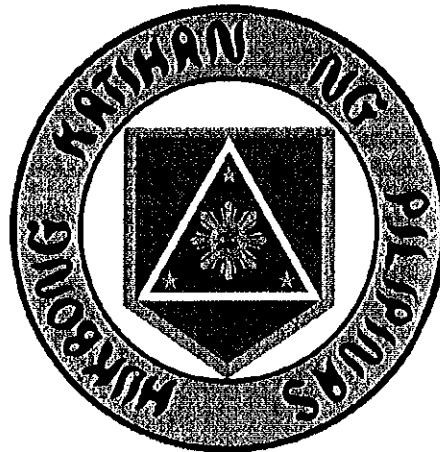


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07 April 2019

Sunday

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DOLE to probe abuse of OFWs

By SHEILA CRISOSTOMO

The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) has been ordered to investigate the alleged involvement of some employees of recruitment agencies in the rape of a 22-year-old Filipina worker in Jeddah and maltreatment of four others.

Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III directed the POEA to look into the report submitted by Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) Jeddah Labor Attaché Nasser Munder about the abuses committed against the five workers and the involvement of some recruitment agencies.

Based on Munder's report, a 22-year-old worker, identified only as Saïda, was raped by her agency representative on Dec. 28, 2018.

The victim is now staying at Bahay Kalinga while the case is being handled by the Assistance to Nationals Section of the Philippine consulate general in Jeddah.

Bello said four household service workers were forced to work for more than 10 hours in different households and render

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another two hours of duty at the house of their original employer.

They were identified as Samra Musa Lidasan, Lyn Silongan Sali, Norhen Gayo Sarat and Noraima Mamadra Bandara.

The four workers hold legitimate *Iqama* or residence permit but were forced to work as cleaners.

They escaped from their employer and sought refuge at the Migrant Workers and Other Overseas Filipinos Resource Center (MWOFR) in Jeddah last March 1.

Bello said both cases involved their Saudi re-

cruitment agency Madar Al Kharj and the Filipino recruitment agency Iemploy Manpower Services Inc.

Munder has recommended the suspension and cancellation of the licenses of the erring recruitment agencies.

Bello added he instructed the POEA to immediately report the developments and results of the investigation to authorize appropriate sanctions on both recruitment agencies.

He assured the abused workers they would be get assistance from POLO and POEA.

MORE ML VICTIMS SLAM OSG FOR BLOCKING DEAL

STORY BY PATRICIA DENISE M. CHIU AND LEILA B. SALAVERRIA

Another group of former political prisoners has questioned Solicitor General Jose Calida's decision rejecting the \$13.75-million reparation claims granted them by a Hawaii District Court. Samahan ng Ex-Detainees Laban sa Detensyon at Aresto (Selda) said the Duterte administration's motives were 'questionable' and its act 'tantamount to the nonacknowledgment of martial law victims.'

A2

FROM A1

By Patricia Denise M. Chiu
and Leila B. Salaverria
@Team_Inquirer

Another group of former political prisoners during the martial law regime of President Ferdinand Marcos has questioned the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) for blocking what should have been the third payout of reparation claims granted human rights victims by a Hawaii District Court.

In a statement, Samahan ng Ex-Detainees Laban sa Detensyon at Aresto (Selda) described as "questionable" the motives of the OSG in refusing the settlement deal that would have distributed \$13.75 million among 6,500 registered claimants in the class suit.

On Wednesday, the OSG, the Department of Justice and the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) said they had agreed on March 11 that

the government would no longer enter into the settlement deal "in the best interest of the republic."

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

Under the settlement agreement, the martial law victims would receive \$13.75 million from the sale of four paintings illegally acquired by former first lady Imelda Marcos, with the government getting \$4 million. The remainder would be split between Golden Buddha Corp. and the estate of Roger Roxas, who discovered the so-called Yamashita treasure.

Dangerous precedent feared

"Is this mere legality or technicality that the OSG is raising to stop the claims distribution?" asked Selda vice chair, Danilo dela Fuente, who added that the move could set a dangerous precedent and may prevent other victims

from seeking claims in the future.

"In the first place, the victims and the members of the class suit have a rightful claim to the settlement. They proved time and again that the late dictator [Marcos] and his family should be made accountable for decades of their rule. The [victims] have all the right to assert and demand justice and compensation," Dela Fuente said.

Selda also questioned the motives of the Duterte administration that, the group said, seems to be rehabilitating the Marcos im-

age by saying that no plunder occurred during his regime.

Stopping the reparations and recognition of their claims may be "tantamount to nonacknowledgment of the victims of martial law," Selda said.

On Saturday, Sen. Koko Pimentel said in a radio interview that he was willing to file a bill to allow the distribution of the proceeds from the sale of the paintings, if this would remedy the situation created by the OSG's rejection of the settlement deal.

Pimentel, however, said he could not judge the fairness of the OSG's move, as he had yet to read and study the reason behind it.

DOJ: Talk to Calida

Asked about the basis for the government's rejection of the settlement agreement, Justice Secretary Menardo Guevara referred the Inquirer to Calida.

"The best person to ask is Solicitor General Calida because [the] OSG is advising the PCGG on these cases," Guevarra said.

Calida had yet to respond to the Inquirer's request for comment at press time.

Claimants 1081

On Friday, another group of rights victims, Claimants 1081, condemned the OSG's position as "an 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."

Claimants 1081 also 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 or transfer the agency under its jurisdiction.

The PCGG is a quasijudicial agency created in 1986 by President Corazon Aquino to recover the ill-gotten wealth accumulated by the Marcos family and its cronies. —WITH A REPORT FROM
JEROME ANING INQ

44% of Pinoys doubt China's intentions for PH

Two in five Filipinos disagree that the Chinese government has good intentions for the Filipino people, a new Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey found amid a string of issues concerning China, the latest involving the presence of hundreds of Chinese vessels near the Philippine-occupied Pag-asa Island.

Results of the survey, conducted from Dec. 16 to 19 last year, showed 44 percent of the 1,440 adult respondents disagreed with the statement

"most of what the Chinese government wants to happen in the Philippines is good for the Filipinos" while 27 percent agreed. The remaining 29 percent were undecided.

Diplomatic protest

This resulted in a -17 net agreement score (percent agree minus disagree), classified by SWS as "moderately weak," and an improvement from -28 in September 1993, when SWS last asked the question about the in-

tentions of China.

The survey, released late Friday, had a margin of error of plus or minus 2.6 percentage points.

The Department of Foreign Affairs said it had lodged a diplomatic protest with Beijing against the Chinese ships around Pag-asa which, according to the military's monitoring, numbered more than 200 vessels since January.

Earlier this year, concerns have been raised about the influx of illegal Chinese workers

in the country. Still, the Duterte administration has pivoted to China for loans and grants to finance his ambitious infrastructure program.

Friendlier stance

President Duterte has taken a friendlier stance toward China, even setting aside a Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling in favor of the Philippines which challenged China's claim to nearly all of the South China Sea, including waters within the

Philippines' exclusive economic zone.

While net agreement eased between September 1993 and December 2018, the number of people who strongly disagreed with the statement rose, SWS noted.

Responses were broken into strongly agreed/disagreed and those who somewhat agreed/disagreed.

Those who disagreed comprised of 22 percent who strongly disagreed, up 17 points from 5

percent in 1993, and 22 percent who somewhat disagreed, down from 39 percent.

Those who agreed consisted of 7 percent who strongly agreed, up from 1 percent in 1993, and 19 percent who somewhat agreed (rounded correctly), a decline from 35 percent.

SWS first asked the question in July 1985 to gauge public opinion about the intentions of the US government, a longtime ally of the Philippines. —INQUIRER RESEARCH INQ

Rody lauded for stance on Pag-asa Island

By JANVIC MATEO

Former foreign affairs secretary Albert del Rosario welcomed President Duterte's pronouncement that he will not allow the Chinese to occupy the Philippine-controlled

Pag-asa Island in the disputed West Philippine Sea.

"On his recently stated position regarding the Philippine defense of Pag-asa, our President is manifesting his own brand of leadership which in this instance is both appro-

priate and admirable," Del Rosario said in a text message to The STAR.

"Let us all be one in standing behind him," he added.

Duterte on Thursday stressed that Pag-asa is part of Philippine territory and asked

the Chinese to lay off on the island.

"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

Turn to Page 6

Rody From Page 1

off Pag-asa because I have my soldiers there," Duterte said.

"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. I will not allow them to also occupy Pag-asa. No, of course not," he added.

Duterte made the statement amid reports that Chinese vessels have been spotted in the area.

The Department of Foreign Affairs has protested the presence of the said Chinese vessels, describing it as a violation of Philippine sovereignty.

"The presence of Chinese vessels near and around Pag-asa and other maritime features in the KIG is illegal," the DFA said in a statement, referring to Kalayaan Island Group that includes Pag-asa.

"Such actions are a clear violation of Philippine sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction, as defined under international law including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea," it added.

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

Joseph Felter, deputy assistant secretary of defense for South and Southeast Asia, said 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."

"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 on Friday to attend a meeting of defense officials of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

He noted that the US does not take a stand on various conflicting claims in the South China Sea. But the US commitment to the Indo-Pacific region involves working with allies and partners to keep the seas free and open and ensure that "no country's sovereignty is undermined," he said.

Crimes against humanity

Also on Saturday, Del Rosario and former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales maintained the International Criminal Court (ICC) is the legal platform where Filipino citizens can exact accountability for injustices related to Chinese aggression in the West Philippine Sea.

"Today, our Filipino countrymen are

increasingly focused on the presence of hundreds of Chinese vessels operating around Pag-asa that serve to harass, bully and persecute our fishermen," they said in an opinion published in **The STAR**.

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

Del Rosario and Morales said Beijing continues to commit atrocious actions in the disputed territories despite the Philippine victory in the Permanent Court of Arbitration that clarified the country's entitlements in the South China Sea.

The two former officials earlier sent a communication to the ICC asking its prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, to initiate a preliminary examination on alleged crimes against humanity committed against Filipino fishermen by Chinese President Xi Jinping, Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua.

- With AP

'STRONGLY WORDED STATEMENT' TO CHINA

LACSON, DEL ROSARIO LAUD DU30 STANCE ON PAG-ASA

Sen. Panfilo Lacson on Saturday thanked President Duterte for telling China to stay away from Pag-asa Island while former Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario urged Filipinos to rally behind the nation's leader for his "admirable" statement.

On his Twitter page, Lacson posted a link to an Inquirer report on Mr. Duterte's statement telling China to "lay off" Pag-asa Island in the South China Sea.

"Let us be friends, but do not touch Pag-asa Island, otherwise, things would be different," Mr. Duterte, addressing Beijing, said at a campaign rally in Palawan on Thursday night.

Lacson on Saturday welcomed that statement, tweeting: "Thank you for this Mr. President!"

A day earlier, he reminded

Mr. Duterte that Pag-asa was part of Philippine territory. He also cited lyrics from the national anthem that said Filipinos would be happy to die defending the country.

At the Puerto Princesa campaign rally, Mr. Duterte told China that Filipino soldiers were stationed on Pag-asa, the biggest of nine islands and shoals occupied by the Philippines in the Kalayaan Island Group and part of the Spratly chain in the South China Sea.

"If you lay a finger on them, it's another story. I will tell my soldiers, prepare for a suicide mission," Mr. Duterte said. "I'm trying to tell China, Pag-asa is ours."

The President's remarks followed 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.

Hoping for China reply

In a text message to the Inquirer, Lacson said Mr. Duterte's "strongly worded statement" to China was "commendable." He hoped China would respond by trying to ease the President's concerns.

"Considering that this is the first time that the President has spoken in such serious and strong terms, I would like to think that China will at least mollify PRRD by backtracking on their aggressive posture in Pag-asa," Lacson said.

