies to investigate the killings, which the group blamed on the regional forces of the PNP and the military, including the Special Action Forces and the Regional Mobile Force Battalion.

The group said among those killed were eight farmers from Canlaon City—brothers Ismael and Edgardo Avelino; Melchor Pañares and his son Mario; Rogelio Recomono and his son Ricky; Gonzalo Rosales and Genes Palmares.

Edgardo Avelino was reportedly the chair of Hugpong Kusog sa Mag-uuma sa Canlaon City, a local chapter of the national farmers' organization Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP).

In Manjuyod, farmers Steve Arapoc and Manulo Martin, and barangay captains Valentin Acabal of Kandabong and Sonny Palagtiw of Panciao were killed.

Slain in Santa Catalina were Franklin Lariosa and Ano Enojo Rapada.

Church workers

UMA said police also arrested 12 other people, including another KMP leader.

Azucena Garubat, a sister of the Avelinos, was among those arrested.

San Carlos Bishop Gerardo Alminaza said in a post on CBCPNews, the official news service of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), that one of those killed was a lay minister at Canlaon parish and the parish administrator "can vouch for his moral character."

"Others were not even shown the supposed arrest papers. Some of those killed belonged to our mission station in Masulong," Alminaza said, demanding an investigation of the slayings amid mounting claims of human rights violations.

Ensure due process

The bishop appealed to the authorities to ensure due process was observed and human rights respected in carrying out their duties.

"We don't want to turn our beautiful island of Negros into a killing field," Alminaza said.

The PNP insisted that Saturday's police operations were legitimate, as the officers were serving court-issued arrest warrants.

Police Col. Bernard Banac said the 14 were killed because they had violently resisted arrest.

"We are sure that there was resistance because our PNP personnel would not use force if there was no threat to their lives," Banac said in a radio interview on Sunday.

Attacks on authorities

Police Col. Raul Tacaca, Negros Oriental police director, said Mario Pajares was not the subject of a warrant, but he engaged the officers who had come to arrest his father and was shot dead.

Tacaca issued a statement, saying the operations were carried out after several attacks on police and military forces in the province by criminals, including communist New People's Army (NPA) rebels.

He said the subjects of the arrest warrants were suspected members and supporters of the NPA.

"They were suspected of being the ones who attacked and killed policemen and soldiers here," Tacaca told the Inquirer.

But Cynthia Avelino denied that her father and uncle were communist rebels and that they were armed.

"My father was sickly and avoided even [arguments]. He was a farmer and a 'habal-habal' (motorcycle for hire) driver who was trying to earn a living peacefully," she told the Inquirer.

"Help us find justice for my father and uncle," she said.

Tacaca said a police officer was shot in the buttocks during the operations that started at 1 a.m. on Saturday and lasted up to midnight.

Police reported recovering rifle-fired grenades, fragmentation grenades, handguns, shotguns, various types of ammunition and subversive documents.

Test in courts

In a statement, CHR spokesperson Jacqueline de Guia said any claims that the victims resisted arrest "need to be tried before [the] courts to ensure that there are no lapses and ascertain if the circumstances really warrant the offense from the police."

International watchdog Human Rights Watch said the killings were "a horrific attack that needs to be investigated independently," as initial reports pointed to police misconduct.

"It's unconscionable that violence like this seems to be getting worse in Negros," said Carlos Conde, the group's Philippine researcher.

Rights group Karapatan also condemned the killings and called for an independent investigation, saying Negros had been a "consistent target" of heightened police and military operations.

In November last year, President Duterte placed the entire island of Negros under a state of lawlessness, after the deadly attack on nine sugarcane farmers, including four women and two children, by unidentified men.

"It seems, though, that it is the PNP and the military [that were] conducting a state of lawlessness against the people of Negros," said UMA chair Antonio Flores.

Flores' group implicated the Army's 94th Infantry Brigade in Saturday's killings.

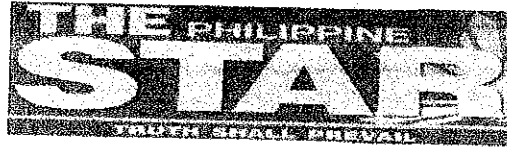
'Policy of killing'

The National Federation of Sugar Workers said it saw a "pattern" in the attacks that showed the "ruthless policy of killing" under the Duterte administration.

The group said it expected the killings to spread to the northern and southern parts of Negros Occidental province, where several farmers' organizations reportedly faced intensified military operations. —WITH REPORTS FROM JEANNETTE I. ANDRADE, PATRICIA DENISE M. CHIU, TINA G. SANTOS, NESTOR P. BURGOS JR., CARLA P. GOMEZ AND AP INQ

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GMA, Chinese premier meet in Hainan

By DELON PORCALLA

Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo met with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and officials of the Boao Forum for Asia during the recently concluded BFA Annual Convention in Hainan, China.

In her speech, the leader of the House of Representatives described the BFA discussion as "valuable" as it mainly covered the direction China is taking on its 40th year of reforms and its relationship with the rest of the world.

"China has given us the lesson that there is just not one path for development because prior to China's experience, it was thought that the only way to development is the Western style model of Jeffersonian democracy and coupled with a free market," Arroyo said.

"China has shown the world that you can have your own model of development using your own historical experience, especially China in the last 40 years. Since the opening of China 40 years ago, it has transformed itself, it is the world's leading growth, unmatched in history."

Arroyo said 400 million people

have been lifted out of poverty in China.

"China is on the verge of becoming the largest economy in the world," she said.

Arroyo also lauded Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative that aims to foster cooperation and development among nations.

The meeting was one of the highlights of the BFA Annual Conference 2019.

Arroyo, a Pampanga congresswoman, is on her second year as BFA board member, which gathers together leaders in government, business and academic institutions throughout Asia to share their thoughts on the most pressing issues in the region and the world.

She noted China's remarkable growth particularly in the past two decades is showing the world that no development model can be applied universally and that the diversity of historical conditions determines the development paths that countries could choose.

China is partner

The former president also tried to correct misimpressions that Beijing is a threat to the region in

Asia, especially since the economic and military giant has been at odds with several nations, including the Philippines, regarding overlapping claims in the South China Sea.

"So what I can say is that China's effort in opening up has really been a boost for the economies of the world, especially the developing economies. The world should look at China's rise as an opportunity rather than a threat," Arroyo said.

She said China through the years has proven wrong the negative notions of its policies toward reform and opening up as it has become a partner in development.

"And as it is poised to lead global economy, it should not be treated as a competitor or a threat," Arroyo said.

"The Philippines actually has been investing in China for quite some time now because we have a very big Filipino-Chinese community, so I'm sure they can invest further in China. At the same time, China is also now investing more and more in the Philippines," she added.

"So this must be a win-win solution for the developing world."

5

'Better to rescind than be bound by China loans'

By **PAOLO ROMERO**

The Philippines would be better off if it rescinds Chinese loan contracts and pay the corresponding penalties if they are found to be disadvantageous, Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon said yesterday as he pressed anew for a comprehensive review of official development assistance (ODA) and other financing contracts with China.

He said the review would make sure the country does not fall into a debt trap where its vital resources are taken away as payment.

"Let's find out if there are indeed stipulations which are too favorable to China, because many were saying the terms are very disadvantageous to the country," Drilon told *dzBB*. "Let us review and expose the terms. We owe it to the public, because it is the public, through their taxes, who will pay the loan."

Some lawmakers and experts as well as concerned groups have strongly warned against accepting the ODA and other financing schemes being dangled by Beijing especially those that stipulate the seizure of the government's

patrimonial assets in the event the country defaults.

While the Duterte administration insists that the patrimonial assets are well-defined, the loans are allegedly governed by Chinese laws and any dispute will be resolved by an arbitration body in Beijing.

Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio cited the P3-billion Chico River irrigation project where China could reportedly seize oil and gas resources in the West Philippine Sea if the government defaults on the loan based on details of the agreement between the two countries.

The Senate economic affairs committee, chaired by Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian, is currently conducting an inquiry into the Chinese loan contracts.

Drilon said a review, and possible cancellation of the loan agreements, is not unusual as the country has done it in the past when the government found some financing contracts to be disadvantageous and even onerous.

He cited the country's previous experience when then president Benigno Aquino

III reviewed the \$421-million Northrail project, which he subsequently cancelled when it was found to be grossly disadvantageous to the Philippine government.

"We paid for some stipulated damages but our judgment call is that it (Northrail) was really disadvantageous to our people," he explained.

The senator also added that both Malaysia and the US have separately warned the Philippines against being ensnared by a debt trap arising from huge Chinese loans, noting that Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in 2018 cancelled two major infrastructure projects by Chinese companies in Malaysia.

A similar cancellation, he also said, can be done in the country even if the contracts have already been approved by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and Malacañang.

Senate President Pro Tempore Ralph Recto and Gatchalian earlier said Congress can block or mandate the renegotiation of loan agreements between the Philippines and China if lawmakers find the terms to be disadvantageous or onerous.

The senators welcomed the move of the Department of Finance (DOF) to publicly disclose the details of the loan contracts the government entered into with China—including the P18-billion Kaliwa Dam project—but warned that this would not stop the Senate and House of Representatives from scrutinizing the contracts for questionable or disadvantageous provisions.

"I'm not saying these contracts are onerous. I don't mind Chinese loans—I'm willing to test them but there have been many concerns from our countrymen and experts as well as disturbing reports on other countries that have been caught in Chinese ODA," Recto earlier said.

'Chinese Investors to be treated well'

Meanwhile, an official of the Chinese embassy in Manila assured prospective investors that the Philippines would serve Chinese businessmen "well" when they come to the country to invest.

Jin Yuan, commercial counsellor of the embassy, welcomed prospective investors from China during a speech at the Philippines-China Summit

on Friday as he urged them to finalize their investment in the Chinese Industrial Park that will be built at Clark, Pampanga.

"Come to the Philippines, and the Philippines will serve you well," Jin said, noting that the Chinese government actively supports the realization of the Duterte administration's Build Build Build program.

According to him, government projects funded by China's grants or soft loans in the Philippines have gradually started. These include two bridges over the Pasig River and the Chico River Pump Irrigation Project.

He also said that other projects—Kaliwa dam, Manila-Bicol railway, Subic-Clark railway, and five bridges over Pasig River—are all prepared for future construction.

Citing statistics from the Department of Finance (DOF), the Chinese diplomat said the Philippines' current debt from China is less than one percent of its total debt, which is much lower than the amount coming from other countries.

He stressed that China's loan procedures and standards are strictly in accordance with

international practice and that the loan rates and costs are lower than most international organizations and developed countries.

"There is no factual basis for those who advocate China's debt will trigger the Philippines' to fall into the so-called China debt trap. Let's forget about these meaningless nonsense and focus on the real Build Build Build," Jin declared.

President Duterte will attend the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation to be held in Beijing this month.

Philippine Ambassador to China Chito Sta. Romana said the Belt and Road forum is to explore where there can be complementarity between Duterte's Build Build Build and the Belt and Road initiative, because both focus on infrastructure development.

During the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Manila in November, Duterte and the Chinese leader decided to elevate their countries' relations to a "comprehensive strategic cooperation" as they "continue to manage contentious issues" in the West Philippine Sea. 10 - With Pia Lee-Brago

Acierto slapped down

Gordon questioned the timing of Acierto's resurfacing which was immediately followed by a resolution of detained Sen. Leila de Lima.

By Mario J. Mallari

The Senate dismissed the apparently coached allegations of former police Col. Eduardo Acierto as the Blue Ribbon Committee shut its door on the proposal to reopen an inquiry on

the P11 billion worth of seized shabu which is being linked to former economic adviser Michael Yang.

Sen. Richard Gordon, Blue Ribbon panel chairman, said Acierto had thus far offered nothing but newspaper clippings

and photographs to back up his allegations.

Gordon stressed that it is now time for law enforcement agencies, particularly the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), to arrest Acierto. "Don't force that on me. They

should arrest him (Acierto), General Albayalde, General Aquino arrest him," said Gordon, referring to Philippine National Police chief General Oscar Albayalde and PDEA Director General Aaron Aquino.

Turn to page 2

Don't force that on me. They should arrest him

From page 1

Acierto is a polluted source due to the cases he was involved in such as the alleged sale of arms to the New People's Army.

At the same time, Gordon questioned the timing of Acierto's resurfacing which was immediately followed by a resolution of detained Sen. Leila de Lima urging investigation of Acierto's allegations.

"Unless there is new evidence... and who is using him and who is allowing themselves to be used by him?" asked Gordon on radio.

"Who filed the resolution? It's Senator De Lima. I respect her but provide evidence, where is the evidence?" he added.

Ironically, De Lima is detained for allegedly receiving drug money from convicted inmates while sitting as Justice secretary during the time of former President Noyoy Aquino.

Gordon reiterated that Acierto has no evidence to back up his

allegations linking Yang to illegal drugs after allegedly facilitating the entry of equipment for a shabu laboratory in Davao.

"However, aside from pictures of news articles, he (Acierto) never presented any other evidence," Gordon said.

"No (actual photograph), the picture (of Yang) with the President was the one that came out in the newspapers," he added.

Gordon said it was only proper for the Senate to trash Acierto's claims against the President and Yang.

Acierto was even offered to become state witness during an executive session at the Senate if he has more credible and solid evidence to back up his allegations but apparently he had nothing more than the newspaper clippings.

Absolute zero

Gordon said that Acierto himself admitted "that is why sir I am not saying anything because I have no evidence."

"Not even an iota of evidence, there is none...we have to be fair,"

Gordon said.

"He (Acierto) has no evidence he was just using the Blue Ribbon Committee to get sympathies, I suggest he visits Baclaran Church to seek sympathy from saints," he added.

Gordon recommended the filing of charges against Acierto and 18 others, including former deputy chief for administration of the PDEA Ismael Fajardo Jr.

They were tagged as involved in the shabu shipment by former Customs intelligence Jimmy Guban. Both Acierto and Fajardo went into hiding afterwards.

Last week, Acierto came out in the media and it turned out that he is currently under the "protection" of a religious group.

However, aside from pictures of news articles, he never presented any other evidence.

Former Special Assistant to the President and senatorial candidate Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go said the President will not shield friends involved in the narcotics trade.

Go said Yang, a Chinese national, has been Duterte's friend since the early 2000s.

"Yang opened a mall in Davao and you know the President, he's very supportive of legitimate businesses. If you want to invest somewhere, he'll support it as long as everything is legal," Go said during a Pasay campaign rally.

Duterte will not tolerate friends involved in illegal acts, Go added.

Noise also from Sabio

Malacañang, meanwhile, described Jude Sabio, the lawyer who filed a communication before the International Criminal Court accusing the President of committing crimes against humanity, as "hallucinating" after the former claimed he was being harassed by the Duterte administration.

Acierto was even offered to become state witness during an executive session at the Senate if he has more credible and solid evidence.

Sabio claimed he was in a "self-imposed hiding" after a Trece Martires court ordered his arrest for deficiency in his Mandatory Continuing Legal Education.

