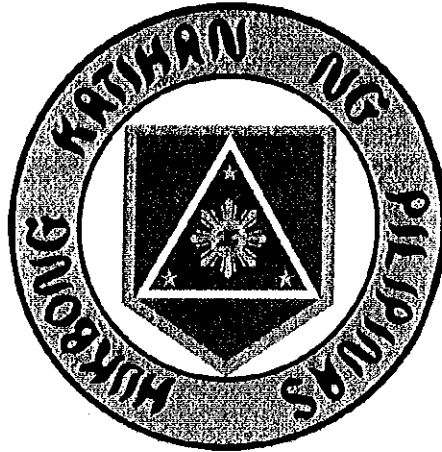


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Rody urged: Veto 'pork' in budget

By CECILLE SUERTE FELIPE and JESS DIAZ

Vetoing the "pork" in the P3.757-trillion budget for 2019 would be an affirmation of President Duterte's much-touted strong political will, Sen. Panfilo Lacson said yesterday.

Asked for reaction to Lacson's suggestion, Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea said in a text message: "Let us not preempt the President."

In a post on his Twitter account, Lacson said the President, who had shown strong political will in a number of controversial issues in the past, can expunge the pork barrel from the budget using his line-item veto power.

"Mr. President, you have displayed your strong political will on several occasions. This time, use your line-item veto power over the 2019 appropriations measure by removing all the 'pork' inserted by

lawmakers who are incorrigibly insatiable and simply 'beyond redemption,'" he said.

Under the 1987 Constitution, the President "shall have the power to veto any particular item or items in an appropriation, revenue or tariff bill, but the veto shall not affect the item or items to which he does not object."

Lacson earlier bared the presence of billions of pesos of "pork" in the proposed budget, including at least P160 million for each House member.

The P160 million includes P70 million for "hard" projects such as roads and flood control;

Turn to Page 8

Rody urged From Page 1

and P30 million for "soft" projects such as textbooks and scholarships.

Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo added P50 million to the budget for "hard projects" and P10 million for soft projects. Some House members reportedly received much more.

Even some senators had been found to have individual amendments totaling P23 billion.

Lacson said that while his revelations prompted some "talking heads" to muddle the issue, it turned out they were actually advancing his cause in educating the public more about the "evil pork" in the national budget.

He has issued a challenge to all fellow lawmakers to make public their amendments to the budget bill, just as he has done by posting his institutional amendments on his website.

"The national budget belongs to the people because

it comes from taxpayers' money. It is bad enough if the money is not used properly; it is much worse if the money is abused by those in government in the form of pork," Lacson stressed.

"The national budget is the lifeblood of our country. If we allow pork to ruin the budget, we taxpayers will suffer," he added.

Budget OK set today

Despite the controversy raised by Lacson, there seems to be no stopping the House from finally approving the proposed P3.757-trillion budget.

The final shape of the spending bill will appear in the report of the bicameral (bicam) conference committee jointly chaired by Camarines Sur Rep. Rolando Andaya Jr., appropriations committee chairman, and his Senate counterpart Loren Legarda.

"I had a private meeting

with Senator Legarda just this morning and we both committed that we will have it passed by Wednesday. How we get there is another problem," Andaya told The Chiefs show on *One News* Signal TV on Monday night.

Asked yesterday what he meant by their commitment to pass the budget proposal by today, Andaya said, "I will try to do both - bicam and (House) plenary."

Under their calendar of sessions, the House and the Senate have only until Friday to ratify the conference committee report on the proposed budget for this year.

Congressmen convene only from Monday through Wednesday, while senators have until Thursday to finish the matter. Senators are unlikely to extend their session up to Friday.

"All talks of a reenacted budget are baseless. The 2019 national budget will be ready for the President's signature next week," Andaya said.

He said all talk about pork barrel funds "is useless un-

less we see the whole picture."

"The House conferees have demanded to see the lump-sum savings of the DBM (Department of Budget and Management) for 2018. We knew from the beginning it would not be granted, for that is where the DBM pork lies. Documents in our possession show that for 2017, a total of P370 billion was generated in savings. This amount was at the full disposal of Secretary (Benjamin) Diokno," he said.

He added the amount of 2018 savings could be higher.

The House leader added that Diokno has at his disposal funds that are "more than enough to sway the outcome of the 2019 elections, if he wants to."

The Senate and House panels in the budget conference have tasked Andaya and Legarda to resolve their disputes on the proposed outlay. The two lead conferees are scheduled to meet again this morning.

Andaya has apparently

abandoned some conditions he had set for the bicam talks, like requiring Diokno to submit a report on savings and unused funds for 2017 and 2018, and compelling senators to reveal their budget insertions, location of projects and their proponents, which the latter have resisted.

So far, only Lacson and Sens. Ralph Recto and Legarda have admitted to proposing insertions.

Lacson said he proposed "institutional amendments," or those submitted by agencies, including more than P4 billion for an anti-terrorism Army battalion.

Recto said his proposed changes included billions for the universal health care program, while among Legarda's realignments are for Antique, where she is seeking a congressional seat in the May elections.

The House for its part has not released the final list of budget insertions it made when it approved its version of the budget and their

authors.

What it disclosed was a listing of members with huge infrastructure allocations under the original budget proposal submitted by President Duterte to Congress in July. Former speaker Pantaleon Alvarez topped that list with more than P8 billion.

"I think the framework of an agreement is there. It's just the cooperation of the executive, specifically the DBM, that we're waiting for now. It can be done even this evening," Andaya told The Chiefs show on Monday.

He said lawmakers would have to approve the budget "painfully," even with Diokno's alleged refusal to help.

He said he could live with having the budget proposal passed without several issues being resolved.

He added that the House could still attend to those concerns by exercising its oversight function during the long election campaign recess.

- With Alexis Romero

LACSON TO DUTERTE: VETO PORK ITEMS

STORY BY MARLON RAMOS

The extremely annoyed senator is banking on the President to purge the lard that 'incorrigibly insatiable' legislators insisted on adding to the 2019 spending bill. He says the porkers are simply 'beyond redemption.'

FROM A1

By Marlon Ramos
@MRamosINQ

An exasperated Sen. Panfilo Lacson is counting on President Duterte to make this year's national budget pork-free, after conceding that legislators who insisted on keeping the draft P3.8-trillion spending bill larded with "insertions" are just "incorrigibly insatiable."

"Mr. President, you have displayed your strong political will on several occasions," Lacson tweeted on Tuesday, a day after Sen. Loren Legarda told her fellow senators that the House-Senate conference committee had agreed to end the two-month budget deadlock.

"This time, use your line-item veto power over the 2019 appropriations measure by removing all the pork inserted by lawmakers who are incorrigibly insatiable and simply beyond redemption," Lacson added.

Disdain for pork

Mr. Duterte had openly shown his disdain for the graft-ridden pork barrel system, railing against it while campaigning for Malacañang in 2016.

Pork barrel, a spending program in the national budget that channels funds to lawmakers' pet projects in their districts, is a source of kickbacks for them.

Several of Mr. Duterte's political allies in the House of Rep-

resentatives, led by Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and even his alter ego, Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno, have been accused of allocating pork, which the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional in 2013, in the wake of the P10-billion pork barrel scam allegedly masterminded by businesswoman Janet Lim-Napoles.

Citing the Constitution, Lacson said the President was authorized to "veto any particular item or items in an appropriation, revenue, or tariff bill, but the veto shall not affect the item or items to which he does not object."

"The national budget is the lifeblood of our country. If we allow pork to ruin the budget, we taxpayers will suffer," Lacson said.

"The national budget belongs to the people because it comes from taxpayer money. It is bad enough if the money is not used properly. It is much worse if the money is abused by those in government in the form of pork," he said.

Sought for comment on Tuesday, Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea said it was up to Mr. Duterte to decide whether to use his veto power to rid the budget of pork.

"Let us not preempt the President," Medialdea said.

Legarda said the Senate and House panels on the budget conference committee would finalize the unified spending bill on Wednesday and that the measure would be ready for ratification by lawmakers on Friday, the last day of business

for the 17th Congress.

Perusing the proposed 2019 budget submitted by the Department of Budget and Management, Lacson claimed that over P100 billion in pork were kept by unscrupulous lawmakers to bankroll their chosen projects in violation of the Supreme Court ruling.

Lump sums

He accused Arroyo of fattening the lump-sum allocations for each House member to up to P160 billion, triggering a verbal tussle with the former President's subordinates in the 292-member chamber.

Lacson said even his fellow senators also placed pork in the form of "individual amendments" and "insertions" amounting to P23 billion in infrastructure projects.

The quarrel over cleaning up the budget delayed approval of the 2019 spending bill, forcing reenactment of the P3.8-trillion 2018 budget to enable the government to operate.

At one point during the exchanges in December last year, House Majority Leader Rolando Andaya Jr. accused Diokno of inserting P75 billion into the budget of the Department of Public Works and Highways without the knowledge of the agency's head, Public Works Secretary Mark Villar.

The accusation backfired on Andaya, who stepped down in January to become chair of the House appropriations committee. --WITH A REPORT FROM CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO INQ

6 February 2019

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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Lorenzana: We have not, and will never surrender any part of our territory

By **FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD**

Defense Secretary Delfin N. Lorenzana cited the most critical external security challenge for the Philippines is the competing territorial and maritime claims in the South China Sea when

he spoke before alumni and students of the National Defense College of the Philippines Monday.

In the forum titled: "The National Security Outlook for the Philippines in 2019", the Defense Chief shared that the Philippine Government ►4

Lorenzana: We have...

◀1

already reiterated its call on China and other claimant countries to finalize and adopt a valid, binding and mutually acceptable code of conduct in the South China Sea.

"While we recognize China as a bilateral partner for joint ventures and other endeavors, it is worth emphasizing that our territorial sovereignty and integrity, maritime entitlements and rights should not be compromised. We are not compromising them; we are not giving them away," Lorenzana emphasized.

"The Philippines continues to view the arbitral tribunal ruling as valid and legitimate. We have not, and we will never surrender any part of our territory," he added.

Lorenzana said the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) maintains its presence within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and with its limited resources, does its best to safeguard the farthest ends of the country's territory.

"Since it is imperative to secure the

national territory, sovereignty and sovereign rights of our country's maritime claims and entitlements, to include the West Philippine Sea and the Philippine Rise, the AFP is steadfast in performing this constitutional duty," the Defense Chief assured.

At the forum, Secretary Lorenzana also underscored the imminent review of the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) with the United States.

"Given this challenge with China, everyone must be asking why we initiated the call to review the MDT with the United States, our only treaty ally," he said.

"We believe it is time to sit down with our US counterparts and revisit the terms of our alliance."

Secretary Lorenzana said the Philippines have always valued its partnership and deep historical ties with the U.S. He noted, however, that the two allies "must clearly define our roles and responsibilities when the need arises."

DND: PH won't give up any territory

By Francisco Tuyay

THE Philippines, while it continues to maintain warm ties with China, is not surrendering nor compromising any part of its territory.

This was stressed by Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana during Monday's forum at the National Defense College of the Philippines dubbed "The National Security Outlook for the Philippines in 2019".

"While we recognize China as a bilateral partner for joint ventures and other endeavors, it is worth emphasizing that our territorial sovereignty and integrity, maritime

entitlements and rights should not be compromised. We are not compromising them; we are not giving them away," he said.

"The Philippines continues to view the arbitral tribunal ruling as valid and legitimate. We have not, and we will never surrender any part of our territory," he added.

The DND chief also cited the competing territorial and maritime claims in the South

China Sea as the most critical external security challenge for the country.

Lorenzana also said the government had reiterated its call on China and other claimant countries to finalize and adopt a valid, binding and mutually acceptable code of conduct in the South China Sea.

He also maintained that the Armed Forces of the Philippines maintains its presence within the exclusive economic zone, and with its limited resources, does its best to safeguard the farthest ends of the country's territory.

"Since it is imperative to secure the national territory, sovereignty and sovereign rights of our country's maritime claims and entitlements, to include the West Philippine Sea and the Philippine Rise, the AFP

is steadfast in performing this constitutional duty," the DND chief emphasized.

In the same forum, Lorenzana reiterated the need to review Manila's Mutual Defense Treaty with Washington.

"Given this challenge with China, everyone must be asking why we initiated the call to review the MDT with the United States, our only treaty ally. We believe it is time to sit down with our US counterparts and revisit the terms of our alliance," he stressed.

While the Philippines has always valued its partnership and in its deep historical ties with the US, Lorenzana noted that the two allies "must clearly define our roles and responsibilities when the need arises."

With PNA A2



DND chief: Wala pang isinusukong teritoryo ang Pinas sa China

"We have not, and we will never surrender any part of our territory!"

Ito ang sinabi ni Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana sa mga mediamen kung isinuulender na ng pamahalaan ang Kagitingan Reef matapos na pasalamatang ang China sa pagtatayo dito ng rescue center.

Ginawa ng Kalihim ang pahayag sa gitna na rin ng mga espekulasyon na isinuko na ng administrasyon ang Kagitingan Reef sa China matapos itong pasalamatang sa pagtatayo ng rescue center.

Binigyang diin ni Lorenzana na muling nanawagan ang pamahalaan sa China at iba pang bansang kaagaw nito sa teritoryo sa West Philippine Sea (South China Sea) na isapinal na ang katanggap-tanggap na Code of Conduct sa usapin ng pinag-aagawang teritoryo.

Ang Spratly Islands sa West Philippine Sea ay pinag-aagawan ng Pilipinas, Brunei, Taiwan, Malaysia kung saan ang pinakaagresibo ay ang China.

Sinabi ni Lorenzana na nanatili ang presensya ng AFP troops sa hurisdiksyon ng bansa sa Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) na kahit limitado ang resources ay mahigpit na binabantayan maging ang pinakamalayo mang teritoryo ng bansa.

Kaugnay nito, muli namang ighat ni Lorenzana ang pangangailangan upang irebisa ang Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT). - Joy Cantos -

Agawan sa WPS, pinakakritikal na hamon sa seguridad

Binanggit ni Defense Secretary Delfin N. Lorenzana na ang pinakakritikal na external security challenge para sa Pilipinas ay ang magkakasalungat na territorial at maritime claims sa South China Sea, nang magsalita siya sa harap ng alumni at mga estudyante ng National Defense College of the Philippines sa forum na pinamagatang "The National Security Outlook for the Philippines in 2019" na ginanap nitong Pebrero 4 sa Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City.