The extent of China's actions would depend on how valuable Pag-asa Island is to them, he said.

"Having said that, a Chinese invasion of Barangay Pag-asa should be regarded by us and our allies, especially the US with whom we have a mutual defense treaty, as such since there is no other way to look at it," he added.

Rare show of support

In a rare expression of support for Mr. Duterte, Del Rosario on Saturday said he fully backed the President's stand.

"On his recently stated position regarding the Philippine defense of Pag-asa, our President is manifesting his own brand of leadership, which in this instance is both appropriate and admirable," Del Rosario said in a statement.

"Let us all be one in standing behind him," he added.

Del Rosario has been critical

of the President's soft stance toward China and for setting aside an international arbitral court ruling in favor of the Philippines that nullified China's expansive claims to virtually the entire South China Sea in 2016.

Last month, he and retired Ombudsman Conchita Carpio Morales, a former Supreme Court associate justice, filed a complaint in the International Criminal Court against Chinese President Xi Jinping and other Chinese officials for alleged crimes against humanity, saying hundreds of thousands of Filipinos were being "persecuted and injured" by China's aggressive island-building and occupation of islands in the South China Sea.

DFA protest

Sen. Richard Gordon on Fri-

day said he was glad that the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) had filed a diplomatic protest with Beijing against the large presence of Chinese vessels around Pag-asa.

"China said it is our friend, but a friend does not send hundreds of Army, hundreds of Navy, does not send hundreds of vessels to harass fishermen in our territory," he said at the commemoration of the Araw ng Kagitingan and Philippine Veterans Week at Port Bonifacio.

The DFA had said the presence of the Chinese vessels was "illegal," stressing that "such actions are a clear violation of Philippine sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction as defined under international law."

—REPORTS FROM LEILA B. SALAVERRIA AND JEROME ANING INQ

Bam seeks probe of foiled dredging

SEN. Paolo Benigno "Bam" Aquino 4th on Saturday raised the need to probe the entry of an African-flagged dredging ship with Chinese crew in Lobo River in Batangas, saying the incident was a clear encroachment upon the country's internal seas.

Aquino and Senate President Pro Tempore Ralph Recto said they plan to file a resolution to seek an inquiry into a report that a Chinese-manned dredging ship will extract sand from the Lobo River that will be used for the expansion of the Hong Kong airport.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources stopped the dredging last week, saying the vessel lacked documents.

"Inagaw na nga nila ang mga isla natin, patl ba naman buhangin, gusto pa nilang angkinin" (They already seized our islands in [the South China Sea], and they still want to get our sand)," Aquino said.

"Nakakaalarma ang insidenteng ito dahil malinaw na ito'y panghihimasok na sa karagatang sakop ng Pilipinas (This incident is quite alarming and it is a clear encroachment upon the Philippines' territorial seas)," he added.

Dredging A8

DREDGING FROM A1

Bam seeks

Aquino believes that the ship is only "a Trojan horse," pretending to undertake a normal business operation for siltation removal, but its main agenda is to take sand from the country's waters to be used for other purposes.

MV Herald, a Sierra Leone-flagged dredging ship, managed to get an environmental compliance certificate (ECC) through a Filipino firm to operate.

But the DENR suspended

the ECC after concerned sectors questioned the awarding of the certificate.

The ship also lacked a permit from the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) to transport sand and failed to present a permit from the local government of Lobo, Batangas, to dredge in Lobo River.

Recto said the Senate inquiry into the "poaching or export of sand and other landfill materials" should cover not only the reported sand dredging in Batangas "but similar cases in other parts of the country."

"Have we become a land rec-

lamation material supplier? Are we exporting our sand? If our mountains have been flattened and transported ship by ship to reclaim islands, some of which are within our territory, then that is land transfer of the worst kind," he added.

Recto said if reports were true that the ship was dredging sand for use in the building of Hong Kong airport's third runway, "then it is our second contribution to the project, the first being the P700 million that Filipino travellers pay a year for the expansion of the Hong Kong airport."

"It is in the fine print of a

round-trip plane ticket to Hong Kong. [It's in the ticket]. You pay 90 Hong Kong dollars as Hong Kong airport construction fee," he noted.

Sen. Richard Gordon said China's actions in the South China Sea "do not demonstrate the actions of a friend" as he pushed for the strengthening of the country's military equipment.

"A friend does not send hundreds of army, hundreds of navy, does not send hundreds of vessels to harass our fishermen in our territory," he pointed out on Friday during commemoration of Philippine Veterans Week held at

Fort Bonifacio.

"I'm glad that [Foreign Affairs] Secretary [Teodoro] Locsin already filed a diplomatic protest. If we do not have a strong Navy, if we do not have a strong Army, we will be pushed around by other countries," Gordon said.

He added that he fought to have 13 percent of the proceeds from Tax Reform Acceleration and Inclusion Law allocated for the military, on top of the budget from the Bases Conversion and Development Authority, to ensure that soldiers would not go to war without the proper equipment.

"It is the military's duty to protect the integrity of our territory and to protect our country but they would not be capable of doing that without the right equipment. Let us remind our leaders to learn from history. We should follow Japan's motto, 'Enrich the country, strengthen the military,'" Gordon said.

About 275 Chinese vessels were spotted near and around Pag-asa (Thitu) Island in the South China Sea from January to March this year, according to the Philippine military.

China said the vessels were civilian ships, mostly fishing boats.

BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO

RODY'S TOUGH TALK ON CHINA PRAISED

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

FORMER Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario commended President Rodrigo Duterte for taking a strong stance against perceived Chinese aggression in the disputed South China Sea amid huge presence of its vessels near islands occupied by the Philippines.

"Our President is manifesting his own brand of leadership which in this instance is both appropriate and admirable," Del Rosario said in a statement.

"Let us all be one in standing behind him," said Del Rosario, who, along with former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales, filed a case against Chinese President Xi Jinping, accusing him of committing crimes against humanity in connection with Beijing's activities to gain control over most of the resource-rich South China Sea.

Duterte on Friday threatened to send troops on a

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RODY'S...

From A1

"suicide mission" if China should undertake aggressive actions on Philippine-occupied features in the South China Sea, particularly Pag-asa Island.

"Let us be friends, but do not touch Pag-asa Island and the rest," Duterte was quoted as saying at a rally in Puerto Princesa, Palawan.

"If you make moves there, that's a different story. I will tell my soldiers, 'Prepare for suicide mission'."

"I'm just telling you that lay off the Pag-asa because I have soldiers there."

The government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs, on Thursday called "illegal" the presence of about 275 Chinese vessels near and around Pag-asa island, saying it was an infringement of Philippine sovereignty.

In a related development, Senator Richard Gordon lashed back at China, saying China was not a friend because its actions did not demonstrate the actions of a friend.

"China said they are our friends but a friend does not send hundreds of army, hundreds of navy, does not send hundreds of vessels to harass our fishermen in our territory," stressed Gordon.

The senator said he was glad Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin already filed a diplomatic protest on March 29.

"If we do not have a strong Navy, if we do not have a strong Army, we will be pushed around by other countries," Gordon said.

Gordon pointed out that he fought to have 13 percent of the proceeds from TRAIN 1 allocated for the military, on top of the budget from the Bases Conversion

and Development Authority, to ensure that soldiers will not go to war without the proper equipment.

"It is the military's duty to protect the integrity of our territory and to protect our country but they would not be capable of doing that without the right equipment. Let us remind our leaders to learn from history. We should follow Japan's motto—Enrich the country, strengthen the military," he said.

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.

Meanwhile, opposition Senator Leila M. de Lima has called the Philippines' unilateral withdrawal from the International Criminal Court as a "self-serving" act that would weaken the Filipinos' defense against foreign aggression and state-led abuses.

De Lima, a human rights and social justice champion, lamented that more than Duterte, the country's unilateral withdrawal from ICC would greatly benefit foreign aggressors, especially China, to the detriment of the Philippines' interests and security.

She warned that Duterte's withdrawal from the Rome Statute becomes nothing more than a self-serving act that also favored his Chinese patron, with the Philippines as the major loser, she said in her recent Dispatch from Crame No. 494.

"Because as sure as anything, Duterte will continue to commit crimes against humanity on his countrymen, and China will continue to commit acts of aggression against Filipino fisherfolks beyond March 17, 2019. The Philippines has just been stripped naked of ICC protection from both," she added.

The Philippines' withdrawal from the Rome Statute took effect last March 17, which means that any future act of aggression by foreign countries and crimes against humanity committed by Duterte after March 17, 2019 can no longer be raised by the Philippines to the ICC.

Additionally, the ICC can only investigate summary executions carried out by policemen and vigilantes, upon Duterte's directive, from June 30, 2016 to March 16, 2019 due to the said withdrawal.

Before March 17, Del Rosario and Carpio-Morales, along with a group of local fishermen, were able to file a communication before the ICC against Chinese President Xi Jinping and other Chinese officials for crimes committed in the disputed South China Sea.

While she lauded the move, De Lima was concerned that "China's acts of aggression complained of in Del Rosario's and Morales's ICC communication definitely will not be the last to be committed by a foreign country or leader against the Philippines and Filipino citizens."

De Lima said she was also alarmed that Duterte's unilateral withdrawal from the country's membership to the Rome Statute without the Senate's concurrence might also prompt him to eventually withdraw from other significant treaties should issues affecting him arise.

"Another point. With the now emboldened President Duterte, whose unilateral act of withdrawing sans Senate concurrence was left unchecked by the Supreme Court, what would prevent him now from likewise withdrawing, whimsically and capriciously as he did as to the Rome Statute, from other major treaties like the RP-US Mutual Defense Treaty?" she asked.

"In short, the grievously ill-advised

and arbitrary unilateral withdrawal from the Rome Statute was a colossal blunder," she added.

In 2018, De Lima sought the Supreme Court's approval to allow her to personally appear and argue on the petition that she and her colleagues filed challenging the Philippines' unilateral decision to withdraw from the ICC.

However, the SC junked the minority senators' motion to allow De Lima to argue for the position of non-withdrawal from the Rome Statute, maintaining that the case will not be prejudiced if a lawyer other than De Lima argued their petition before the Court.

In other developments, Senate President Pro Tempore Ralph Recto on Saturday said he would file a resolution to investigate the sand extraction attempt of a Chinese-manned dredging ship off the coast of Lobo, Batangas, and know if the incident was happening in other areas.

He said the Senate probe into the "poaching or export of sand and other landfill materials" should cover not only the reported sand dredging in Batangas "but similar cases in other parts of the country."

"Have we become a land reclamation material supplier? Are we exporting our sand?" Recto asked.

"If our mountains have been flattened and transported ship by ship to reclaim islands, some of which are within our territory, then that is land transfer of the worst kind," he said.

Recto said if reports are true that the Chinese ship was dredging sand for use in the building of Hong Kong airport's third runway, "then it is our second contribution to the project—the first being the P700 million that Filipino travellers pay a year for the expansion of the Hong Kong airport."

Russian warships set to visit Manila tomorrow

By JAIME LAUDE

Three Russian warships will arrive in Manila tomorrow while Filipino and American soldiers prepare for the launching of military exercises in various parts of the country.

Russia's anti-submarine ships *Admiral Tributs* and *Vinogradov* and sea tanker *Irkut* will drop anchor at the Port of Manila on Monday, according to the Philippine Navy.

Navy Capt. Jonathan Zata said the Russian warships will dock at the Manila South Harbor Pier 15 for a five-day goodwill visit.

"The Philippine Navy will render customary welcome ceremony upon arrival of the vessels to be followed by a press briefing with both navies' key officials," Zata said.

A Navy official said the arrival of the Russian ships coincided with the ongoing joint Philippines-US Balikatan military exercises.

