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MORO REBEL CHIEF LEADS NEXT STEP TO PEACE

STORY BY JULIE M. AURELIO

President Duterte opens another avenue to seal a peace accord with Moro insurgents by appointing the chief of the largest Muslim rebel group as head of an interim government in a new autonomous region in Mindanao. A4

FROM A1

By Julie M. Aurelio
@JMAurelioINQ

President Duterte on Friday appointed the chief of the largest Moro rebel group as head of the transition government that will run a new autonomous Muslim region, taking another step in sealing a peace accord to end decades of insurgency in the country's troubled south.

In a ceremony where he announced the appointment of members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), Mr. Duterte called on the interim government to "always embody the dreams and aspirations of the great men and women who came before you and fought for the recognition of your right to determine your future."

"As you lead this new region toward a brighter tomorrow, I ask you never to waver in your commitment to build an institution that is founded on the rule of law, the promotion of good governance and the defense of our most cherished democratic values," he added.

The President appointed Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) chair Murad Ebrahim as the BTA's interim chief minister, who will temporarily lead the regional parliament of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Safety passes

Several of Murad's top commanders long wanted for deadly attacks were given safety passes to be able to travel to Manila and join the ceremony, including Abdullah Macapaar, who uses the nom de guerre Commander Bravo.

Known for his fiery rhetoric while wearing his camouflage uniform and brandishing his assault rifle and grenades, Macapaar was one of the 41 MILF leaders appointed to the 80-member BTA.

Speaking to reporters after the ceremony, Mr. Duterte justified the appointment of the "revolutionary" MILF commander in the BTA.

"We are talking here of ending a revolution, so you should

WHAT WENT BEFORE

July 2018 – President Duterte signs Republic Act No. 11054, or the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

Jan. 21, 2019 – Plebiscite for the ratification of the BOL takes place for all areas under the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), Isabela City in Basilan and Cotabato City.

Feb. 6, 2019 – Second plebiscite for voters in Lanao del Norte, seven towns in Cotabato

province and other areas that petitioned for inclusion in the future Bangsamoro takes place.

Feb. 22, 2019 – The 80-member Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), the interim government in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), appointed by the President takes oath.

The BTA will run the BARMM's parliamentary government in the Bangsamoro region until its

first regular elections. The interim chief minister will exercise executive authority while the BTA will exercise legislative authority.

Within the first 60 days of the transition period, the interim chief minister will submit to the BTA the proposed organizational plan and schedule of implementation, which the BTA will vote on within 10 days after submission. The transition plan will be implement-

ed 15 days from its approval.

June 30, 2019 – Terms of the incumbent elected officials of the ARMM will expire.

2022 – BARMM constituents will hold election for the first set of officials of the BARMM, synchronized with the national elections. Immediately after the first regular elections, the BTA will be dissolved.

Sources: Inquirer Archives, Republic Act No. 11054

talk to a revolutionary or a warrior of that war," he said, adding that Macapaar "took the brunt" of the military operations against the MILF.

A Jan. 21 plebiscite ratified the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) that created the BARMM which would replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in accordance with a 2014 peace agreement between the government and MILF.

During the ceremony, the President received the Commission on Elections' certification declaring the BOL's ratification, and the expansion of the BARMM's territory to include Cotabato City and 63 barangays

in Cotabato province.

Mr. Duterte said the creation of the BARMM was not only the fulfillment of his campaign promise but also "the realization of all our dreams and end long decades of armed struggle that hindered the growth of the region which I also consider my home."

Counting victories

He said that like any other Mindanaoan, he wanted to see an end to the violence when government and rebel forces were "counting our victories, not by the progress or development of the place but by the dead bodies that were thrown around."

"The road to peace may be long and rough, but I am glad that we have finally reached its endpoint," Mr. Duterte said.

Murad vowed to lead the interim government and make it "promotive, responsive and protective" of the Bangsamoro, the "lumad" and the settlers in Mindanao.