Ibinahagi ng Defense Chief na muling idiniin ng gobyerno ng Pilipinas ang panawagan nito sa China at iba pang claimant countries na isapinal at pagtibayin ang valid,

binding at mutually acceptable code of conduct sa South China Sea.

"While we recognize China as a bilateral partner for joint ventures and other endeavors, it is worth emphasizing that our territorial sovereignty and integrity, maritime entitlements and rights should not be compromised," diin ni Lorenzana.

Sinabi ni Lorenzana na pinananatili ng Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) ang presensiya nito sa loob ng exclusive economic zone (EEZ), at ginagawa ang lahat ng makakaya para protektahan ang teritoryo ng bansa.

"Since it is imperative to secure the national territory, sovereignty and sovereign rights of our country's

maritime claims and entitlements, to include the West Philippine Sea and the Philippine Rise, the AFP is steadfast in performing this constitutional duty," aniya.

Sinabi rin ni Lorenzana na sang-ayon siya sa posisyon ni Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. na maghain ng diplomatic protest laban sa pagtatayo ng China ng maritime rescue center sa WPS, partikular sa Mischief Reef at Fiery Cross.

"I agree with the Secretary of Foreign Affairs that we should protest, only because we don't want them to be keeping on building things there so that it will make it permanent, it will become theirs," ani Lorenzana.

Francis T. Wakefield

AFP, Metrobank give food packs to poor

By MICHAEL PUNONGBAYAN

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) together with Metrobank, through the GT Foundation Inc. (GTFI) and Metrobank Foundation Inc. (MBFI), delivered yesterday food packs to 10,000 poor families in various parts of the country.

Soldiers and volunteers delivered food to poor families to celebrate the Chinese New

Year.

The AFP noted that since 2011, Metrobank Group with their late chairman George SK Ty, through GTFI and MBFI, has been giving food packs to underprivileged families in different parts of the country as a way of carrying out its tradition of sharing.

And since 2015, the military has been working hand in hand with the GTFI in keeping the tradition of sharing by giv-

ing gifts to the families.

Aside from being the partner of MBFI and GTFI in the "Bags of Blessings" program, the AFP said it also provides security and manpower before, during and after the distribution of gift packs to families to show its commitment to and cooperation with the private sector in nation building and peace development.

"I express my appreciation and gratitude to GT Foun-

dation Inc. and Metrobank Foundation Inc. for being our partners in the private sector in nation building and peace development," AFP chief Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr. said.

"Our partnership with the different sectors of our society such as the business sector and the Filipino-Chinese community is very helpful in creating a better future for our children," he added.

The AFP said 600 Manila residents and 500 families each from

Quezon City and Marikina were the recipients of the initial deliveries of the food packs.

In Luzon, the AFP Northern Luzon Command joined the MBFI in giving food packs in the provinces of Pampanga, Pangasinan, Bulacan, Ilocos Sur and Cagayan, while the Southern Luzon Command assisted in giving food packs to those in the provinces of Batangas, Cavite, Laguna and

Naga as the Western Command assisted in the distribution in Palawan.

The Central Command assisted Metrobank in giving gift packs in the provinces of Cebu, Bohol, Negros Occidental, Eastern Samar and Iloilo, while the Eastern Mindanao Command and the Western Mindanao Command distributed gift packs in the provinces of Davao, Surigao del Sur and Zamboanga.

DND sets conditions for martial law end

By Jeannette I. Andrade
@jiandradeINQ

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana may recommend the lifting of martial law in Mindanao by July once lawmakers introduce amendments to the country's antiterrorism law.

At Monday's forum at National Defense College of the Philippines in Camp Aguinaldo, Lorenzana said revisions in Republic Act No. 9372, or the Human Security Act of 2007, and other laws would enable the defense establishment to better face security challenges.

Other challenges

Among key security concerns he cited were the communist rebellion, violent extremism and terrorism, as well as the territorial and maritime dispute in the West

Philippine Sea.

He said these were compounded by the effects of climate change, increasing attacks in cyberspace and the proliferation of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high-yield explosives.

Lorenzana sought support for the defense department's legislative agenda in updating and amending laws, particularly the Human Security Act.

The defense secretary said amendments to the existing antiterrorism law "would no longer necessitate the proclamation of martial law and suspension of habeas corpus."

SC arguments

He said it was the defense establishment's "main argument" in explaining the need to extend martial law in Mindanao.

"We told them that the people (security forces) now have

no teeth," Lorenzana said.

He said he told the Supreme Court that if lawmakers passed the amendments within the first half of 2019, "then I can recommend the cessation of martial law by July 1st."

The proposed amendments to the law included giving law enforcers authority to detain terrorism suspects for 30 days, wiretapping and surveillance as well as monitoring of online activity on suspects for 90 days without need for court approval, and easing up the P500,000 penalty for law enforcers who err in arresting and detaining suspects.

Lorenzana said the extension of martial law in Mindanao had helped security forces neutralize 1,403 enemies of the state and persons affiliated with local terrorist and communist groups from Jan. 1 to September 2018. INQ 47

PH needs better cyber defense – Lorenzana

There is a pressing need to improve the country's cyber security, Department of National Defense (DND) Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said on Monday.

"Another concern is the increasing attacks in cyber space. Previous years have seen the rise of cyber threats, which can be expected to persist, as the vital economic and security mechanism becomes more connected; thus propagating the opportunity for adversarial states and even non-state actors to create disruption on a global scale," the defense chief said during

the National Defense College of the Philippines Alumni Forum, dubbed "The National Security Outlook for the Philippines in 2019" held at the NDCP Compound, Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City.

Given the large scope that a simple cyber-attack covers, much attention and resources are needed to curb such incidents, Lorenzana pointed out.

"Extraordinary attention is required on this matter. It is important to note that the Bangladesh Central Bank heist to which a local bank was implicated must serve as reminder to strengthen both civilian and military

networks," the DND chief emphasized.

Lorenzana said he is pushing for the passage of a law requiring the mandatory registration of SIM cards since a lot of improvised explosive devices in the southern part of the country are being detonated by cell-phones.

"I did not ask Congress, only (Senator Richard) Gordon. I asked him if he could sponsor a bill that requires the mandatory registration of SIM cards. How will it help us? It makes tracking criminals easier," the DND chief said. (PNA)

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• **8ID needs 200 soldiers**

TACLOBAN CITY - The Eighth Infantry (Stormtroopers) Division, Philippine Army (8ID PA), based in Camp Lukban, Catbalogan City, Samar, has started the recruitment and selection for 200 candidate soldiers (CS) as regular quota for 2019, a report from 8ID PA said. Capt. Cherry M. Junia, acting chief of 8ID public affairs office, said the 8ID command has directed all Infantry Brigades and Battalions to conduct registration for all interested CS applicants within their areas of responsibility, following the basic criteria, qualifications for selection, and acceptance of CS applicants. Junia added that interested applicants may proceed to the nearest Brigade/Battalion from their homes and must bring along with them the original copy of the following: birth certificate from Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) with official receipt, form 137, or transcript of records, diploma (High School or College), one (1) 2x2 picture with nametag, and valid identification cards. (Restituto A. Cayubit)

Bike explodes in Maguindanao

By JUAN FENEQUITO

MIDSAYAR, North Cotabato -- A motorcycle exploded while traversing the road in Talayan, Maguindanao Wednesday noon.

This was confirmed by Sixth Infantry Division spokesperson Maj. Arvin Encinas in a text message.

Encinas said the cause of the ex-

plosion was not yet established.

But, there was information that the blast was due to an improvised explosive device (IED) that was kept inside the bike's compartment.

He said the incident was still being investigated by the police to determine the cause and motive of the explosion.

Encinas said, as of this writing, there was no report of any casualty.

Military pooh-poohs UK travel advisory

At least 2,000 to 4,000 local and foreign tourists visit the town daily

By Rico M. Osmeña

The Central Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (Centcom-AFP) on Sunday brushed off alleged terror threats in Visayas region by highlighting its security preparedness and alertness to quell any attempt and act of terrorism.

Centcom chief Lt. Gen. Noel S. Clement, made the assurance Sunday during the

inter-agency tourism stakeholders security summit for Southern Cebu held in Oslob town.

"Terrorism doesn't have any territory, doesn't have any religion. They (terrorists) will inflict damage and sow terror on anyone who gets in their way. We will address any threats to prevent it from happening," he said.

He was reacting to a recent United Kingdom travel advisory warning and discouraging its citizens from travelling to Mindanao and the Visayas because of heightened terror threats.

The advisory specifically included Southern Cebu particularly the towns of Oslob, Dalaguete and Badian.

Local tourism officials and stakeholders were prompted to call the security summit over concerns that tourists would shy away from their area especially in Oslob, which is famous for its "butanding" attraction among foreign and local tourists.

At least 2,000 to 4,000 local and foreign tourists visit the town daily.

"We want to assure the public that we have enough assets and force to prevent any terrorist activities in this area. We also need everybody's support to help us in preventing these groups from carrying out their plans," Clement stressed.

Cavaliers, Responders near UNTV duel

Games Sunday (Pasig City Sports Center)

3 p.m. - NHA vs AFP

4:30 p.m. - Senate vs PNP

ARMED Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police inched closer to another title showdown by beating their respective semis rivals in the 7th UNTV Cup held over the weekend at the Pasig City Sports Center.

The top-seeded AFP Cavaliers leaned on the heroics of the cat-quick Jerry Lumongsod to eke out a 78-76 win over the National Housing Authority Builders in the opener of their best-of-three semis.

Ollan Oliver Omiping and Jerry Boy Saracho, on the other hand, provided the much-needed offensive punch in the pay-off period to help the second-ranked PNP Responders beat the defending champions Senate Defenders, 79-74, in their own semis series.

Both AFP and PNP can forge another exciting finals' encounter in the event organized by UNTV president and CEO Dr. Daniel Razon for public servants with wins on Sunday.

The chosen charity of the champion team, according to Razon, will receive a tax-free P4 million prize while the runner-up's own foundation gets P2 million.



Ollan Omiping tries to shoot against a Senate defender at the start of their semis series in the UNTV Cup last Sunday at the Pasig City Sports Center. Omiping scored 27 points as PNP beat Senate, 79-74.

A former player of the University of the East, Omiping led PNP's decisive run that saw them outscore the Defenders, 28-15, to overcome a 59-51 deficit in the third as they extended their winning run to seven games dating back to the first stage of the elims.

Omiping finished with 27 points, including 11 in the fourth quarter, aside

from posting seven boards and an assist, while Saracho chipped in eight points—all in the final quarter.

Lumongsod made two quick steals in the last 14 seconds with his first off Waldemar Tibay bringing him to the free throw area to shatter a 76-all count with a split. He also halved his free throws off Alvin Vitug after another heist. *AS*

AFP, PNP win

**Games Sunday
(Pasig City Sports Center)
3 p.m. – NHA vs AFP
4:30 p.m. – Senate vs PNP**

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and Philippine National Police (PNP) inched closer to another title showdown by beating their respective semis rivals in the 7th UNTV Cup held over the weekend at the Pasig City Sports Center.

The top-seeded AFP Cavaliers leaned on the heroics of the cat-quick Jerry Lumongsod to eke out a 78-76 win over the National Housing Authority Builders in the opener of their best-of-three semis.

Ollan Oliver Omiping and Jerry Boy Saracho, on the other hand, provided the much-needed offensive punch in the payoff period to help the second-ranked PNP Responders beat the defending champions Senate Defenders, 79-74, in their own semis series.

Both AFP and PNP can forge another exciting finals encounter in the event organized by UNTV pres-

ident and CEO Dr. Daniel Razon for public servants with another wins on Sunday.

The chosen charity of the champion team, according to Razon, will receive a tax-free P4 million prize while the runner-up's own foundation gets P2 million.

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Army-Bicycology, handa at palaban sa Ronda

NI EDWIN ROLLON

KAPIT-BISIG at handa na para sa muling pakikidigma ang Philippine Army-Bicycology Shop, kikip ang misyon na makamit ang overall team championship, hindi man makasingit sa bawat stage sa pagratsada ng 2019 LBC Ronda Pilipinas sinula sa Biyernes (Febrero 8) sa mapaghamong 197.6-kilometer Iloilo-Iloilo Stage 1.

Nawala man ang mga beteranong sina Sgt. Cris Joven, pumuwesto sa No.6 sa overall individual standing sa nakalipas na taon, gayundin sina Sgt. Mercurio Ramos, Jr. at Sgt. Alvin Benosa, kumpiyansasi team manager at dating Olympian swimmer Eric Buhain sa kampanya ng Army-Bicycology na inilarawan niyang mga palaban.

"In last year's edition, hindi namanganoon kataas ang expectation namin sa team. But with sheer guts and determination, lumaban nang todo ang ating mga riders. Luckily, nakakuha ng stage win (3rd stage) si Cris Joven and all of the sudden mas naging palaban ang team," pahayag ni Buhain, katuwang sa pangangasiwa ng koponan ang pakner na si John Garcia.

Hindi man nasundan ang stage three win ni Joven, hindi nagpahuli ang Army-Bicycology sa kabuuan ng 12-stage race para makuha ang No.2 sa overall team standings tangan ang kabuuang oras na 136:56:19 sa likod ng kampeon Navy (135:13:47). Pangatlo naman ang Go for Gold Developmental team (136:59:26).

"With this new group, hopefully we can do much better and win the overall championship," sambit ng dating Philippine Sports Commission at Games and Amusement Board (GAB) Chairman.

Makakasama nang natirang beterano sa koponan na sina Pfc. Marvin Tapic, Sgt. Reynaldo Navarro at veteran internationalist Sgt. Alfie Catalan ang mga bagong riders na sina Robinson Esteves, Warren Borders,



SALUTE! Handa na para sa muling pakikidigma sa mundo ng cycling ang Philippine Army Bicycology Shop na binubuo nina (mula sa kaliwa) Pfc. Marvin Tapic, Sgt. Reynaldo Navarro, Robinson Esteves, veteran internationalist Sgt. Alfie Catalan, Warren Borders, Mark Julious Borders, at alternate rider Kenneth Lacuesta. Ang koponan ay pinangangasiwaan ni coach Bong Curtan at assistant Joel Duenas, sa pagtataguyod nina Team Sports Director / Manager swimming legend Eric Buhain at Assistant Sports Director and Manager John Garcia.