He said the Russian port call was a reciprocal visit brought about by the improved relations between naval forces of Russia and the Philippines following last year's historic visit of the Navy's strategic sealift vessel *BRP Tarlac* to Russia's Pacific Fleet headquarters in Vladivostok.

Meanwhile, organizers of the Balikatan exercises have included a live fire drill at the military's gunnery range in Crow Valley, Capas, Tarlac on Wednesday and a joint amphibious landing on the shorelines of Zambales the following day.

This year's joint exercises involve 4,000 Filipino soldiers, 3,000 US servicemen and 50 Australian troops and will also involve the American vessel *USS Wasp* and US Marines F35B Lightning II fighter jets.

The war drills also include counter-terrorism training, urban operations training, aviation operations and bilateral planning in key areas of the country including Palawan, Zambales and Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija.

This Balikatan series will end on April 12.

The Philippine Navy also hosted a 23-man visiting navy student delegation from Pakistan that arrived in the country last Tuesday for a five-day study tour.

The visiting Pakistanis, students and staff of the Pakistan Navy War College, is headed by Rear Admiral Naveed Ahmed Rizvi.

The delegation that also included naval students from Sri Lanka and Brunei left the country yesterday.

During their visit to Navy chief Vice Admiral Robert Empedrad, Rizvi conveyed the Pakistani navy offer to host Filipino sailors at their Navy War College. 2

Navy inspector general Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Casem highly appreciated the Pakistanis visit as this further opens opportunity to build stronger ties between the two navies.

He said both navies play a major part in the development and enhancement of relations between the two countries.

Army man, bank manager nabbed for guns, drugs

A former member of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and a bank manager, along with four others, were arrested in a police operation in Barangay Rizal, Makati City on Friday night, an official said yesterday.

Former Army man Nolan Yatar and bank manager Albert Altes were arrested along with Wayne Balaysoche, Rodalyn Apolinario, John Evans Brillantes and Melavin Almario, according to Major Gideon Ines, deputy chief of

the Makati City police.

Police secured a search warrant from the Makati Regional Trial Court-Branch 150 against Yatar after they received reports that he allegedly possessed illegal firearms, Ines said.

He said police officers saw Altes, Balaysoche, Apolinario, Brillantes and Almario allegedly gambling and having a drug session at Yatar's house when they served the warrant.

Yatar was dishonorably discharged from the AFP for

being absent without official leave, Ines said.

Recovered during the operation were a .38 caliber revolver with four bullets, seven sachets of shabu with a street value of P5,000 and drug paraphernalia.

Drug suspect slain in Tondo

In Manila, police officers shot dead alleged pusher Larino Ochangco in a reported shootout during a drug sting in Tondo before dawn yes-

terday.

A .38 caliber revolver was recovered at the scene along Clarivel street, where Ochangco was shot at around 2:20 a.m.

Ochangco surrendered to authorities under Oplan Tokhang and was in the drug list, police said.

In Quezon City, at least 20 persons were arrested in separate anti-drug operations since Friday. — Robertzon Ramirez, Marc Jayson Cayabyab, Romina Cabrera

AFP to CPP fronts: Prove documents wrong

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

Do not blame government for the red tag.

This was the message of Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Deputy Chief of Staff for Civil Military Operations Major General Antonio Parlade Jr. to human rights group Karapatan.

In a statement, Parlade said Karapatan has always been a red or supporter of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) by the way they respond to



AFP to CPP fronts...

◀1

situations.

"Your name is all over the RED websites. Joma's face turns red, every time we mention the CPP revolutionary websites, the ILPS (International League of Peoples' Struggle) websites, the ILPS of which Joma is also Chair. It's because he feels guilty for dragging you into this RED network. Unfortunately he cannot take it off the web, as your red finger prints are all over already, every

time there is a captured CPP-NPA, every time a red child warrior is captured. So did we red-tag you?" Parlade said.

Parlade, in the same statement, said their challenge against Karapatan and other groups that are said to be affiliated with the CPP and ILPS, stays.

He also encouraged Karapatan to prove them wrong with the documents they have presented which they have been trying to destroy all these years

with their fake advocacy and not to bring the matter to the United Nations which they have deceived allegedly with their fake reports.

"Do you know that they were unable to explain the 27,000 killed 'allegedly' from police drug war?," Parlade said.

"By the way that figure of killed in EJK (extra judicial killing) was already raised by Joma to 30,000 in a span of one month, since we went to UN to ask where those killings happened so the government can respond. Can anybody explain where the additional 3,000 were

killed in the past 30 days?"

"What about EU and Belgium which you have duped, again with your fake reports of Bakwit and IP killings, in order to ask them for donations through the Rural Missionaries, Solidagro, Viva Salud, Kiyo, and many more foreign NGOs. Same foreign NGOs support Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), Alcadev (Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development) communist school, Salugpungan school for Child Warriors, Gabriela, Anakpawis etc. So what's the common denominator here? If they all celebrate the CPP NPA anniversary in the streets and temporary rebel resting places, what should we call you? Pink Panthers?" he said.

Parlade also urged Karapatan, Ibon and the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP) to all face the challenge and not hide under the robes.

"And please remember, the government are the real Human Rights defenders. We will protect you should you decide to come out, as we have always protected you, even as you accuse us of threatening activists. Many of your colleagues have already spoken against you. None of you were harassed, unless you believe your lies again," Parlade said.

"Just take the challenge. Don't evade the govt by bringing the matter abroad to justify your actions to your donors who are about to cancel your funding," he added.

Four abducted

Meanwhile, suspected communist rebels abducted four supporters of a mayoralty candidate after the latter refused to pay permit-to-campaign fees in Bansud, Oriental Mindoro.

Police Lt. Col. Socrates Faltado,

spokesperson of Minaropa (Mindoro Occidental and Oriental, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan) regional police, identified the victims as Barangay Chairman Peter delos Santos of Malo, Bansud town and militiamen Raymund Malupa, Ricky Capillo and Louie Mehinille.

"Accordingly, Barangay Chairman delos Santos is a known supporter of the incumbent and re-electionist Mayor Angel Saulong," said Faltado.

The four victims were travelling together when they were intercepted at about 7 a.m. yesterday by at least 10 armed men clad in fatigues believed to be members of the New People's Army (NPA) operating in the area.

They were brought deep in the forests of Mindoro province and are now the subject of rescue operations by the police and the military.

Faltado said Mayor Saulong received a text message on April 4 demanding payment for access to campaign in NPA 'area' and threatened with harm if they ignored the demand.

Authorities said the rebels are demanding campaign fees ranging from P20,000 for town and city councillors bets to P250,000 for congressional and gubernatorial bets.

The Department of the Interior and Local Government earlier disclosed that there are scores of local candidates, including incumbent officials, who are in cahoots with communist rebels.

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año earlier warned that local candidates found paying permit-to-campaign fees will face administrative and criminal charges.

The DILG also warned barangay officials to be apolitical in the coming midterm elections. (With a report from Aaron B. Recuenco)

Australia provides \$85 M in dev't aid for PH

The Australian government has allocated about US\$85 million in development assistance to the Philippines, Australian Ambassador Steven Robinson said.

"For the current time, we provide this year about US\$85 million in development assistance, most of them by the beginning of the financial year," Robinson announced during a media reception at the new Australian envoy's residence in Makati Thursday.

A large part of the amount will be devoted to the development of Mindanao, he said, citing the im-

portance of the implementation of the Bangsamoro Organic Law.

Assistance for education will continue as he committed more scholarship opportunities to the Filipino youth.

During his speech, Robinson cited the "firm" education ties between Manila and Canberra, which has already benefited some 12,600 Filipinos.

At least 60 Filipino students are currently studying in Australia earning their master's and doctoral degrees.

"The development as-



Australia provides...

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sistance on education is very important to us and we're looking at what more we can do to (expand) it," the envoy noted.

Aside from the development assistance, Robinson said Australia is also eyeing to improve its defense ties with the country through training and

technical support.

"Since Marawi, defense ties between the two states have grown significantly. We're now looking at building defense and security links (with the Philippines)," he said.

After the Marawi conflict broke out in 2017 when government troops tried

to arrest Abu Sayyaf leader Isnilon Hapilon and his cohorts, Australia was among the country's international partners that extended technical assistance to the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

During the siege, Canberra deployed two AP-3C "Orion" aircraft, which were used in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions, helping Filipino forces mop up the terrorists in Marawi City. (PNA)

Navy, police bag robbery suspects

By Kathleen Mae Bulquerin

Joint elements of the Philippine Navy (PN) and local police recently busted a notorious hold-up and robbery gang operating in Central Visayas during a counteraction operation in Bacolod City.

Col. Henry Binas, chief of Bacolod City Police Office identified the arrested suspects as Arnold Rivera, 21, of Silay City and Rony Ilituro, 34, who are both members of the Epigon Robbery Gang.

The composite team then located the suspects inside their hideout in Purok Badyang, Barangay Sum-ag, Bacolod City.

Two other members of the criminal group remain at large but Binas said it would only be a matter of time before they will be finally arrested.

In a report reaching the headquarters of Naval Forces Central, it was gathered that the Navy joined the police in hot pursuit operations against the suspects after receiving reports that they were about to stage another robbery in the city.

The composite team then located the suspects inside their hideout in Purok Badyang, Barangay Sum-ag, Bacolod City where they subsequently arrested them.

Recovered from the suspects were one M-16 rifle, three .9mm pistol, one hand grenade and various kinds of ammunition and an improvised chisel.

The arrested suspects will be charged with violations of Republic Act 10591 or the Comprehensive Law on Firearms and Ammunitions and RA 9516 otherwise known as Illegal Possession of Firearms and Explosives.

In a statement, the Philippine Navy said it fully supports the local police's law enforcement and security operations as it strives to contribute in maintaining peace and in securing the country's maritime interests in the region.

"We will not tolerate illegal activities that will endanger the lives of our fellow countrymen," the command said.

2 NPA leaders slain in Davao Sur clash

Two New People's Army (NPA) leaders were killed in an encounter with government troopers in Digos City, Davao del Sur on Friday.

Col. Adonis Bajao of the 1002nd Infantry Brigade identified the fatalities as Lesly Pulido, alias Camille, Guerrilla Front 51 secretary, and Roberto Castellote, alias Enoy, commander of the guerrilla unit.

The remains of the NPA leaders were recovered with the help of local guides following the clash in Sitio Lanan, Barangay Goma.

"After almost an hour of fighting, the NPA rebels scamped to various directions leaving their dead leaders and an M14 rifle," Bajao said in a report to Eastern Mindanao Command commander Lt. Gen. Felimon Santos.

Government troopers and

NPA guerrillas also clashed on Monday in Sitio Latel, Barangay Colonsabak in Matanao town.

On Wednesday, soldiers of the 71st Infantry Battalion encountered an undetermined number of rebels in Barangay New Marili in Maco.

Meanwhile, in Cagayan, criminal charges were filed against nine members of the NPA's Henry Abraham Command on Friday over the burning of heavy equipment owned by a businessman in Baggao town.

Capt. Sharon Mallilin, Cagayan police spokesperson, identified those charged as Rolando Ibis, Erming Fernandez, Joseph Bautista, Saturnino Agonoy, Allan Rey Balanay, Dominador Javier, Violeta Ricardo, Cristina Magistro and Marie Cris Arpo.