"We have fought, sacrificed and struggled for a government that would be reflective of our system of life, and a governance that is suitable and acceptable to the Bangsamoro," he said in his message.

Murad said those who ratified the BOL "set the highest expectations" for the BTA. "They deserve no less than a govern-

ment that can live up to those expectations."

Within the first 60 days of the transition period, Murad has to submit to the BTA a proposed transition plan and its schedule of implementation, which the BTA must vote on within 10 days.

Dissolved after polls

The new Muslim region will hold the polls for its first set of elected officials in 2022 at the same time as the national elections. The BTA will be dissolved after the polls.

In his brief speech, Mr. Duterte reminded the BTA to "always work for the best interest and welfare not only of the

Bangsamoro people, but every Filipino who lives in that region."

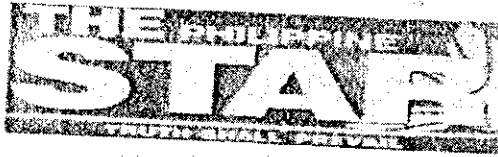
"I trust that you will oversee the transition period to the best of your abilities, especially in the decommissioning of firearms and former combatants," he said.

About 12,000 MILF combatants with thousands of firearms are expected to be demobilized starting this year under the peace deal. Thousands of other guerrillas would disarm if agreements under the deal would be followed, including providing the insurgents with livelihood to help them return to normal life.

Dream come true

"The dream that we have fought for is now happening and there's no more reason for us to carry our guns and continue the war," rebel forces spokesperson Von Al Haq told The Associated Press (AP) in an interview ahead of the ceremony.

The Philippine and Western governments and the guerrillas see an effective Muslim autonomy as an antidote to nearly half a century of Muslim secessionist violence, which the Islamic State group could exploit to gain a foothold. —WITH A REPORT FROM INQUIRER RESEARCH AND AP INQ



MILF's Murad named BARMM transition chief

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ

From being the leader of separatist rebels, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) chief Al Hajj Murad Ebrahim is now the interim head of the newly created Bangsamoro Transition Authority or BTA.

The BTA will supervise the transition from the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to the newly created Bangsamoro ARMM.

Swearing in the transition team last night at Malacañang, President Duterte urged the BTA to work for the speedy decommissioning of the MILF.

"Always work for the best interest and welfare, not only of the Bangsamoro people, but every Filipino who lives in that region," Duterte told BTA officials and some 500 people gathered in the Rizal Hall.

"I trust that you will oversee the transition period to the best of your abilities, especially in the decommissioning of fire-arms and former combatants," he said.

Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo together with Senators Juan Miguel Zubiri, Aquilino Pimentel III and Richard Gordon, former peace adviser Jesus Dureza and key personalities involved in the crafting of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) were

Turn to Page 4

MILF'S From Page 1

present at the oath-taking.

While the road to peace had been long and tortuous, Duterte said he is "glad that we have finally reached its endpoint."

The BOL mandates the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) to replace the existing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

"My only hope is that we put to rest the bitter memories of the past so that we can build a new region that is bound not by ethnic or religious affiliation, but by a common aspiration for peaceful coexistence among our fellow Filipinos," he said.

He also stressed that the

establishment of BARMM is not just the fulfillment of a campaign promise.

"It will be the realization of our collective desire. It will be the realization of all our dreams and end long decades of armed struggle that hindered the growth of the region. I also consider my home," Duterte said.

He expressed hope that genuine peace and development in the region is within reach.

"Now that we have realized our aspirations, believe me, we in Mindanao share our values, we would like to see an end to violence that has led to nothing," the Chief Executive said.

The Bangsamoro people,

he emphasized, are assured of comfort and protection in the exercise of rule of law under his administration.

"I give you my word of honor," he said, citing what he called were fruits of several meetings and long nights of discussions that preceded the crafting of BOL.

"Today, I thank Allah for his mercy and for his understanding of his people," he added.

With the BOL in place, he said the Bangsamoro people stand to benefit more from their land's bounty and resources.