He added there is currently a "very serious threat" to his life after he went to The Hague to lodge his complaint.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo, however, denied the existence of a warrant of arrest for deficiency in MCLE and that Sabio simply wanted exposure.

"He is hallucinating and just wants to publicize himself. There is no such animal as a warrant of arrest for a deficiency in the Mandatory Continuing Legal Education," Panelo said.

PH, US, Australia join war games in Luzon provinces

AT LEAST 7,550 Filipino, American and Australian troops will be participating in this year's "Balikatan" exercises which will formally start April 1 and end on the 12th.

This was disclosed by Philippine "Balikatan" public affairs officer, Lt. Cmdr. Liezl M. Vidallon, in an interview

with reporters Sunday.

Vidallon said the number of participants can be broken down into 4,000 personnel for the Armed Forces of the Philippines, 3,500 on the United States side and 50 from the Australian Defense Force.

Vidallon added that the Australian participation is possible as exercises are

multilateral for this year.

Exercise venues will be in Northern and Southern Luzon. **A3**

The "Balikatan" 2019 aims to enhance the inter-operability of participating forces aside from highlighting long-standing military relations between the Philippines and the US. **PNA**

Defense chief denies China 'scare tactics'

By Nat Mariano

THE report that 600 Chinese vessels had allegedly been circling Pag-asa Island in the West Philippine Sea since January this year was just an "exaggerated claim," an official said Sunday.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the Western Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines "never said" that hundreds of Chinese vessels were navigating around the Philippine-claimed Pag-asa Island.

"That [report] is according to the reporter who was there in Puerto Princesa during the RPOC [Regional Peace and Order Council] meeting," Lorenzana told the *Manila Standard*. *Next page*

He made the statement even as an analyst warned Sunday the Chinese vessels that had been circling Pag-asa Island in the West Philippine Sea were part of the intimidation tactics meant to give Beijing control of the strategic waterway.

The Philippine military on Friday expressed alarm at the presence of some 600 Chinese vessels near the sandbar.

"They have been a critical part of Chinese intimidation around the Senkaku Islands in the South China Sea," said retired US Navy captain Carl Schuster, former director of the US Pacific Command's joint intelligence center.

In a report by ABS-CBN News, AFP Western Command chief Elpidio Factor said "the foreign vessels monitored in Pag-asa Island were all Chinese fishing vessels deployed in the vicinity of the sandbar."

"These vessels are considered Chinese maritime militia and are occasionally complemented by Chinese Coast Guard

vessels to sustain China's assertive presence in the vicinity of the sandbars," Factor told ABS-CBN News.

Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles said the public should await the initial findings of a Cabinet cluster about the matter.

"I think we should await the findings of the cluster to know the truth about it and know what are the recommendations of the President, Nograles told reporters in Romblon on Sunday.

"We should await the recommendations of the President. But of course, there are diplomatic procedures that we need to follow and we will have to run through the process of the Department of Foreign Affairs."

Lorenzana said Malacañang would reject the report.

"[Presidential Spokesman Salvador] Panelo will conduct a presscon tomorrow to clarify everything and to debunk this exaggerated claim, Lorenzana said.

This recent development came following a report that a Chinese coast guard vessel allegedly harassed Filipino fishermen in Scarborough Shoal.

The Palace then expressed the possibility that President Rodrigo Duterte might

raise maritime issues in the disputed waters with China during his coming visit to Beijing next month for the 2nd Belt and Road Forum.

Senatorial candidate Gary Alejano criticized the Duterte administration following the issue, lambasting the government for its alleged failure to act on his warnings about the presence of Chinese vessels near Pag-asa Island in the contested waters.

"The government has been warned two years ago, but [the] President and his cohorts only downplayed the incidents. Not once did the President take seriously the issue of China taking away our territory and abusing our fishermen and soldiers," Alejano said in a statement.

"As I have said before, China will continue to assert control in the Pag-asa Island sandbars despite the 'friendly' relations that the administration is trying to foster," Alejano said.

"The sandbars are critical to China's claim on the Subi Reef. If China seizes Sandy Cay, they will be able to claim Subi Reef as part of the territorial sea of Sandy Cay."

Duterte tells his appointees: Just be honest

By **Julie M. Aurelio**
@JMAurelioINQ

President Duterte only expects one thing from the people he appoints to government positions: honesty.

The President said he chose his presidential appointees with

the public and government's best interest in mind, defending his preference for retired military and police officials.

Zero tolerance

"My selection, really, is based on what is to the best interest of the public and the govern-

ment. That's it. I don't ask for anything else, just honesty," the President said.

Referring to retired military and police officials he named to government posts, he said: "These are the guys who stayed long enough to know the art of governance. And just to be hon-

est, that's all."

Mr. Duterte made the remarks in a PDP-Laban campaign rally in Koronadal City, South Cotabato, on Tuesday last week.

The President is known for his zero tolerance stance on corruption and has fired even those close to him during his days as

Davao City mayor.

'Recycling'

Last week, he vowed to fire more government officials for allegations of corruption, saying he will sack them this week.

However, Mr. Duterte has been criticized for "recycling" offi-

cials who have failed to defeat corruption in their offices, assigning them to other government posts.

In his speech in Koronadal City, the President defended anew his preference for appointing retired military and police officials to civilian positions in the government. INQ

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JOINT MILITARY DRILLS

7,500 TROOPS JOIN 2019 BALIKATAN EXERCISES

Over 7,500 military troopers from the Philippines, the United States and Australia will take part in this year's Balikatan (shoulder-to-shoulder) exercises in Northern and Southern Luzon as its 35th iteration evolves from a bilateral to a multilateral activity.

The Balikatan exercises, which officially kick off on Monday, will

have 4,000 participants from the Philippines; 3,500 from the United States; and 50 from Australia in humanitarian civic activities, special operations training sessions, and military drills.

Drills for this year's Balikatan, which runs from April 1 to April 12, include a combined arms live fire exercise in Tarlac;

an amphibious exercise in Zamboales; special operations training in Ternate and Sangley Point, Cavite; as well as in Clark Airbase in Pampanga; and a staff exercise in Palawan.

There are around 30 community relations activities slated for the Balikatan. —JEANNETTE I. ANDRADE INQ

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MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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35th PH-US Balikatan exercise opens today

By **FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD**

About 4,000 Philippine troops, 3,500 American soldiers, and 50 Australian Defence Force (ADF) members will participate in the biggest annual military exercise between the United

States and the Philippines known as "Balikatan" which opens today at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City.

US Ambassador to the Philippines Sung Y. Kim will be the guest of honor and speaker in the opening ceremony to be attended by high-ranking officials

from both the Philippines and the US.

Also expected to attend the opening ceremony to be held at the Tejeros Hall, AFP Commissioned Officers Club, Camp Aguinaldo, are Philippine Defense Undersecretary Cardozo Luna who will represent

►6

35th PH-US Balikatan...

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Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff General Benjamin Madrigal Jr.

Lt. Gen. Gilbert I. Gapay, the AFP's Southern Luzon Command (SoLCom) Chief is the Exercise Director for the Philippine side, while Brigadier General Chris McPhillips, the Commanding General of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, is the Exercise Director for the US side.

Balikatan 2019, the 35th iteration of the annual military drill, is a Tagalog phrase for "shoulder-to-shoulder" which characterizes the spirit of the exercise and represents the partnership between the US and the Philippines.

Throughout Exercise Balikatan, the AFP, US Armed Forces, and ADF will carry out information exchanges and live training events. These are aimed at enhancing the militaries' interoperability during the planning and execution of joint operations to advance security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

During Balikatan 2019, American and Philippine forces will conduct amphibious operations, live-fire training, urban operations, aviation operations, and counterterrorism response.

All events will take place in Luzon, Palawan, and Mindoro until April 12, 2019.

New US fighter jets

According to US Balikatan organizers, this is the first time that new and more sophisticated fighter jets from the United States will be used during this year's exercises.

"This will be the first Exercise Balikatan to incorporate the USS Wasp paired with the United States Marines Corps' F-35B Lightning II aircraft. Together they represent an increase in military capability committed to a free and open Indo-Pacific," the US Balikatan organizers disclosed.

USS Wasp (LHD-1) is a United States Navy multipurpose amphibious assault ship, and the lead ship of her class. She is the tenth USN vessel to bear the name

since 1775, with the last two ships named Wasp being aircraft carriers. She was built by the Ingalls Shipbuilding division of Litton in Pascagoula, Mississippi.

The F-35B Lightning II multi-role fighter is a family of single-seat, single-engine, all-weather stealth multirole fighters. The fifth-generation combat aircraft is designed to perform ground-attack and air-superiority missions. It has three main models: The F-35A conventional takeoff and landing (CTOL) variant, the F-35B short take-off and vertical-landing (STOVL) variant, and the F-35C carrier-based catapult-assisted take-off but arrested recovery (CATOBAR) variant.

The US Balikatan organizers said participating in Balikatan demonstrates their ability to forward deploy in support of an ally should a crisis or natural disaster occurs.

Balikatan 2019 will also bring together Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members for an International Observers Program. The program aims to promote greater defense cooperation with ASEAN and other key allies and partners, show multinational coordination where the observers can mutually exchange meaningful ideas and best practices, and showcase the joint and combined air, sea, and ground operation of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and US Armed Forces.

This year's Balikatan focuses on maritime security and amphibious capabilities, as well as multinational interoperability through military exchanges.

"Exercises like Balikatan strengthen international partnerships and the participating militaries' abilities to rapidly respond to crises throughout the Indo-Pacific region," the Balikatan organizers said.

The AFP Northern Luzon Command will exercise command, control, and supervision in implementing the rules and regulations for visiting forces as well as monitor all BK35-2019 training events which will be conducted on its area of responsibility.

Major Erickson C. Bulosan, Public Information Office Chief of NoLCom, earlier said several activities are included in this year's Balikatan like the Staff Exercise (STAFFEX), Joint Inter-Operability Event (JIOE), Combined Inter-Operability Event (CIOE), and the Humanitarian and Civic Assistance (HCA).

Bulosan said the AFP aims to strengthen the long-standing relationship between the PH-US through exercises and operational cooperation for mutual benefit of involved forces.

They will also ensure the safe and successful conduct of PH-US Balikatan 35-2019, together and in coordination with all stakeholders in different sites within Northern Luzon Command area of responsibility.

Prior to the opening of the exercises, Filipino, American and Australian forces started conducting humanitarian and civic assistance activities in Luzon as part of this year's Philippines-United States Balikatan Exercises.

Personnel from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), United States Armed Forces, and Australian Defense Force (ADF), all under the ambit of the US alliance, began their Engineering Civic Action Program last March 12, in Tarlac, Batangas, Laguna, and Bataan.

The AFP said the program seeks to construct medical facility and classroom buildings in selected communities in the areas.

The beneficiaries of the class room buildings are the Don Eulogio Luistro Elementary School in Bulsa, San Juan, Batangas; Victor De Guia Elementary School in Balian, Pangil, Laguna; and Pag-Asa Elementary School in Orani, Bataan Province. The local government of Brgy. San Pedro in Moncada, Tarlac will receive a one-story medical clinic.

Medical teams have also been deployed to conduct health engagements in the areas. Communities will benefit from free consultations, hygiene kits distribution, feeding program, and veterinary care. The teams will also share information on family planning, health, environment protection, and disaster preparedness. (Francis T. Wakefield)

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7,500 troops to join 'Balikatan' war games

THIS YEAR'S "Balikatan" (shoulder-to-shoulder) exercises between Manila and Washington will focus on maritime security.

► 'Balikatan' A2

This will be the first Balikatan exercises involving the US Navy's amphibious assault ship *USS Wasp*, which arrived in Subic Bay over the weekend. It carries the F-35B Lightning 2 aircraft of the US Marine Corps.

Also aboard the ship are members of the US Marines from the Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force 4, led by the 4th Marine Regiment.

About 7,500 troops from the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the US military will join the exercises. Of the 7,500 soldiers, 4,000 will come from the Philippines and 3,500 from the US. Fifty troops will come from Australia.

Lt. Cmdr. Liezl Vidallon, spokeswoman for the Philippine side of the Balikatan, said Japan won't participate this year.

Exercise venues include the provinces of Bataan, Batangas,

Mindoro, Tarlac, Zambales and Palawan.

"This year is also different since we will have the FA-50 of the Air Force to join us and there will also be assets coming from the US. Our exercises will also include community relations activities, humanitarian and civic programs, among others," Vidallon told reporters.

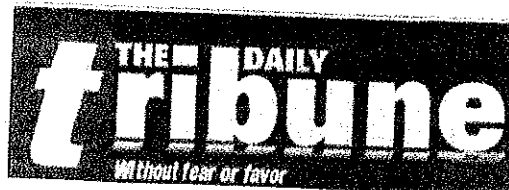
Balikatan opens on Monday, April 1, at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City with US Ambassador to the Philippines Sung Kim, Armed Forces chief Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr., Defense Undersecretary Cardozo Luna and major service commanders from the Philippine Army, Philippine Navy, Philippine Air Force and Philippine Marine Corps as guests.

Luna will represent Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, who is in the United States.

DEMPSEY REYES

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Multi-country 'Balikatan' set

Some 4,000 personnel from the AFP, 3,500 from the United States side and 50 from the Australian Defense Force will take part in the exercises

Around 7,550 Filipino, American and Australian troops will participate in this year's "Balikatan" exercises from 1 to 12 April.

This was disclosed by Philippine "Balikatan" public affairs officer, Lt. Cmdr. Liezl Vidallon, on Sunday.

Vidallon said some 4,000 personnel from the Armed Forces of the Philippines, 3,500 from the United States side and 50 from the Australian Defense Force will take part in the exercises.

He added the Australian participation is possible as exercises are multilateral for this year.

Exercise venues will be in Northern and Southern Luzon.

Objectives for "Balikatan" 2019 are to enhance the inter-operability of participating forces aside from highlighting long-standing military relations between the Philippines and the US.

The Philippines has long been in partnership with the armed forces of several countries although the

US is still the AFP's major partner in the recent decades. 3

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'Balikatan' starts today

BY VICTOR REYES

THE annual, huge-scale military training "Balikatan" is set to start today, with some 4,000 Filipino and 3,500 American troopers participating in the event which is meant to improve the interoperability of the two Philippines and the US to respond to threats.

The number of Filipino participants in this year's two-week Balikatan is about 1,000 less than in last year's exercise while the US sent 500 more.

Among those expected to attend the opening ceremony in Camp

Aguinaldo are Armed Forces chief Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr., US Ambassador Sung Kim, and Defense Undersecretary Cardozo Luna.

Lt. Cmdr. Liezl M. Vidallon, Balikatan exercise director on the Philippine side, said field training exercises will be held in various areas in Luzon including Zambales, for the amphibious assault training exercise, and Crow Valley in Tarlac, for live fire exercises.

Vidallon said the Philippine military will use its FA-50 fighter jets, the former US Coast Guard cutter BRP Ramon Alcaraz, and other assets for the Balikatan.