Mark Julious Borders, at alternate rider Kenneth Lacuesta

"It's a combination of youth and experience. With UCI ranking also at stakes for this year's edition, mas tiyak na raratsada ang ating grupo," sambit ni Buhain.

Sa pagtataguyod ng Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) sa unang pagkakataon matapos simulan ang karera may siyam na taon na ang nakalilipas, nakalaan ang UCI points sa karera dahilang upang makilahok ang walong foreign teams na inaasahang magbibigay ng matinding hamon sa pitong local teams.

Bukod sa Army Bicycology, hahataw din ang Go for Gold, Eleven Cliqq-Air21 by Roadbike Phils, Team Franzia, Team Tarlac at Bike Xtreme, habang ang international team ay kinabibilangan ng Matrix Powertag Japan, Nex Cycling, Korail Team Korea, PGN Road Cycling Team, Sri Lanka Navy Cycle Team, Customs Cycling Indonesia, Terengganu Cycling Team at Cambodia Cycling Team.

Batay sa pinakabagong UCI qualification rule, mabibigyan na ang

top 50 bansa ng direktang slots sa 2020 Tokyo Olympics at malaking ranking points ang kaloob ng LBC Ronda Pilipinas.

Mula sa Iloilo, raratsada ang mga riders para sa 101.8km Guimaras-Guimaras Stages sa Feb. 9, bago magbalik ang ruta sa Iloilo para sa 179.4km Iloilo-Roxas City Stage Three sa Feb. 10 kasunod ang 146.9km Roxas-Roxas Stage Four sa Feb. 11.

Ang ikalima at final stage ay sa Feb. 12 sa distansiyang 148.9km Roxas-Antique.

"Hindi lang sa kababayan natin, ngayon may chance pa kami na maipakita ang galing laban sa international teams," pahayag ni Catalan, sumabak na rin kompetisyon sa abroad bilang miyembro ng National Team.

Pinaiksi ang karera, taliwas sa nakalipas na edisyon upang mabigyan ng pagkakataon ang mga miyembro ng National Team na maihanda ang mga sarili sa tamang pagkakataon para sa pagsabak sa 30th Southeast Asian Games na gaganapin sa bansa sa Nobyembre.

MARCH FOR SLAIN NDFP CONSULTANT

STOP PEDDLING LIES, MALAYAO KIN TELL COPS

SAN PABLO, ISABELA--Relatives and supporters of slain National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) consultant Randy Felix Malayao will hold a people's march on Wednesday, a day before his burial here.

But a week after Malayao was gunned down inside a bus in Aritao, Nueva Vizcaya, on Jan. 30, his family assailed the police for what it described as "lack of clear investigation" of the attack as they had yet to identify the gunman or the mastermind.

His sister Porla Urpano

said the police had yet to release the closed-circuit television footage and dash camera recordings in the crime scene as well as Malayao's laptop and mobile phone.

"We will cooperate but please do not pressure us because we are still grieving," she also said, addressing the investigators.

Innocent

Urpano said she was enraged by police and military allegations that Malayao had a rift with communist rebels

In a statement, the Cagayan Valley police described Malayao as an "alleged financial and sexual opportunist in the revolution." The statement, uploaded on the official website of the regional police, said such tags could have been reasons the rebels decided to kill Malayao.

"Randy was well respected and yet they are making yarn of lies to besmirch him even when he is already dead," Urpano told the Inquirer.

She said her brother had a "noble principle to be honest

and we believed he was innocent of the allegations."

"We want to preserve our integrity and I believe that he left a good mark on many people," she added.

Another sister, Rosalinda, said they wanted a speedy investigation with the identification and arrest of the gunman and the mastermind. *AR*

"We had been surprised with the outpouring of sympathy. Those who visited the wake were people who had been touched by his kindness," she said. --VILLAMOR VISAYA JR. INO

'This is the work of an animal'

By Julie Alipala
and Julie M. Aurelio
@Team_Inquirer

ZAMBOANGA CITY—Roberto Lubiano tried to control his tears as he looked at the coffin of his fifth son, Ranger SSgt. Jerry Lubiano.

The fallen soldier's face was beyond recognition, his arms and legs covered with packing tape to hold the flesh together.

"My son died a hero, but he died with so much pain. He was brutally hacked," Roberto said.

"This is the work of an animal," he added.

The remains of three other Rangers and their commanding officer, Lt. Randy Tanghal, also showed signs of mutilation, although the military has been tight-lipped on how the five died in a clash with Abu Sayyaf in Patikul, Sulu province.

The bodies of Tanghal, Lubiano, Cpl. Oliver Aquino, Cpl. Reggie Draug and Pfc. John Paul Pascua lie at the La Naval Chapel of the Naval Forces

Western Mindanao.

Roberto's son was a hero of Marawi and had been awarded by President Duterte with P100,000 in cash, a .45-caliber pistol and a watch, he said.

Jerry was his family's breadwinner, he added.

On Monday, Mr. Duterte met with spouses and parents of the soldiers killed in the two explosions that ripped through a Jolo cathedral on Jan. 27, and gave them the Presidential Special Financial Assistance worth P500,000, Defense Secretary

Delfin Lorenzana said.

The President extended the same financial aid to relatives of a soldier killed in a clash with Abu Sayyaf in Patikul, Sulu, days ago during a manhunt for the Jolo bombers, Lorenzana said, adding that the Armed Forces of the Philippines also gave the bereaved families P280,000 to P400,000 each, depending on the slain soldier's rank.

"These are over and above their monthly pension," he added. INQ

FEB. 6 PLEBISCITE ON BANGSAMORO ORGANIC LAW

HEAVY TURNOUT OF VOTERS EXPECTED IN COTABATO, LANAO DEL NORTE

More than half a million voters in 67 villages in Cotabato province and six towns in Lanao del Norte are expected to decide on Wednesday whether they will join the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in a plebiscite that authorities hope will draw a big turnout.

The plebiscite follows the Jan. 21 vote, which ratified the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) creating the BARMM, the final step in the 2014 peace agreement between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

"The Jan. 21 plebiscite was a success and we hope to duplicate that success here. [But] it remains to be seen whether or not we will be able to match the turnout," said Comelec spokesperson James Jimenez.

"We are nevertheless hopeful that because this is a politically active area—historically and traditionally—we expect we will have a turnout of at least better than 70 percent," he said.

About 85 percent of voters turned out for last month's poll in the whole of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), plus the cities of Cotabato and Isabela, capital of Basilan province.

Mechanics of plebiscite

Jimenez said there were 639,361 registered voters in the areas covered by Wednesday's plebiscite.

The vote will be held in the towns of Aleosan, Carmen, Cabacan, Midsayap, Pigkawayan, Pikit and Tulunan in Cotabato to determine whether the peo-

ple there will allow 67 of their villages to join the BARMM. The 67 villages include 39 that voted for inclusion in the ARMM in a plebiscite in 2001.

Voters in Lanao del Norte, except those in Iligan City, will be asked whether they will allow six of their towns—Baloj, Munai, Nunungan, Pantar, Tagoloan and Tangkal—to be included in the BARMM. Those in the six towns will be asked if they want to join the new autonomous region.

If majority of the voters in the seven Cotabato towns and the 67 villages concerned vote yes, then these barangays will form part of the BARMM. A sim-

ilar majority is needed in the whole of Lanao del Norte and in the six towns for the inclusion of these municipalities in the new autonomous region.

"A double majority vote [for yes] is needed to make the inclusion happen," Jimenez said.

He said the "possible spillover of incidents" in other parts of Mindanao was the biggest concern in Wednesday's plebiscite, referring to the bombings at the Jolo cathedral and at a Zamboanga City mosque that killed 24 people and wounded more than 100 others.

But Jimenez said the Philippine National Police was "not

expecting any great disruptions" of the plebiscite.

Heavy police presence

PNP Director General Oscar Albayalde said at least 5,500 police officers were deployed to secure 588 polling centers.

"We do not see any threat whatsoever, but we cannot relax. Let us be vigilant always, not just ... security forces but also the community," Albayalde said.

He ordered more road checkpoints and heightened visibility "not just today or tomorrow, but every day" to prevent a repeat of the Jolo bombing.

Later in the day, however,

two separate explosions rocked the towns of Kauswagan and Lala, both in Lanao del Norte, but caused no injuries.

Brig. Gen. Thomas Sedano Jr., commander of the 2nd Mechanized Infantry Brigade based in Iligan, said the Army had deployed 1,600 soldiers to secure polling places in the province.

"We will make sure that Wednesday's plebiscite will be peaceful and credible because we know how important this plebiscite is, not only in Lanao del Norte but also in the whole country," he said.

About a dozen families from the Lanao del Norte towns of

Sultan Naga Dimaporo, Lala, Kolambugan, Baroy and Kapatagan sought refuge in relatives' homes at Ozamiz City in neighboring Misamis Occidental province because of tensions created by "wrong information" about the plebiscite, according to Senior Supt. Leopoldo Cabanag, Lanao del Norte police director.

Rising tensions

The Ozamiz government said 19 families (111 people), mostly women and children, had arrived in the city since Feb. 2 because of rising tensions between supporters and opponents of the BOL, according to Rico M. Guangco Jr., city disaster risk reduction and management officer.

Kolambugan Mayor Lorenzo V. Manigos said some of his constituents were intimidated by the presence of MILF's yes campaigners.

He said prominent politicians in the province were divided over the BOL, with First District Rep. Khalid Q. Dimaporo campaigning against the law and Maigo town Mayor Rafael Rizalda pushing for it.

Pastor Tom Banawa, a resident of Barangay Dableston in Sultan Naga Dimaporo, said their neighbors left their small children with their relatives outside the province and came back to vote. **AP**

"Those who can vote have come back to vote," said Banawa. "We are staying because I don't want to waste my vote for this plebiscite. This is very important to me." —REPORTS FROM

TINA G. SANTOS, JAYMEE T. GAMIL,
RICHEL UMEL, DIVINA SUSON, TITO
FIEL AND BONG SARMIENTO INQ

Sulu leader seeks deeper cathedral blast probe

By ROEL PAREÑO

ZAMBOANGA CITY – Even as five suspects in the Jolo church bombing have surrendered, former Sulu governor Abdusakur Tan Sr. called on authorities not to jump to conclusions and instead dig deeper in their investigation.

Tan said the five suspects who surrendered to the police could be mere accomplices.

"Let's wait for the complete investigation because those who surrendered

can be only part or accessory of a larger group of suspects," Tan said.

Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Director General Oscar Albayalde on Monday announced that the suspects led by Kammah Pae, alias Kamah, surrendered to the military

on Sunday in Sulu.

Four others identified as Albaji Gadjali, his sons Kaisar and Rajan, and Salit Alih also surrendered to the military here.

Kammah and his four companions

Turn to Page 8

Sulu leader

were tagged as members of Ajang-Ajang, a sub-group of the Abu Sayyaf under Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan.

Albayalde claimed the five surrendered for fear they would be killed in the relentless military operations.

The Sulu provincial police are preparing to file 23 counts of murder and 95 counts of frustrated murder and damage to property against the suspects.

The five suspects who surrendered were among 22 others behind the bombing, according to Albayalde.

Albayalde said 14 suspects including Sawadjaan remain at large. The military has been hunting them down in Patikul since Saturday.

The police identified four of those at large as Makrim Habbisi, Barak Ingog, a certain alias Usman and Arab Puti.

PNP spokesman Senior Supt. Bernard Banac said the case has been solved with the arrest of Kamah and the other suspects.

Banac though clarified the case could not be considered "closed" since there are other suspects still at large.

"Nothing is definite yet, nothing is final because the investigation is ongoing. We have to look deeper into the investigation and we have to look at different angles and different groups," Tan said.

Tan lamented that if the investigation ends with Kamah, justice will not be served to the victims and people of Jolo and Sulu, as well as victims of other acts of terrorism.

Albayalde gave assurance that Kamah is not their fall guy.

"We conducted tactical interrogation and also follow-up operations that led to the arrest of the others that were involved," he said.

The PNP said Kamah reportedly escorted an unidentified Indonesian couple in Sulu after they arrived from an island near Basilan on Jan.

21, a week before the bombing attack.

The couple met with Sawadjaan in Patikul where they hatched the plan to bomb the cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Jolo.

Two bombs tore through the cathedral on Jan. 27 during Sunday mass, killing at least 23 people and wounding more than 100 others.

Authorities said the attack was aimed at creating a religious divide and seek support from Islamic State.

Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año confirmed it was a suicide attack.

"It is officially confirmed it's a case of suicide bombing," Año said in a message posted on Viber.

Año cited the results of the post blast and forensic investigations and testimonies of witnesses.

He said efforts are now underway to identify the alleged Indonesian couple.

Año said the Indonesian government has expressed willingness to help in identifying them.

"Identification is in the process but it may take time," he said.

While foreign terrorists are attempting to sway their counterparts in the country into becoming martyrs, Año said it is unlikely there will be a Filipino who will go to such extremes.

"They underestimate the influence of Filipino culture to our Muslim brothers," he said.

Failure of Intelligence

Detained Sen. Leila de Lima claimed a failure of intelligence led to the Jolo bombing attack.

De Lima criticized President Duterte for his failure to prevent the attacks despite his strong hand against terrorism.

She blamed the intelligence community and ques-

tioned how the intelligence fund was being spent.

Malacañang, however, said De Lima was "talking nonsense."

"Her confinement has dulled her senses," presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said.

Panelo described De Lima, in detention on charges of drug trafficking, as "callous" and "insensitive" for not even considering the plight of soldiers hunting down the suspects.

"The fact that the soldiers were not able to detect the terrorists who disguised themselves as churchgoers is no reason for this criminally accused legislator to be so insensitive as to blame them for the tragedy," Panelo said.

Panelo said the President has been hard-pressed in crushing the Islamic militants.

"She claims that the President cannot protect the people from the terrorists with his threatening words, forgetting that this is the same President who crushed the dreaded and ruthless ISIS (Islamic State) and their local counterparts in the Marawi siege," he said.

Panelo said Duterte had declared martial law in battling the enemies of the state.

"Had he not, the entire Mindanao would have been in chaos with bombings and killings a daily occurrence," he said.

