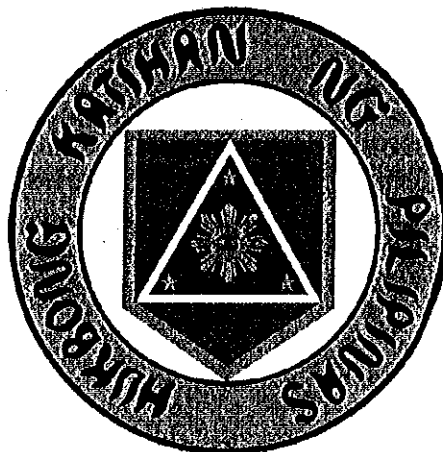


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07 February 2019

Thursday

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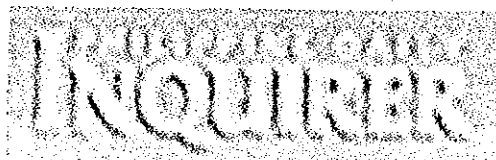
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DENG VAXIA: CRIMINAL RAPS VS NOY, ET AL.

STORY BY DJ YAP

A joint House of Representatives panel found former President Benigno Aquino III and his health and budget secretaries criminally and administratively liable for the aborted Dengvaxia vaccination program.

AG

FROM A1

By DJ Yap
@deejayapINQ

A joint panel of the House of Representatives on Wednesday recommended criminal and administrative charges against former President Benigno Aquino III and his health and budget secretaries for the controversial mass inoculation of schoolchildren with the Dengvaxia vaccine in 2016 that led to a massive health scare.

The committees on good government and health voted 14-4 in favor of a report recommending graft, technical malversation and grave misconduct charges against Aquino, former Health Secretary Janette Garin, former Budget Secretary Florencio Abad and others held responsible for the P3.5-billion vaccination program.

The joint panel found that Aquino and the others violated Section 3 (e) of the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act, which penalizes an official for giving a private party "unwarranted benefits, advantage or preference in the discharge of his official administrative or judicial functions through manifest partiality, evident bad faith or gross inexcusable negligence."

The "private party" referred to was the French pharmaceutical giant and Dengvaxia maker Sanofi Pasteur.

Aquino and Garin have previously denied any wrongdoing, but gave no fresh comments on Wednesday.

In a statement on Wednesday, Abad, who also denied any liability, noted that the report was not yet final and "can even be voted down" by the plenary.

He said the recommendations were "vague and general in many parts" and were not supported by the facts and discussions.

Shortcuts

The panel said there was "collusion among public officials" to ensure that a large quantity of Dengvaxia would be purchased by the government to vaccinate schoolchildren in Metro Manila, Central Luzon

and Southern Tagalog regions.

"This was done even though the safety and efficacy of Dengvaxia had not been clearly established. These officials provided shortcuts in the process to favor Sanofi Pasteur, the manufacturer of a commercially available dengue vaccine," the report said.

DOH Director Maria Joyce Ducusin, Philippine Children's Medical Center (PCMC) Execu-

investigate the personalities involved in the procurement of the dengue vaccines."

Dinagat Rep. Kaka Bag-ao, who voted against the report of the joint panel chaired by Camiguin Rep. Xavier Romualdo, questioned its conclusions.

Bag-ao noted that the facts stated in the report were the same as those cited in an earlier draft prepared by the former panel chair, Surigao del Sur Rep. Johnny Pimentel, which had exonerated Aquino and his officials.

Different conclusion

She asked why the panel under Romualdo had jumped to a completely different conclusion from the same set of facts.

Romualdo said the earlier document only remained a draft, since it was never put to committee deliberation.

Bag-ao argued against the approval of the report but was outvoted. The others who voted against the report were Representatives Gabriel Bordado Jr. of Camarines Sur, Kit Belmonte of Quezon City and Oscar Garin Jr. of Iloilo.

In November 2017, Sanofi issued a global warning saying that people with no prior exposure to the dengue virus might suffer severe symptoms of the disease if they had been inoculated with Dengvaxia.

According to the Department of Health (DOH), more than 830,000 people, mostly children, had been vaccinated with Dengvaxia by the time it was stopped following Sanofi's announcement.

This led to public outcry and congressional investigations over allegations that Filipino children had been used as "guinea pigs" by Sanofi in collusion with the Aquino administration.

Sanofi refunded the government P1.16 billion for the unused Dengvaxia. Lawmakers later earmarked the money for medical assistance for those who had already been vaccinated.

Malacañang on Wednesday said it would "defer" to the House decision to recommend the charges against Aquino and the others.

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo in a statement said the legal process should "take its course and those found responsible be held administratively, criminally and civilly liable."

"The Department of Justice will perform its task of evaluating the evidence presented before it and rule on the existence of a probable cause against the respondents," he said.

"We reiterate the policy of the administration that whoever transgresses the law will have to account for it regardless of the social status and the political affiliation of the transgressor," he added.

Earlier NBI complaint

The National Bureau of Investigation already filed similar charges against Aquino, Garin, Abad and officials of Sanofi, Food and Drug Administration and the DOH in the Office of the Ombudsman.

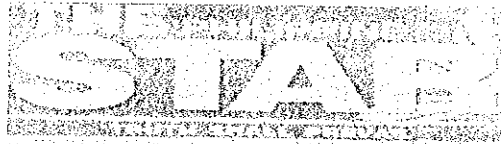
The NBI complaint in July 2018 alleged irregularities and conspiracy in the issuance of the certificate of product registration for Dengvaxia and irregularities in the issuance of exemption to the Philippine National Drug Formulary and Formulary Executive Council.

The NBI also accused Aquino, Garin and Abad of misusing government funds. —WITH REPORTS FROM CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO AND INQUIRER RESEARCH INQ

tive Director Julius Lecciones, former DOH Undersecretary Kenneth Hartigan-Go and members of the PCMC bids and awards committee may also be held liable for graft.

Lecciones also was recommended to be charged with technical malversation and grave misconduct.

The report urged the Anti-Money Laundering Council to "take appropriate action to in-



Measles outbreak declared in MM, CL

By SHEILA CRISOSTOMO

The Department of Health (DOH) yesterday declared an outbreak of highly contagious measles in the National Capital Region (NCR) and Central Luzon.

"We are declaring an outbreak as cases have increased in the past weeks and to strengthen surveillance of new cases and alert mothers and caregivers to be more vigilant," Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said.

In an interview, Duque reiterated his agency's call for parents to submit their children to anti-measles vaccination to contain the spread of the disease.

He warned that bronchopneumonia from measles complication can be lethal, so parents should not be complacent about it.

"Parents have to absolutely bring their children to the

health centers for immunization. There is no other way but back to *bakuna* or vaccination. Parents should not wait for complications to set in because it might be too late," he said.

Based on data presented by the DOH Epidemiology Bureau, the number of measles cases in Metro Manila from Jan. 1 to 19 had reached 196, as compared to 20 cases reported in the region in the same period last year.

At the San Lazaro Hospital, one of the DOH's referral centers for infectious diseases, an average of 48 measles cases are registered every day.

As of Feb. 5, San Lazaro

Turn to Page 4

Measles

From Page 1

has seen 1,355 cases. Of these, 1,240 patients were admitted in January, including 1,114 pediatric patients. Forty-seven of the children died.

This month, San Lazaro has admitted at least 264 cases, including 241 children, eight of whom have died.

Last year, the NCR registered 3,646 measles cases compared to 351 cases in 2017.

The NCR is composed of the 16 cities of Caloocan, Malabon, Navotas, Valenzuela, Quezon City, Marikina, Pasig, Taguig, Makati, Manila, Mandaluyong, San Juan, Pasay, Parañaque, Las Piñas and Muntinlupa and the lone municipality of Pateros.

Related to this health bulletin, other regions under tight watch by the DOH include Regions 1, 2, 4A, 4B, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13 and Cordillera Administrative Region.

The regions need to scale up

their response against measles and have all children vaccinated, the DOH said.

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. It is transferred from person to person through sneezing, coughing and close personal contact.

Its signs and symptoms include cough, runny nose, red eyes/conjunctivitis, fever and skin rashes lasting for more than three days.

Aside from bronchopneumonia, other complications include diarrhea, middle ear infection, encephalitis or swelling of the brain, malnutrition and blindness, which may lead to death.

"Nutritional support and oral rehydration are important measures to increase body resistance and replace lost body fluid caused by coughing, diarrhea and perspiration," Duque said in a statement.

He added that immunization and vitamin A supplementation of nine-month-old children are the best defenses against measles.

Physician Jesse Fantone, chief of the DOH's Regional Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit in Central Luzon, confirmed the outbreak.

"Yes, it's an outbreak," Fantone said.

Dengvaxia fiasco

Vice President Leni Robredo urged yesterday the Duterte administration to take immediate actions to help bring back the public's trust in the government's immunization program to prevent another measles outbreak this year.

Robredo said the rise in measles cases could have been avoided if there were no irresponsible comments and accusations made that eroded the public's trust in the government's immunization program.

The Vice President was apparently referring to the controversy involving the Dengvaxia vaccine, which some groups blamed for the deaths of some Filipino children.

She said because of the Dengvaxia scare, many parents are afraid to have their children vaccinated.

"I hope concerns like this should not be politicized because the lives of the children are at stake here," she said.

Ruby Constantino, director of the DOH Disease Prevention and Control Bureau, earlier warned that another measles outbreak is expected this year, with 2.4 million unvaccinated children.

Robredo said the country's program against measles has been effective, noting that the Philippines is close to eradicating the infectious disease.

"Let's avoid finger pointing. Instead let's find solutions on how we can recover from this," she said.

Meanwhile, the Philippine

Foundation for Vaccination (PFV) yesterday expressed alarm over the rising cases of measles, saying even babies are now getting infected.

In an interview, PFV executive director Lulu Bravo noted there were reports of children below nine years old who have contracted measles.

"We are bothered by so many deaths now from measles and even young babies less than the age recommended for vaccination, meaning nine months old, are getting measles," Bravo said.

Bravo maintained that babies should have measles protection from their mothers up to about nine years old.

But she warned that the babies of mothers who are not vaccinated or not adequately vaccinated would be susceptible to measles as early as one month old.

"In 2005 to 2010 and up to 2013, we were having zero deaths with only a few cases. We are now looking at big

outbreak and hundreds, even thousands, are expected to die every year if this trend continues," Bravo said.

Bravo cautioned that the tourism industry will likely be affected if the rise in measles cases will not be curbed soon because it "is always a potential scare for people not to come."

"When infectious disease outbreak happens, visitors will not come. Remember the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil? When Zika was reported to have increased there, some athletes opted not to participate," she added.

The expert urged parents to have their children vaccinated to protect them against vaccine-preventable diseases like measles.

The DOH is targeting a vaccination rate of 90 percent. In 2016 and 2017, it achieved 70 to 80 percent of the target.

Last year, the agency posted vaccine coverage of 40 percent.

— With Helen Flores

Marcelino turns tables on accusers

By Marlon Ramos
@MRamosINQ

The two top antinarcotics officers linked to the smuggling of P11-billion worth of "shabu" (crystal meth) last year were also behind the shipment of P380 million in illegal drugs seized in Sta. Cruz, Manila, in 2016, according to Marine Col. Ferdinand Marcelino.

Facing the Commission on Appointments (COA) at the Senate on Wednesday, an emotional Marcelino recalled his year-long detention after agents of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) arrested him while allegedly inside a clandestine drug laboratory on Jan. 21, 2016.

His arrest came as a shock to many as he was known as an antidrug crusader when he served PDEA as an agent.

Marcelino maintained that the charges against him were "fabricated," saying this was backed by the decision of the Department of Justice to drop the criminal complaint filed by the PDEA and the PNP Anti-Illegal Drugs Group (AIDG) against him.



Ferdinand Marcelino

'Horrible experience'

"I must say that that experience has been horrible," Marcelino told the panel of lawmakers, his voice cracking.

"Pardon me, sir, if I become emotional when I think about it. It's not easy to be incarcerated, especially if you didn't do anything wrong," he said.

"I actually thought of leaving the military after I was released from prison," he said. "But I did not falter... As a professional Marine officer, I simply go where I'm told to go and do what I'm asked to do."

A member of the Philippine Military Academy Class of 1994, Marcelino faced the commission for confirmation of his promotion to colonel. He is now the deputy chief of Task Force Noah, the military's antidrug unit.

Marcelino told the commission that he learned that then PDEA Deputy Director General Ismael Fajardo and then PNP-AIDG chief Senior Supt. Eduardo Acier-to were responsible for keeping the cache of shabu recovered from the Sta. Cruz apartment, where he and his Chinese informant, Yan Yi Shou, were arrested.

He said it was "divine providence or divine justice" that Fajardo and Acier-to were named as among those who helped smuggle P11 billion worth of shabu through the Port of Manila last year.

Sen. Cynthia Villar sought a Senate inquiry into Marcelino's arrest and detention.

"If I were your wife, I would not let you return to the military service," she told the Marine officer, eliciting laughter from the audience.

Drug trafficking charges

At the House of Representatives also on Wednesday, a report by the committee on dangerous drugs recommended drug trafficking charges against Fajardo, Acier-to and former customs intelligence agent Jaime Guban in connection with the P11-billion shabu shipment that was smuggled into the country using magnetic lifters.

The committee, chaired by Surigao del Norte Rep. Robert Ace

Barbers, also pushed for the relief of current Bureau of Customs (BOC) officials—from the deputy commissioners down to port collectors—to pave the way for a "proper reform and investigation" of corruption in the agency.

Charges also were recommended against former Manila International Container Terminal District Collector Vener Baquiran, former customs appraiser Dolores Domingo, as well as Marina Signapan and Katrina Cuasay, employees of SMYD Trading, for violating the BOC policy against "sectioning."

Sectioning is a practice at the BOC whereby appraisers and brokers are grouped according to sections and becomes a source of corruption. —WITH A REPORT FROM MELVIN GASCON INQ

J

NEWS BRIEFS**House passes ROTC bill on second reading**

The House of Representatives on Wednesday approved on second reading a bill reviving mandatory two-year military training for senior high school students. With ayes overwhelming nays in voice voting, the 291-strong chamber approved the proposed "Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) Act," restoring the ROTC program for all students in Grade 11 and 12. Under the proposal, all senior high school students shall undergo basic military training "in order to motivate, train, organize and utilize [them] for national defense preparedness or civil-military operations." Kabataan Rep. Sarah Elago questioned several provisions in the bill, but the presiding officers overruled her objections and forcefully called a vote. --DJ YAP 47

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New 4th ID commander assumes post

Brig. Gen. Franco Nemecio Gacal is the new commander of the 4th Infantry Division (ID).

Maj. Gen. Ronald Villanueva turned over the post to Gacal in a change of command ceremony held at Camp Evangelista in Cagayan de Oro City on Tuesday.

The 4th ID has jurisdiction over Eastern Mindanao, Caraga and parts of Northern Mindanao.

"Plan well, think forward and use all available resources, maximize the participation of community and all stakeholders. Let us leave no breathing room for the enemy to regroup or regain foothold. Let us fight to win," Army chief Lt. Gen. Macairog Alberto, who led the change of command ceremony, told Gacal.

- Michael Punongbayan

7

'Diamond' division has new commander

By Kathleen Mae Bulquerin

Philippine Army chief Lt. Gen. Macairog Alberto on Tuesday installed Brig. Gen. Franco Nemecio Gacal as the new commander of the elite 4th Infantry Diamond Division at Camp Edilberto T. Evangelista, Patag in Cagayan de Oro City.

Gacal succeeded Maj. Gen. Ronald Villanueva as the new commander of the division which is mainly tasked with the

security operations and in addressing security threats in Eastern Mindanao, CARAGA and areas of Region 10.

For the past three years, the diamond division has neutralized 1,101 New People's Army terrorists, seized 966 firearms and cleared 264 barangays of rebels' influence.

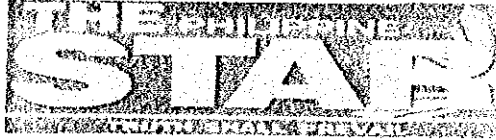
It also facilitated the declaration of Bukidnon as conflict manageable and paved the way for the province's attaining

the status of being ready for further development.

Gacal is a member of the Philippine Military Academy Maringal Class of 1988.

He was a noted operative of special forces and well-rounded military officer with expertise in human resource management.