- Jaime Laude, Raymund Catindig

2 NPA leaders killed in Davao del Sur clash

DAVAO CITY—Two ranking members of the communist New People's Army (NPA) were killed in a 45-minute battle with government troops on Friday in Sitio Lanan, Barangay Goma, in Digos City, Davao del Sur, about 50 kilometers away from here. Lt. Col. Rhojun Rosales, 39th Infantry Battalion commander, said troops from 39th IB were patrolling in the area when they clashed with more or less 30 communist rebels early Friday morning. The troops have been pursuing members of the NPA's Front Committee 51 since 1 pm., Thursday, following reports that the rebels had been recruiting members in the area. Rosales identified one of the dead as Commander Camille, 35, the wife of the brother of a certain Commander Jasmin, former leader of Front 51, who hailed from Magpet, North Cotabato. "Based on the pictures of the rebels in our files, we believe that the body was that of Commander Camille, and the male one was another leader whose identity we are still validating," Rosales said. —ORLANDO B. DINOY

2 NPA leaders killed in Davao del Sur encounter

TWO ranking leaders of the New Peoples' Army (NPA) on Friday morning were killed in an encounter with government forces in Digos City, Davao del Sur.

Armed Forces of the Philippines - Eastern Mindan-

ao Command (EastMinCom) spokesperson Col. Ezra Balagtey identified the fatalities as Kumander Lesly Pulido alias "Camille," secretary of the Guerilla Front 51, (GF51) and Kumander Roberto Castellote alias "Enoy," leader of the GF51. 73 **Zalda delos Reyes**

2 ranking NPA rebs killed

TWO ranking leaders of the New Peoples' Army (NPA) were killed in an encounter with government forces the other day in Digos City, Davao del Sur.

This was confirmed by Colonel Ezra Balagtey, spokesperson of Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)-Eastern Mindanao Command (Eastmincom).

Balagtey identified the fatalities as Lesly Pulido alias Camille, commander of Sec. Guerilla Front. 51, (GF51) and Roberto Castelote alias Enoy, commander of guerilla unit of GF51.

He said the encounter occurred Friday morning in the hinterlands of Sitio Lanan, Barangay Goma, Digos City, Davao del Sur.

According to Col. Adonis Bajao, commander of 1002nd Infantry Brigade troops went to the area in response to the report regarding the presence of rebels harassing the community.

Upon reaching the place, the rebels immediately fired their guns that prompted the troops to return fire that triggered the firefight that lasted for 45 minutes and resulted to the killing of the two NPA leaders. 7

Palace on Negros 14 : Don't believe leftist propaganda

By ALEXIS ROMERO

Malacañang has urged the public not to fall for what it described as "leftist propaganda" in connection with the killing of 14 people in police operations in Negros Oriental.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said the incidents were "legitimate" police operations and not a massacre as claimed by human rights groups.

"We welcome any investigation on the matter," Panelo

said in a statement issued on Friday.

"In the meantime, we urge the public not to be swayed by leftist propaganda, especially those stemming from groups linked with the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army, designed to stigmatize each and every operation of our law enforcers," he added.

The 14 were killed in separate operations launched by authorities against what they said were hardcore criminals.

Activists have been claiming the fatalities were farmers and described the incidents as extrajudicial killings.

Farmers' groups Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura and Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas as well as human rights group Karapatan announced plans to conduct a fact-finding probe on the police operations.

While authorities insisted that the 14 were killed in "shootouts," the chief of the

Negros Oriental police and three municipal police chiefs were relieved from their posts to supposedly give way to an impartial investigation.

Panelo said it was unfortunate that "interest groups" are using the Negros Oriental incident to spread hate and fear toward duly constituted authorities.

He said the police officers were implementing search warrants issued by courts.

Panelo said the fatalities resisted arrest.

"This is not a case of massacre given the fact that those who surrendered without forceful resistance were lawfully apprehended unharmed following the discovery of illegal items pursuant to the court sanctioned search," he said.

"A policeman was wounded, which goes to show that there were indeed some who used violent resistance when authorities were conducting the search," he added.

Panelo defended Philip-

pine National Police (PNP) chief Gen. Oscar Albayalde from critics who urged him to resign over the incident.

He said Albayalde acted objectively by relieving ranking officers to pave the way for a thorough and impartial investigation, and to determine whether lapses were committed during the operations.

"There is absolutely no basis in fact and in law for Gen. Oscar Albayalde to resign," he said. 9

Negros killings: Farmers' kin say police also robbed them

By Carla Gomez
and Christine O. Avendaño
@Team_Inquirer

BACOLOD CITY—The 14 farmers who were killed in joint police and military operations in two towns and a city in Negros Oriental province on March 30 were also robbed of cash and valuables, according to the victims' relatives.

The allegations by the kin of at least two of the slain farmers came even as Malacañang stood behind Police Gen. Oscar Albayalde, the Philippine National Police chief, and asked the people not to be swayed by "communist propaganda."

Argie Acabal, son of Valentin Acabal, barangay chair of Candabong in Manjuyod town, said policemen took P37,000 cash when they barged into their house and killed his father.

"They took the P30,000 I sent to my family. They also took the P7,000 that was kept in a locked box. The P7,000 is from the church where my mother is a treasurer," said Argie, an overseas Filipino worker in Qatar, who returned home after learning of his father's death.

According to Valentin's wife, Angenate, the policemen roused them from sleep and then shot her husband as he pleaded for his life.

She said her husband suffered seven gunshot wounds in the body, including the genitals.

Acabal was one of the 14 farmers who were killed in an alleged



MILITANT VISITORS Angenate and Argie Acabal (third and fourth from left), wife and son of slain barangay chair Valentin Acabal, are visited at their home in Manjuyod town by a fact-finding team led by (from left) Gabriela Women's Party Rep. Arlene Brosas; Antonio Flores, chair of Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura; and Danilo Ramos, chair of Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas. —CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

shootout with policemen and soldiers who were separately serving search warrants to the victims around 1 a.m. on March 30.

Ordered out of house

Aside from Acabal, three others died in Manjuyod, two in Santa Catalina town and eight in Canlaon City.

Relatives of brothers Edgardo and Ismael Avelino in Barangay Panubigan, Canlaon City, also claimed they lost valuables during the police operation.

Carmela Avelino, Edgardo's wife, said she and her two children were ordered out of their house before her husband was killed

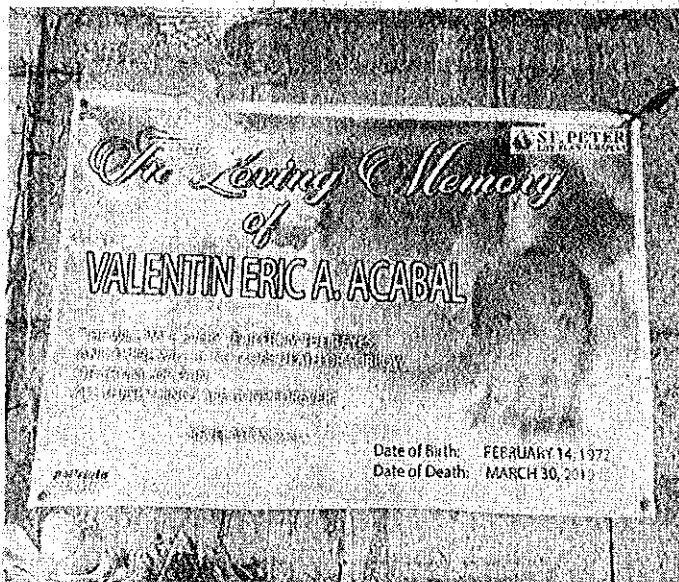
while also pleading for his life.

She accused the policemen of taking their two cell phones, an electronic tablet and P2,000 cash.

Albayalde earlier said the subjects of the warrants were members or supporters of the communist New People's Army (NPA), a claim refuted by the victims' families.

'Massacre' denounced

Lawmakers from the militant Makabayan bloc in the House of Representatives and human rights groups earlier denounced what they described as a "massacre" and demanded Albayalde's resignation as well as



IN MEMORIAM Valentin Acabal was shot as he pleaded for his life, according to his wife. —CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

an impartial investigation.

But Malacañang said the PNP chief "had even acted objectively" by relieving four police officials in the province pending an investigation to find out if they followed proper operating procedures.

"There is absolutely no basis in fact and in law for PNP chief Albayalde to resign," presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo said in a statement on Friday night.

Abayalde on Thursday said he would not resign.

The militant lawmakers should themselves resign out of "delicadeza" for "enjoying the

perks and privileges shouldered by the Filipino people" while supporting the cause of groups that call for the "violent overthrow of the constitutionally elected government," he said.

Ordered relieved were Police Col. Raul Tacaca, director of the Negros Oriental Police Provincial Office; Lt. Col. Patricio Degay, chief of Canlaon City police; Lt. Kevin Roy Mamaraldo, chief of Manjuyod town police; and Capt. Michael Rubia, chief of Santa Catalina town police.

But Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of the San Carlos City diocese belittled the relief of the four police officials, saying they were not

aware of the operations since these were carried out by the Police Regional Office in Central Visayas based in Cebu City.

Palace warns of 'propaganda'

Panelo said the incident "arose from a legitimate police operation."

It was "unfortunate," he said, that Karapatan and other human rights groups were using the incident "to sow hate and fear toward our duly constituted authorities."

"[W]e urge the public not to be swayed by leftist propaganda, especially those stemming from groups linked to the Communist Party of the Philippines and the [NPA], designed to stigmatize each and every operation of our law enforcers intended to protect the general welfare and safety of the Filipino people," Panelo said.

"Authorities were implementing search warrants that were duly issued by competent courts," he said, adding that the policemen "lawfully apprehended" those who "surrendered without forceful resistance."

According to the police, 15 other farmers who were also subject of the search warrants were arrested in the simultaneous operations.

"In fact, a policeman was wounded [in the operations], which goes to show that there were indeed some who used violent resistance when authorities were conducting the search," Panelo said. INQ

Palace wants Albayalde to stay put

MALACANANG stood by Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Oscar Albayalde amid calls for his resignation over police operations in Negros Oriental that left 14 farmers dead.

Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo on Saturday said the calls for Albayalde's resignation were baseless as the police operations were legitimate.

"There is absolutely no basis in fact and in law for the PNP chief, Gen. Oscar Albayalde, to resign," Panelo said in a statement.

"Gen. Albayalde has even acted objectively by relieving administratively ranking officers from their posts just to pave the way for a thorough and impartial investigation free from any possible undue influence and to determine whether lapses were made during the conduct of these operations," he said.

Panelo issued the statement after the Makabayan bloc in the House of Representatives sought Albayalde's resignation over the incident.

Police insisted that the 14 farmers killed in pre-dawn raids last week in Canlaon City and Manjuyod and Sta. Catalina towns were suspected communist rebels.

But a leftist lawmaker, the families of the slain, as well as witnesses, said the farmers were massacred.

Panelo asked the public not be swayed by "leftist propaganda" as he reiterated that the operations were carried out with appropriate court documents.

"We find it unfortunate that Karapatan and other interest groups are using the incident in Negros Oriental to sow hate

Albayalde A2

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■ **ALBAYALDE FROM A1**

Palace wants

and spread fear toward our duly constituted authorities," he said.

"We reiterate that the incident in Negros Oriental arose from legitimate police operation[s]. Authorities were implementing search warrants that were duly issued by competent courts. In separate police operations, 14 residents died when they fought with the law enforcers who were just implementing the search orders of the said local courts," Panelo said.

"As the Philippine National Police explained, this is not a case of massacre given the fact that those who surrendered without forceful resistance were lawfully apprehended unharmed, following the discovery of illegal items pursuant to the court-sanctioned search," he added.

The Negros Oriental operations are being in-

vestigated by the Commission on Human Rights as victims' relatives claimed that there was no shootout, contrary to a police report.

Panelo said the Palace welcomes the probe.

"We welcome any investigation on the matter. In the meantime, we urge the public not to be swayed by leftist propaganda, especially those stemming from groups linked with the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army, designed to stigmatize each and every operation of our law enforcers intended to protect the general welfare and safety of the Filipino people," he added.

