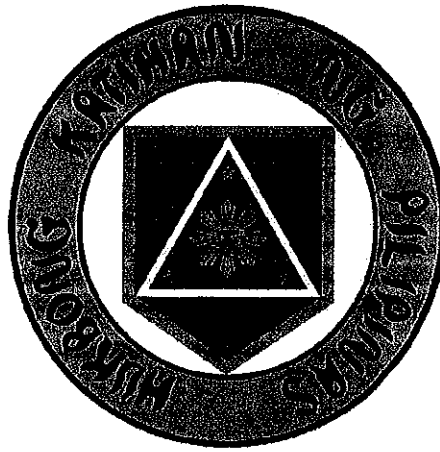


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NEWS CLIPPINGS

03 April 2019

Wednesday



Honor. Patriotism. Duty

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CHINESE-MANNED SHIP ALARMS TOWN

STORY BY MARICAR CINCO

Officials of Lobo town oppose a plan to dredge their river for sand to build a runway in Hong Kong, saying it will harm their mangrove forest and part of the Verde Island Passage, a marine sanctuary.

A4

FROM A1

By Maricar Cinco
@maricarcincoINQ

The sudden appearance of a large Chinese-manned dredging vessel not only caused alarm among residents of a fishing village in Lobo town, Batangas province, but also unraveled a plan by a private company to ship tons of sand from their river to build a runway of Hong Kong International Airport, the Inquirer learned on Tuesday.

The MV Emerald, a 2,990-ton hopper dredger suddenly appeared off Barangay Lagadlarin on Thursday and anchored close to its 30-hectare mangrove forest, according to village chief Mafriel Dimaano.

The 99-meter-long, 17-meter-wide ship sailed into Lobo's waters without prior notice or permission from local officials, Dimaano said on Tuesday.

"Why would a ship that big suddenly dock here when we don't even have a pier?" Dimaano told the Inquirer.

It was not until Monday that a representative of Seagate Engineering and Buildsystems visited Lagadlarin and apologized for causing alarm. He explained that the company had planned to put up signages regarding a project to dredge the Lobo River, Dimaano said.

'Totally hysterical'

"I went totally hysterical and raised my voice at him. I told him, how come their ship came ahead and only thought of putting up signages afterwards. We were not informed at all," he said.

Lobo Mayor Jurly Manalo said Seagate's representative, who was not immediately identified, cited a supposed deal struck between the company and a former mayor in 2008 to dredge the river, but this did not push through. He said the company representative showed an environmental compliance certificate (ECC) issued for the project in 2018 by the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB).

"I told him we wouldn't allow the dredging because we have a dike which would mostly likely collapse if they dredge the river. We also wouldn't allow them to destroy our sea," Manalo said.

The mayor ordered the ship to leave, but it remained anchored off Lagadlarin on Tuesday.

Dredging agreement

The Inquirer has learned that the former mayor was Manalo's younger brother, Virgilio, who was authorized by the municipal council then to enter into a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with Seagate to dredge the river.

According to documents seen by the Inquirer, the council, through an Oct. 28, 2008, resolution, authorized then Mayor Virgilio Manalo to enter into a MOA with Seagate to dredge "180,000 square meters and expandable as necessary" of the Lobo River for flood control.

But it was only almost 10 years later, on July 6, 2018, that

Seagate obtained the ECC from the Calabarzon regional office of the EMB for the "desilting, dredging and remediation" works for the Lobo River Basin Periphery Project.

One document dated Feb. 28, 2019, seen by the Inquirer was a purchase order made by a company called Synergy Plus Holdings Ltd. to Seagate for the purchase of 2 million cubic meters of Lobo River sand for \$2 per metric ton "at source" to be used for the Hong Kong International Airport Three Runway System Project.

Governor not aware

It was unclear whether Seagate could export the sand or even begin the dredging because the regional Mines and Geosciences Bureau office denied the company's request in February for a mineral ore export permit and the current officials of the town were against the dredging.

Seagate officials could not

be reached for comment.

Batangas Gov. Hermilando Mandanas also said he was not aware of the ship's arrival and had not issued any dredging permit.

Police Lt. Col. Crisostomo Ubac, chief of the Batangas Police Maritime Group, said the ship dropped anchor just 500 meters from the shore, which happened to be a mangrove reserve.

Lobo is part of the Verde Island Passage, a marine sanctuary being what scientists call the world's center of the center of marine shorefish biodiversity.

Scientists say mangroves help prevent soil erosion in areas with strong waves, remove dirt and pollutants from the land and could even act as a buffer to storm surges brought by strong typhoons. They say mangroves also help in the healthy growth of seagrass and coral reef ecosystems.

Manalo said barangay officials were prevented from boarding the ship. Only mem-

bers of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and the Batangas and maritime police, who arrived at the village on Friday afternoon, were allowed to board.

"I was also afraid it carried drugs so I asked for the [assistance of] PDEA (Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency)," Manalo said.

No firearms or illegal drugs were found on the ship.

No basis to arrest

Ubac said at least nine Chinese men were on board, while Lobo Mayor Jurly Manalo said they might be from Taiwan after he spoke with one of the crew members on Saturday.

"I asked for the (ship) captain to come down and see me but they said he couldn't speak (Filipino) so they sent the (crew member) and a Filipino as his interpreter. The Filipino was also with them," he Manalo said.

Ubac said the vessel may have violated environmental laws when it dropped anchor off Lagadlarin, but the marine protected area has not been officially declared in writing so there was no legal basis to arrest the crew.

He said the crew intended to conduct underwater quarrying, particularly at the mouth of Lobo River, but they could not present any document for that.

According to Dimaano, there is a small mangrove forest close to the mouth of the river that is adjacent to his village's own mangrove reserve.

Manalo said the ship's anchor might have already dam-

aged the sea grass, a breeding ground for fish and sea turtles.

"A basic and fundamental rule is they communicate with us. They prefer bullying. We don't even allow our own fishing rafts to anchor there, how much more a foreign vessel?" he said.

Palace: We will verify

In Manila, presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo said the military was now looking into the arrival of the ship.

"We will verify," Panelo told reporters, adding that he had texted the head of the military's Southern Luzon Command, whose area of operation includes Batangas.

The PCG spokesperson, Capt. Armand Balilo, tried to quell apprehensions about the vessel, saying it had a contract to dredge and desilt a 6.5-kilometer stretch of the Lobo River.

Balilo also said the ship had an importation clearance from the Maritime Industry Authority as well as an anchorage clearance issued by the Philippine Ports Authority. Its crew of nine Chinese nationals also hold valid visas.

Based on the environment compliance certificates issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the dredging operations will cover parts of the villages of Fabrica, Lagadlarin, Olo-Olo, Poblacion, Tayuman, Mabilog na Bundok and Nagtaluntong.

—WITH REPORTS FROM LYN RILLON,
JOVIC YEE AND CHRISTINE O. AVEN-
DAÑO INQ

SC to probe 13 narco judges

PDEA chief rejects turnover of list to SC

By EDU PUNAY

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday ordered an investigation on the alleged involvement of 13 judges in the illegal drug trade in the country.

In summer session in Baguio City, the justices decided to initiate a fact-finding probe on the reported inclusion of the unnamed judges in the narco list of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA).

PDEA for the list of judges allegedly linked to the illegal drug trade. This will pave the way for a formal fact-finding and administrative investigation by the Supreme Court," SC spokesman Brian Hosaka said in a

SC orders release of drug war records. Story on Page 10.

The high court has authorized Associate Justice Diosdado Peralta to personally coordinate with PDEA for the list of names of alleged narco judges.

"To address this matter immediately, the Supreme Court has tasked and has authorized Associate Justice Diosdado Peralta to coordinate and communicate directly with the

press briefing.

"The Supreme Court, like in the past, will not tolerate any illegal or corrupt activities within its ranks," Hosaka vowed.

Peralta is currently the third most senior member of the high tribunal. His designation to lead the investigation, insiders explained,

Turn to Page 10

means that the Court is taking this issue "very seriously."

The STAR reported last Monday that SC officials recently requested the names of the judges for an internal investigation, but PDEA has refused to share the information.

PDEA director general Aaron Aquino yesterday rejected the request of the Supreme Court to get a copy of the list of judges allegedly linked to the illegal drugs trade.

He said it is still premature to give the names of judges included in President Duterte's drug list.

"The PDEA begs for understanding as we cannot provide the SC with the PRRD list of narco judges as it will still be revalidated by the concerned law enforcement agencies," he said in a statement to The STAR.

Aside from PDEA, the three other agencies validating the narco list are the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency, Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police.

Aquino, on an official trip to Singapore, said they could also not give the names of prosecutors with suspected drug links for the same reason.

Aquino earlier said there are 13 judges and 10 prosecutors in Duterte's narco list.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson has also called on PDEA to share the names of the narco judges with

the SC to allow the judiciary to conduct investigation and the names kept confidential until findings and actions of the Court have been made.

The SC had initiated an investigation on the four narco judges tagged by Duterte in 2016 - Exequiel Dagala of Dapa-Socorro, Surigao, Adriano Savillo of Iloilo City, Domingo Casiple of Aklan and Antonio Reyes of Baguio City.

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

The high tribunal cited the findings of the panel that the judge accepted 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.

The Department of Justice, for its part, has likewise requested the PDEA for the names of 10 prosecutors tagged in the narco list.

Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra said he sent an official communication with PDEA last Monday.

"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 unacceptable," he stressed.

The DOJ chief stressed that the administration of President Duterte 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's 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.

Aquino said the judges and prosecutors on the list are not yet a priority as validation efforts are focused on case build-up against the 46 politicians named by President Duterte.

The PDEA chief said the list of judges, prosecutors and other drug personalities - including 31 celebrities - would still undergo validation, which he said would take time.

PNP chief Gen. Oscar Albayalde favors naming in public the judges and prosecutors allegedly linked to illegal drugs.

He said it is fair that the names are released similar to what was done to the 46 narco politicians named by Duterte in public.

"It was already done to other people so let's just be fair to everybody," Albayalde said.



Peralta

"You will have your time in court. You can disprove the allegations," he said, but admitted a the public has natural tendency to believe allegations of wrongdoing.

Presidential adviser

Malacañang is leaving it to former presidential economic adviser Michael Yang to decide whether to attend investigations on his alleged involvement in the illegal drugs trade.

Opposition Sen. Leila de Lima has called for an investigation on Yang's alleged illegal activities. The senator also asked the Senate to determine whether Yang abused his position as economic adviser for personal interest.

Yang, a Davao-based Chinese businessman, has been accused by dismissed police Senior Supt. Eduardo Acierto of involvement in illegal drugs

trade but the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency said the former policeman may be referring to another person.

De Lima, who is in jail over drug-related charges, also cited the need to inquire into the citizenship of presidential appointees like Yang as well as their influence over policies.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said the adminis-

tration is leaving it to Yang to decide whether to attend the Senate probe or clear his name before the public.

"That's for him to decide for himself," Panelo said, and that those who think Yang is into illegal drugs should just file charges instead of making accusations before the media.

- With Alexis Romero, Emmanuel Tupas

'After Phl protest, best for Chinese fishermen to leave'

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ

Chinese fishermen around Pag-asa Island in the South China Sea should start leaving the area following the diplomatic protest filed by the Philippine government, presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said yesterday.

"Can you tell me what is — what other strong message can you give to them, except to leave the place," Panelo said when asked about the next step following the diplomatic protest about the alleged harassment by Chinese fishermen.

Panelo warned the Philippines will "look for another course of action to assert our sovereignty" if Beijing continues to ignore the protest.

Panelo said the matter on the alleged incursions of China into the disputed areas at the South China Sea could be dealt with by the United Nations in its

General Assembly.

He said the idea is not far-fetched from the realm of possibility — sharing the opinion of former foreign affairs secretary Albert del Rosario.

Del Rosario suggested bringing up the 2016 arbitral ruling before the UN to enforce maritime claims against China.

"Personally, as I said before, the arbitral ruling is there permanently. They cannot remove it from us. It appears, we cannot enforce it because we do not have the might," Panelo said.

Panelo echoed President Duterte's stand against sending troops to enforce the arbitral ruling.

"I don't think that this President will risk the lives of our soldiers going there and declaring war," he said. "I am just giving you what I thought, what could be done. That is what Del Rosario is also saying."

Panelo said he will have to

consult with the President over his legal opinion as well as check with Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. on the other options the Philippines has relating to asserting its rights under the UN arbitration ruling.

The next step

Since the United States and the UN appeared uninterested in enforcing the arbitral ruling, Panelo urged the UN General Assembly to act on the issue.

"So, what is the next step, we are a member of the UN, and there are cases where certain issues that happen in a particular country that affect humanity are raised in the General Assembly. Then the GA makes a unified action, maybe that's it," he said.

Panelo made the statement after Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua met with him last Monday to thank the Philippine government for saying that it has nothing to do with the move of Del Rosario and former ombudsman Conchita Carpio Morales to file a complaint before the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Panelo told a television interview that he understands the sentiments of the Chinese official about the ICC complaint.

"Whether it's the government or a private individual, I

think China will be antagonized in a way because you're trying to paint their President bad. I mean, that's your natural reaction," Panelo said.

While he seems careful on hurting the good diplomatic relations with Beijing, Panelo said Manila won't allow any destruction of the environment in relation to Chinese movements at the South China Sea.

Panelo argued that an independent study should be done on reports that Beijing had damaged the environment in the area.

Panelo agreed with the findings of the UN tribunal which discussed "China's large-scale land reclamations and construction of artificial islands at the seven features of the Spratlys Island have caused severe harm to the environment."

He added that President Duterte cannot risk the "friendlier" relations between the two countries when asked why the Philippine government cannot directly confront Beijing over the issues.

"Well -- you must remember... that we are on a friendly relations. We are having these trade and bilateral agreements and we are exchanging intelligence information with respect to the fight against terrorism and illegal drugs. So, we are

supposed to be friends," he said.

All concerns about the presence of Chinese vessels as well as the reported harassment of Filipino fishermen are done through the PH-CH Bicameral Consultation Mechanism, Panelo said.

"For as long as they are not doing some harm against the fishermen physically, then -- while we are alarmed about it and we are concerned about it and we are going to take that as an issue in incoming bilateral meetings and of course tell them that you can't do this to us if we are friends," he said.

Doctrine of dominance

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the Chinese have long been encroaching into the country's maritime domain since 2012.