Prior to his new post, he has served as the commander of 402nd Infantry "Stinger" Brigade since 2016.
L.P.



DILG, DSWD heads get CA nod

The Commission on Appointments (CA) confirmed yesterday Interior Secretary Eduardo Año and Social Welfare Secretary Rolando Bautista along with 51 other civilian and military officials.

During deliberations of the CA committee on interior and local governments, lawmakers pressed Año on the investigation into the deadly Jolo cathedral bombing in Sulu, efforts to counter religious extremism in the country and housing for informal settlers.

Año said the bombing was considered solved with the arrest of the suspects, even as he stressed the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Philippine National Police continue to hold dialogues with Muslim religious leaders, local officials and other stakeholders to combat extremism.

Año, who graduated from the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) in 1983, was appointed Armed Forces chief in 2016 and later named to head the DILG in January last year.

"If there's anything that Secretary Año should be credited for since being appointed to the

DILG, it is his contributions to exacting accountability from local officials and public safety personnel," Sen. Sonny Angara said in endorsing the official's confirmation before the plenary.

Also confirmed was Bautista, a former Army chief and a member of PMA Class of 1985, who was grilled on the issue of lowering the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

Sen. Risa Hontiveros told Bautista that she was disappointed with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) for reversing its position against lowering the threshold from 15 years to 12 years.

She stressed the DSWD should be at the forefront of opposing such bills in Congress as the agency is among the main implementors of the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2008, which set the age of criminal responsibility at 15 years.

Hontiveros said the reported rise in incidents of minors involved in crime was due to the law not being implemented properly.

Bautista countered by saying the results of an ongoing study of

the DSWD showed lowering the minimum age of criminal responsibility would help in prevention and deterrence but he did not elaborate.

He, however, said the DSWD is leaving it to the Senate and House of Representatives to decide on what would be the ideal minimum age of criminal responsibility.

The bicameral body also confirmed the appointment of Aileen Lizada as commissioner of the Civil Service Commission.

Lawmakers pressed her on improving the performance evaluation of government officials and workers to reduce red tape.

The body also confirmed the appointments of Ramon Bagatsing Jr. as ambassador to India; Ma. Teresita Cruz Daza, ambassador to Chile; Christopher Baltazar Montero, ambassador to Brunei; and Noel Eugene Eusebio Mejico Servigo, ambassador to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The CA likewise confirmed the promotions of 43 generals and colonels, including Lt. Gen. Ronnie Evangelista, superintendent of the Philippine Military Academy.

— Paolo Romero

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MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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CA confirms Secretaries Bautista of DSWD, Año of DILG

By **MARIO B. CASAYURAN**

Before going on a three-month election recess which starts today, the bicameral Commission on Appointments (CA) confirmed yesterday the appointments of two members of the Duterte Cabinet.

Confirmed were Rolando Joselito Delizo Bautista as Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)

secretary, and Eduardo Manahan Año as Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) secretary.

After talking to Bautista outside of the hearing room, San Juan Rep. Ronaldo B. Zamora, concurrent CA vice chairman, led his 12-member House contingent in throwing their support for the confirmation of Bautista's appointment.

Zamora described Bautista, ►9

CA confirms Secretaries... ◀1

a Philippine Army (PA) chief, as a professional.

Ano, former chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), also answered the questions of CA members on the current peace and order situation of the country, particularly details of the Marawi siege.

The CA, likewise, confirmed the appointments of 43 ranking AFP general/flag and senior officers led by two Lieutenant Generals.

The CA also confirmed the appointments of five Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) ambassadors.

The appointment of Aileen Lourdes Abella Lizada as commissioner of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) was also confirmed.

Confirmed as Lieut. Generals were Ronnie S. Evangelista and Macairog S. Alberto while the Major Generals were Samuel G. Gotico, Felipe B. Bejar, Erwin Bernard L. Neri, Ramiro Manuel A. Rey, Pablo M. Lorenzo, Byron H. Calimag, Jesus S. Sarsagat, and Jose C. Faustino Jr.

Ramon Sevilla Bagatsing was confirmed as Chief of Mission, Class I, as Philippine Ambassador to India and Nepal.

Others confirmed were: Moe Albano Wong as Philippine Ambassador to South Korea; Noel Eugene Eusebio Mejica Servigon as Philippine Ambassador to Chile, Ecuador and Peru and Christopher Baltazar Montero as Philippine Ambassador to Brunei Darussalam.

Last week, the CA confirmed the appointments of the following: Raul Salavaria Hernandez, a former DFA spokesman, as Philippine Ambassador to Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan; Leah Basinang-Ruiz, as Ambassador to Poland, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; Alex Garcia Chua, as Ambassador to Kenya, Burundi, Comoros, Malawi, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, South Sudan and as Permanent Representative to the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT); Ma. Theresa B. Dizon-de Vega, as Philippine Ambassador to Germany; Jesus Santos Domingo, as Philippine Ambassador to New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, and Leo M. Herrera-Lim as Philippine Ambassador to Denmark.

CA confirms DSWD, DILG chiefs

He had to answer issues on the peace and order situation

By Marlo J. Mallari

The powerful Commission on Appointments (CA) yesterday approved the ad interim appointments of two members of President Duterte's Cabinet, more than 40 senior military and five diplomats.

Confirmed were Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Rolando Bautista and Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año.

The CA unanimously approved the confirmation of Año, who was asked about issues concerning the peace and order situation in the country. CA members quizzed Bautista over the Bahay Pag-asa program of DSWD but gave their approval to his appointment.

Prior to their appointments as members of the Duterte Cabinet, Año and Bautista served as chief of staff Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the commanding general of the Philippine Army, respectively.

Leading the senior officials of the AFP whose appointments were confirmed were Army chief Lt. Gen. Macarog Alberto and Lt. Gen. Ronnie Evangelista, superintendent of the Philippine Military Academy (PMA). Also confirmed was controversial Marine Col. Ferdinand Marcelino.

During the hearing, Marcelino became emotional after being asked by a member of the CA panel about his alleged involvement in the illegal drugs trade that led to his incarceration.

A known anti-drug crusader, Marcelino, along with his Chinese agent, was linked in the shabu laboratory raided by combined operatives of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency and police Anti-Illegal Drugs Group in Sta. Cruz, Manila in January 2017.

"It is not easy to be imprisoned because I did nothing wrong. All the charges against me were fabricated," said Marcelino, a member of the PMA Class of 1994.

"But it was truly an awakening, a learning experience not only as a military officer but also as a person," he added.

Among the five Department of Foreign Affairs diplomats whose ad interim appointments were confirmed by the CA were former police general and now Ambassador to South Korea Noe Wong and Ambassador to Peru Ma. Teresita Cruz-Daza.

Bautista, Año get nod of CA

BY ASHZEL HACHERO

BYPASSED the last time, Interior Secretary Eduardo Año and Social Welfare Secretary Rolando Bautista finally got the nod of the Commission on Appointments yesterday.

Sen. Juan Edgardo Angara, who sponsored Año's appointment, said he deserves the post as DILG chief.

"He is a paragon of competence and bravery, and clearly deserved to serve as Secretary of the Department of the Interior and Local Government," Angara said during the confirmation hearing.

Año and Bautista served as AIP chiefs of staff before they were appointed by President Duterte to their posts.

They were bypassed by the CA before Congress adjourned for last December.

Also getting the nod of the CA were ambassadors to Asean Noel Eugene Eusebio Mejico Servigon, ambassador to Brunei Christopher Baltazar Montero, ambassador to India Ramon Bagatsing Jr., ambassador to Korea Noe Albano Wong, ambassador to Chile Maria Teresita Cruz and 43 military officers led by PMA Superintendent Gen. Ron-

.....
See BAUTISTA > Page B3

BAUTISTA

nie Evangelista and Marine Col. Ferdinand Marcelino.

Also confirmed was Aileen Lourdes Abella Lizada as commissioner of the Civil Service Commission.

MARCELINO BREAKS DOWN

Marcelino broke into tears when he was asked to recall his arrest and detention over drug charges in 2016 that were later dropped by the Justice Department. The bemedalled Marine officer, also a former officer of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, was among 43 military officers who faced the CA.

Responding to a question by Cebu 1st District Rep. Raul del Mar, who asked him why it took so long before he could be given justice, Marcelino said the justice system in the country is "really slow."

"Sorry Sir, I become emotional every time I recall the days and nights I spent in jail. It's not easy to be jailed, especially when you know you did nothing wrong," Marcelino said.

He told Del Mar that while in

detention, he met others who have been incarcerated for 10 years and whose cases are still being heard.

It will be recalled that Marcelino and his Chinese companion, Yan Yi Shou, were arrested by PDEA agents in an apartment in Sta. Cruz, Manila during an anti-drug operation in January 2016.

Marcelino and Yan were charged for violating Section 11 (possession of dangerous drugs), Article II of Republic Act No. 9165 or the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 in connection with their arrest and the recovery of P380 million worth of shabu found in the apartment.

Marcelino denied the charges and said he was in the apartment for a covert surveillance operation as a member of the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces. He even submitted a certification from the Philippine Army Intelligence Group showing he is sharing information on the alleged involvement of Army personnel in the illegal drugs trade.

Former NBI director Virgilio Mendez also issued a certification recognizing Marcelino's active participation in the anti-drugs operations of the agency.

Marcelino said the reason be-

hind his arrest was because former PDEA director Arturo Caccad was "historically irate" at his continued involvement in the anti-drug campaign of the government.

In May 2017, the DOJ dropped the charges against Marcelino and Yan, saying the evidence presented by the PDEA and the Philippine National Police was insufficient to charge them in court. Yan was killed in August 2018 by riding-in-tandem gunmen in Manila.

During the CA hearing, Marcelino reiterated that the charges against him were fabricated.

He said after his release from detention, he thought of leaving the military for good but eventually changed his mind, adding what happened to him was a "big learning experience not only as a person but also as a military officer."

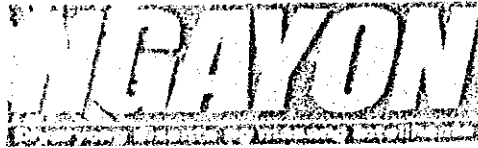
"I cannot thank enough my senior officers in the AFP for continuing to trust me, giving me a break again despite what had happened," he added.

Sen. Cynthia Villar latter said she would file a resolution asking the AFP to explain what happened to Marcelino.

"Maybe we can ask the AFP to give us a written explanation on this," she said.

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Año, Bautista lusot sa CA

Nakalusot na kahapon sa makapangyarihang Commission on Appointments sina DILG Secretary Eduardo Maranan Año, DSWD Secretary Rolando Joselito Delizo Bautista at Commissioner Alleen Lourdes Abella Lizada ng Civil Service Commission.

Nauna rito, nakalusot si Año sa CA committee on local government, si Bautista sa CA committee on labor, employment and social welfare at Lizada sa CA committee on constitutional commissions and offices.

Bukod sa tatlo, nakalusot din sa CA ang limang opisyal ng Department of Foreign Affairs habang pinagtibay rin ng CA ang ad interim appointments ng 42 General/Flag at Senior Officers ng AFP (Malou Escudero)

Ombudsman reverses order vs Ecija mayor

SANTO DOMINGO, Nueva Ecija: The office of the Ombudsman ordered the reinstatement of the mayor of this town after it found erroneous claims in the complaint against her.

The graft court on June 19, 2018 ordered Mayor Imee Llado de Guzman dismissed for alleged violation of anti-graft laws and grave misconduct filed by Vice Mayor Gregand Andres, who then replaced de Guzman on August 2.

But the dismissal order was found "erroneous" and the claim of Andres' camp fake.

In a seven-page resolution, the Office of the Ombudsman "reversed and set aside, and a new one is issued dismissing these cases because of insufficient and legal matters to support against de Guzman."

Andres, however, said the Ombudsman's joint resolution order was "unauthenticated and with clerical errors," and even the original envelope, stamp and seal and receiving slip were suspected to be fake.

"It's very erroneous so we are going to file queries at the Ombudsman," he said.

De Guzman earlier filed two separate motions for reconsideration with the ombudsman for reversal

of her case and asked the Court of Appeals (CA) to issue a temporary restraining order on her dismissal.

The CA resolution, dated November 2018, said a dismissal was final and executory.

"Whether fake or not, still the order will be unenforceable because the case has just attained finality with entry of judgment from the CA and whoever will implement the order will be held liable," Andres said.

The recent resolution created an impasse and a tense atmosphere between the camps of the reinstated mayor and the vice mayor.

During the flag-raising ceremony on Monday, the 69th Infantry Brigade based in Guimba, Nueva Ecija sent at least 15 troops and town police personnel, supported by a grader that blocked the entry and exit points at the municipal hall compound to preempt any untoward incident, but this did not happen.

Meanwhile, Interior and Local Government Provincial Director Renato Bernardino said they have yet to receive a copy of the Ombudsman's new order.

CELSO M. CAJUCOM

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**Standard
TODAY**

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Gov't rescue teams, volunteers look for missing Cessna from Bulacan

GOVERNMENT rescue team and volunteers are searching for the missing Cessna plane with two persons onboard that went missing few minutes after taking off the airport in Plaridel, Bulacan Monday.

The Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines is conducting the search with the help of Air Force and Coast Guard personnel to locate the two-seater Cessna C-152 training aircraft (registry number RP-C 2724) owned and operated by Fliteline Aviation School.

The aircraft departed Plaridel airport around 7:20 am and landed in Subic at 7:51 am for a touch and go landing maneuver.

CAAP spokesperson Eric Apolonio said the plane went missing on his way back to Plaridel airport since Monday afternoon.

"The search and rescue operations proves negative as of yesterday (Tuesday). The Philippine Air Force and the Philippine Coast Guard were tapped to join search and rescue operations," he said.

Apolonio said the search and rescue team is concentrating in the area of Sta. Rita mountain between Pampanga and Zambales.

Volunteers in the localities also helped in the search and rescue operations. **Joel Zurbano**

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Military's anti-coup force in metro has new head

BY VICTOR REYES

A WELL-ROUNDED senior Army officer has been designated as commander of the military's anti-coup force, the Joint Task Force National Capital Region, based in Camp Aguinaldo.

Brig. Gen. Cristobal Zaragoza assumed command of the JTF-NCR yesterday in rites presided by AFP chief Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr., replacing Brig. Gen. Abraham Casis who reached the mandatory retirement age of 56.

The JTF-NCR, the military's anti-coup and anti-terrorism unit in Metro Manila, used to be known as the National Capital Region Defense Command which quelled coup attempts in the 1980s.

Zaragoza, a member of the Philippine Military Academy Class of 1987, is outgoing deputy commander of the Army's 4th Infantry Division based in Cagayan de Oro City. He has served as head of the 401st Bri-

gade in Agusan del Sur, and of Task Force Davao which is in charge of the security of the President's hometown, Davao City.

Zaragoza is a recipient of various awards for excellence in combat and administrative functions.

"He is a very capable officer in the field of combat and intelligence operations," said AFP public affairs chief Col. Noel Detoyato of Detoyato.

Meanwhile, Brig. Gen. Franco Nemecio Gacal of PMA Class 1988 assumed the post of 4th ID commander on Tuesday, vice Maj. Gen. Ronald Villanueva who also reached the retirement age.

As 4th ID commander, Gacal will supervise all military operations in the Caraga region and part of the Northern Mindanao region, primarily against the communist New People's Army.

Gacal was commander of the 402nd Brigade. B2

NDF consultant's slay: Obstruction of justice raps filed

Three persons, including a lawyer of human rights group Karapatan, face charges for allegedly obstructing the investigation of the murder of National Democratic Front (NDF) consultant Randy Felix Malayao.

Chief Superintendent Jose Mario Espino, Cagayan Valley police director, said Karapatan legal counsel Edu

Balgos; his wife Rina, a former board member of Nueva Vizcaya, and Malayao's sister Perla Upano, an employee of the Department of the Interior and Local Government, were charged with grave threats, grave coercion and obstruction of justice.

Espino said the three forcibly took from police custody Malayao's six cell phones, a

laptop and documents recovered at the crime scene, which could have provided leads into the killing.

"Hindi po sana nakitangin yung mga tao na sinasabi namin," Espino said.

Philippine National Police chief Director General Oscar Albayalde relieved Senior Superintendent Jeremias Aglugub, Nueva Vizcaya police

director, and Chief Inspector Geovanni Cehes, Aritao police chief, for violating operational procedures when they turned over the recovered items to Malayao's sister.