Under President Rodrigo Duterte's administration, 180 farmers had been killed, including 40 who were from Negros Island, according to the Kabataan party-list group.

In October 2018, nine sugarcane farmers in Sagay City, Negros Occidental, were having dinner when they were shot dead by five to six gunmen.

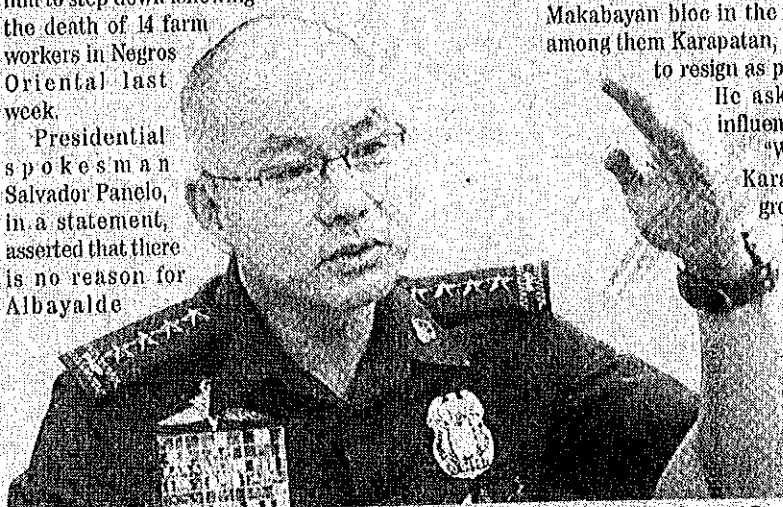
CATHERINE S. VALENTE

Palace shelters Albayalde

By Kristina Maralit

Malacañang Palace yesterday reiterated it is standing by Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Director General Oscar Albayalde amid calls for him to step down following the death of 14 farm workers in Negros Oriental last week.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo, in a statement, asserted that there is no reason for Albayalde



No basis Malacañang is convinced that there is no reason for PNP Director General Oscar Albayalde to step down.

to resign as the joint operations carried out by the PNP and the Philippine Army (PA) were legitimate.

"There is absolutely no basis in fact and in law for the PNP chief, General Oscar Albayalde, to resign," Panelo said.

Panelo came to Albayalde's defense after the Makabayan bloc in the House of Representatives, among them Karapatan, initiated calls for Albayalde to resign as police chief.

He asked the public not to be influenced by "leftist propaganda."

"We find it unfortunate that Karapatan and other interest groups are using the incident in Negros Oriental to sow hate and spread fear towards our duly constituted authorities," Panelo said.

"We reiterate that the incident in Negros Oriental arose from a legitimate police operation. Authorities were implementing search warrants that were duly issued by competent

courts," he added.

He noted the 14 deaths occurred in separate police operations and the fatalities suffered their fate when they fought it out with the law enforcers.

Panalo insisted Albayalde acted objectively by relieving administratively ranking officers of the Negros PNP to ensure a thorough and impartial probe on the incident.

To recall, the Negros Oriental police found themselves in controversy after 14 alleged rebels were killed during a series of operations conducted in Canlaon City and the towns of Manjuyod and Sta. Catalina last 30 March.

He asked the public not to be influenced by leftist propaganda.

Panalo likewise backed the PNP's report that what happened was not a case of massacre as there were several who "surrendered without forceful resistance" and left unharmed after they were found to be in possession of "illegal items" during a court-sanctioned search.

"In fact, a policeman was wounded which goes to show that there were indeed some who used violent resistance when authorities were conducting the search," he stressed.

PALACE CHIDES CRITICS: NO BASIS TO FIRE TOP COP

By Maricel V. Cruz

MALACANANG has sharply criticized several groups calling for the resignation of Philippine National Police chief General Oscar Albayalde over the recent police operations in Negros Oriental which resulted in the death of 14 farmers suspected as communist rebels.

"There is absolutely no basis in fact and in law for the PNP Chief, General Oscar Albayalde, to resign," Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo said in a statement on Friday, saying the operation that led to the killing was legitimate.

"We reiterate that the incident in Negros Oriental arose from a legitimate police operation," Panelo said, adding "authorities were implementing search warrants that were duly issued by competent courts." In separate police operations, 14 residents died when they fought with the law enforcers who were just implementing the search orders of the said local courts.

Panelo said Karapatan and other groups were using the incident to "sow hate and spread fear towards our duly constituted authorities."

"As the PNP explained, this is not a case of massacre given the fact that those who surrendered without forceful resistance were lawfully apprehended unharmed following the discovery of illegal items pursuant to the court sanctioned search. In fact, a policeman was wounded which goes to show that there were indeed some who used violent resistance when authorities were conducting the search," he said.

He added: "General Albayalde has even acted objectively by relieving administratively ranking officers from their posts just to pave the way for a thorough and impartial investigation free from any possible undue influence and to determine whether lapses were made during the conduct of these operations," he added.

Albayalde on Tuesday ordered the

relief of Negros Oriental Provincial Police Office director Colonel Raul Tacaca, chiefs of police Lieutenant Colonel Patricio Degay (Canlaon City Police Station), Lieutenant Kevin Roy Mamaradlo (Manjuyod Municipal Policed Station) and Captain Michael Rubia (Sta. Catalina Municipal Police Station) as the probe into the incidents started.

Meanwhile, a militant lawmaker on Saturday voiced concern over what he called 'intensified militarization' of agricultural areas in Samar, Negros, Surigao del Sur, Quezon and Camarines Norte.

"Farmers are calling out against the militarization of their communities and we join their demand of military pull-out and stop to human rights abuses," Anakpawis Party-list Rep. Ariel Casilao said in a statement.

Casilao, member of the Makabayan Bloc in the House of Representatives, joined the National Fact-finding Mission in Negros Oriental on the mass killing of 14 farmers last March 30.

Casilao said based on information collated by Amihan National Federation of Peasant Women and reports from various people's organizations noted following:

- On March 22, the mass evacuation of more than 1,400 farmers

from three barangays of San Juan De Buan town in Samar due to incessant military operations since March 8 by elements of the 87th Infantry Battalion under the 8th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army;

- On March 31, the mass evacuation of 28 lumad families or more than 160 individuals in Lianga town, Surigao del Sur, due to artillery fire and helicopter bombardment of their communities by units of the Armed Forces of the Philippines;

- On April 1, the mass evacuation of more than 1,700 farmers from Moises Padilla town, Negros Occidental to other barangays and town center due to military operations of the 62nd IBPA;

- On April 3, the strafing of a house of peasant leader in Sta. Elena town, Camarines Norte, the victim is a leader of Gateway to Bicolandia Farmers' Association and a coordinator of Neri Colmenares for Senator Movement, due to massive military operations extending Guinayangan, Lopez, Macalelon, San Francisco, Sariaya and other towns in the Quezon province;

- On April 5, the raid by more than 100 elements of the 79th IBPA of a house of a Pamalakaya fisherfolk leader and another in Escalante City, Negros Occidental, the victims were arrested due to trumped up charges.

Duterte to rig polls – Sison

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte will rig the May 2019 elections to enable candidates of the Hugpong ng Pagbabago (HnP) to gain seats in the Senate and help him push for federalism and prevent the International Criminal Court (ICC) from investigating him, exiled Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founder Jose Maria "Joma" Sison said on Saturday.

The HnP is an initiative of Sara Duterte-Carpio, daughter of the President and incumbent mayor of Davao City.

Sison, in a statement, said Duterte has the capability to manipulate the May 13 midterm polls because he has control over the Commission on Elections and the military.

He added that the President would use his power to fill the Senate with HnP's senators, so that he can secure approval of Charter change to effect a shift from a parliamentary to a federal form of government.

Sison said this move is also Duterte's key to stop the ICC from putting him on trial for alleged abuses in his administration's bloody crackdown on illegal drugs.

"He needs desperately eight more senators to make the two-thirds majority in the Senate in order to push the Charter change to a bogus federalism and thus install himself as fascist dictator, rule beyond 2022 or choose his own successor, protect his bureaucratic loot and prevent the International Criminal Court in The Hague from effecting his arrest for trial on charges of crimes against humanity," he added.

The Philippines officially withdrew its membership from the ICC on March 17.

ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, however, explained that they could still continue their investigation and trial because the complaint against the Duterte administration was filed before Manila's withdrawal from the court.

Sison said Duterte's bets for senator would likely lose because of their involvement in plunder and killings, among other crimes.

"Duterte's favorite [Senate] candidates are up against the people's outrage over Duterte's criminal record. The Catholic vote is unprecedentedly gaining ground as a result of said record and his persistent attacks on bishops and priests for standing up in defense of the people's human rights," he noted.

Sison said Duterte was becoming jittery and threatening to declare the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus and jail his critics, including members of the opposition, through armed force.

He added that the President sensed a wave of popular rejection rising against him.

Duterte recently warned that he might suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus after he was slammed by the critics and opposition lawmakers for ordering all government agencies to review their contracts with private companies and foreign entities, including agreements made with China.

A2 ROY D.R. NARRA

NPA rebels abduct bgy. chairman, 3 others in Mindoro

By Alfred Valizon

SUSPECTED New People's Army rebels on Friday night abducted a village chief and three others in Bansud, Oriental Mindoro.

The rebels earlier threatened to harm the re-electionist mayor if he would fail to heed their demand for a "Permit-to-Campaign Fee," a Police Regional Office 4-B report said yesterday.

Snatched by the gunmen were Bgy. Mabuhay chairman Peter de los Santos, his constituents Louie Mebdinille and Ricky

Capillo, and Raymund Malupa, a member of the Citizen's Armed Auxiliary.

PRO4-B director Brig. Gen. Tomas Apolinario Jr. said that an investigation conducted by the Bansud Municipal Police Station showed that 10 heavily-armed NPA guerrillas, one of them an amazon, went to the nearby Bgy. Malo and at gunpoint seized the four at 8 p.m. on Friday.

Witnesses said the suspects brought the victims towards Sito Sawmill and Sitio Anaw.

As of press time, there was still no word on the

fate of the four.

Apolinario said that there were reports that de los Santos is a supporter of incumbent Mayor Angel Saulong who is seeking reelection in the May 13 elections.

Police also discovered that last Thursday, the mayor received a text message from alleged NPA rebels asking him to pay them a "Permit-to-Campaign Fee" or he and his supporters will be harmed.

The threat was reportedly sent while the mayor was holding a campaign rally in Bgy. Mabuhay.

With Zalda de los Reyes

13

Rebels abduct 4 in Mindoro

By **ALFRED
DALIZON**

SUSPECTED New People's Army rebels on Friday evening abducted four men including a barangay captain and a militiaman in Bansud, Oriental Mindoro after threatening with harm the re-electionist mayor if he will fail to heed their demand for a 'Permit-to-Campaign Fee,' a Police Regional Office 4-B report said yesterday.

Snatched by the gunmen were Raymund Malupa, a member of the Citizen's Armed Auxiliary, Peter de los Santos, chairman of Bgy. Mabuhay and his constituents Louie Mebdinille and Ricky Capillo.

PRO4-B director, Brigadier General Tomas C. Apolinario Jr. said that an investigation conducted by the Bansud Municipal Police Station showed that 10 heavily-armed NPA guerrillas, one of them an amazon went to nearby Bgy. Malo at 8 p.m. Friday and at gunpoint seized the four.

The suspects brought the four towards Sito Sawmill and Sitio Anaw, witnesses said. As of press time, there is still no word on the fate of the four.

Cops hurt in shootout with MILF men get medals

LANAODELSUR—Eight police officers who were wounded in shootouts with Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) guerrillas in law enforcement operations in Madamba town on Thursday were awarded medals.

Brig. Gen. Graciano Mijares of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao police pinned the Medalya ng Sugatang Magiting on Capts. Glen Lyca Gevero and Mark Harry Boglosa; Sgts. Marlon Panitan, Magno

Olete and Niño Cadano, Cpls. Ronald Rosco and Omar Masakal and Patrolman Arnel Montallana on Friday.

The police officers are recuperating at the Amai Pakpak Medical Center in Marawi.

Three MILF fighters were among four suspects killed in shootouts with police officers serving warrants of arrest in Barangay Ilian.

Two villagers were wounded after they were hit by stray bullets.

— John Unson

Abu Sayyaf captive drowns while escaping

By ROEL PAREÑO

ZAMBOANGA CITY – One of the two Indonesian captives of the Abu Sayyaf drowned while escaping on Thursday, the military has clarified.

Col. Gerry Besana, Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) spokesman, said Hariadin and Heri Ardiansyah took advantage of the gunfight between their captors led by Najir Arik and personnel of the Philippine Marine Ready Force Sulu, and tried to swim toward Bangalao island.

Marine soldiers rescued the Indonesians, whom they spotted while conducting roving patrol.

The military earlier reported that Hariadin was shot dead by his captors while escaping.

Prior to the incident, Marines rescued Malaysian Jari Abdullah, who was wounded when shot by his captors while escaping in Barangay Bahkaan off the coast of Banguingui also in Sulu.

The three fishermen were snatched off the coast of Borneo last December and brought to Sulu.

Besana said three bandits were killed in gunfights with soldiers. Two M14 rifles, two M16 rifles and an M203 grenade launcher were recovered from the fatalities.

He said the rescued captives and the remains of the Indonesian were flown to the Westmincom headquarters for turnover to the representatives of their respective governments.

Lt. Gen. Arnel dela Vega, Westmincom chief, said government troopers have trapped the remaining bandits on Simusa Island.

22 soldiers, 11 bandits wounded

Also in Sulu, the military said the number of soldiers and bandits wounded in an encounter in Patikul since Friday has risen to 22 and 11, respectively.

Three soldiers and four bandits were earlier reported killed while 13 soldiers and

nine bandits were wounded in the clash in Sitio Atol, Barangay Latih.

Besana said nine of the wounded soldiers were evacuated to the Camp Navarro General Hospital. Thirteen others are recuperating at Kuta Heneral Teodulfo Bautista Station Hospital in Jolo.

Besana said soldiers overran an Abu Sayyaf camp, which can accommodate 80 persons, following the encounter.

He said soldiers belonging to the 41st and 21st Infantry Battalions were deployed to serve as blocking forces as pursuit operations by Scout Rangers are ongoing.

"The operations will be relentless against these terrorists," Besana said. 15

4 BANDITS KILLED IN CLASH, SAYS MILITARY

ABU SAYYAF CAPTIVE ESCAPES, ANOTHER DROWNS, 3RD SHOT

By Julie Allpala
@InqNational

ZAMBOANGA CITY—Two kidnapped Indonesian fishermen managed to free themselves from their Abu Sayyaf captors but one drowned while swimming to freedom, the military said on Saturday.

Col. Arnel Tolato, commander of the Philippine Marine Ready Force Sulu, said one of his seaborne patrols on Friday afternoon saw four Abu Sayyaf members swimming toward Bangalao Island from the neighboring island of Simisa with their two Indonesian captives.

The four bandits were killed in the firefight that ensued.

One of the Indonesians, Heri Ardiansyah, was plucked from the waters by Marines on board the gunboat while they recovered the body of his companion, Harladin, who had drowned.

Snatched off eastern Sabah

The two Indonesians were among three foreign fishermen who were snatched on Dec. 6 last year from the waters near Pegasus Reef off Malaysia's Sabah state on Borneo Island and taken by speedboat to Sulu, the military said.

The third captive, Jaribin Abdulla, an Indonesian by birth who became a Malaysian citizen,

was rescued a day earlier, also in the waters off Simisa Island.

Abdulla, who was shot in the back as he escaped, is now confined at the intensive care unit of a private hospital in Zamboanga City.

Government forces had surrounded Simisa Island, where a small community thrives near mangroves, to hunt down the remaining Abu Sayyaf gunmen, according to Col. Gerry Besana, public affairs officer of the Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom).

"The island had been blockaded for the past 41 days. They [kidnappers] probably thought they could slip past us by swimming," Besana said.

Recovered weapons

Tolato said they recovered two M14 rifles, two M16 rifles, one M203 grenade launcher, one 40mm ammunition, one M16 magazine, several rounds of ammunition, cellular phones, solar charger and an improvised flotation device.

He said the slain bandits were believed to have operated under Nadjir Arlik, a subleader of the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu.

Besana said Ardiansyah arrived in Zamboanga City at dawn on Saturday and was brought to the Westmincom headquarters in the city.

Dutch birdwatcher Ewald Horn, abducted in 2012, a Vietnamese seaman and four Filipinos are believed to be still in Abu Sayyaf captivity, according to Besana.

Army troops on Friday clashed with about 80 Abu Sayyaf gunmen in Sulu's mountainous Patikul town in a fierce but brief gunbattle that left three soldiers and four militants dead and several wounded on both sides, the military said.

Aligned with IS

The rebels belong to an Abu Sayyaf faction led by commander Hajan Sawadjaan and aligned with the Islamic State (IS) group.

IS issued a statement confirming it killed three and wounded 13 soldiers, but it said "the mujahideen returned safely to base."

Sawadjaan is the main suspect in the bombing of a Roman Catholic cathedral during a Mass that killed 23 mostly churchgoers and two suspected suicide attackers on Jan. 27 in Sulu's capital town of Jolo.

The Abu Sayyaf has been blacklisted by the United States and the Philippines as a terrorist organization due to its brutal history of bombings, ransom kidnappings, extortion and beheadings. —WITH REPORTS

FROM AFP AND AP INQ A2

7 ASGs, 3 soldiers killed in Sulu clashes

By **AARON B. RECUECO**
and **NONOY E. LACSON**

Government forces have rescued an Indonesian captive of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Sulu in the continuing assault against the notorious extremist group that left at least seven bandits dead on Friday alone, the military said yesterday.

Col. Gerry Besana, spokesman of the Western Mindanao Command, said the rescue operation in the waters of Simusa Island in Banguingui town of Sulu, also resulted in the death of another Indone-

sian captive at around 6 p.m. on Friday.

"The rescued kidnap victim was identified as Heri Ardiansyah while the dead kidnap victim was identified as Hariadin, both Indonesians. Accordingly, Hariadin died due to drowning," said Besana.

The gun battle, according to Besana, left three ASG fighters dead following the firefight that lasted for at least 10 minutes.

Almost six hours earlier, soldiers killed four Abu Sayyaf fighters following a raid in their camp in in Sitlo Atol, Barangay Latih in Patikul also in Sulu.

But Besana said the fierce clash

also resulted in the death of three soldiers and the wounding of 22 others.

"The camp had 37 fighting positions believed to have been occupied by 80 Abu Sayyaf militants under Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan," said Besana. 12

The official said soldiers from the 21st and 41st Infantry Battalions were deployed and instructed to establish a blockade to contain the movement of the fleeing ASG fighters.

The military has been trying to eliminate the Abu Sayyaf for years now, its remaining strongholds are in Sulu and Basilan.

ASG Indonesian hostage dies, troops rescue another

BY AL JACINTO AND ROY D.R. NARRA

ZAMBOANGA CITY: An Indonesian hostage of the pro-Islamic State Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) drowned while his compatriot was rescued by Filipino soldiers while fleeing from a firefight with the bandits on Simisa Island, about 30 nautical miles off Sulu.

Officials said Hariadin, 45, drowned as he escaped at the height of the firefight with his companion Heri Ardiansyah, 19, who was rescued by the troops.

The ASG bandits kidnapped the two, along with Malaysian fisher Jari Abdullah, 24, last December off Sabah and brought them to the forested island where security forces had been pursuing the ASG since last month. The troops rescued Abdullah on April

4 on after a clash with the bandits on the island.

"The Joint Task Force Sulu said they engaged militants and the captives tried to swim across the channel towards Bangalao Island to escape from the pursuing troops when they were spotted by the roving sea patrols," the Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom) said.

The Philippine Marine Ready Force Sulu and Naval Task Group

Sulu were on sea patrol along the northwest portion of Simisa Island at about 5:45 p.m. on Friday when they spotted the group with the kidnap victims.

Ardiansyah and Hariadin tried to flee from their kidnappers by using a makeshift flotation device to swim across the channel towards Bangalao Island. But when the government forces approached the floating device they spotted from a distance to investigate, they were fired upon by the terrorists.

The kidnap victims used the 10-minute firefight as opportunity to escape, but Hariadin drowned.

"The 10-minute gun battle further resulted in the deaths of three Abu Sayyaf militants and the seizure of several high-powered firearms, including two M14 rifles, two M16 rifles, and an M203 Grenade Launcher," the military added.

A Naval ship brought Ardiansyah to the Camp Navarro Station Hospital for treatment.

Security forces continue to hunt the bandits under Najir Arik on Simisa, according to Lt. Gen. Arnel de la Vega, the regional military commander.

"Marine troops constrict Abu Sayyaf's movement with the all-out offensives launched to pound terrorists on the island," he said.

While the hunt for bandits continues on the island, fierce fighting in Patikul town killed three soldiers and wounded more than 20, both from the sides of the ASG and the military, after the Army clashed with at least 80 bandits led by Hajan Sawadjaan on Friday.

The operation was ongoing in the hinterlands of Patikul, the bandits' stronghold, where the ASG fighters broke into smaller groups.

INDONESIAN HOSTAGE DROWNS

AN INDONESIAN Indonesian fisherman held hostage for four months by Islamic militants in the Philippines has drowned, a military spokesman said Saturday, while two other captured men have been rescued. The men had been held on a remote island in a standoff for nearly six weeks after Filipino troops block-

aded the island in a bid to close in on the kidnappers.

The men were seized from their fishing boat in early December last year.

The captors, from Islamic militant group Abu Sayyaf, fled the southern island of Sulu Friday.

Turn to A2

INDONESIAN...

From A1

bringing their hostages with them, said military spokesman Lt. Col. Gerry Besana.

One Indonesian fisherman, Heri Ardiansyah, was rescued as the militants tried to flee, but another—Hariadin—drowned in the escape bid.

Another hostage, Malaysian Jari Abdullah, was rescued by Filipino troops a day earlier and is now in a "stable" condition with gunshot wounds at a military hospital, Besana told AFP.

"The island had been blockaded for the past 41 days. They (kidnappers) probably thought they could slip past us by swimming," he added.

Three of at least seven kidnappers who were with the hostages were killed in the operations, he said.

The military got wind of the hostages' location in late February and ordered the small civilian population on the island to leave, Besana said.

Abu Sayyaf is a group of self-proclaimed Islamic militants based in the southern Philippines who have engaged in bombings as well as kidnappings of Western tourists and missionaries for ransom since the early 1990s.

In recent years the group has also preyed on cargo ships, tugboats and fishing vessels in poorly policed waters of the region near the sea borders with Malaysia and Indonesia. **AFP**

Bihag na-rescue, 7 Sayyaf tinigok

NI AARON B. RECUENCO

Nasagip ng tropa ng pamahalaan ang isang Indonesian na bihag ng Abu Sayyaf Group, habang pito na ang nalagas sa mga bandido sa nagpapatuloy na rescue operations ng militar.

Paliwanag ni Col. Gerry Besana, tagapagsalita ng Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom) ng Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), bagamat nailigtas ang isang bihag, isa pang Indonesian din ang nasawi sa rescue operation sa Simusa Island sa Banguingui, Sulu, dakong 6:00 ng gabi nitong Biyernes.

"The rescued kidnap victim was identified as Heri Ardiansyah while the

dead kidnap victim was identified as Hariadin, both Indonesians. Accordingly, Hariadin died due to drowning," paliwanag ni Besana.

Sinabi ni Besana na tatlo ang miyembro ng Abu Sayyaf na nasawi sa unang sagupaan na tumagal nang 10 minuto.

Aniya, sumiklab ang engkuwentro nang makita ng mga sundalo ang tatlong bandido na lumalangoy sa lugar palawid sa Bangalao Island upang takasan ang mga humahabol na tropa ng gobyerno.

Kasama, aniya, ng tatlong bandido sa paglangoy ang dalawang bihag na Indonesian nang sumiklab ang bakkakan.

Nasamsam sa lugar ang dalawang M14 armalite rifle, dalawang M16 rifle, isang M203 grenade launcher, at mga bala.

"Pursuit operations are on-going to neutralize the remaining ASG members still trapped in Simusa Island," pahayag ni Besana.

Halos anim na oras bago ang nasabing sagupaan, apat na bandido na ang napatay ng militar na sumalakay sa kuta ng Abu Sayyaf sa Sitio Atol, Barangay Latih sa Patikul, Sulu.

Kinumpirma ni Besana sa nasabing raid ay nasawi rin ang tatlong sundalo, habang 13 pang kasamahan ng mga ito ang nasugatan, bukod pa sa siyam na bandidong sugatan din.

"The camp has 37 fighting positions believed to have been occupied by 80 Abu Sayyaf militants under Hatib Hajan Sawadjan," sabi ni Besana.

Kabilang sa mga patuloy na tumutugis sa mga bandido ang mga tauhan ng 21st at 41st Infantry Battalion, ayon kay Besana.

Dawlah Islamiyah tagged in latest Isulan bomb attack

By JOSEPH JURELAG

GENERAL SANTOS CITY — Authorities have blamed the Islamic State (IS)-inspired Dawlah Islamiyah terror group as responsible for the April 3 bomb attack at a local restaurant in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat which injured 18 people.

P/Brig. Gen. Eliseo Rasco, Police Regional Office-12 director, said that, based on the initial investigation conducted by a special investigation task

group headed by P/Col. Oliver Enmodias, the improvised explosive device used in the recent bombing attack on Carlito's restaurant along the national highway in Barangay Kalawag, Isulan bore the signature of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

BIFF is a local terror group allied with the Dawlah Islamiyah, an affiliate local terror group of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria operating in Mindanao.

He said the IED components used in the recent bomb attack were the same as those in the bombs that were used in

the previous attacks in Isulan town on August 28 and September 2 last year, which killed four people and 50 others.

Police authorities have filed murder charges against BIFF commander Abu Toraita and several cohorts in connection with last year's bomb attacks in Isulan town.

Rasco said the owner of the Carlito's Chicken Haus had earlier received text messages from an unidentified suspect, believed to be a BIFF member, who tried to extort money from the management.

He said the terrorist group reportedly carried out the attack after the restaurant owner did not give in to the extortion try.

He stressed that the local terror group are now resorting to extortion activities to raise operational funds for their group. *fx*

Nation in briefs

'MISSING' LANAOSUR POLICE OFFICER FOUND

MARAWI CITY: Corporal Gilbert Males, the police officer who was reported missing after a firefight which stemmed from an operation in Madamba, Lanao del Sur, has resurfaced and been reunited with his troops. Col. Madz-gani Mukaram, Lanao del Sur Police Provincial Office chief, said Madamba local officials and the police safely turned over Males on Friday afternoon to his office. Males was one of the police operatives who served the warrant of arrest on Wednesday in Barangay Ilian against five suspects for murder, which resulted in a firefight. Killed in the clash were suspects Usop Malubay Abdulaziz, Zainoden Moro Macalantas Ameril and Allican Macabuntal alias MkiqUsman, and civilian Casara Macalantas who was not included in the arrest warrant. The suspects are believed to be members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front which now leads the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. The police added that the eight other operatives and two civilians, who were wounded in the crossfire are now in stable condition. It was said that at the height of the firefight Males, while tactically maneuvering, was chased by the suspects' companions. He was separated from the team and failed to regroup with his troops. At dawn of April 5, local folk saw Males hiding among the bushes near the road and helped him change into civilian clothes to hide his identity for fear that supporters of the suspects might see him. A former town councilor later brought Males to the house of the Madamba mayor who turned him over to provincial police headquarters.

RY
MASIDING NOOR YAHYA

POSTSCRIPT

FEDERICO D. PASCUAL Jr.

Regional geopolitics or just local politics?

PRESIDENT Duterte is suddenly singing a different tune on China's land-grabbing spree in the West Philippine Sea – an issue he had dismissed as just part of the “greater game of regional geopolitics” – apparently because it is now hurting his candidates in the midterm elections.



Until the votes are cast on May 13, expect Duterte to recite patriotic lines about defending Philippine territory, especially Pagasa island in Palawan, reviewing China contracts, looking after workers displaced by Chinese, fishermen being harassed at Panatag, et cetera.

Do not expect his friends in Beijing to noisily take offense – they know the charade will last only five weeks – as they have to help the Mayor stay in Malacañang as long as is necessary.

A survey conducted Dec. 16-19 showed that most Filipinos (44 percent) do not agree that “what China wants to happen in the Philippines is good for Filipinos.” Only 27 percent agreed that China has good intentions.

China's aggressive activities in Philippine waters and its luring the administration into signing onerous deals have had social media bristling with negative comments on the perceived partiality of Duterte to Chinese.

With that traitorous bias – compounded by gut economic pressures – threatening to jeopardize the chances of his senatorial and other candidates, he now has to revise his talking points. <https://tinyurl.com/y3rq9ko4>

So in Palawan on Thursday, the Davao friend of President Xi Jinping was suddenly telling him (China) against occupying the island-barangay of Pagasa in the Spratlys or risk starting a war!

That was a startling departure from Duterte's usual gambit of not saying anything that might trigger a war that, he claimed, the Philippines could not win. He used to warn of Filipinos being massacred and of Chinese missiles hitting Manila in seven minutes. (Not 8.8 minutes?)

The President declared: “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 Pagasa because I have my soldiers there!”

(Pardon his “my soldiers.” We have a President who regards the armed forces [as well as the “my” police] as some kind of personal Praetorian bodyguards.)

The foreign office protested the swarming by hundreds of Chinese militia boats around Pagasa island, the biggest in the cluster of isles comprising the town of Kalayaan in Palawan. It said that such activity, noted since January, is illegal and a clear violation of Philippine sovereignty.

Foreign Secretary Teddy Locsin Jr. chimed in on Twitter: “When a country let's its countrymen swarm into foreign territory and does nothing to drive them out, it

is deemed to have endorsed and in effect adopted that aggressive act against a foreign country.”

China's aggressive activities in Philippine waters and its luring the Duterte administration into entering onerous deals have had social media bristling with negative comments on his slavish devotion to China.

Is his new-found voice against Chinese intrusions really part of a geopolitical game he is playing or just local election rhetoric like the unfulfilled promises of 2016?

Or – a Game Changer! – has Uncle Sam grabbed the inside track to a Duterte growing impatient with Xi's seducing him with a lauriat of promises that have remained as hollow as Chinese “buchi” (*jian du*) served after a meal?

• When Duterte calls ‘Gintong Ina’ a whore

CALOOCAN Bishop Pablo Virgilio David has taken to Facebook to defend his late mother after President Duterte called her a “whore” in a speech in Malabon on Tuesday. He said in part:

“Bienvenida Siongco David (1922-2000) is the woman the President called a whore. He called me a son of a whore for allegedly attacking him from the Church pulpit – which I have never ever done. The pulpit is never for that purpose. Unless he thinks that calling him to end violence and extrajudicial killing in my diocese is tantamount to attacking him.

“He called my mother a whore at the launching of the candidacy of Vice Mayor Jeannie Sandoval, who was shown on camera laughing along with the crowd. For the sake of my mother whom the president insulted, let me tell you a little about her.

“She survived the Japanese occupation and married my father at the age of 23, before the war ended. Although she was consistently at the top of her class from grade school to college, she was not able to finish a degree because of the war. Instead of going back to school after the war, she did everything she could to make sure my father would finish law and practice his legal profession.

“Because my father stubbornly resisted corruption in his work – first as provincial prosecutor of San Fernando, Pampanga, and later as assistant city prosecutor of Manila – my mother did all she could to help make both ends meet, given my father's meager salary as a public servant. (Until he died, my father was unable to buy himself a car. He did not mind taking public transportation.)

“My mother augmented our education in public schools by tutoring us in-between the house chores. She made sure that, even after she was widowed at age 58, she would be able to get all 13 of us through college and to practice our professions decently as productive citizens.

“She succeeded in raising one sociologist, one architect/urban planner, two lawyers, one civil engineer, one real estate broker, one banker, one medical technologist, one critical care nurse, one bishop, one nutritionist, one dentist, and one economist. Her efforts did not end in vain, not one of her children became a liability to the country.

“She was given the ‘Gintong Ina’ award in the late 80s. She passed away as the millennium came to a close in December 2000.

“Our family does not expect anyone in government to give her a recognition for her immense contribution to nation-building. But we do not expect anyone, either, to insult her memory and call her a whore. She does not deserve it.”

Editorial

Locsin's salvo of tweets on Pag-asa sparks hope

FOREIGN Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. may have had his share of bashers for his Trump-like use of Twitter, but he delivered the appropriate response to the now-confirmed massive Chinese presence near Pag-asa (Thitu) Island, the largest of the Kalayaan (Spratly) Islands under Philippine control.

This was after days of the Palace and the Defense department either denying or downplaying the reported presence of some 600 Chinese vessels near Pag-asa since January.

The initial response was clumsy, with officials fumbling to clarify that the correct number of Chinese vessels swarming Pag-asa was closer to 200, not 600.

Even that was beside the point. Whether 200 or 600, a large presence of Chinese vessels in or near Philippine territory should always be a cause for alarm.

To begin with, the report was from the military establishment itself, particularly the intelligence staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines' Western Command. It was delivered to a regional peace and order council meeting, where the military would have no reason to make false or exaggerated claims.

It does not also matter whether the Chinese ships were stationary or circling. It would have been considered outright invasion, except that, according to the Philippine military, those manning the vessels were unarmed and not wearing uniforms.

The Washington-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative claims the vessels began arriving much earlier, since Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana announced the start of construction and repair projects at Pag-asa. If so, this is a direct challenge to the Philippines' rightful claim on the Kalayaan group, upheld in 2016 by an

international arbitration tribunal at The Hague.

On Tuesday, April 2, Locsin tweeted that he had, in fact, fired a "salvo" of diplomatic notes to Beijing in protest of the massive Chinese incursions.

Two days later, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) issued a strong and well-crafted statement that should have been the government's initial and only response. It said the Chinese presence near Pag-asa was "illegal."

"The Pag-asa Islands are part of the Kalayaan Island Group (KIG), which is an integral part of the Philippines over which it has sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction," the DFA statement said. "Accordingly, the presence of Chinese vessels near and around Pag-asa and other maritime features in the KIG is illegal," it added.

Moreover, the Chinese actions were a "clear violation of Philippine sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction," as defined under international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Locsin is correct in saying that "such actions, when not repudiated by the country concerned, are deemed to have been adopted by it."

"When a country lets its countrymen swarm into foreign territory and does nothing to drive them out, it is deemed to have endorsed and, in effect, adopted that aggressive act against a foreign country," he added.

It is, thus, important to continually assert and reassert the Philippines' claim to the Kalayaan group. The sending of diplomatic notes to protest the Chinese presence reinforces this claim.

It is for this same rationale that the Municipality of Kalayaan was established on Pag-asa Island in 1978. It only has one *barangay* or village, with a population of just 184 people.

This tiny municipality, built purposely to maintain the Philippine claim to the Spratlys, is now being surrounded by Chinese vessels and testing the limits of the Philippines' resolve.

As a matter of principle and duty, Philippine officials should stand in support of the country's claim. To do otherwise is to undermine it. *MF*

BARMM teachers' woe

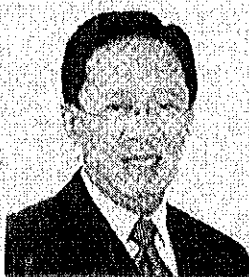
“The inordinate delay in the release of salaries has the effect of making the teachers vulnerable to loan sharks who charge usurious interest.”

This early, we hear discordant voices over the management of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). I thought this is not fair. But if true, this does not augur well for the newly-minted governmental setup.

I am ambivalent writing about this knowing BARMM has not yet gained traction in its long journey towards fulfilling its mission and vision. I thought it deserves a honeymoon period, after all, as Chief Minister Murad Ebrahim claimed they are still on OJT (on-the-job training). But I suppose the earlier the better to appraise them of what is happening on the ground, so that they can nip the problem in the bud. Political theorists postulate that the key to good governance is an effective feedback mechanism coming from unattached and objective sources.

Last week, I went home to Marawi to attend a court hearing. Before the court session started, lawyers and clients huddled talking about the problem of teachers i.e. the inordinate delay in the release of their salaries. Critics who are fast on the draw put the blame on the new regional government. I told them off-hand that there is a better explanation to the issue than accusing the BARMM of creating the problem.

The teachers expressed alarm and fear whether they might be able to receive their salaries before the holy month of Ramadan, which is to start on 6 May, when they needed it most. They said their salaries have been put on hold by the new



SOUTHERN VOICES
Macabangkit B. Lanto

regional government for reasons that were not explained to them clearly.

My initial reaction was to dismiss the complaint as premature. I reasoned out that perhaps the new Minister of Education of BARMM just want to conduct an honest

to goodness inventory of teachers in the light of the pernicious practice before of ghost teachers, even ghost schools. I explained that the new officials just wanted to have a feel of their work and in the transitory mode of adjustment. I advised critics to grant them time to fix it. But I could see on their faces real worry. Their smile when BARMM came to life turned into forlorn.

I chanced upon Paisalin Tago, Member of Parliament of BARMM, at the airport who confirmed that indeed, during the period of adjustment, delay in the payment of the salaries of not only teachers but other employees is unavoidable. For one, the fiscal officers have to apply for bond before funds are entrusted to them which takes time. I reminded him that the transitory provision of the Bangsamoro Organic Law did not mention anything about freezing the salaries of employees of BARMM during transition.

I advice critics to pull their punch because they might be barking up the wrong tree. The real problem could be with national government, particularly the Department of Budget and Management (DBM). For whatever reason, they haven't released the P1.2-billion transition

fund as mandated by Republic Act 11054 or Bangsamoro Organic Law, including the P32-billion budget of the defunct ARMM, which by law should have been transferred to the BARMM.

The transfer of funds entails time and a lot of lobbying. This prompted the regional parliament in its inaugural session to pass two resolutions: one, empowering Chief Minister Murad Ebrahim to “request the release of the transition fund” and another “for the transfer of the current year's appropriation for the ARMM to the BARMM.”

The inordinate delay in the release of salaries has the effect of making the teachers vulnerable to loan sharks who charge usurious interest. Already, school officials had to borrow money to defray the expenses for graduation rites.

A whiff of hope was provided by Chief Minister Ebrahim, who in a radio interview last week said he expects the release of the funds from the DBM this April in time for Ramadan.

These are the explanations that this writer has collated to explain the controversy. Will the BARMM spokesman please stand up to complement these explanations?

I suggest BARMM authorities explain the reason for the delay clearly at the soonest possible time to pour cold water to the brewing controversy.

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Aquino's chop-chop Choppers

It is almost as if every page one turns from the daily journals that cover the period of Benigno Aquino III's administration from his inaugural when his first act as president was to insult and demean historic inaugural tradition to the day he left Malacañang with the Aquino legacy tarnished, there one might find grand and colossal episodes of bungling, buffoonery, corruption or a signature sociopathic disregard for the lives of constituencies — an absence of sincere empathy that would have perpetuated had not Rodrigo Duterte dashed his plans for cloned continuity through Manuel Roxas.

“While corruption has a number of catalysts one of its most potent in the area of police and military hardware is a total disregard for the welfare and safety of constituencies.

In specific cases, it's all of the above.

The Mamasapano Massacre of heroic policemen — all denied assistance and rescue — we now know involved his Interior Secretary much more than the duo first admitted to. The continuing deaths of young children spawned by a reckless deal to release billions in time for the presidential campaign to peddle his successor is another example of criminal disregard.

In that same week, a multimillion-peso scandal involving non-existent health centers was being carried out, also scheduled to coincide with the campaign to install Roxas as Aquino's successor. Again, here is a monetary trade-off favoring partisan expediency at the cost of public welfare.

Psychologists say these symptoms are part of an underlying albeit unofficially verified ailment that produces insensitive sociopathy. Perhaps. But does a sick mind inherently incapable of empathy and personal relationships excuse one from responsibility where these have led to senseless deaths approaching massacre and genocide?

The same kind of mad sociopathic bent was a catalyst in the Mahindra Scam that again involved Aquino's chosen successor. This resulted in equipping police forces with inferior, unusable and substandard transport vehicles. This same negligent disposition towards people was behind the sudden cancelation of maintenance contracts for the Metropolitan Railway Transport 8 in total disregard for the lives and limbs of commuters.

Last year three airmen were killed when a Huey UH-1D helicopter crashed. The helicopter

was one among 21 acquired during the Aquino administration in a botched anomalous deal involving the questionable \$28 million purchase of Huey UH-1H helicopters. The Aquino deal involved accusations of bribery, corruption, failed bids, favored bidding and “emergency” negotiated purchases that had led investors to declare to the international community that when dealing with the Philippine “they had to be extremely careful.”

While hardly a flattering endorsement such negativity worsened when, in 2014, as the helicopters were delivered, a Senate inquiry discovered that the foreign peddler behind Aquino's military modernization program “had agreed to pay Philippine defense officials 15 percent of the contract value — about \$4.2 million — to accept substandard helicopters.”

The scandal had simply validated previous blacklisting. In 2013, Transparency International declared that defense deals in the Philippines have a “very high risk” of corruption. While corruption has a number of catalysts one of its most potent in the area of police and military hardware is a total disregard for the welfare and safety of constituencies.

While the Philippine Air Force dismissed allegations of substandard helicopters declaring, “Absolutely, they are fully mission capable,” less than 21 ordered were accepted as the deal

“Does a sick mind inherently incapable of empathy and personal relationships excuse one from responsibility where these have led to senseless deaths approaching massacre and genocide?”

was prematurely terminated. Of these "mission capable aircraft," within four years one crashed killing three.

Documents showed the aircraft delivered were not the UH-1H as ordered but were UH-1D, an obsolete variant. The latter's manufacturer had folded up and no spare parts were being specifically manufactured for the UH-1D.

Not only were the aircraft not the same Aquino boasted as having bought in his 2012 State of the Nation Address, but they were refurbished. Aquino either bungled or was lying. Where parts were missing, those were replaced with parts designed for another aircraft thus rendering the helicopters unsafe. The fatal 2018 crash proved that.

Rather than focus on corruption and accountability, let us instead view this specific episode along a series where each adds to a grand collective — a preponderance of deadly wheeling-dealing where Aquino and his alter egos were decidedly insensitive, callous and oblivious to vulnerable lives. They were a cabal of virtual sociopaths by the very definition of the word. 5

Del Rosario, Morales ICC case is doomed

“Many officials of the Aquino administration went to The Hague supposedly to attend the arbitral hearing even if they had no part in the actual hearing itself.”

Late 22 March, former Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario and ex-Ombudsman Conchita Carpio Morales made it to the news after it was learned that the two ex-government officials filed a case against President Xi Jinping of communist China before the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The complaint was purportedly filed on behalf of Filipino fishermen displaced by Chinese naval vessels and military personnel from their traditional fishing sites in the West Philippine Sea.

According to Del Rosario and Morales, they filed the suit because the Philippine government allegedly refuses to take legal action against Beijing's aggression against the Filipino fishermen. They alleged in their complaint that “atrocious actions of Chinese officials in the South China Sea and within Philippine territory constitute crimes against humanity, which fall within the jurisdiction of the ICC.”

The two close allies of ex-President Benigno Aquino III added that the case was filed on behalf of “the hundreds of thousands of Filipino fishermen persecuted and injured by China's aggressive island building and occupation of islands in the West Philippine Sea, waters within the country's 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea.”

It will be recalled that Beijing constructed numerous military structures on disputed shoals and islets in the strategic maritime highway of Southeast Asia. Upon the completion of those structures, Beijing's Navy considered the entire area an extension of Chinese territory.

That aggressive move prompted Manila to sue Beijing in the international arbitral tribunal of the United Nations located at The Hague, in the Netherlands. Many officials of the Aquino administration went to The Hague supposedly to attend the arbitral hearing even if they had no part in the actual hearing itself. Among those who went there at public expense were then Justice Secretary and now detained Sen. Leila de Lima and now ex-House Speaker Feliciano Belmonte Jr.

In July 2016, the tribunal ruled for the Philippines and disallowed Beijing's belated claim to the disputed territory. Unfortunately, Beijing refuses to recognize that judgment, and the Chinese Navy continues to drive away foreign vessels and Filipino fishermen from the area today.

Although Aquino III initiated the arbitral case, his successor, incumbent President Rodrigo Duterte, is not too keen on making

“It is doubtful if the ICC can exercise jurisdiction over a non-state member like the Philippines.”

Beijing comply with the arbitral ruling. Duterte, who believes that Manila has no military muscle to go to war with Beijing, prefers dialogue to confrontation.

President Duterte has nothing to do with the ICC case, and Malacañang believes the case will not prosper. Meanwhile, critics of the President praised Del Rosario and Morales for filing the ICC case.

Those praises notwithstanding, there are legal concerns.

Under the Rome statute, the jurisdiction of the ICC may be invoked only if a state-party "is unwilling or genuinely unable to carry out the investigation or prosecution" of international crimes. The Philippines, however, has already officially and effectively withdrawn from the ICC as of 10 March 2019. As of that date, the Philippines can never be a state-party in the context of the Rome Statute.

To all intents and purposes, therefore, Del Rosario and Morales filed their case in the ICC when the Philippines was no longer a state-party to the Rome Statute. Being so, it is doubtful if the ICC can exercise jurisdiction over a non-state member like the Philippines. As every lawyer and law student knows, a judgment rendered by a court that is devoid



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of jurisdiction over the case is void.

Another concern is that communist China is not a member of the ICC. Therefore, even assuming, for the sake of argument, that Del Rosario and Morales are able to obtain from the ICC a judgment against Jinping, it is unlikely that the court can enforce its ruling against the head of a state which is not a member of the ICC.

Since President Xi cannot be compelled to participate in the case filed against him in the ICC, it is almost certain that he will not voluntarily submit to the jurisdiction of the ICC. It will be foolish and impractical for him to do so.

More importantly, even if Del Rosario and Morales are able to obtain a favorable ruling against Xi, enforcing that judgment against him may require the help of the Philippine government. Since President Duterte is hostile to the ICC, Del Rosario and Morales may be unable to get that help.

Filing a case in the ICC is one thing. Getting a favorable judgment and enforcing it is another. That is a grim reality in international law.