She could not immediately say what US assets will be used although the US military said USS Wasp, an amphibious assault ship, arrived in Zambales for the Balikatan.

Vidallon said there will be more "humanitarian civic programs" this year, which will benefit the local communities. She said the US and Philippine forces will build classrooms and health facilities in various areas in northern and southern Luzon, and train residents on how to respond to natural disasters.

"We will also teach them how to administer first aid, CPR (cardiopul-

monary resuscitation)... we're also giving school supplies, sports equipment and veterinary care," she said.

Vidallon said the Australia has sent 50 troopers for limited participation in the exercise.

"They will participate not only in the civic activities but also in special operations training activities," said Vidallon.

She said Australia also had limited participation in last year's Balikatan.

Japan, which has taken part in several Balikatan exercises on a limited scale, has not sent troops for this year's exercise.

'Balikatan' opens today

"Balikatan" (shoulder-to-shoulder) – the biggest annual bilateral military exercise between the United States and the Philippines – formally opens today in Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City.

United States Ambassador to the Philippines Sung Y. Kim is the guest of honor and speaker in the opening ceremony.

High-ranking officials from the Philippines and US are expected to attend the event at the Tejeros Hall, AFP Commissioned Officers Club, among them Defense Undersecretary Cardozo Luna, representing Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, and Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr.

PH and US organizers said about 4,000

Philippine troops, 3,500 US soldiers, and 50 Australian Defense Force members will participate in the exercise that will end on April 12.

Lt. Gen. Gilbert I. Gapay, AFP Southern Luzon Command chief, is the exercise director for the Philippine side while Brig. Gen. Chris McPhillips, the commanding general of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, is his counterpart in the US side.

This year's Balikatan is the 35th iteration of the annual military drill. The annual military drill between the Philippines and the United States also involves Australia.

Throughout Balikatan, the AFP, US Armed Forces, and ADF will carry out information exchanges and live training events. These are aimed at enhancing the militaries' interoperability during the planning and execution of joint operations to advance security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

In addition, US and Philippine forces will conduct amphibious operations, live-fire training, urban operations, aviation operations, and counterterrorism response.

All events will take place in Luzon, Palawan, and Mindoro.
(Francis T. Wakefield)

US-PH Balikatan Exercise 2019, simula na

Aarangkada ngayong araw ang pinakamalaking annual bilateral exercise sa pagitan ng United States of America at ng Pilipinas, o ang "BALIKATAN", sa Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City.

Mismong si United States Ambassador to the Philippines, His Excellency Sung Y. Kim, ang Guest of Honor at Speaker para sa opening ceremony na dadaluhan ng matataas na opisyal ng Pilipinas at U.S.

Sinabi ng PH at U.S. organizers na 4,000 tropang Pinoy at 3,500 sundalong Amerikano, at 50 Australian Defence Force members ang makikilahok sa exercise na tatagal hanggang sa Abril 12, 2019.

Inaasahan ding dadalo sa opening ceremony na gaganapin sa Tejeros Hall, AFP Commissioned Officers Club, Camp

Aguinaldo, sina Philippine Defense Undersecretary Cardozo Luna bilang kinatawan ni Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, at Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff General Benjamin Madrigal, Jr. Si Lt. Gen. Gilbert I. Gapay, AFP Southern Luzon Command (SoLCom) Chief, ang Exercise Director para sa panig ng Pilipinas, habang si Brigadier General Chris McPhillips, Commanding General ng 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, ang kanyang katapat sa panig ng U.S.

Sa Balikatan 2019, ang ika-35 taunang military ng AFP, USAF na lalahukan ng ADF ay magtatampok ng information exchanges at live training events. Layunin ng mga ito na mapabuti ang interoperability ng mga militar sa panahon ng planning at execution ng joint

operations para maisulong ang seguridad at katatagan sa Indo-Pacific region.

Sa panahon ng Balikatan 2019, magsasagawa ang U.S. at PH forces ng amphibious operations, live-fire training, urban operations, aviation operations, at counterterrorism response. Ang lahat ng events ay gaganapin sa Luzon, Palawan, at Mindoro.

Itatampok sa Balikatan 2019 ang mga bagong fighter jets mula sa U.S.

"This will be the first Exercise Balikatan to incorporate the USS Wasp paired with the United States Marines Corps' F-35B Lightning II aircraft. Together they represent an increase in military capability committed to a free and open Indo-Pacific," inihayag ng U.S. Balikatan organizers.

Francis T. Wakefield

PH reiterates commitment to UN peacekeeping operations

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

Defense Secretary Delfin N. Lorenzana has committed 90 military observers and peacekeeping staff, a force headquarters support unit, and one aeromedical evacuation team to the United Nations' (UN) Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System.

Lorenzana pledged the country's commitment to the peacekeeping operations of the UN in his speech at the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial Meeting on Uniformed Capabilities, Performance, and Protection at the UN Headquarters in New York, USA, on March 29, 2019 (EDT).

"The Philippines is ready to increase its engagement in peacekeeping operations," he said.

"The Philippine Government has decided to allow the deployment of military and police in any area, regardless of the security threat level," the Defense chief said, adding that the Armed Forces of the Philip-

pines is currently enhancing its capabilities in support of future peacekeeping deployments.

The Philippines, according to Lorenzana, also recognizes the role of skilled and trained female peacekeepers in the success of peacekeeping operations or PKOs.

With this in mind, Lorenzana said that the Philippines is committed to deploying more female peacekeepers in the future, supporting the holistic approach of the UN in peacekeeping missions.

In addition to highlighting the progress made by member countries in their commitment to UN peacekeeping, the meeting also served as a venue for the ministers to announce their respective pledges and concrete plans that are geared towards strengthening the capabilities and performance of uniformed personnel deployed in PKOs, and ensuring the protection of civilians.

Duterte names Capuyan as head of anti-insurgency task force

By ARGYLL CYRUS B. GEDUCOS

President Duterte has appointed retired colonel Allen Capuyan as executive director of the National Secretariat of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict.

The President signed Capuyan's appointment papers on Monday, March 25. He was Duterte's adviser for indigenous people's concerns. He was also an official of the Manila International Airport Authority (MIAA).

Capuyan was accused of providing tariff codes that gave smugglers of the ₱6.4-billion shabu shipment in May 2017 access to the green lane or express lane which exempts shipments from X-ray inspection.

He was also allegedly the one behind the wiretapping scandal under the administration of former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. He was said to have monitored those they believed to be part of the opposition.

The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict seeks to address causes of armed conflict at the local level by ensuring the provision of social services, employment opportunities, and improved quality of life in communities affected by armed communist conflict.

The task force, which was created in December 2018 and falls under the Office of the President, is chaired by President Duterte and vice chaired by National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr.

The anti-insurgency task force is composed of various national government agencies and two private sector representatives.

El Niño damage hits P4.3B

BY EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

AGRICULTURAL damage caused by a weak El Niño went up further to P4.35 billion from the P1.33 billion recorded earlier, the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Operations Center of the Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Sunday.

Drought claimed 233,007 metric tons (MT) of rice and corn, up by

➤ **DamageA2**

213 percent from 74,348 MT recorded on March 19.

The area of drought-ridden agricultural lands also grew to 149,914 hectares, affecting 138,859 farmers and fisherfolk.

Damage to the rice sector alone stood at P2.6 billion, affecting 108,845 rice farmers in 37 provinces.

The estimated volume of production loss was pegged at 125,590 MT over 111,851 hectares of agricultural areas.

For corn, the DA said damage and losses climbed to P1.66 billion or 107,417 MT, covering 37,643 hectares. About 30,014 corn farmers in 13 provinces were affected, it added.

The affected regions included the Cordillera Administrative Region, Ilocos,

Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Southern Luzon, Bicol, Western Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Northern Mindanao, Davao, Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato Province, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos) and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

The DA's DRRM Operations Center said a total of P95.875 million in financial assistance from the Agricultural Credit Policy Council had been allocated for the Survival and Recovery Assistance Program that would benefit 3,835 affected farmers.

The Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. had also paid P43.083 million to 3,534 farmers in Bicol, Central Luzon, Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon), Western Visayas and Northern Mindanao, it added.

Moreover, a total of P18.3 million was released for cloud seeding by the Philippine Air Force.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol said the cloud seeding would continue in Cagayan Valley, Davao and Soccsksargen in the coming weeks.

"A minimum area of 23,293 hectares have been saved due to the 7,700 units of pump and engine sets distributed between 2017 and 2018, with an equivalent production volume of 90,100 MT of *palay* (unhusked rice) amounting to P1.53 billion," the DA's DRRM Operations Center said.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration has reported that El Niño had peaked and would start weakening in the next months.

R12 lawmen assure peaceful polls

By Bobby Ricohermoso

The Police Regional Office (PRO)-12 yesterday vowed to ensure the peaceful conduct of elections in the Soccsksargen area.

The acronym Soccsksargen stands for the region's four provinces and two cities composed of South Cotabato, Cotabato Province, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos.

This, as Brig. Gen. Eliseo Tam Rasco, PRO-12 regional director, said on Sunday they already confiscated 72 assorted firearms in the region since the start of the election period on 13 January 2019.

Among the operations they conducted were implementation of search

warrants, conduct of checkpoints and chokepoints and other law enforcement activities.

He said the initiatives were conducted in compliance with the directive from the Philippine National Police central office, to strictly implement the firearms ban in coordination with the Armed Forces of the Philippines and other law enforcement agencies.

"This is to prevent the occurrence of election-related incidents and other criminality during the election period and beyond," Rasco said.

He said the initiatives were conducted in compliance with the directive from the Philippine National Police central office.

The police official added they are exerting all efforts to keep the region violence-free in connection with the upcoming 13 May local and national midterm elections.



BDO Foundation, Philippine Army and BSP launch financial education program for soldiers

MORE than 90,000 soldiers and over a thousand civilian employees of the army stand to benefit from a financial literacy program launched recently by BDO Foundation in partnership with the Philippine Army and Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP). The tripartite initiative was officially unveiled in an event led by the foundation's board of trustees, Philippine Army vice commander Maj. Gen. Robert Arevalo and BSP deputy governor Chuchi Fonacier.

The financial literacy program for the Philippine Army is in line with the financial inclusion advocacy of BDO Foundation, the corporate social responsibility arm of BDO Unibank. It contributes



The financial literacy program for the Philippine Army is one of the three financial inclusion programs of BDO Foundation. The foundation also has similar corporate citizenship initiatives for public schools and overseas Filipino workers. B7

to the implementation of BSP's National Strategy for Financial Inclusion, particularly the pillar on Financial Education and Consumer Protection. It aims to share lessons on financial respon-

sibility with officers, soldiers, their families and civilian personnel of the army.

According to BDO Foundation president Mario Deriquito, "This corporate citizenship program is

our modest contribution to the ATR and efforts to develop a world-class army. Our goal is to help soldiers get high marks in their scorecards, particularly on the aspect of personal finance."

At the launch, three financial education videos were presented to members of the Philippine Army's Conference Group Alpha and Charlie. Produced by BDO Foundation in collaboration with the army and BSP, the videos were developed for new recruits, newly promoted officers, senior officers, civilian personnel and their families. The clips covered lessons on saving, budgeting, loans, debt management, entrepreneurship, investing and retirement planning.

MARIKINA HOUSE RAID

GUN, AMMO FOUND IN 'RED' CONSULTANT'S HOME

By Matthew Reysio-Cruz
@MatthewINQ

A team of police and military operatives recovered a firearm, explosives and "subversive" documents from a house once allegedly occupied by National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) consultant Renante Gamara, who was arrested in Imus, Cavite province, on March 20.

The raid, conducted before dawn on Friday, was announced by the National Capital Region Police Office (NCR-PO) over the weekend.

It said the house on Chrysanthemum Street at Barangay Barangka in Marikina City had been used by Gamara

and a certain Ryan Dizon, whom the police also claimed was the homeowner.

Members of the NCRPO-Regional Special Operations Unit (RSOU), Philippine National Police Special Action Force and Armed Forces of the Philippines implemented the raid which yielded, among others, subversive documents, two hand grenades, a 9mm pistol and live ammunition.

Cases of violation of Republic Acts No. 10591 and 9516—related to the illegal possession of firearms and explosives—would be filed against Gamara, who was currently detained in the RSOU custodial facility, and Dizon, who was at large.

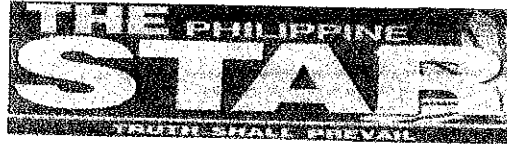
The police said the search stemmed from its arrest of Gamara and a retired priest, Arturo Balagat. The Department of Justice had approved the filing of charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives against the two men.

Lawyer Kristina Conti of the Public Interest Law Center, which is representing Gamara, decried the charges against him as "all lies."

The police had insisted that Gamara was a high-ranking member of the Communist Party of the Philippines, an accusation Conti denied. His work as a peace consultant for the NDFP, she said, was due to his longstanding work with trade unions. INQ **110**

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Town exec killed in NPA attack

By GILBERT BAYORAN

BACOLOD CITY – A municipal councilor, who was seeking reelection, was shot dead by suspected New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas in Moises Padilla, Negros Occidental yesterday morning.

Jolomar Hilario, 51, was asleep when the guerrillas barged into his home in Barangay Inolingan.

At least 50 rebels, who arrived in a truck at around 6 a.m., surrounded the councilor's house, according to Maj. Joem Malong, spokesman for the Western Visayas police.

The guerrillas were armed with short and long firearms. Some of them went into the house and shot the victim in front of his family.

The rebels did not harm Hilario's relatives.

"After the incident,

they fled toward Barangay Quintin Remo," Malong said in a text message to **The STAR**, referring to the rebels.

Relatives rushed Hilario to the nearby Enrico Roa Elumba Clinic, where he was declared dead on arrival at around 7 a.m.

Probers have yet to determine the motive for the killing, which occurred four days after a laborer was killed by alleged NPA rebels in nearby Barangay Macagahay.

Joselito Ramirez, 53, and his two companions were on their way home when three men, who introduced themselves as NPA rebels, waylaid them in Sitio Agogolo on March 27.

The suspects shot Ramirez, killing him at the scene.

They did not harm his companions.

— With Emmanuel Tupas

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Gunmen kill Negros town councilman

By TARA YAP

ILOILO CITY — An incumbent councilor of Moises Padilla town, Negros Occidental, was shot dead early Sunday morning.

A report from Western Visayas police identified the victim as Councilor Jolomar Bahaes Hilario, who was seeking reelection in the May elections.

The 51-year-old Hilario was asleep when trucks carrying 50 armed men arrived at his house in Barangay Inoigan at past 6 a.m. The armed men claimed to be members of the New People's Army (NPA), according to the police report.

The gunmen barged into Hilario's room and shot him several times.

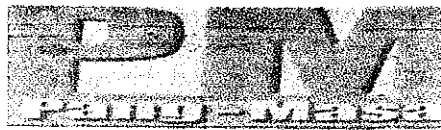
Hilario was taken to a nearby clinic where he was declared dead. He succumbed to several gunshot wounds in different parts of his body.