Probers are looking into Malayao's background as a New People's Army commander as a possible motive for the killing.

- Emmanuel Tupas

MALAYAO MURDER

SLAIN NDFP CONSULTANT TAILED FROM QC BUS TERMINAL, SECURITY FOOTAGE SHOWS

By Jaymee T. Gamil
@JGamilINQ

Edsa in Quezon City around 9 p.m. on Jan. 29.

National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) consultant Randy Malayao may have been killed in a bus in Nueva Vizcaya, but death had apparently been on his tail from the time he boarded the bus in Metro Manila.

Security camera footage released by the Cagayan Valley region police on Wednesday showed that the "persons of interest" behind Malayao's murder had been tailing him since he boarded the Victory Liner bus to Isabela province at the company's Kamias terminal on

Pictures of bus

One of the persons of interest was shown in the footage approaching the bus and visually checking if Malayao had already boarded, before taking pictures of the bus and walking away.

When the bus made a stopover at a terminal in Aritao, Nueva Vizcaya province, around five hours later, the closed-circuit television camera in the bus again showed two persons of interest near the bus's entrance.

A few minutes later a gunman boarded the bus, headed

to the back and then shot Malayao dead while he slept.

In a statement on Wednesday, Victory Liner Inc. condemned the killing, saying the company was coordinating with police investigators.

"Victory Liner is doing everything possible to further improve the security of our facilities," said Richard Rivera, spokesperson for the company.

Malayao's personal effects

Police have yet to identify the suspects in Malayao's slay, and have courted criticism for painting Malayao as a "ranking leader of the Communist Party of the Philippines-NDFP in Ca-

gayan Valley since 1990s."

Chief Supt. Jose Mario Espino, Cagayan Valley police director, on Wednesday said criminal complaints might be filed against a former Nueva Vizcaya board member and a lawyer for militant rights group Karapatan for allegedly intimidating the police into releasing Malayao's laptop and cellphone to his sister.

Malayao's relatives, who requested anonymity, said they "felt pressured" to give the gadgets back to the police. **AJ**

"We will cooperate with the investigators, but do not pressure us because we are still grieving," a relative said. **—WITH A REPORT FROM VILLAMOR VISAYA JR. INQ**

Cagayan PNP releases footage on killing of NDFP consultant

AUTHORITIES in Cagayan Valley released to media the closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage on the killing of National Democratic Front of the Philippines' (NDFP) peace consultant Randy Malayao.

The footage was taken from two angles, one inside the bus and the other outside.

It was taken at the Victory Liner bus terminal in Quezon City at about 9 p.m. on January 29, showing Malayao boarding an Isabela-bound bus.

It was also shown in the video that a man approached the bus, took a picture of the vehicle and left.

Five hours later, at about 2 a.m. on January 30, the bus had a stopover at a terminal in Aritao, Nueva Viscaya. In another footage, two unidentified men were shown smoking outside the bus during the stopover.

At about 2:21 a.m., a man wearing a cap and jacket boarded the bus and approached Malayao.

Two gunshots were heard, after which the suspect was seen fleeing the scene.

Chief Supt. Jose Mario Espino, Region 2 (Cagayan Valley) police

director, said they were checking on the identities of the men in the CCTV footage.

Meanwhile, Victory Liner, in a statement said they adhered to the security requirements laid out by the Land Transportation, Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB), and assured passengers that their safety is the company's concern.

"We denounce the dastardly killing of NDF consultant Madayao, who is known in the community as a peacemaker. Like the rest of the nation, we want the truth to come out," the bus company said.

It also assured that it would be coordinating with police.

"We are constantly assisting the Philippine National Police in its investigation of the case. We assure our riding public that Victory Liner is doing everything possible to further improve our facilities. We adhere by the security guidelines set by the LTFRB, we wait for our regulators to further instruct us on what initiatives are necessary to undertake moving forward," the company added.

FRANCIS EARL CUETO

Police to identify Malayao's killers

THE Cagayan Valley police said it would investigate the identities of the men seen on a CCTV footage behind the killing of National Democratic Front consultant Randy Malayao.

The CCTV footage were taken from two angles—one inside the bus where Malayao was shot and one outside, according to a GMA 7 report.

In the first footage, which was taken at a bus terminal in Quezón City around 9 p.m. on January 29, Malayao was seen boarding an Isabela-bound bus. Suddenly a man approached the bus, took a picture of the vehicle, and left. **Ab**

Five hours later, or around 2 a.m. on Jan. 30, the bus stopped over at a bus terminal in Aritao, Nueva Vizcaya.



Ship Joma home, Dutch urged

Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chairman Jose Maria "Joma" Sison should be stripped of his political asylum status in The Netherlands and subsequently repatriated to the Philippines to face trial for numerous pending cases, members of an anti-communist group who stormed the Dutch Embassy said yesterday.

Turn to page 6

The National Democratic Front of the Philippines' is engaged in senseless struggle and killings

From page 1

Liga Filipinas Independencia (LFI) slammed the National Democratic Front of the Philippines' (NDFP) "senseless struggle and killings" in a petition submitted yesterday to the Embassy of the Kingdom of The Netherlands.

"As a coalition of 38 national organizations nationwide and different sectors of society, we condemn the atrocities and terrorism perpetuated by the CPP-NPA-NDF (Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front) in the past years. And you have granted the devil Joma Sison refuge," LFI head Nolan Tiongco said.

Face raps

The group also called on members of the European Union (EU) to cancel Sison's privilege as a political refugee and bring him back to the Philippines to face the various cases that have been filed against him and the CPP-NPA.

"We appeal to the kind and democratic heart of your (The Netherlands) government and the EU to cancel Sison's

asylum, together with those of his band of terrorists, so that they could face trial in our country. They are facing criminal and acts of terrorism offenses that they have committed. Don't give them safe haven and refuge and scapegoats," Tiongco said.

"We don't know what your moral and legal basis for giving this barbaric terrorist group asylum in your country. Giving them safe haven is giving hell to our country," Tiongco added.

End Reds terror

Around 50 persons, who claimed to be former members of the NPA, said they decided to return to the fold of the law after realizing the "hideous system" within the 50-year-old rebellion.

"The CPP-NPA-NDF has only killed thousands of Filipinos, destroyed many lives and billions of pesos' worth of properties. Joining that organization as a teenager was our greatest regret and now, we are making it our duty to wake up everyone," the anti-communist group said during the rally.

The embassy had acknowledged and received the formal letter but has yet to issue an official statement.

The anti-communist group has been appealing to Filipinos and the international community to take part in ending the rebellion movement.

The NPA, the armed wing of the CPP, is listed as a terrorist organization in the United States and EU.

CL



CCTV footage may unmask killer

By Elmer Manuel

Authorities in Cagayan Valley on Wednesday said they are now following up leads provided by CCTV footage in the killing of National Democratic Front of the Philippines' (NDFP) peace consultant Randy Malayao last 30 January 2018 in Nueva Vizcaya.

This developed after the Cagayan Police released CCTV footage that recorded Malayao's killing. The footage were taken from two angles — one inside the bus where Malayao was shot and one outside.

Region II Police director Chief Supt. Jose Mario Espino said they are now conducting investigation to establish the identities of the men seen in the CCTV footage. The police said they would attempt to enhance the footage.

A man wearing cap and jacket boarded the bus and approached Malayao.

In the video taken at a bus terminal in Quezon City around 9 p.m. on 29 January, Malayao was seen boarding an Isabela-bound bus. The footage also showed a man who suddenly approached the bus, took a picture of the vehicle and left.

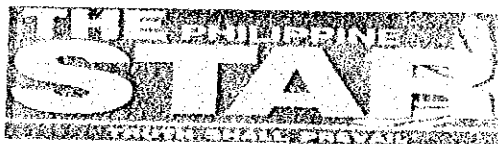
Five hours later, around 2 a.m. on 30 January 2018, the bus was seen during a stopover at a bus terminal in Aritao, Nueva Viscaya. A separate footage also showed two men smoking outside the bus during the stopover.

At 2:21 a.m., a man wearing cap and jacket boarded the bus and approached Malayao. Two gunshots were heard and after this the suspect was seen fleeing from the scene.

Meanwhile, the police on Wednesday said they would lodge complaints against two colleagues and a relative of Malayao for taking evidence related to his killing last week.

Malayao's laptop and six cellphones, which could help the investigation, were allegedly taken from police custody by his sibling Perla Upano, Karapatan legal consultant Edu Balgos and former Nueva Vizcaya board member Rina Balgos.

With Francis Earl Cueto



Duterte to name 80 members of BTA

DAVAO CITY -- President Duterte is expected to announce soon the 80 members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) as the initial result of the plebiscite on the coverage of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) indicates support for greater autonomy for Muslim Mindanao.

The BTA is tasked to oversee the interim government of BARMM.

The Office of the Presidential Assistant on the Peace Process (OPAPP) has submitted to the President the names of 80 nominees.

The creation of the BTA is provided for under the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro signed on March 27, 2014 between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Presidential spokesman

Salvador Panelo earlier said the BARMM would be in place as soon as the President constituted the BTA, unless the Supreme Court rules in favor of a petition questioning the constitutionality of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

But Panelo is confident the high tribunal will reject the petition.

"We cannot be waylaid in the meanwhile in the race to peace and progress," Panelo said.

He also urged critics of BOL to yield to the rule of the majority. "The sovereign voice of the participating voters in the just concluded plebiscite has spoken, ushering a ray of hope to that war weary, poverty stricken, long neglected and much heralded promised land of the '50s," he said.

"The Bangsamoro Organic Law has been officially rati-

fied, it behooves the discordant voices to yield to the rule of the majority," he added.

"The quest (for) lasting peace in that region saw not only the bloody encounters among the Muslim combatants but spawned more conflicts as well, giving birth to more armed groups and violent hostilities to the sufferance of the Bangsamoro people and the Christian inhabitants," the spokesman added.

Panelo also praised Muslim rebels for joining the democratic process.

"We urge the people in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to give their new leaders their support and cooperation but at the same we implore them to be vigilant and assertive of their rights. We also call on the mandated leaders to be fealty to their oaths of office," he said. — Edith Regalado

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Bomb blasts hit Lanao Norte

ZAMBOANGA CITY – Bomb explosions rocked two towns in Lanao del Norte on Tuesday.

The Army's First Division said there was no reported casualty in the explosions, but these triggered panic among residents.

Maj. Gen. Roseller Murillo, Joint Task Force Zam-

PeLan chief, said the explosions occurred in front of a gasoline station in Lala town and near the municipal hall of Kauswagan.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, which occurred on the eve of the plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) in the province.

"Everything is under control... we encourage everyone not to panic and exercise their right to vote... We will respond to any eventuality... during and after the BOL election," Murillo said.

– Roel Pareño, John Unson

After 'avoiding' public eye, Rody holds Cabinet meeting

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ

After being away from the public eye over the past few days, President Duterte held a Cabinet meeting yesterday to thresh out certain issues.

Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles said the meeting would focus on issues of land conversion, common tower, national ID system and updates on the immunization program of the Department of Health (DOH).

Nograles said the agenda also included how to streamline procedures in the Department of Agrarian Reform, particularly on boosting the access of farmers and fisherfolk to credit and loan facilities.

He said the President wanted updates on the agricultural productivity pro-

gram of farmers.

"(We) will also discuss the national ID system and the immunization program of DOH," Nograles said.

Duterte skipped an activity in Leyte last Friday, saying he was not feeling well.

While he was out of the public eye, Duterte had private engagements in two Mindanao cities and in Taguig.

Last Monday, Duterte met with the families of five soldiers who died during a clash with the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu last Saturday and the family of a soldier who was killed during the Jan. 27 Jolo blast. The meeting took place at the Matina Enclaves in Davao City.

Duterte condoled with the bereaved families and honored the slain soldiers by conferring on them the Order of Lapu Lapu with the rank of Kalasag. He also vowed to provide them housing,

livelihood, employment and educational assistance.

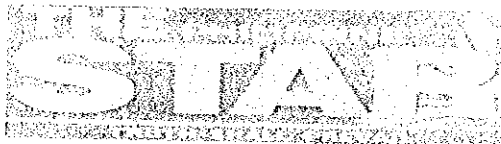
On the same day, the President visited the grave of his mother Soledad at the Roman Catholic cemetery also in Davao City to commemorate her seventh death anniversary.

Duterte paid his last respects to Solona Canoy, wife of former Cagayan de Oro City mayor Reuben Canoy. Solona passed away last Feb. 3 because of cardiac arrest. She was 94.

Duterte also visited the wake of Olivia Paras, wife of Labor Undersecretary Jacinto Paras at the Heritage Park in Taguig City.

Duterte was last seen in public last Jan. 29 when he attended the premiere of the movie about former national police chief Ronald dela Rosa in Mandaluyong City.

— With Alexis Romero



Año on Jolo bombing: Case closed

By PAOLO ROMERO

Authorities consider the deadly bombing of the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo, Sulu as solved, Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año said yesterday.

Año made the statement during his confirmation hearings before the Commission on Appointments after Sen. Risa Hon-tiveros asked him for an update on the bombing that killed more than 20 people and wounded over a hundred others.

"We already consider the case as solved with the identification of the perpetrators and the arrest or the placing into custody of the five suspects. Some people are still at large and three suspects are dead, including two suicide bombers," Año told lawmakers.

"We have determined that this was really perpetrated by suicide bombers," he said.

Año said the Philippine National Police (PNP) filed charges of 23 counts of multiple murder and 95 counts of frustrated murder as well as damage to property against the suspects.

"I would like to share that in the time we were solving the case that the (local government units) played a very important part - they provided a lot of information, they have been

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Año From Page 1

very cooperative and facilitated the arrest of the suspects," he said.

Sen. Aquilino Pimentel III pressed Año to improve the PNP's intelligence-gathering capability and help in the government effort to counter religious extremism.

Año said his department has been conducting regular dialogues with stakeholders, including local officials and Muslim religious leaders, in a bid to combat extremism.

Abu Sayyaf leader Hatib Hajab Sawadjaan, the alleged mastermind in the Jolo bombings, is now head of Islamic State (IS) in the country, Año said.

Año added that while Sawadjaan remains a traditional Abu Sayyaf, he assumed leadership of militants influenced by IS following the death of Isnilon Hapilon in an encounter with state security forces in October 2017 when he and rebels belonging to the Maute group lay siege on Marawi city.

Meanwhile, the Department of Justice (DOJ) noted that principal suspect Mukammar Pay alias Kammah and Alb-

adji Gadjali alias Apah, Radjan Gadjali, Kaisar Gadjai and Said Alih have been charged before the regional trial court in Jolo, Sulu.

Kammah, alleged bomb maker and a brother of slain Abu Sayyaf sub-leader Surakah Ingog, is reportedly the leader of the Ajang-Ajang subgroup of the local terrorist group.

He denied involvement in the bombings.

But prosecutors cited eyewitness accounts as basis for indicting him and the other respondents.

DOJ spokesman Markk Perete said there is no plan yet to transfer the cases from Sulu to a court in Metro Manila.

"The evidence and witnesses necessary to prosecute the case are in Jolo. Hence, it would be more efficient to hold trial there unless compelling reasons exist for the transfer of trial in Manila. As of now, we have yet to receive any request from our prosecutor to effect such transfer," he explained.

The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) will also look into the possibility of a link of

the Sulu, Zamboanga city and Lanao del Norte bombings, Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra said yesterday.

Just like in the Jolo blast, Guevarra said the NBI would also identify the people behind the attacks in Zamboanga and Lanao del Norte and determine their motives.

The DOJ chief also revealed that the NBI had faced difficulties in its probe on the Jolo bombings.

"It seems that the physical evidence on site had not been properly preserved before the NBI's field agents came in," Guevarra said.

Guevarra said he gave the bureau more time to complete its investigation.

Abu Sayyaf

At least two Abu Sayyaf members were killed while another was wounded and captured in separate anti-terrorist operations in Sulu, according to authorities.

The operations were launched yesterday by the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group, backed by elements of the Special Action Force, to capture Alex Habbibondin alias Amah Alex, who was wanted for murder.

But Habbibondin fired at the lawmen triggering a shoot-out, which resulted in his death.

Troops from the 41st Infantry Battalion killed an Abu Sayyaf member, wounded and captured another on Tuesday afternoon in Maimbung town, according to Col. Gerry Besana, spokesman for the Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom).

