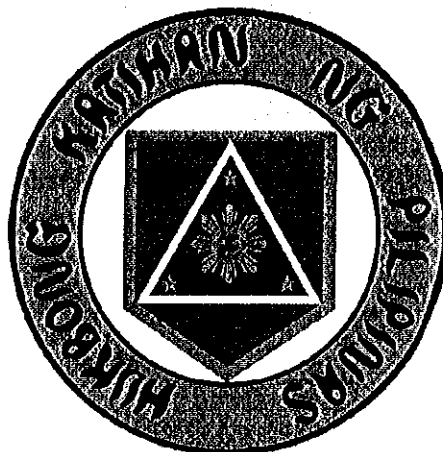


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NEWS CLIPPINGS

03 February 2019

Sunday

Honor. Patriotism. Duty.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

03 FEBRUARY 2019

Weather Forecast- http://pagasa.dost.gov.ph/weather/daily-weather-forecast		
Page Nr.	Title	Source
NATIONAL NEWS		
1-3	Clash erupts in hunt for Jolo blast brains	PDI-A1
4-5	Comelec to poll bets: Register blogs, websites	P Star-1
AFP/ SECURITY RELATED NEWS		
6	Phil to protest China's maritime rescue center in WPS	P Star-10
7	UN protest vs China eyed	P Journal-4
8	Scarp bills on crime responsibility age, ROTC	P Star-4
9	ROTC, senior citizens measures in priority list before adjournment	M Bulletin-6
10	MMDA reroutes traffic for QC solidarity walk	M Times-A8
11	Navy to acquire anti-submarine choppers	M Times-A3
12	Don't spread fake security threat messages-AFP, PNP	Tempo-4
13	Group says 2 slain men tagged rebels were farmers	PDI-A9
14	Reds surrender in Abra	P Star-13
15	Tribute paid to slain NDFP consultant	PDI-A9
16	PH Army denies role in NDF consultant's slay	M Times-A7
17	Davao Norte town declares Satur, 17 others 'persona non grata'	M Bulletin-12
18	'Lucky' NPA surrenderers receive houses	D Tribune-7
19	Reds fake news tactic scored	D Tribune-7
20	NDF man's killing blamed on Duterte	M Standard-A2
21-23	BARMM getting new complex in Lamitan	P Star-1
24-25	Priest who survived blasts leads cathedral cleanup	P Star-1
26-27	NBI looks into bombings, but Jolo mayor wants independent probe	PDI-A6
28	Clashes ongoing in Sulu	M Bulletin-12
29	Maguindanao Moro clan war settled	M Bulletin-12
30-31	Foreign terrorist slain in Sulu clash	M Times-A1
32	Military helps settle Maguindanao rido	D Tribune-7
33-34	Terror leader slain	D Tribune-1
35	5 soldiers killed in clash with Abu bandits in Sulu	P Journal-14
36	Kuta ng terorista sa Maguindanao binomba	Ngayon-2
37	Suicide bombers sa 'Pinas 'Nakakaalarma', ayon kay Lacson	Ngayon-2
38	Troops in hot pursuit of BIFF in Maguindanao	M Bulletin-12
39	Military launches airstrikes vs BIFF faction in Maguindanao	Tempo-4
40	Kuta ng BIFF, pinaulanan ng bomba	Balita-2
41	'Yes' for peace, 'No' to violence-MILF	M Times-A2
42	'Yes' for peace, 'No' to violence-MILF	M Times-A8
43-44	'Suicide bomb' theory splits Palace, AFP	M Standard-A1
45-46	Army-Sayyaf clash: 8 dead, 20 wounded	M Standard-A1

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

47-48	Join war vs. criminality, Rody urges village execs	M Standard-A2
49	7 foreign terrorists nasa Sulul	PM-2
50	Bakbakan sa Sulu: 5 sundalo, 3 Abu Sayyaf member patay	Ngayon-2
51	Bomb Scare kumakalat sa social media	Ngayon-2
52	'Mga tutol sa BOL pakinggan'-Leni	Ngayon-2
EDITORIAL/OPINION/COMMENTARY		
53-54	Stoking a religious war in Mindanao	P Star-9
55	Why were the Ligots acquitted?	PDI-A13
56	Extremists must not hold back peace efforts	M Bulletin-9
57-58	No safe place	M Times-A1
59	Morning after plebiscite	D Tribune-4
ONLINE NEWS		
60-61	Army settles Maguindanao Moro clan war	www.pna.gov.ph
62-63	Gov't offers long term solution to uplift lives of former rebels	www.pna.gov.ph
64	Army leads cleanup drive in 4 Maguindanao towns	www.pna.gov.ph
65-66	Centcom chief warns public vs. 'troll' FB account of CPP-NPA	www.pna.gov.ph

CLASH ERUPTS IN HUNT FOR JOLO BLAST BRAINS

STORY BY JAYMEE T. GAMIL, JULIE ALIPALA AND GEOFFREY MAITEM

Scout Rangers assaulting the lair of the Abu Sayyaf commander linked to the Jan. 27 attack on the Jolo cathedral killed three of the bandits but lost five of their own in a two-hour gun battle in Patikul, Sulu, on Saturday. The military said Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, whose men assisted the 'suicide bombers,' escaped.

AG

FROM A1

By Jaymee T. Gamil,
Julie Alipala
and Jeoffrey Maitem
@Team_Inquirer

Five soldiers and three Abu Sayyaf bandits, including a suspected foreign terrorist, were killed on Saturday in a two-hour gun battle in Patikul, Sulu province, after government troops assaulted the lair of the suspected brains behind the Jan. 27 bombing of a Catholic church in Jolo.

Five other soldiers from the Army's 5th Scout Ranger Battalion and 13 Abu Sayyaf terrorists were wounded in the clash at Sitio Sungkog, Barangay Kabon Takas, Patikul, that started at 11:20 a.m., said Lt. Col. Gerald Monfort, spokesperson for the military's Joint Task Force Sulu.

Among the wounded was Indang Susukan, the notorious Abu Sayyaf subgroup leader who was linked to various mur-

ders and kidnappings in the province, Monfort said.

Susukan's commander, Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, escaped during the fierce gun battle.

Also on Saturday, Air Force OV-10 attack planes and BO-105 gunships pounded known marshland encampments of the Islamic State (IS)-inspired Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in Maguindanao province.

Self-proclaimed 'caliph'

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and Interior Secretary Eduardo Año earlier described Sawadjaan, the target of the military assault in Patikul, as the self-proclaimed "caliph" of the IS jihadis in Sulu.

Sawadjaan's group is said to be the only Abu Sayyaf faction that harbors foreign IS terrorists.

Año on Friday said Sawadjaan's group guided and assisted the Indonesian couple who carried out the "suicide bombing" at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo.

Monfort identified the foreign terrorist who was killed on Saturday as "Abu Black."

"As of now, we can't tell the nationality of Abu Black, but he is a known foreign terrorist" who operated in Cotabato, he said.

Año said security forces were monitoring another foreign suicide bomber in Sawadjaan's group in Patikul, an "Arab-looking" man who "could be Egyptian or Yemeni and had a Tausug wife."

Monfort said the military had not recovered a single enemy body at the scene of the clash due to the "volume of enemy fire," but insisted that the number of slain bandits was accurate based on "clear visual shots" reported by the troops.

Lt. Col. Marlo Jomalesa, commander of the Scout Rangers' assault troops, believed that Sawadjaan was at the hinterland camp when the gunfight started, according to Monfort.

"Pursuit operations will be continued. As of now, we have taken one of [the bandits']

lair," he said.

Col. Gerry Besana, public affairs officer of the Western Mindanao Command, said the Scout Rangers clashed with around 100 members of Sawadjaan's group.

Sulu's provincial social welfare office said the number of internally displaced families from the villages of Patikul had swelled to more than 1,000 on Saturday, from around 400 with 1,197 dependents on Monday, when President Duterte ordered an all-out offensive following the twin church blasts.

Displaced families

The majority of the displaced families came from the remote barangays of Bongkaong and Upper Latih, which the military had earlier identified as "a haven" for the Abu Sayyaf.

Hindun Angsa, the provincial social welfare officer, said the families were evacuated to Lower Latih, a barangay located at the boundary of Jolo and Patikul.

Many of the evacuees re-

sented the disruption in their lives for the problem that originated in Jolo.

"Why are we being made to suffer for the problems of Jolo?" said Sabor Abdulhalim, 57, a farmer.

Lorna Albani, barangay chair of Lower Latih, said they had been taking care of more than 400 displaced families since 2017 because of military operations.

"We have 417 families who evacuated here and there was no advise to allow the return of evacuees to their respective barangays," Albani said.

Pendakong Hadjirol, 61, a grandmother, said she was tired of having to evacuate every time the military operated in her village.

"We evacuated in 2017 and [returned only] in 2018. Now we were ordered to come down [from Upper Latih] because there was another military operation. I don't know why the bombing in Jolo made everyone suffer," Hadjirol said.

In Maguindanao, two OV-10

attack planes dropped at least eight 250-pound bombs to flush out BIFF terrorists from their positions in the marshy areas of Sultan sa Barongis town, said Maj. Arvin Encinas, spokesperson for the Army's 6th Infantry Division.

Full alert

Residents in nearby Plig-awaya town in North Cotabato also reported seeing two FA-50 light attack jets dropping bombs on Liguasan Marsh early Saturday.

"We were able to hit their lair. I am waiting for the reports coming from the ground," Encinas said.

Troops in Maguindanao were placed on full alert following intelligence reports that 40 foreign jihadists had entered the region, said Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, the military commander in the area.

"The Islamic State-linked [BIFF] fighters operates in these provinces. The group is behind the series of bombings in the region," Sobejana said. INQ

03

February 2019



Page: 1

Comelec to poll bets: Register blogs, websites

By SHEILA CRISOSTOMO

In an attempt to regulate the use of social media in the May 13 midterm polls, the Commission on Elections (Comelec) ordered all political parties and candidates to report their official blogs, websites and social media pages.

Based on Resolution 10488 promulgated last Jan. 30, each registered political party and candidate shall register with the agency's Education and Information Division their internet, mobile and social media platforms.

The Comelec noted that "any other blog or social media page which, when taken as a whole, has for its primary purpose the endorsement of a candidate, whether or not directly maintained or administered by

Turn to Page 10

Comelec From Page 1

the candidate or their official campaign representatives, shall be considered additional official blogs or social media pages of the said candidate."

The resolution stipulates the implementing rules and regulations of the Fair Elections Act.

In an earlier interview, Comelec spokesman James Jimenez underscored the need to regulate social media be-

cause of its possible impact on the coming elections.

"In 2016, we saw how effective social media was. We saw how potentially destructive of reasoned conversation social media was. Under that condition, knowing the impact of social media, we really need to regulate because it is being abused," he maintained.

According to Jimenez,

while majority of social media users are "fine" there are small groups that are capable of exerting disproportionate impact using social media.

He said while social media is a free market of ideas, the tools are also freely available to everyone, including the "bad and malicious actors."

"That's the reason you need to regulate (so) the bad or malicious actors do not have free reign of the internet. The abuse

of some has negative effects on everyone and that's why we must have control over social media," Jimenez added.

The official said that Comelec is preparing the draft rules for social media but they will make sure that "whatever draft regulation that we have would respect the individual's right of free expression."

"Social media will remain a free market of ideas, but within the context of keeping

the elections orderly, such as reporting of expenses and reporting of costs," he added.

Under the resolution, candidates with political parties are allowed to spend P3 for every voter registered in the constituency where they are seeking a post.

Candidates without any political party and without support from any political party are authorized to spend P5 for every voter in areas

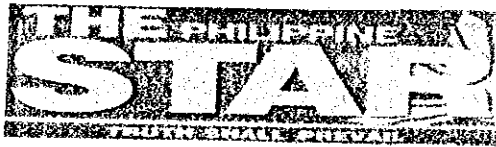
where they are running.

The resolution, promulgated on Jan. 30, 2019, stated that political parties and party-list groups could spend P5 for every voter in the constituencies where they have official candidates.

For the coming polls, the campaign period for national candidates starts on Feb. 12 and ends on May 11 while official campaigning for local bets begins on March 29 and also ends on May 11.

03

February 2019



Page: 10

Phl to protest China's maritime rescue center in WPS

By PIA LEE-BRAGO

The Philippines will protest China's establishment of a maritime rescue center at the Kagitingan or Ptery Cross Reef once it is verified, Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. said yesterday.

Locsin agreed with Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio that the Philippines should contest China's construction on the Philippine-claimed Kagitingan Reef.

"I, however, prefer engaging them openly on the floor of the UN General Assembly,"

Locsin said on Twitter.

The Philippines has filed almost 20 protests against China's actions in the West Philippine Sea without "fanfare," the DFA chief added.

"SAJ Carpio, we're doing that - 18 or 19, so far. No fanfare though; protest is in-

tended for the Chinese not for hysterics in Manila who, sadly, are not foreigners but good God-fearing Filipinos so no need to CC protest to them. It gets in the way of diplomacy," Locsin also tweeted.

Carpio earlier maintained that the Philippine govern-

ment should file a protest to avoid the misunderstanding that it approves of China's action at the Philippine-claimed reef and weaken the country's claim over the disputed area.

But Carpio and Malacañang differed on how the Philippines should deal with China's estab-

lishment of a maritime rescue center at Kagitingan Reef.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said Filipinos should be "thankful" to China for building the center even as Malacañang vowed to oppose acts that intrude into Philippine sovereignty. 1

UN PROTEST VS CHINA EYED

By
Cristina
Lee-
Pisco

APART from filing a diplomatic protest, the Philippines will engage China openly on the floor of the United Nations General Assembly once the reported construction of a maritime rescue center in the West Philippine Sea is verified, Foreign Secretary Teodoro "Teddy" Locsin Jr. said Saturday.

In a series of tweets, Locsin agreed with Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio's position that the country should take action against China for putting up a new facility on Fiery Cross Reef or Kagitingan Reef.

"And we will (protest). I however preferred engaging them openly on the floor of the UN General Assembly," Locsin said. In another tweet, he clarified that the term used should be "protest," not "contest" as Carpio

put it.

The Chinese state media, Xinhua news has reported that China has opened a "maritime rescue center" on Kagitingan Reef (Fiery Cross Reef) in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea) "to better protect navigation and transport safety."

China's transport ministry said the center "will offer better support to maritime rescue operations in the southern part of the South China Sea."

The Government of China had said it plans to use its artificial islands in the West Philippine Sea for humanitarian purposes.

Experts however warned that China is militarizing these waters.