Hilario's killing came two days after the local campaign period started as well as the 50th anniversary of the NPA, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

The incident happened a week after the Army and Philippine National Police (PNP) jointly arrested Frank Fernandez, a former priest turned high-ranking leader of the NPA in Negros Island. Fernandez and his wife were captured in Laguna.

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KONSEHAL ITINUMBA HABANG NATUTULOG

Pinagbabaril ng mga rebeldeng New People's Army (NPA) ang konsehal na si Jolomar Banares Hilario, 51 habang natutulog sa silid ng kanyang bahay sa Brgy. Inolingan, Moises Padilla, Negros Occidental, kamakalawa.

Batay sa ulat, sakay ng isang truck at mga nagpakilalang miyembro ng New People's Army (NPA) at diretsong pu-

masok sa kwarto ng biktima at saka pinagbabaril ito.

Ang biktima ay nagtamo ng tama ng bala sa ibat ibang bahagi ng katawan at mukha at halos maputol na rin ang leeg.

Hindi naman ginalaw ng mga suspek ang asawa ni Hilario na kapitan ng barangay at kanilag mga anak na pinadapalang sa sahig.

Si Hilario ay tumatakbo sa ilalim ng partido ni Mayor Magdaleno Pena na tumatabo sa kanyang ikalawang termino at umano ay naging instrumento sa pagbibigay ng impormasyon sa militar kaya nadakip ang NPA leader na si Frank Fernandez at misis na Cleofe Lagtapon. -Gemma Garcia-

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Konsehal na asset ng militar, nilikida

Patay ang isang konsehal na nagsisilbing asset ng militar matapos siyang pagbabarilin ng mga nagpakilalang teroristang New Peoples Army (NPA) sa loob ng kanyang bahay sa bayan ng Moises Padilla, Negros Occidental kamakalawa.

Base sa ulat ng pulisya, natutulog si Councilor Jolomar Banares Hilario, 51-anyos, sa kanilang bahay sa Brgy. Inolingon kasama ang pamilya nang biglang pasukin ng mga armadong kalalakihan at pagbabarilin dakong alas-6 ng umaga noong Sabado.

Ang mga suspek na sakay ng isang truck ay nagpakilalang mga miyembro ng NPA at direktong pumasok sa kuwarto ng biktima at saka pinagbabaril sa harap ng kanyang pamilya. Hindi naman ginalaw ng mga suspek ang asawa ni Hilario na kapitan ng barangay at kanilang mga anak na pinadapa lang sa sahig.

Si Hilario ay tumatakbo sa ilalim ng partido ni Mayor Magdaleno Pena na tumatakbo sa kanyang ikalawang termino at kamakailan ay inanunsiyo niya na ang biktima ang instrumento sa pagbibibay ng impormasyon sa militar kaya nadakip ang NPA leader na si Frank Fernandez at kanyang asawa na si Cleofe Lagtapon. (Gemma Garcia)

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PNP welcomes EU probe into communist fund diversion

By EMMANUEL TUPAS

The Philippine National Police (PNP) welcomed the decision of the European Union to probe the alleged diversion of EU financial aid to communist rebels.

PNP spokesman Col. Bernard Banac over the weekend said it is good that the EU would look into allegations that non-government organizations (NGOs) receiving EU cash assistance have been diverting the funds to communist insurgents.

Banac is hopeful that EU officials would eventually discover that the NGOs they are supporting have been duping them.

"This is a positive development. If the financial assistance to the communist terrorists will be cut, it is going to help achieve lasting peace in the country,"

Banac said in a radio interview over *dwtZ*.

The EU said it will conduct a financial audit in April, adding it will take legal action should the allegations be proven true.

Banac said they fully support the government's pursuit of localized peace talks in far-flung communities.

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THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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AFP lauds EU move to probe funneling of funds from NGOs to Reds

By FRANCIS Y. WAKEFIELD

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) lauded on Sunday the move of the ambassadors of the European

Union (EU) and Belgium to look into the request of the Philippine government to audit the funds they donate to non-government organizations which local security officials earlier tagged as having links with the Communist

rebels.

"We appreciate the positive response of EU and Belgium to our formal plea to stop funding to Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP) which is directly assisting the NPAs in

Mindanao," Deputy Chief of Staff for Civil Military Operations (J7) Brig. Gen. Antonio G. Parlade Jr. said.

"The same RMP has also partnered with Ibon Foundation in the publication of subversive books being used by IP children in the Salugpungan and Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development or ALCADDEV schools which are teaching IP children to become child warriors. We have to expose this because it is so unfair to the other lay workers and sisters whom we in AFP PNP and government partner with for our value formation and moral reforms," he added.

Parlade said missionaries cannot continue to hide under the cloak of the church, of whatever faith, and then provide funds to terrorists NPAs, and other CPP front organizations like Karapatan, Gabriela, ACT, KMU, Anakbayan, LFS, Bayan or what they call the Makabayan bloc.

He said the RMP provides SUPAMIL or Suporta sa Pamilya (family support) to CPP and NPA cadres and fighters directly and they cannot deny this.

"Those who will say this is a lie should be ready to refute this in a

public debate. We are armed with the truth and nothing else. We are morally convinced that what these CPP organizations are doing is simply to exploit our IPs, project a very dire human rights situation in our country, vilify our government by fabricating reports to cast doubt on the efficiency of our government, and then what? Ask for donations," Parlade said.

"This is a pattern they have established. A fake bakwit (displaced person) to ask for EU funding. A fake advocacy to Save Our Communist Schools and ask for more funding. Kill IPs and attribute it to government then ask for Support to HR (Human Rights) Watch. They put up programs like Literacy Numeracy (LITNUM) for IPs, Community Based Health System for wounded NPAs, Farmers Resource Centers and BREAD to feed NPAs and their families, Sustainable Agri (SUS-AG), or Panday Bolig using disaster rehabilitation as cover," he added.

Parlade said all of these are programs supported by funds coming from EU and given to RMP-Northern Mindanao Region and all of these provide support to the Communist Terrorist Group. 6

MILITARY PRESSES EU PROBE INTO FUNDING FOR RED 'FRONTS' Church group accused of aiding NPA rebels

THE MILITARY on Sunday welcomed the European Union's (EU) favorable response to the Philippine government's request for a probe into European-funded groups linked to the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

Maj. Gen. Antonio Parlade Jr.,

the military deputy chief of staff for civil-military operations, claimed that the Rural Missionaries in the Philippines (RMP) had been "directly assisting" the New People's Army (NPA) in Mindanao with funds from the EU and the Belgian government.

Parlade also said the Catholic Church-linked RMP had partnered with Ibon Foundation "in the publication of subversive books" used by indigenous children in the Salugpungan and Alcadev schools, "teaching IP

►FundingA2

■ FUNDING FROM A1

Military presses EU probe into funding

(indigenous peoples) children to become child warriors."

The RMP has also been providing support to families of NPA cadres and fighters "directly and they cannot deny this."

"We have to expose this because it is so unfair to the other [lawful] workers and sisters whom we in AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines), PNP (Philippine National Police) and government partner with for our value formation and moral reforms," he told reporters in a text message.

Earlier this month, the RMP condemned the government for "red-tagging," saying: "This is such a desperate move to vilify us, for we have been effective in raising people's awareness on the plight and demands of our farmers, fisherfolk and indigenous peoples, and in exposing the grave abuses of human rights in the country."

Parlade also tagged several

other groups as connected with the CPP, including Karapatan, Gabriela, Alliance of Concerned Teachers, Kilusang Mayo Uno, Anakbayan, League of Filipino Students and Bayan.

Some of the groups, he claimed, were also "exploiting" the IPs in the countryside while asking funding from the EU.

In a letter to the EU earlier this month, National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon claimed that at least 60 percent of the funding often received by these alleged "legal fronts" were diverted to the CPP-NPA through a "triple or multiple funding scheme."

The scheme is said to be implemented by simultaneously submitting a single proposal to different countries. "Countries or funding agencies who have given their seal of approval are unaware that they are funding a particular project, which had already been funded by

other countries or funding agencies," Esperon said.

Parlade said international partners had continuously supported groups found to be linked to the communist rebels from early 2000 up to the present. In its most recent grant, the EU released an initial 621,000 euros for one Filipino group linked to the CPP-NPA, he claimed.

"The second tranche and third tranche, that's amounting to 1.3 million euros, *parating pa* (are on their way). Some were advanced, but they are going to conduct audit and freeze once they review these [documents]," he said.

Parlade also said Belgian non-government organizations had allocated 15 million euros to the CPP-linked groups for five years.

The EU and Belgium consider it illegal to fund terrorism, whether directly or indirectly.

DEMPSEY REYES AND PNA

'Reds using IPs to seek EU funds'

COMMUNIST front organizations are exploiting indigenous peoples and fabricating human rights abuses as a pretext for asking for donations from the European Union and its member states, the military said Sunday.

"We are morally convinced that what [these communist] organizations are doing is simply to exploit our IPs, project a very dire human rights situation in our country, vilify our government by fabricating reports to cast doubt on the efficiency

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'Reds...

From A1

of our government, and then what? Ask for donations," said Maj. Gen. Antonio Parlade Jr., chief-of-staff for civil-military operations.

"This is a pattern they have established. A fake '*bakwit*' to ask EU funding. A fake advocacy to Save Our Schools and ask for more funding. Kill IPs and attribute it to government then ask for support to HR Watch," he added.

National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon, meanwhile, told EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator Gilles De Kerchove that the Belgian government, through different non-government organizations, has indirectly and unwittingly partnered with NGOs that act as a legal front for the CPP-NPA.

These Belgian NGOs include the SOLIDAGRO and Viva Salud and KIYO.

SOLIDAGRO has partnered with Philippine NGOs Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development (ALCADEV); IBON Foundation (IBON); Karapatan; Mindanao Interfaith Services Foundation, Inc. (MISFI); Salugpungan Ta'tanu Igkanugon Community Learning Center Inc. (Salugpungan/STTICL); and, the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP).

The Viva Salud, on the other hand, has partnered with the Alliance of Health Workers (AHW); Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU); Gabriela, IBON Foundation and ALCADDEV. Lastly, KIYO has direct links with Gabriela, Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), and Karapatan.

Parlade said RMP and the IBON Foundation partnered in the publication of subversive books being used by IP children in the Salugpungan and ALCADDEV schools, which are teaching IP children to become child warriors, the military said.

"We have to expose this because it is so unfair to the other lay workers and sisters whom we in AFP, PNP [Philippine National Police] and government partner with for our value formation and moral reforms," he added.

These entities, he said, cannot continue to hide under the cloak of the church, of whatever faith, and then provide funds to the NPAs, and other CPP front organizations like Karapatan, Gabriela, ACT, KMU, Anakbayan, LFS, and Bayan.

Majority of these organizations are members of the International League of People's Struggles (ILPS), which is also chaired by CPP founder Jose Maria Sison. PNA

PNP defends killing of 14 'rebels'

BY EUGENE Y. ADIONG

BACOLOD CITY: The Philippine National Police (PNP) in Negros Oriental on Sunday defended its actions during bloody simultaneous police operations that killed 14 alleged members of the New People's Army (NPA) in three areas on Saturday.

Police Col. Raul Tacaca, provincial police director, said his men did not violate human rights. "What we did was legal. We did not just enter their houses. We just performed our duty as police officers," he added.

Police Col. Bernard Banac, PNP spokesman, said law enforcers would not have used force "if there was no threat to the lives of our

police officers."

Based on the report of the Negros Oriental Provincial Police Office, separate operations were conducted in Canlaon City, Manjuyod and Santa Catalina.

Eight were killed in Canlaon City, four in Manjuyod and two in Santa Catalina, according to a report by Tacaca.

The suspects were identified

as Steve Arapoc, Manulo Martin, Sunny Palagtiw, Edgardo Avelino, Esmael Avelino, Rogelio Recomono, Ricky Recomono, Genes Palmares, Eric Acabal, Ano Enojo Rapada, Gonzalo Rosales, Melchor Pañares, Mario Pañares and Franklin Lariosa. Mario, who was not subject of a search warrant, fought police operatives, officials said.

Tacaca said the suspects were members of the NPA.

In a radio interview, Canlaon City Mayor Jimmy Clerigo confirmed that eight persons were killed, while several others were arrested in Canlaon City, and that firearms were recovered.

Clerigo said he had received information that some of those killed were supporters of the NPA.

He said families of those killed,

whom he had met at the Canlaon District Hospital, wanted justice for the killings.

Police accused the individuals of illegal possession of firearms. They reportedly yielded two rifle grenades, seven caliber .45 pistols, 13 caliber .38 revolvers, a .357 Magnum revolver, two shotguns, two improvised guns, several ammunition and personal belongings, including subversive documents.

During the operations, which lasted from 6 a.m. until 12 midnight on Saturday, a police officer was wounded, Tacaca said.

The simultaneous police operations, backed by the Philippine Army, form part of the "One Time, Big Time" operations of the PNP also known as the "Synchronized Enhanced Managing Police Operations" under "Oplan Sauron."

Probe sought

Lawmakers from the Makabayan bloc quickly condemned the "massacre" and sought an immediate probe of the matter.

Anakpawis party-list Rep. Ariel Casilao vowed to push for a House inquiry into the simultaneous police operations in Negros Oriental.

Bayan Muna party-list Rep. Carlos Zarate said: "We will not take this sitting down, and we will seek justice for the victims and file charges against the policemen and their superiors who perpetrated this massacre."

Bishop Gerardo Alminaza, head of the Diocese of San Carlos, Negros Occidental, urged authorities to not regard human lives as mere statistics.

"Please as you do your task make sure you don't violate the

human rights and dignity of our fellowmen and women," Alminaza said in a statement.

Of the eight killed in Canlaon City, one was a lay minister and others worked in the San Carlos diocese's mission stations.

Commission on Human Rights spokesman Jacqueline Ann de Guia said the agency's Central Visayas office would conduct its own investigation.

"Even claims of resisting arrest to justify fatalities need to be tried before courts to ensure that there are no lapses and ascertain if the circumstances really warrant the offense from the police, resulting [in] the curtailment of life," de Guia said in a statement. *AR*

**WITH DEMPSEY REYES,
CATHERINE A. MODESTO
AND DIVINA NOVA
JOY DE LA CRUZ**

14 farmers massacred, groups say

By Rio N. Araja

RIGHTS groups on Sunday condemned what they called a "massacre" of 14 farmers by police in Negros Oriental as authorities defended the incident as a legitimate operation against suspected communist rebels.

Police say the 14 men on Saturday shot at officers with search warrants for illegal firearms, prompting them to return fire. But rights groups insist the men were "farmers asserting their rights to land," the latest victims caught up in a violent crackdown under President Rodrigo Duterte.

Duterte's administration has canceled peace talks with communist rebels—who

are waging a 50-year-old insurgency that has killed thousands—and has ordered his troops to "destroy" them.