The bandit was identified as Murtasil Paradjil alias Muster Ibla, who sustained multiple wounds during the encounter.

Paradjil was brought to the military station hospital in Camp Gen. Teodulfo Bautista.

"Your Armed Forces continue to adhere to the rules of engagement and the principles of International Humanitarian Law, which dictate the protection of hors de combat or out of action due to injury in armed conflicts, despite the fact that our adversaries only resort to non-conventional methods in engaging our troops," Westmincom commander Lieutenant Gen. Arnel dela Vega said in a statement.

- With Edu Punay, Roel Pareño, Emmanuel Tupas

DOJ files murder charges vs Jolo bombing suspects

The Department of Justice (DOJ) on Wednesday filed criminal charges against five suspects in the bombing of the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo, Sulu province, on Jan. 27.

Undersecretary Mark Perete, spokesperson for the DOJ, said Sulu prosecutor in charge Rommel Cancio filed multiple murder charges against Mukammar Pay alias Kammah, Albaji Gadjali alias Apah, Radjan Gadjaliq,

Kaiser Gadjali and Said Alih.

The five were said to be behind the two explosions at the church that killed 20 people and injured more than 100 others.

Ajang-Ajang members

The suspects, all said to be members of Ajang-Ajang, a subgroup of the bandit group Abu Sayyaf, reportedly gave themselves up to the authorities on Saturday.

Perete said the cases were

filed in the Jolo Regional Trial Court, although he did not rule out their possible transfer to Manila.

"The evidence and witnesses necessary to prosecute the case are in Jolo. Hence, it would be more efficient to hold trial there, unless compelling reasons exist for the transfer of trial to Manila. As of now, we have yet to receive any request from our prosecutor to effect such transfer," Perete said. —JEROME ANING INQ AS

REPORT TO CONGRESS

US CONSIDERS CHURCH BLAST BRAINS 'EMIR' OF IS IN PH

By Jeannette I. Andrade
@jiandradeINQ

The US Department of Defense considers Hatib Sawadjaan, the Abu Sayyaf subcommander tagged as the brains behind the Jan. 27 bombing of the Catholic cathedral in Jolo, Sulu province, the "emir" of Islamic State (IS) in the Philippines.

In a quarterly report covering October to December last year, the department noted the "fractured relationship" of the local IS movement with the IS "core group" in Iraq and Syria, as a result of the killing of its emir in Southeast Asia, Isnilon Hapilon, in last year's Marawi siege.

It said that IS-inspired terror groups in Mindanao "remained fragmented and degraded," although they still posed a security threat with an estimated 300 to 500 fighters.

Military aid

The report, submitted to the US Congress by Defense Inspector General Glenn Fine, also discussed Washington's Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines (OPE-P) and justified the US military assistance of \$61.9 million (about P3.2 billion) to Manila.

Fine said the aid package

would "help enhance the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capacity of Philippine forces to better track and target terrorist organizations."

Included in the ISR assistance to the Armed Forces of the Philippines are a training package, software, unmanned aerial vehicle systems, tactical command posts and other equipment.

Citing an analysis of the US Indo-Pacific Command, Fine said that IS-inspired groups in Mindanao "made no progress in expanding [their] areas of operations of influence" after their defeat in Marawi. AS

Support declines

The command clusters the Abu Sayyaf, the Maute group, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and the Ansar al-Khilafah Philippines under IS-Philippines.

"(US Indo-Pacific Command) reported that IS-[Philippines] was no longer receiving the same level of financial support and quality media coverage from international affiliates as it had in 2017," Fine said.

The US command, he said, believes that Sawadjaan acts as emir of IS in Mindanao although the "Isis-core did not confirm an emir and that it was not clear what ties Sawadjaan had with Isis-core."

Some 40 foreign fighters, mostly from Malaysia and Indonesia, were believed to be in the Philippines during the quarter to train and fight with local terrorists, Fine said. INQ

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The Manila Times

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'Sawadjaan acting IS emir in PH'

HATIB Hajan Sawadjaan, a commander of the Abu Sayyaf Group, is believed to be the "acting emir" of the Islamic State (IS) in the Philippines, according to a report by the United States' Department of Defense (DoD).

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■ EMIR FROM A1

'Sawadjaan

The report estimated that there were around 300 to 550 IS terrorists in Mindanao.

"This quarter, US Indo-Pacom (Indo-Pacific Command) reported that it had no update on the status of an ISIS-[Philippines] emir, but it still believed Hatib Sawadjaan, an Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) sub-unit commander, was the acting emir," the report said, using another acronym for IS.

ISIS stands for Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

The US defense department said the US Indo-Pacom had reported that the IS Core, or those who are based in Iraq and Syria, had not clarified their clear relations with Sawadjaan, who is based in Sulu.

There are two groups led by the Abu Sayyaf, one under Sawadjaan and the other under Radulan Sahiron.

The US government has reported that there was no evidence on the relationship between IS-Core and IS-Philippines.

It, however, said the conclusion of the five-month long siege in Marawi, which left about 1,000 persons dead, had "fractured" the relationship between the IS-Core and the IS-Philippines.

The statement jived with that of Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, who said there were around 40 foreign terrorists in Mindanao accompanying groups that have

aligned themselves with the IS, including the Abu Sayyaf under Sawadjaan's supervision and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters under Abu Toraype.

Most of the foreign extremists came from Indonesia and Malaysia, according to Washington, which did not identify the home countries of foreigners aiding Philippine-based terrorists.

Lorenzana and Interior Secretary Eduardo Año had confirmed there were terrorists who came from Pakistan, Egypt, Yemen, Morocco and even Singapore.

Año confirmed that Sawadjaan was the IS "emir" in the Philippines.

He said even if Abu Dar or Owayda Benito Marohombsar had been recognized as the "emir" replacing Isnilon Hapilon for IS Southeast Asia, Sawadjaan is the believed leader of the IS in the country, luring foreign terrorists to southern Philippines.

At the same time, the DoD report said the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) lacked capabilities in collecting information on targets including terrorists.

The report of the DoD's Lead Inspector General for the Operation Pacific Eagle in the Philippines noted that the Philippine military "lacks" assets for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR).

It added that the Armed Forces does not have a "Production, Exploitation and Dissemination cell" that has the capability of producing ISR information and "providing it to a decision-making entity."

The Philippine military, it said, also "suffers from an institutional problem" by using limited ISR assets in live-tracking active operations.

The DoD got this information from the US Special Operations Command-Pacific (USSOCPAC), which also pointed out that the Philippine military still "relies heavily" on the US Defense department and its contractors' ISR capabilities in identifying locations of activities of the enemy.

To attain the "end-to-end" capability requiring the Philippine military's Joint Special Operations Group (JSOG) to have a "tactical level ISR platform, an established Aerial Reconnaissance Unit, a Joint Intelligence Component" to assist with intelligence collaboration and analysis is needed.

In March last year, the Philippine Air Force received six ScanEagle unmanned aerial vehicles from the US that can be used for ISR operations.

The DoD inspector general said the USSOCPAC is providing the Philippine military an intelligence training package, analyst notebook software, multiple unmanned aerial vehicle systems, tactical command posts and other equipment.

For this year, the DoD inspector general said the US Indo-Pacom was planning to spend \$50.1 million or P3.2 billion on contracted ISR and \$11.8 million or P617.4 million on US Army ISR support for the Philippines.

DEMPSEY REYES

5 suspects in Jolo blast charged – DOJ

By JEFFREY Q. DAMICO

The five suspects allegedly involved in the twin blasts at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo last January 27 that killed 23 persons have been charged before the Jolo Regional Trial Court.

"OIC-Provincial Prosecutor Rommel Cancio today filed an information for the complex crime of Multiple Murder with Multiple Frustrated Murder against Mukammar L. Pay @ Kammah, Albaji K. Gadjali @ Apah,

Radjan B. Gadjaliq, Kaiser Gadjali and Said Alih," DOJ spokesperson Undersecretary Markk Perete said in a statement Wednesday.

The DOJ, he said will not seek the transfer of the case to Manila.

"The evidence and witnesses necessary to prosecute the case are in Jolo. Hence, it would be more efficient to hold trial there unless compelling reasons exist for the transfer of trial to Manila. As of now, we have yet to receive any request from our prosecutor to effect such

transfer," he explained.

Kammah initially surrendered to the 35th Infantry Battalion (IB) of the Philippine Army Saturday reportedly to clear his name before he was turned over to police in Jolo, Sulu.

The four other suspects surrendered separately to other police units in Sulu Sunday.

The five have been placed under the custody of the Special Investigation Task Group (SITG) Mount Carmel in Jolo, Sulu. 9

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DOJ indicts five in Jolo blasts, widens probe

By Rey E. Requejo
and Francisco Tuyay

THE Department of Justice has indicted five suspects in the Jan. 27 bomb attack on a Catholic church in Jolo, Sulu that killed 23 people.

The department said the principal suspect Mukammar Pay alias Kammali and four others have been charged before the

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DOJ...

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Jolo, Sulu regional trial court with 23 counts of murder and 95 counts of frustrated murder.

Also charged in court were Albadji Gadjali alias Apah, Radjan Gadjali, Kaisar Gadjai and Said Alih.

DOJ spokesman Mark Perete said the Sulu Provincial Prosecutor's Office found probable cause on the charges filed by the Philippine National Police against the five suspects after inquest proceedings on Monday.

The cases filed by the prosecutors unidentified suspects tagged in the twin attacks.

Kammah, alleged bomb maker and a brother of slain Abu Sayyaf sub-leader Surakah Ingog, is reportedly the leader of the Ajang Ajang subgroup of the terrorist group.

Kammah has denied involvement in the bomb attack.

However, prosecutors cited eyewitness accounts that pointed to him as one of the culprits as the basis for indicting him and other respondents.

The DOJ said there is no plan yet to transfer the cases from Sulu to a court in Metro Manila.

"The evidence and witnesses necessary to prosecute the case are in Jolo.

Hence, it would be more efficient to hold trial there unless compelling reasons exist for the transfer of trial to Manila," he said.

The first bomb went off inside the church as Mass was being celebrated at about 8:30 a.m. on Jan. 27. Shortly afterward, a second bomb went off outside, in time to kill churchgoers rushing out and soldiers and police responding to the first blast.

The Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility for the attack, but local authorities tagged the Abu Sayyaf Group for the incident, even as they acknowledged that an Indonesian couple may have been used as suicide bombers.

Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra, meanwhile, said the National Bureau of Investigation will determine if a spate of bomb attacks in Mindanao were related.

The probe would include three blasts in Lanao del Norte that went off in Lanao del Norte on Tuesday, and a grenade attack on a mosque that killed two visiting missionaries in Zamboanga City last week.

"The NBI will try to see if the spate of bombings are interconnected," Guevarra said.

The first blast occurred in front of a gas station in Lala town at 4:35 p.m., followed by another explosion at the back of the Kauswagan municipal building

15 minutes later.

The third explosion happened at the Mindanao State University High School in Sultan Naga Dimaporo at around 9:30 p.m.

No injuries were reported.

Guevarra said the NBI faced difficulties in its probe of the Jolo bomb attack because the physical evidence on the site had not been properly preserved. Because of this, Guevarra said he gave the bureau more time to complete its investigation.

Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año earlier said that two Indonesian suicide bombers were behind the bombings, citing intelligence sources.

The woman reportedly detonated the first improvised explosive device inside the church while the man detonated the second one outside near the entrance.

In Jolo, Sulu, the police reported the death of an Abu Sayyaf member as troops continued to press the attack against the terrorist group.

Chief Supt. Amador Corpus, acting director of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group said ASG member Alex Habbibondin, alias Amah Alex was killed in a manhunt operations in Jolo, Sulu at about 4:30 a.m.

At least three ASG bandits were killed and dozens were wounded in operations against the group. With PNA

'Abu Sayyaf leader tagged in Sulu blasts is ISIS-PH head'

BY VICTOR REYES

AN Abu Sayyaf leader suspected to have masterminded the bombings at a Catholic church in Sulu late last month is believed to be the acting head of "ISIS-Philippines," a group of several terrorist groups in the country, according to a report of the US Department of Defense (DOD).

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año supported the October-December 2018 DOD quarterly report, saying Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan has taken over as "overall leader" of ISIS in the country, which he called "ISIS Mindanao."

ISIS-Philippines or ISIS Mindanao is composed of the Abu Sayyaf, Maute Group, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, and Ansar Khilafah Philippines.

The former reported ISIS emir or

leader for Southeast Asia, Abu Sayyaf leader Isnilon Hapilon, was killed in Marawi City in 2017 during a five-month armed conflict that started in May that year with the occupation by the Maute of several barangays in the city.

Año said Sawadjaan is less radical than Hapilon.

The January 27 twin bombings at the Our Lady of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Jolo town in Sulu, which Sawadjaan allegedly masterminded, killed 23 persons and injured about a hundred others. Año said Tuesday it was a case of suicide bombing conducted by two Indonesian terrorists who linked up with Sawadjaan after arriving in Sulu from Indonesia.

The cathedral attacks came just weeks after the military redeployed 11 battalions to Sulu to go after the Abu Sayyaf and its

leaders, including Sawadjaan and Radulan Sahiron.

Año said the ISIS in the country was left disorganized after the fighting in Marawi City but it was later revived.

He said Maute leader Abu Dar was among those considered to become the ISIS Mindanao leader but "he (Sawadjaan) was recognized as their leader."

"Actually, he did not pledge allegiance with the ISIS. He remains to be a traditional Abu Sayyaf but after the death of Hapilon and we're finding a leader, Sawadjaan eventually became their leader, if I'm not mistaken third quarter last year," said Año.

DOD Inspector General Glenn Fine, citing information from the US Indo-Pacific Command, said Sawadjaan is the acting emir of ISIS-Philippines.

He said the ISIS-Core or leadership "did not confirm an emir and that it was not clear what ties Sawadjaan had with ISIS-Core."

"However, as of this quarter, no unified leader of ISIS-P was recognized by the extremist groups in the Philippines or ISIS-Core," he added.

In the quarterly report to the US Congress, Fine also said US has committed \$61.9 million (about P3.23 billion) in intelligence support to the Philippine military for this year.

Fine said Philippine military still needs extensive support in the field of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) from the US military.

He said the AFP has "limited ability to

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ABU

collect information on a target and provide that intelligence to a unit on the ground to act on it."

Fine said the AFP's inability to collect, process and disseminate intelligence information was the result of several problems, including lack of ISR assets and lack of "production, exploitation and dissemination cell capable of synthesizing ISR information and providing it to a decision-making entity."

He said the Philippine military also "suffers from an institutional problem, using its limited ISR assets for live tracking of active operations to provide semblance of battle tracking for friendly and suspected enemy elements rather than strategic threat analysis."

Fine said the AFP had been relying "heavily" on the US department for assistance, and it is the desire of the US Pacific Command to provide support for the Armed Forces "to

meet its own needs for ISR support to counterterrorism operations, including the capacity to target and conduct lethal operations against multiple violent extremist threats, without DOD assistance."

Fine said the US Indo-Pacific Command "is planning to spend \$50.1 million on contracted ISR and \$11.8 million on US Army ISR support to the AFP in FY (fiscal year) 2019."

"One of the main objectives of OPE-P (US Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines) is to provide the AFP with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support and to build the AFP's capacity to use ISR in operations against ISIS-P," said Fine.

CHARGES

The Sulu provincial prosecutors office yesterday filed multiple murder and multiple frustrated murder charges before the Jolo Regional

Trial Court against five suspects in the cathedral bombings.

Justice Undersecretary Markk Perete said principal suspect Mukammar Pay alias Kamamah and four others have been charged with 23 counts of murder and 95 counts of frustrated murder.

Also indicted were Albadji Gad-jali alias Apah, Radjan Gadjali, Kaisar Gadjai and Said Alih.

The move came after the local prosecutor found probable cause on the charges filed by the PNP against the five.

Asked if the DOJ would move for the transfer of the case to Metro Manila or other areas due to security concerns, Perete said there is yet no plan.

"The evidence and witnesses necessary to prosecute the case are in Jolo, Sulu. Hence, it would be more efficient to hold trial there unless compelling reasons exist for the transfer of trial in Manila," he said. — *With Ashzel Hachero*

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Duterte vows aid for kin of soldiers killed in Jolo blasts, ASG encounter

By ARGYLL CYRUS B. GEDUCOS

President Duterte on Monday assured the families of soldiers killed in the twin blasts in Jolo, Sulu and those who fought with members of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Patikul of the government's assistance.

Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo confirmed that Duterte had a private meeting with the families of the five killed-in-action (KIA) soldiers from the encounter against the ASG in Patikul last February 2.

The President also met with ►9

COTABATO PLEBISCITE - At the Rajamuda Elementary School in Plikit, Cotabato, a woman casts her vote as her daughter watches during Wednesday's plebiscite. Rajamuda is one of the 67 villages in Cotabato included in the proposed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. (Keith Bacongco)

Duterte vows aid...

◀1

the relatives of a soldier killed in the bombing incident in Jolo, Sulu, last January 27. The meeting took place at the Matina Enclaves.

According to the Palace official, Duterte extended his condolences to the families of the slain soldiers who were also recognized for their sacrifice.

"The President condoled with the bereaved families and honored the fallen soldiers for their heroism by awarding them the Order of Lapu Lapu (rank of Kalasag)," Panelo said.

"He comforted the grieving families and assured them of the government's

assistance in terms of housing, livelihood, employment, and educational assistance, among others," he added.

Panelo said the President was joined by Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff General Benjamin Madrigal, Jr., Philippine National Police Director Oscar Albayalde, and Philippine Army Commanding General Lieutenant General Macarrog Alberto.

The President also visited the wake of Solona Torralba Canoy, wife of former Cagayan de Oro mayor Reuben Canoy in Barangay Causwagan. Solona passed

away last February 3 due to cardiac arrest. She was 94.

According to Malacañang, Duterte arrived at the Canoy residence at 8:05 p.m. and talked to the family members for more than an hour.

In 2018, Duterte appointed Canoy as a member of the consultative committee tasked to review the 1987 Constitution. Canoy, a lawyer by profession, is the founder of the Radio Mindanao Network.

Meanwhile, official Palace photos show that Duterte also visited the wake of the late Olivia Paras, wife of Labor Undersecretary Jacinto Paras at the Heritage Park in Taguig City Tuesday evening.

Duterte honors six soldiers with Order of Lapu-Lapu

SIX soldiers posthumously received the Order of Lapu-Lapu with the rank of *Kalasag* (shield) from President Rodrigo Duterte.

In a statement, Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo on Wednesday said Duterte had a private meeting on Monday with the families of the five soldiers who were killed in an encounter with members of the Abu Sayyaf Group in Sulu last February 2 and a soldier who was also killed in twin bombings in Jolo, Sulu, on January 27.

The meeting took place at Martina Enclaves in Davao City, according to Panelo.

"The President condoled with the bereaved families and honored the fallen soldiers for their heroism by awarding them the Order of Lapu-Lapu, rank of *Kalasag*," he said.

The spokesman added that the President assured the families of assistance through housing, livelihood, employment and educational aid, among others.

The twin suicide bombings that rocked the morning Mass at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo left 23 people dead and dozens injured.

It was believed that the Abu

Sayyaf Group were behind the explosions, which was carried out by foreign suicide bombers.

Duterte created the Order of Lapu-Lapu through the issuance of Executive Order 17 on April 7 last year.

According to the measure, the *Kalasag* Medal is given to those officials and personnel of the government and private individuals who lost their lives as a direct result of their participation in an activity pursuant to a campaign or advocacy of the President.

In 2018, Duterte earlier offered members of the Abu Sayyaf the same Order of Lapu-Lapu.

He also offered to hold peace talks with the group, which is listed as a terrorist organization by the United States State Department.

Joining the President during his visit to the families of the soldiers were Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff Benjamin Madrigal Jr., Philippine National Police Chief Oscar Albayalde and Philippine Army Commanding General Macarog Alberto. A2

RALPH U. VILLANUEVA

Jolo blasts soldiers' benefits assured

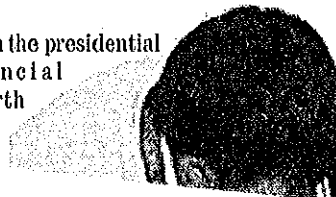
The President addressed the concerns of the families about the benefits due them such as housing and jobs

By Elmer N. Manuel

President Rodrigo Duterte the other day assured the families of soldiers killed in the twin explosions in Jolo, Sulu, that they will receive all the benefits due them as well as provide them with necessary housing and educational assistance for the victims' children.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, who was present during the meeting said President Duterte also gave the families financial assistance of P500,000.

"He gave them the presidential special financial assistance worth

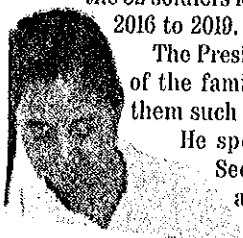


P500,000 while the Armed Forces of the Philippines likewise gave them their financial assistance ranging from P200,000 to P400,000 depending on the rank of the soldier," he said.

Aside from meeting the families of Jolo blasts victims, the President also met with families of the 32 soldiers killed in action from February 2016 to 2019.

The President addressed the concerns of the families about the benefits due them such as housing and jobs.

He specifically instructed Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III to address their concerns about

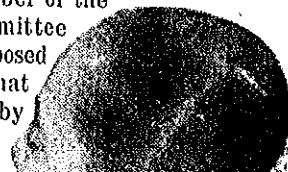


jobs while National Housing Authority General Manager Marcelino Escalada Jr. was also present to discuss their issues on housing.

Meanwhile, President Duterte on Tuesday night also visited the wake of the wife of former Cagayan de Oro City Mayor and veteran broadcaster Reuben Canoy.

The former mayor's wife Solona passed away on Sunday.

A long-time acquaintance of the President, Canoy was a member of the consultative committee that drafted the proposed federal charter that is being pushed by Duterte.



Duterte honors soldiers killed in Jolo blasts

By ARGYLL GEDUCOS

President Duterte on Monday met the families of the soldiers who were killed during the twin blasts in Jolo, Sulu and in an encounter with members of the Abu Sayyaf Group in Patikul, also in Sulu.

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo confirmed that Duterte had a private meeting at the Matina Enclaves in Davao City with the families of the five

soldiers killed-in-action in an encounter with the ASG in Patikul last Feb. 2.

The President also met with the kin of a soldier killed in the bombing incident in Jolo last Jan. 27.

According to the Palace official, Duterte extended his condolences to the families of the slain soldiers who were also recognized for their sacrifice. He also assured them that the government will give them assistance.

"The President condoled with the

bereaved families and honored the fallen soldiers for their heroism by awarding them the Order of Lapu Lapu, Rank of Kalasag," Panelo said. "He comforted the grieving families and assured them of the government's assistance in terms of housing, livelihood, employment, and educational assistance, among others," he added.

Panelo said Duterte was joined by Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff Gen.

Benjamin Madrigal Jr., Philippine National Police chief Director General Oscar Albayalde, and Philippine Army commanding general Lt. Gen. Macalrog Alberto.

Duterte also visited the wake of Solona Torralba Canoy, wife of former Cagayan de Oro City Mayor Reuben Canoy in Barangay Causwagan, Cagayan de Oro. Solona passed away last Feb. 3 due to cardiac arrest. She was 94.

Malacañang said Duterte arrived at the Canoy residence at 8:05 p.m.

and talked to the family members for more than an hour.

In 2018, Duterte appointed Canoy as a member of the Consultative Committee tasked to review the 1987 Constitution. Canoy, a lawyer by profession, is the founder of the Radio Mindanao Network.

Official Palace photos also showed that Duterte also visited the wake of the late Olivia Paras, wife of Labor Undersecretary Jacinto Paras, at the Heritage Park in Taguig City Tuesday night.

2 Sayyaf todas sa Sulu encounter

Napaslang ang dalawang miyembro ng mga bandidong Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) habang dalawa pa ang sugatan matapos ang magkahiwalay na engkuwentro sa pagitan ng militar kahapon.

Sa ulat na tinanggap ni PNP-CIDG Acting Director P/Chief Supt. Amador Corpus, kinilala ang unang napatay na si Alex Habbibondin alyas Amah Alez.

Bandang alas-4:30 ng madaling araw, isinagawa ang manhunt counter terrorism operation ng CIDG-Regional Force Unit 9-Sulu, Marine Battalion Landing Team (MBLT) 1, Special Ac-

tion Force at Sulu Police sa Sitio Barrio Militar, Jolo laban sa suspek na may warrant of arrest sa kasong murder na inisyu ni Judge Betlee lan Barraquias ng Branch 3, Jolo Regional Trial Court (RTO).

Sa halip na sumuko, nakipagpalitan umano ng putok ang nasabing bandido sa tropa ng gobyerno na siya nitong ikinamatay. Narekober sa lugar ang isang cal. 357 magnum ng napaslang.

Ayon naman kay Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabayo, kumander ng 11th ID, nakasagupa rin ng 41st-IB ang hindi bababa sa 20 Abu Sayyaf sa ilalim ng grupo ni

Idang Susukan sa Brgy. Sa-ying Susuk, Maimbung, Sulu. Tumimbuwang sa 20 minutong bakbakan ang isang 'di kilalang ASG member habang isa sa mga kasamahan nilo na nasugatan at nadakip ay nakilalang si Murtafil Paradjil alyas "Muster Ibla". Nasamsam sa lugar ang tatlong M14 rifles, isang M16 rifle, isang bandolier ng magazine para sa M14 at mga bala. (Joy Cantos, Rhoderick Beñez)

Amnesty for MILF rebels in the offing

THE government is speeding up work on an amnesty program for members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front after a successful plebiscite paves the way for the creation of a Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao that will see former rebels take on a leadership role.

"We're trying to fast-track the amnesty, but you know the amnesty has to be concurred with by Congress, so we're working on

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Amnesty...

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that," Undersecretary Nabil Tan of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, said on ANC's Early Edition on Wednesday.

Tan told ANC that those with pending cases would "normally" not be appointed to the Bangsamoro Transition Authority, which will govern during a three-year transition period before elections.

However, Mohagher Iqbal, chairman of the group's implementing panel, said they will push for provisional appointments until the rebels receive their amnesties.

He told ABS-CBN News that 10 MILF commanders are facing criminal cases for "common" crimes.

He added that about 35,000 to 40,000 combatants may be covered by the amnesty.

3 Maute 'remnants' killed in Lanao Norte

COMBINED forces of the military and police killed three remnants of the Islamic State (IS)-linked Maute group in Lanao del Norte early on Thursday.

Maj. Ronald Suscano, spokesman of the Army's 1st Infantry Division, identified one of the slain suspects as a certain Omar Daiser, while the two others were unidentified, during an operation at around 2:30 a.m. in Barangay Lumba Punud, Pantar, Lanao del Norte.

Quoting Brig. Gen. William Alunday, Joint Task Group Lanao del Norte commander, Suscano said Daiser was a fugitive who escaped from Marawi City Jail and joined the Maute group.

He has a standing warrant of arrest for robbery with homicide issued by the Marawi City Regional Trial Court and was known to be an illegal drug pusher and user. He was also a "follower" of former Marawi mayor Solitario Ali.

Suscano said Daiser and the two other terrorists were shot dead after "resisting arrest" and fighting it out with responding military and police personnel.

Troops also recovered four M16 armalite rifles, an M203 grenade launcher, one FAL assault rifle and one Pietro beretta 9mm pistol with markings as property of the Philippine National Police. **AR**

DEMPSEY REYES

INQUIRER

Comelec, PNP: 2nd BOL vote a success despite fear-mongering

By the Inquirer Staff
@Team_Inquirer

The second round of a vote for the ratification of a law that would give Muslims greater control of Mindanao went on without any serious incident in Cotabato and Lanao del Norte provinces on Wednesday, the Commission on Elections (Comelec) said, despite explosions on Tuesday believed to be intended to keep voters at home.

James Jimenez, spokesperson for the Comelec, described the plebiscite as successful after the polls closed at 3 p.m.

The vote was held in 67 villages in Cotabato and six towns in Lanao del Norte to determine whether those municipalities would become part of the proposed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), whose charter, the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), was ratified in the first round of the plebiscite in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the cities of Cotabato and Isabela on Jan. 21.

The Philippine National Police said Wednesday's plebiscite was "peaceful."

Palace: Voters undeterred

Speaking on radio at about noon, PNP Director General Oscar Albayalde said the explosions in Lala and Kauswagan in Lanao del Norte were likely "fear-mongering" to defeat the BOL in the plebiscite.

Albayalde said "everything [was] peaceful" at the polls and the vote went "without incident."

Malacañang deplored the explosions on Tuesday, saying no act of intimidation could stop voters from turning out for the plebiscite.

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo said the explosions were "acts of cowardice on the part of those who resist change and want to perpetuate the climate of fear, hopelessness and poverty among the Bangsamoro people and the

Christian inhabitants in Mindanao."

On the eve of the plebiscite, a grenade went off near a gas station at Barangay Maranding in Lala and a homemade bomb exploded near the town hall in Kauswagan.

No one was hurt in the explosions, police said.

MILF blamed

On Wednesday, Lanao del Norte Gov. Imelda Dimaporo, who opposed the BOL, blamed the explosions on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the key Muslim insurgency group in Mindanao that had signed a peace agreement with the government.

The plebiscite on the BOL was the final step in the peace accord and the MILF led the campaign for ratification of the law.

"It was meant to sow fear among the people, just like what they did in Cotabato City," Dimaporo told reporters, referring to Tuesday's explosions and the grenade-throwing in Cotabato City early on Jan. 21, which did not stop residents of the city from voting for the BOL.

"Kauswagan is a Christian municipality," Dimaporo said. "They were attacked by the MILF in 2000."

But Murad Ebrahim, the MILF chair, said the explosions could only have been the work of people who wanted to sabotage the plebiscite.

"We cannot accept that accusation without any proof," Murad said.

"We have been campaigning very hard not to disturb the plebiscite because we know the people need to vote. If there are disturbances, that will discourage voters to go to voting places. I think those who would do that are those who are against the plebiscite," he said.

Turnout undetermined

More than half a million voters were expected to take part in the plebiscite.

The Comelec had predicted

a turnout of more than 70 percent, but Jimenez said the election watchdog had received reports that the turnout was nearing 75 percent as of midday on Wednesday.

"We expected a lower turnout due to apprehensions because of security concerns in some places. But people are coming out. They do not come in droves like in the previous elections but the stream of arrivals was steady," Jimenez said.

But lawyer Michael Abas, the regional election director, said the turnout in Cotabato was smaller than the turnout in the ARMM on Jan. 21.

"We're lucky if we can even reach 60 percent voter turnout," Abas told reporters in Midsayap after the polls closed.

Security was tight to ensure voter safety during the plebiscite, with attack helicopters watching from the sky as the vote got under way in Cotabato.

Senior Supt. Oliver Enmodias, the police regional deputy director, said the plebiscite in the province was largely peaceful.

Man with gun arrested

Supt. Aldrin Gonzales, speaking for the police task force assigned to the plebiscite, said a member of the MILF identified as Mohammad Sawan Kutok was arrested in a polling precinct at Barangay Dungguan in Aleosan for carrying a gun.

About 2,000 members of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) faction led by Nur Misuari participated in the plebiscite in Cotabato. **AR**

Misuari's faction of the MNLF, which signed a peace agreement with the government in 1996, opposed the BOL, but a spokesperson said the group gave its members freedom to vote. —REPORTS FROM
TINA G. SANTOS, JAYMEE T. GAMIL,
CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO, EDWIN
FERNANDEZ, BONG SARMIENTO, JEFFREY MAITEM, DIVINA SUSON AND
SHEILA MADELA CRUZ INQ

Comelec: 2nd Bangsamoro plebiscite successful

By SHEILA CRISOSTOMO

Despite the bombings in Lanao del Norte, the second leg of the plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) was successful, the Commission on Elections (Comelec) declared yesterday.

James Jimenez, Comelec spokesman, said they are looking at a voter turnout of 75 percent.

"So far, it's showing up to be very successful elections. Of course, if something happens at the very last minute, that very last minute event is what's going to define the whole exercise. But with caution in mind, yes it is successful so far," he said in an interview.

Jimenez said they could not determine if the bombings were election-related, but noted that the timing was "ridiculous" as these happened the day before the plebiscite.

The plebiscite covered the entire province of Lanao del Norte except for Iligan city and 67 barangays in seven towns of North Cotabato.