Panelo then accused De Lima of trying to use the present situation to her advantage.

"She tries to reenter the public's consciousness by dishing out reckless and offensive rants against the President, reducing herself into a pathetic figure and a pitiful caricature," he said.

"She is better off indulging herself in meditation and prayers so the goodness in her heart comes out in full bloom instead of seeing only the dark side in her dungeon," Panelo added.

- Christina Mendez, Emmanuel Tupas

'Foreign terrorists training locals'

THE JOLO twin blasts carried out by suicide bombers were an example of foreign terrorists training locals on how to sow chaos in the country, Interior Secretary Eduardo Año said on Tuesday.

Terrorists A2

TERRORISTS FROM A1

Foreign

"By showing and doing these suicide bombings, they are expecting Filipino Muslim terrorists would follow soon. They underestimate the influence of Filipino culture on our Muslim brothers," he told reporters.

There has been no record of a suicide bombing in the Philippines committed by a Filipino terrorist, as it is deemed too violent, according to security officials and experts.

In August 2018, a Moroccan with ties to the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group launched a suicide attack in Lamitan City, Basilan in which 10 people were killed.

Año said authorities were still verifying the identities of the Jolo Cathedral suicide bombers, believed to be an Indonesian couple.

"Identification is on the process but may take time. The Indonesian government is willing to assist. It is officially confirmed that it's a case of suicide bombing," he said.

It was Año who first told the public the suicide bombers in the twin blasts at the Our Lady of Mount

Carmel Cathedral were Indonesians, citing intelligence sources.

Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Oscar Albayalde later confirmed Año's claim and said witnesses to the bombings noticed that the couple couldn't speak Tausug, the language of Sulu natives.

A DNA test on two unclaimed pairs of feet would be conducted, Año said.

According to investigators, the Indonesian couple came to the Philippines on January 21 through Lampinigan Island, 277.3 kilometers away from Jolo.

The two were brought to Jolo on January 24 by pump boat.

Upon arrival in Jolo, the couple was brought to the house of Sawdjaan Met Usman, the alleged mastermind of the blasts. The couple and other suspects then went to a forested area in Patikul, Sulu to plan the attack.

They went back to Jolo on January 26 with black trolley bags allegedly carrying the improvised explosive devices or IEDs used in the blasts. The woman reportedly was the first to detonate a bomb, followed by the man seconds later.

A total of 23 people died from the blast, according to the PNP.

ROY D.R. NARRA

Bombing solved but not closed

By Elmer N. Manuel

Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Eduardo Año on Tuesday confirmed that suicide bombers were indeed behind the deadly explosions that rocked a cathedral in Jolo, Sulu two Sundays ago.

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It is officially confirmed that it's a case of suicide bombing

From page 1

The twin blasts left 23 people dead and scores of people injured.

In a statement, Año said an Indonesian couple were the perpetrators following investigations and testimonies given by the survivors and witnesses.

"It is officially confirmed that it's a case of suicide bombing," he said. "The conclusion was based on post blast and forensic investigation, as well as the testimonies of survivors."

The DILG chief, however, noted the identification of an Indonesian husband-and-wife team who were allegedly behind the suicide bombing in Jolo is ongoing. It might take time before a conclusion is reached, he said.

Año also said the Indonesian government expressed willingness to assist in identifying the couple.

"Bombers are Indonesian couple. Identification is on the process but may take time. Indonesian government is willing to assist," said Año who also downplayed the effort by foreign terrorists to teach Filipino religious hardliners about suicide bombing. He said it is not a part of Filipino culture.

"By showing and doing these suicide bombings, they are

expecting the Filipino-Muslim terrorists would follow soon. They underestimate the influence of Filipino culture on our Muslim brothers," Año said.

Suspects surrender

The Department of Justice (DoJ), meanwhile, disclosed that the multiple murder and frustrated murder complaints against five of the suspects in the deadly Jolo cathedral bombings last week have been submitted for resolution.

Identification is on the process but may take time. Indonesian government is willing to assist.

In a statement, DoJ Undersecretary Mark Perete disclosed that a prosecutor in Sulu terminated the inquest proceedings against the five men under police custody.

They are Mukammar L. Pae/Kammah L. Pae with alias Kammah; Albaji K. Gadjali with alias Apah Albaji/Awag; Radjan B. Gadjali with alias Rajan; Kaisar B. Gadjali with alias Isal, and Said Alih with alias Papong.

They will face complaints filed by the Sulu police in connection with the twin blasts at the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Cathedral - multiple

murder, multiple frustrated murder and damage to property and by procedure, a prosecutor has to find probable cause that the respondents committed the alleged crimes before charges could be filed in court for trial.

Año said an Indonesian couple were the perpetrators following investigations and testimonies given by the survivors and witnesses.

The five surrendered to authorities over the weekend, leaving at least seven identified suspects and other John and Jane Does at large.

Case solved

Meanwhile, the Philippine National Police (PNP) is already considering the case as solved but not closed, its spokesman Senior Supt. Bernard Banac said Tuesday.

In a separate interview, Banac said the PNP now has in its custody five of the bombing suspects but noted that they could not yet close the case since 14 other suspects are still at large.

"The case has been solved but not closed. This means that the suspects are now in the custody of the police and appropriate charges have been filed against them," Banac said. "Manhunt operations against the remaining suspects were ongoing."

Año: Jolo cathedral attack a case of suicide bombing

BY VICTOR REYES

INTERIOR Secretary Eduardo Año yesterday said the bomb attack at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Jolo town in Sulu on January 27 is a case of suicide bombing involving an Indonesian couple.

"It's officially confirmed that it's a case of suicide bombing," Año said referring to the twin bombings at the church, which killed 23 persons and injured about 100 others.

Año said the conclusion was based on the "post-blast and forensic investigation, as well as the testimonies of survivors." The investigation was conducted by the police.

The cathedral attack is the second case of suicide bombing in the country. The first was in July last year when a Moroccan blew himself up in Lantoran City, killing 11 people. Officials initially denied the Lantoran incident was a case of suicide bombing.

Año said the cathedral bombers are an Indonesian husband and wife couple.

He said the Indonesian government "is willing to assist" in the identification of the two.

Intelligence reports said the couple, identified by Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana earlier as Yemenis, linked up with the group of Abu Sayyaf leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan after arriving in Sulu

from Indonesia.

The two, prior to the blasts, were escorted to Jolo by Kammah Pae alias Kamah, a member of the Ajang-Ajang which is a group associated with the Abu Sayyaf.

Pae and four other suspects surrendered to authorities on Saturday and Sunday. PNP chief Oscar Albayalde said Monday Pae did not admit participation in the attack but his cohorts said Pae "escorted" the Indonesians to his (Pae's) house in Jolo.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana has said another man with the name "Kamah" is behind the blasts, and not the one who surrendered last Saturday.

Officials have said about 40

foreign terrorists are in the country, mostly in Sulu and Maguindanao. The foreign terrorists supposedly include Indonesians, Malaysians, Pakistanis, Moroccans, Egyptians, and Singaporeans.

Año said the foreign terrorists continue to teach Filipino terrorists on suicide bombing.

"By showing and doing these suicide bombings, they are expecting the Filipino Muslim terrorists would follow soon. They underestimate the influence of Filipino culture on our Muslim brothers," he said. PNP spokesman Senior Supt. Bernard Banac said the police force considers the Jolo bombing

See AÑO > Page B3

AÑO

case as solved but not yet closed.

"We've arrested the (five) suspects and filed charges against them so the case is solved but it does not necessarily mean it's closed because we continue to pursue other suspects. We continue to pursue them as of now," he said.

Police said there are 14 other

suspects in the blasts, including Sawadjaan, who Banac said masterminded the attack. Soldiers clashed with Sawadjaan's group in Patikul on Saturday. The clash left five soldiers and three terrorists dead.

Banac said Kamah, during questioning, denied any involvement in the bombing "but his four companions admitted that he is their leader."

Banac maintained that Kamah and his companions provided transportation and food to the Indonesian couple "until the bombing of the Sulu cathedral was consummated."

"It's his right to deny the charges against him. That is his right. But because of the testimony and evidence we gathered against him, we included him in the case (that was filed)," Banac said.

Two explosions in Lanao del Norte

BY VICTOR REYES

TWO explosions rocked Lanao del Norte yesterday, eve of the plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law.

No one was reported killed or injured in the blasts.

One occurred at the back of Kauswagan town hall at around 4:50 p.m., said Col. Alex Aduca, spokesman of the Task Force Plebisito of the Army's 3rd Mechanized Brigade.

Aduco said the improvised explosive device (IED), placed in a bag, was left under a dump truck.

Aduco said the second IED explosion occurred around 4:35 p.m. in front of a gas station in Barangay Maranding in Lala town.

"We're still confirming who is behind these," said Aduco.

Asked if the blasts were related to the BOL plebiscite, Aduco said: "That's one of the angles we're looking into — peace spoilers who want to sow fear."

Aduco expressed confidence no further bombings will occur "because we already intensified our checkpoint operations and our patrols."

Maguindanao bomb blast misses candidate's convoy

BY VICTOR REYES

AN improvised bomb exploded in Talayan town in Maguindanao yesterday, barely missing the convoy of former town mayor Datu Ali Midtimbang Sr. who is running for mayor in the May elections.

PNP spokesman Senior Supt. Bernard Banac said one person sustained minor injuries.

Banac said the bomb, placed in a motorcycle, exploded at around 11:45 a.m. The motorcycle was parked on the side of the national highway in Sitio Nes in Barangay Tambunan.

He said initial investigation showed two unidentified men on board two motorcycles "stopped, parked

one motorcycle on the side of the road, and pretended to buy fruits from a nearby makeshift store." They left aboard one motorcycle.

The motorcycle that was left behind exploded moments later, Banac said, when the convoy of Midtimbang "was passing by, and barely a few meters away." No one was reported hurt from Midtimbang's convoy.

The injured person was fruit vendor Sera Mangelen, 25, a resident of the town.

Responding bomb experts from the Army and the Talayan town police recovered bomb components from the blast site.

Asked if the attack was politically motivated, Banac said, "It's hard to speculate. We're still determining (the motive). But based on the initial investigation, we are now in the election period so it could be a reason to harm anyone." B2

Maj. Arvin Encinas, spokesman of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said the blast site was about 100 meters from a checkpoint manned by soldiers.

'CASE SOLVED' 5 Jolo bombers kinasuhan na

Nina JEFFREY G. DAMICOG, FER TABOY, BETH CAMIA, at MARTIN SADONGDONG

Kinasuhan na ang limang suspek sa magkasunod na pambobomba sa Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral sa Jolo, Sulu noong Enero 27.

Nagsampa na ng kaso ang Philippine National Police (PNP) sa Provincial Prosecutor's Office sa Sulu laban kina Kammah Pac; Albaji Gadjali; at anak niyang sina Kaisar at Rajay; at Salit Alih.

"The prosecutor has terminated the inquest proceedings and deemed submitted for resolution the case against the five arrested suspects in the Jolo Cathedral bombing," pagsisiwalat ni Department of Justice (DoJ) spokesman Undersecretary Mark Perete.

"The suspects have been named respondents in the cases for multiple murder, multiple frustrated murder and damage to property filed by Sulu Police Provincial Office, Camp P/SSupt Julasirim Ahadlin Kasim, Asturias, Jolo, Sulu," diin niya.

Sa nasabing reklamo, sinabi ni Perete na kasama rin ang pitong iba pang 'di pa nakikilalang suspek.

Unang sumuko si Kammah sa 35th Infantry Battalion (IB) ng Philippine Army nitong Sabado, bago itinum over sa pulisya sa Jolo, Sulu.

Habang ang apat na iba pang suspek ay sumuko rin sa hiwalay na local police units sa Sulu, nitong Linggo.

Samantala, ang lima ay nasa kustodiya ng Special Investigation Task Group (SITG) Mount Carmel sa Jolo, Sulu.

**P500KTULONG SA BIYUDA
NG MGASUNDALO**

Samantala, bagamat walang public

engagement, naging abala si Pangulong Duterte sa pagharap sa mga asawa ng limang nasawing sundalo sa pambobomba.

Ayon kay Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, ipinatawag sila kamakalawa ng Pangulo sa Davao City, kasama sina Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello at NHA Manager Jun Escalada.

Ayon kay Lorenzana, binigyan ng Pangulo ng tig-P500,000 ang mga biyuda ng limang sundalo.

Galing umano ang pondosa Presidential Special Financial Assistance fund.

Nagbigay din, aniya, ang Armed Forces of the Philippines ng tulong pinansiyal na P280,000 hanggang P400,000, depende sa ranggo ng mga sundalo.

Bukod pa umano ito sa buwanag pensyon na matatanggap ng mga biyuda.

'CASE SOLVED'

Ipinahayag kahapon ng Philippine National Police (PNP) na "case solved" na ang pambobomba sa cathedral, matapos na sumuko ang limang suspek at kasuhan.

Gayunman, sinabi ni Senior Supt. Bernard Banac, PNP spokesperson, na ang kaso ay hindi pa "closed" dahil nagsasagawa pa ng imbestigasyon para sa ikaaresto ng nasa 14 pang suspek, kabilang si Abu Sayyaf sub-leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan.

"This case is solved but not yet closed. This means that the suspects were already placed under police custody and the charges against them were already filed. We cannot close the case yet because pursuit operations are still on-going against the other at-large suspects," sabi ni Banac.

Jolo blasts considered solved: PNP

By MARTIN SADONGDONG

The Philippine National Police (PNP) disclosed yesterday that the twin explosions at a cathedral in Jolo, Sulu, last month has already been solved with the surrender of the five suspects and the filing of charges against them.

However, Senior Superintendent Bernard Banac, PNP spokesperson, noted that the case cannot be considered "closed" yet as deeper investigation is still being conducted to arrest at least 14 other suspects, including Abu Sayyaf sub-leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan.

"This case is solved but not yet closed. This means that the suspects were already placed under police custody and the charges against them were already filed. We cannot close the case yet because pursuit operations are still on-going against the other at-large suspects," Banac said.

The twin explosions occurred at Our Lady of Mount Carmel on January 27 which resulted in the death of 23 persons.

Over the weekend, five suspects linked to the twin bomb attacks at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral surrendered to authorities, according to PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde.