"I hope that we can end this... and I assure you, there is one contentious issue, resources, it's also yours," he said, referring to the Linguasan Marsh that he vowed would benefit Mindanaoans.

"We do away with greed.

We do away with oppression and especially we try. We can always try; sometimes it can be done, sometimes it cannot be reached. But I pray that we will end the hate that pervaded our lives for so many years," the President said.

He ended his speech with "Allahu Akbar" (God is Great) to trumpet his commitment to the cause of Muslim Filipinos.

MILF peace panel chairman Mohagher Iqbal and MILF brigadier commander Abdullah Goldiano Makapaar bin Sabbar — also known as Commander Bravo — joined other Muslim leaders in witnessing last night the ceremonial declaration of the BOL plebiscite canvass results by the Commission on Elections (Comelec).

Earlier in the evening, Duterte also swore in the 80 members of the BTA, formed

to serve as interim government of BARMM.

They will administer BARMM for three years or until new elected officials take over in 2022.

He also acknowledged the role of Dureza in attaining peace in Mindanao as presidential adviser on the peace process before former military chief Carlito Galvez took over his post.

"The courage and determination of the Bangsamoro will not be in vain as the administration works for the realization of the peaceful cohabitation of Muslims and Christians in Mindanao," he said.

The BTA is composed of representatives from various Muslim and non-Muslim groups, indigenous peoples, women, youth, settler communities and traditional leaders.

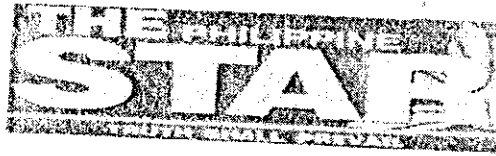
Galvez said yesterday's event "marks another major step towards the long-held aspiration of our Moro brothers and sisters for genuine and meaningful autonomy."

"Through the BTA, the Bangsamoro people shall have a stronger voice and have the power to chart their own course of development," Galvez said in his speech.

Galvez said the approval and eventual ratification is a concrete manifestation of the people's overwhelming support for the future of the BARMM government.

Comelec chairman Sheriff Abbas presented results showing voters' support for BOL during the recent plebiscite.

In a message, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana called on every Filipino to support the peace agenda.



PNP welcomes law modifying rank classification

By EMMANUEL TUPAS

The Philippine National Police (PNP) welcomed the new law that modified the rank classification of police officers, returning their old ranks similar to military titles.

PNP spokesman Senior Supt. Bernard Banac said the new law clarifies the command and responsibility in the police force for effective and efficient supervision and control among its uniformed personnel.

"The rank classification will contribute to more performance output and productivity from the police for having high morale, as they will be called again the way they were addressed before," he said in a statement.

Banac said the public still finds it difficult to follow and understand their current

ranks.

Col. Noel Detoyato, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Public Affairs Office chief, said the return of police ranks to military titles would eliminate the confusion created by these civilian police titles.

"This is a welcome development for us because we too are confused. Despite prevailing civilian ranks of policemen, most of them are still being addressed by the common people as sarge or general," Detoyato said.

"Restoring the previous military rank to our policemen is no problem for us. In fact, it will erase the prevailing confusion among us," said Detoyato. Prior to the creation of the PNP, the now defunct Philippine Constabulary-Integrated National

Police (PC-INP) sported military ranks or titles.

Detoyato said only the rank titles of the policemen will change, as the PNP will still function as the country's sole civilian police force.

President Duterte signed Republic Act 11200, which standardizes the way PNP officers are called, into law last Feb. 8.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson, a former PNP chief, said the measure eliminates confusion on how our law enforcers must be addressed and brings our policemen closer to the populace.

Lacson said the rank classification system should remove confusion on how to address police officers, noting that people still tend to address them by their military rank assignments.

— With Jaime Laude

Modified ranks eliminate confusion – PNP

By **MARTIN A. SADONGDONG**

The Philippine National Police (PNP) has welcomed the approval and signing of a law which modifies the rank classification in the police organization and standardizes how cops are addressed.