Jimenez noted that all the polling precincts in the two provinces were "open and functioning" at 8:30 a.m.

He added that distribution of election paraphernalia proceeded smoothly, with "no problems" about teachers, unlike the Jan. 21 plebiscite in Cotabato city, where the voting was delayed because teachers backed out on plebiscite day.

Voting proceeded unhampered despite the heavy rains in some parts of Lanao del Norte.

Jimenez maintained that while there were persistent rumors of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) fighters entering the provinces, no untoward incidents were reported.

"We are trying to verify these rumors but in the meantime, the local government units are on alert and the military and police are taking steps to secure the voting," he added.

The generally peaceful conduct of the second plebiscite for the BOL in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato provinces was confirmed by the Philippine National Police (PNP) yesterday.

PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde made the statement despite the three explosions which hit three towns in Lanao del Norte.

"Everything is peaceful," he said in a television interview over GMA News.

Albayalde personally supervised the conduct of security measures in the two provinces to ensure that no untoward incidents would occur when the voters went to the polling precincts.

He said the explosions could be the

handiwork of people who wanted to sow fear among the public.

A total of 7,312 police personnel secured 4,479 polling precincts in the two provinces.

Meanwhile, two policemen were arrested in Iligan city for possession of firearms without securing proper certificates for a gun ban exemption from the Comelec and clearance to provide security to a politician.

They are Police Officers 1 Johaimen Mohamad, and Rasid Lambay, both members of the Pantar municipal police station in Lanao del Norte.

The two were caught at a security checkpoint in Barangay Tomas L. Cabili at around 5 p.m.

Seized from the police officers were one M16 rifle, an MP5 rifle, one 9mm pistol and a .45 caliber pistol.

Acts of cowardice

Malacañang condemned yesterday the explosions on the eve of yesterday's plebiscite on the BOL in Lanao del Norte.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said no amount of bombing or terrorist act scared, intimidated or threatened the voters from participating in the plebiscite.

Panelo also assured the electorate that the Armed Forces of the Philippines provided safeguards to ensure the conduct of peaceful polls.

"The road to lasting peace in that region is not without obstacles strewn by those who foment disunity and who purvey the status quo. We shall not be waylaid by the twin forces of obstruction and destruction," Panelo said.

Malacañang also described as acts of cowardice on the part of the groups behind the blasts, saying they resist change and want to perpetuate the climate of fear, hopelessness and poverty among the Bangsamoro people and the Christian inhabitants in Mindanao.

According to Panelo, the Duterte administration continues to have faith in the vibrant democracy, knowing that the peace-loving residents of Lanao del Norte and the municipalities of Alocos, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pikit, Pigkawayan and Tulunan, all in the province of North Cotabato, courageously exercised their right of suffrage in favor of the ratification of Republic Act 11054.

'No cause for fear'

Lanao del Norte provincial election officer Joseph Hamilton Cuevas assured voters that security forces were deployed in various areas to ensure that the plebiscite would be peaceful.

"No need to be afraid," Cuevas said in

a text message yesterday. "The explosions (were) meant to scare the people, not to injure or kill."

Cuevas added that since martial law is being enforced in Mindanao, the military and police check the movement of vehicles and thwart any untoward incidents.

"(There will be) more visibility in the voting centers," he said.

Chief Insp. Salman Saad, spokesman for the provincial police, earlier said more than 2,000 law enforcers were deployed in polling centers and checkpoints in the province.

"We also have quick reaction teams on standby," Saad said, adding that bomb-sniffing dogs and explosive and ordnance disposal teams were waiting for orders.

The first blast occurred in the business district of Lala at around 4:30 p.m. Seconds later, another explosion was reported in Kauswagan, 59.8 kilometers away.

Late Monday night, another explosion was heard near the Mindanao State University high school in Sultan Naga Dimaporo.

"We (are still trying) to find out if (the blasts) were coordinated or related to the plebiscite," Saad said.

For his part, regional police spokesman Supt. Surki Sereñas said the reports claiming that improvised explosive devices were used in the bombings did not come from his office.

"We appeal for calm and sobriety. This misinformation is the handiwork of those who want to sow fear and panic among the people of Lanao del Norte and derail the conduct of a peaceful and orderly plebiscite," Sereñas said.

The plebiscite for the inclusion of sev-

cral barangays in seven North Cotabato towns into the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) was generally peaceful, officials also said.

Major Gen. Cirilito Sobejana of the Army's 6th Infantry Division said his office has not received any report of untoward incident in polling sites from the first hour of the plebiscite until 3 p.m. yesterday.

But a resident of Barangay Dungan in Aleosan was arrested for carrying an unlicensed pistol while in the premises of a polling site, according to the police.

The suspect, Mohammad Kutok, 32, was booked for possession of an unlicensed firearm and not for any hostile act detrimental to the polling activity.

Kutok is a member of the MILF, the police added.

Voter turnout

Despite Monday's bombings, the voting for the BOL plebiscite in Lanao del Norte started as scheduled.

Meanwhile, the municipal police said personnel from the Explosives and Ordnance Division are still conducting laboratory tests on the debris found at the site.

Elsewhere in Lanao del Norte, authorities reported satisfactory voter turnout even as some residents in the capital town of Tubod allegedly fled to nearby Ozamiz city.

The police in

Linamon town, adjacent to Kauswagan, imposed a lockdown. Iligan city authorities are also on high alert.

While no casualty was reported in the bombings, Brig. Gen. Alex Aduca of the Philippine Army's 2nd Mechanized Brigade said the incidents were meant to embarrass the military.

But in a televised interview yesterday, Lanao del Norte

Gov. Imelda Dimaporo blamed the MILF for the incidents.

The governor noted that Kauswagan was attacked by the MILF in 2001, 2004 and 2008, causing death and destruction to the mostly Christian settlers of the town.

— With Emmanuel Tupas, Christina Mendez, Gerry Lee Gorit, Lino dela Cruz, John Unson, Helen Flores, Roel Pareño J

BOL plebiscite a success - Comelec

By LESLIE ANN G. AQUINO and AARON RECUENCO

The Commission on Elections considers the conduct of the February 6 Bangsamoro Organic Law plebiscite a success.

"It is successful so far," Comelec Spokesman James Jimenez said in a press briefing less than an hour before voting closed Wednesday.

A lot of places, he said reported a 75 percent voter turnout.

"We have reports of turnout approaching 75 or better...we are waiting for other places to report. But again like I said in some places in Lanao del Norte, 75 percent or better turnout has been reported," said Jimenez.

The poll official said this was ►9

BOL plebiscite a...

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very high despite security concerns.

"Considering our concern that the turnout will be depressed because of concerns and fear. But people still went out to vote...the stream of arrivals is steady," Jimenez said.

"The population in these areas are very politically active. I suppose that would be one of the reason. They feel strongly about these elections," he added.

Jimenez also revealed that 100 percent of the polling precincts opened.

"By 8:30AM, we received the report of 100 percent of the precincts of Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato opened and functioning," he said.

The plebiscite was held in the entirety of Lanao del Norte (except in Iligan City) and in seven towns of North Cotabato.

The National Plebiscite Board of Canvassers (NPBOC), meantime, will convene Thursday at the Comelec main office in Intramuros, Manila.

The Comelec en banc, sitting as NPBOC, is set to canvass a total of 8 Certificates of Canvass (COCs) namely the Provincial COC from Lanao del Norte and one Municipal COC each from Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Mid-sayap, Pigkawayan, Pikit, and Tulunan in North Cotabato.

Three bomb blasts

Unidentified men launched three bomb attacks in Lanao del Norte in an apparent bid to sabotage the conduct of the second Bangsamoro Organic Law plebiscite. But security officials said the explosions did not scare voters from going to the polling precincts yesterday.

In fact, Director General Oscar Albayalde, chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP), said that at least 50 percent of the registered voters have already cast their votes as of noon yesterday.

"These were probably intended to scare the people for BOL plebiscite. But these are all under investigation and as of now, there are already two persons of interest," said Albayalde.

"The voting started 8 a.m. Everything is peaceful and we continue to secure polling centers in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato," he added.

At around 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, an improvised explosive device exploded in Barangay Maranding in Lala town of Lanao del Norte, followed by another blast near the multi-purpose gym of Kauswagan town 20 minutes later.

Another explosion occurred at around 5 p.m. on Tuesday at the premises of Mindanao State University (MSU) Municipal High School in Sultan

Naga Dimaporo.

There was no reported casualty in the three explosions.

The three towns are not included in the list of areas which would take part in the plebiscite.

The plebiscite covered the towns of Baloi, Munai, Nunungan, Pantar, Tagoloan and Tangkal in Lanao del Norte; and 39 barangays in the towns of Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Mid-sayap, Pigkawayan and Pikit in North Cotabato.

"The perpetrators did not go through the checkpoints, that means that they are not outsiders. So what we did is to intensify the security in polling places," said Albayalde.

There were 588 polling centers in North Cotabato and Lanao del Norte.

A total of 7,312 policemen and soldiers were deployed to secure the polling places and the roads leading to the precincts.

In Lanao del Norte, a total of 3,463 policemen were tapped, some coming from Central Visayas. In North Cotabato, a total of 1,410 soldiers and policemen were deployed. At least 1,400 more policemen, 400 of them from Central Luzon and CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon) were deployed.

The first plebiscite was held on January 21 and covered Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu, Maguindanao, Tawi-Tawi, Cotabato City and Isabela City in Basilan.

BOL plebiscite 'very successful' despite blasts

BY GERARD NAVAL

POIL and security officials yesterday said the second round of the plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) was "very successful" despite the explosions that rocked Lanao del Norte on the eve of the referendum.

The plebiscite was held in Lanao del Norte (except in Iligan City) and in seven towns of North Cotabato.

Commission on Elections (Comelec) spokesman James Jimenez said, "So far, it's showing up to be a very successful election."

"We don't know yet about how the voter turnout will shape up. But, at least in some places, we've already received reports that the estimate is edging up to 75 percent," he said.

Jimenez said the twin explosions may be "immaterial."

"The timing is ridiculous. It happened on the eve of the elections. How can it not be election-related? And even if it was not election-related to begin with, the fact that it went off on the eve of the elections automatically makes it election-related. It will have an impact whether intended or not," said Jimenez.

He attributed the high voter turnout to the long history of political activity in the region.

"We've always adverted to the history of political activity in that area. We know these people. The population in these areas is very politically active. I suppose that would be one of the reasons. They feel strongly about these elections," said Jimenez.

On late Tuesday afternoon, twin blasts hit Lanao del Norte, the first at the back of the Kauswagan town hall, and the second in front of a gas station in Lala town.

Aside from the good voter turnout, Jimenez noted the absence of delays in the opening of polling precincts.

"By 8:30 a.m. we received the report of 100 percent of the precincts of Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato opened and functioning," he said.

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

PNP spokesman Senior Supt. Bernard Banac said the explosions that rocked Lanao del Norte on the eve of the plebiscite "did not discourage voters from trooping to polling centers."

Banac said over 7,000 troops manned posts to assume poll duty.

Maj. Arvin Encinas, spokesman of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said

the only minor incident reported in North Cotabato was the arrest of a Moro Islamic Liberation Front member, Mokamad Sawan Kutok, 32, who was nabbed for illegal posses-

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sion of a firearm in Aleosan town at around 7:40 a.m.

In Iligan City, police said PO1 Johaimen Tomondong and PO1 Rasid Arumpac Lambay, both of the Pantar town police, were nabbed at a checkpoint for violation for the Comelec gun ban on

Tuesday afternoon.

Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo, concurrent presidential spokesman, said the explosions last Tuesday stemmed from acts of cowardice on the part of those who resist change and want to perpetuate the climate of fear, hopelessness and poverty among the Bangsamoro people

and the Christian inhabitants in Mindanao.

"The road to lasting peace in that region is not without obstacles strewn by those who foment disunity and who purvey the status quo. We shall not be waylaid by the twin forces of obstruction and destruction," he said. — *With Victor Reyes and Jocelyn Montemayor*

ARMM opens Bangsamoro Museum

By ALI G. MACABALANG

COTABATO CITY—The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) inaugurated last Monday the Bangsamoro Museum at the refurbished Shariff Kabunsuan Cultural Complex (SKCC) here.

ARMM Governor Mujiv Hataman, in opening the museum, underscored the importance of the facility as a repository of artifacts, works of art, as well as textual and iconographic records relevant to the cultural memory of the Bangsamoro people in Muslim Mindanao.

The ARMM was established 29 years ago but issues about the absence of a regional museum came to the fore only when national experts and curators visited the autonomous government last year and offered enabling services.

"Ito rin ang ating motibasyon upang buuin ang museo na ito," Hataman said.

"Ayaw na nating maranasan ang hirap at kung sinu-sino lamang ang magkukwento sa atin (tungkol sa) buhay at aspeto ng ating pagiging Moro," he added.

The museum is incorporated in

the huge SKCC building inside the 32-hectare compound here. A mini-library of the museum was opened last year mostly by visiting researchers.

The ARMM's Bureau of Public Information (BPI) said the completion of the museum formed part of the Hataman leadership-avowed legacy for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), which was prescribed for creation under R.A. 110540. The law was ratified overwhelmingly in the Jan. 21 plebiscite.

"Itong Bangsamoro Museum, kasama na rin ang Regional Library, ay simbolo ng pagkokonsolida natin sa mga dokumento para sa transisyon ng gobyerno," Hataman said.

Despite its belated realization, the Bangsamoro museum would constitute a "legacy" to the next generation in the advent of BARMM governance.

The ARMM leadership cited the assistance of independent curator and institutional critic Marian Pastor Roces, who has been campaigning to showcase the vital stories about the Bangsamoro people through the exhibition of different artifacts from the region. 8

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'2ND BANGSAMORO PLEBISCITE PEACEFUL' 'No' votes lead in Lanao del Norte

BY MASIDING NOOR YAHYA

MARAWI CITY: The "No" vote led the early unofficial canvass of the Bangsamoro referendum results by the National Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel) in six towns of Lanao del Norte, at 5 p.m. on Wednesday.

The early Namfrel tally was as follows:

Baloi: Yes - 7; No - 210
Munay: Yes - 1; No - 203
Nunungan: Yes - 8; No - 202
Pantar: Yes - 4; No - 227
Tagoloan: Yes - 8; No - 222
Tangcal: Yes - 85; No - 226

Wednesday's plebiscite, which came two weeks after the vote for the ratification the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) for a new Muslim autonomous region, was for the inclusion of several villages and municipalities in North Cotabato and Lanao del Norte in the

Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

The vote proceeded smoothly and without any untoward incident, according to the Commission Elections (Comelec).

Comelec spokesman James Jimenez said on Wednesday distribution of election paraphernalia in plebiscite areas were completed early and all precincts in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato were reported opened at 8:30 a.m.

"We have no problem with teachers. We received no report about teachers who failed to report for their election duties," he said.

Jimenez said they were closely monitoring the progress of vot-

ing, citing persistent "rumors" of armed men, allegedly MILF fighters.

"We are trying to verify the rumors, but for the meantime the local government units, the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines were on top of the situation and were taking steps to secure the voting places," he added.

Maj. Arvin Encinas, spokesman of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said the only election-related incident recorded, a minor one, was in North Cotabato at 7:40 a.m. when authorities arrested Moka-mad Sawan Kutok, 32, who was carrying a homemade .38 revolver

with nine live ammunition.

Encinas said Kutok was nabbed inside one of the polling precincts of Aleosan town in North Cotabato.

Kutok is a member of the MILF's Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) under Hadji Bayan Abdulrahman of the 108th Base Command.

In Lanao del Norte, the military said that the referendum turned out well even after the two explosions that occurred in Lala and Kauswagan towns. (b)

Jimenez also said there were heavy rains in some part of Lanao del Norte but voting still proceeded.

Estimates of voter turnout ranged from 35 percent to 75 percent. "So we don't know yet if the turnout would be good or not," Jimenez said.

Malacañang on Wednesday assured the public that security measures were in place to ensure the safety of the public after two explosions hit Lanao del Norte and another rocked Maguindanao on the eve of the plebiscite.

Two weeks ago, majority of voters from the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao voted in favor of the BOL. A2

WITH WILLIAM B. DEPASUPIL,
DEMPSEY REYES AND
CATHERINE S. VALENTE

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2 'persons of interest' eyed in Lanao del Norte blasts

THE PHILIPPINE National Police (PNP) is pursuing two "persons of interest" behind the bombings in Lanao del Norte that occurred on the eve of the second plebiscite of the Bangsamoro Organic Law.