'Scrap bills on crime responsibility age, ROTC'

By HELEN FLORES

Days before Congress goes on recess, various child rights groups called on lawmakers yesterday to stop the passage of the bills that seek to lower the minimum age of criminal liability and revive the Reserved Officers Training Corps (ROTC).

The groups, led by Salinlahi Alliance for Children's Concerns, said both the Senate and the House of Representatives are eyeing the passage of the lowering of the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 15 to 12 years old and the revival of the ROTC for senior high school students before the session ends next week.

"We are here to collectively voice out our call to all our legislators, listen to the public and vote against (lowering of the minimum age of criminal responsibility)," Eule Rico Bonganay, Salinlahi secretary general, said at a press conference in Quezon City yesterday.

Bonganay said Congress should reconsider its "persistent efforts" in advancing the bill amending the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act or RA 10630 to

lower the minimum age of criminal liability and acknowledge the broad number of organizations, experts, individuals and institutions against it.

The House of Representatives passed House Bill 8858 that seeks to lower the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12 years on third and final reading early this week.

Senate President Vicente Sotto III filed a bill seeking to lower the minimum age of criminal liability to "above 12 years old," while Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon wants to lower the age to 12 years.

Bonganay cited the recent killing of a 16-year-old youth in Davao after he allegedly resisted arrest.

"We fear that this kind of situation will continue especially if the minimum age criminal responsibility is lowered to 12 years old. The use of *hantaban* (resisted) as the reason for shooting or killing children has long been frequent and it will further be justified if (it) becomes a law," he said.

Meanwhile, Bonganay said House Bill 5113, which seeks to revive the mandatory ROTC for

Grades 11 and 12 is "being railroaded in Congress."

"The renewed proposal to revive ROTC in Congress fortifies the continuing culture of impunity among the youth, by instilling mercenary military tradition in lieu of the recognition of basic human rights," he said.

"These bills not only criminalize children but promote a culture of violence, terror and corruption among our youth," he added.

The group reiterated its call to the Duterte administration to focus on resolving poverty that worsens the conditions of children instead of passing laws that are punitive, not rehabilitative.

"We now ask legislators to vote against these bills. They should heed the call of children, child rights groups and the majority of the public in the growing call to stop the lowering of minimum age of criminal responsibility and shoot down the revival of mandatory ROTC to Grades 11 and 12," Bonganay said.

A recent survey by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) showed majority of Filipinos want the minimum age of criminal responsibility to remain at 15 years.

ROTC, senior citizens measures in priority list before adjournment

By BEN ROSARIO

The bill seeking the revival of the citizen military training in college remained on top of the House of Representatives'

Exempted from undergoing the mandatory ROTC course are students who are physically and psychologically unfit; athletic scholars chosen to represent the school in sports competitions and those with other valid reasons as approved by the Department of National Defense.

list of legislative priorities despite the time constraints faced by lawmakers in pursuing it.

Majority Leader and Capiz Rep. Fredenil Castro said House Bill 8961 or the "Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) Act" will be presented for second reading approval, and possibly for final reading, before the election break on Thursday.

In a news forum yesterday, Castro said two pro-elderly bills which are part of the House priorities, are also set for final reading and approval.

House Bill (HB) 8884 granting senior citizens and persons with disabilities a 20 percent discount on travel tax hurdled second reading last Wednesday.

On the same day, congressmen also passed on second reading HB 7030 or the proposed "Anti-Eldery Abuse Act".

HB 7030 proposes to protect senior citizens from physical, emotional, financial and psychological abuses.

Authored by Deputy Speaker and Batangas Rep. Raneo Abu, together

with Reps. Raul C. Tupas (Luzon) and Micaela Violago (NUP, Nueva Ecija), the ROTC bill will establish a mandatory basic ROTC program for students enrolled in Grades 11 and 12 in all public and private educational institutions as a requisite for graduation.

Exempted from undergoing the mandatory ROTC course are students who are physically and psychologically unfit; athletic scholars chosen to represent the school in sports competitions and those with other valid reasons as approved by the Department of National Defense.

Baguio City Rep. Mark O. Go said that aside from the elderly and PWDs, 20 percent discounts on travel tax granted under HB 8884 will also cover students representing their schools and the country in international sports tournaments and academic competitions and Philippine representatives to international academic conferences, beauty pageants and sports competitions.

In HB 7030, abuse against senior citizens will include, among others, physical abuse, psychological, mental or emotional abuse, economic and financial abuse and material exploitation and sexual abuse or non-consensual sexual contact of any kind.

MMDA reroutes traffic for QC solidarity walk

THE Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) will reroute traffic and implement the "stop and go" scheme in parts of Quezon City on Sunday for the solidarity walk of Muslim and Christian groups at the Quezon City Memorial Circle (QCMC) to condemn the bombing incidents in Mindanao.

The march was expected to draw 4,000 participants, resulting in traffic disruptions in certain portions of the Elliptical Road and its junctions.

The agency said religious groups including Muslims, Catholics, Protestants and other Christian denominations would start assembling at 5 a.m.

Muslim participants would assemble at Commonwealth Avenue, while Christians would gather at East Avenue.

At 7 a.m., the MMDA would stop and move traffic at Masaya Street corner Commonwealth Ave. to allow Muslim groups to cross the Elliptical Road from their assembly area at the Philippine Coconut Authority (Philcoa).

The group will pass through the east side gate facing Commonwealth Ave. all the way to Liwasang Aurora in QCMC, where the marchers will hold a program.

Traffic rerouting will be implemented along the Elliptical road and the East Ave. junction as Chris-

tian groups will enter the QCMC gate facing East Ave. all the way to Liwasang Aurora.

Vehicles from Elliptical Road going to Kalayaan Road, University of the Philippines Diliman and Commonwealth Ave. are advised to turn right to East Ave., left at Matalino St., left at Kalayaan Ave., and right to Elliptical Rd. going to their destination.

Meanwhile, all vehicles from EDSA via East Ave. shall turn right to Matalino St., left at Kalayaan Ave., and right to Elliptical Road going to their destination.

Dubbed as "*Lakad para sa Kapayapaan Laban sa Karahasan*," the solidarity walk aims to show that Muslims and Christians are "allies promoting peace and not war."

"There would be exchange of bibles and [Qur'an]... and participants would embrace upon the convergence [point]. This was also done during the bombings in Zamboanga. Faith leaders will again join to condemn the bombing in Jolo," MMDA's traffic chief for EDSA Edison Bong Nebrija told reporters.

Delegates from the Philippine National Police (PNP), Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the MMDA will also participate.

Nebrija said traffic would return to normal at 10 a.m.

NEIL JAYSON N. SERVALLOS

03

February 2019

The Manila Times

Page:

A3

Navy to acquire anti-submarine choppers

THE Philippine Navy will for the first time acquire anti-submarine helicopters this year, according to Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana.

Lorenzana said two anti-subma-

rine choppers from AgustaWestland will be delivered in May. The helicopters were tested in the United Kingdom last year.

"Anti-submarine helicopters are in the process of being acquired,

additional information from the PN (Philippine Navy) said they will arrive in May 2019," Lorenzana said in a text message.

The helicopters, worth P5.4 billion, include munition, mis-

sion essential equipment and integrated logistic support. **A3**

The AW-159 choppers can be armed with rockets, machine guns, missiles, torpedoes and depth charges. **DEMPSEY REYES**

Don't spread fake security threat messages – AFP, PNP

By MARTIN SADONGDONG

Believing in false security threats and relaying it to other people through social media posts and chain messages only help lawless elements and terrorists in spreading their propaganda and sowing fear among the general public.

This was stressed by ranking military and police officers Saturday as the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police called for calm and sobriety amid the recent bomb attacks in Mindanao.

Major Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Philippine Army

6th Infantry Division and Joint Task Force Central, called on the public to refrain from sharing hoax messages about supposed bomb attacks in malls, religious places, and other places of convergence.

"With the very volatile situation, there are some individuals who are circulating messages in the social media threatening the public of more bombings which have triggered fear among the populace," Sobejana said.

Sobejana, which has military jurisdiction over Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, North Cotabato, and Sultan Kudarat, said he has alerted all his units to "strictly heighten the alert level and secure

all places of worships and areas of convergence" in their areas of operation.

"We will also further intensify our intelligence efforts and initiate pro-active security measures to thwart possible hostile plans," he noted.

The military officers called fake security threats "annoying" and urged the public to report to authorities individuals who try to sow fear by spreading false and malicious information.

"Peace and security is everybody's responsibility. Hence, report to authorities any security-related issues for the safety of everyone," he said.

NEWS BRIEFS

Group says 2 slain men tagged rebels were farmers

A Mindanao-based rights group on Thursday denounced the killing of two farmers tagged as communist rebels in San Agustin town, Surigao del Sur province, last week. Ryan Amper, spokesperson of Barug Katungod Mindanao, slammed the Philippine Army's 36th Infantry Battalion for the killing of civilians Emel Tejero and Randell Gallego. Amper, in a statement, said the two men were with four other farmers hauling abaca hemp in San Agustin when they were shot allegedly by soldiers "without any provocation." But Maj. Rodolfo Cordero Jr., civil military officer of the 401st Infantry Brigade, said Tejero and Gallego were killed in a brief clash between soldiers and 10 New People's Army guerrillas. Soldiers recovered an M-14 rifle, bombs and bullets after the clash, Cordero said. —FRINSTON LIM

03

February 2019



Page:

18

Reds surrender in Abra

Two New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas have surrendered to the military in Abra.

The surrenderees, whose names were withheld, reportedly admitted to authorities that they were members of the NPA-Milisyang Bayan, a group whose members pose as ordinary citizens during the day.

The rebels brought their rifles and two improvised explosive devices when they surrendered to the Army's 24th Infantry Battalion (IB) based in Barangay Tagodtod, Lagangilang town on Jan. 31.

The rebels told the military that they want to live a normal life and give their children a better future.

Earlier this year, nine members of the Milisyang Bayan and a regular NPA rebel also surrendered to the 24th IB.

Brig. Gen. Lenard Agustin, acting commander of the Army's 7th Infantry Division, thanked the Philippine National Police for helping the military implement the campaign against insurgency.

— Michael Punongbayan

Tribute paid to slain NDFP consultant

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
@nestorburgosinq

ILOILO CITY—Friends, former schoolmates and colleagues of Randy Felix Malayao on Wednesday gave tribute to the slain peace consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), calling him a tireless seeker of justice.

"His sense of justice was unwavering and so was his compassion," said University of the Philippines Visayas (UPV) professor Mary Barby Badayos-Jover, a friend.

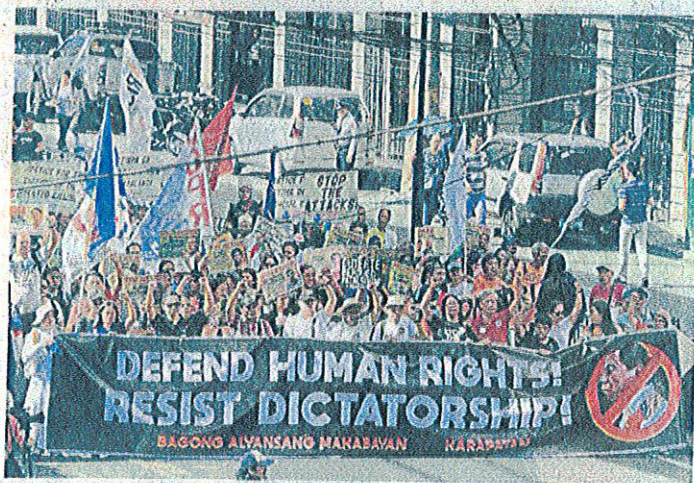
"He was a calming presence who encouraged me to go beyond my comfort zone," she said.

Malayao, a fisheries graduate of UPV in Miagao, Iloilo province, and former editor in chief of Ang Mangingisda, student publication of the UPV College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences, was shot dead while asleep on a bus in Aritao town in Nueva Vizcaya province.

Popular student

He was a consultant of the NDFP in peace talks with the government and vice president of the Makabayan coalition.

Malayao was a popular student leader at UPV and was vice president for Visayas of the College Editors Guild of the Philippines (CEGP). He was also a founding member of the school chapters of the UP Beta Sigma Fraternity and League of Filipino Students.



RALLY FOR RIGHTS Activists march on Mendiola, near Malacañang Palace, on Dec. 10 to denounce the killings of militant organizers and their tagging as communist rebels.

—INQUIRER PHOTO

Friends and former campus journalists remembered Malayao as the well-dressed, tall and lanky student leader who spoke passionately.

"He was always wearing polo shirts, brown slacks and leather shoes and was ready to jump into any discussion of any topic," a former campus journalist said.

They recalled Malayao as the CEGP organizer who helped restore or activate student publications in the Visayas.

Impunity

He also led journalism training programs, discussions on social issues and helped in the production of student publications, often spending nights in

editing and laying out issues.

The UPV Beta Sigma Fraternity condemned the attack and demanded justice.

"The butchers ended the life of a person who aspired for nothing but peace and genuine development in our country," the fraternity said in a statement.

"We mourn Brod Randy's death under the hands of cowardly criminal butchers. But let us not allow fear to conquer us amid the darkness," the fraternity added.

The UP Fisheries Guild and UPV College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences Student Council also condemned Malayao's killing. INQ

PH Army denies role in NDF consultant's slay

BAYOMBONG, Nueva Vizcaya: The Philippine Army's 5th Infantry Division (5th ID) in Camu town, Isabela has denied involvement in the killing of a peace consultant of the National Democratic Front (NDF).

Felix Randy Malayao, NDF consultant, was shot dead by still unidentified gunman at about 2:30 a.m. on Wednesday while he was inside a Victory Liner bus in CCQ terminal in Barangay Darapidap, Aritao town.

The NDF is an umbrella group composed of the Communist Party of the Philippines, its armed wing the New People's Army, among other organizations.

The NDF in Cagayan Valley (Re-

gion 2) released a statement accusing the 5th ID of the killing of Malayao.

"With all its allied organizations and member individuals, [the NDF Cagayan Valley] condemns the murder of NDF consultant Felix Randy Malayao by death squad elements of the 5th ID [Infantry Division]," the statement said.

"This allegation of the NDF Cagayan Valley is not true and has no basis. We challenge whoever wrote the statement to come out in the open and report to the Philippine National Police and present evidence if there is any," Maj. Jefferson Somera, 5th ID spokesman, said.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO

Davao Norte town declares Satur, 17 others 'persona non grata'

DAVAO CITY (PNA) -- Former Bayan Muna Rep. Satur Ocampo and 17 others are no longer welcome in Talaingod municipality after local officials declared them "persona non grata", following last year's incident involving the alleged trafficking of tribal students.