Senator Panfilo Lacson authored the Senate version of the law which President Duterte signed as Republic Act No. 11200 last February 8, amending Republic Act 6975 or the Department of the Interior and Local Government Act of 1990. The newly-signed law is the consolidated version of Senate Bill 2031 and House Bill 5236.

Under the new law, the PNP's rank classification system will be distinct from that of the members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), with ranks used in addressing police personnel preceded by the word "Police."

"The new law clarifies the com-

mand and responsibility in the PNP for effective and efficient supervision and control among its uniformed personnel while performing their mandate to enforce the law, fight illegal drugs and crimes, maintain peace and order, with the active support of the people in the community," said Senior Superintendent Bernard Banac, PNP spokesman.

"Definitely, the rank classification will contribute to more performance output and productivity from PNP uniformed personnel for having high morale as they will be called again the way they were addressed before, in contrast to the present rank classification which the public still finds difficult to follow and understand," he stressed.

According to Banac, the new rank classification in the PNP shall be as follows: Director General to Police General; Deputy Director General to Police Lieutenant General; Director to Police Major General; Chief Super-

intendent to Police Brigadier General; Senior Superintendent to Police Colonel; Superintendent to Police Lieutenant Colonel;

Chief Inspector to Police Major; Senior Inspector to Police Captain; Inspector to Police Lieutenant; Senior Police Officer 4 to Police Executive Master Sergeant; SPO3 to Police Chief Master Sergeant; SPO2 to Police Senior Master Sergeant; SPO1 to Police Master Sergeant; PO3 to Police Staff Sergeant; PO2 to Police Corporal; and PO1 to Patrolman/Patrolwoman.

Banac said the PNP rank classification law "standardizes the nomenclature of organizational hierarchy in the police service, common among the uniformed services."

He, however, clarified that while the new police rank classification has similarities with the military rank structure, it does not suggest a deviation from the civilian character of the PNP as proscribed by the law.

Lacson backs new classification system

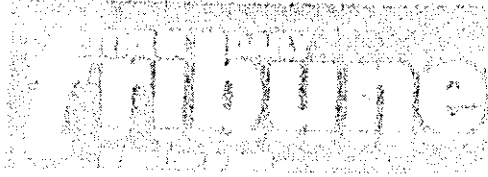
By Macon Ramos-Araneta

REPUBLIC Act 11200 or the law which standardizes the way PNP officers are called, which was signed by President Rodrigo Duterte into law, would eliminate confusion on how our law enforcers must be addressed, said Senator Panfilo Lacson.

Lacson, who served as PNP chief under the Estrada administration from 1999 to 2001, said this would also bring our policemen closer to the populace.

"More importantly, this allows for better coordination between the PNP and other law enforcement units in countering terrorism and other threats to national security," said Lacson.

Under the new law, the PNP's rank classification system will be distinct from that of the members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, with ranks used in addressing PNP personnel preceded by the word "Police." The PNP rank classification shall be as follows: Director-General to Police General; Deputy Director-General to Police Lieutenant General; Director to Police Major General; Chief Superintendent to Police Brigadier General; Senior Superintendent to Police Colonel; Superintendent to Police Lieutenant Colonel; Chief Inspector to Police Major; Senior Inspector to Police Captain; Inspector to Police Lieutenant; SPO4 to Police Executive Master Sergeant; SPO3 to Police Chief Master Sergeant; SPO2 to Police Senior Master Sergeant; SPO1 to Police Master Sergeant; PO3 to Police Staff Sergeant; PO2 to Police Corporal; and PO1 to Patrolman/Patrolwoman. A3



ROTC eyed in relief operations

Military reservist units can play a major role in rescue and relief operations during disasters, an official of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) said.

They (ROTC units) can serve as our ready reserve and warm bodies in case of disasters. (They can act as) force multipliers.

If needed, the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) can be mobilized to augment regular military units conducting relief operations, AFP public affairs office chief, Col. Noel Detoyato, said Thursday.