"The investigation is still ongoing although [the Lanao del Norte provincial director] said they have two persons of interest in the bombing incidents," PNP Chief Oscar Albayalde said in a television interview Wednesday noon.

He said Tuesday's bomb at-

tacks in Kauswagan and Lala towns, which made use of improvised explosive devices, could have been meant to intimidate voters. No casualties were reported based on the PNP's latest report.

The PNP chief flew to Lanao del Norte on Wednesday to monitor the security forces deployed for the plebiscite. Albayalde said checkpoint operations were set up in different areas in Lanao del Norte and Cotabato to thwart attacks.

Sayyaf member killed

Meanwhile, operatives of the PNP Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (PNP-CIDG) and Special Action Force killed an Abu Sayyaf Group member in a manhunt operation in Jolo, Sulu Wednesday morning.

Alex Habbibondin alias Amah Alex was killed by operatives in Sitio Barrio Militar at about 4:30 a.m. He was the subject of a warrant of arrest for murder issued by Branch 3 of the Regional Trial Court in Jolo.

Authorities confiscated the suspect's caliber .357 magnum firearm.

Amah Alex was part of the group that evaded a firefight with the Philippine Army in Patikul on February 2.

The group, which consisted of over 100 members and was led by Hatib Hakan Sawadjaan, battled with the 5th Scout Ranger Battalion. Fighting claimed the lives of three members, including a foreign terrorist, the military said.

Five soldiers were killed in the clash. **ROY D.R. NARRA**

(7)

BOL voters defy bombs

*Comelec chalks up 70% turnout;
'Yes' prevails in early tally*

By Vito Barcelo and Francisco Tuyay

DESPITE three explosions on the eve of a plebiscite in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato, thousands of voters went to the polls in a peaceful exercise to determine if they wanted to be a part of the new Bangsamoro autonomous region.

With more than 7,000 soldiers and police guarding the polling places, authorities reported no untoward incidents.

On Tuesday, an explosion occurred in Barangay Maranding, the business center of Lala town at 4 p.m., followed by another blast in Kauswagan town minutes later. A third explosive device went off in Sultan Naga Dimaporo town in Lanao del Norte at 10 p.m. No injuries were reported.

A Palace spokesman described the bomb attacks as acts of cowardice and said no amount of bombing would scare people away from casting their votes.

"The road to lasting peace in that region is not without obstacles strewn by those who foment disunity and who purvey the status quo," said Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo. "We shall not be way-

laid by the twin forces of obstruction and destruction."

The plebiscite will determine whether six municipalities in Lanao del Norte and 28 barangays in North Cotabato located in the municipalities of Aleosan, Carmen, Cabacan, Midsayap, Pigkawayan and Pikit will be included in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

The first plebiscite held on Jan. 21 included provinces in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao—Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, and cities of Cotabato and Isabela.

The Commission on Elections reported a big turnout in Wednesday's vote, saying about 70 percent of some 640,000 residents participated in the referendum. *Next page*

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As of 5:40 p.m., the unofficial count showed the "yes" votes ahead with 31,698, against the "no" votes at 9,712.

The official results would be released four days after the plebiscite, Comelec spokesman James Jimenez said.

The ARMM and Cotabato City voted "yes" to ratify the Bangsamoro Organic Law while Isabela City opted not to join the BARMM, which replaces the ARMM.

The BOL seeks to give the Moro people the basic legal tools to chart their

own destiny within the country's constitutional framework.

Police said there were no violent incidents in the 6,803 polling centers covering the two provinces.

Philippine National Police spokesman Sr. Supt. Bernard Banac said the Tuesday bombings failed to keep voters from the polling places.

The blasts on Tuesday prompted the military and police to tighten security at checkpoints.

Lala, Kauswagan, and Sultan Naga Dimaporo were not part of the six municipalities participating in Wednesday's plebiscite.

Banac said the explosions were under

investigation.

"The PNP security operations in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato are well in place to make the plebiscite today safe, peaceful and orderly," Banac said in a message sent to reporters just before the plebiscite.

A total of 7,312 security forces from the PNP (5,573) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (1,739) were deployed on the ground for the second BOL plebiscite.

AFP public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato said the military took "extra precautionary measures" to secure the second BOL plebiscite. With PNA

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Terror fails to stop vote

By Kristina Maralit
and Elmer N. Manuel

The Palace commended the successful conduct of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) plebiscite despite the explosions that rocked Lanao del Norte on the eve of the vote for the inclusion of six towns of the

province in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, the Palace said.

No amount of "terrorist attack" will stop the people from having their voice be heard, according to presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo, as voters trooped to polling

Turn to page 2

The explosions on the eve of the Bangsamoro Organic Law plebiscite stem from acts of cowardice on the part of those who resist change

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precincts in the second plebiscite for the ratification of the BOL.

"We assure the electorate in that part of Mindanao that the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has provided safeguards for their safety and will be on full alert to thwart any attempt from any armed group or terrorists to derail the democratic process," Panelo said in a statement.

Coming on the heels of the twin blasts that killed 22 people and injured more than a hundred at a Catholic church in Jolo, Sulu and the bombing at a mosque that left four people dead in Zamboanga, three explosions happened in Lanao del Norte last Tuesday.

The first blast occurred in Barangay Maranding in Lala town while the other occurred at the back of the municipal hall in Kauswagan town past 4 p.m. A third explosion in Sultan Naga Dimaporo happened shortly thereafter.

Initial investigations bared the triple blasts were meant to create panic ahead of the second BOL plebiscite.

"The explosions on the eve

of the BOL plebiscite stem from acts of cowardice on the part of those who resist change and want to perpetuate the climate of fear, hopelessness and poverty among the Bangsamoro people and the Christian inhabitants in Mindanao," Panelo said.

Members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front who will have a huge role in the autonomous Bangsamoro region were also spotted.

"The road to lasting peace in that region is not without obstacles strewn by those who foment disunity and who purvey the status quo. We shall not be waylaid by the twin forces of obstruction and destruction," the official added.

He likewise stressed the recent spate of bombings in the region makes martial law all the more needed in Mindanao.

Roving MILF members

Members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which will have a huge role in the autonomous Bangsamoro region, were spotted in the province and

neighboring North Cotabato that has 67 barangays seeking to join the new region.

Prior to the plebiscite, additional security troops were deployed in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato where some 700,000 voters were set to join the plebiscite according to Commission on Elections (Comelec) spokesman James Jimenez.

Jimenez said MILF members in the area were unarmed "for the most part" and do not appear to be fighting forces and noted that all teachers supposed to man the plebiscite also showed up despite reports that some were terrified by Tuesday's blasts.

"We hope that the people will still vote," said Jimenez in a radio interview.

Meanwhile, the police and military have yet to identify the possible motive in the bombings in Kauswagan, Sultan Naga de Maporo and Lala towns. While it did not cause any fatalities, security was heightened in the area.

Kauswagan Mayor Rommel Arnado said the latest blasts may have been aimed at scaring voters, many of whom supposedly oppose the MILF after previous

attacks in the south.

The MILF, whose 2014 deal with the government led to the Bangsamoro's creation, denied the accusation coming mainly from Cotabato City Mayor Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi.

The Bangsamoro will get P50 billion in development funds over the next 10 years, as well as a chunk of the tax revenue generated within its borders.

The national government will

keep control over the police, though the leadership of the autonomous area will be closely involved in security matters.

Following the "double-majority" rule, Lanao del Norte will have to consent to the inclusion of the municipalities of Baloi, Munai, Nunungan, Pantar, Tagoloan and Tangkal in the new region.

The 67 barangays in North Cotabato will also need the majority vote from the seven towns covering

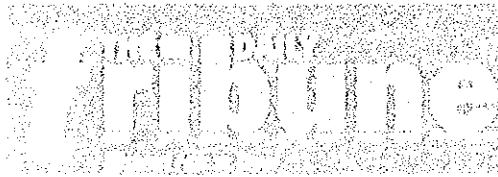
them, namely, Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pigkawayan, Pikit and Tulunan.

Exercise went smoothly

The second round of the plebiscite ran smoothly, the Comelec said.

Unlike the first round where the opening of some precincts were delayed, all polling stations opened on time.

Neil Alcober



Go sees PHL peace, progress

Former Special Assistant to the President Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go yesterday said he is confident the country would enjoy peace and progress under the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte.

Go cited the Duterte administration's continuing implementation of the "Build, Build, Build" program for crucial infrastructures meant to spur economic progress in the country.

I join you in the prayer for peace.

He also noted the conduct yesterday of the second phase of the plebiscite for the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law which is expected to bring lasting peace in Mindanao.

On Tuesday, Go greeted the Chinese-Filipinos and wished the country peace and prosperity as the country celebrated the Chinese New Year welcoming the year of the Pig.

Also called as Chunjie or Spring Festival, the Lunar New Year is celebrated by more than 20 percent of humanity and considered as the most important holiday in China and to Chinese people all over the world.

"Let me greet our people, particularly our Filipino-Chinese brothers, a happy Chinese New Year," Go said.

"As we usher in the Lunar New Year, I join you in the prayer for the realization of peace that we have longed for as well as progress for our country and the upliftment of the lives of our citizens," he added.

Go, who is running for the Senate in this year's midterm election, vowed to support the programs of President Duterte, particularly the campaign against illegal drugs, criminality and corruption.

His legislative agenda also includes programs for health, agriculture, education, housing, long-term sports development, fire protection and prevention, localized peace talks, creation of a Department of Overseas Filipino Worker, barangay welfare and improved benefits for senior citizens.

CRP

3 bomb blasts rock Bangsamoro plebiscite

By AARON
REQUENCO

Unidentified men launched three bomb attacks in Lanao del Norte Tuesday in an apparent bid to sabotage the Bangsamoro Organic Law plebiscite yesterday but security officials said the explosions did not scare voters to cast their votes.

In fact, Director General Oscar Albayalde, chief of the Philippine National Police, said that at least 50 percent of the registered voters have cast their votes as of noon yesterday.

"These were probably intended to scare the people for BOL plebiscite. But these are all under investigation and as of now, there are already

two persons of interest," said Albayalde.

"But the voting started 8 a.m. Everything is peaceful and we continue to secure polling centers in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato," he added.

At around 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, an improvised explosive device exploded in Barangay Maranding in Lala, Lanao del Norte, followed by another blast near the multi-purpose gym of Kauswagan 20 minutes later.

The last explosion occurred at around 5 p.m. on the premises of the Mindanao State University Municipal High School in Sultan Naga

Dimaporo.

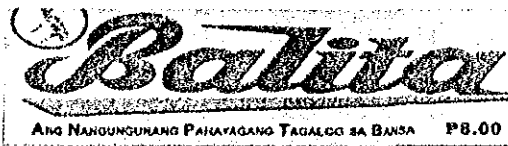
Nobody was killed or injured in the three explosions.

The three towns are not included in areas which would take part in the plebiscite which covers Baloi, Munal, Nunungan, Pantar, Tagoloan, and Tangkal in Lanao del Norte and 39 barangays in Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pigkawayan, and Pikit in North Cotabato.

"The perpetrators did not go through the checkpoints which means that they are not outsiders. So what we did is to intensify the security in polling places," said Albayalde.

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3 magkasunod na pagsabog sa BOL plebiscite

Nina AARON RECUECO, FRANCIS WAKEFIELD, at FER TABOY

Hindi natinag sa tatlong magkasunod na pambobomba ang mga botante upang makiisa sa pagdaraos ng Bangsamoro Organic Law plebiscite sa Lanao del Norte, kahapon.

Ayon kay Director General Oscar Albayalde, pinuno ng Philippine National Police (PNP), halos 50 porsiyento ng mga rehistradong botante ang nakaboto bago magtanghali kahapon.

"These were probably intended to scare the people for BOL plebiscite. But these are all under investigation and as of now, there are already two persons of interest," ani Albayalde.

"But the voting started 8 a.m. Everything is peaceful and we continue to secure polling centers in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato," dagdag pa niya.

Sa ulat, sa ganap na 4:30 ng hapon nitong Martes, isang improvised explosive device

(IED) ang sumabog sa Barangay Maranding sa Lala, Lanao del Norte, na sinundan ng isa pang pagsabog malapit sa multi-purpose gym ng Kauswagan, 20 minuto ang nakalipas.

Pagsapit ng 5:00 ng hapon panibagong pagsabog ang naganap sa loob ng MSU Municipal High School sa Sultan Naga Dimaporo.

Walang iniulat na nasaktan sa tatlong pag-atake.

Nilinaw ng awtoridad na hindi kabilang ang tatlong bayan na pinasabugan sa listahan ng mga lugar na bahagi ng plebesito.

Sakop ng plebesito ang mga bayan ng Baloi, Munai, Numungan, Pantar, Tagoloan at Tangkal sa Lanao del Norte; at 39 barangay sa mga bayan ng Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pigkawayan at Pikit sa North Cotabato.

"The perpetrators did not go through the checkpoints, that means that they are not outsiders. So what

we did is to intensify the security in polling places," paliwanag ni Albayalde.

Samantala, nasa kabuuang 7,312 pulis at sundalo ang ipinakalat upang masiguro ng seguridad sa mga polling center.

PAGHIHIGANTI NG BIFF?

Samantala, ipinahayag ng militar na paghihiganti ang nakikita nilang motibo sa tatlong magkasunod na pagsabog sa Lanao del Norte.

Sinabi ni Philippine Army 6th Infantry Division commander Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, ang grupo ni Salahuddin Hassan ng Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) ang nasa likod umano ng pagsabog.

Aniya, gumanti ang grupo ni Salahuddin sa pagkamatay ng kanilang mga kasamahan sa airstrikes nitong Linggo.

Nilinaw ni Sobejana na walang kinalaman sa BOL plebiscite ang pagsabog.

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Pondo sa BOL transition tiyakin

Nanawagan si Sen. Bam Aquino sa mga kapwa mambabatas na tiyaking may sapat na pondo ang implementasyon ng Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) para matiyak na matutupad nito ang mandatong maghatid ng kapayapaan at kaayusan sa Mindanao.

Ilinatakda ng Republic Act 11054 o ng Bangsamoro Organic Law na ilipat ang kasalukuyang pondo para sa Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) sa Bangsamoro Transition Authority.

Ayon kay Sen. Bam, hindi sapat ang pondo ng ARMM para sa 2019 na P31.1 bilyon dahil nasa P59 bilyon ang kailangan ng BOL. Naglaan ang bersiyon ng Senado ng dagdag na P30 bilyon sa 2019 budget para sa BOL, na umaasa si Bam na makalulusot sa bicameral conference committee.

"Sayang naman kung hindi natin bibigyan ng tamang pondo ang BOL. Itodo na natin ang suporta upang maabot na ng mga kababayan natin sa Mindanao ang inaasam nilang kapayapaan at kaunlaran," wika ni Sen. Bam na co-author at co-sponsor ng BOL.

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2nd round ng BOL generally peaceful

Kapwa idineklara kahapon ng mga opisyal ng Philippine National Police (PNP) at Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) na nagtapos ng matiwasay sa pangkalahatan ang ginanap na ikalawang round ng plebisito para sa Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

Ang sitwasyon ng seguridad ay inilat ng ground forces dalawang

araw bago magsara ang botohan sa polling centers dakong alas-3:00 ng hapon sa lalawigan ng Lanao del Norte at North Cotabato kung saan matuas ang nairehistrong bilang ng mga nagpartisipang mga botante.

Sa kabila ng tatlong insidente ng pagsabog sa mga bayan ng Kauswagan, Lala at Sultan Naga Dimaporo; pawang sa Lanao del

Norte na bagaman walang nasugatan sa insidente.

Bandang ala-1:00 palamang ng hapon ay nasa 50-85 % na ang voters turnout sa mga bayan ng Aleosan, Pikit, Carmen, Midsayap, Pigcawayan at Tulunan, pawang sa North Cotabato. Habang Lanao del Norte ay nasa 50 % ang voters turnout sa mga polling precinct. *Joy Santos, Doris Franche-Borja*

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Common to tycoons



TO THE
 POINT
 EMIL P.
 JURADO

I FEEL sad when I think of my three best friends who were among the country's top tycoons. I got to know them when I was business editor of the Philippines Herald.