A resolution unanimously approved by the Talaingod Municipal Council on January 14 cited the November 2018 incident when Ocampo

and his companions were arrested for bringing with them 14 minors without travel permits and, in some cases, without the knowledge of the children's parents.

The local officials also expressed the sentiments of the Ata Manobo tribal leaders, who earlier condemned Ocampo and his companions for violating the rights of the tribe and the alleged intrusion of the New People's Army (NPA) into tribal lands.

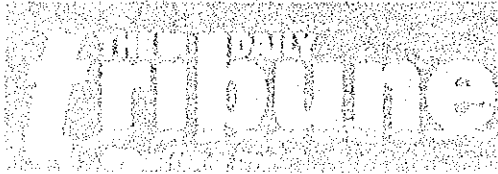
Ocampo's 17 companions who were also declared "persona non grata" were France Castro, Meggie Nolasco, Pastor Edgar Ugal, Rev. Ryan C Magpayo, Pastor Eller A. Ordez, Rev. Juriel Jaime, Jesus Madamo, Maryro Poquita, Maria Concepcion Ibarra, Jenveive Pabara, Merhay Taliedo, Maricel Andagkit, Marcial Rendon, Ariel Ansan, Mariane Aga, Nerfa Awing, and Wingwing Daunsay.

Aside from trafficking charges, Ocampo and his colleagues are facing child abuse and kidnapping cases.

The town's tribal leaders have also accused Ocampo of failure to

seek a Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) before entering into the tribe's ancestral domain. 12

Ocampo had earlier said he and his colleagues were headed to Talaingod with the minors for a fact-finding mission on the supposed abuses committed by the military in the area.



'Lucky' NPA surrenderers receive houses

By Kuhlín Ceslle Gacula

Former members of the New People's Army (NPA) in Mindanao region who decided to surrender and return to the fold of the law will receive 50 housing units from the National Housing Authority.

The houses were awarded to the lucky returnees after the personnel of the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines, who were the original beneficiaries of the project, decided to waive their rights in their favor.

The former rebels will be occupying Freedom Residences, a three-hectare developed area in Cuambogan, Tagum City.

NHA General Manager and Housing Urban Development Coordinating Council Secretary General Marcelino Escalada Jr. said a total of 31 former rebels will be the first occupants of the first 50 complete units.

Escalada added each housing unit costs P450,000 with a floor area of 33 square meters with a lot and extra seven square meters for laundry area.

Once completed, Freedom Residences will have a total of 375 units, with provisions for a training facility to provide NPA surrenderers with necessary livelihood skills.

Army commanding general Lt. Gen. Macarrog Alberto said it is important to prioritize the former NPA members in the government's housing program, to attract more communist insurgents to surrender and live peacefully instead.

"Some two hectares will also be developed as a commercial area where owners can engage in small businesses," Escalada added.

The 31 former NPA members are among the first 50 beneficiaries who have been fully evaluated by the government through the Enhanced-Comprehensive Local Evaluation Program.

Reds fake news tactic scored

A check, however, showed that the information provided by Magbanua was false

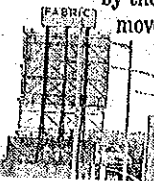
By Kathleen Mae Bulquerin

Describing the rebel movement as a money-making venture, the military on Saturday slammed the government enemies' ploy of spreading false information on the Internet purportedly



to lure the gullible into their fold.

Maj. Abel Potutan, acting public information office chief of Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)-Central Command, described the false information being spread by their enemies as a desperate move.



Potutan said it was designed to convince people into joining and supporting the rebels'

dwindling and weakening movement.

He was reacting to an online post by a certain Juanito Magbanua, who claimed the government troops suffered at least 27 casualties during a firefight with the communists in Negros Island last month.

A check, however, showed the information provided by Magbanua was false.



"A desperate move of the enemies of the state to lure the people into joining their

dwindling money-making armed group," Potutan said.

Potutan claimed on the contrary, it was the rebels that suffered the said number of casualties and not the military.

"There were only two recorded casualties from the government side when the terrorists blatantly executed one unarmed and off-duty CAPGU member in broad daylight and indiscriminately opened fire at the Army detachment that wounded one soldier," Potutan added.

Last month, government troops were

able to neutralize six NPA terrorists and seized several firearms, war materials and subversive documents.

Lt. Gen. Noel Clement, commander of Central Command, said the fake news tactic used by the NPA will not work anymore on the people.

"People are now more discerning. Never again that these bands of bandits could ever deceive anyone in Negros Island," Clement said.

He credited the public for supporting them in their anti-insurgency campaign.

NDF MAN'S KILLING BLAMED ON DUTERTE

By Brenda Jocson

GAMU, Isabela—Communist rebels have accused President Rodrigo Duterte of ordering the summary execution of National Democratic Front consultant Randy Malayao, who was shot dead in a parked bus Wednesday.

In a press statement released through its Cagayan Valley Kilusang Rebulusyon spokesman Bienvenido Magalat, the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-NDF said Duterte and Department of Justice placed Malayao on a proscription list and Order of Battle, making him a target of government forces.

The President, the communists said, issued Executive Order 70 that created the National Task Force to End the Communist Insurgency, then ordered the all-out war against both the NPA and the Abu Sayyaf group last week in the aftermath of the bombing of the Jolo Cathedral that claimed 22 lives and injured over 100 others.

Malayao had faced charges filed by the family of the late Cagayan Governor Rodolfo Aguinaldo, who was killed in 2001. But these were dismissed, Magalat said, leading to the NDF consultant's release from the Cagayan Provincial Jail in Tuguegarao City.

According to the military, Malayao was "one of the masterminds" of the communists in the north, being the top NPA commander in Cagayan Valley.

Major Jefferson M. Somera, spokesperson of the 5th Infantry Division at Camp Melchor dela Cruz based here, said the military was not surprised by the leftists' accusations and threats.

"In fact we are used to it. Instead, we will continue our massive intelligence and information gathering in coordination with other law enforcement agencies in the area of responsibility so that we could prevent and foil whatever plans the rebels would do," he said.

The 5th ID "is very much prepared to combat whatever atrocities these insurgents would do to protect all civilians and military any time," Somera added.

Meanwhile, the Philippine National Police office in Region 2 maintained its heightened alert status in anticipation for leftist-led rallies and any attacks that may occur during Malayao's vigil in San Pablo, Isabela.

Malayao was once vice president of the Kpallisyong Makabayan and writer of the "Northern Dispatch," the official publication of the NDF.

On Friday, Chief Inspector Rex Pascua, chief of police of Jones town in Isabela, said they expect rebels from the Benito Tesorio Command or NPA South Front to attack government forces and outposts to avenge Malayao, whose remains were taken back to San Pablo on Thursday.

Pascua said police would put up checkpoints along the interior roads of Isabela's towns and ask for identification from passersby in a bid to thwart the Tesorio rebels, who claimed responsibility for an ambush that killed two Army soldiers in Gamu two years ago.

"We will remain alert and keep our men on the ground. In fact, we had intensified our guard and alerted our assets," the police chief said, noting that Jones town has already been declared an election hot spot by the Commission on Elections. A2

03

February 2019



Page: 1

BARMM getting new complex in Lamitan

By JOHN UNSON

BASILAN – There is a new government complex in Lamitan City in this province where the newly created Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) can establish a provincial center.

The complex, now 90 percent complete, can accommodate provincial offices of

Turn to Page 10

BARMM

From Page 1

different BARMM agencies. It is a joint project of the executive department of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), the region's Department of Public Works and Highways and the Basilan district engineering office.

The BARMM will replace the now 29-year ARMM following the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) last Jan. 21.

Soler Undug of the Basilan district engineering office said the P120-million main building of ARMM's supposed provincial government complex is ready for inauguration.

ARMM Gov. Mujiv Hatanman, regional public works secretary Don Loong and the Basilan engineering office are presently constructing a P60-million auditorium in the same area. The building will also be turned over to the

BARMM.

"Lamitan City is proud to host the Basilan provincial operations center of the incoming BARMM entity," Lamitan City Vice Mayor Roderick Furigay said yesterday.

The ARMM administration is also turning over to the BARMM the more than P1-billion Basilan transcentral road project, portions of which now straddle the former enclaves of the Abu Sayyaf in the Sampinit Complex in hinterlands of the island province.

The highway will interconnect Barangay Tumahubong in Sumisip, Barangay Mahayahay in Maluso and Barangay Santa Clara, located in the middle of the cities of Lamitan and Isabela.

The construction of the transcentral road involves the ARMM, the office of Basilan Gov. Jim Salliman, the ARMM regional police and the West-

ern Mindanao Command (Westmincom) of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Lt. Gen. Arnel dela Vega, commander of Westmincom, said he is certain Basilan will become even more peaceful under BARMM.

"There are existing infra-

structure built by the present ARMM administration in strategic areas in the province in recent years. There is enough for BARMM to start with," he said.

Dela Vega said one proof that there is sustainable peace now in Basilan was the peace-

ful conduct last week in Sumisip town of the ARMM regional athletic meet involving more than 4,000 students from local schools and from the provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi.

Organizers said holding

such an event would have been impossible anywhere in Basilan when the Abu Sayyaf was still a serious threat to local security.

The venues of different athletic competitions during the regional meet in Sumisip were former bastions of the Abu Sayyaf.

The Abu Sayyaf, originally a small band of radical Islamists, first emerged in Basilan in the early 1990s and subsequently became a Mindanao cell of the Islamic State in the Middle East.

The group, now dominant only in Sulu, is feared for its practice of beheading captives if ransom demands are not met.

ARMM's education secretary Rasol Mitmug Jr. and Hataman have separately said the regional athletic meet was held in Sumisip to show that the province is now peaceful following the surrender of about 300 Abu Sayyaf gunmen in the past three years.

Priest who survived blasts leads cathedral cleanup

By ROEL PAREÑO

ZAMBOANGA CITY – A cleanup of the bombed-out Jolo cathedral has begun even as investigators have yet to finish their task of positively identifying the perpetrators of the carnage.

An interagency team began its cleanup work at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral last Friday, led by the priest who was officiating mass when two bombs exploded within seconds of each other – one inside and the other outside – immediately killing 21 people

and wounding 100 others. The 22nd victim died of her injuries last Thursday.

A joint investigation task group led by the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) has given the administrator of the cathedral the go signal to clear

the debris and rubble left by the Jan. 27 terror attack.

Fr. Jeff Nadua, a witness to the tragedy, said the church will remain closed to the public to give way to repairs. He didn't say for how long.

Turn to Page 2

Priest

From Page 1

As the cathedral was being cleared of debris, Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra complained about the difficulty faced by the NBI in gathering evidence due to possible contamination of the crime site.

"The NBI field operatives are encountering some difficulty because there have already been so many people who went in and out of the cathedral and may have accidentally moved the physical evidence," he said.

President Duterte and some of his key officials, including defense chief Delfin Lorenzana and PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde, had visited the blast site.

Involved in the cleanup were local government workers and firefighters as well as volunteers from the Muslim community.

The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) has extended funding assistance for the repair of the cathedral.

The assistance was presented Friday by Abe Macacua, ARMM-Humanitarian Emergency Action Response Team (ARMM-HEART) logistic officer on behalf of Gov. Mujiv Hataman.

Macacua, representing Hataman and ARMM's Social Welfare Secretary Laisa Alamia Masuhud, visited Fr. Romy Saniel, administrator of the Vicariate of Jolo, to discuss further assistance as well as express their solidarity with Christians.

Saniel was reportedly overwhelmed by offers of help from ARMM, which also extended P30,000 each to the families of the victims.

Hataman also provided P20,000 assistance to victims confined at hospitals in ARMM.

With President Duterte's tagging suicide bombers as responsible for the carnage, authorities are now eyeing such angle - after initially dismissing it.

Guevarra said an NBI team sent to Jolo early last week to assist in the investigation would try to pinpoint the identities of the perpetrators of the terror attack.

"The NBI is investigating all possible angles," Guevarra said.

He also revealed he has not set any deadline for the conclusion of their investigation.

The NBI, he said, would also investigate possible connection of the cathedral explosion to the grenade attack on a mosque in Zamboanga City on Jan. 30. The mosque attack killed two Islamic preachers.

New offensive

Amid heightened security in Mindanao, Army rangers encountered some 100 Abu Sayyaf fighters in the jungles of Patikul town in Sulu.

The troops from the 5th Scout Ranger Battalion under Lt. Col. Marlo Jomalesa chanced upon the group of Abu Sayyaf leader Hajan Sawadjaan at about 11:30 p.m. in sitio Sungkog, Barangay Kabbon Takas.

Col. Gerry Besana, spokesman for the Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom), said

the fighting was intense.

Based on initial reports, the terror group sustained an undetermined number of casualties. There were no immediate reports of casualties on the government side, he added.

A day after the Jolo cathedral blast, President Duterte ordered the military to pulverize the Abu Sayyaf. Airstrikes and shelling of suspected terror hideouts in the jungles followed Duterte's order.

Besana said more troops have also been deployed for blocking mission, to prevent Abu Sayyaf guerrillas from slipping out of their besieged jungle positions.

The military official maintained the military operation was away from civilian communities.

But some 350 families from the nearby villages of Patikul have fled to safer ground for fear they would be caught in the crossfire.

Despite the offensive, the military is again appealing to the public for calm and sobriety as misinformation and fake bomb threats continue to circulate in Mindanao.

Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Philippine Army's 6th Infantry Division, assured the public that government forces are on top of the situation.

He admitted that the Jolo and Zamboanga City incidents had caused fear among the people, and that some were taking advantage of the situation to further sow fear.

Sobejana said he has directed all units under his command to be always on alert level and to secure all places of worship and public places.

"We will also further intensify our intelligence efforts and initiate pro-active security measures to thwart possible hostile plans," he said.

Avoid sharing messages

He appealed to the public not to spread unverified messages of possible terror attacks.

"Peace and security is everybody's responsibility. Hence, report to the authorities any security related issues for the safety of everyone," he said.

"Moreover, I am appealing for sobriety and request everyone to stop spreading unverified stories and reports that could aggravate the current situation in the affected areas," he added.

The military is "on top of the situation and we have enough forces to protect the people and secure the area" in partnership with local government units and other stakeholders, he said.

"I call on everyone to be united in our will to resolve the current security threat and look for just and lasting peace," he added.

"Rest assured that in public service, we are never above you, we are never below but always beside you," he stressed.