The latest violence occurred in three separate incidents in Negros island, the center of the nation's sugar industry and home to some of the country's wealthiest landowners as well as some of its poorest farm workers.

Authorities say the operation was a response to communist rebel attacks in Negros, adding one policeman was wounded.

"They fought back against our operating units. We were forced to fire back. Some of [the 14 men] are farmers but we cannot confirm how many," provincial

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police spokesman Edilberto Euraoba said.

Police arrested another 12 men while they recovered various firearms from those killed, Euraoba added.

However rights and peasant groups said the 14 men killed on Saturday were farmers, some elderly, citing witness accounts contradicting the police's statement.

"They were defenseless. It's clear that it was a massacre. They are tagged as members and sympathizers [of communist rebels] but they are farmers asserting their rights to land," Maria Sol Taule, legal counsel for rights group Karapatan, said.

"President Duterte is attacking his critics including people fighting for their rights. It's an all-out attack on all they suspect to be enemies, whether farmers or lawyers."

Rows over land have become increasingly common as Manila faces criticism for its slow-moving program to redistribute farmland to millions of sharecroppers—tenant farmers who give a part of each crop as rent—who remain mired in poverty.

The Federation of Agricultural Workers condemned the latest deaths, saying it highlighted growing rights violations on Negros island.

The nation's rights body said it would investigate Saturday's incident, expressing "grave concern" over what it called a rising number of killings in the country.

Taule added that the incident was the latest in a series of attacks on farmers, following the killing of nine farmers by gunmen also in Negros in October.

Farm workers account for about 20-million people, a fifth of the population, who live on less than two dollars a day, the government says.

Leftist lawmakers denounced the latest killings.

Anakpawis Party-list Rep. Ariel Casilao blamed Duterte's Memorandum Circular 32 that directed additional troops to provinces with areas of lawlessness, saying it was a death warrant to civilians in Negros Oriental.

"The state-sanctioned terror act should be condemned by all sectors as [President Rodrigo] Duterte and his warmonger minions are hell bent to impose martial rule in a nationwide scale," he said.

ACT Teachers Party-list Rep. Antonio Tinio believed the police operation against the 14 slain victims should not be called a "legitimate anti-crime operation."

"What they are doing is nothing but the vilification and targeting as criminals and 'terrorists' of progressive farmers and their organizations whose only crime is to demand reforms and to criticize the anti-people policies of the current administration," Tinio said in a statement.

Another ACT Teachers Party-list lawmaker, France Castro, said "it follows the rulebook of targeting civilians and innocents under the so-called Oplan Kapayapaan as well as tokhang and other bloody operations which the Duterte administration is waging against the people."

Col. Raul Tacaca, the province's chief of police, said eight of the suspect criminals were killed in Canlaon City, four in Manjuyod town and two in Sta. Catalina town.

He said policemen were serving search warrants when the victims fired shots at them.

Bayan Muna Party-list Rep. Carlos Zarate vowed to seek justice for the victims.

"State forces are on a rampage and activists and critics are in their cross-hairs. We will not take this sitting down and we will seek justice for the victims and file charges against the policemen and their superiors who perpetrated this massacre," he said.

Commission on Human Rights spokesperson Jacqueline Ann de Guia said they have already ordered the regional sub-office of CHR-Region VII to investigate the case.

"At this point, our interest is finding out the truth behind a police operation, which authorities claim to be meant to serve warrants of arrest, but resulted in the deaths of 14 farmers and a cop said to be injured," De Guia said.

The claim that authorities were serving search warrants when the shooting began needed to be investigated, De Guia said. need to be looked into.

"Even claims of resisting arrest to justify fatalities need to be tried before courts to ensure that there are no lapses and ascertain if the circumstances really warrant the offense from the police, resulting the curtailment of life," she added. With AFP and PNA

14 dead in Negros police operations

CEBU CITY — At least 14 persons were killed and 14 others were arrested in a series of police operations dubbed as "Oplan: Sauron" in Negros Oriental last Thursday which militant groups condemned and described as a massacre of farmers.

According to the Philippine National Police Regional Office 7, those who were killed fought back when police tried to implement search warrants against some residents suspected to be keeping firearms in their homes.

The PRO 7 said 34 of the 36 search warrants implemented yielded positive results.

They were identified as Steve Arapoc, Manulo Martin, and Sonny Palagtiw of Barangay Pansiao, Manjuyod; Edgardo Avelino and Esmael Avelino of Barangay Panubigan, Canlaon City; Ricky Recomono and Rogelio Recomono of Barangay Masulog, Canlaon; Genes Palmares of Barangay Aquino, Canlaon; Eric Acabal of

Barangay Kundabong, Manjuyod; Ano Enojo Repada of Barangay San Pedro, Sta. Catalina; Melchor Panares and Mario Panares of Barangay Bayog, Canlaon; Franklin Lariosa of Barangay Talalak, Sta. Catalina, and Gonzalo Rosales of Barangay Pula, Canlaon.

Six subjects of search warrants were able to escape, the PRO 7 said.

Police Corporal Ian Puerto, an operative of the Regional Mobile Force Battalion 7, was wounded in the leg during the exchange of gunfire.

Firearms, hand grenades, and assorted bullets were seized during the police operations.

PNP spokesman Police Col. Bernard Banac yesterday affirmed that the 14 persons who were killed in the Negros Oriental police operations tried to shoot it out with policemen.

"We are sure that they really tried to shoot it out because our policemen will not use force if

there is no threat to their lives," said Banac, adding the police operations underwent the process of validation of intelligence reports and processes in carrying out raids.

"It is the duty of the PNP to enforce the law and maintain peace and order for public safety. And these were done by following the rules of engagement, respect on human rights, and presumption of regularity," said Banac. "The police were running after these personalities because of the violations of the law, and based on the information obtained they were keeping contrabands, guns, and bullets. The PNP just implemented the search warrant and at the course of the implementation, there were gun battles," he added.

San Carlos Bishop Gerardo Alminaza yesterday sought an investigation on the killings.

"We demand a quick investigation on this and appeal to our government authorities to restore

peace and order," Alminaza said.

The prelate said he was informed by the parish administrator of the Canlaon Parish that a lay minister was among those killed.

"The parish administrator of Canlaon Parish just called me that a lay minister he can vouch for his moral character is one of those issued with warrant of arrest and killed. Others were not even shown the supposed arrest papers," said Alminaza. "What's happening? Are we still observing law and order?" he asked.

Alminaza appealed to peacekeepers not to violate human rights in performing their task.

"Please as you do your tasks make sure you don't violate the human rights and dignity of our fellowmen and women," he said. "Please make sure you are not adding more reasons for our people to get disillusioned with our government and peacekeepers," added Alminaza.

A local farm workers' group also

condemned the killings.

Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura chairperson Antonio Flores said the death of 14 peasants is similar to what happened in Guihulngan and nearby places late last year where six peasants were killed after they allegedly fought it out with police and military elements.

"We call on Negros Oriental Gov. Roel Degamo and the Commission on Human Rights and other independent bodies to call again for an impartial investigation in the killings of the 14 peasants," Flores said.

The police operations were carried out during the 50th founding anniversary of the New People's Army. Those who were subjected to the search warrants were reportedly NPA members and those arrested were reportedly NPA supporters. (Calvin Cordova, Leslie Ann G. Aquino, Ellalyn V. Ruiz, Chito Chavez, and Aaron Recuenco) 4

Pagpatay sa 14, pareho sa Sagay massacre?

Kinondena ng grupo ng mga magsasaka ang pagpatay sa 14 na magsasaka sa magkakahiwalay na operasyon ng pulisya sa Negros Oriental, habang nanawagan naman ng masusing imbestigasyon ang isang obispo sa lalawigan dahil lay minister ang isa sa mga napaslang.

Sinabi ni Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (UMA) Chairperson Antonio Flores na walang kaibahan ang pagpatay sa 14 — pawang magsasaka — sa pamamaslang sa mga magbubukid sa Guihulngan noong nakaraang taon nang anim ang napaslang dahil umano sa pakikipagsagupaan sa mga pulis at sundalo.

"We call on Negros Oriental Gov. Roel Degamo and the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and other independent bodies to call again for an impartial investigation in the killings of the 14 peasants," sabi ni

Flores.

Kabilang sa 14 na napatay nitong Biyernes ang walong magsasaka mula sa Canlaon City, habang dalawa pa ang napaslang sa bayan ng Sta. Catalina, samantalang 14 na iba pa ang naaresto at pawang magbubukid din.

Kinumpitina naman ni San Carlos Bishop Gerardo Alminaza na kabilang sa mga pinaslang ang isang lay minister sa simbahan ng Canlaon.

"The parish administrator of Canlaon Parish just called me that a lay minister — he can vouch for his moral character — is one of those issued with warrant of arrest and killed. Others were not even shown the supposed arrest papers," sabi ni Alminaza.

"What's happening? Are we still observing law and order?

We demand a quick investigation on this

and appeal to our government authorities to restore peace and order," dagdag pa ng obispo.

Matatandaang pagkatapos na mapatay ang siyam na sakada sa Sagay City noong Nobyembre, inilabas ni Pangulong Duterte ang Memorandum Circular Order 32 "[to] suppress lawless violence and acts of terror" sa Negros Island.

"It seems though that it is the PNP and the military which is conducting a state of lawlessness against the people of Negros. Besides the massacres in Canlaon, Guihulngan and Sagay, police and military operations are continuing in Northern Negros Occidental, which includes Sagay and Escalante," sabi ni Flores.

**Ellalyn De Vera-Ruiz at
Leslie Ann G. Aquino**

14 na 'nanlaban', tinigok sa NegOr

Nina CALVIN CORDOVA at FER TABOY

Nasa 14 na katao ang napatay at 14 na iba pa ang inaresto sa serye ng operasyon ng pulisya na "Oplan Sauron", sa Negros Oriental.

Ayon sa Police Regional Office (PRO)-7, nanlaban umano ang mga napatay nang isilbi ng awtoridad ang mga search warrant nitong Huwebes laban sa ilang residente na hinihinalang nag-tingat ng mga baril sa kanilang bahay.

Sinabi ng PRO-7 na 34 sa 36 na search warrants na ipinatupad ay nagpositibo.

Napatay sa umano'y engkuwento sina Steve Arapoc, Manulo Martin, at Sonny Palagtiw, ng Barangay Pansiao, bayan ng Manjuyod; Edgardo Avelino at Esmar Avelino, ng Bgy. Parubigan, Canlaon City; Ricky Remono at Rogelio Recomono, ng Bgy. Masulog, Canlaon; Genes Palmares, ng Bgy. Aquino, Canlaon; Eric Acabal, ng Bgy. Kundabong, Manjuyod; Arno Enojo Repada, ng Bgy. San Pedro, Sta. Catalina; Melchor Panares at Mario Panares, ng Bgy. Bayog, Canlaon; at Franklin Lariosa, ng Bgy. Talalak, Sta. Catalina at Gonzalo Rosales, ng Bgy. Pula Canlaon.

Anim namang target ng search warrants ang nakatakas, ayon sa PRO-7.

Nasugatan naman sa binti si Corporal Ian Puerto, ng Regional Mobile Force Battalion 7, sa kasagsagan ng bakbakan.

Nasamsam naman sa serye ng operasyon ang mga baril, granada, at iba't ibang bala.

Kinumpirma naman kahapon ng Philippine National Police (PNP) na kung hindi miyembro at tagasuporta umano ng New People's Army (NPA) ang mga napaslang at naaresto.

Ayon kay Chief Supt. Debold Sinas, nakatanggap umano silang impormasyon na may mga kasapi ng SPARU ng NPA sa Canlaon City, Sta. Catalina, at Manjuyod sa lalawigan.

Naniniwalarin si Sinas na responsable ang mga suspek sa mga karahasan at harassment sa lugar nitong Pebrero.

Ito, aniya, ay dahil plano umano ng

NPA na lusubin ang himpilan ng Canlaon City Police, batay sa mga dokumento na sinasabing nakumpiskang pulisya sa isa sa mga suspek.

Nakarekober din umano ang pulisya ng mga sketch ng presinto, pati na rin ang bilang at oras ng mga pulis na nakaduty.

Matatandaang nitong nakaraang linggo, isinailalim ng pulisya sa red alert status ang Negros Oriental ng pagdadagdag ng pulis sa probinsiya dahil sa banta ng pag-atake ng mga rebelde.

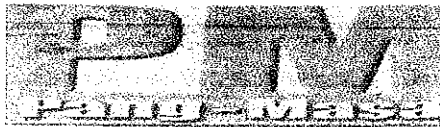
Iginiit naman ni Senior Supt. Raul Tacaca, director ng Negros Oriental Police Provincial Office, na legal ang nasabing operasyon.



TIYAGA LANG

Isinasalansan ng magsasaka ang kaaaning tabako upang patuyuin sa isang crude drying barn sa Barangay Caslagan, Sta Cruz, Ilocos Sur, kahapon.

**RIZALDY
COMANDA**



14 REBELDE NAPATAY, 12 NADAKIP SA SAGUPAAN

Napatay ang nasa 14 miyembro ng New People's Army (NPA) habang 12 ang naaresto sa magkakahiwalay na operasyon ng mga pulisya sa Negros Oriental.

Ang mga napatay ay kinilalang sina Steve Arapoc, Manolo Martin, Sunny Palagtiw, Gene Palmares, Eric Acabal, Ano Enojo Rapada, Gonzalo Rosales, Franklin Lariosa, Melchor Panared, Mario Pafiares, Edgardo Avelino, Esmael Recomono, Rogelio Recomono at Ricky Reco-

mono.

Walo sa kanila ay mula sa Canlaon City, apat sa Manjuyod at dalawa mula sa Sta. Catalina.

Nabatid na nanlaban umano ang mga ito habang isinisilbi ang warrant of arrest sa iba't ibang kaso. 2

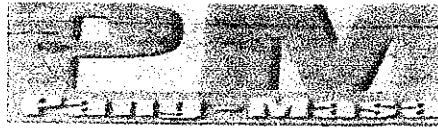
Narekober mula sa mga suspek ang dalawang rifle grenades, dalawang fragmentation grenades, pitong kaliber 45 baril, 13 kalibre 38 baril, isang 357 magnum revolver, dalawang shotguns, dala-

wang improvised guns, ibat ibang bala, apat na cellular phones, at mga subersibong dokumento.

Nilinaw naman ni Police Brig Gen. Debold Sinas, director ng Police Regional Office-7 nakatanggap sila ng impormasyon na ang mga suspek ay mga miyembro ng SPARI ng NPA na nag-operate sa Canlaon City, Sta. Catalina at Manjuyod at plano na mang-harass at umatake sa Canlaon PNP base sa nakuha na mga subersibong dokumento. -Gemma Garcia-

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18 pulis na nakipaglaban sa NPA rebels, paparangalan

Dahil sa pakikipagsagupa sa tinatayang 50 miyembro ng New People's Army (NPA) na lumusob sa istasyon ng pulisya ay bibigyan parangal ni Philippine National Police (PNP) Chief Police General Oscar Albayalde ang 18 pulis ng Victoria, Negros Occidental.