"They (ROTC units) can serve as our ready reserve and warm bodies in case of disasters. (They can act as) force multipliers," he said in a text message.

Lawmakers are pushing to revive the mandatory ROTC training, saying that the program develops a "strong sense of discipline and purpose" among the youth.

ROTC used to be a compulsory course for male college students but it was turned into an optional course following reports of anomalies in the program.

Training reservists on disaster and relief operations and rehabilitation can prepare them to respond to natural and man-made calamities that often hit the country.

Earlier, the Department of National Defense said the mandatory ROTC bill is not "military-centric" but focused on values formation.

House Bill 8961, which seeks to amend for the purpose, Republic Act 7077 or the Citizen Armed Forces of the Philippines Reservist Act, has been approved on second reading. **PNA**

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PHILIPPINE INQUIRER

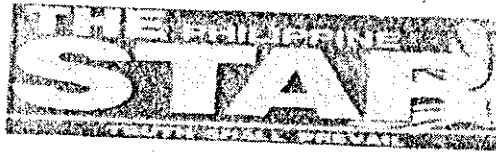
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PERMIT TO CAMPAIGN

349 GOV'T EXECS WHO PAID NPA FEES ON DILG WATCHLIST

The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) is keeping an eye on 349 government officials found to have paid extortion money and permit-to-campaign fees to the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) in previous elections. **M**

In a statement on Thursday, DILG Secretary Eduardo Año cited a watchlist which includes 11 provincial governors, five vice governors, 10 provincial board members, 55 mayors, 21 vice mayors, 41 councilors, 126 barangay captains, 50 barangay councilors and eight other barangay officials. —JAYMEE T. GAMIL INQ



NYC chair: Rody idea inspired revocation proposal

By JANVIC MATEO

Under fire for his proposal to remove scholarships from "anti-government" students, National Youth Commission (NYC) chairman Ronald Cardema said he was merely reviving an earlier idea of President Duterte.

Speaking with The Chiefs aired on Cignal TV's "One News" on Thursday, Cardema said he merely based his proposal on an earlier threat made by the President against protesters.

"He really said it, 'I will take government scholarships from those leftist groups and I will give it to the *Lumads*,'" Cardema said in a mix of English and Filipino.

He appeared to be referring

to a remark made by Duterte last year after students staged a nationwide walkout to protest against his government's policies.

"I'll give you a privilege; don't come to school for a year. I'll let the bright *Lumad* enter UP," the President said in a speech at the military's Eastern Mindanao Command headquarters on Feb. 1, 2018.

Cardema said he just remembered Duterte's remark following the death of University of the Philippines-Los Baños student John Carlo Alberto, who was killed in a recent encounter between the New People's Army and the military in Laguna.

He stressed the need to remove the scholarships of "the very few" who bear arms

against the government, although he failed to respond to observations that these students are no longer scholars anyway as they have already left school to join the rebels.

Vindicated

Cardema said he felt vindicated following the recent statement of the President, who said there is nothing wrong with disagreeing with the government unless one explicitly expresses support for the NPA.

"The President of the Republic has spoken, basically urging on my point that only government scholars who are already joining the NPA," he said. "I am thankful that the President of the Philippines issued that statement."

The NYC chief had to go on

the defensive after his earlier statement – which called for the removal of scholarships of "all anti-government scholars, specifically those students who are allied with the (communist rebels)" – drew condemnation from various groups.

"I will not resign because the senators are calling for my resignation based on a wrong information," he said.

"That's their opinion. But they are basing it on a wrong report of other news outlets that I want the removal of all government scholarships of all street protesters, of all rallying against the government," he added.

Cardema said he was only calling for the removal of government scholarships of "very, very few" anti-government scholars

who have already joined or are supporting the NPA.

"We did not say all and I always specifically mention that it's OK to rally and to voice out their dissent even with the President or on our government," Cardema said.