Prayer for peace

Meanwhile, an interfaith movement has set noon of Feb. 7 as a time for a nationwide prayer for peace.

In a statement, the PasaLord Movement said among those who would be joining them are leaders of the Philippine Navy (PN) who committed to enjoin their troops to join in the nationwide prayer.

PasaLord Movement founder-convenor Bing Pimentel said their aim is to unite Filipinos of various creeds and denominations to pray for peace in the Philippines.

"This synchronized prayer will be a historic occasion. Never has the Philippines or any country in the world paused all their activities for a moment to lift the nation up to God Almighty," Pimentel said.

- With Evelyn Macairan, Michael Punongbayan

05

February 2019

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Page:

A6

TAN FEARS WHITEWASH, INVITES RIGHTS GROUPS

NBI LOOKS INTO BOMBINGS, BUT JOLO MAYOR WANTS INDEPENDENT PROBE

By Julie Allpala
and Jerome Aning
@Team_Inquirer

The National Bureau of Investigation is conducting its own probe of the deadly bomb attack on a Catholic church in Jolo, Sulu province, and a small mosque in Zamboanga City, Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra said on Saturday.

Guevarra ordered the investigation a day after Jolo Mayor Kherkar Tan reiterated his call for an independent investigation by human rights groups while expressing doubts about the government security measures before the blasts.

"The NBI is investigating all possible angles. The NBI will also include the bombing of the mosque [because] there might be a connection," Guevarra said in a statement.

He said investigators in Jolo were hampered by the state of the preservation of the crime scene.

"Our field operatives are encountering some difficulty because so many people have come in and out of the cathedral and may have accidentally moved the physical evidence," Guevarra said.

Mayor airs appeal

The twin explosions at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo on Jan. 27 killed 22 people and left more than 100 others wounded.

Two days later, a grenade was lobbed into the mosque at Barangay Talon-Talon in Zamboanga City, killing two Islamic preachers, wounding four others, and fanning speculation

that the attack was in retaliation for the church bombing.

In an interview with the Inquirer, Tan appealed to local and international human rights groups to come to Jolo and investigate the church bombings.

"I am asking human rights groups to come here, do an independent factfinding. I fear this bombing might end up being whitewashed," Tan said.

Residents as well as the families of the victims who either died or were wounded in the twin blasts refused to believe claims by President Duterte and other government officials that Indonesian suicide bombers may have carried out the attack.

'Tightly secured'

Instead, they wanted security forces to answer why the bomber was able to get inside the cordoned-off area and evade the tight security implemented around the cathedral as early as seven months ago.

"The church [was] tightly secured, very secured. Troops [frisked and inspected the belongings of] every person trying to get into the premises, we are not that stupid to buy this (suicide bomber) theory," said Eugene Non, a son of Fe Non, who died in the blast on the day he celebrated his birthday.

Based on the security plan of the Metro Jolo Inter-Agency Task Group, the cathedral, including the Notre Dame building, and the office of the Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo, had been cordoned off as early as August last year.

Roadblocks and checkpoints manned by soldiers of the Army's

35th Infantry Battalion were erected on five roads—General Arulas Street, Buyon Street, Travesia Road, Sanchez Road and Muralla Road—which lead to the two church structures.

Other people interviewed by the Inquirer could not understand how government security forces in the cordoned-off section, called Walled City, failed to detect the bombs or apprehend their carriers.

"For six to seven months, the church had been highly secured, soldiers had kept people out and people were not allowed even to touch the cor-

dón," said Fr. Romeo Saniel, OMI, apostolic administrator of the Jolo vicariate.

Saniel called for justice for the victims and for security forces to be made accountable.

'A big question'

Tan said it was "a big question to all of us here" why a bomb got through. "No vehicle was allowed to pass in front of the cathedral. No vehicle, not even a motorbike, was allowed to park nearby," he said.

Arthur de los Reyes, whose wife Daisy also died in the blast, said even getting inside the

cathedral was difficult.

"Our bags, even our small items, were thoroughly inspected, so [we cannot accept] these recent reports that a man and woman were able to get inside with a backpack. How?" he said.

"There were security lapses," he said. "We want them to be accountable for that. I lost my wife. I and my daughter, Angel, are still nursing our wounds [from the blast]," De los Reyes said. *M*

Ridzmar Mukadil, the only Muslim killed in the attack, was the sole breadwinner of his family in Barangay Godinez. A shoe repairman, he was also the only

person allowed to stay outside the cathedral every Sunday.

But although family members already accepted his death, they also wanted to know why the explosions took place in the tightly secured area.

Ghost town at 8 p.m.

The hut where Mukadil lived was covered with posters which read, "Yes to Bangsamoro Organic Law."

Midz Aslirin, a pedicab driver, said the road to the cathedral was opened to the public only on Sundays.

"It was opened in one direction only. You could not pass through if you did not have an ID," he said.

Before the bombing and despite the threats, Tan said Jolo's economy flourished.

"Life here was so alive despite the imposition of martial law. But now, at 8 p.m., Jolo looks like a ghost town," he said.

Everything under control

Senior Supt. Pablo Labra II, police director of Sulu, said security forces had imposed a lockdown around the cathedral because of previous bomb threats.

"But incidents like bombing happened. It doesn't mean we are remiss (in our duty) or there had been negligence in securing the place. What we do, we just focus on our work," Labra said.

Col. Gerald Monfort, spokesperson for the Army's 11th Infantry Division, denied rumors that residents were at risk of being shot and killed by security forces if they were found outside their homes after 9 p.m. INQ

Clashes ongoing in Sulu

By ZEA C. CAPISTRANO

DAVAO CITY — Government troops encountered about 100 fighters of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Patikul, Sulu Saturday morning.

In a text message to The Manila Bulletin, Lt. Col. Gerry Besana, spokesman of the Sixth Infantry Division (6th ID), said the encounter occurred at around 11:30 a.m. on Saturday in Sitio Sungkog, Barangay Kabbon Taka.

He said troops of the Fifth Scout Ranger Battalion encountered the group of Hajan Sawadjaan. 12

Firefight was still ongoing, according to Besana, who added that there was, so far, no reportedly casualty on the side of the government.

Maguindanao Moro clan war settled

CAMP SIONGCO, Maguindanao (PNA) — Moro families locked in a long-standing family feud that has claimed lives from both sides agreed on Friday to bury the hatchet, and end their bloody war with the help of the Philippine Army.

Using a diplomatic approach, the Army's 37th Infantry Battalion (IB) settled the feud between the two families in Buldon, Maguindanao in a simple ceremony held at the 37th IB Alpha Company command post in Sitio Bura, Barangay Oring, Buldon, Maguindanao.

Lt. Col. Roberlo Go Jr., 37th IB commander, said the families of Ape, Mangurong, and Tabubong of Barangay Edcor were engaged in a long-drawn feud, or "rido", with the family of Mismar of Barangay Nuyo.

"It started from a deer hunting trip when one of the family members of the Ape-Mangurong family accidentally shot and caused the untimely death of a member of the family of Mismar," Go said.

Attacks and counter-attacks have since become the order of the day for both clans, which are even related with each other by blood, until the Army intervened.

03

February 2019

The Manila Times

Page:

A1

Foreign terrorist slain in Sulu clash

BY ROY D.R. NARRA

A FOREIGN terrorist was among those killed when soldiers clashed with more than 100 members of the Abu Sayyaf Group in Patikul, Sulu on Saturday, the military said.

Lt. Col. Gerald Monfort, spokesman for Joint Task

Force Sulu, said the for-

eign terrorist, identified as Abu Black, was among the 150 Abu Sayyaf rebels who battled members of the 5th Scout Ranger Battalion at Sitio Sungkogan in Barangay Kabbon Takas.

The military is yet to determine Abu Black's nationality.

"Someone [identified] as Abu Black [was] among the terrorists killed. We still don't know his nationality," Monfort

said in a news briefing. He added that two other, Abu Sayyaf rebels died in the hour-long clash, while 13 others were injured.

The fierce firefight in the rebels' mountain lair also left five soldiers dead and five others injured, Monfort said.

He added that the group that clashed with soldiers was led by Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, who was

Clash A2

CLASH FROM A1

Foreign terrorist

allegedly involved in the twin bombings at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo, Sulu on January 27.

"The fight between the two [groups] was intense since our troops were trying to capture the high ground," Monfort said.

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año on Friday confirmed that Indonesian suicide bombers were behind the Jolo blasts.

An intelligence source said the terrorists, a man and a woman, came into contact with the group controlled by Sawadjaan, whose Ajang-Ajang subgroup ran errands for the Abu Sayyaf kidnap and terror group.

Based on eyewitness accounts, the woman brought the bag containing the bomb, and placed it on one of the pews. She detonated it from a distance.

"The second IED (improvised

explosive device) was believed to have been detonated by the man himself with the bag attached to his body," the source said.

Col. Noel Detoyato, military public affairs chief, confirmed that the two sets of body parts were recovered by authorities in Jolo.

Soldiers also fought members of the Ajang-ajang faction on Thursday, but no casualties were reported.

Immediately after the Jolo cathedral attack, the military launched air strikes on the lairs of Abu Sayyaf rebels, in compliance with the order of President Rodrigo Duterte to crush the terrorist group.

The President on Saturday sought the help of local officials in fighting terrorism.

In his message at the Barangay Summit on Peace and Order in Palo, Leyte, Duterte vowed to do

his best to preserve and protect the nation, but that he would need the cooperation of communities.

"It is imperative for our local communities to contribute to this undertaking by advocating and implementing policies and programs that strengthen the government's campaign against illegal drugs, criminality, corruption and terrorism," Duterte said.

"Peace and order and the adherence to the rule of law are vital in ensuring the progress of a nation," he added.

The President expressed hope that local leaders would unite to fight threats to their localities.

High alert

The terror attacks in Mindanao also prompted the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) in Iloilo to heighten its alert status.

PCG-Iloilo commander, Lt. Commander Rodolfo dela Peña, said 20 PCG personnel were deployed to Iloilo and Guimaras to augment the security force there.

"We had doubled our efforts in ensuring the safety of inbound and outbound passengers last Dinagyang Festival. Now, I can say that our efforts tripled," dela Peña said.

He said security measures were aimed to prevent the entry of any terror group.

The PCG in Western Visayas said it was possible for some terror groups to penetrate the island through motorized *bancas*, thus the need for regular shore patrols, dela Peña said.

"We continue to monitor our shores since terror groups might gain access to Iloilo through the waters," he said.

He said cargo trucks and roll-on, roll-off (RoRo) vessels coming in and out of Iloilo ports, as well as the baggage of inbound and outbound passengers will be thoroughly screened.

Dela Peña called on village officials to report strangers in their neighborhood.

WITH CATHERINE
VALENTE AND PNA

Military helps settle Maguindanao *rido*

Government troops based in Maguindanao yesterday reported that they successfully helped settle the bloody four-year feud or "rido" between four influential families in Buldon town.

"Rido" is a Moro term which means bloody family feud resulting in prolonged violence in areas that they happen.

Lt. Col. Roberto Go Jr., commander of 37th Infantry Battalion, said he along with Buldon Mayor Abolais Manalao, Vice Mayor Cairudin Pangunutan and Barangay Nuyo Chairman Ali Gumaga, served as a witness as the warring families decided to bury the hatchet.

"Rido" is a Moro term which means bloody family feud resulting in prolonged violence in areas that

they happen.

Go said they helped settle the feud involving the families of Ape, Mangurong and Tabubong from Barangay Edecor with the Misnar family from Barangay Nuyo of Buldon town.

According to reports, a deer hunting trip by the families of Ape, Mangurong and Tabubong had gone wrong, when one of their family members accidentally shot and killed a member of Misnar family.

The incident triggered the "rido" which is common in Buldon.

Because of the growing violence, the military decided to step in and helped settle the feud.

The move resulted in both families surrendering their firearms and vowing to stop the bloodbath.

KMB

Tribune

Terror leader slain

Troops of the 5th Scout Ranger Battalion under Lt. Col. Marlo Jomalesa encountered more or less 100 ASG members under Sawadjaan that prompted an exchange of fire

President Duterte's order for an all-out war against terror neutralized a "high-value target" under Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan but cost the lives of five soldiers while five others were wounded in an armed clash between state forces and the ASG in Patikul, Sulu yesterday. **Turn to page 2**

Terror leader slain

I ordered you to destroy the organization. I'm ordering you now: pulverize the Abu Sayyaf by whatever means

From page 1

Another ASG leader, Indang Susukan, reportedly lost an arm in the skirmish.

Col. Gerry Besana, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Western Mindanao Command spokesman, estimated three were killed and more than 15 were injured among the bandits.

The President ordered state forces to crush the ASG which had pledged allegiance to the

Islamic State (IS) in an all-out war campaign after the twin bombings of the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo that killed 21 people.

Besana said the firefight happened at a "thickly vegetated" area in Sitio Sungkog, Barangay Kabbon Takas in Patikul around 11:30 a.m. and lasted for almost two hours.

"The enemy force is still strong in this area so our troops are still having a hard time due to the thick vegetation," he said.

Apart from the firefight on the ground, the military is also conducting air strikes against the ASG. Joint Task Force Sulu commander Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabayo said the conflict was still ongoing.

The Joint Task Force Sulu reported troops of the 5th Scout Ranger Battalion under Lt. Col. Marlo Jomalesa encountered more or less 100 ASG members under Sawadjaan that prompted an exchange of fire.

Preserve the country

Last 29 January, Mr. Duterte ordered the military to "pulverize" the terror group which was implicated in the bombing.

"I ordered you to destroy

the organization. I'm ordering you now: pulverize the Abu Sayyaf by whatever means," the Commander-in-Chief strongly mandated the government's forces after the Islamic State, through their local counterpart Abu Sayyaf," he said.

"So what you can do is if you are about to conduct bombings, tell the people to move out. Put them in a place and the government will pay for their needs. Then let go of the bullets," he added.

"Our duty is to protect the Filipino people. And second is that we have to preserve the nation. If we lose Jolo, even just one island, well, we have failed in our mission to preserve the territory of the Republic of the Philippines," he said.

The Abu Sayyaf has "no ideology" and declared loyalty to the "evil movement" of IS.

The President expressed outrage over the terrorist attacks in the Jolo church and said despite the presence of rebellious groups such as the Moro National Liberation Front of Nur Misuari in Jolo, the Christians and Joloanos "continue to live in

peace together."

"The Abu Sayyaf has "no ideology" and declared loyalty to the "evil movement" of IS," Mr. Duterte said.