Kabilang sa tatanggap ng Medalya ng Kadakilaan sina Police Lt. Eladio G. Alo, Chief of police ng Victoria MPS; Pol. Chief Master Sergeant's Aimee Lutze Cadiente at Marlon Ordonia, Pol. Sr. Master Sergeant Arturo Gordo Jr., Pol. Master Sergeant Arnold Cabacang, Pol. Staff Sergeant's Ramil Ramosa; Raul Francisco Jr.; Brande Esquilon; Pol. Corporal's Bryan Ed Penaffor; Jaykarl Laurio; Eddie Edwin Diaz; Tracy Silagan at Jake Salesa; Patrolman's Ronnel Goco; Marlon Estopagian; Errol Montopar; Geral Casyao at Jhonar Cris Bernadas.

Bukod sa Medalya ng Kadakilaan, makakatanggapnaman sina Gordo at Cabacang ng Medalya ng Sugatang Magiting.

Iginiliit ni Albayalde na ang katapangang ipinakita ng mga pulis ay nagpapakita lamang na kanilang kahandaan na lumaban sa kanilang mga kalaban.

Matatandaan na noong Marso 28, 2019 ay umatake ang mga miyembro ng NPA sa Victoria police station; subalit nakipaglaban ang mga pulis at naprotektahan ang kanilang police station na nagresulta sa pagkakapatay sa tatlong rebelde at pag aresto sa isa pa. **Gemma Garcia**

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Reds lose Agusan stronghold

By Kathleen Mae Bulquerin

The government's campaign to marginalize and eventually send the New People's Army to oblivion was further bolstered after the military managed to drive them out from one of their strongholds in Buenavista, Agusan del Norte.

With the terrorists out of the way, the military's 23rd Infantry Battalion (IB) and the duly-constituted local government are now firmly in control and the local residents can now move freely and without fear.

The operations culminated with the withdrawal of the terrorists from the area.

To further assert the presence of the government, the military over the weekend conducted a multi-stakeholder engagement community outreach program and the inauguration of a Cafgu patrol base in Sitio Afaa, Barangay Lower Olave, Buenavista.

The said area used to be under the strong grip of the communists but their influence was

diminished because of the series of civilian and military operations in the past months.

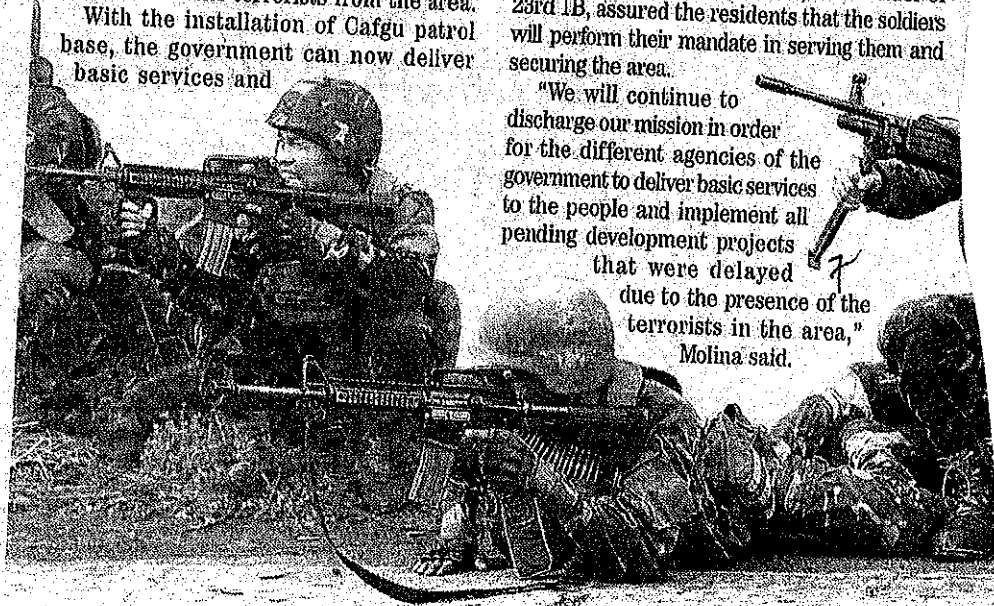
The operations culminated with the withdrawal of the terrorists from the area.

With the installation of Cafgu patrol base, the government can now deliver basic services and

introduce livelihood programs in the remote area that would benefit more than 500 residents.

Lt Col. Francisco Molina Jr., commander of 23rd IB, assured the residents that the soldiers will perform their mandate in serving them and securing the area.

"We will continue to discharge our mission in order for the different agencies of the government to deliver basic services to the people and implement all pending development projects that were delayed due to the presence of the terrorists in the area," Molina said.



Military offensive The government is clearly winning the war against insurgency because of effective coordination among soldiers, local officials and residents.

AS

Fatal blow dealt to CPP

The Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) report on European financing of front organizations for the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) which the European Union (EU) is now probing will be a precursor to dealing the communist movement with a crippling blow, AFP Deputy Chief of Staff for Civil Military Operations (J7) Brig. Gen. Antonio Parlade Jr. said.

Parlade added the AFP welcomed the move of both the EU and Belgium to conduct an audit to grants being provided to alleged front organizations of the CPP-NPA.

The move came days after the government submitted documents and other pieces of evidence to EU Programme Manager on Governance Louis Dey and Belgian Ambassador Michel Goffin, asking the two parties to "immediately cease" the release of funds.

Turn to page 6

The fronts allegedly exploit indigenous peoples (IP) and fabricate reports that paint a very dire human rights situation in the country which they then use as a pretext for asking donations from foreign donors like the EU and member states.

"We are armed with the truth and nothing else. We are morally convinced that what this CPP organizations are doing is simply to exploit our IP, project a very dire HR (human rights) situation in our country, vilify our government by fabricating reports to cast doubt on the efficiency of our government and then what? Ask for donations," Parlade said.

We are optimistic that truth will be on our side in this endeavor.

"This is a pattern they have established. A fake 'Bakwit' (evacuation) to ask EU funding. A fake advocacy to Save Our Schools and ask for more funding. Kill IP and attribute it to government then ask for support from Human Rights Watch," he added.

The CPP-NPA is listed as terrorist organization by the United States and the EU.

Parlade particularly identified the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP) as among the groups whose funding should immediately be stopped.

"We appreciate the positive response of EU and Belgium to our formal plea to stop funding to Rural Missionaries which is directly assisting the NPA in Mindanao," Parlade said.

Col. Noel Detoyato, AFP-Public Affairs Office chief, said the move could further weaken the armed revolution being waged by the CPP-NPA in the country for decades now.

Truth on gov't side

"We are optimistic that truth will be on our side in this endeavor and the cutting off of international fund to these fronts will further weaken them and it will hasten their irreversible downward trend towards irrelevance," Detoyato said.

"As more surrenderers are coming out, their affidavits will further strengthen our position in our desire that these fundings will stop," he added.

Parlade said the RMP and IBON Foundation are responsible for publishing subversive books being distributed to IP children in Mindanao — aimed at training young IP to become warriors and fight the government.

"We have to expose this because it is so unfair to the other lay workers and sisters whom we in the AFP and Philippine National Police (PNP) partner with for our values formation and moral reform programs," Parlade said.

NGO fronts listed

Apart from RMP and IBON Foundation, among the listed local non-government organizations (NGO) acting as CPP fronts were the League of the Filipino Students (LFS), Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development (ALCADEV); Karapatan; Mindanao Interfaith Services Foundation Inc. (MISFI); the Salugpungan Ta'tanu Igkanugon Community Learning Center Inc. (Salugpungan/STTICL); Alliance of Health Workers (AHW); the Kilusang Mayo

Uno (KMU); Gabriela, and the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT).

Last February, the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict sought a dialogue with the EU and other European governments, detailing how European funds end up in the hands of CPP-NPA legal fronts.

Belgian NGO which are the usual sources of funds for communist fronts are the Solidagro, Viva Salud and Kiyo. It was also learned that the SOLIDAGRO has partnered with Philippine NGO ALCADDEV; IBON Foundation; Karapatan; MISFI; Salugpungan/STTICL, and RMP.

Established partners

The Viva Salud, on the other hand, has partnered with the AHW; KMU; Gabriela, IBON Foundation and ALCADDEV. Lastly, KIYO has direct links with Gabriela, ACT and Karapatan.

This information was gleaned from the Belgian government, through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Esperon said in the letter.

"We have to expose this because it is so unfair to the other lay workers and sisters whom we in AFP, PNP and government partner with for our value formation and moral reforms," he added.

Behind Church's cloak

These entities, he said, cannot continue to hide under the cloak of the church, of whatever faith and then provide funds to the NPA and other CPP front organizations like Karapatan, Gabriela, ACT, KMU, Anakbayan, LFS, Bayan or what is called the Makabayan Bloc.

Majority of these organizations are members of the International League of People's Struggles, which is also chaired by CPP founder Jose Maria "Joma" Sison.

Parlade also gave special mention to RMP for directly supporting NPA members through its "Suporta sa Pamilya" (SUPAMIL).

"The RMP provide SUPAMIL or Suporta sa Pamilya (Support to Family), of CPP and NPA cadres and fighters directly and they cannot deny this. Those who will say this is a lie should be ready to refute this in a public debate," he added.

This is a pattern they have established. A fake "Bakwit" (evacuation) to ask EU funding.

CPP-NPA front groups, he said, put up programs like Literacy Numeracy for IP, Community-Based Health System for wounded rebels, Farmers Resource Centers and BREAD to feed communist fighters and their families, Sustainable Agri, or Panday Bolig using disaster rehabilitation as cover.

He said all of these are programs supported by funds coming from EU and given to RMP-Northern Mindanao Region. This in turn provide support to the CPP-NPA.

"Deceit, lies, propaganda are what the CPP-NPA have perfected over 50 years which have duped all of us, students, farmers, clergy, teachers, government workers and international organizations like EU and UN," he said.

"How much longer can we tolerate this scam now amounting to billions of pesos, which could have been spent for the needs of the genuinely impoverished and neglected instead of the NPA and 'Joma's minions?'" he added. **Mario J. Mallari**

Military: We've got proof of funds going to leftist group

BY VICTOR REYES

THE Armed Forces yesterday said it is pleased with the decision of the European Union and Belgium to look into funds they have been providing to the "Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP)" which is said to be a front organization of the communist movement.

Brig. Gen. Antonio Parlade, AFP deputy chief of staff for civil military operations, said the military has proof that the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), are hiding behind the RMP to get funds from abroad.

"We appreciate the positive response of EU and Belgium to our formal plea to stop funding to Rural Missionaries (of the Philippines) which is directly assisting the NPAs

in Mindanao," said Parlade.

AFP spokesman Brig. Gen. Edgard Arevalo said EU and Belgium did not just commit to look into the funding but also to enlist a third party firm to audit the funds they have donated to the supposed communist front organization.

"It shows that they desire to ensure that their support does not end up with organizations that actually or indirectly support terrorist activities," said Arevalo.

"Soon the flow of funds to organizations like Ibon Foundation, Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, Anakbayan, and other front organizations will stop. It will also halt the many years spent and millions of pesos funneled to support the terrorist movement," he added.

The Duterte administration, through

the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, last week formally asked the EU to stop giving funds to the communists who are said to be using the funds to recruit and exploit children.

Parlade said the RMP has partnered with the Ibon Foundation in the publication of "subversive books" which are used by children in schools put up in indigenous peoples (IP) communities.

He said these schools "are teaching IP children to become child warriors," said Parlade.

"These missionaries cannot continue to hide under the cloak of the church, of whatever faith, and then provide funds to terrorists NPAs, and other CPP front organizations like Karapatan, Gabriela, ACT (Association of Concerned Teachers), KMU (Kilusang Mayo Uno), Anakbayan, LFS (League of Filipino

Students), Bayan or what they call the Makabayan bloc," said Parlade.

Parlade alleged that RMP has been providing support to the families of CPP and NPA cadres and fighters "and they cannot deny this."

"Those who will say this is a lie should be ready to refute this in a public debate. We are armed with the truth and nothing else," said Parlade, who called the RMP a front organization of the CPP-NPA.

Parlade said the military is convinced that CPP front organizations are exploiting IPs, projecting a sorry human rights situation in the country, and vilifying the government to cast doubt on its efficiency.

He implied the CPP has been killing IPs and blaming the government for the deaths, and will then ask support from human rights groups.

NPA declared 'persona non grata' in Region 1

SAN FERNANDO CITY, La Union – The Regional Peace and Order Council and Regional Development Council in Region 1 have declared the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army as "persona non grata" in the Ilocos provinces.

The declaration was announced last Friday at Hotel Ariana, Bauang, La Union during the joint first quarter meeting of the RPOC Region 1 and RDC Region 1 presided over by Major Gen. Lenard T. Agustin, commander of the Army 7th Infantry Division.

Members of the RPOC 1 and RDC 1 unanimously approved RPOC Resolution No. 1, Series of 2019, condemning the unlawful acts committed by the CPP-NPA and declaring them as persona non grata.

Agustin said the declaration is the first step in line with President Duterte's Executive Order No. 70 which institutionalizes the whole of nation approach and created a national task force to end the local communist armed conflict and attain inclusive and sustainable peace.

The declaration was issued following the recent 50th founding anniversary of the NPA.

The region's development situation, major programs, and concerns regarding the May 13 midterm elections were discussed in the meeting.

Aside from the insurgency updates and the elections, topics about the crime situation and anti-illegal drug operations were also discussed. **(Freddie Lazaro)**

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Municipal councilor gunned down

ILOILO CITY — A municipal councilor of Moises Padilla, Negros Occidental was shot dead early yesterday morning.

A report from Philippine National Police Regional Office 6 identified the victim as Councilor Jolomar Banares Hilario who is seeking reelection in the May 13 midterm elections.

The 51-year-old councilor was sleeping when trucks with 50 armed men arrived at his house in Barangay Inoligan at past 6 a.m.

While raiding his house, the armed men claimed to be members of the New People's Army.

The perpetrators went inside Hilario's room and peppered him with bullets before fleeing.

Hilario was taken to a nearby clinic, but was declared dead on arrival. He succumbed to several bullet wounds in different parts of his body.

He was killed two days after the local campaign period started and the 50th founding anniversary

of the NPA, the armed group of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

The incident also came a week after the Philippine Army and the police arrested Frank Fernandez, a former priest-turned-high-ranking leader of the NPA in Negros, and his wife in Laguna.

The PA 3rd Infantry Division and PRO 6 have urged candidates in Negros and Panay not to pay permit-to-campaign fees to the NPA. (Tara Yap) 4

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Konsehal, binistay habang tulog

Patay sa pamamaril ang isang konsehal sa Moises Padilla, Negros Occidental ngayong Linggo ng umaga.

Batay sa report mula sa Police Regional Office (PRO)-6, kinilala ang pinaslang na si incumbent Moises Padilla Councilor Jolomar Bafiates Hilario, na re-electionist sa Mayo 13.