They were identified as Kammah Pae alias Kammah, from Abu Sayyaf Group-affiliated Ajang-Ajang; Albaji Klsae alias Awag and his sons Rajan Bakil alias Radjan and Kalsar Bakil alias Isal; and Salit Alih alias Papong.

Charges for 23 counts of murder, 95 counts of frustrated murder, and damage to property were filed against them and 14 other suspects before the Sulu Provincial Prosecutor's Office on Monday.

Other respondents include Sawadjaan, Usman Absarah, Barak Ingog, Makrim Ablsi, Bapah Absara, one alias Ebng, and several John and Jane Does.

However, according to media reports, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana revealed that they were looking for a different suspect whose name "sounds like Kammah."

Speculations were then raised that the "Kammah", who surrendered to authorities is only a "fall

guy", since according to critics, no terrorist as notorious as Abu Sayyaf would yield to lawmen after committing a crime with magnitude as big as the Jolo cathedral blasts.

Earlier, Albayalde said Kammah Pae and his cohorts were "forced" to surrender "out of fear for their lives" because of the massive pursuit operations being conducted by the police and military.

Albayalde also noted that Kammah Pae admitted to being part of the Ajang-Ajang Group but denied his involvement in the Jolo cathedral bombing.

Banac, for his part, maintained that the "Kammah" they had in custody is the same person that the police and military have been hunting all along.

On the other hand, he said the police and military will continue to work on "further developments" of the case.

"Our coordination with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is continuous. We have created a special investigation task group [SITG Mount Carmel] to monitor further developments," Banac said. 4

Indonesia pasok sa Jolo suicide bombers

Nakahanda ang Indonesian government na tumulong sa forensic examination sa sample tissue ng nagkadurog na katawan ng umano'y mag-asawang suicide bombers sa Jolo Cathedral noong Enero 27.

Kasabay nito, kinumpirma ni Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año na sui-

cide bombers ang nasa likod ng pagpapasabog sa Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral.

"It is officially confirmed that it's a case of suicide bombing," pahayag ni Año na sinabing ito'y base sa resulta ng post blast at forensic investigation at gayundin mula sa testimonya ng mga survivors.

"Bombers are Indo-

NI JOY CANTOS

nesian couple. Identification is on the process but may take time. The Indonesian government is willing to assist. It is officially confirmed that it's a case of suicide bombing," sabi pa ni Año.

Si Año ang unang nagbulgar na mag-asawang Indonesian ang nasa likod ng twin bombing base sa intelligence sources nito bilang dating AFP chief.

Sinabi ng Kalihim na ang pagpapasabog sa Jolo Cathedral ay isa sa mga paraang itinaturo ng

mga dayuhang terorista sa mga Pinoy Muslim extremists kung paano maghahasik ng terorismo sa bansa.

Wala rin aniyang rekord ng suicide bombing sa Pilipinas na kagagawan ng mga Pinoy terrorists dahil macyado itong bayolente.

8 militants dead

COTABATO CITY- Government troops intensified air and artillery strikes to flush out ISIS-inspired local terrorists in marshy areas in Maguindanao, resulting in the killing of eight suspected terrorists and wounding of 10 others, the military reported Monday.

Capt. John Arvin Encinas, spokesperson of 6th Infantry Division, said the surgical military operations were aimed at flushing out at least 200 members of the Dawlah Islamiyah-inspired Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) under Salahuddin Hassan alias Abu Toraife and Abubakar Ismael alias Ustadz Karialan who are holding out near the Liguasan Marsh in Barangay Tugal, Sultan sa Barongis, Maguindanao.

He said the military offensive had also destroyed several bunkers and foxholes which served as encampment for the local terrorists.

He said one of those wounded

critically was BIFF rebel leader Salahuddin Hassan.

Five of the fatalities were identified as Abu Salik, Abu Tutin, Saidin Kusain, Guabar Sulaiman and Hashim Abo.

Major Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, 6th ID commander, said the air strikes and artillery bombardment were launched on terrorist lairs based on the information provided by BIFF rebels who earlier yielded to authorities.

He said the military operation was closely coordinated with Moro Islamic Liberation Front-Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities to ensure the safety of civilian residents in the area.

"The targeted areas were confined to locations away from populated communities," Sobejana said.

He the military offensive was carried out to thwart possible terror attacks from the ISIS-inspired local terror groups. (Joseph Jubelag)

8 sa BIFF dedo sa airstrikes

Patay ang walong miyembro ng Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) sa airstrikes na isinagawa ng Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) sa Maguindanao, iniulat kahapon.

Ayon kay Maj. General Cirilito Sobejana, commander ng Joint Task Force Central (JTFC), pinaulanan ng FA-50 bombs nitong Linggo ang kuta ng mga terorista, na ikinamatay ng walong BIFF.

Lima sa mga nasawi ay kinilalang sina Hashim, Abo Salik, Abo Tutin, Saidin Kusain, at Guabar Sulaiman.

Samantala, 10 iba pang miyembro ng BIFF ang nasugatan, kabilang si Salahudin Hassan.

Sinabi ni Sobejana na isinagawa ang airstrikes malapos magbigay ng impormasyon ang sub-commander ng BIFF hinggil sa lokasyon ng mga miyembro ng grupo.

Sumuko sa Philippine Army ang 10 mandirigma ng BIFF, sa ilalim

ng sub-commander nilang si Gani Saligan, na pawang kakasuhan.

Fer Taboy

High turnout seen in BOL plebiscite

By MAYEN JAYMALIN

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) is expecting a high voter turnout and a more peaceful conduct of today's

plebiscite for the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

Comelec spokesman James Jimenez said today's plebiscite – in Lanao del Norte and

North Cotabato – might not generate the same level of interest than the one conducted on Jan. 21 in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

Turn to Page 8

High turnout

From Page 1

(ARMM) – Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi – as well as in the cities of Cotabato and Isabela.

"The stakes are a little different, it's just inclusion, but we are nevertheless hopeful because this is a politically active area, historically and traditionally. We expect that we will have a turnout better than 70 percent," Jimenez said, adding today's activity is expected to be "less emotional" and more peaceful.

Despite fears that violence might spill over from other parts of Mindanao, Jimenez said both the Comelec and the Philippine National Police (PNP) are hopeful that

today's plebiscite will be peaceful and successful.

"According to the PNP, there is no increase in the number of hotspots. Clearly they are not expecting any great disruption during the elections. Let's face it, the Jan. 21 plebiscite was successful and we hope to duplicate that success," Jimenez said.

PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde yesterday visited his men tasked to secure the plebiscite.

Photographs released by the PNP showed Albayalde leading a command conference at the Midsayap municipal hall in North Cotabato.

Albayalde will also visit

and supervise security preparations in Lanao del Norte.

Canvassing in Manila

Jimenez said much of the canvassing of the plebiscite results would be conducted in Manila, with the National Plebiscite Board of Canvassers (NPBOC) set to reconvene tomorrow afternoon.

He said certificates of canvass from different municipalities of North Cotabato will be directly transmitted to the NPBOC.

Official results of the plebiscite are expected within four days or by Tuesday at the latest, Jimenez said.

Special monitoring teams have been deployed prior to plebiscite day to help in the voting preparations.

Election paraphernalia will be released at 4 a.m. today. Voting precincts are open from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Manual system of voting will be used in the plebiscite.

Jimenez said voters should write "yes" or "no" on the ballots to indicate whether they want to be included or not in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao or BARMM.

A total of 639,361 registered voters are expected to cast their votes.

Support for BOL

The people of Lanao del Norte yesterday affirmed their support for the BOL as they prepared to participate in the plebiscite.

Residents expressed their confirmation through a resounding "yes" during a peace assembly on the BOL held at the municipal gym of Kapatagan town on Monday.

Assistant Secretary Dickson Hermoso of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) said the landmark legislation was part of the Duterte administration's commitment to attain a lasting peace in Mindanao. Hermoso said with the ratification of the

BOL, combatants of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) will be decommissioned and development programs and projects will be provided for the new Bangsamoro region.

MILF Bangsamoro Transition Commissioner Abdullah Camlian said the BOL could be the last chance for the Bangsamoro people to achieve their aspirations for a lasting peace.

For his part, Omar Yasser Sema of the Moro National Liberation Front Bangsamoro Transition Commission urged the people to stay vigilant during the plebiscite.

The peace assembly was part of the commitment of the OPAPP with the Comelec to carry out a series of education campaigns in areas covered by the plebiscite.

The campaign aims to help voters make an informed decision during the plebiscite.

Meanwhile, local governments in North Cotabato also expressed their support for the BOL during a forum held in Midsayap on Feb. 2.

The forum was attended by local officials, members of academe and civil society groups.

OPAPP Undersecretary Nabil Tan urged the people

to support the inclusion of their towns and cities in the BARMM.

'Allot enough funds for BOL'

Sen. Paolo Benigno Aquino IV urged his colleagues in the Senate to allot enough funds for the full implementation of the BOL and ensure the fulfillment of its mandate to bring peace and order in Mindanao.

"Our Muslim brothers and sisters have long fought for this so the transition must not be delayed by lack of budget," Aquino said, referring to the BOL.

He said the ARMM's proposed budget of P31.1 billion for this year would not be enough as the transition to BARMM needs around P59 billion.

Republic Act 11054 or the BOL mandates that the current appropriation for the ARMM should be transferred to the Bangsamoro Transition Authority.

The Senate version of the 2019 budget has allotted around P30 billion additional budget for the BARMM, which Aquino hopes will hurdle the bicameral conference committee. — **With Jose Rodel Clapano, Emmanuel Tupas, Paolo Romero**

2nd BOL plebiscite held today in Lanao Norte, N. Cotabato

By LESLIE ANN G. AQUINO

The second round of the plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law will be held today, February 6, in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato.

The Commission on Elections said the plebiscite will be held in the province of Lanao del Norte, except Iligan City; the municipalities of Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pikit, and Pigkawayan in the province of North Cota-

bato; and the 28 areas contiguous to any of the Bangsamoro core areas, where either the local government of such area, by way of a resolution; or at least 10 percent of the registered voters in a local government unit, by way of a petition, asked for inclusion in the plebiscite.

Comelec Spokesman James Jimenez expressed hope that today's plebiscite will be as successful as the January 21 referendum.

"January 21 was a success and we ▶ 4

2nd BOL plebiscite...

hope to duplicate that success here," said Jimenez.

The poll official is unsure if this plebiscite would generate the same interest from voters due to the absence of the question on the ratification of the BOL.

"I guess it remains to be seen if we're going to match the turnout, stakes are a little different, no longer ratification, it's just inclusion," Jimenez said.

"I don't know if it will necessarily generate the same level of interest but we are nevertheless hopeful that because this is a politically active area, historically and traditionally, we expect that we will have a turnout better than 70 percent," he added.

The plebiscite ballots will feature several questions regarding the position of voters on whether they want their areas to be included in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

In the case of Lanao del Norte, all voters in the province will have a say if the towns of Baloi, Munai, Nunungan, Pantar, Tagoloan, and Tangkal will be allowed to join BARMM.

Voters from the said towns will also be asked if they will agree to have their municipalities join the newly-formed

region.

For voters in North Cotabato such as in the municipalities of Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pigkawayan, Pikit, and Tulunan will have a say if the 67 barangays seeking inclusion will be given permission to do so.

On the other hand, voters from the 67 barangays from the said municipalities will also be asked if they agree to join the BARMM.

The Comelec expects to complete the canvassing of votes at the national level in four days.

Albayalde inspects security preps

Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Director General Oscar Albayalde was in North Cotabato Tuesday to inspect security preparations for the second BOL set tomorrow.

"The Chief, PNP PDG Oscar Albayalde and TDCO/Task Force Commander Police Deputy Director General Archie Gamboa are now inspecting our final deployments in North Cotabato where a final briefing on security preparations for North Cotabato and Lanao Norte to be attended by Comelec, PNP and AFP officials and other stakeholders," PNP spokesperson Senior Supt. Bernard Banac said in a message sent to reporters Tuesday.

The country's top cop will also visit

some voting centers on Wednesday to ensure that the plebiscite runs smoothly and safely.

"All RDs (regional directors) of neighboring Police Regional Offices have been directed to provide strong border controls and checkpoints to ensure that no spoilers from other areas will disrupt the plebiscite," Banac added.

3,209 police personnel

Albayalde earlier said 3,209 police personnel will be deployed to secure the 588 polling centers in various areas of the two provinces.

"We are ready to assume election duties anew for the Bangsamoro Organic Law plebiscite. We will be using similar operational template applied in the first plebiscite," the PNP chief told reporters in a press briefing on Monday at Camp Crame, Quezon City.

Albayalde said there will be a ceremonial send-off for the 3,209 police officers tasked to perform election duties on Tuesday in Cagayan de Oro City.

The police personnel are expected to be augmented by soldiers and other law enforcement agencies.

Albayalde said Cagayan de Oro City will serve as monitoring and action center for the plebiscite.

Meanwhile, the military has deployed more than 10,000 troops and support units to help secure the BOL plebiscite, alongside the PNP (With a report from PNA)

4,000 troops to guard 2nd BOL plebiscite

3 explosions in Mindanao on the eve of vote

BY DEMPSEY REYES AND
WILLIAM B. DEPASUPIL

SOME 4,000 soldiers will be deployed to secure the second plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) in the provinces of Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato today, Wednesday.

►PlebisciteA2

■PLEBISCITE FROM A1

4,000

The army does not expect any threat during the second round of the plebiscite, during which six towns in Lanao del Norte and dozens of *barangay* or villages in North Cotabato will vote on whether or not to join the new Bangsamoro autonomous region.

On Tuesday, however, two blasts were recorded in Lanao del Norte — one each in the towns of Kauswagan and Lala. Another explosion occurred in Talayan, Maguindanao. No casualties were reported in all three incidents.

Capt. Clint Antipala, spokesman of the Philippine Army's 1st Infantry Division (ID), said two brigades were designated as a task force and assigned to areas of Lanao del Norte covered by the BOL. A brigade consists of three battalions or about 1,500 soldiers.

In North Cotabato, the Army's 6th ID has deployed two battalions or about 400 soldiers for the plebiscite in 39 villages of the province.

"Even if there are no threats being received for now, we should not be complacent at all at this time. We still have to ensure the safety of all those who will cast their votes," Maj. Arvin Encinas, 6th ID spokesman, told reporters.