"It's very concerning. In fact, they have been doing the building of islands from reefs since, I think 2011, 2012. So it concerns us because they are encroaching on our exclusive economic zone," Lorenzana told the media in Washington in response to questions why the Chinese had been aggressive in its maritime claims in the South China Sea.

Lorenzana is in Washington in a meeting with US Defense Secretary Patrick Shana-

han on key defense and security issues involving the two countries.

In line with its maritime and territorial claims to almost 90 percent of the South China Sea, China has occupied seven formerly obscure maritime features in the Kalayaan Island Group that it transformed into man-made and highly militarized islands.

Recent reports claimed that since January up to the present, China has deployed more than 600 fishing boats close to Pag-asa Island in the disputed Spratlys.

Del Rosario said that even with the "full accommodations" being granted to China by the Philippine government, Beijing continues its unlawful actions on Filipino fishermen.

"Even as now, with full accommodations being granted to Beijing by our government, we continue to be faced with unlawful actions from our northern neighbor, a modern day goliath, whose intentions and activities are to force a doctrine of dominance and control on our region and beyond," Del Rosario and Morales said in a statement.

-- With Jaime Laude, Cecille Suerte Felipe, Helen Flores, Louise Maureen Simeon, Marc Jason Cayabyab, Evelyn Macairan, Pia Lee-Brago

Hanjin takeover not limited to Chinese — gov't

By JAIME LAUDE

While two Chinese shipbuilding companies are waiting in the wings for their planned takeover of the debt-ridden Hanjin

Heavy Industries (HHI), the Philippine government is also talking to other interested parties to bail out the debt-ridden shipbuilding firm.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana disclosed this yesterday, saying firms from United States, Japan, some

European countries, Singapore and Indonesia have also signified interest in Hanjin.

"They're (Chinese firms) waiting in the wings," Lorenzana told the foreign media during his initial meeting with US Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan.

He added the Philippine government is also ready to get in and operate the Korean shipbuilding company located in the former US naval base in Subic Bay in case it's not passed on to any of the private firms.

Lorenzana is currently in Washington for a meeting with Shanahan. He is in the US where he attended the United Nations Ministerial Meeting on Peacekeeping last week in New York.

"But we are also talking to a lot of interested parties in the US, Japan, Korea,

from European countries, and from Singapore and Indonesia," Lorenzana told Washington-based media yesterday.

Chinese firms took interest over Hanjin operations in Subic but this raised concern among the country's top security officials.

Former Navy chief Alexander Pama said ownership of the Hanjin shipyard will enable unlimited access to one of the country's highly strategic security features.

"Let's be aware of this Hanjin shipyard issue is not about business, financial and other economic issues. This is very significant national security issue," Pama posted in his Facebook account.

He added that nothing can prevent the owners from making the facility into a de facto naval base and a maritime facility for other security purposes.

Lorenzana: China encroachment 'very concerning'

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana described China's encroachment on the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the West Philippine Sea as "very concerning."

At the Pentagon where he met with acting US Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan on Monday, Lorenzana was asked by American journalists about the situation in the South China Sea and China's expanding dominance in the disputed area.

"It's very concerning," he said, adding, "In fact, they (China) have been doing the building of islands from reefs since, I think, 2011, 2012."

Lorenzana further said, "So it concerns us because they are encroaching on our EEZ."

While Lorenzana expressed concern about China encroaching on the Philippine EEZ, Sen. Leila de Lima wondered why the government advised Filipino fisherfolk to stay away from a place they have every right to visit.

Panatang Shoal

De Lima said the Duterte administration betrayed the Philippines when the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources advised Filipino fisherfolk to avoid going to Panatang (Scarborough) Shoal in the meantime, following reports that the Chinese coast guard had harassed them.

She said the fisherfolk should be allowed to go to Panatang Shoal because the Permanent Court of Arbitration, acting on a Philippine complaint against China, ruled that



PENTAGON MEET Acting US Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan (left) welcomes Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana upon his arrival for a meeting at the Pentagon in Washington on Monday. —AP

they have traditional fishing rights in the resource-rich area.

The same ruling junked Beijing's sweeping claim over the South China Sea.

"Instead of putting the welfare of our Filipino fishermen at the forefront and asserting the Philippines' rightful claim over [the South China Sea], this government chose to betray the country and its victory again by maintaining its policy of kowtowing to China," De Lima said in a statement.

Subic shipyard

At the Pentagon, Lorenzana also mentioned China's interest in the cash-strapped shipbuilder Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction-Philippines at Subic Bay in Zambales province.

"There are two Chinese shipbuilding companies which are interested from the get-go

when they learned about the financial trouble of Hanjin and they're waiting (on) the wings," Lorenzana said.

He said other parties from the United States, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Indonesia and European countries had expressed interest in the shipbuilding facility.

"But if no one will be interested then we do not want others to come in. The country, the government of the Philippines, is ready to get in and run this shipyard," Lorenzana said.

Since January, the defense establishment has been raising the possibility of a government takeover of Hanjin's shipyard in Subic, considered the country's most strategic port that serves as the major docking and anchorage area for the Navy's large vessels.

Hanjin early this year filed for voluntary rehabilitation in an Olongapo City Regional Trial Court and sought government help in looking for investors to take over its shipyard operations.

Former Navy chief Alexander Pama previously raised the alarm on the possibility of Chinese companies, one of them state-owned, taking over Hanjin's operations.

"Let's be aware that this Hanjin shipyard issue is not just about business, financial and other economic issues. This is a very significant national security issue," Pama said in a Facebook post in January.

—REPORTS FROM JEANNETTE I. ANDRADE AND LEILA B. SALAVERRIA INQ

BANDITS IN THE HIGH SEAS

POACHERS FROM MALAYSIA, INDONESIA AVOID PH WATERS OVER

KIDNAP FEARS, SAYS COAST GUARD

By Julie Alipala
@inqmindanao

ZAMBOANGA CITY—Kidnap-
ping in the high seas, usually
done by the bandit group Abu
Sayyaf, has been scaring away
poachers of rare and endangered
species of turtles from Tawi-
Tawi, an officer of the Philippine
Coast Guard (PCG) said.

Lt. Makaradat Uddin, PCG
district commander in Tawi-
Tawi, said poachers from
Malaysia, Indonesia and other
Asian countries had been veer-
ing away from the Tawi-Tawi
islands, including the Turtle Is-
lands, the natural nesting
ground for green sea turtles.

PCG officials suspected the
presence of Abu Sayyaf men,

who are known for their kidnap-
for-ransom activities and for be-
heading several of their victims,
must have scared the poachers.

"We no longer monitor
poachers coming from nearby
countries, perhaps they are al-
ready afraid of passing through
or going to these islands be-
cause of the kidnappings by the
Abu Sayyaf Group," Uddin told
the Inquirer.

Island watch

He said Tawi-Tawi residents
had been closely guarding their
areas, particularly the six small
islands that composed Turtle Is-
lands. These are Baguan, Lang-
gan, Great Bakkungan, Taganak,
Lihiman and Boan.

The International Union for



BANDIT SCARE The Philippine Coast Guard says the presence
of Abu Sayyaf bandits in the waters off Tawi-Tawi has made
illegal fishers and poachers from nearby countries think twice
before entering Philippine territory. —INQUIRER PHOTO

Conservation of Nature has de-
clared all marine turtle species
as endangered and Turtle Is-
lands as the only major nesting
ground for green sea turtles in

Southeast Asia.

The United Nations Educa-
tional, Scientific and Cultural
Organization has also declared
Turtle Islands, which cover

around 308 hectares of land, as
one of its heritage sites.

In May 1996, the Philippines
and Malaysia agreed to declare
Turtle Islands as the first trans-
boundary protected area for ma-
rine turtles in the world, and es-
tablish the Turtle Islands Heritage
Protected Area to guarantee the
continued existence of marine
turtles and their nesting sites.

Illegal fishing

Cmdr. Joseph Coyne, PCG
commander in southwestern
Mindanao, said the Department
of Environment and Natural Re-
sources, the Protected Area
Management Board and the
PCG had been protecting these
islands not just from poaching
but also from illegal fishing.

Uddin said the PCG had ar-
rested a number of foreigners
who were either trying to get in-
side Tawi-Tawi via Sabah or get-
ting out of the country through
the southern back door.

Early this year, two Ameri-
cans, both Muslim converts,
were intercepted in Tawi-Tawi
when they tried to enter the
country through Sabah.

The Americans were sup-
posed to be on an adventure trip
but for lack of travel papers, they
were arrested and turned over to
the Bureau of Immigration for
further investigation, Uddin said.

He said they also arrested a
Polish who was facing illegal
drugs charges in Siquijor
province and who tried to es-
cape through Tawi-Tawi. INQ

NAVY RECLASSIFICATION

FROM FAST FRIGATES TO PATROL SHIPS

By Jeannette I. Andrade
@jiandradeINQ

The Navy has downgraded its three Del Pilar-class frigates into patrol ships based on their capacity for maritime warfare.

The BRP Gregorio del Pilar (FF-

16), the BRP Ramon Alcaraz (FF-17), and the BRP Andres Bonifacio (FF-18) have been reclassified from fast frigates to patrol ships and would be redesignated as "PS."

According to Navy spokesperson Capt. Jonathan Zata, frigates are supposed to be

"naval combatant that has more than one capability to address the multidimensional nature of naval warfare."

"These should have the capability for antisurface, anti-submarine and even electronic warfare," Zata added. INQ

Three frigates reclassified as patrol ships

By Bobby Ricohermoso

Citing the need to correctly classify its three ships based on their roles in protecting the country's maritime interests, the Philippine Navy (PN) yesterday designated *BRP Gregorio Del Pilar*, *BRP Ramon Alcaraz* and *BRP Andres Bonifacio*, all ex-United States Coast Guard cutters, from frigates into patrol ships.

A frigate is any of various types of modern

naval vessels ranging in size from a destroyer escort to a cruiser, armed with guided missiles and used for aircraft carrier escort duty, shore bombardment and miscellaneous combat functions.

PN spokesman Capt. Jonathan Zata said the command deemed it relevant to reclassify the vessels as patrol ships, since frigates are supposed to be naval combatants that have more than one capability to address the multi-dimensional nature of naval warfare.

He added the platform should have the capability for anti-surface, anti-air, anti-submarine and even electronic warfare suites.

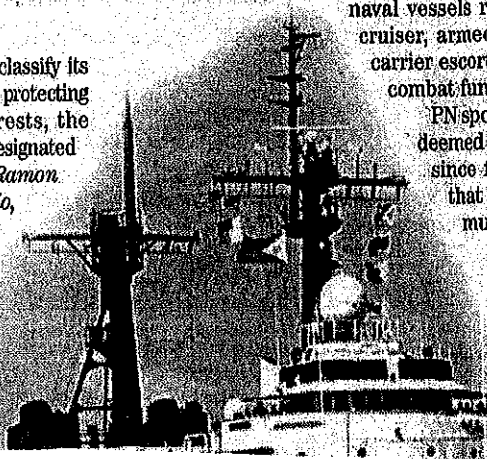
As frigates, the three vessels were designated as FF-15 (*BRP Gregorio Del Pilar*), FF-16 (*BRP Ramon Alcaraz*) and FF-17 (*BRP Andres Bonifacio*).

However, with the reclassification, they will now use the call sign "PS" which stands for patrol ship.

He added the platform should have the capability for anti-surface, anti-air, anti-submarine and even electronic warfare suites.

Zata added the ships will now take on a different role and purpose as part of a fleet's battle formation.

The three ships were acquired by the country in 2011, 2013 and 2016 and have cruising range of 14,000 miles and are armed with 76mm Oto Melara automatic cannon, 25mm and 20mm light cannons and .50-caliber machine guns.



DOLE orders POGOs to submit list of foreign workers

By **ERMA R. EDERA** and **GENALYN D. KABILING**

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) had requested all accredited Philippine off-shore gaming operators (POGOs) to submit a list of all their foreign workers to determine how many of them are working legally in the country and to know if they are paying the proper taxes.

Foreign POGO workers on the list who do not have the required alien employment permit (AEP) will be recommended to the Bureau of Immigration for immediate deportation.

On Friday, the DOLE reported that a total of 76,936 individuals are currently working in 165 Service ►4

DOLE orders POGOs... ◀1

Providers of POGO.

"Out of this figure, 63,855 or 82.9 percent are foreign nationals, while 13,081 or 17.1 percent are Filipinos," the DOLE said.

At least 87.9 percent or 56,180 of them are Chinese, Vietnamese - 1,862 (2.9 percent) and Indonesians - 1,586 (2.5 percent).

DOLE said the numbers could still increase in the coming days. A total of 27 licensed POGO firms have yet to submit their list of FN employees.

According to the DOLE, there are 138,000 foreign workers in the Philippines, most of them Chinese nationals employed by POGOs.

DOLE said 83,760 have Special Work Permits (SWP) and 54,241 have Alien Employment Permits (AEP).

An SWP is issued by the Bureau of Immigration (BI) to foreigners who will be working in the country for less than six months, while an AEP may be obtained by foreigners at the DOLE if they will be locally employed over six months.

For visas, the DOLE said the Department of Justice (DOJ) and four economic zones were able to issue 84,010 visas to foreigners.

Bello admitted that DOLE has limited capability to thoroughly uncover labor violations since it only has 800 labor inspectors nationwide.

The labor department is still waiting for the submission of issued visas for other economic zones.

Exploitation of Chinese workers

China has appealed to the Philippines to help investigate the possible exploitation of Chinese workers in illegal gambling operations in the country.

Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua sought the country's cooperation amid concerns about the welfare of Chinese nationals during his closed-door meeting with Presi-

dential Spokesman Salvador Panelo in Malacañang.

The Chinese diplomat paid a courtesy call on Panelo at his office Monday and tackled various areas of mutual concern. The meeting, which Panelo described as productive, lasted 50 minutes.

"On the Chinese workers in the country, Ambassador Zhao gave assurances that his government does not consent to any illegal entry or employment of its citizens in the country," Panelo said.

"In addition, he expressed concern on the possible exploitation of Chinese citizens in illegal gambling operations in the country and called for cooperation in strictly monitoring the situation and swift investigation and prosecution of those responsible," he added.

Panelo and Zhao also discussed the country's loan agreements with China and agreed that the terms of the loan pacts were "competently and fully negotiated by both parties on equal footing."

"According to Ambassador Zhao, it is the strong and robust economy of the Philippines that led the Chinese government to extend preferential credit terms for the country's infrastructure plans," Panelo said.

Panelo and Zhao also recognized the need for the peaceful resolution of the South China Sea issue as well as the responsible use of marine resources in the disputed territory.

"Both officials recognize the value of responsible utilization of the marine resources of the West Philippine Sea, including the rich fishing ground of the Scarborough Shoal," Panelo said.

"Both officials likewise give importance to the existing bilateral consultation mechanism between China and the Philippines as an avenue to address possible issues in the West Philippine Sea and to resolve any conflict or misunderstanding that may arise therefrom," he added.

DND to fisherfolks: Continue fishing in PH waters

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

The Department of National Defense (DND) urged local fishermen to continue their fishing activities in Philippine waters within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) despite the presence of Chinese vessels near Pag-asa

Island in the West Philippine Sea that have been crowding the area since January this year.

In a statement, the DND also assured that the Armed Forces of the Philippines-Western Command (AFP-WesCom) has been continuously monitoring the waters around Pag-asa ▶4

DND to fisherfolks...

◀1

Island and are aware of the presence of Chinese vessels and their activities in the area.

The DND also said they have reported Chinese presence in the area to the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) for appropriate action.

"Just as the Philippines honors our international obligations and protocols, we also expect other countries and their vessels to do the same especially when sailing and fishing in international waters," the DND said.

"This is necessary in order to avoid any misunderstanding and to reduce tensions between countries in the region," it added.

AFP Chief of Staff General Benjamin Madrigal, Jr., on the other hand, said there were only 200 Chinese vessels found near Pag-asa Island in the West Philippine Sea since January contrary to reports.

In an interview at the opening ceremony of the 35th Philippine-United States Balikatan Exercise in Camp Aguinaldo, Madrigal said the figures came from the Commander of the Western Command himself, Vice Admiral Rene V. Medina.

"I just talked with the WesCom commander, yung report na binangit, nasa mga around 600 plus yung sinasabi (for the first quarter) pag binilang mo yung lahat na yun na sightings, but yung involved na mga vessels its below that," Madrigal said.

Madrigal said the presence of the Chinese vessels is not only a concern of the military but by other agencies as well.

"Kasi marami diyan of course fishing vessels," he said.

To guard our territory, Madrigal assured that the military maintains its patrol in the area together with the Philippine Coast Guard.

"The foreign vessels monitored in Pag-asa Island are all Chinese fishing vessels deployed in the vicinity of the sandbar," Lt. Col. Elpidio Factor of the AFP Western Command said in an interview over ABS-CBN News.

"These vessels are considered as Chinese maritime militia and are occasionally complemented by Chinese Coast Guard vessel to sustain China's assertive presence in the vicinity of the sandbars," he added.

DND: Tuloy lang sa pangingsda

Hinimok ng Department of National Defense (DND) ang mga mangingisda na ipagpatuloy lang ang kanilang pagpalaot sa karagatang saklaw ng ating Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), sa kabila ng mga ulat na daan-daang barko ng China ang nakaisasyon malapit sa Pag-asa Island sa

West Philippine Sea simula Enero ngayong taon.

Sa isang pahayag, tinyak ng DND na tuluy-tuloy ang monitoring ng Armed Forces of the Philippines-Western Command (AFP-WesCom) sa karagatan sa paligid ng Pag-asa Island, at batid ng mga ito ang

presensiya ng mga barkong Chinese sa lugar.

"Just as the Philippines honors our international obligations and protocols, we also expect other countries and their vessels to do the same especially when sailing and fishing in international waters," saad sa pahayag ng DND. "This is necessary in order to avoid any misunderstanding and to reduce tensions between countries in the region."

2 Francis T. Wakefield

VESSEL WITH CHINESE, INDONESIAN CREW SPOTTED OFF BATANGAS

A DREDGING vessel, composed of Chinese and Indonesian crew, was spotted off the waters of Lobo in Batangas, authorities confirmed on Tuesday.

Lt. Gen. Gilbert Gapay, commander of the military's Southern Luzon Command, said the ship was registered to Sierra Leone, citing reports from the Philippine Coast

Guard (PCG) in Batangas and the Littoral Monitoring Station in Mindoro.

PCG spokesman Armand Balilo identified the ship as *M/V Emerald*, noting that the vessel came from Singapore before navigating to the coast of Lobo town.

"It will be used for the dredging and desilting of Lobo river and nearby estuaries

covered by an approved contract between Lobo LGU (local government unit) and Seagate Engineering and Build Systems, a Filipino company," he said in a text message, citing a report from the PCG.

Gapay added "pertinent documents" had been submitted to the Maritime Industry Authority central office, as well as to the Of-

fice of the National Security Adviser for the issuance of a "special permit for utilization."

The presence of the vessel, he said, was also cleared by the Philippine Ports Authority while the coast guard in the area was "closely monitoring" it.

Based on the report of the Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and

Quezon) police, the ship was spotted near Lobo since last week with nine Chinese crew, all possessing passports, visas and seaman's book.

Balilo added that the vessel were issued clearances by the regional office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. **DEMPSEY REYES**

Chinese vessels should leave — Palace

CHINESE vessels on Pag-asa Island should immediately leave the area now that the Philippines had decided to file a diplomatic protest, Malacañang said on Tuesday.

Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo said the protest was a testament that the government is

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Chinese

against the presence of the ships there.

"We are already complaining, why are they there? Then, effectively, you are asking them to leave," Panelo said, adding that the Chinese vessels should leave as soon as possible.

The Palace official said he took the issue up with President Ro-

drigo Duterte during Monday evening's Cabinet meeting.

He said the President "just listened."

"That is what the President does, when you make a report, he listens, he observes. If he will tell you anything later, he will say it. He is not risky with his words," he said.

Lt. Col. Elpidio Factor of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Western Command earlier said about 600 Chinese vessels were

circling the island.

However, Panelo said on Monday that Vice Admiral Rene Medina of the Western Command reported that only 275 Chinese ships were there.

He added that the vessels were not "circling," but were stationary. "If they are circling, they are planning something. But, if you are only stationary, maybe you are just watching," Panelo said.

The Palace official also clarified

that the diplomatic protest was "on the way."

Malacañang on Monday said the Department of Foreign Affairs had filed the protest.

"Let us see how they (China) will respond to the diplomatic protest," Panelo said.

Panelo said that if confirmed, he would "politely ask" Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua to explain and stop the activities.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lo-

renzana also on Tuesday admitted that China's activities in the South China Sea was "concerning."

"It's very concerning. In fact, they have been doing the building of islands [at] reefs since, I think, 2011 [or] 2012. So, it concerns us because they are encroaching our EEZ," he told reporters in Washington, D.C.

**RALPH U. VILLANUEVA
AND DEMPSEY REYES**

Ex-PH execs hit out at Chinese actions

By Rey E. Requejo

CHINESE officials led by President Xi Jinping have been committing crimes against humanity with their continued "atrocious actions" in the disputed South China Sea that hurt the livelihood and significantly diminished the food security of Filipino fishermen and their families, two former government officials said Tuesday.

Former Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario and retired Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales, who filed a case against Xi before the International Criminal Court,

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Ex-PH execs...

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said "unlawful actions" by Beijing showed that despite assurances to the contrary, the Chinese seek to take control and exert dominance over the disputed maritime territories.

"Even as now, with full accommodation being granted to Beijing by our government, we continue to be faced with unlawful actions from our northern neighbor, a modern-day Goliath, whose intentions and

activities are to force a doctrine of dominance and control on our region and beyond," the two former officials said, in a statement.

Notwithstanding the 2016 Philippine victory at The Hague, which ruled that China's claims to the South China Sea were excessive, China continues to do illegal dredging and artificial island building, which have degraded the marine environment and hurt the livelihood and food security of Filipino fishermen and their families.

"Today, our Filipino countrymen are increasingly focused on the presence of hundreds of Chinese vessels operating around Pag-asa that serves to harass, bully, and persecute our fishermen," they said.

"To our poor fishermen, however, Beijing's actions may be viewed as crimes against humanity, given that they are planned by the Chinese government, accepted by the Chinese government, and nothing is done by the Chinese government to stop these persistent inhumane actions against a civilian population of over 300,000 Filipino fishermen who appear helpless against a powerful Goliath," they said.

Del Rosario and Morales made the statement after Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua on Monday described as "fabrication" their complaint before the ICC.

DFA fires off 'salvo of diplomatic notes' vs China boats in WPS

FOREIGN Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. on Tuesday said the Philippine government served a "salvo of diplomatic notes" to China over the presence of Chinese vessels near the Pag-asa Island in the West Philippine Sea.

"Before going to [a] successful China visit, I fired off salvo of diplomatic notes so I would not be accused of insincerity if, as suggested, I fired them off after the visit, which is sioki [cowardly]," Locsin said in a post on Twitter.

The statement came after he was tagged and asked on Twitter to confirm if the country filed a diplomatic protest against China after more than a hundred vessels suspected to be Chinese militia were sighted near the Philippine-occu-

pied Pag-asa Island in the Kalayaan Island Group.

In a follow-up tweet, Locsin reiterated that he sent the notes verbales on the Chinese activity before his four-day official

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visit to China last month where he met with State Counselor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, his counterpart.

"I sent notes verbales versus swarming before my China trip. You have my word on it and that is all you all get," he said.

Locsin said the documents will not be made public.

In a recent television interview, Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo said the diplomatic note would ask the Chinese government what the vessels were doing there.

Panelo, who met with Chinese Ambassador to Manila Zhao Jinhua on Monday, said the envoy recommended raising the issue during the two states' Bilateral Consultation Mechanism meetings instead.

Meanwhile, a leftist lawmaker slammed Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Reforms Director Eduardo Gongona for warning that Filipino fishermen to avoid Panatag Shoal as it is occupied by Chinese vessels.

"Gongona just slapped his own face with his statement. Aside from obviously [surrendering] the claim of our country's waters, he is outright violating the mandate of his own office," Anakpawis party-list Rep. Airl Casilao said.

"Gongona just blabbered about not to execute Philippine laws in Panatag Shoal. Our government is very strict with Filipinos but very lax with the Chinese," Casilao said.

Maricel V. Cruz with PNA

Fishermen can stay, not militias

**Panatang Shoal open fishing
area for "both sides"**

Malacañang on Tuesday said Chinese fishermen can stay in disputed waters off Pag-asa Island, but not China's paramilitary forces, if indeed there is militia presence in the area.

In a televised interview, presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua has given the assurance that the people manning the vessels are "fishermen, not militia."

The Philippine military has reported the presence of Chinese vessels at the Panatang Shoal near Pag-asa Island.

Panelo stressed that Beijing and Manila had previously agreed that "fishermen should not be disturbed there, both sides."

"If they want to fish there, they can fish," said Panelo. "But the Chinese government, however, should stop it if indeed they have knowledge of these militiamen or fishermen staying there and watching us."

"They (militia) shouldn't be staying there because it raises apprehensions on the part of other fishermen," he added.

The presidential spokesman added China is already investigating the vessels and a video supposedly showing Filipino fishermen recently driven away from Scarborough Shoal.

"The Philippines has filed a *note verbale* over the presence of Chinese vessels off Pag-asa Island," Panelo said. "The document, now on the way to Chinese officials, will ask what are they (vessels) doing there and why are those fishermen stationary."

Elmer N. Manuel

'Artificial islands in SCS not work of magic'

BY ASHZEL HACHERO

FORMER Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario yesterday lashed back at Chinese Ambassador to Manila Zhao Jianhua for branding as a "fabrication" the communication that he and former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio Morales filed with the International Criminal Court related to the West Philippine Sea.

"How did those artificial islands get there if it's all fabrication? If China did not put those illegal struc-

tures up, who did?" Del Rosario said in an interview with ANC News.

Del Rosario said three of the artificial islands put up by Beijing are located in Fiery Cross Reef, Subi Reef and Mischief Reef which are within the country's 200-mile exclusive economic zone.

He said he could not comprehend how Zhao could say that the communication is a fabrication when the evidence speaks for itself.

"I think it's all magical if it's what

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ARTIFICIAL

he's saying because how did those artificial islands get there if it's all fabrication?" he asked.

Zhao has said the communication filed with the ICC was not based on facts and was purely a political move targeting the Chinese leadership. He also said the move was a misuse of the mandate of the ICC.

Del Rosario and Carpio-Morales has accused Chinese President Xi Jinping and other Chinese officials of committing crimes against humanity in the South China Sea, which they said involved or resulted to "massive near-permanent, and devastating environmental damage in the area and across nations."

They claimed China's actions in the South China Sea has caused serious injury to Filipino fishermen and future generations of inhabitants of the coastal countries in the SCS by accelerating the collapse of fisheries stocks.

In the same interview, Del Rosario and Morales said Filipinos will never allow the country to become subservient or a province of China.

"The Filipinos cannot be cowed into getting such kind of state, so I don't think the country will ever become a province of China," Morales said.

Del Rosario said the government should do more to ensure that such a thing would not happen, adding that it is difficult to gauge the government's response every time China is involved whether it is still speaking for the country or the other.

"Sometimes, when there's an issue involving China, it's difficult to decipher when our people speak, whether they're speaking for the Philippines or whether they're speaking for China. But I think we should work on ensuring that the Philippines, for the sake of our children and our grandchildren, does not become a province of China," he explained.

Del Rosario urged current Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. to inform President Duterte about China's increasing militarization in the SCS so the government can do more to protect its interests.

"I think Teddy Boy (DFA Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr.) is independent-minded with no political agenda so he would be the perfect person to convince the President that this is what we should do," Del Rosario said.

He said contrary to those who say that the country has no capability to deal with Beijing, there are options that Manila can use to defend its claim and stop the militarization of the area.

"We are not without solutions, we are not without options. We have many allies who are just waiting on what we will do since they are also concerned about what is happening in the area," he said, adding that one option is "to bring the case to the United Nations General Assembly."

Morales said Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo was "misinformed" when he claimed that the communication filed with the ICC was a "futile exercise."

"He was misinformed or he misread it at all the Rome Statute. A crime was committed within the territory of the Philippines at a time when it was still a member of the Rome Statute so whether the perpetrator belongs to a country which is a member of the Rome Statute is immaterial," Morales said as she insisted on the ICC's jurisdiction over the issue.

"What is material is that the person committed a crime within the Philippine territory when it was still a member of the Rome Statute," she added.

The Philippines' withdrawal from the ICC became official last March 17.

Del Rosario echoed Morales' remarks saying the ICC does not distinguish between the rankings or influence of an individual but rather on the crime committed.

"The ICC does not recognize the ranking or importance of an individual, without any regard whether he is a president, prime minister or a king as long as a crime is committed against the Philippines when it was still a member of the Rome Statute. That is the material thing, that is the most important," Del Rosario said.

The two expressed confidence on the outcome of their communication, citing the country's success in the case that it filed in 2013 with the Permanent Court of Arbitration challenging Beijing's massive claim over the SCS.

Del Rosario said at that time nobody believed that the country will file the case which it eventually won in 2016 with the arbitral tribunal invalidating China's nine-dash line claim.

"Our tasks are well-defined. It is about charging China's highest officials of crime against human-

ity, crime against our fishermen. I think we are on track on coming up with something that makes sense, we have done this before, we can do this now," he said.

"We can prove that damage to marine environment is so serious, it will take millions of years to have it restored. Crimes against humanity is applicable here because we're going after individuals," he added.

He stressed that Xi and the other respondents planned and accepted the plan, that they did not stop it and they identified a certain segment of the population that will endure the suffering for their actions.

Senate minority leader Franklin Drilon welcomed Zhao's commitment that Chinese nationals working in the country will comply with our laws.

In a statement, Drilon said it is expected that Chinese or any other foreigners working in the country have to follow local laws just like Filipinos who follow the law of the country in which they are working at.

"We agree that in enforcing our laws, these workers should be treated professionally. Foreign nationals working in the Philippines, whether from China or elsewhere, are expected to follow our laws, just as our OFWs follow the rules of the country where they work," Drilon said.

"Hence, I support the move of Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III to form an inter-agency body to determine the number of foreign workers in the country, including those in the POGO (Philippine Offshore Gaming Operator) industry, in order to ensure that they possess a valid alien employment permit and pay income taxes as required by our laws," he added.

In his visit to Malacanang Palace on Monday, Chinese Ambassador to the Philippine Zhao Jianhua said China will let Philippines deal with illegal Chinese workers in accordance with our laws but asked that authorities should also consider their "humanitarian needs."

Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian, chairman of the Senate committee on economic affairs, urged the Department of Labor and Employment and the Bureau of Immigration to step up the campaign against illegal foreign workers who are taking away jobs from ordinary Filipinos amid reports of sightings of foreign workers even on private construction sites. — *With Raymond Africa*

DFA: Diplomatic protest vs China still 'on the way'

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR
and ASHZEL HACHERO

CHIEF Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo yesterday said the Philippines is still in the process of filing a diplomatic protest, contrary to his statement on Monday that government has filed one against China over the presence of hundreds of Chinese vessels near Pag-asa Island in the West Philippine Sea.

Panelo, in an interview with ANC TV and later in a press briefing in Malacañang, said he asked Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro

Locsin Jr. about it after a Cabinet meeting in Malacañang on Monday night, and the latter told him it was already "on the way."

He said Locsin also said what was to be filed was a "note verbale."

"That (filing of diplomatic protest) was what the Western Command said. Perhaps they were already assured that such will be filed," Panelo said.

He also said there is not much difference between a note verbale and a diplomatic protest because the important thing is the Philippines

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is "taking issue" on the presence of Chinese vessels around the Pag-asa island as well as the issue of some Filipino fishermen who are allegedly being turned away by the Chinese from their traditional fishing areas in the West Philippine Sea.

Locsin yesterday said he will file a diplomatic protest against the presence of hundreds of Chinese vessels around Pag-asa island if there is a major difference between a diplomatic protest and a note verbale.

"I don't see the difference between notes verbale and diplomatic protests. If there is a major difference, Sal (Panelo), I will thenceforth file diplomatic protests," Locsin said.

Locsin reiterated his point that filing a note verbale would not really address the problem.

"Exactly what I was saying when I made light of notes as throwing paper at a brick wall. But then no one has ever gone to war over fishing except when it was an excuse for a bigger strategic purpose so

that fishing violation or not they have an excuse to go to war," he said.

A note verbale is a formal record of information delivered orally, is written in the third person, and not signed.

A diplomatic protest, in written form, is filed to object to actions by a foreign government and to put on record the country's stand on a certain matter.

If and when a diplomatic protest is filed, Locsin also said it will not be made public.

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PH can raise China issue to UN

The government can raise the country's maritime case against China before the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, according to a Palace official.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo has agreed with former Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario that elevating the arbitral ruling on the South China Sea issue before the UN could be among the government's options in asserting the country's territorial sovereignty.

"The arbitral ruling is there permanently. They cannot remove that from us but the problem is it appears that one we cannot enforce simply because we don't have the might," Panelo said during a Palace press briefing.

"So ano next step kung wala

mangyari? Siguro we are member of the United Nations and there are cases where certain issue that happens in a particular country that affects humanity are raised. In the general assembly tapos General Assembly makes a unified action siguro baka 'yun," he said.

Asked if the government will ask the UN to intervene, Panelo said it was up to President Duterte to make the decision.

"I'm giving you what I thought could be done," he said. "Isa 'yan sa mga pwede gawin natin," he added.

For now, Panelo said the government has decided to pursue dialogue instead of waging war with China to address the dispute in the West Philippine Sea. He said the country must face "reality "

that both nations have conflicting claims and that the arbitral award could not be enforced.

"I don't think the President, this President will risk lives of soldiers going there and declaring war. number two, the US also appears not to be interested in enforcing it. Neither is the United Nations," he added.

In July 2016, the Hague-based arbitration court ruled that China has no legal or historical basis to claim rights over resource-rich South China Sea. The United Nations-recognized tribunal said China breached the sovereign rights of the Philippines by building artificial islands, interfering with its fishing and oil projects. Beijing however has refused to recognize the decision. **(Genalyn Kabiling)**

Bets told: No donating to Church during campaign

By SHEILA CRISOSTOMO

Candidates in the May 13 elections have been warned against giving donations including to churches during the campaign period, the Commission on Elections (Comelec) said yesterday.

Comelec Commissioner Luie Guia said all candidates seeking local and national positions are reminded to comply with Section 104 of the Omnibus Election Code, which regulates donations.

"Beware! This is one of the most important, yet ignored provisions of the Omnibus Election Code," Guia said on Twitter.

The law prohibits poll candidates including their spouses, relatives, campaign

managers or representatives from donating cash or in kind to churches.

It however allows normal and customary religious dues or contributions such as stipends or tithes during Sundays or other designated collection days as well as periodic payments for legitimate scholarships and school contributions habitually made before the prohibited period.

Comelec spokesman James Jimenez said the prohibition covers donations in large amounts.

"For example, if a church is in need of a new facility or a new wing in its building and a candidate offers to shoulder its construction in exchange for their votes. It is like using

it as a church charity," Jimenez said.

He said giving tithes or basket offerings to churches are not covered by the prohibition.

Violators will face one to six years imprisonment, disqualification from public office and removal of the right to vote.

Absentee voting

More than 34,000 individuals have been allowed to vote under the Local Absentee Voting (LAV) system for this coming elections.

Data showed the Comelec approved 34,693 applications for LAV. Of the figure, 21,488 are personnel of the Philippine Army; 8,501 from the Philippine National Police, and 2,335 from the Philippine Air Force.

Others applicants approved for the LAV are personnel of the Department of Education with 769; Philippine Navy, 466; Comelec, 322; Philippine Coast Guard, 176, and Bureau of Jail Management and Penology with 150.

One personnel each of the National Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Fire Protection and Department of Labor and Employment availed themselves of LAV.

There are 481 members of the media who applied and approved to vote under LAV.

The Comelec disapproved 5,739 applications for failing to meet the deadline.

Comelec Resolution No. 10443 provides that absentee voters can cast their votes from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. from April 29

to 30 and May 1.

The LAV allows some sectors to cast their votes for national posts ahead of the actual election day as they have to perform election-related duties.

For the coming polls, LAV voters will be able to vote only for national posts such as senators and party-list groups.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) will monitor the implementation of its programs during the election period to ensure it will not be used by politicians.

The DSWD said it will not stop implementing its programs and assured the public that these will not be used for campaign purposes.

The Comelec has issued a

resolution granting a petition of the DSWD to be exempted from the prohibition against the release, disbursement or expenditure of public funds during the election period as provided under the Omnibus Election Code.

The exemption covers the payout of the cash grants for the beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program and the implementation of the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation.

The DSWD also requested for an authority to continue its ongoing disaster relief, recovery and rehabilitation efforts, and to undertake possible relief, early recovery and rehabilitation efforts during the election period.

— With Janvic Mateo

New apartments turned over to airmen

By FRANCIS WAKEFIELD

The Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) on Monday turned over newly built apartments in San Fernando City, La Union, to airmen of the Philippine Air Force (PAF) 580th Aircraft Control and Warning Wing (ACWW) and their families.

The size of each of the 15-door airmen's apartments was doubled from their previous 60 square meters to 120 square me-

ters. Each apartment has three bedrooms with built-in cabinets, storage and laundry areas, and a garage for two cars.

Representing Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Assistant Secretary for Financial Management Josue Gaverza Jr. said the turnover was a "clear demonstration of the shared commitment of the BCDA and the AFP to serve as catalysts in transforming military bases and installations into centers of development and economic activities." 9

Airmen get upgraded housing units

The upgraded housing facilities were intended for members of the PAF's 580th Aircraft Control and Warning Wing

By Mario J. Mallari

In line with President Rodrigo Duterte's promise of better housing units for men in uniform, the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) on Monday turned over newly upgraded facilities to the Philippine Air Force (PAF) in La Union.

BCDA president and chief executive officer lawyer Vince Dizon said the turnover of the 15-door apartment units to the PAF is part of the Duterte administration's commitment to uplift the living conditions of all servicemen.

The upgraded housing facilities were intended for members of the PAF's 580th Aircraft Control and Warning Wing based in San Fernando City and their families.

"It's saddening that our

soldiers are being sheltered inside old and dilapidated houses. That is why the BCDA, under the leadership of President Duterte, changed that. We promise to bring much better facilities in the future," Dizon said.

The size of each of the 15-door airmen's apartments was doubled from their previous 60-square-meter housing to 120 square meters. Each unit has three bedrooms with built-in cabinets, storage and laundry areas, and a garage for two cars.

The detention cell inside the Wallace Air Station was also expanded from just nine square meters to 40 square meters. BCDA also constructed a 700-meter concrete pavement with drainage and a one-kilometer asphalt road.

Aside from the detention facility, security was further enhanced with other improved structures such as the guard house and shed, and gate boom.

Defense

Assistant Secretary for Financial Management Josue Gaverza Jr., who represented Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana during the turnover, thanked BCDA for its continuous support to the Department of National Defense.

"This is a clear demonstration of the shared commitment of the BCDA and the AFP to serve as catalysts in transforming military bases and installations into centers of development and economic activities," said Gaverza.

Gaverza commended the quality and speedy implementation of the upgraded facilities.

"This reflects BCDA's resolve and willingness to improve the living conditions of soldiers anywhere in the country," he said.

"We look forward to more partnerships and cooperative endeavors with BCDA as we expect the government and President Duterte's leadership to impart more development projects," Gaverza said.

Meanwhile, Air Force chief Lt. Gen. Rozzano Briguez cited the BCDA as an "indispensable partner" for contributing P8.2 billion to the AFP Modernization Program during the first two years of the Duterte administration.



CUSTOMS CHIEF INTENSIFIES DRIVE VS ZAMBASULTA SMUGGLERS

ZAMBOANGA CITY: The Bureau of Customs (BoC) top official has directed fast local agency personnel to further intensify the all-out campaign against smuggling, including illegal drugs, in the areas of Zamboanga, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi or ZamBaSulTa. Customs Commissioner Rey Leonardo Guerrero was in the city recently for the arrival ceremony of the Philippine Coast Guard's (PCG) BRP Malamawi, a modern 24-meter fast patrol boat for use by the BoC in its anti-smuggling and anti-drug trafficking operations. Late last year, Guerrero said, the BoC signed a memorandum of agreement with the PCG and the Armed Forces of the Philippines to strengthen the bureau's anti-smuggling drive in the country's southern parts. He also commended Zamboanga BoC district collector Segundo Barte Jr. for his satisfactory performance, particularly in upgrading the bureau's collection of duties and taxes, as well as the anti-trafficking campaign in their area of operation. Barte was optimistic that BRP Malamawi would greatly assist his office in carrying out the bureau's objectives, even as he assured that the new fast patrol vessel would go a long way "in eliminating or minimizing entry of smuggled goods in the region." A7

ANTONIO P. RIMANDO

PH, US reaffirm 'enduring' alliance

DEFENSE Secretary Delfin Lorenzana met with acting US Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan in Washington, D.C. on Monday, reaffirming the "enduring" alliance between the two countries through discussion of bilateral issues.

Charles Summers, the Pentagon's chief spokesman, said Lorenzana and Shanahan tackled a "broad range" of defense issues and "mutual steps" that would further strengthen the ties between the Philippines and the US.

"They agreed on the need to increase inter-operability between our perspective militaries, through exercises, training and US support for the Armed Forces of the Philippines' modernization plans," Summers said in a statement.

He said Lorenzana and Shanahan also affirmed their commitments to fighting terrorism in the southeast Asian region.

Summers thanked Lorenzana for providing continuous support to the alliance "and for his role in

advancing our shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

During an interview after Lorenzana was welcomed to the Pentagon, he said he believed that the relationship between Manila and Washington would "continue to develop" under Shanahan's leadership at the US Department of Defense.

"Our alliance has remained strong despite the complex dynamics due to environment that is evolving all over the world. This has been made possible due to close engagement that our countries have maintained throughout the years, to ensure that our alliance remains responsive to challenges," the Philippine defense chief said.

"To keep the momentum, we need to continue assessing the arrangements, we have to ensure that to enable us to attain our mutual interest. My department will continue to work closely with your side in this regard,"

Lorenzana added.

He encouraged defense officials from the US and the Philippines to consult each other through existing dialogue mechanisms "to include but not limited" to the Philippines and the US' Bilateral Strategic Dialogue and the Mutual Defense Board Security Engagement Board (MDB-SEB), which is being held every year.

Lorenzana cited the "steady progress" of the implementation of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, including the completion of projects in Basa Air Base in Floridablanca, Pampanga.

He mentioned the 35th iteration of the *Balikatan* (shoulder-to-shoulder) exercises between Philippine and American forces, which opened officially on Monday in Manila, encouraging planners to come up with various ways in ensuring drills address training needs of both militaries.

A2 **DEMPSEY REYES**

Lorenzana meets with US counterpart, reaffirms alliance

BY VICTOR REYES

DEFENSE Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and his United States counterpart, Patrick Shanahan, have agreed to step up interoperability between the two armed forces during a meeting in Washington on Monday.

Pentagon spokesman Charles Summers Jr. said the two defense chiefs met "to reaffirm the enduring alliance between the United States and the Philippines and to discuss bilateral issues in the relationship.

"The two leaders discussed a broad range of defense issues and mutual steps to strengthen the alliance," said Summers.

The US and the Philippines forged a Mutual Defense Treaty in 1951.

"They agreed on the need to increase interoperability between our respective militaries, through exercises, training, and US support for the Armed Forces of the Philippines' modernization plans," said Summers.

The US has been conducting exercises with Filipino forces over

the past decades to improve interoperability in addressing external and internal security threats and humanitarian assistance disaster relief.

"Secretary Shanahan and Secretary Lorenzana affirmed their common commitment to fighting terrorism in Southeast Asia," added Summers.

Summers said Shanahan thanked Lorenzana "for his continued support to the alliance, and for his role in advancing our shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific."

In a statement issued prior to his

meeting with Shanahan, Lorenzana said the Philippine and US defense relations "will continue to develop" to meet security challenges that the two countries face.

"To keep the momentum, we need to continue assessing the arrangements we have to ensure that, to enable us to attain our mutual interest. My department will continue to work closely with your side in this regard," said Lorenzana.

Lorenzana noted the conduct of this year's Balikatan exercise which

commenced on Monday, adding the two-week exercise is meant to bolster interoperability between Filipino and American forces.

"As such I encourage our planners to come up with ways to ensure that the Balikatan exercise addresses the training needs of both armed forces. Furthermore, allow me to reaffirm the agreement between both sides to ensure that all our activities are of high value and great impact as well as mutually beneficial," he added.

Lorenzana urged officials from both sides to continue dialogue with each other, through the established mechanisms such as the Mutual Defense Board and Security Engagement Board. B3

Lorenzana also expressed gratitude to the US for its continued support in the campaign against terrorism. He said he hopes the counter-terrorism cooperation to be sustained "through real-time information sharing, intelligence exchange and training."

PCSO donates P86 million for AFP's treatment facilities

THE Armed Forces of the Philippines formally received checks amounting to P85,946,975 from the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office Monday.

The donation is under the PCSO's AFP/PNP Health Capability Program, military public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato said.

The turnover of the checks took place at the PCSO Conservatory Building, Shaw Boulevard, Mandaluyong City.

Detoyato said the money will be distributed to eight selected AFP military treatment facilities.

"On behalf of the whole AFP, we humbly accept this donation through the benevolent initiative of Mr. Anselmo Simeon Pinili, Chairman of PCSO and (former general manager) Maj. Gen. Alexander Balutan (Ret). Thank you for acknowledging the

hardships of our soldiers and for easing our struggles through your own simple way," AFP Chief-of-Staff Benjamin Madrigal Jr. said in his speech read by Rear Admiral Jande S. Francisco, Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications, Electronics and Information Systems Service AFP.

The collaboration between the PCSO, the AFP, and the PNP started in 2018 with the mission to improve the capabilities of our military and police medical facilities to enable them to provide quality health care services to its mandated and expanded clientele.

The PCSO has always been ready to assist the AFP through donations in times of calamities. They also delivered medicines and bottled water to evacuation centers in Marawi and

Iligan City back in 2017. In the same year, they donated P102 million for the upgrade of medical facilities, and another P1 million as additional funding for the scholar-dependents of AFP personnel through the AFP Educational Benefit System Office.

In 2018, the PCSO donated P5 million worth of endowment fund to the Veterans Medical Center in Quezon City, aside from other programs.

"Today, we are again fortunate and truly grateful in receiving the PCSO donation intended for the capability upgrade of selected AFP medical treatment facilities," Madrigal said.

"These acts of generosity shall continuously serve as motivation and inspiration for our troops to carry on with our mission of protecting the people and our nation," he added. PNA

30,000 absentee voting applications okayed

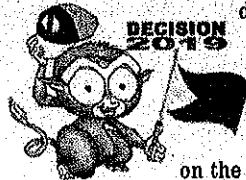
By Raymart T. Lolo

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) on Monday said it approved over 30,000 applications for local absentee voting relative to the scheduled May midterm elections.

Of the 34,693 total approved applications, about 21,488 were members of the Philippine Army, 8,501 were Philippine National Police personnel and 2,335 were members of the Philippine Air Force.

Also getting approvals were personnel from various government offices and members of the media.

Some 6,000 applications, however, were turned down due to late filing.



State employees, members of the police and military and media practitioners may avail of the privilege as they may not be able to vote on the actual election day.

HONORING WAR HEROES

HUKBALAHAP MONUMENT TO RISE IN ECIJA TOWN

By Tonette Orejas
@ttorejasINQ

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—A park in Cabiao town, Nueva Ecija province, will soon host a monument honoring the Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (Hukbalahap), a peasant-led army that fought the invading Japanese forces during World War II.

It was in Cabiao where the resistance army was formed on March 29, 1942. The town government has committed to reserve a land for the monument planned by Holy Angel University's Center for Kapampangan Studies (CKS), said Robby Tantingco, CKS executive director.

The park spans 2,000 square meters at Barangay Sta. Rita. Many Huks belonging to Squadron 55 had settled in the village, according to Jose Hipolito, the town's planning and development officer and nephew of several Huks.

Unsung heroes

"Local government officials of Cabiao showed me the development area where two monuments will be put up—one for a local hero and another for the Hukbalahap," Tantingco said.

"Finally, we will have a monument for the unsung heroes of World War II. The Holy Angel University has committed to help Cabiao build this war memorial."

The National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP) earlier installed a marker at a public elementary school in Cabiao in 2017 for the 75th founding anniversary of Hukbalahap.

According to the NHCP, the subvillage of Bawit in Barangay Bagong Silang (then called San Julian) was the birthplace of Hukbalahap, which it described as a "big and successful guerrilla movement in Central Luzon and

other parts of North Luzon."

Bawit was part of a forest in Mt. Arayat which the Japanese set on fire to flush out guerrillas.

Communist link

Hukbalahap fought 2,000 battles against the Japanese Imperial Army in a war that claimed 20,000 lives between 1942 and 1945. Japan surrendered to allied forces on Sept. 2, 1945.

Cabiao is near Arayat town in Pampanga. The Kapampangan language is still spoken there.

During the Huk's 77th anniversary this year, representatives of the old Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) honored the former guerrillas. The CPP, founded in 1930, merged with the Socialist Party of the Philippines and formed the Hukbalahap. It later became the Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan.

Tantingco said the Huks' affiliation with the communists and socialists was the excuse the Philippine and United States governments used to deny them their recognition as war heroes and their pension after the war.

Only the Banal Regiment was recognized for its ties to the United States Armed Forces in the Far East. The Philippine Veterans Affairs Office has reproduced and put online the Philippine archives collection, which included guerrilla files.

Surviving Huks fought hard to claim their war pensions, which the government began releasing in 1976 although the amounts, they said, were a pittance.

The CKS has campaigned for the national recognition of the Hukbalahap's heroism. It co-hosted a national conference for the 75th anniversary of World War II in the Philippines and produced the movie "Aria," a story of a Huk commander who struggled to get back her pension. INQ

Reds tagged in slay of Negros councilor nabbed

BACOLOD CITY — A New People's Army (NPA) leader and 13 other communist rebels were arrested in Isabela, Negros Occidental on Monday.

Four of those arrested were identified by witnesses as the perpetrators of the murder of Councilor Jolomar Hilario of Moises Padilla town on Sunday.

Capt. Junji Liba, town police chief, said the suspects were with a group of rebels intercepted by personnel of the 2nd Provincial Mobile Force Company in Barangay Sebucawan.

He said three land mines, including detonating devices, ammunition for an M203 grenade launcher and magazines for an AK47 rifle were among those recovered from the suspects.

Brig. Gen. Benedict Arevalo, 303rd Infantry Brigade commander, said Abraham Villanueva, secretary of the NPA's Armando Sumayang

Command, Rona Magbanua and Jomar Villarojo were apprehended following an encounter in Sitio Amian Ilawod, Barangay Tampalon, Kabankalan City.

Arevalo said the rebels yielded a .45-caliber pistol, two rifles, ammunition, fragmentation grenades, a laptop and a binocular.

Also in Negros Occidental, NPA guerrillas burned farm equipment and the bunkhouses of workers at Hacienda Nieva in Barangay Tooy, Himamaylan City.

Four tractors, a 10-wheeler truck and a sugar cane loader owned by Miguel Hinojales were set on fire, Lt. Col. Ervin Glen Provideo, city police chief, said.

Police said around 30 communist guerrillas raided the compound.

Bullets and bullet shells for an M16 rifle and two empty gallons of gasoline were recovered at the scene.

12 — Gilbert Bayoran

NPA leader, 2 others fall in Negros Occidental

Clashes also erupt in cities of Kabankalan and Himamaylan

By Carla P. Gomez
@carlagomezINQ

BACOLOD CITY—A high-ranking leader of the New People's Army (NPA) in Negros Occidental province and his two companions were arrested on Monday night by a team of policemen and soldiers in Kabankalan City.

Brig. Gen. Benedict Arevalo, 303rd Infantry Brigade commander, said the rebel leader, Abraham Villanueva, secretary of the NPA Southwest Front, or the Armando Sumayang Command, had pending arrest warrants for arson and frustrated murder.

Villanueva is also known by his aliases "Tikboy" and "Gamay." Arrested with him were Rona Magbanua, alias "Cheche," 18, of Hinobaan town, and Jomar Villarojo, alias "Tiny," 28, of Kabankalan.

Magbanua, known as Cheche, is the finance and logistics officer of Southwest Front Platoon 1, while Villarojo, known as Tiny, is among the NPA's fighters, said Lt. Col. Patricio Tomales, 15th Infantry Battalion commander, said.

Seized from the group were a .45-caliber pistol and three fragmentation grenades.

Armed men

Their arrest came six days after former Catholic priest Frank Fernandez, Kometing Rehiyonal-Negros head and National Democratic Front of the Philippines consultant, was arrested with his wife and another companion in Laguna province.

Arevalo said they received a tip about the presence of armed men at Sitio Amian Ilawod in Barangay Tampalon, Kabankalan. When govern-



TOP REBEL Police say Abraham Villanueva (right), secretary of the New People's Army's Southwest Front (Armando Sumayang Command), has pending arrest warrants for arson and frustrated murder. Seized from Villanueva and his companions, Jomar Villarojo and Rona Magbanua, during their arrest in Kabankalan City were a gun and hand grenades. —CARLA P. GOMEZ

ment troops went to the village, they saw the three wearing shirts marked "PKP @50," which were used by rebels to mark the NPA's 50th founding anniversary.

Arevalo said Villanueva and his companions did not resist arrest.

A 20-minute clash, however, ensued early on Tuesday in the area when soldiers and policemen encountered a group of NPA rebels who were believed to be companions of Villanueva.

Recovered from the clash site were an M16 rifle, bullets, cellular phones, electronic gadgets, a transistor radio, a pair of binoculars, medical kit and antigovernment documents.

Hacienda attack

Police said another group of NPA rebels on Tuesday burned four tractors, a truck, a sugar-

cane loader and bunk houses of farm workers at Hacienda Nieva in Barangay Tooy, Himamaylan City, about 28 kilometers north of Kabankalan.

Police Lt. Col. Ervin Glen Provideo, Himamaylan City police chief, said about 30 armed rebels attacked the hacienda and gathered 20 farm workers in one place, before they started burning the vehicles and equipment.

The hacienda's lone security guard escaped and reported the incident to the police.

The suspects, who identified themselves as NPA rebels, fired their guns as they left, Provideo said.

On Monday, more than 1,700 people evacuated after a clash between government soldiers and rebels broke out at Barangay Quintin Remo in Moises Padilla town.

A soldier was hurt while

three improvised bombs were recovered after the exchange of gunfire between soldiers and about 20 NPA rebels believed to be among those who shot and killed reelectionist Moises Padilla Councilor Jolomar Hilario in neighboring Barangay Inolingon on Sunday.

Graduation ceremonies in some schools in the remote village of Quintin Remo were disrupted by the skirmishes.

At least 1,700 residents in the subvillages of Santos-Santos, Lomlom and Upper Mamballo fled their homes.

Farming, tourism suspension

In Mountain Province, all farming and tourism activities had been suspended in Bauko town on Monday due to pursuit operations conducted by the police against communist rebels who killed a policeman and wounded another during a March 29 clash at Mt. Kapuwaw.

Arsenia Addon, Bauko tourism officer, advised residents to "confine their activities to barangay centers or populated areas," and to steer clear of the rugged mountains straddling Bauko and Tadian town in Mountain Province, and parts of Buguias town in Benguet province.

On Sunday, residents reported hearing gunfire and explosions in the borders of Bauko and Tadian.

Members of the NPA Leonardo Pacsi Command fled toward this area after engaging the Cordillera police's Regional Mobile Force Battalion in a 15-minute firefight in Bagnen village.

Pat. Wilfredo Padawil was killed in the clash that injured Police Cpl. Irpeel Lapniten. —WITH A REPORT FROM KARLSTON LAPNITEN INQ

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Albayalde relieves Negros Oriental provincial director, 3 police chiefs

By MARTIN A. SADONGDONG

The commander of the Negros Oriental Provincial Police Office (PPO) and the police chiefs of Canlaon City, Manjuyod, and Sta. Catalina towns were relieved administratively on Tuesday by Philippine National Police (PNP) chief General Oscar Albayalde following a police operation that resulted in the death of 14 individuals.

Relieved were Police Colonel Raul Tacaca, provincial director of the Negros Oriental Provincial Police Office; Police Lieutenant Colonel Patricio Degay, chief of Canlaon City Police Station; Police Lieutenant Kevin Roy Mamaradlo, chief of Manjuyod Municipal Police Station; and Police Captain Michael Rubia, chief of Sta. Catalina Municipal Police Station.

"I would like to emphasize that their relief is not a punitive measure for alleged actions or inactions rather it is an administrative relief to ensure that they will not be able to exert any influence in the ongoing investigation," Albayalde said in a press briefing in Camp Crame, Quezon City.

"The purpose of the fact ►4

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Albayalde relieves...

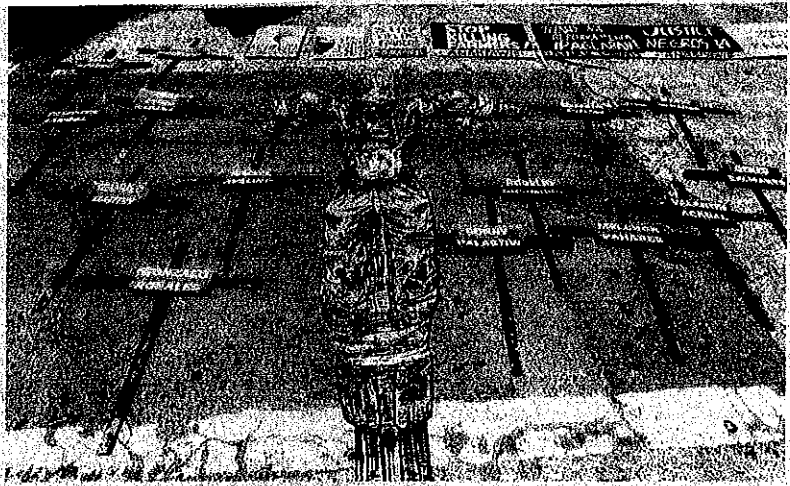
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finding investigation is to determine whether there were any lapses in the series of police operations carried out by the local police units involved and whether or not the rules prescribed in the Revised Police Operations Procedures were properly observed," he added.

Citing intelligence information from the Negros PPO, the 14 victims were earlier tagged as members of the Special Partisan Unit (SPARU) of the New People's Army (NPA).

But this was denied by the Leonardo Panaligan Command (LPC-NPA) based in Negros Oriental which claimed that eight of those killed were farmers while the rest were civilians.

Although Albayalde maintained the presumption of regularity in the police operations, he said the Internal Affairs Service (IAS) and Directorate for



PROTEST OVER NEGROS KILLINGS— Crosses representing the 14 individuals killed in Negros Oriental lay on the ground during a demonstration outside the PNP headquarters in Camp Crame, Quezon City, Tuesday. Human rights activists claim the 14 were victims of a massacre, while the police insist they were killed during anti-drug operations. (EPA-EFE/Rolox de la Pena)

Investigation and Detective Management (DIDM) have already conducted a motu proprio investigation to determine whether the policemen involved in the operations committed lapses.

In a separate press briefing, PNP spokesperson Colonel Bernard Banac said they are ready to face any investigation that would be conducted by rights and advocacy groups.

Ping on Negros slays: Hear police's side

By CALVIN CORDOVA

CEBU CITY — The Philippine National Police (PNP) should be given a chance to prove that the 14 persons said to be the victims of a massacre in Negros Oriental were killed in legitimate po-

lice operations, Sen. Panfilo Lacson said Tuesday.

"Let's give our police a chance to prove their claims that what happened were legitimate police operations," said Lacson, who visited the Central Visayas Police headquarters to turn over the equipment that the PNP

Foundation Inc. donated to regional police.

"Investigations by different bodies are ongoing. The Commission on Human Rights, the Internal Affairs Service of the PNP and the National Police Commission are investigating and the Department of Justice may

come in," he said.

The Central Visayas police insists that those who were killed while exchanging fire with the police were either members or supporters of the New People's Army (NPA).

Sixteen persons were also arrested when police served 36 search warrants

as part of its campaign against loose firearms in the third district of Negros Oriental.

Lacson, a former PNP Chief, said the public should not be quick to judge the police.

"Let's not be swayed by propaganda. If you have noticed, those who are making noise are the front organizations (of the NPA)," he said.

The senator wondered why those who got killed were keeping firearms.

"When farmers possess firearms, fragmentation grenade and there were also handheld radios, what are those indicatives? Maybe they were farmers in the morning but in the evening, they armed and they extort," said Lacson.

Eight of the fatalities were from Canlaon City, four from Manjuyod town and two from Sta. Catalina.

"Sta. Catalina is a hotbed of insurgency since three decades ago and nothing has changed," said Lacson.

Instead of condemning them right away, the policemen involved in the operations should be provided with the needed support, Lacson said.

4 top cops sacked over Negros 14

By Francisco Tuyay

THE National Police Command relieved four police officers whose men were involved in anti-criminality operations that left 14 individuals dead in Negros Oriental, with local officials evacuating 1,700 residents of different villages in Moises Padilla to get them off any crossfire.

PNP chief Oscar Albayalde identified the police officers as Negros Oriental Provincial Police Office director Col. Raul Tacaca, chiefs of police Lt. Col. Patricio Degay (Canlaon City Police Station), Lt. Kevin Roy Mamaraldo (Manjuyod Municipal Police Station) and Capt. Michael Rubia (Sta Catalina Municipal Police Station).

Albayalde said the relief would give way

to an impartial investigation into the death of 14 suspects during the operations.

In related developments:

- The Human Rights Watch on Tuesday called for an impartial and independent probe on the killings.

"A prompt, impartial and independent investigation into the Negros Oriental killings is desperately needed. Concerned governments, particularly European Un-

ion countries that have supported criminal justice reform in the Philippines, should be raising their concerns loud and clear over the deteriorating situation," HRW Asia division researcher Carlos Conde said in a statement.

"With appropriate assurances, they also might want to offer direct assistance and expertise for an independent investigation," Conde added.

- The Department of the Interior and Local Government vowed to provide the "best legal defense" to the policemen who were involved in the operations.

"We stand by our police officers and we will provide them with the best legal defense to help them overcome whatever legal challenges that may arise as a result of several operations,"

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año said in a statement.

Año underscored that the police operations were legitimate as they were all covered by search warrants, adding that subjects of the operation had engaged authorities in an encounter.

"Our law enforcers acted professionally and in accordance with the law during the conduct of police operations in Negros Oriental. They simply returned fire when the subject of the search warrants engaged them in a shootout," he said.

- Soldiers of the Philippine Army's 62nd Infantry Battalion encountered about 30 communist rebels, whose group was believed behind the murder of Moises Padilla Councilor Jolomar Hilario on Sunday. With PNA A2

Año backs beleaguered Negros cops

Police said the fatalities were suspected members of the special partisan unit of the New People's Army

By Elmer N. Manuel with
Kathleen Mae Bulquerin

The Negros Oriental policemen who conducted a series of anti-criminality operations over the weekend that resulted in the death of 14 individuals and arrest of 15 others, received a much-needed moral boost after Interior Secretary Eduardo Año yesterday expressed his support to them.

"We stand by our police officers and we will provide them with the best legal team to help them overcome whatever legal challenges that may arise as a result of several Negros Oriental operations," Año said.

The lawmen found themselves in the middle of controversy after human rights advocates claimed that those killed were not criminals but peaceful residents and peasant leaders in their respective communities.

Col. Raul Tacaca, the erstwhile police provincial director, said eight were killed in Canlaon City, four in Manjuyod and two in Sta Catalina town.

A policeman, identified as Cpl. Ian Puerto of the regional mobile force battalion, was wounded during the operations.

Police said the fatalities were suspected members of the special partisan unit of the New People's Army

(NPA) who resisted arrest during the service of search warrants for illegal possession of firearms and explosives.

The operations came a day after the NPA marked its 50th founding anniversary.

Recovered from the suspects were rifle-fired and fragmentation grenades, handguns, shotguns, various types of ammunition and subversive documents.

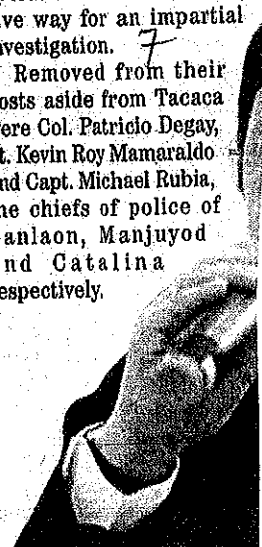
"Our law enforcers acted professionally and in accordance with the law during the conduct of police operations in Negros Oriental," Año said.

He added that the policemen were armed with search warrants issued by the Negros Oriental Regional Trial Court.

Meanwhile, Director General Oscar Albayalde yesterday ordered the relief of the police chiefs in areas where the

operations were conducted, to give way for an impartial investigation.

Removed from their posts aside from Tacaca were Col. Patricio Degay, Lt. Kevin Roy Mamaraldo and Capt. Michael Rubia, the chiefs of police of Canlaon, Manjuyod and Catalina respectively.



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Negros police chief sacked over 'massacre'

BY VICTOR REYES

PNP chief Gen. Oscar Albayalde yesterday ordered the relief of the Negros Oriental police director and three city and town police chiefs over last Saturday's series of anti-crime operations that left 14 farmers who are alleged communist rebels dead.

Albayalde said the administrative relief of the officials was not punitive in nature but merely meant to pave the way for an impartial investigation on the incident that leftist groups claimed was a massacre.

Relieved were Negros Oriental provincial police director Col. Raul Tacaca, Canlaon City police chief Lt. Col. Patricio Degay, Sta. Catalina town police chief Capt. Michael Rubia, and Manjuyod town police chief Lt. Kelvin Roy Mamaradlo.

Albayalde said he is leaving it up to Central Visayas regional police director Brig. Gen. Debold Sinas to designate replacements for the sacked officers.

"I would like to emphasize that their relief is not a punitive measure for alleged actions or inactions, rather it is an administrative relief to ensure that they will not be able to exert any influence in the ongoing investigation,"

Albayalde said.

The investigation, Albayalde added, is being conducted by the PNP's Internal Affairs Service and the Directorate for Investigation and Detective Management. He earlier said the internal investigation is motu proprio in nature.

"The purpose of the fact-finding investigation is to determine whether there were any lapses in the series of police operations carried out by the local police units involved and whether or not the rules prescribed in the Revised Police Operations Procedures were properly observed," said Albayalde.

While the PNP maintains regularity in the conduct of the operations, Albayalde said "we find it prudent on our part to initiate an investigation if only to discount any doubts and satisfy the requirements of fair and judicious investigation in fairness to our personnel also."

He said the PNP is not condemning the policemen involved for doing their job.

"We appeal to the public to be circumspect in making hasty conclusions and passing judgment on the police. Let us not be fooled by leftist propaganda and fake news of a purported massacre," he said.

"All deaths did not happen in one place, but were the result of implementation of separate search warrants that went awry when the subjects of the search operations put-up armed resistance," Albayalde added.

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año yesterday vowed to provide "best legal defense" to cops involved in last Saturday's series of operations

See NEGROS ► Page B3

NEGROS

in Negros Oriental.

"We stand by our police officers and we will provide them with the best legal defense to help them overcome whatever legal challenges that may arise as a result of several Negros Oriental operations," said Año.

Año stressed the operations were legitimately conducted, adding the policemen were serving search warrants from Negros Oriental courts and the suspects shot it out with the lawmen.

"Our law enforcers acted professionally and in accordance with the law during the conduct of police operations in Negros Oriental. They simply returned fire when the subject of the search warrants engaged them in a shoot-out," said Año.

Año dismissed allegations by several leftist groups, including the human rights group Karapatan, that claimed the fatalities were mere farmers.

These groups have appealed for the conduct of a thorough investigation on the incidents. Albayalde said the PNP is ready to face any

investigation.

Año said the allegations were "part of the typical disinformation and propaganda campaign of the CPP-NPA-NDF and their communist front organizations to portray government in the baddest light even in the face of evidence to the contrary."

"How can they say there was a massacre when some 12 other suspects were arrested during the operations? It's very obvious that these leftists are just maligning the government and projecting they are for the people," said Año.

60% of disaster funds received by CPP-NPA used for rebel cause – AFP

About 60 percent of funds received by front organizations of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) during disasters, such as typhoons "Yolanda" in 2013 and "Pablo" in 2017, went to the communist terrorists, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) said Tuesday.

A good 60 percent of the solicited

funds go to the CPP-NPA. Only 40 percent are spent for rehabilitation, if at all, said Brig. Gen. Antonio G. Parlade Jr., Deputy Chief of Staff for Civil Military Operations (J7), citing revelations of former rebels and organizers.

"Reports from California Filipino communities last November, 2018 said that their donations went unac- ▶ 4

60% of disaster funds...

counted (for) during the onslaught of Yolanda for instance. In the Visayas, they use CERNET or the Community Empowerment Resource Network as the CPP clearing house of all these fake advocacies," Parlade said.

"We saw this pattern earlier in the past but it's only now that we had solid evidence after the series of engagements we had with the European Union (EU) and some European governments," he added.

Parlade said CERNET is based in the Visayas, particularly in Cebu and Bohol but extends up to Samar and Leyte.

Parlade said front groups such "Panday Bolig," allegedly aligned with the Reds and disguising themselves as relief organizations, appeal to the kind-hearted, especially in Canada, the United States, Europe, Australia, etc. to provide them with funds but only a portion are spent for the actual rehabilitation of areas devastated by disasters.

He said in the days to come, they will expose the other "miracles" the CPP has been doing to deceive the people.

"This is just the tip of the iceberg. Now they are in panic mode," he said.

Parlade said these funds from NGOs which went to their pockets are what they use in recovering lost ground, even without their armed groups.

"These funds were used to organize their mass base, with livelihood projects that promote the CPP and highlight the neglect of government, rather partner with government to develop the countryside," he said.

The AFP had earlier lauded the move of EU and Belgium ambassadors 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," Parlade 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 ALCADEV 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 terrorist NPAs, and other alleged 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 (SusAg), 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.

"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. 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?" Parlade said.

"The same deceit worked with Belgian funded Belgian NGOs in Manila, which have benefitted the same CPP front organizations. Most of these organizations are members of Joma's (Jose maria Sison) International League of People's Struggles or ILPS and can be found in the ILPS website," he added. (Francis T. Wakefield)

1,700 flee homes as Army, NPA clash in Negros Occ

BY EUGENE Y. ADIONG

BACOLOD CITY: About 1,700 residents of Barangay Quintin Remo and the neighboring villages in Moises Padilla, Negros Occidental were evacuated and several graduation rites were postponed after the encounter between government troops and communist rebels on Monday.

Soldiers of the Philippine Army's 62nd Infantry Battalion encountered about 30 communist rebels, whose group is believed to be behind the murder of Moises Padilla Councilor Jolomar Hilario on Sunday.

Quintin Remo village chief Felisa Villafior said in a radio interview on Tuesday that about 900 residents from four *sitio* (sub-villages) stayed overnight at the Guinpanaan National High School-Mamballo extension. They were mostly residents of Sitio Santos-Santos where the encounter took place.

Similarly, about 500 people from Barangay Montilla and 240 in Barangay Guinpanaan fled their homes and were housed in various temporary shelters.

Villafior added that the municipal government provided food and water to the evacuees.

Brig. Gen. Benedict Arevalo, commander of the 303rd Infantry Brigade, said he directed the troops to complete the clearing operation so that the residents can

return home by Tuesday.

"We don't want them to be inconvenienced. Within the day, they were expected to return home," he added.

The encounter, which lasted for about an hour, happened on Monday morning in Sitio Santos-Santos while government troops were conducting pursuit operations.

One of the soldiers, Corporal Ryan Quevedo, was slightly wounded during the firefight.

Soldiers recovered several rounds of ammunition, anti-personnel mines and personal belongings of the rebels at the encounter site.

On Sunday, Hilario, 51, a councilor running for reelection, was shot dead inside his home in Barangay Inolingán at about 6 a.m. by gunmen who identified themselves as members of the New People's Army (NPA).

The victim was asleep when about 50 armed men on board a truck arrived and some of them barged into Hilario's residence and shot him.

Sacked

Meanwhile, Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Oscar Albayalde on Tuesday relieved four Negros Oriental police officials, including the provincial director, four days after the killing of 14 farmers who were allegedly communist rebels.

Relieved from post pending investigation were Police Col. Raul Tacaca, Negros Oriental provincial director; Police Lt. Col. Patricio Degas, Canlaon City chief of police; Police Lt. Kevin Roy Mamaradio, Manjuyod chief of police; and Police Capt. Michael Rubia, Sta. Catalina chief of police.

Albayalde said the PNP-Internal Affairs Service was already conducting an investigation to find out if the operation was conducted properly.

The PNP was slammed by various sectors and lawmakers for the brutal killing of 14 farmers — eight in Canlaon City, two in Santa Catalina, and four in Manjuyod — in separate operations on Saturday.

The slain farmers were identified as Steve Arapoc, Manulo Martin, Sunny Palagtiw, Edgardo Avelino, Esmel Avelino, Rogelio Reomono, Ricky Reomono, Genes Palmares, Eric Acabal, Ano Enojo Rapada, Gonzalo Rosales, Melchor Pafiares, Mario Pafiares and Franklin Lariosa.

Albayalde earlier said the farmers resisted arrest and fought back police operatives, triggering a firefight. He claimed the farmers, who were mostly peasant leaders, were NPA members.

A police officers was wounded during one of the operations.

The operatives also arrested 12 other farmers based on the search warrants served.

Best legal defense

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año, meanwhile, on Tuesday said the Department of the Interior and Local Government would provide the best legal defense to the police officers who were involved in the simultaneous operations in Negros Oriental.

"We stand by our police officers and we will provide them with the best legal defense to help them overcome whatever legal challenges that may arise as a result of several Negros Oriental operations," Año said.

He insisted that the operation was not a massacre of the farmers, as claimed by the some sectors and their families, but just "part of the typical disinformation and propaganda campaign of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front and their communist front organizations to portray government in the [worst] light even in the face of evidence to the contrary."

"How can they say there was a massacre when some 12 other suspects were arrested during the operations? It was obvious that the leftists were, trying to destroy the image of the government to get sympathy from the masses," Año said.

**WITH A REPORT FROM
ROY D.R. NARRA**

Cops foil kidnap try on Sulu teachers

By ROEL PAREÑO

ZAMBOANGA CITY — Two police officers were wounded in an encounter with Abu Sayyaf bandits in what was believed to be an attempt to kidnap a group of teachers in Patikul, Sulu yesterday.

The police officers were escorting the teachers when around 10 bandits attacked them in Barangay Kan Ague at about 8:30 a.m.

The wounded police officers were evacuated to the Integrated Provincial Health Office and Sulu Hospital for treatment.

Col. Gerry Besana, Western Mindanao Command

(Westmincom) spokesman, said the bandits also suffered casualties, citing bloodstains on their escape route.

On Simisa Island's Sitio Halu-Halu in Barangay Bakaan, an Abu Sayyaf bandit was killed in a clash with soldiers at around 8:31 a.m. also yesterday.

The military said the body of the bandit and his M1 Carbine rifle were recovered at the scene.

"We believe that a number of the bandits were wounded... Our troops are still pursuing them as of this report," Lt. Gen. Arnel dela Vega, Westmincom chief, said. 12

Abu Sayyaf fighter killed in Sulu encounter

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

Military troops seized a body of an Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) militant, and seized a high-powered firearm following a gun fight in Sulu on Tuesday, April 2. The encounter took place at about 8:30 in the morning.

While conducting pursuit operation, troops of the Third Marine Company, Marine Battalion Landing Team 3 engaged an undetermined number of ASG members in Sitio Halu-Halu, Simisa Island, Barangay Bakaan, Banguigui, Sulu.

The 15-minute firefight resulted in the death of an ASG fighter, and the recovery of an M1 Carbine rifle.

"The Joint Task Force Sulu continuously

puts more pressure on the remaining Abu Sayyaf bandits to gain more enemy strongholds and armaments," said Lieutenant General Arnel Dela Vega, commander of the Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom).

"We believe that a number of the bandits were wounded and probably could have died due to loss of blood after the encounter especially that our troops are still pursuing them as of this report," he added.

Dela Vega said that "while operations are vigorously undertaken to neutralize the remaining bandits, we still encourage other Abu Sayyaf members to lay down their arms in order to finally have peace in Sulu."

Troops continue to conduct pursuit operation against all ASG elements still at-large in Sulu.

ASG gunman killed in Sulu fighting

ZAMBOANGA CITY: Government troops clashed with pro-Islamic State (IS) militant groups in Sulu, which killed an Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) fighter and wounded two police officers in separated encounters on Tuesday.

Officials said the fighting simultaneously erupted on Simisa Island off Banguing town and in Patikul town.

The Marines killed one gunman in Simisa where troops had been pursuing a group of ASG gunmen hiding on the forested island since last month.

Lt. Gen. Arnel de la Vega, chief of the Western Mindanao Command, said members of the 3rd Marine Company recovered the body of the still unidentified bandit, including an M1 rifle, following a firefight that lasted for about 15 minutes.

De la Vega said there was no report of military casualties as he vowed to destroy the ASG.

"The Joint Task Force Sulu continuously employ more pressure on the remaining Abu Sayyaf bandits to gain more enemy strongholds and armaments. We believe that a number of the bandits were wounded and probably could have died due to loss of blood after

the encounter especially that our troops are still pursuing them as of this report," he said.

But while vowing to finish off the bandits group blamed for the series of ransom kidnappings of fishers off Sabah in Malaysia and the spate of terror attacks, de la Vega also called on Abu Sayyaf fighters to surrender peacefully.

"While operations are vigorously undertaken to neutralize the remaining bandits, we still encourage other Abu Sayyaf members to lay down their arms in order to finally have peace in Sulu," he said.

Security forces also clashed with Abu Sayyaf fighters in the village of Kan Ague in Patikul where two police officers were wounded in the fighting, de la Vega added.

He said soldiers and policemen were escorting a group of teachers when about 10 militants attacked them in the village, triggering a firefight.

He did not say if any of the teachers were wounded in the firefight, while the wounded police officers were rushed to a hospital in Jolo as troops pursued the bandits in Patikul's hinterlands.

AL JACINTO

ASG bandit killed, 2 cops wounded in Sulu clash

By Francisco Tuyay

AN ABU Sayyaf bandit was killed while two policemen were wounded after they prevented teachers from being kidnapped by the terrorists in Patikul, Sulu on Tuesday.

Reports said policemen from the Patikul Municipal Police Station were escorting the teachers who were travelling from Jolo to Barangay Taung when they crossed paths with around 15 bandits, triggering the firefight at 8:30 a.m.

Wounded during the firefight were Police Master Sergeant Al-Nidzfar Eragi and Patrolman Jordan Changlapon of the Patikul MPS.

The ASG, meanwhile, suffered a still undetermined number of casualties during the firefight.

Shortly after the incident, additional policemen responded to the site of encounter while the wounded lawmen were brought to the hospital for treatment.

Meanwhile, in separate encounter in Patikul, a bandit was killed following an encounter with marine troopers in Barangay Bakaan, Banguigui minutes after the attempted kidnapping of the teachers.

Col. Gerry Besana, spokesman of the Western Mindanao Command, said the bandit was killed after Marine troopers from the 3rd Marine Company of exchanged fire with ASG terrorists while on pursuit operations in nearby Sitio Halu-Halu, Simisa Island, Barangay Bakaan, Banguigui, Sulu.

The ASG member's dead body was recovered in the encounter site along with an M1 Carbine rifle. AB

"The Joint Task Force Sulu continuously employ more pressure on the remaining Abu Sayyaf bandits to gain more enemy strongholds and armaments," said Lieutenant General Arnel dela Vega, Commander of the Western Mindanao Command.

"We believe that a number of the bandits were wounded and probably could have died due to loss of blood after the encounter especially that our troops are still pursuing them as of this report," Dela Vega said.

Abu Sayyaf member killed, 2 cops wounded in Sulu clashes

A MEMBER of the bandit group Abu Sayyaf was killed while two policemen were injured in separate skirmishes with government forces in Banguigui and Patikul towns in Sulu yesterday morning.

One of the clashes occurred in Sitio Halu-Halu in Simisila Island, barangay Bakaan in Banguigui town, said Col. Gerry Besana, spokesman of the military's Western Mindanao Command.

Besana said troops from the

Marine Battalion Landing Team 3 were on a combat operation in the area at around 8:31 a.m. when they clashed with undetermined number of Abu Sayyaf men.

The 15-minute firefight resulted in the death of one of the bandits and recovery of an M1 Carbine rifle. The military said more bandits may have died or wounded in the firefight.

"We believe that a number of

the bandits were wounded and probably could have died due to loss of blood after the encounter, especially that our troops are still pursuing them as of this report," said Wesmincom chief Lt. Gen. Arnel Dela Vega. B2

In Patikul town, two policemen were injured in a firefight with Abu Sayyaf members in Barangay Kan Ague at around 8:30 a.m., a report from the Sulu provincial police said. — Victor Reyes

AMBUSH

Armed men believed to be members of the extremist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) ambushed a convoy of soldiers and teachers in Patikul town of Sulu on Tuesday morning and wounded two policemen.

A report reaching Camp Crame in Quezon City revealed that the policemen were escorting a group of teachers heading to Barangay Taung when they were waylaid at around 8:30 a.m. in Barangay Kan Ague.

Two policemen were wounded during the ambush and the clash that ensued. They were identified as Police Master Sergeant Al-Nidzfar Eradio and Patrolman Jordan Changlapon.

Some 10 to 15 Abu Sayyaf men reported carried out the ambush.

Policemen and soldiers were immediately dispatched in the area to run after the attackers. The teachers were secured.

The wounded cops, on the other hand, were taken to the hospital.
(Aaron Recuenco) 4

MNLF suspends study of 1996 accord

By Perseus Echaminada

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) suspended yesterday the tripartite review for the final implementation of the 1996 peace agreement in deference to the plan of President Duterte to change the form of government from unitary to parliamentary federal system.

"The review of the final implementation of the 1996 peace agreement was held in abeyance so that the MNLF can focus on Federalism," MNLF spokesman Emmanuel Fontanilla told the *Daily Tribune*.

The final review of the 1996 peace agreement was abandoned by former President Benigno Aquino III in 2013 triggering the declaration of independence of the Bangsa Moro Republik.

He said the resumption of peace talks between the MNLF and the government will be focused on the MNLF proposal to set up three Federal States (Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao) to prevent dismemberment of the country.

He said the MNLF will issue a manifesto expressing full support to Federalism.

Fontanilla said the MNLF has already convened its own panel but as of yesterday, the Office of the Presidential Peace Adviser has yet to communicate with the MNLF despite repeated pronouncements of President Duterte that he wants to resume peace talks with MNLF founding chairman Nur Misuari.

He said he has been trying to contact Presidential Peace Adviser Carlito Galvez but there have been no replies to his phone calls. 3

BARRM execs told to start working on generating income

COTABATO CITY (PNA) - A ranking official of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) has directed all local chief executives (LCEs) to hold seminars, training and the like within the region to generate income for the new political entity.

Ministry of the Interior and Local Government (MILG) - BARMM Minister Naguib Sinarimbo said Monday the move was consistent with the provisions of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), and aims to enhance the creation and generation of revenues in

the region and trigger economic activities, generating employment.

"Hold trainings, seminars here than outside BARMM," he said.

While Sinarimbo's directive applies to all local government units (LGUs), he offered exemptions, such as activities funded by "development partners" that may be held outside BARMM for "security reasons" or the event requires facilities that are not available within the BARMM.

Development partners refer to international agencies like the United Nations, the United States Agency for International Development, the

Australian Agency for International Development, and others that are actively supporting the development of Muslim Mindanao.

The local officials were also required to submit a written report of LGU activities one week after the event.

Sinarimbo said his directive would "ensure the resources of the region are circulated within and trigger economic activities and create employment."

"Just imagine if an LGU will hold meetings in an establishment within the region and the 20 persons meeting will order 'pastil' (sautéed spiced chicken wrapped with fragrant rice in banana

leaves)," Sinarimbo said.

This means, he said, that the restaurant hosting the LGU event would need additional workers and increase the demand for banana leaves and chicken.

"Such would also require more people to harvest and cut banana leaves and, in turn, give jobs to 'sikad' (pedicab drivers) to deliver the banana leaves," he said.

Sinarimbo added that flourishing businesses like restaurants would pay their income tax to the region, which in turn would be used for delivering government services to constituents.

Candidates warned vs use of Bangsamoro law

COTABATO CITY: The local government minister of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) on Tuesday warned politicians against using the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) in their campaign strategy to win votes in the coming elections.

The warning came after several political groups that voted against the BOL have been spreading stories purporting that candidates who campaigned for its ratification would work out BARMM's expansion if elected to local positions.

Naguib Sinarimbo, BARMM's local government minister, said nowhere in the BOL could one find a provision stating that the Bangsamoro region could still be expanded after the January 21 plebiscite in provinces of the now defunct Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Sinarimbo urged candidates to refrain from hitting rivals who campaigned for the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law.

"The BOL clearly says that the January 21 and February 6 plebiscites related to the Moro issue were the last, nothing more. Candidates are advised to focus on sensible campaign platforms

and refrain from using scare tactics," he said.

The plebiscite for the ratification of BOL or Republic Act 11054 last January 21 paved the way for the replacement of the ARMM with BARMM.

There are 63 *barangay* (villages) in several towns in North Cotabato, under Administrative Region 12, that became part of BARMM territory through a separate plebiscite last February 6.

Quarters that opposed the creation of BARMM are using the social media to scare voters on the possible alignment of more local government units with BARMM if they vote for pro-BOL candidates aspiring for local posts in towns and cities close to BARMM.

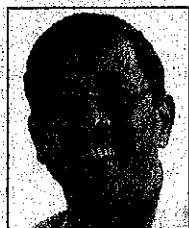
Legal luminaries in the Bangsamoro Transition Authority appointed to oversee the transition from ARMM to BARMM said it was unfair to use such a campaign discourse to cause division among pro-BOL and anti-BOL camps.

Quirino Esguerra, an election lawyer and counsel of many local executives in BARMM, said the BOL had no "opt in" provision enabling local government units outside to become part of its core territory.

JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL

CTALK
CITO BELTRAN**The 'guess who' list**

The Presidential Apologist recently remarked that Nic Gabonada who was singled out by Facebook as having originated Facebook accounts that were in violation or non-compliant of Facebook policy, had nothing to do with the Duterte administration whether during the presidential campaign or thereafter. In other words, it is now expedient for the First Apologist to cut and chum Gabonada so that the Facebook action does not result into aftershocks or a tsunami that could hit the administration. I don't think Gabonada himself wants to debate on the value and substance of his efforts and inputs to making Duterte president, but in the world of real men with honor, if you can't say anything good, don't say anything at all.



Given how the administration is slowly sinking in their mud of mistakes and controversies, perhaps, cutting Gabonada loose with such ingratitude will come as a blessing in disguise. Perhaps, Gabonada is simply being set free by the Lord and making him realize who his real friends are and who are the real men.

Are you in the "Guess Who" list of government?

In case you haven't noticed, the latest fad among law enforcement officials in the Duterte administration is to come up with a "Guess Who" List. Last week the fad really peaked after PDEA Director Aaron Aquino started talking about drug personalities in media, entertainment and the judiciary. Not to be outdone, the AFP recently came out with a "Guess Who" list of politicians allegedly supporting or protecting the New People's Army or NPA in their area.

The problem with all that is when people like PDEA Director Aaron Aquino are dared or challenged to name names, they shut up tighter than a clam! When PDEA claimed that a number of judges were narco-protectors or coddlers, no less than officials of the Supreme Court asked PDEA for the list in order to take action against the guilty, but the PDEA according to the SC, refused to cooperate. Now the pressure is on Director Aquino to name names because the Supreme Court and the Department of Justice are duty-bound to investigate and punish any and all erring officials. Even his fellow PMAer Senator "Ping" Lacson has called for Aquino to provide the list.

In the first place, is there really an official list of drug users, dealers, and coddlers based on verified information and police work? The PDEA has to be very careful of such claims or insinuations because they could end up like the young black and gay

American actor from TV the series "Empire" named Jussie Mollett who claimed to be the victim of a hate crime because he was black and gay. Police eventually surmised that Mollett had staged the whole scene to boost his ratings. The actor paid dearly in terms of his reputation and his deed. If there is a list in PDEA it is certainly doing more harm for every one. The so-called list of narco-judges discredits the image and reputation of judges and the judiciary as a whole for as long as Aquino refuses to name who is on the "Guess Who" list.

Has anyone advised Director Aquino that he ultimately becomes guilty of aiding and abetting suspected drug dealers, users and coddlers by refusing to officially respond to the request of the DOJ and the Supreme Court? The reported refusal of the PDEA to provide the list would be tantamount to obstruction of justice in any official investigation. People at the PDEA, the AFP and Malacañang should really think twice about coming up with "Guess Who" lists because what you use against others can also be used against you. Imagine if the media practitioners or politicians decided to get back and start coming up with "Guess Who" list of government officials who live the lifestyle of the rich and famous, officials with more than one wife, officials whose children are dropouts and drug users or the 2019 Guess Who list of closet queens and brown nosers! I am not advocating such behavior but what you do unto others can also be done unto you. Another point that the list makers and givers of 2019 should watch out for is the possibility of being sued for libel and defamation. A "Guess Who" list is never fail safe as the PDEA has discovered. Somewhere down the road you will be challenged and if you can't stand and deliver, you will end up on the list of those who buckled and turned.

If you're in the market for a new car, or simply a car crazy grease monkey, well it's that time of the year when you get four days to indulge your self with the newest products, car models, modifications, displays and what have you in motoring. Yes the annual MIAS or Manila International Auto Show that always draws the highest number of visitors will open its doors at the World Trade Center Manila (WTCM) on April 4 to 7. The MIAS regularly features the latest commercially available vehicles for the Philippines and from time to time features concept cars like e-vehicles and the likes.

Given its longevity and popularity, many such organizers can only wish that the government would invest money constructing exhibition centers as big as those in Tokyo and Shanghai that could easily house numerous international exhibitions and conferences under one or several roofs. While the WTCM has been the go to place, the market has outgrown the facility and as the Philippines becomes increasingly attractive as a go to place for business and investment, the government should provide the proper and affordable venue for both private and public (government) exhibitions and trade shows. We have the goods and we have the experts, now let's build world-class business friendly venues.

Email: utalk2ctalk@gmail.com

Chinese impunity



IF WE feel like we are being raped by China in the West Philippine Sea and violating our territorial integrity, the Philippines only has itself to blame.

Our splayed-legs foreign policy-vis-a-vis Beijing has given it the license to treat us like its province.

Our fishermen are being driven away by Chinese gunboats from fishing in Bajo Masinloc off the coast of Zambales.

"This is the worst offense of its kind."

Complaints reported to the Philippine Coast Guard and Navy are dismissed and not given credence by naval authorities. The Coast Guard, instead of protecting our fishermen right in our own waters, tell the locals to stay away from Scarborough Shoal to avoid Chinese patrol boats.

Mainland Chinese workers are displacing Filipinos from jobs in the online gaming industry even as these foreigners are also allegedly operating shabu labs with Filipino connivance. This is the worst offense of its kind because the illegal drug trade is the scourge that destroys the very fabric of Philippine society.

It is rather strange that the three mentioned Chinese transgressions are not being brought up by candidates in the May 13 midterm elections. There's an unverified report China would attempt to influence the outcome of the elections to favor certain candidates. If the Russians were able to influence voters into voting for Donald Trump as president by providing derogatory information on Democratic rival Hill-

ary Clinton, there's no saying China cannot do it here.

Accepting campaign money donations and buying voters during elections is de rigueur in our political process. There's an old joke in Philippine politics that goes like this: Some candidates are running for the fun it while others are there for the funds of it.

There are those, however, who are running because their delusion that only they can give deliverance from the political, economic and social ills plaguing this benighted land.

Just look at the roster of candidates. Some are unqualified non-entities who are not household names even in their own households. One of the leading senatorial bets who could win is one whose last stint in the Senate was his distinction as chairman of the committee on silence. But in a way, he was better off than his colleagues who delivered privilege speeches only to expose their own inadequacies.

But what can you expect of voters from a populace fed daily with a surfeit of stupid shows featuring Vice Ganda and gossips of which film celebrity is dating or has just broken up with whom?

So much for illuminating important issues of the day. Entertainment, it seems is the panacea to all the problems facing Filipinos. No wonder we have the kind of leaders we have today. In the turnstile of power, problems like unemployment, high crime rate, monstrous traffic, and high cost of living go in and out with the change of leadership. Still, the problems remain with us. It's a vicious cycle that sadly Filipinos have come to accept.

A revolution is not also the answer. Unlike the tectonic shift that went with the upheaval in the French Revolution, in Indonesia and South Korea, there was no change in the political structure in the vents that followed People Power at Edsa. It was just a revolving door and a change in leadership with oligarchs replaced by another set of cronies who controlled the economy.

Misuari's threat

A DEPUTY majority leader of the House of Representatives has made it clear that it was not the fault of the Lower House that the Duterte administration's proposed shift to federalism remains hanging in the balance this late in the day.

Rep. Rodante Marcoleta said the new House leadership under Speaker Gloria Arroyo completed everything that had to be done when it pushed and approved this priority legislation last December. The solon was referring to the passage on third and final reading of the measure which seeks to amend the 1987 Constitution, including the proposal to lift the term limits of legislators and local officials.

The approved bill, however, hit a huge snag in the Senate, with Senate President Tito Sotto informing reporters that the bill is still in the Senate Committee on Constitutional Amendments, Revision of Codes and Laws. The senators, at this point, are not yet ready to discuss its merits, including the mode of amending the Constitution, whether by constituent assembly or by

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constitutional convention.

The discussion on constitutional change has been put to the fore again with President Duterte's recent revelation that Nur Misuari, founding chairman of the rebel Moro National

Liberation Front (MNLF), had threatened to "wage war" again if he will not be given federalism. The threat, ironically, was hurled to the President of this Republic right inside the seat of power, Malacanang Palace.

We wonder: For all his bravado, machismo and braggadocio, why did Duterte treat lightly this threat from a Muslim rebel? We must consider, too, that the President has just given a big favor to Misuari -- he earlier convinced the Sandiganbayan to allow Misuari to travel abroad and miss his scheduled hearing before the court. Misuari, a former governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), is facing graft charges before the Sandiganbayan in connection with the questionable purchase of textbooks during his term in the ARMM. *by*

When you consider federalism, you are talking about the whole Philippines. It is not a gift that can be given by the President to Misuari alone, and on a silver platter. Federalism concerns not just the southern Philippines, or the Muslim areas of Mindanao, but the whole country. So why would Misuari use lack of federalism as reason for waging war, clearly a self-serving obsession?

We find little assurance from the pronouncement of Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana who thought Misuari's idea was a "bluff." The defense secretary said the MNLF is still capable of creating trouble and pockets of violence and terrorism, but a full-scale war is out of the question.

Lorenza based his assessment on the fact that many original MNLF members have chosen to link up with the administration-sponsored Bangsa Moro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BMARM). Also, the MNLF has had its share of fractious division within its ranks, with one faction led by Misuari and the other, lead by incumbent MNLF chairman Yusuf Jikiri.

Misuari is fast becoming a political anachronism, but why is Duterte still bestowing him relevance?

ONLINE NEWS

03 APRIL 2019

<http://retiredanalyst.blogspot.com/>

Video: Peace missions changing the way we see Basilan

From CNN Philippines (Apr 2, 2019): Video: Peace missions changing the way we see Basilan

Basilan is an area known for violent incidents and a safe haven for terrorists and rebel groups. But authorities in the area claim that the province's image is slowly changing in light of peace missions conducted by the military and in the southern Philippine province.

<http://cnnphilippines.com/videos/2019/4/2/Peace-missions-changing-the-way-we-see-Basilan.html>

Posted by Retired Analyst at 9:13 PM

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Soldier wounded in NPA clash in Negros

From the Manila Bulletin (Apr 1, 2019): Soldier wounded in NPA clash in Negros

Iloilo City—A soldier of the Philippine Army's 62nd Infantry Battalion (62 IB) has been wounded in a Monday clash with the New People's Army (NPA) rebels in Moises Padilla town, Negros Occidental province.

Lt.Col Egberto Dacoscos, 62 IB commander, identified the wounded as Corporal Ryan Quevedo.

Dacoscos said in a statement that the incident occurred Monday morning as part of its hot pursuit operation against the NPA rebels who shot and killed Town Councilor Jolomar Hilario early Sunday morning. The 51-year-old councilor, who was running for re-election, was still sleeping when 50 armed NPA rebels barged into his house to kill him.

The 62 IB troops were in Quintin Remo village when NPA rebels opened fire. This resulted into a firefight until the rebels withdrew.

Government troops then recovered three improvised explosive devices (IEDs), ammunition, communist paraphernalia, and personal belongings of the NPA rebels.

Dacoscos also said they have reason to believe that several NPA rebels were wounded based on the blood trail.

<https://news.mb.com.ph/2019/04/01/soldier-wounded-in-npa-clash-in-negros/>
Posted by Retired Analyst at 8:46 PM No comments:

<http://retiredanalyst.blogspot.com/>

45 NPA rebels surrender in CALABARZON region

From the Manila Times (Apr 2, 2019): 45 NPA rebels surrender in CALABARZON region

CAMP VICENTE LIM, Laguna: A total of 45 Communist Party of Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) members, 19 of them female, and members of the Milisyang Bayan, Kontak, Baseng Masa and Organisadong Masa under the Komiting Larangan Girilya Cesar (KLGC), Sub-Region Military Area (SRMA-4A) surrendered to the Police Regional Office Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon).

On Friday, 33 of them under KLGC, SRMA-4A all operating in the provinces of Laguna, Rizal and Quezon surrendered to PRO-4A Regional Intelligence Division and the military.

Another 12 rebels from General Nakar, Quezon surrendered on March 30. At about 9 p.m. on the same day, Brig. Gen. Edward Carranza, Police Regional Office Calabarzon regional director, said the surrenderers were tribal chieftains and members of Samahang Dumagat, an ethnic group based in the mountainous range of Laguna, Rizal and Quezon that the NPA infiltrated and utilized as advance post in the mountains.

Their peaceful surrender was made possible through several meetings and dialogue in cooperation with the chieftain or punong tribo of their respective areas in support of the government program.

All the surrenderers, their documents, firearms, ammunition and explosives are now under the custody of the Regional Special Operations Unit 4A for documentation and safekeeping.

Carranza said the initial debriefing revealed that most of the surrenderers were utilized to monitor the presence and activities of the government forces in their locality. They also served as escort, guide, runner and their homes were used as safe houses of the CPP-NPA terrorists in case of emergencies. Most of them were part-time guerrilla fighters and part-time farmers. They played the dual role of military protector and political enforcer in their respective barangay (villages).

"Ka Cyrus," one of the surrenderers revealed that in 2009 they assaulted Panukulan Police Station in Quezon. They were also involved in an ambush of Special Action Force troops in Antipolo City that left four dead and five captured including two wounded personnel.

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Ka Cyrus was a former NPA platoon leader. He said that in 2006, he had an intimate relationship with a certain Ka Sophia from UP Diliman who gave birth in 2008, but did not return.

PRO 4A was coordinating with the Department of Interior and Local Government and Department of Social Welfare and Development for the surrendered rebels to undergo processing to avail assistance under the Enhance Comprehensive Local Integration Program.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/45-npa-rebels-surrender-in-calabarzon-region/534043/>

Posted by Retired Analyst at 7:56 PM

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