Natutulog ang 51-anyos na konsehal

nang dumating sa kanyang bahay sa Barangay Inoligan ang mga truck na kinalululanan ng 50 armadong lalaki, pasado 6:00 ng umaga ngayong Linggo.

Nang pumasok sa bahay ng opisyal, nagpakilala umano ang mga armado bilang mga miyembro ng New People's Army (NPA).

Dumiretso umano ang mga suspek sa kuwarto ni Hilario at pinagbabaril ito

bago nagsitakas.

Dinala si Hilario sa malapit na klinika, pero hindi na siya umabot nang buhay dahil na rin sa maraming tama ng bala sa kanyang katawan.

Tara Yap



Hilario

Kandidato na konektado sa NPA minomonitor ng AFP

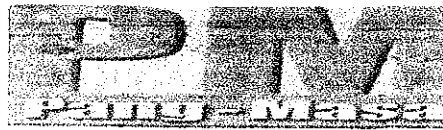
Minomonitor na ng Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) ang mga pulitiko na tumatakbo ngayong midterm elections na umano'y konektado sa New People's Army (NPA).

Ayon kay AFP Public Affairs Chief Noel Detoyato, na mayroon na silang tinututukan noon pa at hindi sila nahuhuli sa pagmomonitor dahil may kakayahan din sila at mayroon na rin mga sumusuko.

Sa ngayon ay pinag-lisa na nila ang mga reports dahil noong isang araw pa lamang nagsimula ang pangangampanya sa lokal at mas umilgiting umano ang campaign period kapag simula na ang local campaign.

Idinagdag pa niya na sa ngayon ay 63 rebelde ang sumuko sa AFP nitong mga nakaraang linggo, 28 dito ay regular na miyembro ng NPA at 35 militia ng Bayan supporters.

Habang anim na NPA naman ang napatay at apat dito ang nadakip ng AFP sa kanilang operasyon na ginawa ng mga nakaraang linggo kabilang dito ang walong engkwentro, isang pag-atake at isang attempted arson incident. (Gemma Garcia)



MGA KANDIDATO NA KONEKTADO SA NPA, MINOMONITOR

Patuloy ang ginagawang pagmomonitor ng Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) sa mga pulitiko na tumatakbo ngayong 2019 midterm elections na umano ay konektado at nagbabayad sa New Peoples Army (NPA).

NI GEMMA GARCIA

Ito ang sinabi ni AFP Public Affairs Chief Noel Detoyato at mayroon na silang tinututukan noon pa at hindi sila nahuhuli sa pagmomonitor dahil may kakayahan din sila at mayroon na rin mga sumusuko.

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Army uncovers Maute terror plot

By ROEL PAREÑO

ZAMBOANGA CITY – The military has uncovered an alleged plot by the Maute terrorist group to launch bombings, kidnappings and extortion during the election period in Lanao provinces.

The information was intercepted by the military's intelligence unit tracking down the remaining Maute group in Lanao del Sur, Col. Romeo Brawner, chief of the Army's 103rd Infantry Brigade, said yesterday.

Brawner said the plot was confirmed by some members of the terrorist group, who have surrendered to the military, and documents recovered from the terrorists' lairs.

"We heard of their plots to conduct bombings, continue their activities of kidnapping and other

criminal acts like extortion. But they failed to carry these out due to our relentless operations against them," Brawner said.

He said reports showed the Maute terrorist group was divided into smaller groups after the deaths of the leaders.

Brawner said intelligence reports indicated the group has only 15 remaining members.

He said he could not rule out the support the group is receiving from the relatives of its members.

"Although their relatives know that they are bandits, support is still given," Brawner said.

The Western Mindanao Command vowed to deploy additional security men in several areas in Mindanao after the police listed 454 election hotspots in the region.

PEACE, FINALLY

MILF deactivates weary warriors

Babu Psung recalled how they lived in constant fear until the sound of gunfire had become normal

MAGUINDANAO — Peace now reigns and the women of Mindanao welcome it with their men.

Babu Psung, 60, from Sultan Sa Barongis, Maguindanao, was among the hundreds of Bangsamoro residents who witnessed the inauguration of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao on 20 March.

We feel genuinely happy that we are able to witness all these.

She is the wife of a grizzled Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) combatant. And on that day she knew he will never go back to war again. Ever.

She had always been an evacuee or "bakwit" due to the age-old armed conflict that had torn the region.

The recent peace pact between the government and the former rebels now make them as catalysts of peace and development.

She attributes this life-changing transformation to the gains of the peace process.

Babu Psung recalled how they lived in constant fear until the sound of gunfire had become normal. Her husband had been a combatant long before they were married.

She could not hold back her tears when she learned that her family will finally be leaving behind a dark chapter in their lives.

With the formal decommissioning of her husband and thousands of MILF fighters, she believes that the Bangsamoro people can look ahead to a brighter future.

"We already learned that this (decommissioning) will put weapons beyond use. This is not to surrender them but just to set them aside," she said.

"The next phase is the implementation of projects for all. These are not dole outs but livelihood projects that will benefit everyone,"

she added with a bright hope.

Bapa Imam, also 60, became a combatant during the martial law years. He said he is joyful now that war is over between them and the government soldiers.

Her husband had been a combatant long before they were married.

"We feel genuinely happy that we are able to witness all these," he said.

The major components under the Normalization Track are security, socio-economic development, confidence-building and Transitional Justice and Reconciliation.

The Joint Normalization Committee, which is under the oversight of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, will oversee the conduct of activities under the Normalization Track of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. **ADC**

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NGAYON

Ang pinakamahalagang magasin ng mga balita sa kasalukuyan

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7 Abu Sayyaf sumuko

Pitong miyembro ng Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) ang sumuko sa militar kahapon sa lalawigan ng Sulu. Sa ulat ng Philippine Army (PA) 2nd Special Forces Battalion, sumuko sa militar ang mga bandido sa bayan ng Parang Sulu kasama ang kanilang mga armas dahil sa hirap na rin ng kanilang buhay sa bundok at pagtatago sa batas. Ang mga sumuko ay kasalukuyang isinasailalim sa interrogasyon ng militar. Sinabi ni Col. Antonio Nafarette ng 1101st Infantry Brigade na handa silang magbigay ng financial assistance mula sa gobyerno para makapagsimula ng bagong buhay ang mga rebelde. Nilinaw nito na ang pito ay isasailalim sa Sulu Provincial government livelihood program. **(Gemma Garcia)**

BARMM transition fund's release pushed

By ALI G. MACABALANO

COTABATO CITY – The Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) has authorized Interim Chief Minister Murad Ebrahim to work for the release of national funds for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), which President Rodrigo Duterte inaugurated last Friday.

In its first parliamentary session that day, the BTA passed four resolutions, two of which empowered Ebrahim to "request the release of the transition fund" and "to request for

the transfer of the current year's appropriations for the ARMM to the BARMM."

Under RA 11054 or the Bangsamoro Organic Law, the national government must allocate a ₱1.2-billion "transition fund" for the new region's initial operations. It also abolished the 29-year Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), and the ₱32-billion budget appropriated for this year will go to BARMM.

The parliamentary resolutions were passed earlier purportedly for the presentation of the excerpts on the two budget-related measures

to President Duterte.

But in his nine-minute speech, the President did not mention budget concerns for the new entity, reiterating only his general description of BARMM as a potential avenue to help "correct historical injustices of the past" among Moro communities.

In his welcome address at the inauguration ceremony, Ebrahim also did not mention BARMM's financial woes, pointing out only the prospects of the fledgling region in the dawning of "new beginning for Bangsamoro" and his administration's adherence to good governance prescribed by law

and Islamic principles.

In a radio interview Thursday, Ebrahim said BARMM's leadership expected the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to release within this April funds for maintenance and operations as well as salaries of the 37,000 former workers of ARMM serving the new regional government on a holdover capacity.

While waiting for national funding, officials and staff appointed by Ebrahim in 10 initially constituted ministries will be considered as volunteers.

Ebrahim's radio announcement followed some posts on Facebook pur-

porting that BARMM's holdover rank-and-file personnel were anxious about delayed salaries in March and partly in February this year.

Manila Bulletin sources from the regional education sector said the delayed release forced many teachers as well as elementary and secondary public school officials in BARMM to take out loans so they could hold graduation ceremonies.

The sources attributed the delay to the late submission of BARMM officials' statements of assets, liabilities and net worth (SALN) to the national government.

The magnificent Del Rosario-Morales gambit

It was a magnificent three-point shot. A complaint submitted on March 13 beat the buzzer by four days, before the Philippines, in the contemplation of Rodrigo Duterte, effectively opted out of membership in the International Criminal Court on March 17.

The Del Rosario-Morales gambit was a strategic counter-elite move. It shows respected leaders like Albert del Rosario and Conchita Carpio Morales taking personal risks to file a case against Xi Jinping before the ICC for crimes against humanity and for implementing a system to control the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea (WPS) that has caused environmental degradation and livelihood losses to Filipino fishermen.

The domestic impact of the gambit is electrifying, because far too many of the powerful elites in this country, in government, in the private sector and civil society, have actively aligned with President Duterte, or have fallen silent. Even those who may have realized their grievous mistake in egging Mr. Duterte to run for president in 2016, notably Fidel V. Ramos and Aquilino Pimentel Jr., have kept silent.

The move has been criticized as a "political move" with no chance of success. It is, in fact, a bundle of political, legal, psychological and other moves. The Philippines has greater chances of taking on China before international law and world public arenas than in the military and bilateral diplomacy arena. Besides, one cannot judge a whole game by the first move alone.

From the Philippine perspective, the move has already been a success. Thousands have signed a petition supporting the complaint. It has helped lift the sense of paralysis that has enveloped this nation



ON THE MOVE

SEGUNDO ECLAR ROMERO

in confronting China on the WPS and its intrusion into our domestic affairs.

The Del Rosario-Morales gambit pushes the envelope for more pervasive but low-key activities that will help sustain this nation's viability and integrity. There are layers of patriotism and national community-building that are at play. Many people just do what they have done all their lives—exude professional excellence, day in and day out. Many others are deeply engaged in social responsibility—working with people, generating inclusive livelihood, defending and promoting human rights, protecting the environment and moderating profits. Many others play out servant leadership, helping communities help themselves, and helping organizations achieve their missions by making such achievement about teams and not about egos. And many people plant trees and pick up the trash.

The Del Rosario-Morales gambit sustains the narrative of Rodrigo Duterte as a vassal of China. Mr. Duterte has disowned

the initiative, declaring so to visiting Chinese leaders. But this posture is not without cost.

Mr. Duterte himself is experiencing a reduction in his degrees of freedom. Scolding the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System has not solved the water crisis. The drug and corruption problems have worsened. Economic growth forecasts are less optimistic. Nur Misuari is hovering menacingly over the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Presidential intrusion into the electoral process is alarming. Public opinion is much more attentive and critical. Over three years, he continues to rail against his special enemies, but he now realizes he needs to pause and ponder the consequences of his actions.

Recently, Facebook degraded Mr. Duterte's "air force"—drastically shutting down 200 pages and accounts that partly constitute the massive intravenous infusion of fake news that sustains the Duterte cult.

That the Del Rosario-Morales gambit will ruffle Chinese feathers is certain, but it will win us respectability among fellow Asean claimant countries like Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia, and other countries intimidated by this new imperialist on the block.

The Del Rosario-Morales gambit has taken the war to Xi Jinping, the capo di tutti capi, and the local boss is embarrassed. What can he do—add Del Rosario and Morales to his hit list? That will only boost the psychological lift from this gambit. Filing the complaint doesn't look like a futile act, after all.

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PEACE AND PROGRESS IN BARMM

THERE are good indications that the implementation of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) will succeed, except for Nur Misuari's threat of waging war (if federalism is not considered) made under the very nose of President Duterte and his top security advisers.

Misuari did not elaborate what type of federalism he is asking for, and he seems to be not fully aware that the BOL's features have a semblance of the federalism espoused by former Senate president Nene Pimentel.

I was in the BARMM (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) area more than a week ago, and I noticed all top-rated hotels in Cotabato City were fully booked with foreign visitors. Photocopying and blue printing shops were busy

reproducing land titles, location maps, copies of MOAs and deeds of sale, signifying an upbeat business atmosphere after the ratification of the BOL.

I learned that the leaders of the transition government are attempting to increase the per capita income of Muslims in the area to a level similar to Kuwait's (GDP per capita \$69,700 as of 2017 estimate) from the Philippines' GDP of \$10,000 (2017 estimate). This is a realistic target, considering the millions of barrels of gas and oil deposits in Liguasan Marsh that belong to the Filipino Muslims.

Let us pray to Allah that progress and peace will reign forever in the Muslim region.

A13
ISIDRO C. VALENCIA,
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April Fool's Day

Today Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana meets with US acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan in Washington. It will be the first meeting between the two officials. The visit would therefore be more in the nature of getting to know each other. Nonetheless, Lorenzana is expected to take up the matter of a possible review of the Philippines-United States Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT). He has consistently advocated a review of this security arrangement noting that significant changes in regional and global relationships have taken place since the treaty was signed in August 1951 more than half a century ago. Incidentally the treaty was signed by Carlos P. Romulo, Joaquin Elizalde, Vicente J. Francisco and Diosdado Macapagal for the Philippines, while Dean Acheson, John Foster Dulles, Tom Connally and Alexander Wiley signed for the United States.



REVELLE

RAMON J. FAROLAN

While others have spoken up for maintaining the existing treaty in its present form, declaring its vagueness as being some form of deterrent, Lorenzana has called for greater clarity as to the extent of US commitment in the region. For one thing, it does not address situations arising within our exclusive economic zone. The MDT Article 4 in particular, talks vaguely of "an armed attack in the Pacific area..." How about nonviolent encroachments short of an armed attack?

Shanahan served for 30 years as a Boeing Aircraft Corp. executive before being appointed by President Donald Trump to the position of deputy defense secretary in 2017. During his time at Boeing, he was known as "Mr. Fix It," being a key management expert in the development of company aircraft. He took over in January 2019 when Gen. James Mattis resigned over policy differences with Trump specifically over his sudden decision to withdraw US forces from Syria.

A few notes on Mattis. Filipinos should be specially grateful for his role in the return of the Balangiga bells. As I mentioned in an earlier column, his personal initiatives and actions in monitoring developments on the return of our national treasure made the event possible.

Mattis is a product of the ROTC program in the United States. He joined the Marine Corps and was known as the "warrior monk" for his intellectual skills. When he was appointed to the defense position by Trump, he needed a waiver from Congress since the National Security Act prohibited an active duty officer to serve as defense secretary until seven years after retirement. This was to ensure separation from military and civilian oversight responsibilities. The waiver was granted by a Senate vote of 98-1, a measure of the respect in which he was held by the lawmakers. Perhaps we might consider this same condition in the appointment of our defense officials. His resignation was considered a terrible blow for the Trump administration.

The Lorenzana-Shanahan meeting takes place on the first day of the month of April, a day traditionally known as April Fool's Day.