The BOL, under Republic Act 11054, is an organic law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) that will have wider powers, which will replace the 29-year-old Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Comelec all set

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) said on Tuesday it was all systems go for the second plebiscite.

Comelec spokesman James Jimenez said the second plebiscite would only be held in areas that submitted petitions for voluntary inclusion in the BARMM.

In North Cotabato, voters in 67 villages will be asked if they wish to join the expanded autonomous region, while voters in the mother towns where these 67 villages belong to will be asked if they will allow these villages to join the new Bangsamoro autonomous entity.

The 67 villages are in seven towns: Aleosan (4 villages out of 19), Carmen (7 out of 28), Kabacan (7 of 24), Midsayap (13 of 57), Pigcawayan (12 of 40) Pikit (23 of 42) and one in Tuluunan.

The six towns of Balo-i, Munai, Nunungan, Pantar, Tagoloan and Tangkal in Lanao del Norte will also be asked if they wish to join the Bangsamoro region.

Voters in other Lanao del Norte towns, except Iligan City, will vote on whether to allow the six towns to join the Bangsamoro or not.

The Comelec expects a 70-percent voter turnout. The commission en banc, sitting as the National Plebiscite Board of Canvassers (NPBC), hopes to finish canvassing in four days.

The second plebiscite, Jimenez said, would be "a little less" contentious compared with the first plebi-

scite last January 21, which was primarily for the ratification of the BOL.

"It's only an inclusion question whether a certain area wanted to join [the BARMM] or not," Jimenez added. "It is less emotional and more practical."

Canvassing

A total of eight certificates of canvass will be forwarded to the NPBC for canvassing — one for the province of Lanao del Norte and the rest from seven municipalities of North Cotabato.

In the first plebiscite held on January 21, voters from the ARMM ratified the BOL by an overwhelming majority even as the "no" votes won in the province of Sulu.

In the ARMM, 1,540,017 voters cast ballots for "yes" votes and 198,750 for "no."

The NPBC also proclaimed Cotabato City to be part of the BARMM, while Isabela City was proclaimed not part of the new region after voters there rejected the BOL.

In Cotabato City, 36,682 voters cast ballots for "yes" and 24,994 for "no." In Isabela City, "yes" votes reached 19,032, not enough to defeat the 24,441 "no" votes.

Youth OK expansion

Majority of the youth will vote for the inclusion of six towns in Lanao del Sur and 67 villages in North Cotabato to the BARMM in the February 6 plebiscite, according to a survey conducted by peace advocate International Alert.

International Alert found that 71 percent of the youth in Lanao del Norte were in favor of the BOL, and would vote for inclusion of the towns of Tangkal, Tagoloan, Munai, Pantar, Nunungan, and Balo-i in the BARMM.

Moreover, 83 percent of the youth in the municipalities of Pikit, Kabacan, Carmen, Midsayap, Pigkawayan, and Aleosan in North Cotabato also opted for inclusion.

International Alert statistician Angelo Casalan said that youth in favor of the BOL in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato increased from 53 percent in 2018 to 71 percent and 83 percent in 2019. He attributed this to increased awareness after campaigns, from 64 percent in 2018 to 98 percent in 2019 in Lanao del Norte, and 86 percent in 2018 to 98 percent in 2019 in North Cotabato.

The survey also found that youth opting for inclusion in Lanao del Norte believed that the BOL needed to address terrorism, rebellion, corruption, implementation of Sharia Law and poverty.

International Alert Country Manager Nikki de la Rosa said the results of the survey might not be conclusive because the youth only accounted for 45 percent of the voting population for inclusion in the BARMM.

The youth composed the majority, or 57 percent, of voters in the first BOL plebiscite in January.

International Alert conducted the survey among 355 individuals aged 18 to 35 in Lanao del Norte from January 11 to 16, and on 209 respondents in North Cotabato from January 24 to 27.

**WITH DIVINA NOVA JOY
DELA CRUZ**

More police deployed for 2nd BOL plebiscite

COTABATO CITY: The Police Regional Office 12 (PRO 12) based in General Santos City under the command of Regional Director and Chief Supt. Eliseo Tam Rasco deployed personnel to safeguard the second Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) plebiscite in North Cotabato on Wednesday.

The team is composed of 582 personnel from PRO 12 Regional Headquarters, Regional Mobile Force Battalion, City/Provincial Mobile Force Company and Alert Company.

They have been at their respective areas of responsibilities since February 4 and will be recalled on February 8.

Michael Abas, Commission on Elections (Comelec) Region 12 director, in his message at send-off rites for the police team, thanked PRO 12 for their support particularly in the peaceful BOL plebiscite in Cotabato City last January 21.

Abas said the towns included in the second plebiscite are Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pikit, Pigcawayan and Tulunán, all in North Cotabato province.

"The Comelec is confident that the plebiscite that will be held today (February 6) with its affiliates from the PNP (Philippine National Police) and the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines), will be safe and successful," he added.

Daniel Macatlang Jr., director of the Directorate for Integrated Police Operation-Western Mindanao, also in another message to the police personnel, shared his personal experiences about his visit to blast sites in Jolo, Sulu, where twin explosions last week left more than 20 dead and dozens injured.

He told the personnel to be careful in responding to any incident that may happen and to be extra vigilant about unusual activities of people during the plebiscite.

Macatlang appealed to those who plan to sow violence on plebiscite day not to carry out their evil intentions.

Meanwhile, Rasco commended the PRO 12 for its role in the January 21 BOL plebiscite in Cotabato City that resulted in secure, peaceful and orderly conduct of the plebiscite.

JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL

Lower turnout expected in BOL plebiscite round 2

BY GERARD NAVAL

THE Commission on Elections (Comelec) expects less interest among voters in today's plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato.

In a press briefing, Comelec spokesman James Jimenez said while the poll body is hopeful of a success similar to January 21's 85 percent turnout, it won't be surprised if it will see fewer voters

in the second round of the BOL plebiscite.

Jimenez said this is because of the absence of the question on the ratification of the BOL, unlike in the Jan. 21 plebiscite.

"The stakes are a little different. The stakes are no longer ratification. It's just inclusion," he explained.

Jimenez said the history of elections in the Mindanao provinces may still result in a 70 percent voter turnout.

"We are, nevertheless, hopeful that because this is a politically active area, we expect we will have a turnout of at least better than 70 percent," he said.

Areas that would conduct the Bangsamoro plebiscite today are the towns of Baloj, Munai, Nunungan, Pantar, Tagoloan, and Tangkal in Lanao del Norte.

Also participating in the plebiscite are 67 barangays in the mu-

See LOWER ► Page B3

LOWER

municipalities of Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pigkawayan, Pikit, and Tulunan in North Cotabato.

A total of 639,361 registered voters are set to cast their votes in 2,129 clustered precincts in 588 voting centers in the covered areas.

The elections will again be using the manual system of voting, and will be held from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Just like in the first round, the plebiscite ballots will ask the voters whether they want their areas be included in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Jimenez said in the case of Lanao del Norte, all voters in the province will have a say if the towns of Baloi, Munai, Nunungan, Pantar, Tagoloan, and Tangkal will be allowed to join BARMM.

Voters from the said towns will be asked if they agree to have their own municipalities join the newly-formed region.

As for North Cotabato, all voters in the municipalities of Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pigkawayan, Pikit, and Tulunan will have a say if the 67 barangays seeking inclusion will be given permission to do so.

On the other hand, voters from the 67 barangays will be asked if they agree to join the BARMM.

The Comelec expects the canvassing of votes to be completed in four days.

The National Plebiscite Board of Canvassers (NPBOC) is scheduled to convene tomorrow to await the transmission of eight certificates of canvass (COCs).

VIOLENCE SPILLOVER

Jimenez said one of the concerns is the possible spillover of the violence from the other parts of Mindanao, particularly from Jolo, Sulu and Zamboanga City, to the plebiscite areas.

He also said Comelec cannot prevent members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) from being present in the plebiscite areas.

"We can't unduly restrict the movement of people, who are coming to an area for peaceful purposes," he said.

"To that point, our voters just need to trust our authorities to have the situation well in hand," he added.

In a bid to appease the public, Jimenez noted that the Philippine National Police has not increased the areas of concern.

"According to the PNP, there is no increase in the number of hotspots. Clearly, they are not expecting any great disruptions during the plebiscite, which is a good thing," he said.

Military officials said about 4,000 soldiers have been dedicated to help secure today's plebiscite in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato.

Capt. Clint Antipala, spokes-

man of the Army's 1st Infantry Division, said about 3,000 soldiers will be fielded for the plebiscite in Lanao del Sur.

Antipala said they do not see any "challenges" or "threats" to the plebiscite "but if in case there is, our troops are there for any eventuality."

"We're hopeful it's not going to be violent, we're hopeful that the plebiscite will be peaceful. We hope the residents will be given the chance to cast their vote freely," said Antipala.

6th Infantry Division spokesman Maj. Arvin Encinas said the security measures that will be pursued in North Cotabato will be the refined version of what was implemented during last month's plebiscite in Cotabato City and Maguindanao.

About a thousand soldiers have been tapped to secure the elections, said Encinas.

PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde flew to North Cotabato to check on the PNP's preparation for the plebiscite, said PNP spokesman Senior Supt. Bernard Banac.

Banac said Albayalde is going to visit some of the polling centers today "to insure that the plebiscite will run smoothly, and safely."

He said regional directors in nearby areas "have been directed to provide strong border controls and checkpoints to ensure that no spoilers from other areas will disrupt the plebiscite." — *With Victor Reyes*

Bam Aquino seeks ample budget for Bangsamoro

SEN. Paolo Benigno "Bam" Aquino 4th on Tuesday appealed to lawmakers to ensure that there would be ample funds in the proposed P3.7-trillion national budget to implement the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

The senator reminded the government of its promise to bring peace and order in Mindanao through BOL, which created the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

The Senate version of the 2019 budget allotted around P30 billion additional budget for the BOL.

"Dapat tiyakin na sapat at hindi kulang ang suporta para sa BOL (Enough support for BOL must be ensured)," said Aquino, co-author and co-sponsor of the BOL.

The senator is hopeful that the bicameral conference committee will finish crafting the proposed 2019 General Appropriations Bill on Wednesday, February 6, so that the Senate and the House of Representatives will be able to ratify the budget measure on the same day.

Republic Act 11054 or BOL mandates that the appropriation for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) shall be transferred to the Bangsamoro Transition Authority.

The ARMM was allotted P31.1 billion for 2019, but this amount will not be enough because officials said the transition to BOL would need around P59 billion.

"Ang tagal na nitong pinangarap at inilaban ng mga kapatid nating Moro (Our Moro bothers and sisters dreamed of and fought for this for so long," Aquino said.

"Dapat hindi mabinbin ang transition dahil sa kakulangan ng budget (The transition process must not be delayed due to lack of budget)," he added.

BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO

StarDaily
TODAY

Bombings haunt BOL vote; 3k troops deploy

By Francisco Tuyay and Vito Barcelo

EXPLOSIVES on a motorcycle went off near a military checkpoint in Maguindanao on Sunday, just one day ahead of the final round of a plebiscite to ratify the Bangsamoro Organic Law in Mindanao.

Nobody was hurt as the driver of the motorcycle, seeing the checkpoint, turned around and parked the vehicle on the side of the road, said Maj. Arvin Incinas, spokesman for the Army's 6th Infantry Division.

The bomb went off about 100 to 200 meters from the checkpoint in Barangay Tambunan, Talayan town, at noon Sunday.

A similar explosion was set off in Cotabato City in the early hours of Jan. 21, the

first round of the plebiscite.

The blast came as some 3,000 troops were deployed in various parts of Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato provinces for the Feb. 6 plebiscite.

The voting will cover six towns of Lanao del Norte—Baloi, Munai, Nunungan, Pantar, Tagoloan and Tangkal, along with 67 barangays in North Cotabato and seven towns of Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pigkawayan, Pikit and Tulunan. *Next page*

Bombings...

From A1

Capt. Clint Antipala, Spokesman of the 1st Infantry Division, said they have not detected any potential threats, but said they were prepared for any eventuality.

A week ahead of today's plebiscite, government forces heightened security measures in sensitive areas where the polling would take place, as well as in the adjacent provinces.

Acting on the presence of 10 fully armed men, police from Lambayong municipal station and troops from the 2nd Mechanized Infantry Battalion swooped down on Barangay Zeneben, Lambayong and seized a locally made M79 grenade launcher, a homemade 12-gauge shotgun and various ammunition from Bai Mashia Sangkai and Amando Ebad, who were arrested.

Hours later, authorities raided a gambling site in the same village and confiscated 36 undocumented motorcycles.

Major Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the 6th Infantry Division, said the operations stemmed from the complaints of residents.

The Commission on Elections said the plebiscite for the inclusion of six municipalities of Lanao del Sur and North Cotabato in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao would push through Tuesday, despite recent bomb attacks in Jolo, Sulu and Zamboanga.

Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año said the authorities were still trying to identify the two Indonesian suicide bombers in the church attack that killed 22 people in Jolo, Sulu.

"We are expecting a 70 percent voter turnout for the second round of the plebiscite for the inclusion of additional areas under the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region," said Comelec spokesman James Jimenez.

The plebiscite will determine the areas in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato

that will join the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region.

Jimenez said they hoped to duplicate the success of the Jan. 21 vote, and expected result of the voting in four days.

The first round of the plebiscite covered the existing areas of Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao for the ratification of BOL question and Cotabato City and Isabela City in Basilan, asking voters there if they wished to be under the jurisdiction of the new region.

The "yes" vote for the ratification won with over 1.5 million votes as against around 198,000 "no" votes.

As of November 2018, there are 352,494 registered voters in Lanao del Norte and 286,867 in North Cotabato, the Comelec said.

Last month, the National Plebiscite Board of Canvassers ratified the BOL creating the BARMM, replacing the ARMM after the "yes" votes prevailed in most areas covered by the first round.

Isabela City voted against its inclusion in the BARMM, however.

The peace advocate International Alert, a non-government organization, said its own surveys showed that most of the youth want the six Lanao del Norte towns and 67 North Cotabato barangays to be included in the BARMM.

Nikki de la Rosa, country manager of International Alert, said based on their latest survey, 71 percent of the youth in Lanao del Norte are in favor of the BOL and would vote for the inclusion of the municipalities of Tangkal, Tagaloan, Munai, Pantar, Nunungan and Baloi in the BARMM.