AFP not convinced

Despite statements from the Department of National Defense (DND) and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) that suicide bombers were responsible for the deadly bombings, the AFP said it is not yet convinced that these were cases of suicide bombings.

AFP spokesman Brig. Gen. Edgard Arevalo said initial investigations have found other leads that discounted the possibility of a suicide bombing, noting that the military earlier had announced that investigations revealed the improvised explosive device that went off inside the cathedral was "remotely" detonated and that this would already dispel reports of a suicide bombing.

"There were other leads in the initial investigation that can rule out suicide bombing," Arevalo said despite President Rodrigo Duterte, DND Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and Interior Secretary Eduardo Año's statements that it was indeed a suicide bombing.

5 soldiers killed in clash with Abu bandits in Sulu¹⁴

HEAVY fighting erupted yesterday between government troops and an estimated 100 heavily-armed Abu Sayyaf bandits in Patikul, Sulu, killing five soldiers dead and five others wounded.

The Joint Task Force Sulu is validating an intelligence information that three bandits were also killed while 13 others also on the enemy side were injured in the exchange of fire.

The clash occurred as troops pressed their hunt for a suspect in last Sunday's bombing at the Jolo Cathedral which killed 22 and injured at least 100 others.

The fighting erupted when members of the Army's 5th Scout Ranger Battalion accidentally crossed the path of Abu Sayyaf gunmen led by Commander Hajan Sawadjaan in Bgy. Kabon Takas in Patikul around 11 a.m. yesterday.

Sawadjaan is wanted for his reported involvement in the deadly church bombing in Jolo.

There were reports that the group of elusive Abu Sayyaf Commander

Radullan Sahiron alias Commander Putol reinforced the group of Sawadjaan, triggering heavy fighting.

Sahiron is the subject of a US\$1 million bounty offered by the United States government. He is wanted for his alleged involvement in the kidnapping of an American citizen on November 14, 1993; the infamous May 2001 Dos Palmas kidnappings of U.S. nationals Martin and Gracia Burnham and 17 Filipinos, and the killing of dozens of security forces in ambushes in Sulu.

More military and police reinforcements were sent to the area as police went on full alert in the entire province and the rest of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to thwart more Abu Sayyaf offensives, including bombings.

The government troops were led by Lt. Col. Marlo Jomalesa, said Armed Forces Western Mindanao Command spokesman Lt. Col. Gerry Basana.

The encounter occurred days after Air Force helicopter gunships

By Alfred Dalizon

pounded some Abu Sayyaf targets in Patikul although a source said that the aerial attack was "very limited" since the military doesn't want to hit the civilian populace.

Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año had said that Indonesian suicide bombers guided by the Abu Sayyaf group were the culprits in the Jolo church bombing, making him the latest top security official to affirm President Rodrigo Duterte's earlier claim.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana also said he believes suicide bombers were responsible for the twin blasts. He said forensic investigators of the Philippine National Police are looking at body parts, saying these could belong to two persons.

Police officials involved in the investigation of the twin bombings maintained that accounts from witnesses and pieces of physical evidence "were pointing or lead-

ing to a suicide bombing scenario," said PNP spokesman Sr. Supt. Bernard Banac.

"Actually, DNA testing is still being done, so we're just waiting now for the results to determine that indeed, the body parts came from one or two persons that may lead to the conclusion that the attack was a suicide bombing," said Banac.

The 22nd victim, Thelma Villanueva, died on Thursday at the Zamboanga City Medical Center.

Of the 22 killed, six were soldiers, one was a member of the Philippine Coast Guard, and 15 were civilians. The wounded were 14 soldiers, two Coast Guard servicemen and 85 civilians.

The bombing has angered President Duterte who ordered a complete lockdown of Jolo.

HIGHTENED ALERT IN MAGUINDANAO

Philippine Army 6th Infantry Division commander Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana ordered his men to secure all places of worship, public places and places of convergence

in Maguindanao to prevent a repeat of the deadly twin blasts at the Jolo Cathedral and the bombing of a mosque in Zamboanga City.

He also ordered his men to intensify their intelligence efforts and initiate pro-active security measures to thwart attacks.

The move was made to lessen the fear among the residents after messages circulated on social media threatening more bombings.

Sobejana appealed to the public not to spread annoying messaging that would frighten the populace.

"We appeal to the public not to spread annoying messages unless verified to be true. I am asking for sobriety and request everyone to stop from spreading unverified stories and reports that could aggravate the current situation in the affected areas," Sobejana said.

The official assured that the AFP is on top of the situation and have enough forces to protect the people.

With Zalda delos Reyes

Kuta ng terorista sa Maguindanao binomba

Naglunsad kahapon ng air strike operations ang militar sa pinagkukutaan ng Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters-Daesh, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) inspired terror group sa Sitio Tatak, Brgy. Tugal, Sultan sa Barongis, Maguindanao kahapon ng umaga.

Avon kay Major

Arvin Encinas, tagapagsalita ng 6th Infantry Division (ID) ng Philippine Army, dakong alas-6:00 ng umaga nang simulan ang air strike operation.

Sinabi ni Encinas, nagresulta ang operasyon sa pagkasira ng mga bunkers at foxholes sa nasabing kuta na pinagkakanlungan

ng tinatayang nasa 20 Daesh inspired terrorist groups.

Nabatid na nakatanggap ng Intelligence report ang Army's 6th ID na tinatayang 30-40 dayuhang terorista ang posibleng nakapasok sa Central Mindanao at nagbabalak maghahalik ng terorismo. (Joy Cantos)

Suicide bombers sa 'Pinas 'Nakakaalarma', ayon kay Lacson

Maging si Senator Panfilo "Ping" Lacson, dating hepe ng Philippine National Police, ay nagpahayag ng pagkaalarma sa pahayag ni Interior Secretary Eduardo Año na dalawang Indonesian suicide bombers ang nasa likod umano ng dalawang pagsabog sa Jolo, Sulu.

Ayon kay Lacson, Ito ang unang pagkakataon na nagkaroon ng suicide bombing sa Pilipinas dahil dati naman ay naka-remote control ang pagpapasabog ng bomba.

"Alarming. Kasi kung babalikan natin, ngayon lang nagkaroon ng suicide bombing sa Pilipinas. Dati nakatanim ang bomba, remote control," sabi ni Lacson.

Idinagdag ni Lacson na dapat maalarma ang lahat dahil mas lalong nagiging "deadly" at delikado ang sitwasyon kapag nakapasok sa bansa ang mga suicide bombers.

Nagbabala rin si Lacson sa posibilidad na mismong mga Filipino ang maging suicide bombers dahil tiyak na magiging madalas ito.

Pinayuhan ni Lacson ang Armed Forces of the Philippines na magbuo ng isang composite task force na tututok sa Jolo bombing upang ma-reconstruct ang crime scene at maging mas malalim ang imbestigasyon. (Malou Escudero)

Troops in hot pursuit of BIFF in Maguindanao

By ALI G. MACABALANG

COTABATO CITY — Backed by airstrikes, soldiers continued their hot pursuit Saturday of a group of Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) who were sighted in Sultan-sa-Barongis, Maguindanao, a military official said.

Capt. Arvin Encinas, head of the Sixth Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, said the strike started at about 6 a.m., which was promptly followed by ground troops, who combed through Barangay Tugal in Sultan-sa-Barongis town where more than 20 followers of Solaiman Hassan under the BIFF-Abu

Toraife faction were spotted.

"We are still monitoring the result of the operation," Encinas told The Manila Bulletin Saturday noon.

He said the operation was "surgical" in nature wherein troops were under instruction to ensure the safety of innocent civilians as much as possible.

The Toraife faction in the BIFF has been tagged as Islamic State (ISIS)-inspired and operates in Maguindanao.

Two other BIFF factions are expected to return to the folds of law if the proposed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) is put in place, according to officials of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front

(MILF).

The creation of BARMM was prescribed under Republic Act 11054 or the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), which was ratified overwhelmingly in the January 21 plebiscite across the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

The Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion (33IB), which is involved in the current military offensive, provided 120 households in Barangay Tugal with solar-rechargeable flash lights and six lamps with posts last week. The barangay remains without electricity and is located on the banks of the Liguasan Marsh. 12

Military launches airstrikes vs BIFF faction in Maguindanao

COTABATO CITY – The military launched airstrikes against Islamic State-inspired members of the outlawed Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters in Maguindanao yesterday.

Capt. Arvin Encinas, head of the Army 6th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, said the airstrikes in Barangay Tugal in Sultan-sa-Barongis in support of troops hunting more than 20 followers of Solaiman Hassan under the BIFF-Abu Toralife faction started at about 6 a.m.

"We are still monitoring the result of the operation," Encinas said.

He said the operation was "surgical" in nature in which troops were under instruction to ensure safety of innocent civilians as much as possible.

The Toralife faction of the BIFF has been tagged as an IS-inspired band in Maguindanao.

Two other BIFF factions are likely inclined to join the fold of law if the proposed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim

Mindanao is put in place and shows favorable functions, according to officials of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The creation of BARMM is prescribed under Republic Act 11054 or the Bangsamoro Organic Law, which was ratified overwhelmingly in the Jan. 21 plebiscite across the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, which the new entity will replace and absorb. (Ali Macabalang and Martin Sadongdong)

Kuta ng BIFF, pinaulanan ng bomba

NI MARTIN A. SADONGDONG

Upang tuluyang dunugin ang mga grupong terorista sa Mindanao, naglunsad ang militar kahapon ng umaga ng matinding surgical air, artillery, at ground operations sa natukoy na kuta ng Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters sa isang bayan sa Maguindanao.

Sinabi ni Major Arvin Encinas, hepe ng Public Affairs Office ng 6th Infantry Division (6ID) ng Philippine Army, na nagsagawa ang Joint Task Force Central (JTFC) ng pinaigling na operasyon sa Sitio Tatak, Barangay Tugal, Sultan Sa Barongis, Maguindanao bandang 6:00 ng umaga.

Ayon kay Encinas, gumamit ang JTFC ng dalawang OV-10 bomber plane nang patulanan nito ng hindi bababa sa walong 250-pound aerial bombs sa mga kuta ng BIFF, kung saan nasa 20 teroristang naiimpluwensiyahan ng Islamic State of

Iraq and Syria (ISIS) ang nakatira, sa ilalim ni Salahudin Hassan.

Kabilang si Hassan sa mga binanggit sa reklamong inihain ng Police Regional Office (PRO)-12 laban kay Abu Toraife, lider ng paksiyon ng BIFF na nagdeklara ng suporta sa ISIS.

Ang reklamo ay may kaugnayan sa pambobomba sa isang internet café sa Isulan, Sultan Kudarat noong Setyembre 2, 2018, na nagresulta sa pagkamatay ng dalawang katao, at pagkasugat ng 14 na iba pa.

I habang isinusulat ang balitang ito, sinabini Encinas na walang impormasyon ang militar sa naging resulta ng airstrikes, partikular sa mga nasawi o nasugatan.

Gayunman, tiniyak ni Encinas na nawasak ng operasyon ang kuta ng BIFF sa lugar.

Sinabi naman ni Major General Cirilito

Sobejana, commander ng JTFC, na naka-full alert ang militar sa ngayon matapos nilang matanggap ang intelligence report na may 40 dayuhang terorista ang nakapasok sa bansa.

Sa Patikul, Sulu, nakaengkuwentro ng militar ang nasa 100 miyembro ng Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) kahapon ng umaga.

Sa text message sa BALITA, sinabi ni Lt. Gerry Besana, na nangyari ang sagupaan bandang 11:30 ng umaga sa Sitio Sungkog, Barangay Kabbon Taka sa Patikul.

Aniya, nakaengkuwentro ng 5th Scout Ranger Battalion ang grupo ni Hajan Sawadjaan, at kasalukuyan pang nangyayari ang bakbakan habang isinusulat ang balitang ito.

May ulat ni Zea C. Capistrano

'Yes' for peace, No' to violence – MILF

BY MASIDING NOOR YAHYA

ILIGAN CITY: "Vote 'Yes' for peace and 'No' to continued violence." This was the message of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) top commander in a statement urging the people of Lanao del Norte to vote 'Yes' on February 6, the second plebiscite for the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

On the other hand, the Dimaporo clan in Lanao del Norte is strongly opposed to the inclusion of six towns in Lanao del

Norte in the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). These are Balo-i, Munai, Nunungan,

Pantar, Tagoloan and Tangkal.

In a video post, the controversial commander of the MILF Northwestern Mindanao Command Abdullah Macapaar, popularly known as Commander Bravo, appealed to voters for unity and peace to vote "Yes" on February 6 for the inclusion of the six municipalities in the BARMM.

He expressed his group's appeal to all voters in Lanao del Norte to vote "Yes" for peace and prosperity and for the future of their children.

"We don't want war," the MILF commander said. "Your

vote for 'Yes' means that you want peace and you give us the opportunity to live in peace and we will take this as a debt of gratitude."

"But if you vote 'No,' you violate our right to live in peace," he added, noting that is what the MILF and the government are avoiding as it may result in conflict in Lanao del Norte.

The second Bangsamoro plebiscite on February 6 will be held in the six towns of Lanao del Norte and 67 *barangay* (villages) in North Cotabato.

The first plebiscite held on

January 21 resulted in a big "Yes" win for the BOL in the existing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao as well as in Cotabato City.

This is the culmination of the peace process began by the Aquino 3rd administration and the MILF aimed at granting genuine self-rule for Moros and ending decades of conflict in the region.

During the Arroyo's administration, Commander Bravo attacked communities in Lanao del Norte when peace negotiations bogged down.

In January, Secretary Car-

lito Galvez Jr. of the Office of the Presidential Assistant for the Peace Process brokered a dialogue between Bravo and the Dimaporos to ensure a peaceful plebiscite in Lanao del Norte. Both parties promised that there would be no violence during the conduct of the plebiscite.

Meanwhile, in a news briefing in Cagayan de Oro on Friday, Salahoden Benhamza, legal officer for the MILF's Northwestern Mindanao Command, said a "No" vote could disenfranchise Moro youth, and this might encourage them to rise up and rebel. **K2**

'Yes' for peace, 'No' to violence – MILF

BY ROY D.R. NARRA

THE Armed Forces of the Philippines called on the public to refrain from sharing unverified reports of possible bombing incidents as these could spread fear or worsen the security situation.

Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the 6th Infantry Division, issued the statement following reports that some individuals have circulated messages on social media on alleged threats of bombings in some areas.

He said the bomb threats circulating on social media were

unverified.

"With the very volatile situation, there are some individuals who are circulating messages in the social media threatening the public of more bombings has triggered fear among the populace," Sobejana said. "I am appealing for sobriety and request everyone to stop from

spreading unverified stories and reports that could aggravate the current situations in the affected areas."

The military official assured the public that security officials have taken steps to protect the people.

He said troops under his command have been ordered to guard

areas of convergence, including places of worship.

"We will also further intensify our intelligence efforts and initiate pro-active security measures to thwart possible hostile plans. We appeal to the public not to spread annoying messages unless verified to be true," Sobejana said. *AN*

03

February 2019

Standard
TODAY

Page:

A1

'SUICIDE BOMB' THEORY SPLITS PALACE, AFP

By Joel Zurbano

MILITARY authorities appear skeptical the twin explosions in Jolo last weekend were suicide bombings despite claims they were by President Rodrigo Duterte and Interior Secretary Eduardo Año.

Año said Indonesian suicide bombers guided by the Abu Sayyaf group were the culprits.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on Friday also said he believed suicide bombers were responsible for the blasts, adding forensic investigators of the

Turn to A2

43

'SUICIDE BOMB'...

From A1

Philippine National Police were looking at body parts, saying these could belong to two persons—one inside the church and another outside.

The bombings immediately sent a security ripple in the country's major airport facilities while the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines activated Airport Security Committees to prepare against threats of terror and provide safe air transport services to the riding public.

The AFP had said initial investigation suggested the improvised explo-

sive device (IED) that went off inside the cathedral was "remotely" detonated, and that this would already dispel reports of a suicide bombing.

In Manila, the Ninoy Aquino International Airport-Office for Transportation Security instructed personnel to make simultaneous checking of all passengers entering at the initial and final security check to ensure that no firearms or explosives could be smuggled into four airport terminals.

Last Monday, the CAAP initiated security committee meetings in its 12 area centers nationwide to revisit and update the airports' contingency plans and simulate bomb incident management exercises.

The authorities discussed various

areas of security including aircraft security checks upon disembarkation, aircraft access management, mandatory removal of shoes, In-Flight Catering Security Plan development, and random searches using the Explosive Trace Detection System.

In the landside and airside areas of airport security, measures such as the deployment of behavioral observation personnel at the passenger terminal building front-of-the-house and landside parking area, increasing security patrol visibility, deployment of government armored assets, K9 Explosive Detection Units, and bomb squad, and the development of a strong security culture amongst airport

stakeholders were discussed.

The committee also discussed updates on the observance and implementation of the (OTS) Security Condition 2 (SECCO 2).

In compliance with the International Civil Aviation Organization's current National Civil Aviation Security Program and Airport Security Program, SECCO 2 is defined as verifiable intelligence indicating the probability that civil aviation operations have been targeted for attack.

"SECCO 2 requires further security enhancement from aircraft operators and state agencies, such as the CAAP, to manage the risk of flights," said CAAP Media Communications chief and spokesman Eric Apolonio.

03

February 2019

Standard
TODAY

Page:

A1

ARMY-SAYYAF CLASH: 8 DEAD, 20 WOUNDED

By Francisco Tuyay

EIGHT people—five soldiers and three Abu Sayyaf bandits—were killed while more than 20 were wounded in an armed clash between government troops and an estimated 100 Abu Sayyaf in Patikul, Sulu on Saturday, the military said.

Troops hunting down terrorists who engineered the Jolo Cathedral bombing in Jolo clashed anew, this time with a large concentration of the bandit group,

Turn to A2

Y

ARMY-SAYYAF...

From A1

among them a suspect in the twin blasts that killed 22 and hurt at least 100 others in the capital town of Jolo last week.

The "intense firefight" between the 5th Scout Ranger Battalion and the Abu Sayyaf members under a certain Hajan Sawadjaan erupted in Barangay Kabbon Takas shortly before noon, military officials told reporters.

Sawadjaan is an Abu Sayyaf leader believed to be involved in the bombings at the Jolo Cathedral during a Mass on

Jan. 27.

In his report, Col. Gerry Besana, spokesperson of the Western Mindanao Command, said the fighting started at about 11:30 a.m. and raged on to late afternoon.

The gun battle entered its fourth day after the awful bomb attack labeled as a suicide bombing, apparently pulled off by Indonesian Jihadist couple that claimed 22 people dead and wounded 123 others.

Besana said the fresh fighting erupted as troops from the 5th Scout Ranger Battalion under Lt. Col. Marlo Jomalesa encountered an estimated 100 heavily armed Abu Sayyaf militants under Hatib

Sawadjaan at Sitio Sungkog, Barangay Kabbon Takas in Patikul.

Initially, the ASG reportedly inflicted and undetermined number of casualties with government forces suffering no deaths.

There was no confirmation yet whether Sawadjaan was actually leading the large group of terrorists when spotted by soldiers on relentless pursuit against the enemy of the state.

Sawadjaan was classified as a notorious terrorist behind the killing of Canadians John Ridsdel and Robert Hall in 2016 and figured in the kidnapping of teachers in Basilan.

The terrorist sub-leader operates in

Sulu with hundreds of fighters equipped with sophisticated weapons.

On Wednesday, government forces pounded ASG positions in the ridges of Patikul, Sulu after President Rodrigo Duterte ordered troops to crush the terrorist group following the twin blasts in Mt. Carmel Church, sparking skirmishes.

The day after, a member of the Ajang-Ajang wing of the ASG under Sawadjaan, Ommal Usop, was killed in shootout with troops in Brgy Latih, Patikul town.

Besana identified Usop as one of 13 members of the Ajang-Ajang group responsible in the twin bombing in Mt. Carmel Church last Sunday.

JOIN WAR VS. CRIMINALITY, RODY URGES VILLAGE EXECS

By Vito Barcelo

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has urged all barangay officials to join the government's fight against all forms of criminality and illegal drugs, saying community officials play a vital role in ensuring peace and order in the country.

In his message during the Barangay Summit on Peace and Order in Palo, Leyte, as delivered by Interior Secretary Eduardo Año on Friday, Duterte said it is important that local communities participate in the government's campaign against what he calls the ills of the country.

"Peace and order and the adherence to the rule of law are vital in ensuring the progress of a nation," Duterte's message read.

"It is imperative for our local communities to contribute to this undertaking by advocating and implementing policies and programs

that strengthen the government's campaign against illegal drugs, criminality, corruption and terrorism," added the President, who was ill and did not make the event.

This developed as National Capital Region police chief Director Guillermo Eleazar on Saturday appealed to the public to remain calm and vigilant in the aftermath of the Jolo cathedral bombing that claimed 22 lives last Sunday.

Eleazar stressed there is no security threat against Metro Manila, even as government forces have stepped up attacks against the terrorist Abu

Sayyaf Group and the communist New People's Army.

The Philippine National Police have tightened security around churches and mosques in Metro Manila following the Jolo bombing, which also injured over 100 churchgoers.

"We have no reliable or confirmed threat here in Metro Manila, but we did the security inspections just the same to keep our police prepared and active, and to be more vigilant for the sake of our citizens," Eleazar told radio dzBB.

A unity prayer walk has been scheduled for Sunday to call for cooperation to achieve security, he added.

In Palo, the President via Año also expressed his gratitude to the barangay captains of Eastern Visayas for their unwavering commitment to eradicate the ills of the society.

"Our barangays play a crucial role in preserving and protecting the rights and freedoms of our citizenry. Indeed, it is in our local communities

that the values of social responsibility, civic duty and justice are fostered," Duterte said.

"I am confident that you will remain as this administration's reliable partners in implementing peace and order programs that ensure the safety and security of our communities and help uplift the lives of our countrymen," he added.

"Your support in these endeavors has indeed improved the capacity of our law enforcement agencies in defending our freedoms and liberties," the President said.

Duterte expressed hope the youth will be able to learn from their local communities about nation-building and selflessness.

"The result of your hard work serves as an inspiration for our people, especially the youth, to take part in the noble work of nation-building. May your selflessness further inspire your constituents to become agents of positive change as well," he said. *2



7 FOREIGN TERRORISTS NASA SULU!

Pitong foreign terrorist ang na-monitor ng militar na nagkakanlong at nagsasanay sa pinagkukutaan ng mga bandidong Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) na mga kasamahan umano ng mag-asawang suicide bombers sa Jolo Cathedral na kumitil sa buhay ng 22 katao habang mahigit pa sa 100 ang nasugatan noong Enero 27 ng taong ito.

Sa nakalap na intelligence report, nabatid na

ang pitong dayuhan ay kinabibilangan ng mga Moroccan, Indonesian at Malaysian na miyembro ng Islamic State of Iraq and Syria ang nagkakanlong at nagsasanay sa kagubatan ng lalawigan.

Sa isang panayam kay Jolo Mayor Kherkar Tan, sinabi nito na pitong teroristang dayuhan ang na-ireport sa kanyang tanggapan kasunod ng pahayag ni DILG Secretary Eduardo Año na mag-asawang dayuhang

NI JOY CANTOS

Indonesian ang suicide bombers sa Our Lady of Mount Carmel sa kapitolyo ng lalawigan.

Kasunod ng pag-utos ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte na pulbusin ang mga terorista, agad na nagsagawa ng air strike operations ang Philippine Air Force sa kuta ng mga bandido sa Brgy. Latih, Patikul, Sulu noong Miyerkules at sinundan naman ito ka-

hapon ng ground assault operation ng Army's 5th Scout Ranger dakong alas-11:30 ng tanghali nitong Sabado.

Sa natuprang bakbakan na tumagal ng halos 50 minuto, limang sundalo at tatlong miyembro ng Abu Sayyaf Group ang nasawi habang lima ang sugatan sa hanay ng militar at 15 naman sa panig ng mga kalaban.

Dahil sa naganap na bakbakan, daan-daang residente ang napilitang lumikas sa bisinidad ng Brgy. Kabbon Takas, Patikul at mga karatig

lugar sa matinding takot na maipit sa bakbakan.

Bakbakan sa Sulu: 5 sundalo, 3 Abu Sayyaf member patay

Limang sundalo at tatlong miyembro ng mga bandidong Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) ang nasawi habang marami pa ang nasugatan sa ground assault operation ng tropa ng militar sa pinagkukutaan ng lider ng ekstremistang grupo sa Patikul, Sulu nitong Sabado.

Ang Abu Sayyaf Group ang sinasabing nagkakanlong sa mga dayuhang terorista na namonitor sa Sulu at hinihinalang kasamahan ng mag-asawang nagsagawa ng suicide

bombing sa Jolo Cathedral noong nakaraang linggo.

Sa report ni Army's 11th Infantry Division at Joint Task Force (JTF) Sulu Commander Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabaya, dakong alas-11:30 ng umaga nang lusubin ng 5th Scout Ranger Battalion ng Philippine Army ang pinagkukutaan ni Abu Sayyaf Commander Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan.

Si Sawadjaan ang umano'y isa sa mastermind sa pambobomba sa Jolo Cathedral.

NI JOY CANTOS

Nabatid na limang sundalo at tatlong bandido ang napaslang na kinabibilangan ng isang hinihinalang dayuhang terorista sa mahigit dalawang oras na bakbakan.

Lima ring sundalo ang nasugatan habang sampu naman sa mga kalaban kabilang si Abu Sayyaf Sub Commander Indang Susukan.

Nabatid base sa intelligence report na pitong dayuhang terorista na kinabibilangan ng mga Indonesian at

Malaysian na miyembro ng Islamic State of Iraq and Syria ang nagkakanlong at nagsasanay sa Abu Sayyaf sa kagubatan ng lalawigan.

Si Sawadjaan ang pumalit sa dating lider ng Abu Sayyaf at Emir ng ISIS sa Southeast Asia na si Isnilon Hapilon na nasawi sa Marawi City siege noong 2017.

Una nang tinukoy ni Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana na nakatanggap siya ng intelligence report na mag-asawang Yemeni ang mga teroristang

suicide bombers sa Jolo Cathedral na itinaon sa misa ng simbahan.

Gayunman, sinabi naman ni Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año na base sa pinakahuling update ay mag-asawang Indonesian terrorists ang mga dayuhang suspect.

Base naman sa intelligence report, sa pitong dayuhang terorista na nasa Sulu na nagkakanlong sa mga kuta ng Abu Sayyaf, karamihan sa mga ito ay mga Moroccan.

Bomb Scare kumakalat sa social media

Binabalot ng bomb scare ang netizens kung saan maging sa social media partikular na sa facebook at twitter ay maraming mga babala ang mga itong natatang-gap hinggil sa umano'y bombang sasabog.

Ito'y sa kabila ng halos isang linggo na ang nakalilipas nang bombahin ang Jolo Cathedral sa Sulu noong Enero 27 na ikinasawi ng 22 katao habang mahigit pa sa 100 ang nasugatan.

Nitong Biyernes, nabulabog ang mga mali shoppers sa lungsod ng Zamboanga matapos na

mapagkamalang bomba ang isang naiwang bag kung saan nataranta ang mga tao pero nang magresponde ang mga awtoridad ay negatibo sa bomba ang nasabing mall.

Nabatid na labis na nag-aalala ang netizens kaugnay ng pangamba na muling maulit ang pambobomba ng mga teroristang grupo sa ibang mga lugar.

Dahil dito, nagbabala naman si Philippine National Police Spokesman P/Sr. Supt. Bernard Banac sa mga mapanakot na Indibid-

wal na nagpapakalat ng bomb threat sa social media na mananagot ang mga lito sa batas sa oras na matukoy ng mga awtoridad.

Nabatid na pinakilos na rin ng PNP ang Anti-Cybercrime Group ang mga operatiba nito upang matukoy ang mga nagpapakalat ng mga 'bomb hoax' sa social media tulad ng may mga terorista umano sa Metro Manila at target maglunsad ng pambobomba sa mga shopping malls at iba pang matataong lugar. (Joy Cantos)

'Mga tutol sa BOL pakinggan' - Leni

Inudyukan ni Vice President Leni Robredo ang pamahalaan na tingnan ang mga inaalala ng mga bumoto na tutol sa ratipikasyon ng Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL). Ayon kay Robredo, kinakailangan na marinig ang lahat ng tinig sa napipintong pagtatatag ng Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Tinanggihan ng Isabela City, Basilan at ng probinsiya ng Sulu ang BOL sa plebisito na naganap noong Enero 21. Iginlit ni Robredo na hindi masosolusyunan ng BOL ang deka-dekadang suliranin sa Mindanao. Ganunpaman ay naniniwala ang bise presidente na mahalagang instrumento pa rin ang BOL para sa mamamayan ng Mindanao, mga taong sa tingin nila'y matagal nang napabayaan at hindi makapagpahayag ng sarili.

SV

06

February 2019

THE PHILIPPINE
STAR

Page: 9

FROM A DISTANCE

CARMEN N. PEDROSA

Stoking a religious war in Mindanao

The latest report from the military pointed to an Indonesian couple suicide bombers behind the bombing of the cathedral in Jolo. It was followed by the bombing of a mosque in Zamboanga. The culprits may be found but there is a bigger picture to the incidents coming, as it did after the successful plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law a few days ago.



The twin bombings show partisans more interested in continuing the war by stoking a religious conflict. To them the bigger picture is to keep the war going using religious differences between Christianity and Islam.

The plebiscite showed the willingness of the majority to make peace as the will of the communities, whether Christian or Muslim. Both have lived together through many years so it is a flimsy excuse from warmongers to continue the war.

The Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy added their voice to the quest for peace. "We stand in solidarity with our Christian brothers and sisters in Jolo in the wake of the bombings that took the lives of 20 people and wounded countless others during mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel," it said in a press release yesterday.

"We pray for the full recovery of those injured and vehemently condemn this deliberate act of terrorism that may dilute the gains of peace achieved by the Bangsamoro People after the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law or BOL.

"As such, we urge the Filipino people, especially those in Mindanao to exercise caution and vigilance. This is the time for us to stand against these terrorists who seek to divide the Bangsamoro people and cast fear. We must recommit to protecting one another from threats of violence by reporting to the authorities suspicious movements of individuals or groups that threaten the peace and order situation in our communities.

"This incident is also a bleak reminder to all sectors of the urgency to address the issue of violent extremism in conflict-affected communities of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

"Thus, we call on government and stakeholders to act now and establish a national action plan that will develop systemic preventive steps to address the conditions that drive individuals to radicalize and join violent extremist groups and put in place security-based counter-terrorism measures.

"We also appeal to our leaders to take a rational and pragmatic approach to this crisis to prevent violence from further escalating in the region." - Amina Rasul, a known moderate is head of the group.

In my opinion, part of the pragmatism is to accept that a solution will not come quickly. It will evolve and will take many long years to achieve the sharing of political power and economic benefits between the Muslim and Christian parts of the Philippines.

The plebiscite was a first step in a long process.

I think it may be more acceptable if we were to separate the federalist principle of freedom than the difficulties on how to create a fully functioning federal state. The federal-

ist principle is freedom for communities to manage their economy as well as their political and justice systems.

The Bangsamoro organic law is designed to make that freedom possible without secession. The plebiscite was won for that purpose.

The Christian-Moro conflict if I may refer to that as such has a long history. And as my friend Dr. Michael Mastura said over and over again when he was still active with the MILF: the US has an obligation to resolve the Moro question because it was responsible for creating the mess in the first place. He blames it for incorporating Moroland, an independent entity as part of the Philippines. This official line is carried by the MILF. It is one view and by no means the only one. It has an ignoble streak. To others it seeks to justify foreign intervention with what should be an internal issue. It is a one-sided view of history.

In other countries federal states were independent before political union as is the case of the European Union. The reverse is more difficult to achieve and the reason why countries interested in the structure are discussing how to help each other. But we can begin with encouraging the federalist principle in the discussions in the Philippines.

Most Filipinos especially Christians are not aware that the mosque in Marawi is one of the oldest in the Philippines. When the Mautes and their foreign allies, ISIS attacked to take over the city, the origin of Islam in the Philippines was not considered.

Islam came before Christianity to trade with the Philippines. The Muslims fought in vain in the wars of colonialism of the Philippines. Bangsa Moro was incorporated as part of the defeated North. I do not favor the Mautes or their ISIS allies' rebellion and their chosen path of violence. But it will help us to understand the roots of the conflict.

Federalism would give Bangsamoro some political control of their region while staying within the nation state of the Philippines.

There are more than 25 countries in the world today that have federal systems of government. That means more than 40 percent of the world are governed by a federal system in one form or another.

According to political experts, federalism is emerging as the central ethos of an emerging civilization that recognizes both national and sub-national identities and promotes regional and global frameworks for better understanding, coordination and cooperation.

Today the champion of federalism in the Philippines is President Rody Duterte who is from Mindanao.

He will work for the Philippines to stay as one country but with smaller communities with political clout to govern their communities.

With this kind of division, it is understandable why the local authorities are unable to support themselves. The unjust division is also one of the reasons why the Muslims would rather secede.

Federalism is the best antidote to secession feared by most Filipinos who do not understand the system.

I must add that to do this we should strengthen the moderate Muslims who want political solutions against extremists like the Mautes and ISIS.

In his speech after being proclaimed the standard-bearer of PDP-Laban political party, Duterte said he has no ambition to run for president, but decided to do so when his political party's leaders urged him to run and push for federalism.

"*Kinausap ako* to carry the torch of federalism," Duterte said. "I will build a nationwide consensus for federalism."

Federalism as the only solution to achieve peace and order in Mindanao. Both Christians and Muslims must work for it.

Why were the Ligots acquitted?

Why did the Court of Tax Appeals (CTA) refuse to give credence to the evidence extracted during the Senate hearings in 2011 showing that the couple owned assets valued in the hundreds of millions of pesos that cannot be justified by the miniscule compensation income of Gen. Jacinto Ligot and the zero earnings of his wife Erlinda?

The public's dismay and disgust was captured by the Inquirer editorial on Jan 22 ("The lucky Ligots") indignantly asking "who must account for what appears to be so remiss and shoddy a work that... gave the Ligots exactly the lucky break they needed to squeak out of the law's grasp?"

To answer this question, let us examine the CTA's 83-page decision penned by Justice Ma. Belen M. Ringpis-Liban. The prosecutors of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) indicted the Ligots for their alleged "failure to supply correct and accurate information, in their joint Income Tax Returns (ITR)..." and for their "unlawful attempt to evade the payment of taxes..."

To commit these crimes, the couple, according to the BIR, "accumulated [1] bank deposits and [2] properties... that were not commensurate to their declared income in their ITRs and SALNs" from 2001 to 2004.

On item 1, the CTA, however, disallowed "all evidence, testimonial or documentary, relating to the spouses' bank accounts," because Republic Act No. 1405 (the Bank Secrecy Law) granted bank deposits "absolute confidentiality."

The only exceptions to confidentiality are (1) "upon written consent of the depositors" which the couple vehemently refused to give; (2) "in cases of impeachment" which is obviously not applicable here; (3) "upon orders of a competent court" in



WITH DUE RESPECT

ARTEMIO V. PANGANIBAN

cases of "bribery or dereliction of duty" which are not the crimes involved here; or (4) "in cases where the money deposited is the subject matter of the litigation," which is also inapplicable here as the BIR did not claim ownership of the deposits; it merely used them as evidence of tax evasion.

Disallowed also was the Anti-Money Laundering Council memo given to the Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Makati (not to the CTA), because the said memo was issued in connection with an alleged violation of the Anti-Money Laundering Act (Amla) pending in the said RTC, not in relation to the crimes brought by the BIR to the CTA, which did not at all involve the Amla.

On item 2 (properties), the documents evidencing the titles on the land in Malaybalay, Bukidnon and on the Essensa East Forbes Condo in Taguig were not formally offered in evidence; those on the two condos in the Paseo Parkview Tower II in Makati, registered in the name of Miguela L. Paragas, "did not show the nexus" between the said owner and the spouses. And

those on the 5-hectare Tanay, Rizal property were satisfactorily shown by the defense to be held in trust by Ligot on behalf of several military officers.

Moreover, those on the two properties in Anaheim and Buena Park, California, were not authenticated, as required by our laws, by the diplomatic and/or consular officials of the Philippines in the United States, and were thus inadmissible in evidence to show they were indeed owned by Erlinda Ligot.

In short, the prosecution's pieces of evidence "have either been excluded, as in the case of the bank deposits, or were found to have scant probative value due to the failure to establish their authenticity and due execution, as in the case of the... properties... [or] have simply not been offered in evidence."

But all is not lost. The nation can still mitigate its defeat via the asset forfeiture case pending in the Sandiganbayan, provided the prosecution learns its lesson on how to transform the perceived facts during the Senate hearing into legal facts in a court of law, per my column on Jan. 20 ("Commenting on high-profile cases"). Ditto for the Amla case in the Makati RTC.

Moreover, the BIR is not precluded from collecting the taxes due thereon by carefully following the procedures prescribed by the National Internal Revenue Code. Jurisprudence allows the collection of taxes despite an acquittal in the herein crimes.

Though complicated, the rules of evidence were designed to discover the truth, free from bias, popular belief and error. May the truth prevail in these three other cases.

Comments to chiefjusticepanganiban@hotmail.com

Extremists must not hold back peace efforts

THE two recent attacks in Mindanao – one a bombing in a Catholic cathedral in Jolo, Sulu, the other a grenade attack on a Muslim mosque in Zamboanga City three days later – should not be seen as indicating or fueling religious animosity in the region, Muslim religious leader Aleem Mahmod Mala Adilao said Wednesday.

Two bombs exploded while Mass was being celebrated last Sunday at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Jolo. Twenty-one persons attending Mass, including several soldiers, were killed while 112 others were wounded.

Three days later, a grenade was lobbed through the window of the Kamardikaan mosque in barangay Talon-Talon in Zamboanga City, killing two Islamic preachers and wounding four others in the Muslim house of worship. The victims were part of a group of 11 preachers who had been staying in the mosque the last two days.

The attack on the Jolo cathedral was highly unexpected. In all the years of turmoil in Mindanao, the various religious groups – Muslims, Christians, as well as Lumads – had maintained a great deal of respect for one another's faiths. Religion was not a major factor in their conflicts.

The Jolo Cathedral attack was deplored and condemned worldwide – by Pope Francis, the leaders of the United States, China, Japan, Russia, Canada, Australia, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the World Bank, the European Union.

"This is not a conflict between two religions," said Regional Chairman Adilao of the Ulama League of the Philippines. "These are the handiwork of some people who want to destroy the harmonious relationship of Christians and Muslims in Mindanao." He called for continued inter-religious dialogues in grassroots communities in Mindanao.

The Ulama League has been working closely with the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, with which it has formed the Bishops-Ulama Conference which is promoting inter-religious dialogue as part of the peace building effort in Mindanao.

Fr. Roberto Layson, head of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate's inter-religious program, who was the parish priest of Jolo in 1997 before he was reassigned to North Cotabato, commented in kind: "We have to strengthen our inter-religious program as part of our advocacy on peace here in Mindanao" which, he said, is needed to ease the anger, biases, and prejudices of some people because of experiences in the past.

Religious bigotry on the part of some people must not be allowed to worsen the present troubles in Mindanao. The attacks on a cathedral in Jolo and on a mosque in Zamboanga City by some extremist groups must not be allowed to hold back the progress achieved by the recent Bangsamoro Organic Law which will soon give the Moro people a truly autonomous region.

03

February 2019

The Manila Times

Page:

A1

No safe place

SUNDAY
STORIESMARLEN V.
RONQUILLO

THE high-profile political assassinations that took place recently in Quezon City, according to the news archives, were grudges that had roots elsewhere, far-away conflicts that gunmen opted to settle in the capital city. Not city-grown, not local fights between and among QC politicians, turned bloody and messy.

One such high-profile killing had its origin in violent Masbate politics and another was a bitter political dispute in Abra that found its tragic end in QC, with the congressman-brother of the current chief justice as victim.

➤ Ronquillo A5

57

No safe place

QC may have its own share of failings, sins and omissions, but nurturing political assassins was not one of them.

Candidates competing for major elective posts in the city throw mud and brickbats at each other during the election season. But the temporal animosity automatically dissipates after the election season ends. Even in the City Council, the spirit was usually one of bipartisanship, especially when the issues were grants of permits and special use orders. Everybody happy, as they say.

Tragic end

But the reputation of Quezon City as "Exhibit A" of political civility came to a tragic end on January 30, when one of the three congressional candidates for the second district of the city — the Novaliches area — was ambushed while her SUV was negotiating a major street in Bagong Silangan, where she was the village chief.

Crisell "Beng" Beltran was taken to a nearby hospital but was pronounced dead on arrival. Same with her driver, Melchor Salita, who was rushed to the hospital but did not survive the short trip.

City residents who are used to the civility of political campaigns are still in a state of shock and bewilderment, and are now asking questions. Why did this happen? According to the city hall, Beltran had no political enemies. She got along fine with both allies

and opponents, supporters and detractors. But with the formal campaign season about to start, it is not baseless to connect the ambush of Beltran to the heat and passion of the political season.

The city was officially removed from the fast-diminishing list of places free from violence on a day that saw so much blood spilled due to extreme violence and reckless murders that happened across parts of the country.

NDF consultant shot

While asleep on board a bus bound for Northern Luzon, Randy Malayao, a consultant of the National Democratic Front (NDF), was shot at close range by a man who boarded the bus at a stop in Aritao, Nueva Vizcaya. The gunman fired twice, then calmly stepped out of the bus into a waiting motorbike. It was the kind of professional hit that could only be undertaken by a trained assassin.

NDF Northern Luzon said that the culprit came from the "death squads" sponsored by the Army's 5th Infantry Division, but the 5th ID has denied the charge.

Who would kill a sleeping man who was probably dreaming of a better life for the country during the time of his death? A better life for the weak, the meek, the persecuted and those seeking peace. But none of that dreaming for the better good and decades of activism saved him from the cold, hard bullet of the assassin.

The death of a sleeping man on a bus whose work was that of a consultant for the peace process has forced the nation to ask this hard question: Is there a place in the country still safe from predators and assassins? A place where the phrases "death squads" and "guns-for-hire" and "riding in tandem" have no relevance and traction?

Church blasts

On that same bloody day, "Bloody Wednesday" as a newspaper headline called it, the answer to that question came from Mindanao. It was a clear "NO."

In a thickly populated area of Zamboanga City, a grenade hurled into a mosque through an open window instantly killed two sleeping Islamic preachers and wounded four others. When one lobs a grenade into a place of worship — and a sacred place that preaches peace among men regardless of religious beliefs — that act is meant to do two things: kill people and inflame the most outrageous of human urges.

A sizable swath of Southern Mindanao is now gripped by religious tension as the grenade attack on the small mosque took place just a few days after a dastardly attack on the Jolo Cathedral during a morning Mass on January 27. The attack on the Jolo Cathedral killed more than 20 people, mostly church regulars, and wounded more than 100 others.