Exactly 67 years ago, on April 1, 1952, 77 young men aged 17 to 21 arrived at Fort General Gregorio del Pilar, home of the Philippine Military Academy located in the outskirts of Baguio City. Four years later, on April 4, 1956, 51 of the original 77 emerged as the Class of 1956. They were commissioned as second lieutenants in the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and were distributed among the four major services of the AFP—Army, Air Force, Constabulary and Navy. (The Constabulary, now the Philippine National Police, has since been separated from the AFP, leaving the latter with only three branches of service.)

The great majority of young men joining the PMA—and this is true for the Class of 1956—come from the middle class. Many are products of provincial high schools with a few coming from Metro Manila educational institutions. All are chosen by merit using as basis competitive exams held nationwide. The free college education complete with subsistence, shelter, uniforms, books and a moderate stipend, all supported by the Filipino taxpayer, is often cited as the main reason for joining the academy.

In 1952, the Philippines had a population of 22 million; today there are over 100 million Filipinos. The commander in chief was Elpidio Quirino from Ilocos Sur; today the commander in chief, Rodrigo Duterte, hails from the opposite end of the archipelago in Davao. In 1952, the AFP had only eight generals; today it has 180 generals. In 1952, the PMA cadet corps consisted of only some 300 cadets; today the corps has over 1,000 cadets with approximately one-fourth being women.

Of the 51 graduates, one became national security adviser, another served as commanding general, Philippine Army and director general, National Intelligence Coordinating Agency, while another was commanding general, Philippine Air Force and later, ambassador to Indonesia. Others served as heads of government-owned and -controlled corporations, particularly Pagcor and Philippine Airlines. This week the surviving members of the Class of 1956, along with their ladies, get together to mark another milestone in life. The dwindling numbers tell us that the final boarding call is not too far away.

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Sundalo nagpatulong sa BITAG na makabalik sa serbisyo

KUNG minsan, may mga reklamong nagbibigay sa akin ng katanungan na "kung bakit BITAG ang kanilang nilalapatan." May hangganan ang aming kakayahan pero ganunpaman, wala kaming tinatalikuran.

Isang 22-anyos na sundalo ang nagpasaklolo sa BITAG. Nais niyang humingi ng tulong na makabalik sa serbisyo. Ang siste, si Private Jessie James Abrazado ng Philippine Army, sinibak dahil sa kapulpulan ng kanyang mga superior. Basta pinatigil sa serbisyo ng walang due process.

Honorably discharged ang pobre at walang derogatory record. Nagka-leche-leche lang ang kanyang buhay nang makaengkuwentro sila ng NPA. Si Abrazado at ang kanyang buddy ang sentinel o look out nang maganap ang insidente. Sinalakay sila ng mga armadong rebelde... habang

ang pito nilang mga kasama, abalang-abala sa pagtoma. Sarap na sarap sa pulutang sinampalukang baboy.

Mabuti na lang at alerto ang nagrereklamo. Dahil kung hindi, malamig na bangkay silang lahat, pati mga senior niyang lasenggo. Imbes na pasalamat, siya pa ngayon ang pinag-initan ng mga kasamahan. Kasalanan niya dahil hindi siya nagpabaya at uminom habang nasa trabaho. Wrongful turnover at absence without official leave o AWOL ang hatol sa nagrereklamo. Depensa ng pobre, umalis siya dahil sa pambubugbog ng squad leader.

Mga kumag na sundalo, tinaasan na ang mga suweldo, tatagay-tagay lang at todo pasarap sa buhay. Isang matinding kahihayan sa uniporme at sa sariling bayan. Hindi ko nilalahat. Maraming matitino... gaya na lang nung sundalong umawat sa sira-ulong pulis na gustong pumatay ng bata.

Kinausap namin sa ere si Major Ian Fabellon ng Philippine Army. Walang naging problema sa aming pag-uusap dahil karapat-dapat si Abrazado.

Pansin namin ang kagustuhan niyang maglingkod sa bayan. Gusto lang talagang ma-redeem ang sarili at sa army. Hindi dapat maparusahan ang pobreng ito dahil lamang sa minor infraction. Handang makipagbakbakan kahit sa Marawi, Lanao o saang parte pa ng Mindanao. Ang mga ganitong klase ng sundalo, marapat na bigyang papuri at tularan. Snappy salute!

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14 Reds killed, 16 nabbed in Negros Oriental

By Sarwell Meniano March 31, 2019, 5:35 pm

TACLOBAN CITY – A day-long joint military and police operations against the New People's Army (NPA) in Negros Oriental on Saturday has resulted in the death of 14 and capture of 16 members.

Government forces served 36 search warrants to suspected rebel hideouts in three cities and nine towns in the province. Executive judges in Negros Oriental and Cebu City issued the warrants for alleged violation of Republic Act 10951 or the Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Regulation Act, government sources revealed.

Those killed reportedly fought back and engaged authorities in a shootout as the latter served the search warrants. Some eight of the fatalities were from Canlaon City, four from Manjuyod, and two from Santa Catalina Negros Oriental, it was reported.

Dubbed as "Oplan Sauron 2pt0", the operation has led to the recovery of 53 assorted firearms, including high-powered rifles, handguns of various calibers and some grenades. Also seized were 210 assorted ammunition, seven gun magazines, 109 empty shells, four mobile phones, and voluminous subversive documents.

"The simultaneous implementation of 36 search warrants resulted to the arrest of 16 person subject for the search warrants while six suspects were able to elude arrest, but resulted to a positive recovery of their firearms," the Philippine National Police said in its report.

"Oplan Sauron 2pt0" is an internal security operation plan against personalities connected to the Communist Party of the Philippines, NPA, National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF) in the first congressional district of Negros Oriental and a follow-up to the Dec. 27-29, 2018 operation dubbed as "Oplan Sauron," the same sources explained.

The joint operations covered Ayungon, Canlaon City, Guihulngan City, Mabinay, Manjuyod, Siaton, Santa Catalina, Tanjay City, and Vallehermoso.

Government forces conducted the operation in response to recent attacks committed by the CPP-NPA, which is listed as a terrorist organization by the United States and European Union.

These rebel offensives reportedly include the thwarted attack on Canlaon Police Station, failed assassination of policemen in Manhuyod town, killing of an Army retiree, failed assassination of a junior police officer in Canlaon town, and assault on the residence of an intelligence operative of Manjuyod police station. **(PNA)**

<http://www.pna.gov.ph/>

7K plus troops to participate in 'Balikatan' 2019

By Priam Nepomuceno March 31, 2019, 3:22 pm

MANILA -- Around 7,550 Filipino, American and Australian troops will be participating in this year's "Balikatan" exercises which will formally start April 1 and end on the 12th.

This was disclosed by Philippine "Balikatan" public affairs officer, Lt. Cmdr. Liezl M. Vidallon, in an interview with reporters Sunday.

Vidallon said this can be broken down into 4,000 personnel for the Armed Forces of the Philippines, 3,500 on the United States side and 50 from the Australian Defense Force.

He added that the Australian participation is possible as exercises are multilateral for this year.

Exercise venues will be in Northern and Southern Luzon.

Objectives for "Balikatan" 2019 are to enhance the inter-operability of participating forces aside from highlighting long-standing military relations between the Philippines and the US. **(PNA)**

<http://www.pna.gov.ph/>

Student activist-turned Army scholar gets college diploma

By Lilian Mellejor March 31, 2019, 4:48 pm



Members of the 71st Infantry Battalion congratulate Peter (with Toga), a Salugpungan-turned Army scholar, during a graduation ceremony of the Liceo de Davao Tagum College on March 29, 2019. *(Photo courtesy of 71st IB CMO)*

DAVAO CITY -- A 24-year-old supporter of the Communist New People's Army (NPA) who surrendered to government forces and became a scholar of the Philippine Army's 71st Infantry Battalion (71IB) was among the successful graduates of the Liceo de Davao Tagum College.

Identified only as alias Peter, he received his diploma on Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education on Friday's graduation of the Liceo de Davao Tagum College held at the New City Hall building in Tagum City.

Peter was a student of a Salugpungan school run by the Mindanao Interfaith Services Foundation, Inc. (MISFI) in Sitio Tyra, Barangay Lapu-Lapu, Maco, Compostela Valley that has been reportedly penetrated by the communist recruiters teaching students to grow up hostile to the government.

Peter came from a poor Mansaka tribe family who cannot afford to send him to school. After finishing high school in the Salugpungan, MISFI sent him to Liceo de Davao as its college scholar on condition that he would go back as a volunteer teacher of Salugpungan school after graduation.

In 2018 at the height of the mass surrender of the New People's Army (NPA) members and underground supporters and arrest of some insurgents, Peter and his brother, who was serving as informant of the NPA, feared they would also suffer the same experience of those arrested by the government.

This prompted Peter and his brother to surrender in August 2018 in Purok 8, Barangay Nueva Visayas in Mawab, Compostela Valley. His surrender also cut the scholarship from MISFI. Nowhere to go, Peter then sought the help of the 71IB.

"We were told he did not like it teaching in Salugpungan. That after college he would take the exam for teachers and work somewhere else," said First Lt. Jhocell D. Asis, Civil Military officer of the 71st Infantry Battalion based in Maco, Compostela Valley province.

In a phone interview on Sunday, Asis said the 71IB went beyond its means and helped Peter continue with his college education at Liceo.

Asis said Lt. Col. Esteveyn Ducusin, the commanding officer of 71IB and whose advocacy is empowering youth, decided that the unit will take responsibility for Peter's studies.

The 71st IB assisted Peter in all school's requirements, including financial assistance and board and lodging.

"We are joyful having known Peter's graduation. This only implies that those who go back to the folds of the law are ensured with opportunity for better life. And we will always extend help to those who will cooperate with us," Ducusin said in a statement.

Peter has already expressed his intention to join the Army.

"He really liked to join the Army so we will help him process his papers and take the exam in October. He can qualify for an officer because he is a college graduate," Asis said.

Asis said the 71IB has also facilitated the employment of his brother in a private company. He refused to name the company for security reasons.

The 71IB also enrolled the family of Peter in the People's Organization created by the Army troops to assist families of the surrenderers. Peter's family has already planted the seedlings provided by the 71IB.

"May lupa kasi sila na gusto i-develop (They have now lands they want to develop) into an agricultural area," Asis said.

According to Asis, the 71IB will continue to provide interventions in areas affected by communist insurgency. **(PNA)**

[www. retiredanalyst.blogspot.com](http://www.retiredanalyst.blogspot.com)

AFP-CRS: Army extends medical care to arrested NDF consultant

Posted to the Armed Forces of the Philippines-Civil Relations Service (AFP-CRS) Facebook page (Mar 31, 2019): **Army extends medical care to arrested NDF consultant**
National Democratic Front consultant and former Catholic priest Francisco Fernandez and his wife, Cleofe Lagtapon, were accommodated and given appropriate medical treatment at the Army General Hospital (AGH) after his arrest on Sunday, March 24, 2019.

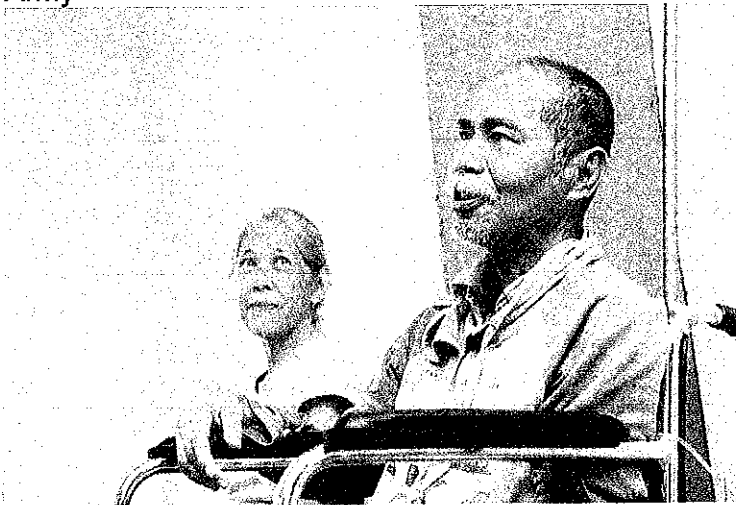
Fernandez and his wife were arrested by personnel of the Laguna Provincial Police Office by virtue of a warrant of arrest for murder and for violating Republic Act 10591 or the Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Regulation Act when several pistols and grenades were found in his possession in his residence in Nagcarlan, Laguna.

According to Brigadier General Benedict Arevalo, commander of the 303rd Infantry Brigade based in Murcia, Negros Occidental, Fernandez is Secretary of the New People's Army Komiteng Rehiyonal-Negros and has four standing arrest warrants for murder. "It took some time before we got a breakthrough on the location of Frank Fernandez," he added, pointing out that the Army's efforts became a law enforcement operation wherein the Philippine National Police carried out the apprehension based on the warrants of arrest issued by the courts.

After the arrest, the couple were initially brought to the Asian Hospital and Medical Center in Alabang, Muntinlupa to undergo physical examination when Fernandez complained of chest pains. They were eventually transported to AGH upon the request of Police Chief Superintendent Edward Carranza, CALABARZON Regional Director for security reasons.

"We have received information that some of his comrades will attempt to free the couple from our custody. The police has primary custodial responsibility over the couple but we requested the Army, which has secondary responsibility, to accommodate them in their secure medical facility", said Carranza.

"We assure the public that his medical needs are being met and his rights are upheld. Our doctors all have taken their Hippocratic Oath and do not discriminate against anyone who needs medical attention", said Lt. Col. Ramon Zagala, Army spokesperson. | Philippine Army

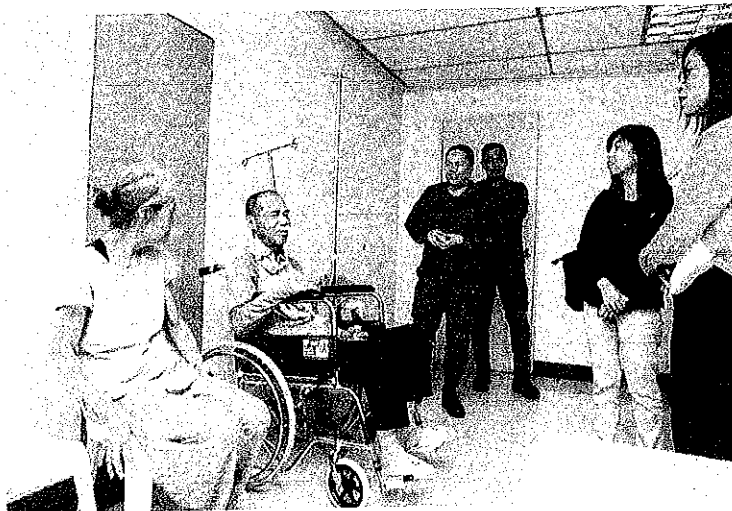


By 2028, a world-class Army that is a source of national pride.

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Posted by Retired Analyst at 11:02 PM No comments: