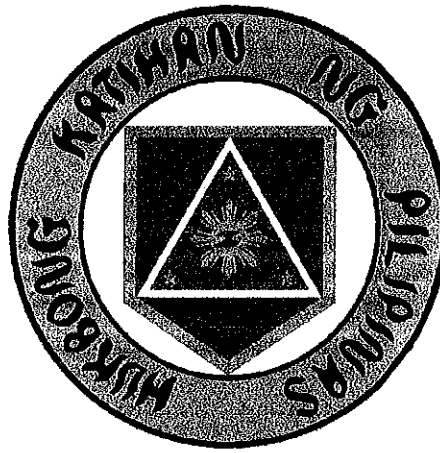


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06 April 2019

Saturday



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DUTERTE TELLS CHINA: DON'T TOUCH PAG-ASA

STORY BY JULIE M. AURELIO

The President says he will deploy troops on a 'suicide mission' in response to any harm that Chinese forces may inflict on Pag-asa, the largest of nine islands and shoals occupied by Filipinos in the Spratlys chain.

FROM A1

By Julie M. Aurelio
@JMAurelioINQ

President Duterte has told China not to "touch" Pag-asa Island, the largest in the Kalayaan Island Group occupied by Filipinos, otherwise he would send Philippine troops on a "suicide mission" in response.

The President, who spoke during a campaign rally in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan province, on Thursday night, said he was just giving "a word of advice," not a warning, to Beijing.

"I am asking you, I will not plead or beg, but I'm just telling you, lay off the Pag-asa because I have soldiers there. And if you lay a finger on them, it's another story. I will tell my soldiers, prepare for a suicide mission," Mr. Duterte said.

275 Chinese vessels

"Let us be friends, but do not touch Pag-asa Island, otherwise, things would be different," he said.

The President made the remarks following a report by the military's Western Command that at least 275 Chinese vessels believed to be part of China's maritime militia had been monitored around Pag-asa since January.

"I'm trying to tell China, Pag-asa is ours. We have been there since 1974," Mr. Duterte said.

China's claims to nearly all of the South China Sea, including Pag-asa, have been invalidated by the international arbitral tribunal in 2016 in a ruling on a case filed by Manila against Beijing, which has ignored the decision.

The President said he would rather strike a compromise than resort to an armed conflict with China because the Philippines was incapable of waging war over the West Philippine Sea.

'If I go to war ...'

"If I go to war, it will pulverize my Navy in a matter of minutes. And if I go to war with China, their missile will reach Manila in seven minutes," he said during another campaign rally in Malabon City on Tuesday night.

Mr. Duterte has been criticized for taking a soft stance on China's expansion in the South China Sea and for setting aside the arbitral tribunal's ruling in favor of closer ties with Beijing in hopes of getting Chinese aid and investments.

Mr. Duterte on Thursday also expressed doubts on whether the United States, the country's treaty ally, could send help "on time" in case the Philippines was attacked.

"America said it will help us because we have a US defense [treaty]. That's a gamble. They say, 'I have your back covered.' They're only good with words," he said.

Mr. Duterte pointed out that the Americans still had to first get permission from their Congress before they could send help to the Philippines.



BIGGEST PH-HELD ISLAND The waters around Pag-asa Island have drawn about 275 Chinese vessels believed to be part of China's maritime militia over the past three months as the Philippines repaired and reconstructed some of its facilities, including the washed-out portion of an airstrip seen in this Dec. 14, 2018, satellite picture. —PHOTO COURTESY OF CSIS/AMTI

"Do I trust the Americans? Yes. But will that help be on time? That's the problem," he said.

During his visit to Manila last month, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo assured the Philippines the United States would come to its defense if it came under attack in the South China Sea.

This was "the first time that the US made a [clear] policy statement that any attack on the Philippines will trigger a US response," according to presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo.

The Philippines, China, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia and Taiwan have overlapping claims in the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.

On his Twitter page on Friday, Sen. Panfilo Lacson said that as "an elected senator of the republic and as a freedom-loving Filipino," he would join the

President on a visit to Pag-asa.

"Di ka pasisitil"

No Philippine President has visited the island. A visit by the highest official of a country to a disputed territory would draw opposition from other claimants. The Philippines and Vietnam strongly protested Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian's visit in 2008 to Ligao (Itu Aba) Island, the biggest island in the Spratlys chain.

Lacson also reminded Mr. Duterte that Pag-asa was a village in the "Municipality of Kalayaan, Province of Palawan, Mimaropa (Region IV-B), Republic of the Philippines."

"We should not allow China to encircle, much less occupy, the island of Pag-asa. Let's be reminded of what we sing every Monday morning, during our flag-raising

ceremony," Lacson said.

He quoted parts of the national anthem—"Sa maulupig, 'di ka pasisiil ... Aming ligaya na 'pag may mang-aapi, ang mamatay nang dahil sa iyo" (You will resist invaders ... We will gladly die for you fighting oppressors).

Lacson has been critical of the administration for displaying a defeatist stance in the maritime conflict with China, saying that would only embolden Beijing to further "bully" Manila.

DFA protest

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said it had lodged a protest with Beijing against what the military described as a "swarm" of Chinese vessels around Pag-asa.

"Such actions, when not repudiated by the Chinese government, are deemed to have been adopted by it," the DFA said in a rare rebuke of China on Thursday.

The presence of the Chinese vessels near Pag-asa, also called Thitu Island, raises questions about their intent and role "in support of coercive objectives," the DFA said.

Without referring directly to Manila's protest, China's foreign ministry spokesperson, Geng Shuang, said in Beijing that bilateral talks on the South China Sea held in the Philippines on Wednesday were "frank, friendly and constructive."

—WITH REPORTS FROM INQUIRER RESEARCH, AFP AND REUTERS INQ

Rody won't bare list of 'narco celebrities'

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ

President Duterte sees no reason to publicly identify the celebrities in the watchlist of those suspected of involvement in illegal drugs.

Duterte said the celebrities are not running for public office, unlike the politicians in the watchlist, who must be held accountable to the public.

"It will be publicized at an appropriate time, maybe," Duterte said after attending the 31st annual convention of the Prosecutors' League of the Philippines last Thursday in Palawan.

"There is no reason to (name them) since they are not up for election. People have nothing to do with their lives except that they are committing a crime," he said.

Duterte told the convention that he cannot allow the Philippines to become a narco state.

He said he is keen on derailing the bid of politicians linked to drugs.

"The celebrities (in the list are not) seeking public office. But those who are

seeking public office and will someday, if they win, hold power, that's the problem," he said.

Duterte said as President, he is "morally, legally bound to tell the people" the real score about their candidates.

"If they still vote for you, fine. This is a democracy. But the people ought to know and that is my solemn duty - to inform the public under the right of information and to know who are the idiots there," he said.

Duterte said he could not invoke public safety in the case of narco celebrities since they are private persons.

He stressed he could not just reveal the names of the celebrities in the narco list without proper justification.

Duterte said he has yet to review the names of the

Turn to Page 4

Rody

From Page 1

celebrities in the narco list without proper justification.

He said he has yet to review the names of the celebrities amid earlier rumors that a known showbiz artist

tagged by the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) got support from Palace officials.

Pressed if he knows the showbiz personalities involved in drugs, Duterte

admitted he has not yet seen the list.

Duterte said he has given the authorities a freehand in the conduct of investigation about the drug links of certain personalities.

"But on the day that it will be published, I should know so that I have the right answers to

give to the inquiring public," the President said.

Duterte's former political adviser and now senatorial candidate Francis Tolentino has insisted that the celebrity narco list should be made public because they are idolized by many, including the youth.

During a recent roundtable interview with **The STAR** editors, deskmen and reporters, Tolentino said the showbiz personalities should always live by example because they are being admired by many of their fans.

PDEA chief Aaron Aquino and Philippine National

Police chief Gen. Oscar Albayalde have warned about the involvement of some popular celebrities, including some matinee idols, in drug abuse. But the officials have opted to keep the list secret until given a go signal by the President to make it public.



Crimes against humanity

By Amb. ALBERT DEL ROSARIO
and Ret. Ombudsman CONCHITA CARPIO MORALES

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.

Notwithstanding our 2016 Philippine victory at The Hague which clarified our entitlements in the South China Sea, Beijing continues to commit atrocious actions including illegal dredging and artificial island building, thereby resulting in, among other things, a degraded marine environment that has negatively impacted on the livelihood and significantly diminished the food security of our fishermen and their families, not to mention all of us who are part of the consuming public.

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.

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.

We believe that the International Criminal Court (ICC) is a legal platform for us Filipino citizens to exact accountability for the injustices being particularly endured by our poor fishermen.

Our objective therefore is to hold as individually responsible President Xi Jinping, Foreign Secretary Wang Yi and Ambassador Zhao Jianhua for crimes against humanity committed against our fishermen in our territory during the period when the Philippines was a state party to the Rome Statute (1 Nov. 2011 – 17 March 2019).

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6

UNWARRANTED

CHINESE BOATS NEAR PH ISLES A CONCERN —US OFFICIAL

BANGKOK—The presence of large numbers of Chinese vessels near islands and islets occupied by the Philippines is "a concern," a senior US defense official said on Friday.

The Philippine government protested the Chinese ship movements on Thursday after its military monitored more than 200 Chinese vessels from January to March in a disputed area named Sandy Cay, which is near the Philippine-occupied island of Pag-asa.

Asked about the situation while on a visit to Bangkok, Joseph Felter, deputy assistant secretary of defense for South and Southeast Asia, told reporters that the United States was troubled "by any aggressive activity by any country in the South China Sea."

Aggressive and provocative

"In this case, China's activities are of concern. It seems to be somewhat aggressive and provocative and we feel that they're unnecessary and unwarranted," said Felter, who was in Thailand to attend a meeting of defense officials of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or Asean.

He noted that the United States did not take a stance on various conflicting claims in the

South China Sea. But he said the US commitment to the Indo-Pacific region involved working with allies and partners to keep the seas free and open, and ensure that "no country's sovereignty is undermined."

"We expect every country to be able to sail, fly and operate wherever international law allows," he said.

The Philippines regards a chain of islands and islets, nine of which it occupies, in the Spratly archipelago in the South China Sea as a municipality it calls Kalayaan under its western province of Palawan. That claim conflicts with the larger territorial claims of China, Vietnam, and three other governments in a long-simmering Asian dispute.

Man-made islands

Over the last few years, China has stepped up its territorial claims by turning seven man-made islands it controls into military installations, drawing rebukes from other claimants as well as Washington.

Chinese boats have swarmed around Sandy Cay, a chain of three sandbars between Pag-asa and a Chinese man-made island called Subi, since 2017. Such practice could be meant to pressure other governments into abandoning their islands.

A 2002 accord between China and the 10-nation Asean aims to prevent armed confrontation in the busy waterway, where much of Asia's oil and trade transit.

Felter said the meetings he attended also addressed the lingering threat from the extremism and the Islamic State group in Southeast Asia, and the United States looked forward to working with regional partners on counterterrorism. —AP *AL*

Duterte to China: Don't touch Pag-asa

By ALEXIS ROMERO

Deviating from his usual tone of appeasement, President Duterte has asked the Chinese not to occupy Pag-asa Island or risk starting a war.

While the Philippines remains friends with China, Duterte stressed he would not allow the Chinese to occupy Pag-asa in the Kalayaan Island Group (KIG).

"This is not a warning, this is just a word of advice to my friends, since we are friends, China. I will not plead or beg, but I'm just telling you - lay off Pag-asa because I have my soldiers there," the President told reporters in Palawan where he campaigned for PDP-Laban candidates.

"The Pag-asa Island belongs to us. Is that our base? China would never do that, I assure you, unless China wants a war with us. *Di ako papayag kung*

Turn to Page 2

Duterte

From Page 1

pati yung Pag-asa i-occupy nila (I will not allow them to also occupy Pag-asa). No, of course not," the President told reporters in Palawan late Thursday.

"I assure you that if they kill or arrest people there who are Filipinos, then that would be the time that we will have to decide what to do," he added.

Duterte maintained that the developments in the West Philippine Sea are part of a "greater game of geopolitics."

"Well, I said that's part of the conflict, because they have gobbled up the whole of (South) China Sea, for them, it's theirs, they felt free to roam around but they never harmed or arrested any Filipino. I am sure it has something to do with the greater game of geopolitics. And it is not directed to us," he said.

Duterte reiterated that an armed conflict would only lead to a massacre of Filipino soldiers and policemen.

"We go into a compromise for the time being because if we go to war or there is a violent conflict, we would never win and I would suffer beyond imagination. I would just go there, send my soldiers and policemen to be slaughtered. I am not prepared to do that," he added.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) earlier called Beijing's attention to the presence of hundreds of Chinese vessels around Pag-asa Island in Palawan, saying their activities are "illegal" and a violation of Philippine sovereignty. The vessels—believed to be militia disguised as fishing boats—have been stationed

around Pag-asa since January.

He said he would ask the military to "prepare for suicide missions" if the Chinese dare venture into Pag-asa.

"No, I'm trying to tell China, Pag-asa is ours. We have been there since 1974. If it is yours, why did you not ask us to leave? So, let us be friends but do not touch Pag-asa Island and the rest. Otherwise—otherwise things would be different," Duterte said.

He could be referring to the 1974 "ceding" of the KIG to the Philippines then under the Marcos regime by fishing businessman and adventurer Tomas Cloma, who claimed to have "discovered" them in the 1950s.

Duterte said if there were doubts on the Philippines' sovereignty over Pag-asa, then the Chinese would have made it an issue right after he became president.

The issue cropped up just as Duterte was preparing to visit Beijing later this month to attend the China-led Belt and Road forum.

'China activities near Pag-asa alarming'

A senior US defense official said yesterday the presence of large numbers of Chinese vessels near islands and islets occupied by the Philippines is "a concern."

The government protested the Chinese ship movements Thursday after its military monitored more than 200 Chinese vessels from January-March in a disputed area named Sandy Cay, which is near the Philippine-occupied island of Pag-asa.

Asked about the situation while on a visit to Bangkok, Joseph Felter, deputy assistant secretary of defense for South and Southeast Asia, told reporters that the US is troubled "by any aggressive activity by any country in the South China Sea, in this case China. We see that as of concern."

Defend Pag-asa

Liberal Party senatorial candidate Mar Roxas said Pag-asa is indisputably Philippine territory and should be defended by the administration.

Roxas is part of the Otso Diretso opposition Senate slate.

"It's simple, it's (Pag-asa Island) ours. We won our case on that," the former senator said, referring to the arbitration case won by the Philippines in July 2016 against Beijing.

Former solicitor general Florin Hilbay, also a candidate of Otso Diretso, challenged the government to make public the diplomatic protests filed by the Duterte administration against China.

— With Christina Mendez, Jess Diaz, Helen Flores, AP

PH to China: Lay off Pag-asa Island

Duterte rules out war, but is ready to defend Filipinos if harmed

By ARGYLL B. GEDUCOS
and GENALYN D. KABILING

President Duterte advised China to lay off Pag-asa Island in the West Philippine Sea, saying the territory belongs to Filipinos.

"Pag-asa Island belongs to us. Is that yung base natin? China would never do that, I assure you, unless China wants a war with us. Hindi ako papayag kung pati yung Pag-asa i-occupy nila? [I will not allow it if they occupy Pag-asa Island] No, of course not," he said during a chance interview with reporters after the national assembly of prosecutors in Palawan.

The President said he was not warning China but was giving the Asian giant a friendly advice.

"I am trying to tell China: Yung Pag-asa [Island] is ours. We have been there [since] 1974. Kung inyo 'yan, bakit hindi ninyo pinaalis ►10

PH to China: Lay...

◀1

kami (If that is yours then why haven't you driven us out of there)?" he said late Thursday evening.

"So let us be friends but do not touch Pag-asa Island and the rest. Otherwise, things would be different. This is not a warning, this is just a word of advice to my friends kasi kaibigan tayo ng (because we are a friend of) China," he added.

War ruled out

The President, however, ruled out going to war with China over the territorial row, saying he would work for a "compromise" instead amid the reported presence of at least 275 Chinese vessels near Pag-asa Island.

"If we go to war or there is a violent conflict, we would never win and I would suffer beyond imagination. I would just go there send my soldiers and policemen to be slaughtered. I am not prepared to do that," he said.

He admitted that it would be a suicide if the country resorts to the use of force against China.

"Kung gusto natin we have two op-

tions - we drive them away by force, can we do that? Unless we want to commit suicide," he said.

"If you go to war, the first step of China would be to launch its missile in seven minutes it would arrive Manila before you can make a fourth of your journey to where you want to go," he added.

Don't harm Filipinos

But Duterte said he will not hesitate to shed blood if the Chinese would harm Filipinos in the Pag-asa Island.

"And I assure you that if they kill or arrest people there who are Filipinos, then that would be the time that we will have to decide on what to do," he added.

"So nakikiusap ako (I am asking you). I will not plead or beg, but I am just telling you to lay off the Pag-asa because may mga sundalo ako diyan. 'Pag 'yan ang ginalaw ninyo, ibang istorya na 'yan (I have soldiers there. If you harm them, then that will be a different story)," he said.

On the Chinese ships swarming

around Pag-asa Island, Duterte acknowledged that China has "gobbled up" the whole of South China Sea on the belief it owns the territory. But so far, he pointed out that China has not harmed any Filipino.

"Para sa kanila, kanila 'yan [For them, it's theirs] so they felt free to roam around but they never harmed or arrested any Filipino, I am sure it has something to do with the greater game of geopolitics. And it is not directed to us," he said.

"That is part of the conflict because they have gobbled up the whole of China Sea. Para sa kanila, kanila 'yan (For them it belongs to them). So they feel free to roam around and do whatever - but they actually never harmed or arrested any Filipino," he said.

President Duterte has opted to set aside the country's conflict with China on the disputed waters and build stronger relations with the Asian giant.

He assured that he would raise with China the Arbitral Ruling favorable to the Philippines before he steps down as president.

DUTERTE WARNS CHINA:

Back off Pag-asa Island

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte on Thursday warned China not to touch Pag-asa (Thitu) Island in the South China Sea (West Philippine Sea) where hundreds of Chinese vessels have massed, circling the area.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the national assembly of prosecutors in Puerto Princesa, Palawan, Duterte maintained that Pag-asa Island belongs to the Philippines.

"Pag-asa Island belongs to us. *Hindi ako papayag kung pati 'yung Pag-asa i-occupy nila* (I will not allow them to occupy Pag-asa Island). No, of course not," Duterte said.

The President issued the warning following reports from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) that hundreds of Chinese coast guard and fishing vessels had "swarmed" the Manila-held Pag-asa Island.

➤Pag-asaA8

■ **PAG-ASA FROM A1**

Back off

the Manila-held Pag-asa Island.

"I will not plead or beg, but I am just telling you to lay off Pag-asa [Island] because I have soldiers there," Duterte said.

"If you touch it, that's another story. Then I will tell my soldiers 'prepare for suicide missions'."

The President, however, ruled out going to war with China over the territorial row, saying he would work for a "compromise" instead.

He explained that he was not ready to do battle with China and to send government troops to their death.

"We go into a compromise for the time being [precisely because], if we go to war or there is a violent conflict, we would never win and I would suffer beyond imagination. I would just go there to send my soldiers and policemen to be slaughtered. I am not prepared to do that," the President said.

Duterte admitted that it would be suicide if the country resorted to use force against China.

"*Kung gusto natin* (If we want), we have two options — we drive them away by force, can we do that? Unless we want to commit suicide," the President said.

"If you go to war, the first step of China would be to launch its missile in seven minutes [and] it would arrive in Manila before you can make a fourth of your journey to where you want to go," he added.

Earlier, the military said it had monitored a surge in the number of Chinese vessels around Pag-asa Island this year. The AFP's Western Command said the vessels were part of China's maritime militia.

Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jinhua, however, said the Chinese vessels seen near the island were not armed.

The Philippines had filed a diplomatic protest with Beijing over the matter.

But Duterte said he was convinced that the presence of Chinese vessels in Pag-asa "has something to do with the greater game of geopolitics."

"It is not directed to us. And I assure you that if they kill or arrest people there who are Filipinos, then that would be the time that we will have to decide on what to do," he added.

Duterte acknowledged that China had "gobbled up" the whole of the South China Sea on the belief it owns the territory.

But so far, he pointed out, China had not harmed any Filipino.

"*Para sa kanila, kanila 'yan* (For them, it's theirs), so they felt free to roam [there], but they never harmed or arrested any Filipino," Duterte said.

"We say it's ours because of the economic zone that is given to us. Then they say it's part of their territory, that's why there is a conflict not only with us, but with the peripheral countries around the [South] China Sea," he added.

Since assuming the presidency in 2016, Duterte has sought to downplay Manila's maritime dispute with Beijing in exchange for improved ties with the world's second largest economy.

Duterte has also refused to flaunt the Philippines' victory against China in a United Nations-backed arbitration court also in 2016 that invalidated Beijing's expansive claims to the disputed waters.

WITH AFP

Du30 to China: Back off from Pag-asa

By Nat Mariano, Macon Ramos-Araneta
and Maricel V. Cruz

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has warned Beijing to back off from a disputed island in the South China Sea, warning of possible military action if China "touches" it amid rising tensions over the key waterway.

Duterte, aiming to attract trade and investment from the Asian superpower, has mostly withheld his early criticism of Beijing's expansive claims to the sea—a point of regional contention because trillions of dollars of goods pass through it.

But as the military warned this week that hundreds of Chinese coast guard and fishing vessels had "swarmed" the Manila-held Pag-asa island, also known as Thitu, Duterte spoke out late Thursday.

"I will not plead or beg, but I am just telling you that lay off the Pag-asa because I have soldiers there," Duterte said in speech to prosecutors.

"If you touch it, that's another story. Then I will tell my soldiers 'prepare for suicide missions,'" he added.

He also said he would park five Navy ships in the area and tell the Chinese that they were well within the country's exclusive economic zone.

Next page

Du30...

From A1

Duterte has repeatedly said war with China would be futile and that the Philippines would lose and suffer heavily in the process.

His words came after his Department of Foreign Affairs issued a statement calling the Chinese ships' presence an "illegal" violation of Philippine sovereignty.

China, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam have all staked claims to various islands and reefs as well as waterways in the sea, with rich petroleum reserves thought to sit deep beneath the waters.

In a major victory for Manila, an international maritime tribunal ruled early in Duterte's presidency in 2016 that China's claims to the area have no legal basis.

However, he has largely set aside that ruling and backed off on their once tense territorial dispute over the sea.

He has been criticized at home for taking too soft a stance on China and getting little of the billions of dollars in investment promised by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

For its part, Beijing has played down the rising tension over Pag-asa, saying on Thursday that both sides had "exchanged views frankly, amicably and constructively" on the issue.

The United States, long-time Philippine ally and former colonial master, has moved to oppose any Chinese expansion in the sea.

For the first time, the US said in March that it would come to Manila's aid in case of an "armed attack" in the South China Sea.

The US navy has also forcefully asserted its right to freedom of navigation in the area, repeatedly sailing close to the man-made islands and drawing Chinese protests.

In his campaign speech, Duterte said his remarks were not a warning, but advice to a friend.

"I'm trying to tell China: That Pag-

asa [Island] is ours. We have been there since 1974. If that's yours, why didn't you drive us away? So, let us be friends but do not touch Pag-asa Island and the rest. Otherwise... things would be different," Duterte said.

In interviews after the speech, however, the President returned to his normal rhetoric, saying war with China would be suicide, and that Beijing could launch a missile that could hit Manila in seven minutes.

"I am sure that it has something to do with the greater game of geopolitics and it is not directed to us. And I assure you that if they kill or arrest people there who are Filipinos, then that would be the time that we will have to decide on what to do," he added.

The country's military earlier said about 275 ships have swarmed the vicinity of Pag-asa Island from January to March this year.

Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua claimed the Chinese ships were fishing vessels and were unarmed.

However, the Department of Foreign Affairs on Thursday labeled as "illegal" the presence of hundreds of Chinese vessels swarming around the Kalayaan Island Group.

Senator Panfilo Lacson said Friday he will join President Duterte if he decides to visit Pag-asa Island, which is surrounded by Chinese vessels.

"I volunteer to join him in my capacity as an elected senator of the republic and as a freedom-loving Filipino," Lacson said.

In a Twitter post, Lacson said that Pag-asa is part of the Philippines as he quoted lines from the Philippine national anthem stating that Filipinos would not allow any invaders and will die fighting for the country.

He said China should not be allowed to encircle, much less occupy Pag-asa Island.

Duterte said Thursday that he would not allow China to seize Pag-asa Island even as he maintained that the country must not go to war with the Chinese.

During the 2016 presidential campaign, then Davao City Mayor Duterte said if

China will refuse to honor the decision of the Arbitral Court, he would personally go to the disputed territory to jet ski to the disputed areas and plant the Philippine flag.

Months after he won the elections, Duterte said the "jet ski" reference was only a hyperbole to drive home the point that he would uphold the Philippines' claims in the South China Sea.

"You cannot expect me to ride [on a jet ski], I don't even know how to swim," he said in an interview with Al Jazeera in October 2016. "If it overturns, you lose a president."

In the House, Buhay Party-list Rep. Lito Atienza welcomed the rebuke issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs and appealed to the Chinese government to stop their purported "fishing operations" in Philippine territory.

"We are appealing to the Chinese leadership to refrain from any action that may deprive our Filipino fishermen from earning their living and benefiting from our natural resources. Pag-asa Island, as part of the Kalayaan Island Group (KIG), is included in the official demarcation of Philippine territory as defined by no less than the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

"The mere presence of Chinese vessels in the area should have required Philippine permission. But for them to shoos away Filipino fishermen in an area clearly defined as within our territory is a violation of Philippine sovereignty," he said.

In an interview on radio dzMM, the director of the University of the Philippines Institute for Maritime Affairs and Laws of the Seas Jay Batongbacal said the Philippines should seek help from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

"We have to unify within the region and come up with a single ASEAN position against China's fishing fleet because we are not the only country receiving this kind of treatment," he said in Filipino.

With AFP

KEEP OFF PAG-ASA, DUTERTE TELLS CHINA

By Efren Montano

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte on Thursday said he would not allow China to seize Philippine-occupied Pag-asa Island even as he maintained his stand not to go to war with Beijing to defend the country's interests in the South China Sea.

Pag-asa, a 37-hectare island with an airstrip, commercial communications tower, and power generators, is the largest of the Kalayaan Island Group territories claimed by the Philippines and is part of the municipality of Palawan.

"The Pag-asa Island belongs to us. Is that yung base natin? China would never do that, I assure you unless China wants a war

with us, eh di ako papayag kung pati yung Pag-asa i-occupy nila," the President told reporters in Puerto Princesa City.

The President also raised the matter during the PDP-Laban campaign rally that followed.

"Let us be friends but do not touch Pag-asa Island otherwise things would be different," Duterte said.

"I will not plead or beg. I am just telling you that lay off with Pag-asa because may mga sundalo ako dyan at pag 'yan ang ginalaw ninyo ibang istorya na 'yan," he added.

Duterte, however, clarified that this is "not a warning" but "just a word of advice" to China because it is the country's friend.

Hours before he made

the remark, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) came out with a strongly-worded statement slamming the presence of Chinese vessels in waters off Pag-asa Island.

The DFA said the presence of Chinese vessels is illegal and raised questions "about their intent as well as concerns over their role in support of coercive objectives."

About 275 Chinese vessels were spotted near and around Pag-asa, which China calls Zhongye, from January to March this year, according to the Philippine military. China said the vessels are civilian ships, mostly fishing boats.

A senior Philippine diplomat said the diplomatic protest against China's massive presence in Pag-asa was filed last March

29.

But Duterte said the Chinese "have never harmed or arrested any Filipino."

"I am sure it has something to do with the greater game of geopolitics. And it is not directed to us. And I assure you that if they kill or arrest people there who are Filipinos, then that would be the time that we will have to decide on what to do," he said, adding he could send suicide missions.

"At 'pag 'yan ang ginalaw ninyo, ibang istorya na 'yan. (And if you touch Pag-asa Island, it would be a different story.) 'Di sabihin ko na 'yang mga sundalo ko, 'prepare for suicide missions'. (I will tell my soldiers to prepare for suicide missions)," Duterte added.

Duterte sa China: **'Pag-asa Island lubayan n'yo'**

Siniguro ni Pangulong Duterte na hindi siya papayag na angkinin at sakupin ng China ang Pag-asa Island kaya ang pakiusap niya dito ay huwag gagalawin ang isla.

"I will not plead or beg, but I am just telling you that I lay off the Pag-asa because I have soldiers there," wika ng Pangulo sa speech nito kamakailawa ng gabi sa Puerto Princesa City.

"If you touch it, that's another story. Then I will tell my soldiers 'prepare for suicide missions,' giit pa ng Pangulo.

"I assure you, unless China wants a war with us, eh 'di ako papayag kung pati 'yung Pag-asa i-occupy nila? No, of course not," wika niya.

Aniya, hangga't maari ay dadaanin sa diplomasya at compromise ang anumang sigalot

dahil hindi naman kaya ng Pilipinas na makipag-giyera sa China.

"We go into a compromise for the time being, kasi hindi nga, if we go to war or there is a violent conflict, we would never win and I would suffer beyond imagination. I would just go there send my soldiers and policemen to be slaughtered. I am not prepared to do that," dagdag pa ni Duterte.

Idinagdag pa ng Pangulo, ang presensiya ng mga Chinese vessels malapit sa Pag-asa ay posibleng bahagi ng "greater game of geopolitics."

"It is not directed to us. And I assure you that if they kill or arrest people there who are Filipinos, then that would be the time that we will have to decide on what to do," giit pa ng Pangulo. (Rudy Andai)

PRRD doubts quick US help in case PH is attacked

By GENALYN D. KABILING

Amid the country's territorial dispute with China, President Duterte doubts whether the United States could send help "on time" in case the country

is under attack.

The President observed the US was good with words when it offered to come to the country's aid but it remained unclear if the US Congress would actually allow its troops to go to war.

"Ang America sabi niya tutulong kasi may US Defense tayo. Alam mo 'yung sugal na 'yan, sabihin mo, 'Adre sige, I have your back covered.' Mabuti lang 'yan sa salita. Kung makita nila sumabog na 'yung mga tao, lumilipad

na [America said it will help us because we have a US defense (treaty). You know the gamble there, you say 'I have your back covered.' They're only good with words. What if they see explosions hit people, things ►10

PRRD doubts quick...

◀1

start flying?]," Duterte said during the PDP-Laban campaign rally in Palawan Thursday night.

"Do I trust the Americans? Yes. But will that help be on time? That's the problem," he added.

Duterte said the United States could declare war but must still get permission of its Congress to do so. "Kung hindi magbigay? [What if they don't give it?]," the President asked.

During a campaign sortie in Koronadal City, South Cotabato last week, the President revealed he is not angry with the US but is "wary" about its style of diplomatic engagement.

The President's latest comment about the United States came after he asked China to "lay off" Pag-asa Island located in the West Philippine Sea amid citings of Chinese vessels either sailing or stationed in the area.

Being friends, Duterte said he was just giving China a "word of advice" not

a warning.

"I will not plead or beg, but I'm just telling you that lay off the Pag-asa because may mga sundalo ako diyan (I have soldiers there)," he said.

"At 'pag 'yan ang ginalaw ninyo, ibang istorya na 'yan. 'Di sabihin ko na 'yang mga sundalo ko, 'prepare for suicide missions' [If you touch that, that's a different story. I'll tell my soldiers to prepare for suicide missions]," he added.

In his recent visit to Manila, US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo announced the US would defend the Philippines in case of an armed attack in the disputed South China Sea. The US action is supposedly part of its obligation under the 1951 mutual defense treaty signed with the Philippines.

Under the defense pact, the Philippines and United States agreed to help each other in case of an "armed attack in the Pacific area" on either party.

PRRD doubts US vow to defend PH

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has expressed doubt the United States will make good of its word to defend the Philippines in times of war or aggression from other countries.

Speaking at the PDP-Laban campaign rally in Puerto Princesa, Palawan Thursday night, Duterte taunted the assurance of Secretary of State Michael Pompeo that the US will protect Philippines from any foreign attack.

"Ang America sabi niya tutulong kasi may US De-

fense tayo. Alam mo 'yung sugal na 'yan, sabihin mo, "Adre sige, I have your back covered." Mabuti lang 'yan sa salita," Duterte said.

Duterte bared that the US "can declare war but they have to get the permission of Congress of the United States of America" before launching any counter-attack against an enemy-state of the Philippines.

However, Duterte clarified that he trusts the Americans but the problem would be whether the help would come on time.

"Do I trust the Americans? Yes. But will that help be on time? That's the problem," asks Duterte.

Duterte then continued recounting how China and Russia helped the government in liberating Marawi City from the ISIS-inspired Maute terror group without asking even for a "toothpick" in exchange of weapons "to fight more efficiently and faster."

Meanwhile, the Philippines has called on concerned parties to desist from any activities in the West

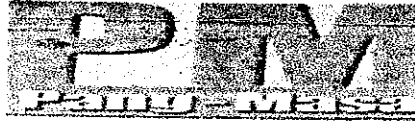
Philippine Sea (South China Sea) amid the recurring presence of Chinese vessels in the disputed area.

In a strongly worded statement issued on Thursday night, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said "We call on concerned parties to desist from any action and activity that contravenes the ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), as these generate tension, mistrust and uncertainty, and threatens regional peace and stability."

The Western Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines has said over 600 Chinese vessels have been circling Pag-asa Island since January this year.

This prompted the Philippines to lodge protests against China stressing their presence in Pag-asa Islands, which are part of the Kalayaan Island Group (KIG), an integral part of the Philippines over which it has sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction is illegal.

Efren Montano & Cristina Lee-Pisao



PRRD HINDI PAPAYAG NA ANGKININ AT SAKUPIN NG CHINA ANG PAG-ASA ISLAND

Hindi umano papayag si Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte na angkinin at sakupin ng China ang Pag-asa Island.

Ito ang siniguro ng Pangulo sa harap ng mga mamamahayag sa Puerto Princesa, Palawan.

"I assure you, unless China wants a war with us, eh 'di ako papayag kung pati 'yung

Pag-asa i-occupy nila? No, of course not," wika ni Pangulong Duterte.

Aniya, hangga't maari ay dadaanin sa diplomasya at compromise ang anumang sigalot dahil hindi naman kaya ng Pilipinas na makipag-giyera sa China.

Ikinagdag pa ng Pangulo, ang presensiya ng mga

Chinese vessels malapit sa Pag-asa ay posibleng bahagi ng "greater game of geopolitics."

"It is not directed to us. And I assure you that if they kill or arrest people there who are Filipinos, then that would be the time that we will have to decide on what to do," giit pa ng Pangulo. -Rudy Andal-

'Geopolitics game in WPS'

Acknowledging a growing concern over the presence of Chinese vessels near Pag-asa Island in the West Philippine Sea, President Rodrigo Duterte said the naval presence was the consequence of the "greater game of geopolitics" that is not directed on the Philippines nor to any other country.

"I am sure that it has something to do with the greater game of geopolitics and it is not directed at us. And I assure you that if they kill or arrest

Turn to page 6

'Geopolitics game in WPS'

I am sure that it has something to do with the greater game of geopolitics and it is not directed at us

From page 1

people there who are Filipinos, then that would be the time that we will have to decide on what to do," Mr. Duterte told reporters at a gathering of public prosecutors in Puerto Princesa, Palawan last Thursday night.

The President mentioned the historical friction in the area that will not be resolved by force.

If they kill or arrest people there who are Filipinos, then that would be the time that we will have to decide on what to do.

"There's a conflicting claim. We say that it's ours because of the economic zone that's given to us. Then, they say that it's part of their territory. That is why there is a conflict not only with us, but with the peripheral countries around (West Philippine) Sea," he said.

Use of force not an option

"We can drive them away by force. Oh can — can we do that? Oh... Unless we want to commit suicide. If you go to war, the first step of China would be to launch its missile. In seven minutes, it would arrive in Manila," he said.

Pag-asa Island belongs to us. Of course, China would never do that.

"So, we go into a compromise for the time being. I can't just go there and send my soldiers and policemen to be slaughtered. I am not prepared to do that," he added.

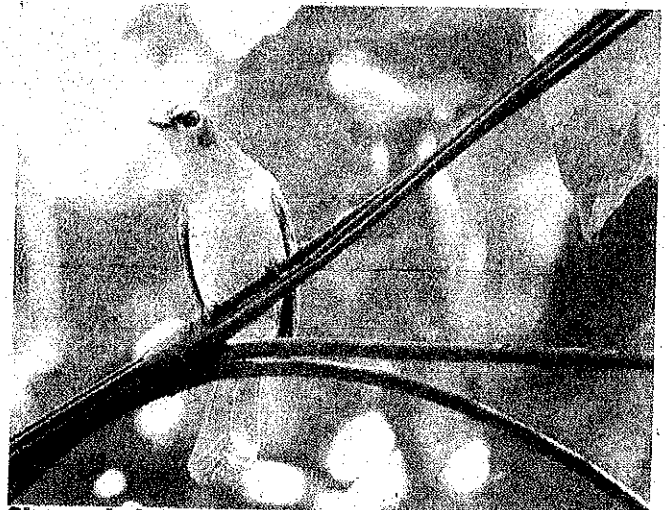
Mr. Duterte, however, drew the line on Pag-asa Island.

"Pag-asa Island belongs to us. Of course, China would never do that. I assure you. Unless China wants to start war with us. I won't ever allow it, if they would attempt to occupy even Pag-asa. No, of course not," he said.

No one harmed or arrested

"They felt free to roam around, but they never harmed or arrested any Filipino. I am sure it has something to do with the greater game of geopolitics," he added.

Asked if he would order the ships, suspected to be Chinese



Stop and chow Birds are not spared from the heat as a feathered creature sought the comfort of a cool shade of a guava tree and likely to get a quick meal.

AL PADILLA

militia vessels, surrounding the area to leave, Mr. Duterte reminded how the Philippines' security forces — in terms of weaponry and manpower — are inferior compared to that of China's.

It will be a different story, however, if China arrests or kills any Filipino in the contested waterway.

China's Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua, in his courtesy visit to presidential spokesperson and chief legal counsel Salvador Panelo in Malacañang a few days ago, asserted that, as far as he knows, the more than 200 Chinese vessels spotted off Pag-asa Island are manned by "fishermen."

The Chinese envoy also reiterated that his country will not deploy armed militia men to the area that may risk sparking violent conflict between the two countries.

Unless China wants to start war with us. I won't ever allow it, if they would attempt to occupy even Pag-asa.

"We have been handling this issue through friendly and diplomatic channels, you don't have to worry about whether there would be any kind of outbreak of conflict or not," said Zhao.

Kristina Maralit

Pinoys distrust Beijing's 'good' intentions: SWS

FOUR out of 10 Filipinos do not believe China's intentions for the Philippines are good for them, according to a Social Weather Stations survey released Friday.

The survey, conducted from December 16 to 19 last year, found 44 percent of Filipino adults disagreed with the statement: "Most of what the Chinese government wants to happen in the Philippines is good for the Filipinos."

There is a net agreement score of a moderately weak -12 (23 percent agree, 35 percent disagree) among those who were undecided about their trust in China, and the very weak -40 (19 percent agree, 60 percent disagree) among those with little trust in China, according to SWS.

Only 27 percent agreed with the statement while 29 percent were undecided, equivalent to a net agreement score of -17, "moderately weak," SWS said.

Of the 44 percent who disagreed, 22 percent "strongly disagree" while the other half "somewhat disagree."

Recently, concerns have been raised about Manila securing loans from Beijing due to the two nations' long-standing dispute in the South China Sea.

Next page

Pinoy...

From A1

The Philippines and China have long figured in a maritime dispute as Beijing refuses to recognize an international arbitral court's ruling that invalidated the

latter's sweeping 9-dash line claim over the South China Sea.

Reports of Chinese personnel harassing Filipino fishermen in the West Philippine Sea, the country's exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea, have also made headlines several times.

But relations between Manila and Bei-

jing have considerably improved under the leadership of President Rodrigo Duterte who has chosen to forge closer ties with Asia's largest economy, setting aside Manila's maritime dispute with Beijing.

Philippine authorities have repeatedly raised concerns over China's activities in the disputed waters, particularly its

rampant militarization efforts in recent years, which Beijing has denied.

In a speech on Thursday, Duterte warned Beijing to back off from a disputed island in the South China Sea, warning of possible military action if China "touches" it amid rising tensions over the key waterway.

Martial law victims hit SolGen for rejecting settlement deal

By Christine O. Avendaño
@10avendanoINQ

The group of martial law victims who won a human rights settlement in Hawaii against the estate of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos assailed the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) for rejecting a United States court-supervised deal that would have given them compensation from the proceeds of the sale of several paintings illegally acquired by former first lady Imelda Marcos.

In a statement on Friday, Claimants 1081 "condemned the OSG and its attempt to muscle in on the matter of the settlement," as it urged the government to "be consistent with its policy of support for compensation for the Marcos human rights victims."

On Wednesday, the OSG, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and

the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) said they agreed on March 11 that the government would no longer enter into the settlement deal "in the best interest of the republic."

'Grossly disadvantageous'

The OSG, headed by Jose Calida, said it found the terms of the settlement agreement "grossly disadvantageous to the government and not in accord with existing Philippine laws and jurisprudence."

Calida cited a memorandum that required the PCGG to get OSG and DOJ approval of the terms "before it can enter into the settlement agreement."

The PCGG, the OSG added, sent on March 16 a letter to the New York District Court under Judge Katherine Failla informing the court of the government's final decision.

The claimants' American lawyer, Robert Swift, said Hawaii District Court Judge Manuel Real had authorized on March 28 the distribution of \$1,500 to each of the 6,500 registered martial law victims in the class suit. The court approved a \$13.75-million settlement to the victims that in turn would be charged against the proceeds of the sale of four paintings.

Imelda collection

The paintings were among the art collection of the former first lady that disappeared shortly after her husband's downfall in 1986. They reappeared in July 2013 after the arrest of Imelda Marcos' former aide, Vilma Bautista.

Under the settlement agreement, the martial law victims would receive a total of \$13.75 million from the sale of the paintings, the government



Jose Calida

would get \$4 million, while the remainder would be split between Golden Buddha Corp. and the estate of Roger Roxas, who discovered the so-called Yamashita treasure.

Claimants 1081 said the agreement was already final, according to the New York District Court which has jurisdiction over the case.

The OSG's move, the group's said, "runs counter to the policy and acts of President Duterte with respect to the distribution of compensation of martial law victims provided by Republic Act No. 10368, or the Human Rights Reparation and Recognition Act of 2013."

Claims board

The law called for the creation of a Human Rights Victims' Claims Board to process the claims of people who have suffered human rights violations between Sept. 21, 1972 and Feb. 25, 1986.

Claimants 1081 said Mr. Duterte had consistently supported their claims "by first directing a faster human rights compensation process through the Claims Board and later by extending the life of the compensation fund up to the end of this year."

The group said the share of the human rights victims from the New York settlement would have been the third tranche of their compensation.

Continuing jurisdiction

It reminded the government that the PCGG continued to have jurisdiction over the Marcos assets and their recovery, and pointed out that "the OSG had failed in its attempt to either disband the PCGG and transfer jurisdiction, or to transfer the PCGG under its jurisdiction."

The PCGG, a quasijudicial agency created in 1986 by then President Corazon Aquino to recover the ill-gotten wealth accumulated by the Marcos family and their cronies, has so far recovered a total of P171 billion worth of Marcos ill-gotten wealth and is targeting a collection of P40 billion more in 2020.

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Revolutionary war? Rody told not to threaten Pinoys

By HELEN FLORES

A "revolutionary war"?

Vice President Leni Robredo said yesterday President Duterte should not threaten Filipinos with something unconstitutional just because of a tantrum.

She was referring to the President's speech the other night in Palawan where he mentioned declaring a "revolutionary war" for the remainder of his term and the arrest of all dissenters after a senator questioned an order to review government contracts.

"I was surprised with the President's (threat) to declare a revolutionary government because we are both lawyers and he knows that this is against the Constitution," Robredo said in a speech in Bohol where she joined the campaign sortie of the opposition Otso Diretso.

"You cannot threaten the people with something unconstitutional just because you are having tantrums. I think it's an irresponsible response because when we entered this job, the hardships are part of the mandate we swore to," she said.

Senatorial candidates of Otso Diretso also slammed the President for threatening to declare a revolutionary government, suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus and order the arrest of his critics.

Robredo is "ready" to take over the position of Duterte if he makes good his threat to set up a revolutionary government so he can easily arrest critics and political foes.

"I think all of those who run for vice president should

be ready for the eventuality because it's part of the mandate of the vice president,"

Robredo said when asked to comment on a pronouncement by her former lawyer Romulo Macalintal that she automatically becomes president if Duterte declares a revolutionary government and designates himself its leader.

Macalintal is running for senator in the coming polls under Otso Diretso.

Under a revolutionary government led by Duterte, Robredo becomes the president of a duly constituted government, he said.

"He (Duterte) ceases to be president having divested himself of the presidency. Such act will pave the way for Vice President Leni Robredo to take over the vacant position of president and assume the functions and the Office of the President," he said.

The revolutionary government envisioned by Duterte cannot be compared with the one led by former president Corazon Aquino because "his is just his own making or a one-man declaration of a revolutionary government or practically a mere knee-jerk reaction against his critics, while Aquino's was the result of a people's uprising where people came together and showed their power to take over an abusive and graft-laden government," Macalintal added.

"Finally, there is no such thing as suspending the privilege of a writ of habeas corpus and declaring a revolutionary government as these are inconsistent acts," he said.

"If President Duterte suspends such privilege, then he is still adhering to the provisions of our Constitution, which is inconsistent with his revolutionary government, which has no charter at all," according to the veteran election lawyer.

Threat ineffective

Sen. Francis Pangilinan, president of the opposition Liberal Party, said critics will not be silenced by Duterte's threats "but by his sterling performance in going after these (drug) syndicates."

"Instead of threatening his critics with arrest, he should arrest the big-time drug lords and his Customs appointees who have repeatedly brought in tons of shabu worth billions of pesos," Pangilinan said.

Sen. Risa Hontiveros called Duterte's issuing such threats shameful. "In the middle of China's massive, illegal and deep incursion into our territories and our very own workplaces, President Duterte would rather pick on his own people than confront the country's real invader," Hontiveros said.

"Those who should be arrested are not our countrymen and women but foreign encroachers who illegally occupy our territories, threaten our small fisherfolk, smuggle illegal drugs and rob our workers of their jobs," she said.

Human rights lawyer Chel Diokno and former Quezon congressman Erin Tañada said the Chief Executive should not be too "onion-skinned."

Diokno reminded Duterte

that no one is above the law and warned that the declaration of a revolutionary government is a betrayal of the Constitution and the people.

"My advice to him is not to be onion-skinned and don't be hot tempered. Just 'chel'," he said in jest, in an apparent play on his name and on the word "chill."

Duterte's outburst was prompted by Sen. Franklin Drilon's calls for his administration to exercise caution when reviewing government contracts.

Diokno, along with other groups, recently raised concern about several onerous provisions in the government's agreements with China for the Kaliwa Dam project, like high interest rates and a "waiver of sovereign immunity" clause.

"No one is above the law. So we are ready to face whatever it is he wants to do," Diokno said.

Samira Gutoc, who is also running for senator under Otso Diretso, described the President's recent pronouncements as dangerous.

"Mr. President, please do not make threatening a habit. Suspending the writ of habeas corpus and declaring a 'revolutionary war' are serious matters that you should not say irresponsibly," the Mindanao peace advocate said.

The Commission on Human Rights (CHR) said President Duterte's plan to curtail criticism is a step toward dictatorship.

"Open and free discourse is a crucial facet of a democracy. It is a right guaranteed by the

Constitution and guided by different laws," CHR spokesperson Jacqueline de Guia said.

"In this case, criticisms, especially if warranted and viewed for public interest, should not be used as a justification to curtail other rights, lest we spiral into a dictatorship," she added.

De Guia also urged the public to be vigilant against possible oppressions and abuse of power.

"Just the same, we remind the government to use the authority the people granted to them to protect rights and liberties rather than curtail them," she added.

Shielding Paolo

For militant lawmakers, Duterte's declaration was intended to deflect public attention from his son Paolo's alleged involvement in illegal drugs and his administration's "onerous" loans from China.

Duterte's plan was "meant to divert attention from the glaringly disadvantageous and downright treasonous loan agreements with China," Rep. Antonio Tinio of party-list Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) said.

"You can be sure that he has no intention of rescinding any of these loan agreements anytime soon," he said.

Rep. Carlos Zarate of Bayan Muna said Duterte's newest rant against his detractors is a cover-up also for the questionable killing by policemen of 14 Negros Oriental farmers.

"His pique cannot be a basis for suspending the writ of

habeas corpus and arresting all his critics," he said.

Bayan Muna chairman Neri Colmenares said under the Constitution, the writ could be suspended only in case of "invasion or rebellion, and public safety requires" it.

"His threat is his way to deflect attention away from the very serious issues hounding his administration and leadership, namely his flawed policy on China and the failure of his drug war," he said.

For labor group Federation of Free Workers (FFW), there is no ground for Duterte's plan to suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus.

"There is no actual or existing rebellion or invasion contemplated under Sec 18, Art VII of the Philippine Constitution that can be invoked to justify the suspension," said FFW president Sonny Matula.

He said the Duterte administration should instead focus on other issues like the arrest of workers and farmers even if there's no suspension of the writ.

"That there have been arrests of workers and farmers on trumped-up charges is more alarming," he pointed out.

But the President might be "joking again, as will be explained by his spokespersons," Matula added.

"But this is no laughing matter. Our human rights are being threatened. That's the serious matter that we need to address," he maintained.

- With Paolo Romero, Sheila Crisostomo, Evelyn Macajran, Jess Diaz, Janvic Mateo

Du30 warns Naia takeover by PAF

By Julie M. Aurelio
@JMAurelioINQ

President Duterte has warned that he would order the military to take over the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (Naia) if congestion and inefficiency woes plaguing the country's premier airport remain unresolved.

Mr. Duterte said he would adopt the same solution he implemented at the corruption-tainted Bureau of Customs (BOC) for Naia—by letting soldiers take over airport operations.

"That Naia, if it does not improve, the (Philippine) Air Force (PAF) will take over. That's the only way," he said, without elaborating on his plan to improve the Naia.

The President made the remarks during a PDP-Laban campaign rally in Puerto

Princesa City on Thursday night.

The Naia, the country's main international gateway, has been beset with congestion and inefficiency in recent years.

The government has been looking for ways to decongest the airport by building alternative airports outside Metro Manila.

Permanent BOC takeover

The President has always preferred retired military officials for government posts, and has even directed the military to take over the operations of the BOC after two large shipments of "shabu" or crystal meth slipped through the Port of Manila, right under the BOC's nose.

Meanwhile, the President said the military's takeover of the BOC might be a permanent setup.

"This is my warning. To the Customs, the military there might be permanent," he said on Thursday night.

Shoot smugglers on sight

He reiterated his order to Customs Commissioner Rey Leonardo Guerrero, a retired military general, to shoot and kill smugglers on sight.

"My order to Guerrero was this, 'Replace all the guards there and if you catch someone smuggling, shoot him, kill him and say that I was the one who ordered it,'" Mr. Duterte said.

He added that he even led the destruction of smuggled luxury vehicles and sports cars, since such vehicles end up in the hands of smugglers. A3

"They say that the corruption in Customs is unstoppable. Let's see. Your life, not your pockets, will be at stake now," the President warned. INQ

Duterte wants military to take over NAIA

BY RALPH U. VILLANUEVA

UNLESS the situation at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) improves, the military might take over its operations, President Rodrigo Duterte said.

NAIA has been consistently cited as one of the worst airports in the world.

Last year, it was ranked the 6th worst airport in the world.

In a speech during the Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan campaign rally in Palawan, Duterte said, "If those in NAIA do not improve, the Air Force will take over. That's the only way," Duterte said.

The President's statement came ahead of the April 30 moratorium the government

gave the "super-consortium," which is seeking to rehabilitate the airport.

Department of Transportation Secretary Arthur Tugade, earlier said that the consortium, made up of AC Infrastructure Holdings, Aboitiz InfraCapital Inc., Alliance Global Group Inc., Asia's Emerging Dragon Corp., Filinvest Development Corp., JG Summit Holdings Inc. and Metro Pacific Investments Corp. keep on delaying their talks.

"The talks have been dragging on. I want to set a cap. By April 30, if we have not come to an agreement, we will do the projects by ourselves," Tugade told reporters last month.

"They say we are delayed. We are not the ones causing the delay. They are the ones calling for extensions as to when we will meet," he added.

This is not the first time Duterte mulled militarizing offices of the government.

Last year, he "militarized" the Department of Agriculture as he brought on board a former general, former Philippine Army chief Rolando Bautista. This year, the President appointed three former generals to the department.

Last year, Duterte also said he would "militarize" the Bureau

of Customs as he underlined the need to address the issue of smuggling.

After this pronouncement, Duterte appointed former military chief Rey Guerrero as the new Customs chairman, replacing another former military man, Isidro Lapeña, who was transferred to the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority.

Duterte occasionally says that he prefers dealing with military men because they did as they were ordered without question.

In the same speech, Duterte recalled how he asked Guerrero to address the smuggling issue in the country.

He said he ordered Guerrero to replace all guards in the bureau, destroy smuggled vehicles and, ultimately, kill the smugglers.

ing wrong with his recent directive to review all the contracts, saying the objective was to determine if there were deals that were detrimental to the country's interests.

"I ordered the review of the contracts and here comes Drilon saying that [I should] be careful. Be careful of what?" Duterte added.

"Why should I be very careful in reviewing contracts that are not to the interests of the people? And the onerous and burden[some] provisions there that people have to honor, so you think that I will allow it just because we cannot impair the obligation of our contracts?" he said.

'He can't do it'

Sen. Panfilo Lacson on Friday said he believes that Duterte is smart enough to know that he cannot declare a revolutionary government and suspend the writ of habeas corpus.

"He will not do it because he is too smart and intelligent to know he cannot do it," Lacson said in a text message.

Senate President Vicente Sotto 3rd said Duterte issued the statement out of frustration.

"I'm sure he will have a better outlook once his programs against criminality becomes more successful. Suspension of the writ has proper constitutional safeguards while a revolutionary war is a metaphor," Sotto said.

Senators Francis Pangilinan and Risa Hontiveros also rejected the President's threat.

"Instead of threatening his critics with arrest he should arrest the big-time drug lords and his (Bureau of) Customs appointees who have repeatedly brought in tons of shabu

worth billions (of pesos). With the arrest of these bigtime druglords he would have proven his drug war is for real and his critics will be silenced," Pangilinan said.

"In the middle of China's massive, illegal and deep incursion into our territories and our very own workplaces, President Duterte would rather pick on his own people than confront the country's real invader," Hontiveros quipped.

"Instead of standing up to China's aggression, President Duterte threaten his own people with warrantless arrests and war. What should be suspended are not the people's civil liberties but the onerous contracts entered into by President Duterte with the Chinese government," Hontiveros added.

No reason

Senatorial candidates and members of the House of Representatives also criticized the President.

Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate said there was no reason to suspend the writ of habeas corpus or declare a revolutionary government.

"*Hindi pwedeng dahilan ng pagtanggal nito ay napikon lang ang Presidente* (You cannot suspend the writ just because the President got piqued)," Zarate said.

Makabayan senatorial candidate Neri Colmenares agreed, saying there was no constitutional basis for such a suspension of the writ.

**CATHERINE S. VALENTE,
GLEE JALEA AND
BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO**

Duterte OKs arming of state prosecutors

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

PRESIDENT Rorigo Duterte said he was open to the proposal to arm state prosecutors to protect themselves following the killing of several government lawyers.

In his speech during the national convention of the Prosecutors' League of the Philippines in Puerto Princesa, Palawan on Thursday night, Duterte, a former prosecutor, said he recognized the important role of prosecutors in the administration of justice and the danger that comes with it.

"I also encourage the leadership of the Prosecutors' League to work with the Philippine National Police, National Bureau of Investiga-

tion and relevant agencies to come up with solutions on how to better protect our prosecutors and their families," Duterte said.

"I'm ready for any suggestions, options. All are on the table. *Ano ang gusto ninyo* (What do you want)? *Baril* (Guns)? I will allow it," he added.

Duterte, a gun enthusiast, suggested prosecutors use Glock 19.

"*Huwag kayong kumuha ng* (Do not get) .45, it's too heavy. Go for the Glock 19. *Ang Glock hindi*

talaga nagja-jam 'yan (It does not jam). I'm not advertising the Glock, but it's a fact. That's why we bought it for my policemen. And maintenance-free, *hindi magkakalawang 'yan* (it does not get rusty)," he said.

The President said he understands that a prosecutor's job involved "antagonizing lawless elements, hardened criminals and their powerful backers."

"The assassination of prosecutors across the country highlighted the danger that prosecutors and their respective families endure," he added.

"Rest assured that our law enforcement agencies in our help are expediting the investigation of these assassination cases," he added.

Duterte admitted that he had been carrying a gun since he was

a prosecutor because he had to investigate military and police officers, as well as rebel leaders.

Meanwhile, the President lauded the prosecutors for their unwavering commitment to fight criminality, illegal drugs and corruption.

"I will do everything to protect you," the President told the prosecutors, saying they should not have to suffer for doing their job.

"With the valuable help of the Prosecutors' League, I am confident that we can further strengthen, improve and reform the entire National Prosecution Service so that you may all become efficient, credible, impartial and incorruptible prosecutors, upon whom our people may depend on whenever they feel wronged or aggrieved," he added. **A3**

President open to arming state prosecutors

By Rey E. Requejo

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte favors arming government prosecutors as part of their safety and protection amid the killings that targeted members of the National Prosecution Service.

"I'm ready for any suggestion. Op-

tions all are on the table. What do you want? Gun? I will allow it," Duterte said in his speech during the 31st Annual Convention of the Prosecutors League of the Philippines in Puerto Princesa City.

President Duterte, a government prosecutor-turned politician in 1986,

recalled that he himself could not go around without a gun as he was handling cases against alleged scalawags in the police and military. A2

"In my time, you ask those in my age, I carried a gun. I cannot go out without a gun. I was not comfortable without it. Like I was nude and naked," he said.

The Russians are coming – again

By Sundy Locus

A few months before the signing of a naval cooperation agreement with the Philippines, the Russian Navy sent yet another contingent to Manila for a five-day goodwill visit.

Three Russian vessels will lead the contingent arriving in the country on Monday, 8 April, spearheaded by the large anti-submarine ships *Admiral Tributs* and *Vinogradov* and their support sea tanker, the *Irkut*.

Arriving are head of mission Rear Admiral Edward Mikhailov, along with the commanding officers of the Admiral Panteleev, Captain Dmitry Tikhomirov; the Admiral Varyag, Captain Alexsei Ulyanenko; and the Boris Botuma, Sergev Bondar.

The visit is expected to highlight the growing defense relations of the two countries anchored on President Rodrigo Duterte's "independent foreign policy."

To recall, Russian Navy (PN) chief Adm. Vladimir Korolyov met with his counterpart, Philippine Navy Vice Adm. Robert Empedrad, and other Filipino military officials on 20 March to discuss the agreement. Empedrad reiterated that both sides agreed to sign it in July

during his visit in Russia.

The signing will coincide with the Russian Navy's foundation anniversary. The PN will join the celebration by participating in a fleet review.

If finalized, the naval cooperation agreement will pave

the way for "more engagements between the two navies, like more port visits, exchanges in training."

"We came up with an agreement for deepening cooperation between the Russian Navy and the Philippine Navy... We finalized the agreement and we are going to sign it during my next visit to Russia in July," Empedrad said.

This is not the first time that Russian vessels made port calls in the country. Three Russian vessels have docked in Manila last January for a three-day goodwill visit.

AFP official unmask CPP fronts, networks

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

A military official revealed that the Communist Party of the Philip-

pines (CPP) and its armed units are masking themselves as humanitarian non-government organizations (NGOs) to get funds, ►10

AFP official unmask...

◀1

which they reportedly use for terrorist activities in the Philippines, from international donors.

In his speech at the Milipol Asia-Pacific 2019 Conference in Singapore Thursday, Major General Antonio Parlade Jr., Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Deputy Chief of Staff for Civil Military Operations, disclosed that the CPP has already established an international network called the International Department consisting of some 252 member-organizations based in 39 countries.

According to Parlade, the CPP was able to establish 16 chapters abroad through the International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS) headed by CPP founding chair Jose Maria Sison.

Sison, who founded the CPP 50 years ago, is a recognized political refugee in The Netherlands and enjoys the protection of the Refugee Convention and Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

"We foresee that this problem, if not checked, can turn out to be a hybrid scheme that can be a transnational crime problem," Parlade told homeland security authorities of Asia-Pacific countries, seeking cooperation to combat a wide international network of communist-infiltrated front organizations.

"The purpose of this presentation is to make you aware that there is such a thing, and because of how intricate these international funding is being done. It may not be in our radar," he

added.

Parlade named local organizations such as IBON Foundation, General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership, and Action (GABRIELA), Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), Karapatan, National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL) as affiliates of ILPS.

Parlade said these organizations conduct international solidarity missions where they reportedly publish inaccurate reports to portray a tyrant and oppressive Philippine government.

"At the same time, they lobby for funds from foreign institutions claiming that they will be used for projects to solve the fabricated issues, but will rather be used to fund terrorist activities," the military official told security experts.

Fabricated reports

Parlade also disclosed that CPP-infiltrated organizations publish inaccurate information such as weak employment generation, and bloated figures on displaced indigenous communities in order to discredit the government.

"They've been fabricating reports, they've been tweaking, distorting reports so that the Philippine government will be perceived as incompetent, inefficient," Parlade said.

"They submit all these reports, false and fabricated reports, to the European Union, United Nations, and other governments, again for funding," he added.

'Funding Reds may turn into transnational crime'

THE Armed Forces of the Philippines warned homeland security officials in Asia-Pacific countries that the "funding schemes" perpetrated by groups linked to the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) could become a "transnational crime problem."

Maj. Gen. Antonio Parlade, the military's deputy chief of staff for civil-military operations, sought the

cooperation of various nations to fight the "wide international network" of the organizations "infiltrated" by the CPP.

In his speech at the Milipol Asia-Pacific 2019 conference held in Singapore on Thursday, Parlade said some groups have been "masking themselves" as humanitarian nongovernment organizations "to secure funds from international donors — which are used to

conduct terrorist activities."

According to him, the CPP established an international network composed of 252 organizations based in 39 countries. It also set up 16 chapters across the world through the International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS) headed by CPP founder Jose Maria "Joma" Sison.

►RedsA2

"We foresee that this problem, if not checked, can turn out to be a hybrid scheme that can be a transnational crime problem," Parlade said.

"The purpose of this presentation is to make you aware that there is such a thing and because of how intricate these international funding is being done, it may not be in our radar," he added.

Parlade named some Philippine-based organizations that are supposedly connected with the ILPS.

These groups include IBON Foundation, Gabriela, Alliance of Concerned Teachers, Karapatan and National Union of Peoples' Lawyers.

These organizations, the official said, were found to be conducting "international solidarity missions where they publish inaccurate to portray a tyrant and oppressive Philippine government."

"At the same time, they lobby funds from foreign institutions claiming that they will be used for projects to solve the fabricated issues, but will rather be used to fund terrorist activities," Parlade claimed.

Earlier this year, a contingent from the Philippine government went to Belgium to inform officials there that some groups being funded by the European Union were using the money to conduct activities linked to the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the CPP.

Belgian Ambassador to the Philippines Michael Goffin said Brussels is investigating the matter.

DEMPSEY REYES

Another Surigao town bars NPA, leftist allies

Going one step farther, the municipality also declared as *persona non grata* other groups affiliated with the terrorists

By Kathleen Bulquerin

Already running out of space to operate and hide from pursuing government soldiers, the communist New People's Army (NPA) was dealt another severe blow by residents of one of its former strongholds in Surigao del Sur.

This, after the municipal council of Tagbina declared not only the NPA members as *persona non grata* but also their affiliated front organizations.

In its resolution, the municipal council declared the CPP-NPA as *persona non grata* as they "sow and create a condition

of widespread and extraordinary fear and panic among the populace."

The excerpt of the resolution also said the municipality has experienced atrocities perpetrated by the CPP-NPA-NDF like the killing of a pilot of a banana plantation, harassment of military outposts and extortion activities.

Going one step farther, the municipality also declared as *persona non grata* other groups affiliated with the

terrorists that include Kahuggungan sa Mag-uuma sa Surigao Sur, Alliance of Concern Teachers, Karapatan and Anakpawis.

Also, barred were members of Anak Bayan, Bayan Muna, Gabriela, League of Filipino Students, Rural Missionary of the Philippines, Bagong Alyansang Makabayan and Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas.

"As much as we want peace and order, this declaration shows our utmost desire to completely eradicate the presence of terrorist groups that cause oppression,

panic and chaos here in our municipality," Mayor Generoso Naraiso said.

Lt. Col. Jaime Datuin of the 75th Infantry Battalion said they are grateful for the support being shown to them by the people in their campaign against terrorism and anarchy.

"I hope other municipalities will do the same, condemn the communist terrorists in the pursuit to peace and economic development for us to live in a harmonious and peaceful community" Datuin said.



Red wolves don sheep's clothing

By Mario J. Mallari

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has warned Asia-Pacific security officials against the international affiliate-groups of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) that masquerade as humanitarian organizations but are actually supporting terror activities.

In his speech at the Milipol Asia-Pacific 2019 Conference in Singapore on Thursday, Maj. Gen. Antonio Parlade Jr., AFP Deputy Chief of Staff for Civil Military Operations (J7), stressed CPP's international network poses a threat if left unchecked.

Turn to page 2

Red wolves don sheep's clothing

We foresee that this problem, if not checked, can turn out to be a hybrid scheme that can be a transnational crime problem

From page 1

According to Parlade, in its 50 years existence, the CPP managed to establish an international network, named the International Department, comprised of some 252 member-organizations based in 39 countries.

The group formed 16 chapters abroad through the International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS) headed by CPP founding chairman Jose Maria Sison.

"We foresee that this problem, if not checked, can turn out to be a hybrid scheme that can be a transnational crime problem," said Parlade.

Many are anti-fascist and anti-imperialist, collaborates in looking for funders and helps internationalize trivial issues.

"The purpose of this presentation is to make you aware that there is such a thing. Because of how intricate these international funding is being done, it may not be in our radar," Parlade said.

Through ILPS, Parlade said the CPP connects organizations from various countries with similar orientation and solicit funding.

"ILPS connects all like-minded organizations all over the world, many are anti-fascist and anti-imperialist, collaborates in looking for funders and helps internationalize trivial issues," said Parlade.

"They do fact-finding missions and help fabricate reports to gain more funding," he added.

Propaganda mills

During the forum, Parlade named local organizations that are affiliated with the ILPS, such as the IBON Foundation, General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality,

Leadership and Action, Alliance of Concerned Teachers, Karapatan and National Union of Peoples' Lawyers.

Parlade said these organizations conduct international solidarity missions where they publish inaccurate reports to portray a tyrant and oppressive Philippine government.

At the same time, they lobby for funds from foreign institutions, claiming that they will be used for projects to solve fabricated issues. Instead, the funds are used to finance terrorist activities.

The CPP-infiltrated organizations, he added, publish inaccurate information, such as weak employment generation and bloated figures on displaced indigenous communities.

"They've been tweaking, distorting reports so that the government will be perceived as incompetent, inefficient. They submit all these reports, false and fabricated reports, to the European Union, United Nations and other governments, again for funding," he said.

Last February, Parlade, along with other top security officials, met with EU and Belgian officials to unmask the CPP and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), as terrorist groups.

They submit all these reports, false and fabricated reports, to the European Union, United Nations and other governments, again for funding.

The EU and government of Belgium have vowed to conduct audits of organizations providing funds to groups identified by Philippine authorities as fronts of the CPP-NPA.

Help from public needed

In December 2018, Mr. Duterte

signed Executive Order 70, creating the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict.

"This national task force is not only about a military or police solution, but it's about good governance. It's approaching the problem in many perspectives, and you can see there the 12 lines of efforts that we are using to engage the different CPP programs. There's local government empowerment because this is about good governance. We are engaging our international stakeholders through our international engagements," Parlade said.

During the task force's engagement in Europe earlier this year, he learned that the communist-affiliated NGO were able to raise as much as 15 million euros over a five-year period from Belgium alone.

He also found out

that about 1.3 million euros will be remitted this year.

They do fact-finding missions and help fabricate reports to gain more funding.

"We have a long way to go. We have to analyze deeper, the links, the layers and layers of organizations covering this fund-generating scheme for the terrorists," Parlade said.

"So, we have to work together in order to alert each other of this," he added.

Cordillera cops step up security amid mounting NPA attacks

By ALFRED DALIZON

CORDILLERA Police Regional Office director, Brigadier General Israel Ephraim T. Dickson yesterday ordered stepped-up security across the region particularly on lightly-guarded police stations and other government facilities in the wake of a series of New People's Army attacks.

The latest NPA offensive in the region took place last Tuesday in Tadian, Mountain Province wherein NPA guerrillas used banned landmines to kill one policeman and wound eight others.

Dickson said that the rebel offensive came in the heels of their recent anniversary and a police operation in Mount Kapuwao in Barangay Bagnen Proper in Bauko municipality last March 29 which thwarted their launching of

their so-called 'permit-to-campaign' activities on candidates for the May 13 national and local elections.

The official also condemned the NPA's use of landmines.

"Only terrorists resort to landmines, as often seen in the news from around the world. International humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions have outlawed the use of landmines in warfare because of the risk of civilian casualties or collateral damage," Dickson said.

According to the Cordillera police director, the NPA Mountain Province movement, with its latest use of landmines, has placed itself once again in the ranks of ISIS, Abu Sayyaf, and other organizations that employ Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) as tools for extortion, intimidation, and terrorism.

"It underscores their desperation in losing their relevance to Philippine society, and their de-

scend into banditry and "peace saboteurs," he said.

Dickson however said that despite the mounting NPA attacks, they are still committed to maintaining peace in the region by ascribing to the present administration's offer to misguided youth and adults deceived by NPA propaganda.

"It is not too late to take the path to peace and a productive family life within the folds of the law. The Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) provides the means to start a new life. Under E-CLIP, the rebels who lay down their arms will receive PHP15,000 immediate cash assistance," he said.

"They will also be entitled to a livelihood amounting to PHP50,000 and from the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process and livelihood program from the Department of Social Welfare and Development, depending on

the assessment that will be done by the concerned agency, as well as technical and skill development training, housing, Philhealth enrollment, legal assistance and other benefits offered by the government," Dickson added.

The official visited the slain policeman and wounded officers in Bauko and paid tribute to their gallantry in action. "These policemen have displayed their commitment and dedication to service and despite the danger, had the will to fight," he said.

Both Dickson and Philippine National Police chief, Director General Oscar D. Albayalde offered their deepest sympathies to the family of Patrolman Wilfredo Padawil of the 1502nd Maneuver Company of the Cordillera 15th Regional Mobile Force Battalion, the cop who was killed in the Bauko clash. Another policeman identified as Corporal Eirphil Lapniten was also wounded in the same encounter.

Another policeman identified only as Corporal Casil was killed in the later NPA attack.

MILF slams police over Lanao Sur clash

Former Moro rebel group files protest, says PNP violated ceasefire terms in encounter that killed 4 of its fighters

By Bong S. Sarmiento
@inqmindanao

DAVAO CITY—The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on Friday filed a protest against the police for allegedly violating a ceasefire agreement in the deadly clash in Madamba, Lanao del Sur province, that left four Moro fighters dead.

This developed as Presidential Peace Adviser Carlito Galvez Jr. described the incident as "an isolated case," but appealed to government security forces to

be prudent in conducting law enforcement operations in the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) to avoid jeopardizing the peace process in the South.

Butch Malang, chair of the MILF panel in the Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH), told the Inquirer that police did not inform his group about their operation at Barangay Ilian.

"There was no coordination with the CCCH and clearly this is a violation of the ceasefire

agreement. The clashes could have been prevented if there was coordination," Malang said in a phone interview.

According to him, the village is an MILF-populated community.

Warrants of arrest

A police team was serving warrants of arrest early on Thursday against several suspects in the murder of a village official when the clash occurred at Ilian.

Police claimed the suspects resisted arrest and that the ensuing firefight resulted in the

killing of four men, whom the MILF later identified as members of its Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF).

Eight soldiers who joined the police team were wounded and one policeman remained missing as of Friday morning.

Malang said the CCCH was working to locate the missing policeman.

Von Al Haq, spokesperson for the BIAF, said the government troops involved in the operation should have coordinated with the CCCH to prevent the clash.

The government and the MILF, he explained, have not signed an "exit agreement" despite the creation of the BARMM, meaning all mechanisms under the peace process have not been dissolved.

Order to stand down

Al Haq said the MILF had ordered its fighters in Madamba and neighboring towns to stand down.

"[We ordered them] not to be swayed by their emotions [and to] totally observe and respect all

peace mechanisms with the sole intent of protecting the gains of the peace process," he said.

Galvez said the military, the police and local officials were planning to hold a dialogue with the MILF's 102nd Base Command to normalize the situation.

"They should bear in mind the supremacy of the peace process and the safety of the operating troops should always prevail, and consider the strategic implications of their tactical actions," Galvez told the Inquirer in a text message. INQ

MILF fighters killed in Lanao Sur clashes

LANAO DEL SUR – Four suspects were killed, three of them Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) guerrillas, while eight police officers were wounded in shootouts in Madamba, Lanao del Sur on Thursday.

Abomay Abdulaziz, Zainodin Macalantas Ameril and Macabuntal Alican allegedly shot it

out with police officers serving warrants of arrest in Barangay Ilian.

A certain Casara Macalantas was also killed in the police operations.

Von Al-Haq, spokesman for the MILF's Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces, said Abdulaziz, Ameril and Alican were MILF fighters under Abu Haniff.

Al-Haq confirmed that the clash occurred in an MILF enclave covered by a ceasefire agreement with the government. "We learned that there was no prior coordination," he told reporters.

Brig. Gen. Graciano Mijares, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao police director, said four M16 rifles and

a 40-millimeter grenade launcher were recovered from the fatalities.

Col. Madzgani Mukaram, Lanao del Sur police director, said the wounded police officers remain confined in a hospital.

Mukaram said two villagers were also wounded after they were hit by stray bullets.

— John Unson

4 MILF fighters slain in Lanao Sur gunfights

By **ALI G. MACABALANG**

COTABATO CITY — Four members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) were killed while eight cops were wounded in gunfights in Madamba, Lanao del Sur on Thursday.

The skirmishes occurred in Barangay Ilian, Madamba town when MILF gunmen reportedly opened fire on a police team which was trying to arrest a guerilla named Zanadin Macalatas, who was wanted for murder.

Senior officials of the Police Regional Office-Bangsamoro Autono-

mous Region in Muslim Mindanao said personnel of the Lanao del Sur provincial police were fired upon by Macaalas and his three companions, prompting them to return fire.

Macaalas and his companions, identified as Alikhan Usman, Casara Macalatas and Usop Abdulaziz, were killed in the ensuing gunfight, according to an initial report from PRO-BARMM.

While the police team was moving out of the bloody scene, relatives of the slain MILF members attacked, sparking a running firefight that left eight policemen wounded, the report said.

A police officer has also been reported missing, allegedly snatched by MILF gunmen at gunpoint.

The Lanao del Sur provincial police, in a report to PRO-BARMM headquarters in Maguidanao, said the guerillas also torched the police patrol vehicle of the raiding team.

4 slain, 8 PNP officers wounded in Lanao ops

MARAWI CITY: Three of the five wanted for murder and one civilian caught in crossfire, were killed during a police operation in Madambat town, southwest part of Lanao del Sur, police said.

Eight police officers were wounded, while one was reported missing after the firefight.

Col. Madzгани Mukaram, Lanao del Sur Police Provincial Office chief, said police operatives were serving an arrest warrant against Usop Malubay Abdulaziz; Abdulaziz Macalantas Abomay; Zainodin Moro Macalantas Ameril; Alican Macabuntal, alias MkigUsman; and Usman Barating Macabuntal for murder issued by Branch 10 of the Regional Trial Court in Lanao del Sur when the firefight ensued between the operatives and the suspects.

Residents, however, related a different version of the incident.

Salic Mangompia Mai posted on social media that his relatives in Barangay Ilian were awoken by burst of gunfire at about 1 a.m. When they looked out they saw police mobile cars.

It was learned that some of those served with arrest warrant were members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) but the police did not coordinate with the Government of the Philippines-

MILF Coordinating committee.

Police identified the slain suspects as Abdulaziz, Ameril, Macabuntal and Casara Macalantas, who was not included in the arrest warrant.

Wounded police officers were identified as Capt. Glen Lyka Gevero, Capt. Mark Harry Boglosa, Senior Master Sgt. Marlon Panitan, Staff Sgt. Magno Olete, Staff Sgt. Niño Cadano, Corporal (Cpl.) Ronald Rosco, Cpl. Omar Masakal and Patrolman Arnel Montallana.

Cpl. Gilbert Males was reported to be still missing as of the latest count on Thursday.

Mukaram said the law enforcers were met by a volley of fire from high caliber of firearms from the suspects as they approached the area, which triggered an armed confrontation.

Recovered from the slain suspects three M16 Rifles, an M203 Grenade Launcher, seven short magazines, two long magazines, and 102 live M16 ammunition.

Brig. Gen. Graciano Mijaris, police regional director of Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, visited the wounded police at the hospital and awarded them the Medalya ng Sugatang Magiting.

**MASIDING NOOR YAHYA
AND ROY D.R. NARRA**

ISIS-inspired group behind Sultan Kudarat blast -- PNP

By **ALFRED DALIZON**

THE signature of the bomb which was detonated inside a chicken restaurant in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat bore the signature of an ISIS-inspired terror group which has gained notoriety for its involvement in extortion activities in Mindanao, Police Regional Office 12 director, Brigadier General Eliseo T. Rasco told the Journal Group yesterday.

The official said that their investigation showed

that the improvised explosive device which went off inside the Carlito's Chicken House injuring 18 innocent victims appear to be very similar to those used by the Dawlah Islamiyah Terrorist Group led by one Abu Turaiife in their previous attacks on establishments which have refused their extortion demands.

Rasco said that with these findings, they now are looking at the group of Turaiife as the primary suspects in the bombing. According to him, the ISIS-inspired DITG was also the same group tagged

responsible for two similar improvised explosive device (IED) explosions in Isulan municipality on August 28, 2018 and September 2, 2018 respectively.

"Bomb experts noticed that the components of the IED which went off inside the Chicken house are very similar to the ones used in the two bombing incidents in Isulan last year," the PRO12 director said after visiting the blast site and talking with officers of the Special Investigation Task Group Carlito and local government officials.

Rasco has called on all officers and men of the SITG Carlito to ensure that the bomb attack will be immediately solved and criminal cases filed against the perpetrators.

The official said that during questioning, the owner of the IED-hit establishment said that prior to the incident, an unidentified caller told him to give them money or his restaurant will be bombed. The suspect also sent the owner similar text messages claiming they were members of the Abu Turaiife Group.

Abu Sayyaf captive shot while escaping rescued

By ROEL PAREÑO

ZAMBOANGA CITY – Marine soldiers rescued a Malaysian who was shot while escaping from his Abu Sayyaf captors during an encounter in Banguingui town off Sulu on Thursday.

Reports from the Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) identified the victim as Jari Bin Abdullah, who was kidnapped along with two Indonesian fishermen in Pegasus reef in Sandakan last December.

Col. Gerry Besana, Westmincom spokesman, said Abdullah was with a group of bandits led by Najir Arik, who clashed with personnel of the Marine Battalion Landing Team-9 under the Philippine Marine Ready Force Sulu in

Barangay Bahkaan on Simusa Island at about 4:25 p.m.

Lt. Col. Gerald Monfort, Joint Task Force Sulu (JTFS) spokesman, said Abdullah was rescued 10 meters from bandits' escape route.

Abdullah, who was reportedly in critical condition, was airlifted to a hospital at Camp Gen. Teodulfo Bautista in Barangay Busbus, Jolo for treatment.

Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabayo, JTFS and 11th Infantry Division commander,

condemned the shooting of the captive.

"It is an indication of the group's hopelessness and being desperate as they are now surrounded by our troops," Pabayo said.

4 bandits, 3 soldiers slain

Meanwhile, four Abu Sayyaf bandits and three soldiers were killed in an encounter in Patikul yesterday.

Besana said 13 other soldiers and nine bandits were wounded in the clash in Sitio Atol, Barangay Latih at around 6:50 a.m.

The wounded soldiers were evacuated to a military hospital in Jolo.

Besana said the bandits, who were led by Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, escaped toward the forested area of Mt. Dahu.

"The operation is ongoing and intermittent firefights ... were reported," he said. Besana said the operation is part of the offensive of the JTFS against Abu Sayyaf bandits who attempted to kidnap a group of elementary teachers in Barangay Kan-Agi on Tuesday.

"With the people of Sulu on our side, we will further intensify our campaign against the Abu Sayyaf. We will continuously hunt them down wherever and whoever they are," Pabayo said.

— With Jaime Laude

3 soldiers killed in Sulu clash

By NONOYE LACSON

ZAMBOANGA CITY — Three soldiers were killed, while 13 others were wounded, in an encounter with an estimated 80 gunmen of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Patikul, Sulu, at sunrise Friday.

A military report reaching the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Western Mindanao Command (AFP-WestMinCom) here, Friday, indicated that the group of ASG was led by Hatib Sawadjaan also suffered several fatalities and wounded comrades.

The military said the encounter took place in Sitio Atol, Barangay Latih in Patikul, Sulu about 6:50 am yesterday. The firefight was still ongoing, the report said.

Philippine Air Force (PAF) gunship helicopter have given the ground troops aerial support as they chased the ASG into the hinterlands of Barangay Latih.

The military detachment located in Barangay Latih and Barangay Danag delivered four rounds of 81mm and five rounds of 81mm mortar shells in the direction of the ASG, the military report said.

Soldiers from the 21st Infantry Battalion stations in the two barangays were immediately dispatched to form a blocking force to prevent the ASG from eluding the pursuit military operations against them.

Soldiers from the 41st IB located in Barangay Buhanginan were already moved to Barangay Bungcaong to join in the operations.

4 ASG, 3 soldiers killed in Sulu clash

BY AL JACINTO AND DEMPSEY REYES

ZAMBOANGA CITY: Fresh fighting between pro-Islamic State militants and government troops erupted on Friday in Pakitul, Sulu, killing four members of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and three soldiers, with more than 20 wounded.

Lt. Col. Gerard Monfort, spokesman for the Philippine Army's 11th Infantry Division, said the 5th Scout Ranger Battalion clashed with about 80 ASG gunmen under notorious commander Hajan Sawadjaan at Sitio

Atol, Barangay Latih in Patikul.

"Heavy firefight ensued which resulted in the wounding of 13 rangers and the death of three others, while casualties on the enemy side are yet to be determined. Firefight continues as of this report,"

said an earlier bulletin of the Western Mindanao Command.

But the latest update said the clashes, which lasted for about 30 minutes, also resulted in the death of four terrorists and the wounding of nine others.

The recent fighting came a day after Malaysian hostage Jari bin Abdullah, 24, was shot and wounded during a firefight between troops and the bandits on Simisa Island off Banguingui town, about 5,100 kilometers away from Patikul. (See related story above.)

Marines recovered Abdullah and was brought to a military base in Jolo, but his condition remained

unknown.

The ASG previously threatened to execute Abdullah along with two other Indonesian fishers Heri Ardiansyah, 19, and Hariadin, 45, if their governments or employer fail to pay ransom running into millions of pesos.

Monfort said the wounded had been evacuated by Philippine Air Force plane to Kuta General Bautista Station Hospital in Jolo.

He added that the soldiers suffered minor wounds from shrapnel and were now in stable condition, while the rest of Joint Task Force Sulu were pursuing the fleeing bandits.

4 Abu Sayyaf, 3 soldiers slain in Patikul battle

FOUR Abu Sayyaf Group members and three soldiers were killed, while 22 others were wounded in a clash in Patikul, Sulu, on Friday.

Troops from the 5th Scout Ranger Battalion were patrolling at around 6:50 a.m. when they encountered around 80 Abu Sayyaf members in Sitio Atol, Barangay Latih, Western Mindanao Command spokesman Colonel Gerry Besana said.

The Abu Sayyaf encountered by the soldiers were under sub-leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, who allegedly masterminded the twin explosions at Mt. Carmel Cathedral in Jolo, Sulu on January 27. At least 23 people were killed and over a hundred others were injured in that attack.

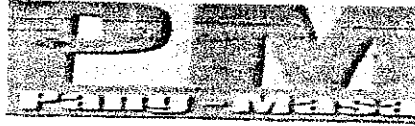
The same group were also behind the April 2 attack on teachers in Patikul, leaving two of the police escorts injured, Besana added.

"The 30-minute fierce firefight resulted to four killed and nine wounded on the enemy (Abu Sayyaf) side while the AFP troops suffered three killed-in-action and 13 others wounded," he said.

Troops under the Joint Task Force Sulu were pursuing the remaining members of the group encountered by the government forces, Besana noted.

The injured soldiers were airlifted via helicopter to a military hospital in Jolo, he said.

"Most of the wounded soldiers suffered slight injury due to shrapnel wounds and are now in stable condition," said Besana. **Francisco Tuya**



7 PATAY SA SULU ENCOUNTER

Patay ang tatlong miyembro ng Philippine Army Scout Ranger, habang 4 sa bandidong Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) nang magkasagupa ang dalaawang panig kahapon ng umaga sa Brgy. Latih, Patikul, Sulu.

Sa report ni Lt. Col. Gerald Monfort, Spokesman ng Joint Task Force (JTF) Sulu, dakong alas-6:50 ng umaga nang makaengkuwentro ng 5th Scout Ranger Battalion ang nasa 80 miyembro ng Abu Sayyaf sa ilalim ng pamumuno ni

Nina JOY CANTOS at RHODERICK BEÑEZ

Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan sa Sitio Atol, Brgy. Latih, Patikul ng lalawigan.

Ang grupo ni Sawadjaan ay sangkot sa Jolo Cathedral bombing sa lalawigan ng Sulu noong Enero 27, 2019 na kumutil

ng buhay ng 23 katao habang mahigit pa sa 100 ang nasugatan.

Ang palitan ng putok ay tumagal ng 30 minuto hanggang sa mai-

taboy ang mga kalaban na mabilis na umatras sa bakbakan bitbit ang mga sugatan sa kanilang panig.

Ayon naman kay

Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabayo, Commander ng JTF Sulu, ang combat operation ay bahagi ng pursuit operation laban sa mga ekstremistang Abu Sayyaf na nasa likod ng pag-atake sa mga guro sa

Brgy. Kan-Agi, Patikul, Sulu noong nakalipas na Abril 2 ng taong ito.

Ang mga nasugatang sundalo ay nagtamo ng bahagyang sugat sa katawan ay nasa maayos ng kondisyon.

7 patay sa Sulu encounter

Tatlong miyembro ng elite Scout Ranger ng Philippine Army at apat na bandidong Abu Sayyaf ang patay matapos sumiklab ang panibagong engkuwentro sa Brgy. Latih, Patikul, Sulu kahapon ng umaga.

Ayon kay Joint Task Force Sulu spokesman Lt. Col. Gerald Monfort, nagsasagawa ng combat operations ang mga tropa ng 5th Scout Ranger Battalion nang makaengkuwentro nila ang tinatayang nasa 80 ASG members.

Sinasabing 13 pang sundalo at siyam na mga bandido ang sugatan sa matinding bakbakan.

Ang mga kalaban ay kabilang sa grupo ni Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan na sangkot sa Jolo Cathedral bombing sa lalawigan ng Sulu noong Enero 27, 2019.

Ang palitan ng putok ay tumagal ng 30 minuto hanggang sa maitaboy ang mga kalaban na mabilis na umatras sa bakbakan bitbit ang mga sugatan nilang kasamahan.

Una nang naglunsad ng malawakang opensiba ang Joint Task Force Sulu noong nakaraang linggo laban sa pinagsanib na puwersa ni Abu Sayyaf leaders Radulan Sahiron at Sawadjaan na umano'y nagtipon-tipon sa Patikul, Sulu. (Joy Santos)

WOUNDED SAYYAF MALAYSIAN HOSTAGE RECOVERED

ZAMBOANGA CITY: A Malaysian hostageD by the Abu Sayyaf Group(ASG)was shot and wounded following a firefight between pro-Islamic State bandits and government troops on Simisa Island off the province of Sulu.

Troops recovered Jari bin Abdullah, 24, on Simisa Island where security forces had engaged Sayyaf fighters under Najir Arik in sporadic clashes since last month.

Abdullah was recovered on Thursday afternoon, but the Western Mindanao Command only reported it on Friday. In a conflicting report, it claimed Abdullah was retrieved by Marines who were pursuing the ASG gunmen, but

the military said that the hostage was shot by his captors while escaping. It was unclear whether soldiers saw the bandits shooting Abdullah.

"Troops from the Philippine Marine Ready Force Sulu retrieved Jari Bin Abdullah near the Abu Sayyaf's route of withdrawal, 15 minutes after troops engaged the militants under Najir Arik on Simisa Island," the Western Mindanao Command said in a statement.

It added: "The Joint Task Force Sulu, under Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabayo Jr., said Abdullah managed to escape, but was shot by his captors before he was secured by the troops."

It also quoted Pabayo as say-

ing: "The act of shooting the kidnap victim is indicative of the Abu Sayyaf's hopelessness and desperateness as the militants are now surrounded by our pursuing troops. The Armed Forces of the Philippines in Sulu is now more motivated to hunt down these terrorists."

The military said Abdullah was airlifted by a helicopter to a military hospital in Jolo.

Lt. Gen. Arnel de la Vega, chief of the Western Mindanao Command, said the ASG was still holding several hostages on the forested island and soldiers were deployed in Simisa to rescue the captives. "Marine troops continue their pursuit and offensives to run down militants and rescue captives



A military photo shows Malaysian hostage Jari bin Abdullah who was shot during a clash between Abu Sayyaf bandits and government troops on Simisa Island off Sulu province.

on the island. Troops maximize combat and intelligence build-up to track down and close in on evading terrorists, delivering deliberate operations to ensure the safety of kidnap victims on Simisa Island," he said.

The ASG had previously threatened to execute Abdullah along with two other Indonesian fishers Heri Ardiansyah, 19, and Hariadin, 45, if their governments or employer fail to pay ransom running into millions of pesos.

The captors also phoned Abdullah's wife, Nadin Junianti, in February telling her that no Malaysian authorities or negotiators had contacted them to secure her husband's release.

The gunmen said that her hus-

band would face difficulties if there was no contact from Malaysia. They also asked her for telephone contacts of Malaysian journalists. The woman has repeatedly appealed to Malaysian authorities to help secure her husband's release. She said it was the second time the kidnap group had contacted her.

The militants are believed to be holding nearly a dozen captives, mostly foreigners. Sabah Police Commissioner Datuk Omar Mammah said authorities were working with their Philippine counterparts to secure the release of the hostages who were kidnapped at sea off Sandakan in Sabah on Dec. 5, 2018.

AL JACINTO

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Malaysian na dinukot ng Sayyaf, nasagip

Nasagip ng tropa ng militar ang isang Malaysian kidnap victim matapos na masabat habang sugatang tumatakas sa mga humahabol na kidnappers ng Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) sa Simusa Island, Brgy. Bahkaan, Banguingui, Sulu nitong Huwebes ng gabi.

Kinilala ni Lt. Col. Gerald Monfort, Spokesman ng Joint Task Force (JTF) Sulu ang nailigtas

na si Jari Bin Abdullah na kasama ng dalawang Indonesian crew na binihag ng grupo ng mga bandido at ilinatago sa nasabing isla.

Bandang alas-8:40 ng gabi, nang magawang makatakas ni Abdullah sa kanyang mga abductors pero habang siya ay tumatakbo, nagising ang mga bandido kaya hinabol siya at binaril. Bagama't sugatan, nag-

tatakbo ang dayuhan hanggang sa makasalubong ng tropa ng Philippine Marine Ready Force Sulu (PMRFS) na nagsasagawa ng security operation laban sa mga kidnappers sa Simusa Island.

Napilitan naman ang mga terorista sa pamumuno ni Najir Arik na magsi-atras matapos na makipagpalitan ng putok sa mga sundalo bago nagsitakas. (Joy Cantos)



Malaysian kidnap victim ng Abu, nasagip

Isang Malaysian kidnap victim ang nasagip ng tropa ng militar habang sugatang tumatakas sa mga humahabol na kidnappers nitong bandidong Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) sa Simusa Island, Brgy. Bahkaan, Banguingu, Sulu kamakalawa ng gabi.

Kinilala ni Lt. Col. Gerald Monfort, Spokesman ng Joint Task Force (JTF) Sulu ang nailigtas na biktima na si Jari Bin Abdullah, kabilang sa tatlong hostages ng mga bandido sa nasabing isla.

Ang dalawa pa ay mga Indonesian crew na binihag ng grupo ng mga bandido na itinatago ng mga ito sa nasabing isla.

Bandang alas-8:40 ng gabi nang magawang makatakas ni Abdullah sa kaniyang mga abductors

pero habang tumatakbo ito ay nagising ang mga bandido hinabol ito at binaril.

Bagaman nasugatan ay nagtatakbo ang kidnap victim at habang hinabol ito ng mga armadong bandido ay nakasalubong naman ng tropa ng Philippine Marine Ready Force Sulu (PMRFS) na nagsasagawa ng security operation laban sa mga kidnappers sa Simusa Island.

Napilitan naman ang mga bandido sa pamumuno ni Najir Arik na magsi-atras matapos na makipagpalitan ng putok sa tropa ng mga sundalo.

Ang palitan ng putok ay tumagal ng 15 minuto bago nagsitakas ang mga bandido sa takot na malaganap ng puwersa.

Wala namang naiulat na nasugatan sa panig ng tropa ng militar sa nangyaring bakbakan.

-Joy Cantos-

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Terrorist group led Isulan blast

By Gladys Mae Ablon
and Kathleen Mae Bulquerin

Probers are now investigating the possible involvement of the Dawlah Islamiyah group led by Abu Toraife in a restaurant blast in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat recently.

Soccsksargen Police chief Brig. Gen. Eliseo Rasco said the suspects are probably from the group who had been staying in the Maguindanao area.

Recovered parts of the improvised explosive device from the blast area were the same as that used in the explosion in August last year in the town of Isulan allegedly committed by the Dawlah Islamiyah group.

"Fragments recovered were also the ones used to blow up Isulan last year like the nails,

the placement of the device and other details," the official added.

There were 18 people injured in the explosion near the entrance of Carlito's Chicken.

Authorities had earlier theorized the restaurant owner probably refused to respond to an extortion message sent to them last week as a possible motive for the bombing.

There were 18 people injured in the explosion near the entrance of Carlito's Chicken.

Meanwhile, one of the three hostages kidnapped by the Abu Sayyaf Group recently was found wounded by the military in Simusa Island, Banguingui, Sulu after escaping from the terrorist group led by Najir Arik.

Before he was rescued, a 15-minute firefight ensued between the ASG and the Marine Battalion Landing Team 3 around 4:25 p.m. Thursday.

During the firefight, the victim tried to escape but was shot by his captors in the process. He was later found by the Philippine Marine Ready Force Sulu abandoned by the ASG during their withdrawal.

The wounded kidnap victim was given first aid and was brought to Kuta Heneral Teodulfo Bautista via helicopter for proper medical treatment.

There were no casualties on the government side.

Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabayo Jr., Commander of JTF Sulu said that "eliminating the ASG is the only answer in attaining lasting peace in Sulu."

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SEARCH FOR TRUTH

ERNESTO P. MACEDA, Jr.

Not all about the whale

Have you heard the one about the dead whale that washed up on shore, its belly bursting from all the plastic it ingested? The next day, they suspended the elections. Apparently, there was no candidate remaining to campaign.



Our apologies for the irreverence. To the whale. As for candidates for public office, they do deserve the label though no one deserves to be swallowed up. We're seeing more and more plastic these days in all the distortions and contortions of principle in the name of the vote. Cuaresma is a sacrifice but when it coincides with the general elections and the campaign period every three years. It's as if we descended down another circle of hell.

Return to myth. The whale's misfortune is a metaphor here but the true story on which it is based is innately tragic. Whales, with their increasingly rare sightings, have become the unicorns of the oceans. The narwhal species, with its protruding horn, is called precisely that. The death of any one whale owing to our negligence is a wound we can hardly treat. It's a stark reminder of how delicate the balance of our marine ecosystem has become. And also of how our carelessness will come back to haunt us.

The episode in the Philippines was preceded last year by similar incidents around the world. Just this week, there was another one in Italy. Whales of different species have been washing up, killed by all the plastic they swallow: Sperm in Spain, Pilot in Thailand, Sperm in Indonesia, Cuvier's beaked here in Compostela Valley, Sperm in Italy.

Whales are the obvious avatars of the multitude of marine species that are affected by the crisis of plastics pollution - fish, birds, turtles, seals - all are victimized directly. You and I, being on top of the food chain, are the ones prejudiced indirectly as when the microfibers of the plastics ingested by our marine diet transfers to our own digestive systems.

Tragedy of the commons. According to scientists, every single piece of plastic ever made still exists. Unless something is done to regulate plastics production or to treat it as the hazardous waste that it actually is, the projection is that by 2050, plastics will outweigh all the fish in the sea.

The Philippines has a starring role in this horror story. We are a world leader in marine pollution, the 3rd largest marine pollutant what with our "sachet economy" coupled with our shameful absence of discipline. Here are some of our numbers: 60 billion sachets per year, 17.5 billion shopping bags. Don't look at the whale. Just think Manila bay clean up, Binondo estero clean up and wonder where the plastic in your home ends up ultimately.

Initiatives like brand audits conducted by NGOs at waste disposal sites show that its the multinational corporations that are top contributors to the detritus. This only highlights the urgency of tapping the private sector to cooperate in whatever niggardly effort government undertakes to achieve a modicum of success.

In all endeavors to find a solution to this crisis, the keyword is sustainable. Only by insisting on development that does not compromise the future's needs can we hope to succeed in meeting the needs of the present.

Emperor's new clothes. Add Senator Panfilo Lacson to the growing number of statesmen chomping at the bit each time Sec. Sal Panelo turns from spokesman for the Philippine President to spokesman for China, specially on developments in the West Philippine Sea. Lacson's credible solo, added to the Del Rosario-Carpio Morales duet, affirms in crescendo the voice of that segment uncomfortable with the progressive surrender of our prerogatives. Yes, there remain a few, a happy few, band of brothers, endowed with the courage to rally even against the most frightful odds.

The good senator cannot fathom the reasons why we would refuse to act when it's a stronger country that we face across the ring. This is weakness according to Lacson. And it is compounded by further impotence when it is advertised and even advanced as a justification. This will invite heightened bullying. Yes, why not just lay down, allow them in and occupy the entire country?

President Benigno Aquino III faced the same bully and the same fearsome missiles. But he didn't fold his cards. He went to the Hague. And what he did there and what he won there is a paragon of what little fellows can do and achieve when he decides that he can face down giants.

Warmer days ahead. "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night..." When Herodotus wrote this immortal line from his epic "Histories", he may not have anticipated how it might be used someday in a context other than the relay-like postal system employed by Persian couriers. Of course it has been informally adopted as a motto by the US Postal service. But in the present setting, we use it to reference the unflagging assault by our candidates on an anxious electorate.

It's been a struggle for them, thus far, having to campaign in this intolerable heat. Not only are they debilitated by the high temperatures, even their targets are wilting with their receptiveness turning into reproof. And its only going to get hotter. By the time election day comes around, it might just be a case of last man standing wins the vote.

Universidad de Manila. Yesterday, 3,000 new graduates were conferred their bachelor's, masteral and doctoral diplomas by the Universidad de Manila at the PICC Plenary Hall. This brings to 39,930 the total number of Manilenos that the UDM has graduated ever since it was established in 1995. Congratulations Mayor Joseph E. Estrada and the City Council of Manila. Their sustained support for the University through the years has made an enormous difference in the lives of these graduates, their families and their communities.

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AT GROUND LEVEL

SATUR C. OCAMPO



Deeper look into the slay of 14 farmers in Negros

Definitely justified are the strong public outrage and calls for impartial investigation into the killing last March 30 of 14 farmers, by police and military forces in joint day-long operations in Canlaon City and the towns of Manjuyod and Sta. Catalina in Negros Oriental.

The Philippine National Police has justified the killings, as the operations were supposedly intended to search for and confiscate illegal firearms. And Malacañang, through the presidential spokesperson, promptly backed up the justification: that the persons gunned down during the search operations "fought back." Such a claim — "nanlaban" in the police lingo — has become the standard rationale for the killing of thousands of suspected illegal drug users and pushers since Duterte assumed the presidency in July 2016 and launched his "war on drugs" through Oplan Tokhang.

However, Negros Oriental Governor Roel Degamo and Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of San Carlos City (Negros Occidental) weren't convinced by these explanations. Similarly unconvinced and outraged were the relatives of the victims, witnesses to the killings, and human rights and people's organizations who all have raised questions and demanded a thorough investigation.

The Commission on Human Rights took preliminary steps to look into the incidents, with its Central Visayas director saying he would check on reports he had received that "what happened were tokhang-type killings." PNP chief Oscar Albayalde ordered the relief of four Negros Oriental police officials purportedly to clear the way

for what he called an "impartial investigation" by the PNP Internal Affairs Service; the investigation would focus on whether the joint operations had complied with existing rules of engagement and relevant jurisprudence.

At the House of Representatives, the Makabayan bloc of partylist representatives has sought congressional action by filing two resolutions. The first resolution urges the committee on human rights to hold a public investigation on the killings. The other calls for the scrapping of "Oplan Sauron", the implementing program in Negros of President Duterte's Memorandum Circular No. 32.

It was through Oplan Sauron that the joint police-military teams carried out the oddly-named "Synchronized Enhanced Managing Police Operation" which led to the March 30 killings in Negros.

The Makabayan bloc's suggested inquiries, starting with Memo Circular 32, can provide a deeper and wider perspective not only on the March 30 killings. It could also shine a light on similar operations carried out earlier: one of these happened in Guihulngan City (Negros Oriental) on Dec. 27-29, 2018, in which six persons were killed and several others arrested for alleged illegal possession of firearms.

Memo Circular 32, issued on Nov. 22, 2018, provides "reinforcing guidelines" for the AFP and PNP in implementing "measures to suppress and prevent lawless violence."

It was issued pursuant to President Duterte's Proclamation No. 55, issued on Sept. 4, 2016, declaring a state of national emergency on account of lawless violence in Mindanao, after the

bombing of a night market in Davao City. It called on the AFP and PNP to undertake "all necessary measures to suppress any and all forms of lawless violence in Mindanao" and prevent its "spread and escalation elsewhere in the country."

The memo-circular was spurred by "a number of sporadic acts of violence" particularly in the provinces of Samar, Negros Oriental, Negros Occidental and the Bicol region which "appear to have been committed by lawless groups." It directs the Department of National Defense (DND) and the Department of Interior and Local Governments (DILG) to coordinate the immediate deployment of additional forces of the AFP and PNP in these places "to suppress lawless violence and acts of terror" and "prevent such violence from spreading and escalating elsewhere in the country."

Further, it orders the AFP, PNP, and the Department of Justice (DoJ), in close coordination with other law-enforcement agencies and the intelligence community, to "intensify their local and transnational intelligence operations against individuals or groups suspected of, or responsible for, committing or conspiring to commit acts of lawless violence" in the country. Likewise, it orders the prompt investigation and prosecution of "all individuals or groups apprehended for committing, or conspiring to commit, acts of lawless violence."

Previous press reports on how the Police Regional Office 7 (PRO-7) based in Cebu City implemented Memo-Circular 32 cited the following: PRO-7 deployed more than a thousand

policemen, supported by AFP troops, to conduct a massive police operation in Guihulngan City that resulted in the killings and arrests earlier mentioned. More than 80 search warrants used in the operations had all been issued by Judge Soliver Peras of Regional Trial Court Branch 10 in Cebu City. (In the March 30 operations, 35 search warrants were reportedly used.)

The reports also said PRO-7 Director Debold Sinas had announced the relief of and the filing of administrative charges against five Cebu-based police officers, who were found to have failed to perform their duties in the Oplan Sauron operations on Dec. 27-29, 2018.

Given that precedent case, couldn't there also have been failures in the performance of duties, to say the least, in the wider March 30 joint operations?

Who is committing this lawless violence now? How worse can the situation get?

Consider this: Proclamation No. 55 (that is, the state of national emergency) remains in effect, supplemented with a slew of executive orders giving more leeways to the AFP and PNP in carrying out their operations. And most recently, riled by criticisms all around, Duterte has been grumbling that he has "enough problems with criminality, drugs, rebellion and all," and threatening to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, order the arrest of all critics, and declare a "revolutionary war" until the end of his term.

Isn't this senseless violence, instigated, inflicted and condoned by the state? What will stop it?

* * * 9
Email: satur.ocampo@gmail.com
★

Failed state is past

“Noynoy’s idiotic stand triggered a diplomatic row with Hong Kong that lasted until Rody issued the public apology while addressing over 2,000 Filipinos working in Hong Kong.”

The doomed *Otso Diretso* bets were whining about their impending lockout from the senatorial race by raising the fear of a “failed state” if the bets of President Rody Duterte dominate the polls.

“If the administration secures a good majority in the Senate, they could virtually do anything they want,” one of the bets said at a press conference at the Liberal Party (LP) headquarters in Quezon City.

The prospect of a dominant win by the Hugpong ng Pagbabago (HnP) slate made up mostly of Partido Demokratiko Pilipino (PDP) stalwarts is too real for the yellow candidates.

The LP considers the midterm elections as crucial for its existence since the next reform that Rody wanted to implement is federalism that will practically erase the party from the political map.

From federalizing the republic to opening the country’s doors to China, the Duterte administration “could do anything it wants” if administration candidates were to dominate the May elections, *Otso Diretso* warned.

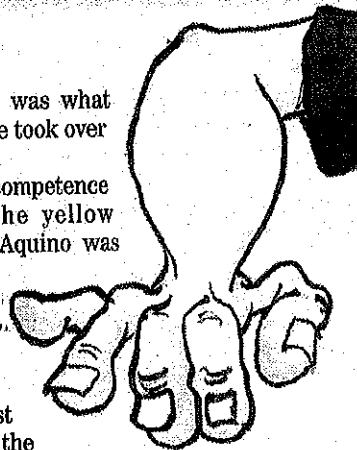
A failed state, however, was what Rody ended up with when he took over the presidency.

The classic example of incompetence and indifference that the yellow administration of Noynoy Aquino was known for was his first acid test as President in which he miserably failed to show leadership.

It took eight years for closure to come to the August 2010 tragedy that resulted in the death of eight Hong Kong tourists that took a sincere moment in April 2018 for Rody to achieve.

The crack in the relations between the Philippines and its nearest Asian neighbor came about as a result of a stubborn stand of former President Noynoy Aquino that “the misdeed of a deranged man should not be shouldered by the whole country.”

Police officer Rolando Mendoza held hostage a busload of tourists due to a grudge with the Ombudsman who ordered his relief.



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The botched rescue attempt was televised worldwide and clearly showed government negligence played a huge role in the death of the hostages.

A recounting of the event during the investigation conducted by both Philippine and Hong Kong authorities also showed that Noynoy should bear some of the responsibility for the tragedy after refusing to coordinate with then Hong Kong Chief Executive Donald Tsang during the crisis.

Noynoy then was indulging himself in his favorite pastime of disappearing from public view while the hostage crisis was in progress. His excuse later was that he was with Cabinet officials monitoring the situation.

Noynoy was seen only after the messy rescue had ended, making himself appear to be inspecting the crime scene with police and Cabinet officials.

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The LP considers the midterm elections as crucial for its existence since the next reform that Rody wanted to implement is federalism that will practically erase the party from the political map.

What followed was more mishandling of the situation, such as Noynoy shielding his allies from sanctions and his adamant refusal for a public apology to the Hong Kong people, which was later found to be related to his sentiments against China in the West Philippine Sea dispute.

Noynoy's idiotic stand triggered a diplomatic row with Hong Kong that lasted until Rody issued the public apology while addressing over 2,000 Filipinos working in Hong Kong.

"May I address myself to the Chinese people who are here, from the bottom of my heart and as the President of the Republic of the Philippines and on behalf of the Filipino people, may I apologize formally to you now. We are sorry that the incident happened," he added.

Rody also made a promise that the incident "as humanly possible" will never happen again.

"We apologize," Rody said, which was a statement that drew applause from the crowd of mostly overseas Filipino workers (OFW), some of whom may have been affected by the chilly relations between Hong Kong and the Philippines. 4

Hong Kong has around 222,000 Filipino workers.

Noynoy's lack of empathy was behind the moronic refusal to issue a public apology, which was the only demand of Hong Kong, the relatives of the slain hostages and the whole Chinese nation, which was shocked by the horrific incident.

Just to keep his false sense of sovereignty intact, Noynoy sacrificed the whole nation's welfare.

The situation of a failed state that Rody's opponents are talking about should accurately refer to the callous and bumbling administration of Noynoy that kept Filipinos miserable and without any pride.

Order in the house



**POWER
 POINT**
**ELIZABETH
 ANGSIOCO**

THE past days have been quite eventful to say the least. Fourteen people, mostly farmers, were killed in a police operation in Negros Oriental. Reports said that those who carried out the operation were wearing masks, or had their faces covered. Human rights groups said that the killings could have been part of this administration's anti-communist drive.

A Chinese-manned dredging ship was found docked in Barangay Lagadlarin in the coastal town of Lobo, Batangas. This vessel was set to gather two million cubic meters of sand from Lobo River but the Local Government Unit did not allow the ship to do any dredging alleging that the ship did not have the necessary permits from the LGU. There were also reports of the presence of Chinese dredging and quarrying ships in Zambales.

Chinese ships' presence was also reported near the Pag-asa Island in the West Philippine Sea.

Journalist and Rappler CEO Maria Ressa and the other members of the company's 2016 Board of Directors had to go to Court to post bail TWICE in one week due to cases filed against them by this administration. Presently, Rappler and Ressa are facing 11 or 12 cases filed in succession within a period of only a little over a year. This kind of government action against a media firm is unprecedented in the country.

Two videos tagging President Rodrigo Duterte's children as principals in an elaborate big-time drug dealing syndicate surfaced one after another. The 'revelations' were narrated by an alias "Bikoy" who said that he was an operative of the syndicate for many years. The first video named the president's son, Paolo Duterte as a drug lord who received big chunks of money for drug trafficking. Bikoy also said he has seen Paolo Duterte's dragon tattoo on his back and that this proves the younger Duterte's being part of a drug trafficking triad.

The second video of "Bikoy" alleged that the name of Duterte's daughter with partner Honey-let Avanceña, Kitty, is being used by another big drug lord who has amassed many millions of pesos through the illegal drug activities of the same syndicate. The second video said that there is a third video that will be released soon.

As expected, President Duterte claimed that the videos are nothing but black propaganda against his family. Paolo Duterte has tagged op-

position Senator Antonio Trillanes as the mastermind behind the videos, which, Trillanes of course denied.

At about the same time that these videos on the Dutertes surfaced, another video trended online and was hotly debated by netizens. This time, it was a sex video of popular singer/songwriter Jim Paredes, a known critic of this administration. Paredes, in a statement admitted that he was the man in the video. He said that it was private and that he did not know how it was made public. It would appear that Paredes was set up.

“No one likes to live in a messy dwelling.”

Towards the end of the week, President Duterte spoke in a PDP-Laban campaign rally in Malabon. It should not have been a big deal because after all, it is campaign season. What roused people's curiosity was the fact that the President used a bullet-proof glass in front of him as he spoke to the people. He said that the Presidential Security group required him to use the special glass.

To my knowledge, this is the first time that a bullet-proof glass was used by a sitting President when addressing the Filipino people. Is there a threat to the life of Duterte that extra security measures were needed? This was the question asked by people when news about this broke out.

During another speech in Puerto Princesa on April 4, Duterte threatened to suspend the Writ of Habeas Corpus, arrest all his critics, and wage a revolutionary war until the end of his term if critics do not stop. These are very serious threats that are not made lightly by any official, especially the President.

All these happened in just a little over a week. Such is the present political life in the country.

People continue to get killed daily and it seems that nothing is done to bring murderers to justice. Worse, it is those tasked to keep the peace and secure the people that are often tagged as the perpetrators of these killings. **A4**

China is aggressively claiming our territory and getting our natural resources right under our

Turn to A5

Order...

From AA

noses. Jobs that should benefit poor Filipinos are given to Chinese nationals. Drug syndicates continue to proliferate and drug lords, just like the killers of innocent lives, are freely roaming our

streets.

Journalists and media outfits critical to this administration continue to be harassed are under threat. Anti-Duterte personalities are targeted.

We have a President who threatens to go to war against the very people he is supposed to serve. The father of the nation is lost, it seems.

Our country is our house. And our house is in such a disarray that we urgently need some

order. No one likes to live in a messy house. No one wants to have a dictator of a father where the family is always under threat and no one is allowed to speak her/his mind or suffer the consequences.

In this country, we need checks and balances. We need people who will stand up and earnestly clean this mess. We cannot just shrug our shoulders and let our house continue to deteriorate. We

cannot close our eyes in the hope that others will come and clean our house for us. We need to act.

It will not be easy to do the cleanup operation. We need to shoo away those who illegally occupy parts of our house. We need to fix things so peace reigns and our families are safe. We need to make the father respect, not threaten his family.

We can begin by responsibly exercising our

right to vote on May 13. And not only that, we should vote into office those who have the capability to work and stand up to power. We should choose those whose integrity cannot be bought by drug, or any kind of money.

It is time to put order in this house.

@bethangstoca on Twitter Elizabeth Angsioca on Facebook

EVERYMAN

Impunity in the South China Sea

By Val Abelgas

WITH the government either defending, justifying or simply doing nothing about China's aggressive actions, the country's giant neighbor has become even bolder to pursue its "creeping invasion" of the disputed territories in the South China Sea.

After occupying, reclaiming and building virtual military bases with airstrips, radar equipment and other installations on several disputed islands in the last few years, the Chinese recently built an alleged maritime rescue center on the Kagitingan Reef (Fiery Cross Reef), which is part of the Kalayaan Island Group that the Philippines rightfully claims sovereignty over. Instead of lodging a protest, Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo ironically says we should be thankful for the Chinese facility because it would help Filipino fishermen in distress.

Recently, US Indo-Pacific Fleet commander Admiral Philip Davidson reported that the China Coast Guard continues to harass and intimidate Filipino fishermen in Panatag Shoal (Scarborough Shoal).

Based on this and the complaints of Filipino fishermen, former Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario and former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales filed a complaint with the International Criminal Court against Chinese President Xi Jinping for "crimes against humanity" for the alleged harassment of Filipino fishermen.

But President Rodrigo Duterte and Presidential Spokesman Salvador ignored the complaint, saying ICC had no jurisdiction and it was a futile exercise, and reassuring their Chinese friends that relations with China would continue to be warm despite the complaint.

And just last week, the country's Western Command reported that a flotilla of Chinese vessels, described in news reports as Chinese militia, has been swarming around Pag-asa Island, which is very close to Palawan and is, in fact, officially considered part of the province's Kalayaan town and home to a small Philippine military contingent and to about 100 Filipino residents, mostly fishermen.

On the previous Chinese transgressions in the disputed islands, former Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano claimed the DFA had filed "dozens, 50 or even 100 protests" with China, but never released a single copy of the supposed protests. How can Cayetano produce a copy when it was obvious he was lying and couldn't even remember if dozens or 100 protests had been filed?

On the latest report that hundreds of Chinese vessels are swarmed around Pag-asa

Island, Foreign Affairs Secretary Toedoro Locsin also claimed to have filed a "salvo of diplomatic notes" with the Chinese government, but when pressed to present a copy, Locsin, who has taken on his boss' penchant for "colorful" language, merely said: "You have my word for it, and that is all you get. *Manigas na kayo na nagda-doubt pa!*" (Drop dead, you doubters.)

Panelo later thumbed down the request to make the protest public and urged the people to just "take the word of the public officials," which unfortunately is not easy to do considering the track record of this administration on transparency.

Take for example the case of the "Operation Tokhang" reports. The Philippine National Police and the Office of the Solicitor General Jose Calida has been asked to present the official reports on the illegal drug operations for a long time now. Calida first promised to present the report to the Supreme Court but reneged on the offer citing national security.

The high tribunal had to order Calida and PNP last Tuesday to submit to the court the police reports on the killings of more than 4,000 people in Duterte's brutal war on drugs.

But back to China. Before Locsin claimed that he had sent a "salvo of diplomatic notes" to China, Panelo said the government would "ask politely" why the Chinese vessels were in the area of Pag-asa Island. On the same breath, he downplayed the presence of the Chinese militia, first claiming that there were only 275 ships and not 600 as claimed by the military, and then saying that the Chinese were perhaps merely watching the area.

But based on how the Chinese slowly, but gradually took over the disputed islets in the South China Sea, it is not farfetched to suspect that the Chinese are eyeing the island, which is not just an islet or reef, but a big and inhabitable island.

Their presence seems to send a clear signal to the Philippine military, which is in the process of repairing military installations there, to back off.

"This is a straightforward intimidation tactic—to interrupt Filipino maritime traffic in very close proximity to Thitu (Pag-asa Island)," said Alexander Neill, Shangri-la Dialogue Senior Fellow for Asia Pacific security at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Neill said China's aggressive action on Pag-asa is because of the "inability of Filipino forces to react to probing tactics by

Chinese vessels, and on the political front by President Duterte who has warned to China and is prepared to dismiss the threat by China to Philippines territory."

He said the maritime militia serves as "eyes and ears" for the People's Liberation Army.

"It is also a warning that China has the potential to take the islands with little difficulty, should they choose to," he added.

Another report that should be a cause for Filipinos is the sudden appearance of a Chinese-manned dredging ship near the coastal town of Lobo in Batangas. Apparently, the ship had no prior authority to sail into the Batangas coast, but its appearance revealed a plan by a private company to dredge sand from the Lobo river to build a runway of the Hongkong International Airport, according to the Inquirer. But one wonders if the sand is not going to be used to reclaim more islands in the South China Sea. *Lulutuin tayo sa sariling nating mantika*, as they say in Filipino.

The dredging ship's appearance also stresses the impunity with which the Chinese, including private companies, are violating Philippine laws and sovereignty obviously because of the way the Duterte administration are coddling up to the Chinese. Chinese companies have been found to be bringing in illegal Chinese workers to the detriment of Filipino workers but the government merely shrugged it off.

In the wake of all these continuing aggressive actions by the Chinese in the South China Sea, the Philippine government continues to reassure Beijing that everything's okay and that our relations with China continue to be warm. In a campaign rally in Malabon on Tuesday, Duterte said China just wants to become a friend of the Philippines, as he downplayed Chinese aggressions in the South China Sea.

Even Speaker Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who was very "friendly" with China during her presidency, chimed in last week during a forum in that developing countries like the Philippines should look to China as partner, not a threat.

All these developments make us wonder why it appears that this administration is so beholden to China. If we look at Duterte's key supporters in the presidential campaign—the Marcos family and Arroyo—it should not surprise us that they, too, are known friends of China during their reign. Just wondering.

valabelgas@aol.com

Indo-Pacific: A US-concocted geo-political equation



**BACK-
BENCHER
ROD P.
KAPUNAN**

THE emergence of China as an economic power has given impetus for the US to counteract what it sees as a new threat to its dominance in the eastern side of the Pacific rim. The Indo-Pacific as a geo-political concept is now frequently used by the Trump administration to differentiate it from President Obama's pivot-to-Asia policy.

Geographically, the Indo-Pacific covers a much wider area as that includes the Pacific and Indian Ocean, and the littoral states surrounding that great body of water. Unlike the pivot-to-Asia policy, the US has to rely on its allies. The concept of Indo-Pacific is slowly being recast as an emerging security arrangement stretching from the South China Sea to the Andaman Sea onward to the Indian Ocean. US military strategists envision it as a way to check China's influence.

The US now sees the Indo-Pacific to serve as foundation to future military alliance by commingling countries with different political allegiances and perceptions of the regional and international problems. However, taken collectively, it is devoid of ideological substance. Countries that may be covered are less cohesive and symmetrical in their perception of China. As a counterbalance to China's increasing economic and political influence, it would be less effective and would expose the purpose of only wanting to insulate them from China.

This is the same strategy of desperately promoting a proxy war. By creating a wedge, the US hopes that countries in the widened geo-political equation would seek to formalize their military alliance with the US. It is principally eyeing India as the most eligible to take the cudgels of alternative force.

Possibly the US may establish a liaison with countries outside of the South China Sea to coordinate the conduct of joint military exercise that has for its objective instilling in India the responsibility of securing stability in the SCS, it being a co-terminous to the Indian Ocean. That would then give India the leverage to assert in the SCS alongside countries that have a formal military alliance with the US like Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand.

Should India decide to endorse the US proposal, there is the great possibility it would be carrying out the greater burden now being undertaken by the US navy now badly divided among securing the Straits of Taiwan, safeguarding the Sea of Japan

“What does India's presence mean?”

to prevent surprised incursion from North Korea, and keeping an eye on the powerful Russian Navy based in Sakhalin Island. Should such unexpected turn of events happen, India would be forced to defend US interest without that country being formally inducted to join the alliance.

The presence of the Indian navy in the SCS may not drastically alter the military balance in the region, but it certainly it would deliver the much-needed propaganda boost, that the US still has the clout to rally behind it in containing China. In fact, some politicians in India adhere to the belief that China remains its rival not to say of their dormant but unresolved border dispute.

Even if we take it that isolating China is next to impossible, most countries in SCS even those situated in the India Ocean cannot wholly distance themselves from China. Through the years their economy has become integrated and complimentary.

by

to the Chinese economy which is essential to their own economic development and prosperity. They all realize that the US can never fill up this vacuum should they decide to forego their current economic link in favor of what many see as a rehash of the Cold War.

This explains why the Philippines like the rest of the ASEAN has slowly been economically tilting towards China. The US to this date has failed to analyze that its continued sponsorship of military alliances is a dissipating its resources while the continued building up of economic ties is always productive investment. This is the hard reality that the US refuses to accept; that it is only the US arms industry that is benefiting from the proxy war. China as

their new trading partner has delivered the goods they needed while the US despite years of presence and dominance has failed.

How could the US promote the Indo-Pacific as a form of geo-political groupings? India for instance cannot openly endorse this rather outlandish strategy for objectively it has no direct interest to protect in the SCS. Stationing naval ships, conducting regular naval patrol or holding joint naval military exercise with other countries could only be interpreted as endorsing the US policy which in the long run is economically consuming to India. On the contrary, China and many countries in Southeast Asia could view their presence as an unwarranted provocation.

While China and the Asean concede that freedom navigation in the SCS should be firmly maintained, which in fact is about to ratify the Code of Conduct for navigation, that certainly could raise questions about the presence of naval ships alien to the region or do not share the same coastline in

the SCS. If the US navy is seen as necessary to provide security and stability to countries with umbilical dependence on its presence, that does not hold true for other countries like India. For Asean to acquiesce to the regular presence of foreign navies not littoral to the SCS is to bestow in them right to treat SCS their lake, the way the US navy treats it as its own lake.

Instead of the US navy dangerously stretching its responsibility, it seems the new strategy is to encourage the sharing of that responsibility with other countries by allowing them to deploy their naval forces in the SCS. Many suspect this is to lay the groundwork for the future formation of a new military bloc. While the central operation would still be in the SCS, the new bloc would include the navies coming from the Indian Ocean. One must constantly bear in mind that the Indo-Pacific as a new geopolitical term came on the heels of the intensifying rivalry between the US and China.

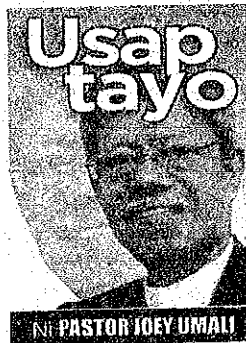
In which case, India's possible deployment of a naval task force in the SCS would require no formal military alliance with the US but nonetheless would herald to the world the US is not alone patrolling the area. Invariably, India will be more preoccupied in patrolling SCS than in the Indian Ocean which encompasses the Bay of Bengal in the West, Arabian Sea in the East and Sri Lanka to the South where there are more political hotspots than in the SCS.

Many observers believe that should the Indian presence in the SCS become regular, it would now be following the footsteps of the US navy, a role it should not play for the fact that its interest is only limited to transporting goods to and from China through the South China Sea which all countries in the region guarantee to remain open to all ships. Neither will Asean allow India to usurp its primordial role as principal arbiter to any dispute that may arise in the SCS.

rpkapunan@gmail.com

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Kaibigan ba natin talaga ang China?

KABI-KABILA ang kontrobersya tungkol sa relasyon ng Pilipinas sa China, bagamat pilit na nakikipagkaibigan si Presidente Duterte sa higanteng bansang ito. Ang mala-king tamong, kaibigan nga bang maituturing ng Pilipinas ang China?

Ang China ay isa sa bansang pinagkakautangan ng Pilipinas. Isa rito ay ang \$62 milyong utang para sa Chico River Pump Irrigation Project. Ayon sa mga ekonomista, mas mataas ang interest na ipinapataw ng China, kumpara sa Japan at South Korea. Kung magkakaroon ng problema sa kasunduan at kinakailangan

ang "arbitration," ang pag-uusap ay ipapasailalim sa batas ng China at gagawin ang pag-uusap sa Hong Kong. Kung hindi makakabayad ang Pilipinas, maaaring kunin ng China ang ginamit na "collateral" sa utang, ang deposito ng natural gas sa Recto Bank na sinasabing may 5.4 bilyong bariles ng langis at 55.1 trilyong cubic feet ng natural gas — isang napakalaking kayamanan na lampas-lampas sa halaga ng pagkakautang. Ito ba'y patas na kasunduan ng tunay na magkakaibigan?

Patuloy na dumaragsa ang mga Chinese maritime militia sa isla ng Pag-asa sa Palawan na pagmamay-ari ng Pilipinas. Ayon mismo sa AFP Western Command, noong nakaraang linggo ay namataan sa paligid ng Pag-asa ang 275 mga barko mula sa China. Dahil dito, mahigit sa 300,000 mangingisdang Pilipino ang diumano'y natatakot mangisda sa lugar na kinagisnang Pilipino ay tinatakot, bilang mga Pilipino. Doon mismo sa lugar nila, ang mga mangingisdang Pilipino ay tinatakot, pinagbabantaan, itinataboy. Ganito ba ang pagtrato ng isang kaibigan sa kanyang kaibigan?

Kamakailan, sina dating Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario at Ombudsman Conchita Carpio Morales ay nagsampa ng kahilingan sa International Criminal Court na imbestigahan nito si Chinese President Xi Jinping dahil sa pang-aabuso sa mga mangingisdang Pilipino at pagwasak sa "reef" bunga ng itinatayo nitong mga istraktura sa mga teritoryong idiniklara

(Sundan sa page 5)

USAP TAYO. Mula page 4

ng Permanent Court of Arbitration na pag-aari ng Pilipinas. Ganito ba ang sitwasyon ng tunay na magkakaibigan?

Interesado ang China na billin at pamahalaan ang natuging Hanjin Heavy Industries na gumagawa ng mga barko sa dating US Naval Base sa Subic Bay sa Zambales. Maraming nangangamba na kapag ito'y napasakamay ng gobyerno ng China, magdudulot ito ng napakalaking panganib sa seguridad ng Pilipinas. Dahil sa ginagawang pagtrato ng China sa Pilipinas, may batayan ba ang ganitong pangamba?

Tila бага pang-linis, ang Lonely Planet, isang travel website at guide book publisher, ay nagsabi na ang Banaue Rice Terraces na idiniklara ng UNESCO na isang World Heritage Site ay itinatayo ng mga Chinese dalawang libong taon na ang nakararaan. Nakakatawa, pero baka kaya isang araw

ay magising na lamang tayo na lahat sa Pilipinas ay pag-aari o gawa ng mga Chinese?

Narapat lamang na makipagkaibigan tayo sa lahat ng bansa, ngunit pakikipagkaibigan patas ang ugnayan, kung saan ay igagalang ang ating sobereniyang at dangal bilang isang malaya't nagsasariling bansa. Hindi komo higanteng Goliath ang China ay magiging sunud-sunuran na lamang tayo rito at magbubulag-bulagan sa kanyang ginagawa, sapagkat tayo'y isang musmos na David. Sa Bibliya, isang musmos na David ang tumalo sa isang higanteng Goliath.

Ang kailangan natin ay ang paggalang sa ating sarili, ang pagtitiwala sa ating kakayahan. Ang dangal natin bilang isang bansa't lahi ay hindi maaaring maaagaw niinuman nang wala tayong pahintulot. Maging ng isang higanteng tulad ng China!

Exe