To defuse the religious tension that came in the wake of

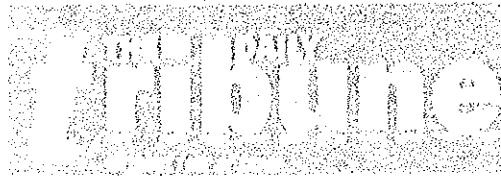
the two attacks, Zamboanga City Mayor Isabelle Salazar appealed for calm. "We do not want to give the impression that this is another attack on religion," she said.

That the Jolo bombing was reported to be the work of Islamist jihadists and suicide bombers set off the explosives — which led to their own annihilation — all the more heightened the tension and fear in Southern Mindanao. There is no scenario more scary than a place that is turned into a staging ground for tit-for-tat, terror act for terror act, based on religious urges. The Forever War in the ravaged areas of the Middle East all had their origins in religious fervor and fundamentalism.

As massive military operations are now taking place in Sulu against the perpetrators of the cathedral attack, and Zamboanga City is desperate to remove religion from the mosque grenade attack equation, Quezon City, meanwhile, once the haven of civil politics, is now torn by self-doubt. What will happen next? Assassins crossed the line when they targeted local politicians, Quezon City's own.

From the hotbeds of religious tension in the South, to what were supposed to be nurturing grounds of non-violent politics in the highly urbanized areas up North, the carnage on Bloody Wednesday showed there are few places in the country unvisited by vehement men who spread mayhem.

Where is that big promise of "peace for the living?"



Morning after plebiscite

“After the tally, an overwhelming yes vote was registered in Marawi, Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao while the “No” vote prevailed in Sulu and Isabela City.

Anticipating traffic and hurdles like the perennial road repairs works, (what's with the “Build, Build, Build” program, even concrete roads that appear in good condition are being torn down for repair?) we motored early to Marawi from Cagayan de Oro to cast our votes in the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) plebiscite. We met less military checkpoints along the highway and soldiers manning them were respectful. There was clear wearing away of the fear and anxiety residents experienced in the immediate aftermath of the Marawi war when civilians were subjected to strict and meticulous inspection and irritating questions. We hope this will be the new normal in our commute to Marawi.

As we approached our precinct, there was visible lack of enthusiasm among handful of early voters. The inclement weather did not help. A fleet of vans emblazoned with “Libreng sakay” for evacuees were provided by the Marawi city government which has pulled all stops campaigning for “Yes” vote. As I watched them, I cannot help but wonder if the voters really know what they are voting for and the ramifications of their vote to their life and future.

After the tally, an overwhelming yes vote was registered in Marawi, Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao while the “No” vote prevailed in Sulu and Isabela City. A provision in the BOL which is being questioned by the Sulu provincial government before the Supreme Court, treats all provinces and cities comprising the Autonomous Region in Muslim



SOUTHERN VOICES
Macabangkit B. Lanto

Mindanao (ARMM) as one geographical area for purpose of the plebiscite. Hence, the “No” vote in Sulu will just be buried by the landslide “Yes” vote in other provinces. Being part of ARMM Sulu cannot opt-out from Bangsamoro Autonomous Region

in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) while Isabela will be excluded. The Moros heaved a collective sigh of relief after the BOL passed the final crucible. With their angst tempered, they face tomorrow full of hope for peace and betterment of life. But a new challenge which is no less formidable looms in the horizon.

A new political entity, BARMM comes to life. It has inherited a swirling cesspool of anomaly and misgovernance meriting a tag as a “failed experiment” in governance. The efforts of the immediate past governors of its predecessor, the ARMM, for reforms couldn't matched the enormity and magnitude of the mess passed upon them. Reform is very much a work in progress and the challenge now faces the new leadership of BARMM. Perhaps a fresh look at these problems should be the first order of the day.

Some who will lead the BARMM are described by critics as babes in the wood. They will be transported from the battlefield to the administrative field, the dynamics of which need a different kind of art and skill. Past corruption has become endemic that if they

don't watch and guard their moral compass they will be eaten by the system. They will be confronted with a bigger bureaucracy, enormous funds to appropriate and wider autonomous power. It will not be a walk in the park.

The Bangsamoro Transition Authority that will be organized by the President to govern the BARMM in the interim will play a crucial role at this formative stage. It might spell the success or failure of BARMM. While it is given that an ideal commission should be inclusive of stakeholders, its members must possess basic knowledge of the art of governance. They must have bona fides to include, inter alia, integrity and dedication to the mission and vision of the BARMM. They must keep in mind that the BARMM is sort of a laboratory for a future federal system of government or a substitute system if the campaign for Federalism fails. If it succeeds, other regions can ask for a similar arrangement. The whole country is watching how it will fare. Will it pave the way for a future multicultural Federalism or lead to nightmarish balkanization?

The Department of the Interior and Local Government should team up with the University of the Philippines National College of Public Administration and Governance to form a pool of experts that will conduct seminars and short-term courses for would-be administrators of BARMM. Together, they should identify and classify problems and solutions and plow thru the maze of defined powers of the central and autonomous governments whose nuances are deep and susceptible to contrasting interpretation. 4

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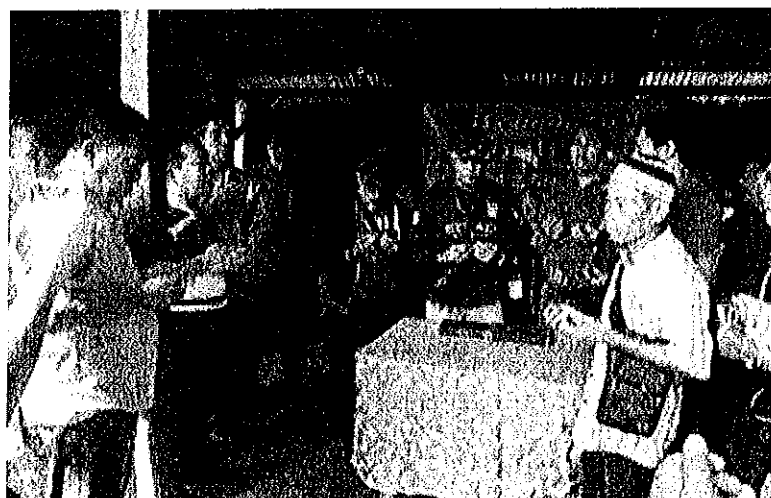
ONLINE NEWS

03 FEBRUARY 2019

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Army settles Maguindanao Moro clan war

By Edwin Fernandez



SETTLED. Members of Muslim warring families pray before the Holy Quran after a military-led dispute resolution on Friday, ended the long-drawn family conflict. *(Photo by 37th IB)*

CAMP SIONGCO, Maguindanao -- Moro families locked in a long-standing family feud that has claimed lives from both sides, agreed on Friday to "bury the hatchet" and end their bloody war with the help of the Philippine Army.

Using a diplomatic approach, the Army's 37th Infantry Battalion (IB) settled the feud of two families in Buldon, Maguindanao, in a simple ceremony held at the 37th IB Alpha Company command post in Sitio Bura, Barangay Oring, Buldon, Maguindanao.

Lt. Col. Roberto Go Jr., 37th IB commander, said the families of Ape, Mangurong, and Tabubong of Barangay Eddor had an existing feud with the family of Mismar of Barangay Nuyo for the past several years.

"It started from a deer hunting trip when one of the family members of the Ape-Mangurong family accidentally shot and caused the untimely death of a member of the family of Mismar," Go said of the protagonists who are distant relatives.

Attacks and counter-attacks have since become the order of the day for both clans until the Army intervened in the feud.

Family feud, or "rido" in the vernacular, is common in Buldon, an upland town in northern Maguindanao.

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Go said that as an agent of peace and order, the troops of 37th IB initiated the settlement of the feud to prevent the warring clans from spewing more violence in the communities that might affect innocent civilians.

"The purpose of the settlement was to ensure that the conflict between the feuding families would be resolved and shall not recur in the future," he said.

"This way the community people will live in peace and harmony with the intercession of the military and the local government unit," Go added.

Buldon Mayor Abolais Manalao, Vice Mayor Cairudin Pangunutan, and Barangay Nuyo Chairman Ali Gumaga lauded the 37th IB for the job well done.

Go said during settlement, the warring families also handed over their firearms, among them two .45-caliber pistols and ammunition.

Major Gen. Cirilito E. Sobejana, commander of the 6th Infantry Division, commended both the feuding parties for their cooperation to the military and ended their "rido" voluntarily and peacefully.

The activity ended with both parties shaking hands as they vowed to be advocates of peace and order in their community. **(PNA)**

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Gov't offers long term solution to uplift lives of former rebels

By Perla Lena



ASSISTANCE. A former rebel receives his PHP10,000 cash assistance from the provincial government of Capiz in a ceremony held at the DILG Function in Roxas City in January 2019. *(Photo by 3ID Public Affairs Office)*

ILOILO CITY -- The government is ready to welcome communist terrorist rebels who would like to surrender under the localized peace talks.

Those who surrender are offered the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP), Capt. Eduardo A. Precioso Jr., chief of the 3rd Infantry Division Public Affairs Office said in an interview Thursday.

Precioso said poverty and lack of opportunities for livelihood were the reasons given by the surrenderers for joining the communist movement.

He emphasized that E-CLIP could help change the mindset of the rebels and that the government will always look after their welfare. "We are offering them a long-term solution," he said.

Under E-CLIP, the rebels, upon surrendering, will receive PHP15,000 each in immediate assistance. They will also be entitled to a PHP50,000 livelihood assistance from the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process and livelihood program from the Department of Social Welfare and Development, depending on the assessment that will be done by the concerned agency, as well as educational benefits, housing, and a parcel of land.

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However, they still have to undergo various processes that are required by the program, and secure a certificate from the Joint Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police Intelligence Community that they are members of the New People's Army and are qualified to avail of the E-CLIP.

Meanwhile on January 29, the provincial government of Capiz extended a PHP10,000 cash assistance to a former rebel who surrendered in 2018.

In a press statement, the former rebel, alias Jr, surrendered due to "fatigue and extreme hunger".

Col. Alberto Desoyo, commander of the Army's 301st Infantry (Bayanihan) Brigade who awarded the assistance, said the gesture "is the government's way of showing its sincerity to help those who voluntarily returned to the fold of the law."

"We are expecting more surrenders as we intensify our anti-insurgency campaign with the overwhelming support of various sectors in Panay," Desoyo said.

Since 2014, more or less 50 former rebels from Capiz have received financial assistance of PHP10,000 each.

In 2018, the 61st Infantry (Hunter) Battalion, under the leadership of Lt. Col. Sisenando Magbalot Jr., facilitated the surrender of 59 Militia ng Bayan and three regular NPA members in Cuartero, Capiz.

"You might as well surrender because we have here local government units and various agencies of the government to help you live life anew and uplift you from poverty through legal means," Precioso said. **(PNA)**

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

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Army leads cleanup drive in 4 Maguindanao towns

By Edwin Fernandez



CLEAN UP. Soldiers, policemen, and civilians work side-by-side in cleaning their communities in the towns of Sultan sa Barongis, Rajah Buayan, Shariff Saydona Mustapha, and Shariff Aguak, all in Maguindanao, on Friday (Feb. 1, 2019). *(Photo courtesy of 40th IB)*

CAMP SIONGCO, Maguindanao -- The Army in Maguindanao on Friday spearheaded a cleanup drive involving soldiers, local officials, residents and former Moro rebels along the national highway traversing four Maguindanao towns.

The multi-sectoral cleanup drive was the brainchild of Lt. Col. Edgar Catu, commander of the Army's 40th Infantry Battalion.

Soldiers, militiamen, police officers, civilians, mothers, fathers, teachers, and school children, numbering about 300, joined the cleanup along the highways connecting the towns of Sultan Sa Barongis, Rajah Buayan, Shariff Saydona Mustapha and Shariff Aguak, all in Maguindanao.

Former members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters also took part in the campaign.

"The project aims to sustain cleanliness, beautification, and sanitation in the municipalities through an active and continuing partnership among government agencies as part of the clean and green campaign of the national government," Catu said in a statement.

Catu said similar activities will be initiated by the Army in the coming days until it becomes a "hobby" for the local folks to clean their surroundings. **(PNA)**

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Centcom chief warns public vs. 'troll' FB account of CPP-NPA

By John Rey Saavedra

CEBU CITY -- The Central Command (Centcom) of the Armed Forces of the Philippines on Friday warned netizens against "troll accounts" on social media purportedly owned by the Communist Party of the Philippines - New People's Army (CPP-NPA), which are releasing fake data on casualties of government troopers.

Lt. Gen. Noel Clement, Centcom commander, said a bogus account using the name "Juanito Magbanua" posted on Facebook, claiming the government suffered 27 casualties on Negros Island in January alone.

Clement said the post was a desperate move of the enemy of the state to lure the people into joining their group, which he described in a statement as a "dwindling, money-making armed group."

Data showed that NPA rebels in Negros suffered losses in January when government troops were able to neutralize six NPA terrorists. Of the six, four were apprehended, one arrested, and another one surrendered, he said.

Centcom noted two recorded casualties from the government's side "when the terrorists blatantly executed one unarmed, off-duty member of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (Cafgu) in broad daylight and indiscriminately fired at the army detachment that hurt a soldier."

Also in January, the Negros Island army successfully hit an NPA lair, which yielded three homemade shotguns, one 45-caliber pistol with two magazines loaded with live ammunition, two 38-caliber revolvers, one 357-caliber revolver, one bomb with detonating device, one hand grenade, a binocular, war materiel, and a sack of subversive documents.

"This old trick of luring the people in providing fake data will no longer work anymore. People are now more discerning. Never again could these bands of bandits ever deceive everyone in Negros who have been witnessing our victories," Clement said.

The commander of the armed forces in three regions of the Visayas urged the public to report the presence of communist rebels to the authorities.

"With all our successes we give credit to all the people who actively report enemy presence in their communities. This brings us to saying that the enemies must accept the fact that they are slowly losing their grip on the masses, especially to all victims of their atrocities," he said

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

The statement also said that it is the civilian populace that suffered from the hands of the rebels.

"For the record, NPA killed more civilians than it has inflicted casualties on the government side. Since 2018 to date, civilian death toll has reached 24, perpetrated by the NPA's SPARU mercenaries," the statement added.

In an interview with a radio broadcaster last Wednesday, a certain Ka Juaning, who claimed to be a "commander" of Negros Island's NPA-rebel unit, spoke about alleged losses on the government side.

A well-placed source from the armed forces in the Visayas, who spoke on condition of anonymity, however, said his claims "were all unverified and farce that appear to be distorted propaganda." (PNA)