At least 83 percent of the youth from the towns of Pikit, Kabacan, Carmen, Misamis, Pigkawayan and Aleosan in North Cotabato back the inclusion of 67 barangays, she added.

The International Alert's survey was conducted among youth aged 18 to 35 in Lanao del Norte from Jan. 11 to Jan. 16 and in North Cotabato from Jan. 24 to Jan. 27.

With Rio N. Araja and PNA

Maguindanao solon goes to Saudi on 2-day investment mission

COTABATO City and First District of Maguindanao Rep. Bai Sandra Sema, one of the main proponents of the recently passed Bangsamoro Organic Law, was part of a Philippine delegation that went to Saudi Arabia where they were able to get investment pledges for Cotabato City and other Bangsamoro provinces from

Arabia businessmen.

The delegation, composed of Filipino government officials and businessmen headed by House Speaker Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, went to Saudi Arabia to present investment possibilities for Middle Eastern businessmen in the newly created Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in

Muslim Mindanao.

"Now that the Bangsamoro Organic Law has been passed it is time to work for the economic prosperity of the newly created BARMM," Rep. Sema said.

"This investment mission was done as the next important step to ensure that new investments will come in for Co-

tabato City and the rest of the unified BARMM and realize the promise of the BOL," she added.

The delegation was received by the Majlis Ash Shura, the Consultative Assembly and advisory council of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, led by its President, Dr. Abdullah Bin Mohammed Bin Ibrahim Al Sheikh.

Security main BOL poll concern

By Elmer N. Manuel

Following the spate of bombings that rocked Jolo and Zamboanga recently, security will be the main concern when the second round of the plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) is held today for the inclusion of additional areas in the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region.

Comelec spokesman James Jimenez said in a press briefing while he expects that the second round of the plebiscite will go smoothly, concerns with security will also be the number one priority of the agency.

Jimenez was referring to the plebiscite which will cover the six municipalities of Lanao del Norte - Baloi, Munai, Nunungan, Pantar, Tagaloan and Tangkall - as well as 39 barangays of North Cotabato located in the municipalities of Alcosan, Carmen, Cabacan, Midsayap, Pigkawayan and Pikit.

UNRAVELING

Only the Communists are opposed to ROTC revival



By GETSY TIGLAO

I'M glad that the bill reviving the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) is making headway at the House of Representatives, with the third and final reading scheduled for this week before Congress goes on recess for the elections.

With the passage of the ROTC bill imminent in Congress, it is now up to the Senate to decide whether they want to promote nationalism by supporting this bill, or if they want to support the Reds by rejecting the ROTC bill.

Because let's be blunt, it is only the Communists and their left-wing allies who are opposed to any type of law that will help promote love of country among the youth.

It is a fact that many young Filipinos have become rudderless amid the continuous campaign by the yellow opposition to discredit Philippine institutions in favor of the Western globalist impositions.

Whereas before, doing well in one's profession was seen as a worthy goal to help serve the country, now the aimless youth have to find their way through a consumeristic, materialistic, and celebrity-obsessed society.

Instead of helping the nation, the goal of many youth nowadays is leave for abroad and change citizenship.

It doesn't help, too, that our long-cherished ideas of a strong republic and a good working government are being constantly attacked by the Communist Party, whose goal, it must be said over

and over again, is to gain power through violent means.

The Communists are also covertly working to destroy government through their agents in the Red-allied party-list groups and other leftist organizations.

It is time for media people to realize that these organizations should not be aided in their propaganda requirements since they are out to overthrow a democratically elected government that is overwhelmingly supported by the people.

Consolidated House Bill (HB) No. 8961 proposes to establish a two-year basic ROTC program for all students in Grades 11 and 12 in all public and private schools. It will form part of the senior high school curriculum and will be a requirement for graduation.

The bill also provides that educational institutions that fail to implement the ROTC program shall be subject to disciplinary and administrative sanctions from the Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education.

It also states that any student who fails to take the basic ROTC shall undergo a compulsory military training as provided for in Section 14 of Republic Act 7077. There will be provisions for exemptions, such as those who are physically or psychologically unfit.

We would like to commend Deputy Speaker and Batangas Rep. Raneo Abu for his articulation of the ROTC bill, which was mainly based on his own HB 5113. He cited Speaker Gloria Macapagal Arroyo for her stewardship of the consolidated

bill after it was classified as urgent by President Duterte.

Already, we are hearing the critics of the ROTC revival saying that this will only militarize the schools. That's the usual line of Communists. They are afraid that if young Filipinos become nationalistic, they will have no one left to recruit to add to their dwindling numbers.

Not only that, the Communists and their leftist allies are so afraid of the ROTC program because this will boost the country's reserve military strength. Years ago, before it was weakened, the ROTC was even a source of officers for the military for those undertaking its advanced programs.

The deluded ambition of the Communist Party-New People's Army is to topple our democracy through their "armed struggle." With a strong military force the menace that is the CPP-NPA can finally be wiped out.

How will an ROTC bill develop nationalism? Take a look at all countries that are strong and progressive, but are also renowned for having a compulsory military training for their youth.

A basic military training will help develop among the youth discipline, preparedness, loyalty, integrity, patriotism, and other moral values that are essential if we want the Philippines to become a strong nation.

The effects on a youth's consciousness of this kind of learning are deep and profound. They will realize that they are part of a nation, that they and their families belong to this beautiful land, which has to be defended by its citizens.

Now you can see why the Communists hate the ROTC bill. Because the Reds recruit the youth and teach them the opposite – to kill soldiers, po-

licemen, politicians, and other civilians in order to further their "cause" – the establishment of a Communist system in the country.

Senators and other politicians who will oppose the ROTC bill will show their true political colors. They should tread carefully for election time is near. The voting public is not as naïve as in the 1980s and the Reds have been exposed for what they truly are, nothing more than power-hungry terrorists and criminals.

(For further reading on this subject matter, please refer to my previous columns, <https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/11/28/revival-of-rotc-will-be-good-for-the-philippines/> and <https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/03/23/to-develop-nationalism-require-military-service/>)

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Conspiracy theory

Part 2

LAST week's column stirred a hornet's nest of stinging comments from my friends from both sides of the aisle — the Yellow horde and the DDS. The former regards this conspiracy as a veritable manifestation of the dying throes of a strongman feigning to be a strong leader of a weak state. Or as I gather from various blogs in social media "...a leader who equates the use of political will with that of a totalitarian wielding political bully power." A culmination of the two years of policy bumbling, merely coping with the challenges of the presidency and outright misgovernance lathered with copious amounts of misogynic statements and attacks against the Catholic Church. This is a harsh judgment of DU30's regime, but not entirely unexpected as the PNoy administration's skeletons in the closet are now being exposed: the irregular Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP) controversy, Dengvaxia deaths due to corruption, pork barrel scam (Napoles) and a host of anomalies, making PNoy and his minions vulnerable to possible jail terms — as his predecessors GMA and Erap went through. We Filipinos have the propensity to jail our presidents; or in a more depraved way, the incoming regime, if in opposition, will exact its pound of flesh. Thus, what GMA did to Erap, and what PNoy did to GMA and what DU30 will do to PNoy — are by far the trend. If the opposition wins after DU30, then he may also see the other side of a jail cell.

But there were positive remarks too on my conspiracy article. In fact, certain permutations to the conspiracy theory were added, suggesting a wide traction that seem to make the scenarios more believable. For instance, some proffered the idea



**LITO MONICO
C. LORENZANA**

that all these were tolerated upon his sufferance and mostly emanated from the mind of the political strategist — the Deegong himself — who may have foreseen and even planned this a long time ago. In summary, this is a foreplay to the long-awaited revolutionary government (revgov) that has particularly resonated with his true believers. Accordingly, the Deegong is wise enough to lull the Yellows into a state of confidence, lethargy even. And he will pounce at the time of his choosing.

To fortify the DU30's authorship of the conspiracy theory, they volunteered the information that long before his ally GMA was installed as speaker in the House of Representatives, the bureaucracy was being reconfigured with retired military men, seconded into the President's coterie, occupying key positions — "...59 retired military generals, police directors, admirals and colonels (were to date) appointed to the Cabinet and other agencies, including government-owned corporations. Many of them are either from Mindanao or were assigned to Davao City where Mr. Duterte served as mayor for 22 years..." (Inquirer.net, *Fe Zamora, Philip Tubeza*). But more importantly, key officials, from the AFP chief of staff to area commanders, police generals and regional directors, which matter the most in a junta-led government, were personally hand-picked by DU30. He learned well from his lamented predecessor, President Marcos, whom he professed to admire greatly.

Which brings the conspiracy theory to the part played by the Marcoses. The

family has staged a comeback with the help of DU30 but at the same time their impact has been greatly moderated; thus, they must remain the liege lords of the north in obeisance to the DU30 and the Duterte that may come after the Deegong Sarah. With the Sandiganbayan's decision finding the matriarch Imelda guilty on seven counts, and the pending P200-billion forfeiture case hanging like Damocles' sword over them, the Marcoses understand where power lies. For all intents and purposes, only the Marcos name and a whiff of the legend lingers. Bongbong's move against Leni is going nowhere and even if he wins the protest, it will come too late. And the most capable of the Marcoses after Ferdinand himself, Imee, may just wither in the vine in the Senate — if she makes it. And the brains, the political centurions and structures that were once formidable adjuncts to the family — Danding Cojuangco, Estelito Mendoza, Lucio Tan, Enrile and their ilk — may now be in an advanced state of dementia. And their North is no longer solid as there are now more claimants. There is no longer a "king of the north," to paraphrase "The Game of Thrones." Thus, the conspiracy theory with the suspected provenance of the Deegong has more credence. But how will this blow in the international scene? Not much, really.

Our closest ally America, while awaiting the impeachment of a clueless President who is likewise accused of being a stooge or spy of the Russians, is really of no consequence to the realities of the Philippines. We symbolically cut our umbilical cord with mother America when the Deegong did his song and dance number on his pivot to China, but our direct emotional ties with 2 million Filipinos in America are a permanent unbreakable bond. And our substitu-

tion for China's embrace is proving to be awkwardly uncomfortable with the Chinese territorial claims and encroachment into our sovereignty unchecked, and with the Deegong postponing confrontation with the inevitable to the next regime.

Shamelessly we have telegraphed to our neighbors in Asia and to the world that despite our moral victory at the UN arbitral court, China can do whatever it wants. It will spread morsels and scraps our way and we will take them — under the guise of the 'Build, Build, Build' program. And we will be thankful. We are in effect already a province of China. So, the conspiracy theory, either way, does not matter to them.

And where will be the adherents of real reform? The believers in a federal-parliamentary government and the liberalization of our economy through constitutional revisions? We've been had!

And we are again faced with an election where the name brands, the political dynasts and the discredited politicians freed from their jail terms may again win. And they will once more ride herd over this country and continue sucking the marrow of our countrymen — because the stupid voters will put them in power. And we will celebrate this as the triumph of democracy.

Perhaps the conspiracy theory is just a theory. Perhaps it is a product of the minds of desperate Filipinos who have been waiting for the *pagbabago* to happen. Perhaps it is a longing for freedom-loving, honest and handworking constituents like many of us to repair to a reverie where we are momentarily made safe. Perhaps, this is just a projection of our fears and hopes. Or perhaps, this is in fact true, ongoing and may soon erupt. Perhaps...!

What if DU30 is sicker than his politics?

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte's state of health has been a



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matter of routine concern for Filipinos since he came into office in July 2016, but it took a turn for the worst last week when rumors spread online that he had, in fact, died.

➤TatadA5

This gave Malacañang a chance to quote Mark Twain and say "rumors of his death were grossly exaggerated": on Monday, one newspaper front page showed him having breakfast and reading a newspaper with his live-in partner Honeylet Avanceña; on Tuesday, his spokesman Salvador Panelo babbled about his "robust health." A slight fever last Friday had prevented him from attending a scheduled peace and order summit in Leyte, said Panelo, otherwise he was in the very pink of health.

We have nothing as reliable as a medical bulletin to tell us about DU30's actual health condition. Usually reliable Palace sources said he was not in Malacañang from Friday to Sunday; on the other hand, our Davao sources, who have access to DU30's inner circle, said he was not in Davao either. His last public appearance was when he visited Jolo to condole with the families of the victims of the January 26 twin bombings of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral; reports said he had a dizzy spell after that visit, while clasping his breast with his right hand. He finally reappeared on Monday in Davao.

Asking for prayers

DU30 was reported to have asked for prayers. He had not done this before; he had on the other hand attacked the Church with profanities and invectives, and ridiculed Catholics for their hopeless church-going. Some of my friends quickly responded with genuine charity without suspecting DU30 might just be playing with them. They were happy to learn he had not succumbed to any fatal illness.

The most skeptical, however, wondered whether it's not a DU30 "clone" or "double" that's been photographed for the consumption of the Filipino public, especially after the *Philippine Star* on Tuesday carried on its front page a picture of a DU30 look-alike, together with a Kim Jong Un look-alike, feasting on fried chicken at a Jollibee outlet in Hong Kong. The North Korean strongman's impersonator was identified as Howard, while DU30's impersonator was identified as "Cresencio Extreme."

But while DU30's physical health seems to be holding out, not everything about his government is well. His handling of the twin bombings in Jolo and the bombing of the Zam-

boanga mosque is all shot; you have to suspend all disbelief to believe what DU30 and the Philippine National Police (PNP) are saying about the so-called "suicide bombing." An unidentified Indonesian husband and wife were supposed to have been the suicide bombers; this means they carried the bombs that killed 20 others and wounded over a hundred, mostly churchgoers, and were probably blown to bits, beyond recognition.

DU30's clairvoyance

How in Heaven's name were the police able to identify them as Indonesians, after their bodies were pulverized, and without any policeman or witness having spoken to them when they were still alive, before the fatal explosions? And how was DU30 able to identify the "suicide bombers" even before the PNP began their half-baked investigation? This seems to suggest some amount of clairvoyance.

In my previous column, I mentioned that one full week after the bombings, the PNP crime laboratory had not been able to come out with a crime report, because they could not decide what explosive material was used by the "suicide bombers."