Santa Banana, those were the days when I could just barge into the office of a bank chairman or president, or a tycoon for that matter, for an interview!

They were Henry Sy Sr., founder of SM and its affiliates now in banking, property development, hotels, tourism and retail. I have written about the time I first met him—when he was a 23-year-old shoe retailer in Carriedo. I followed his rags-to-riches story.

“The passing of these three men is a personal loss to me.”

Henry was three years older than I, but I was lucky to know him personally and at times have coffee with him.

He told me the secret of having a successful retail company. Before opening an SM, he would invite all known retail companies to have space at SM, and all he asked was 10 percent of their sales. They could not refuse because SM gave them free security, free amenities and free space. No wonder he is called the King of Retailers.

Henry's legacy is that there is no substitute for hard work, patience and perseverance.

Another tycoon friend was George

SK Ty, founder and chairman of Metrobank.

I consider George a personal friend because we often conversed during the foreign visits of Presidents Fidel Ramos, Joseph Estrada and Gloria Arroyo. We were all part of the business delegation.

George was well known for his philanthropy. He had an annual selection of the best teachers, best policemen, best soldiers, and outstanding Filipinos. His corporate social responsibility was outstanding.

At one time, George made me a judge of the best teachers.

And then, there is Alfonso Yuchengco, chairman and president of RCBC, Malayan Insurance and Great Pacific Insurance.

When he was just starting out in insurance, the Business Writers Association of the Philippines voted him as the “Young Insurance Man of the Year.” Later, he was named “Insurance Man of the Year.”

He often invited me and my wife for dinner at his home. Every year-end, he would ask me to brief his executives on business prospects for the following year. When he became ambassador to Japan, I visited him there.

If there is one thing common among these three, it's their vision for the Philippines. This is why I believe their good fortune was a reward from God. Their passing is a loss not only to the country but also to me.

I do not subscribe to the sentiment that the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law will usher in peace, unity and development in Mindanao.

The IS-inspired terror groups have proliferated in Mindanao. They will continue to frustrate whatever plans the Duterte administration has for the new Bangsamoro territory.

The fact that there are now some 40 foreign terrorists in the country, according to Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, aggravates the situation. These groups' single agenda is to create panic and confusion among the populace.

Turn to A5

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Common...

From A4

Note that the plebiscite result is not unanimous. Sulu is against it, and so is Isabela in Basilan. This also means that Nur Misuari's Moro National Liberation Front is not one with the MILF that will rule the BARMM. This simply means that unity and peace in Mindanao are not forthcoming.

There are many reasons that the Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu are not united. It's rooted in history. The Tausugs in Sulu cannot live with the Maranaos in the Lanao provinces, and neither can the Maranaos and Maguindanaoans live with the Tausugs. It's tribalism.

This is the reason Muslims love guns. They are a source of power. You cannot separate guns and Muslims.

It's a long way to peace.

The **Manila Standard** will finally publish my memoirs. Publication was delayed because of unforeseen events.

First, there was a question of money. This is why I am eternally grateful to **Standard** publisher Rollie Estabillo and Martin and Philip Romualdez who finally decided to publish my book.

I am also thankful to opinion page editor Adelle Chua and writer Jenny Ortuoste for helping me finalize my memoirs.

I was also not satisfied with the first print. I did not like the cover "Periodista: The Road Never Ends."

I have to revise the entire project to be true to myself. God willing, I should be able to launch the book after the elections in May.

If many parts of the country are election hot spots because of the possibility of violence, it is simply because there are politicians who do not want to lose power and the perks that go with it.

Nothing much has changed, indeed. And then, after the elections, there will be more protests. Here there are only those who won and those who claim they were cheated.

www.emiljurado.weebly.com

Gy

No rest for the weary

By now, a number of conjectures have come out about the Jolo bombing, five suspects of which supposedly surrendered because of "massive hot pursuit operations" by the police and the military.

"What this tells us is that our hardworking men in uniform cannot afford to relax yet even as the public is assured of the fast and efficient work they are doing to catch the criminals.

based on these white flags from suspected terrorists, for their doggedness.

Sadly, it may have been their own complacency that led to the suicide bombing on church grounds.

Statements made by the authorities after the five key

If one were to look at it from the *Ang Probinsiyano* fan mindset, the scenario is heroic and action-packed and the villains, no longer able to take the heat, turned themselves in. End of story? Not by a long shot.

This complicated plot has many possible twists and turns that could make your head spin. The Philippine National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines must be commended,

surrenders which could lead to the quick conclusion of this ugly chapter revealed that local police had been guarding the cathedral 24/7, setting up a sort of checkpoint at the location on Sundays.

"The suicide bombing couple, he adds, were guided by one of the surrenderers, a certain 'alias Kamah,' who is said to be the brother of a slain Abu Sayyaf leader.

People going to Mass, in other words, are checked before they can enter, much like our experience in malls hereabouts. Yet while these mall "wand" or x-ray checks have become part of our urban experience, it is unfathomable that it should be done in churches.

But what do we know? Life in places like Sulu is far different from many other parts of the Philippines.

In these regions that had long been regarded as breeding grounds for rebellion, security measures need to be much tighter, justifying a martial law.

Unfortunately, security may have lapsed somehow for two Indonesians to enter, carrying backpacks filled with explosives.

This, of course, has yet to be verified, Interior Secretary Eduardo Año says. What we are told at this point is that the Abu Sayyaf is behind the blasts along with a "foreign terrorist related to ISIS."

The suicide bombing couple, he adds, were guided by one of the surrenderers, a certain "alias Kamah," who is said to be the brother of a slain Abu Sayyaf leader. Two pairs of unclaimed feet will tell the story once forensics is done.

“*Sadly, it may have been their own complacency that led to the suicide bombing on church grounds.*”

Meanwhile, it should interest us to know that the Interior chief thinks the Jolo Cathedral bombing has nothing to do with the Zamboanga City mosque bombing, but is perhaps connected more with the Lamitan, Basilan blast last year where a foreign IS member was also involved.

He also thinks it is connected more with the Marawi siege – an ISIS instigation – rather than the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) plebiscite.

The "timing" mentioned before, then, had to do with the end of the polls, during which the perpetrators probably saw their chance because the soldiers had possibly let their guard down after the extreme alert for the BOL voting.

What this tells us is that our hardworking men in uniform cannot afford to relax yet even as the public is assured of the fast and efficient work they are doing to catch the criminals.

Now that they know that the Jolo bombing was meant to be "training" for future Filipino suicide bombers, there can be no let-up in their efforts.

Warped mind

“No other action was taken by Noynoy regarding the spread of terrorist groups during his term outside of the US-sponsored operations.”

Detained Sen. Leila de Lima was talking through her hat when she claimed the recent bombings in Mindanao were the result of failed intelligence.

Presidential spokesman Sal Panelo simply ascribed the assessment to De Lima's "dulled senses" as a result of her incarceration due to drug trafficking charges.

De Lima also can't be referring to President Rody Duterte who sometimes tells the public raw reports even ahead of the military on sensitive issues, such as the Jolo cathedral bombing in which he was the first to propound the involvement of a foreign suicide bomber in the attack.

Subsequently, the military did find two Indonesians, who were a couple, as having blown themselves up resulting in the gruesome incident during a Sunday Mass.

The resolute actions of Rody, including the declaration of martial law, were the result of him acting on reliable and quick intelligence.

"The detained Sen. Leila de Lima is talking nonsense. Her confinement has dulled her senses," Panelo said in a statement.

The spokesman reminded De Lima that Rody was the same President "who crushed the dreaded and ruthless Islamic State (IS) and their local counterparts in the Marawi siege."

While it took six years for a coalition of forces led by the United States to expel the IS from Syria, it only took six months for Rody to clear Marawi City of the terror incursion.

"Rody is also the same President who has declared a war on drugs, criminality and corruption and gained headway in all those fronts by his swift action and enforcement of the law, without fear or favor," Panelo added.

De Lima, in her daily reverie behind bars, may have been caught in a time warp and had issued the comments referring to her patron, former President Noynoy Aquino's actions during the Mamasapano debacle.

Among Noynoy's failures was his insistence that, lately, in rebuttal to Rody's allegations before relatives of the 44 fallen Special Action Force (SAF) troopers, provided more questions than answers.

Among the points in his statement released after Rody practically put the blame squarely on him for the death of the SAF commandos on 25 January 2015 was that the United States was not involved in Oplan Exodus that

neutralized Malaysian terror kingpin Marwan but resulted in the death of 44 SAF commandos.

Rody, then Davao City mayor, was in the same room as Aquino in Zamboanga City when the SAF members were being mowed down by Islamic rebels for almost the whole day of 25 January, and the operation was secretly led by the United States' Central Intelligence Agency.

Noynoy's counterclaim was that the US helped with equipment and intelligence gathering and nothing else, but claimed he did not discuss the details of the operation with American officials.

Both the Philippine National Police-Board of Inquiry and the Senate reports on the incident indicated at least six Americans were at the Oplan Exodus command center.

No other action was taken by Noynoy regarding the spread of terrorist groups during his term outside of the US-sponsored operations.

“
*De Lima...
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Armed Forces of the Philippines intelligence reports also cited at least 23 armed groups in Mindanao that still pledge allegiance to IS and several foreign jihadists operating in Mindanao.

Foreign IS fighters from Asia, such as from Indonesia, Malaysia and even China, were unable to return home after the defeat of the terror group in Syria and Iraq.

More than 30 Malaysian militants were believed involved in the Marawi City siege.

Aside from Asian countries, foreign fighters from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Chechnya and Singapore were reported to have been part of the pro-IS groups in Marawi City.

The outcome of the process to create the Bangsamoro autonomous region is a potential source of another armed outbreak.

The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), which is among the Muslim groups that pledged allegiance to IS, appears to be waiting in the wings for developments that will make it spring into action.

The BIFF is a splinter group of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) which was formed after the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain signed under former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2008.

MILF and BIFF members are mostly linked to each other either by blood or through intermarriages.

Rody had repeatedly sought apology for imposing martial law, but said it was the best way to address the existing threats from the IS.

The failure of intelligence is among the blunders of the yellow horde since it had lost its faculty on what should be considered effective that saves lives against that which results in feeding soldiers to the lion, as Rody termed it.

ONLINE NEWS

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ASG 'bandit' killed, another captured in Sulu

By Teofilo Garcia, Jr

ZAMBOANGA CITY -- An Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) follower was killed while another was captured in a clash as government offensive continues against the ASG bandits behind the January 27 bombing of the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo, Sulu.

Col. Gerry Besana, Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) information officer, said the firefight occurred in Barangay Saying Susuk, Maimbung, Sulu at about 5:10 p.m. Tuesday.

Besana said the troops were conducting focused military operations against the church bombers when they clashed with a group of ASG bandits led by sub-leader Idang Susukan.

The firefight that lasted for about 20 minutes resulted in the death of an ASG bandit and the capture of ASG follower Murtasil Paradjil, who was injured during the firefight.

Government troops brought Paradjil to the Kuta Heneral Teodulfo Bautista Station Hospital in Barangay Bus-Bus, Jolo, for treatment.

Besana said the troops recovered three M-14 rifles, an M-16 rifle, and a bandolier with M-14 magazine and ammunition from the clash site.

He disclosed that a soldier was wounded during the firefight. No identity was released except that the wounded soldier belongs to the Army's 41st Infantry Battalion.

The Joint Task Force Sulu said the ASG involved in Tuesday's firefight was the same group that clashed with the Army's 5th Scout Ranger Battalion on February 2.

"The Abu Sayyaf militants are now on the run after the ferocious gunfight with the scout rangers. They are now splintered into small groups to evade the pursuing government troops," said Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabayo, Joint Task Force Sulu commander.

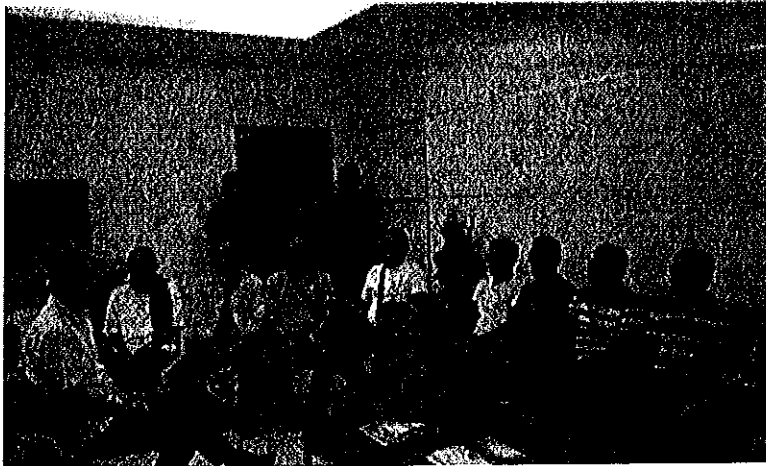
Pabayo said the troops are tracking down the ASG bandits, who fled following the 20-minute firefight in Maimbung on Tuesday. **(PNA)**

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

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9 ex-rebels in Bataan receive financial aid

By Marilyn Galang



CASH AID. Bataan Governor Albert Garcia (left) joins former members of the New People's Army in a group photo after as he gives them financial assistance of PHP10,000 each on Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2019. *(Photo courtesy of the Philippine Army's 7th Infantry Division)*

FORT MAGSAYSAY, Nueva Ecija -- Nine former members of the Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines - Rebolusyonaryong Hukbong Bayan (MLPP-RHB) from the province of Bataan who surrendered to the Philippine Army's 48th Infantry (Guardians) Battalion (IB) received financial assistance on Tuesday.

Brig. Gen. Lenard T. Agustin, acting commander of the Army's 7th Infantry (Kaugnay) Division, said Wednesday that Bataan Governor Albert Garcia awarded the PHP10,000 aid to each of the surrenderers.

Agustin said the former rebels brought with them one improvised M14 rifle with 26 live ammunition, two caliber .38 revolvers with 13 live ammunition and one hand grenade when they surrendered at one of the patrol bases of the 48th IB on November 26, 2018.

He said the granting of cash assistance to the former rebels is through the initiative of the 48th IB under the leadership of its commanding officer, Lt. Col. Arnel B. Cabugon.

He, however, clarified that the cash assistance awarded is also an initiative of the provincial government of Bataan and excluded from the Enhance Comprehensive Localized Integration Program (E-CLIP) benefits.

"The awarding of financial assistance is just first of the many benefits that the former rebels will enjoy. I call on the rebels who are still in the mountains to lay down your arms and be with your families. The 7th ID is always open to help you go back to the folds of the government," Agustin said in a media interview.

The E-CLIP program extends reintegration assistance, firearm remuneration livelihood assistance, housing, conditional transitional grant, livelihood materials and implements or employment assistance, access to government service, loan and market access, medical assistance, alternative learning system, psychosocial assistance, college tuition and stipend, and legal assistance to rebels who return to the fold of the law. **(PNA)**

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Poll bets urged to reject NPA extortion demands

ILOILO CITY -- The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is calling on candidates not to give in to extortion demands of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA).

Col. Erickson Rosana, Assistant Chief of Staff for Operation of the 3rd Infantry Division (3ID), in a press conference on Wednesday, bared they received reports from election candidates, especially from the Central Panay area, about armed groups asking for payment in exchange for permit to campaign (PTC).

Moreover, the AFP will subject to validation the information that there are politicians who have contacts with the NPA.

"We will release the names once we have fully validated the data and the Regional Joint Security Control Center (RJSCC) will be responsible for that," Rosana added.

The national headquarters of the AFP has already validated the presence of terrorist groups in four barangays in Western Visayas while 10 additional barangays will still be subjected to validation.

Once a barangay is identified as infiltrated by NPA or armed groups, the AFP will deploy troops in the area and at the same time an investigation will be conducted to determine why the barangay was infiltrated.

Rosana also emphasized that once a barangay is cleared, it doesn't mean that they could not be infiltrated again.

The AFP assured the public that it will strengthen and focus their military operations on the hinterland areas to prevent the terrorist groups from sabotaging and destroying the peaceful conduct of the mid-term elections.

Meantime, it was revealed that Western Visayas has 88 NPA surrenderers since last year.

"They were forced to surrender due to our intensified combat operations coupled with social pressure from various sectors," Rosanna said.

The AFP also called on remaining members of the communist terrorist group to avail of the Enhanced-Comprehensive Local Integration Program of the government for them to start a new life. **(PNA)**