They also apparently had difficulty gathering DNA samples after the "crime scene" was prematurely and ill-advisedly washed of the blood and body parts of the victims. At this writing, the situation reportedly remains unchanged. There is still no crime lab report.

Indonesians at Crame

On Monday, PNP Chief Oscar Albayalde announced that five Abu Sayyaf members had surrendered to the police in connection with the cathedral bombing. But there has been no explanation of the delayed crime lab report. Nor has there been any intelligent follow-up on the alleged Indonesian suicide bombers. On Monday, a group of Indonesian government men, obviously intelligence personnel, were huddled at Camp Crame with PNP officers. They stayed there for hours. Their presence, however, was not mentioned in Albayalde's press briefing that afternoon.

Why were they there in the first place? Highly informed PNP sources were inclined to believe the Indonesians were invited by Albayalde to lend a hand to DU30 and the PNP in selling the story to the pub-

lic about the "Indonesian suicide bombers." But Albayalde's people apparently failed to convince the Indonesians to support their proposed script, so there was no mention of the Indonesians coming to Camp Crame that afternoon.

This suspicion may or may not be correct. If correct, DU30 will have to exert great effort to make sure Jakarta does not question his claim, without any concrete proof, that two Indonesian "suicide bombers" carried out the Jolo bombings.

The prospect from Jakarta

More than this, DU30 will have to make sure Indonesia, the biggest Muslim country in the world, does not protest DU30's deafening silence and inaction on the bombing of the Zamboanga mosque, which killed two Islamic missionaries and wounded five others, one day after the Sulu cathedral was bombed.

Frustrated by DU30's insouciance, in utter contrast to his ballistic reaction to the Jolo bombings, some moderate Filipino Muslims are asking that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the 57-nation "collective voice of the Muslim world," demand an explanation for DU30's lukewarm re-

sponse. They seem inclined to believe that the Zamboanga attack could have been the work of the old Davao Death Squad, whose crimes were exposed in the 2017 Senate hearings by two self-confessed DDS members, Edgar Matobato and Arturo Lascañas. An OIC intervention could seriously disrupt DU30's last three years in office.

This would be regrettable enough. But what if, despite the Malacañang quack doctor's professional diagnosis, DU30's medical condition proves to be no better than that of his politics? DU30's reported call for a command conference of the military and the police, soon, can only be intended to examine his prospects.

Even before the official campaign period for the May 13 elections could begin, former presidential spokesman and senatorial candidate Harry Roque Jr. withdrew from the race for reasons of health. For those who never considered Harry a worthy pick, this was a signal service to the voters. Many are hoping most of the 62 remaining senatorial candidates could follow Harry's lead and relieve them of the burden of rejecting the unfit.

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Protest



CROSSROADS

JONATHAN
DE LA CRUZ

AS WE greet the Filipino Chinese community and the Chinese people worldwide Kung Hei Fat Choi, it is our hope that they will continue to contribute to the peace and betterment of the world. Now that China has surpassed all expectations becoming the second biggest economy in the world and lifting almost 50 percent of its 1.3-billion population from the clutches of poverty in just over three decades, it behooves the Chinese leadership and its people to contribute their own share in lifting struggling peoples and nations the world over abiding, as they have always sworn, by the five principles of good neighborliness foremost being non-intervention in the internal affairs of nations.

Having said as much, I will have to laud Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana for joining Foreign Affairs Secretary Teddy Boy Loacsin in protesting the reported setting up of a "maritime rescue center" by China in the disputed islands it is occupying in the West Philippine Sea. That "rescue center" may benefit fishermen and even ships passing through that busy passage, as presidential spokesman and Legal Counsel Sal Panelo advised shortly after the news went out. That is well and good. But the same should be built on any island officially recognized as China's territory. Not on any of the disputed areas.

Building the same in any of the dis-

puted "rocks" (as the UNCLOS Tribunal described the disputed protrusions in the sea) at this time can only invite protest from the other claimants in the area. And besides, it is a clear affront on a friendly country like the Philippines which has been bending over backward just so the Chinese moves in the West Philippine Sea can be accommodated. That diplomatic protest should issue tomorrow at the latest. We should not wait any minute longer to show our displeasure over this unwelcome move no matter how feverish Panelo's defense is.

"Let's move and move quickly."

For if truth be told, the build up in those areas (Fiery Cross reef, Johnson reef, Cameron reef and other features in the area) remains in serious dispute no matter that China has already reclaimed and expanded these "rocks" in its attempt to transform these into "islands under occupation" and which it can then claim sovereignty after. So, we should not be a party to furthering their claims and transforming these areas officially into islands under China's sovereign control. We should not do that at all.

And setting up a "maritime rescue center" without as much as a bye to the

Philippines, the protestee in the UNCLOS Tribunal, and the UN itself is already another step toward such a transformation. The decision of the Tribunal is very clear, these "rocks" cannot be claimed as "islands" and therefore not entitled to having "exclusive economic zone" and even continental shelf.

For example, in the case of Kagitigan Reef (Fiery Cross Reef), the Tribunal concluded: "Fiery Cross in its natural condition was encumbered by a rock that remained exposed at high tide and accordingly a high tide feature." Having a high tide feature one has some of the legal entitlements of an island such as generating a "territorial sea" but is far from being an island. By international convention, an island is a high tide feature which can sustain habitation and economic life of its own. An island can then claim an exclusive economic zone and a continental shelf—features which as we have mentioned earlier we should prevent from happening at all by any means. As such, we should as we have always protested, China's effort to "build, build, build" in the West Philippine Sea as it can transform "rocks" into islands in no time at all. How to go about the protest and how feverish should such be is something which President Duterte and his Cabinet should determine.

For now, we can only contend ourselves with diplomatic protests and similar initiatives in other fora knowing fully well as President Duterte has so often advised we cannot go to war or engage in any other aggressive behavior which we will only regret later. *AS*

But protest? Let's move and move quickly.

Editorial

Pilipinas, nagiging santuwaryo ng mga dayuhang terorista

ANG Pilipinas ang nagiging takbuhan ng mga dayuhang terorista kapag itinataboy sila sa sariling bansa. At dahil maluwag ang pintuan ng Pilipinas, malayang nakakapasok ang mga teroristang ito. Maluwag ang border. Relaks ang mga naghabantay sa airport at seaport kaya walang anumang nakakapasok ang mga dayuhang mamamatay-tao. Ayon sa report, ginagawa ng santuwaryo ng mga terorista ang Jolo. Ayon sa military, dito nakikita ang mga dayuhan na kasama ng mga Abu Sayyaf.

Kaya positibo ang sinabi ng DILG na ang nagsagawa ng pambobomba sa Jolo Cathedral ay mga Indonesians. Dalawampu't tatlo ang namatay sa magkasunod na pambobomba sa Jolo Cathedral noong nakaraang linggo at dalawa naman sa Zamboanga kung saan, hinagisan ng granada ang isang mosque. Ayon pa sa DILG, mag-asawang Indonesian ang

nagsagawa ng pambobomba sa cathedral. Ganito rin ang nang pinahayag ni President Duterte. Ang hindi malinaw ay kung suicide bombers ang mag-asawa. Iba't iba ang lumalabas na report. May nagsasabing ang babae ang nag-iwan ng bomba sa upuan sa loob ng simbahan at saka sila lumabas. Sumabog umano ang bomba makaraang makalabas ang mag-asawa. May nagsasabi naman na pinasabog ng mag-asawa ang sarili. Tinuruan umano ng Abu Sayyaf ang mag-asawang Indonesian kung paano makakapasok sa simbahan at magsagawa ang pambobomba.

Nangyari na ang malagin na pambobomba at ang malaking katanungan ngayon ay kung paano maluwag na nakakapasok sa bansa ang mga teroristang ito. Kung mga Indonesian nga ang nagsagawa ng pambobomba, paano sila nakapasok dito at nakahalubilo ng mga Pinoy. Tiyak na nagkaroon ng kaluwagan ang mga awtoridad.

Ayon pa sa report, may mga dayuhan na nakitang nakikipaglaban sa mga sundalo. Pinamumunuan umano ng Abu Sayyaf leader na si Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan ang mga dayuhan, ayon sa military. Hindi naman nabatid kung ilang dayuhan ang kasama ni Sawadjaan. Si Sawadjaan ang itinuturong utak sa Jolo bombing.

Nakalulusot nang walang hirap ang mga dayuhang terorista at nagsasagawa ng pagpatay. Nararapat maghigpit ang awtoridad. Bantayan ang sea border at maaaring sa backdoor dumadaan ang mga terorista.

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Authorities verify identity of Indonesian couple in Jolo blast

By Christopher Lloyd Caliwan February 5, 2019, 2:19 pm

MANILA -- Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Eduardo Año on Tuesday said authorities are still in the process of verifying identities of the suicide bombers who carried out the twin bombings in a church in Jolo, Sulu.

"Bombers are Indonesian couple (husband and wife). Identification is on the process but may take time. The Indonesian government is willing to assist. It is officially confirmed that it's a case of suicide bombing," Año said in a message to reporters.

It was Año who first revealed that the suicide bombers in the twin blast at Our Lady of Mount Carmel are Indonesians, based on his intelligence sources.

The DILG Secretary said the confirmation is based on post-blast and forensic investigation as well as the testimonies of survivors.

Año also said that Jolo twin blasts perpetrated by suicide bombers is one of the ways foreign terrorists are educating Filipino Muslim terrorists on how to cause chaos in the country.

"That is what they are trying to do. By showing and doing these suicide bombings, they are expecting Filipino Muslim terrorists would follow soon. They underestimate the influence of Filipino culture to our Muslim brothers," he told reporters.

There has been no record of any suicide bombing in the Philippines committed by a Filipino terrorist as it was deemed too violent by security officials and experts.

Philippine National Police (PNP) chief, Director General Oscar Albayalde said that they would further validate the information by conducting a DNA test on two unclaimed pairs of feet.

"It will be part of our DNA testing. We will subject everyone who died in DNA testing even if it is a long process," Albayalde said.

He said they are already coordinating with their Indonesian counterparts in identifying the couple.

The woman reportedly was the one who detonated the first improvised explosive device (IED) inside the church then the man detonated the second IED at the church entrance seconds later.

Albayalde said the investigation on the church bombing is still far from over as "there are more pieces of evidence that need to be carefully examined to test its consistency with other facts and circumstances surrounding the incident." **(PNA)**

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Metrobank, AFP distribute 'food packs' to indigents

By Priam Nepomuceno February 5, 2019, 2:04 pm

MANILA -- The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), together with Metrobank, through the GT Foundation, Inc. (GTFI) and the Metrobank Foundation, Inc. (MBFI), distributed food packs to 10,000 poor families in celebration of the Chinese New Year.

Each food pack was worth PHP1,000, military public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato said in a message Tuesday.

Since 2011, the Metrobank Group, with their late chairman Dr. George SK Ty, through GTFI and MBFI, have been giving these "Bags of Blessings" to the underprivileged families in the country as a way of carrying out their tradition of sharing.

Since 2015, the AFP has been one with the GTFI on this tradition of sharing by giving gifts to the families.

Aside from being the partner of MBFI and GTFI in the "Bags of Blessings" program, the AFP also provides security and manpower before, during, and after the distribution of gift packs to the recipient-families.

This shows the commitment and cooperation of the AFP with the private sector in nation-building and peace development, Detoyato said.

"I express my appreciation and gratitude to GT Foundation, Inc. and Metrobank Foundation, Inc. for being our partners in the private sector in nation-building and peace development. Our partnership with the different sectors of our society, such as the business sector and the Filipino-Chinese community, is very helpful in creating a better future for our children," AFP Chief-of-Staff Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr. said.

The City of Manila receives the most number of food packs with 600 recipient-families, while Quezon City and Marikina City have 500 recipient-families each.

The Joint Task Force National Capital Region assisted the foundation in giving the food packs.

In Luzon, the Northern Luzon Command joined the MBFI in giving the food packs to the provinces of Pampanga, Pangasinan, Bulacan, Ilocos Sur, and Cagayan.

Meanwhile, the Southern Luzon Command assisted in giving the food packs to the provinces of Batangas, Cavite, Laguna, and Naga, while the Western Command assisted in the province of Palawan.

The Central Command assisted Metrobank in giving the gift packs to the provinces of Cebu, Bohol, Negros Occidental, Eastern Samar, and Iloilo. The Eastern Mindanao Command and the Western Mindanao Command distributed the gift packs to the provinces of Davao, Surigao del Sur, and Zamboanga.

The AFP said it is one with the Filipino-Chinese community in celebrating the Chinese New Year by sharing happiness and prosperity to every member of the society, including the less fortunate and the underprivileged. **(PNA)**

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PH not surrendering any part of its territory: DND chief

By Priam Nepomuceno February 5, 2019, 2:02 pm

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MANILA -- While it continues to maintain warm ties with China, the Philippines is not surrendering or compromising any part of its territory.

"While we recognize China as a bilateral partner for joint ventures and other endeavors, it is worth emphasizing that our territorial sovereignty and integrity, maritime entitlements and rights should not be compromised. We are not compromising them; we are not giving them away," Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said during Monday's forum at the National Defense College of the Philippines dubbed, "The National Security Outlook for the Philippines in 2019".

"The Philippines continues to view the arbitral tribunal ruling as valid and legitimate. We have not, and we will never surrender any part of our territory," he added.

The DND chief also cited the competing territorial and maritime claims in the South China Sea as the most critical external security challenge for the country.

Lorenzana also shared that the government has already reiterated its call on China and other claimant countries to finalize and adopt a valid, binding and mutually acceptable code of conduct in the South China Sea.

He also maintained that the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) maintains its presence within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and with its limited resources, does its best to safeguard the farthest ends of the country's territory.

"Since it is imperative to secure the national territory, sovereignty and sovereign rights of our country's maritime claims and entitlements, to include the West Philippine Sea and the Philippine Rise, the AFP is steadfast in performing this constitutional duty," the DND chief emphasized.

In the same forum, Lorenzana also reiterated the need to review Manila's Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) with Washington.

"Given this challenge with China, everyone must be asking why we initiated the call to review the MDT with the United States, our only treaty ally. We believe it is time to sit down with our US counterparts and revisit the terms of our alliance," he stressed.

While the Philippines has always valued its partnership and in its deep historical ties with the US, Lorenzana noted that the two allies "must clearly define our roles and responsibilities when the need arises." (PNA)