"We are specifically against only those few who are aiding, supporting or joining the New People's Army," he added.

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año said there is "no need" for Cardema to resign from his position.

"In his sincere intention to rally the youth towards more relevant undertakings, his statements may have been misinterpreted. I think that as NYC chair, he just got frustrated that some of our young people, who are sup-

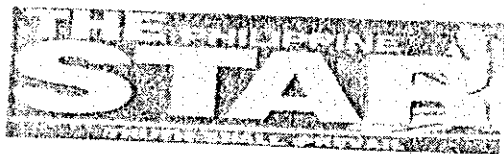
posed to be part of nation-building and support of government undertakings, are being brainwashed into joining anti-government forces," Año said.

He said Cardema has been "doing good things" in the youth agency.

Año also noted that President Duterte himself had said students directly helping the communist rebels will have their scholarships revoked and may also be charged with rebellion.

For its part, the Commission on Human Rights reminded the government that criticisms on governance and to demand redress for such are entitlements of the people in a democracy and is guaranteed by the Constitution.

— With Romina Cabrera



4 NPAs surrender in Mindanao

By JAIME LAUDE

Four ranking New People's Army (NPA) rebels in Northern Mindanao have surrendered to the Army in Bukidnon.

Col. Edgardo de Leon, commander of the Army's 403rd Brigade identified the four as Lorena Micabalo, 24, alias Ka Jai-jai; Gloria Jandaya, 63, alias Ka Diding; Gliceria Balangiao, 34, alias Ka Jao; and Jackielyn Ann Elaco, 34, alias Ka Lala.

Micabalo, a political officer, surrendered on Feb. 14; Jandaya, staff of the NPA's Regional Urban Committee, and Balangiao, liaison-staff of the NPA's North-Central Mindanao Regional Committee, surrendered on Feb. 11 while Elaco, finance officer and political instructor, gave herself up late last

month.

"All four are members of the NPA's Sub-Regional Committee 4, a group actively behind the radicalization of communities to recruit residents in western Bukidnon and urban areas including Cagayan de Oro City," De Leon said.

In a debriefing, the four claimed that they decided to quit communist insurgency due to the false promises of their senior leaders as well as their frustration over contradictions between what is being preached and what is happening in the NPA leadership.

"Their confessions were administered by lawyers from the Public Attorney's Office in affidavits that were presented to the provincial prosecutor in Bukidnon," De Leon added. ||

More blows dealt on NPA in Mindanao

By **MIKE U. CRISMUNDO**

BUTUAN CITY—The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) captured an alleged supply officer and courier of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) in Barangay Napnapan, Pantukan, Compostela Valley (ComVal) province, according to First Lt. Jhocell D. Asis, Civil Military Operation (CMO) officer of the Army's 71st Infantry (Kaibigan) Battalion (71st IB).

In a statement sent to The Manila Bulletin on Thursday afternoon, the 71st IB CMO officer also said that the peace and development team of the 71st IB and Pantukan Municipal Police Station (MPS) apprehended in a separate operation three suspected armed NPA terrorists in Sitio Binogsayan, Barangay Napnapan, Pantukan, ComVal province, also on Wednesday.

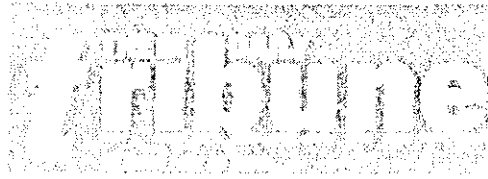
The identities of the apprehended CPP-NPA supply and courier officer, as

well as the armed NPA suspects, were withheld pending thorough investigation.

This developed as four alleged officials of the CPP-NPA surrendered to the First Special Forces Battalion (1st SFBn) in Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon province on Friday.

According to Capt. Ryan D. Layug, Civil Military Operation (CMO) officer of the 403rd Infantry (Peacemaker) Brigade, those who yielded were a certain "Ka Jai-Jai," 24, political officer of SYP Company 3, Sub-Regional Committee 4 (SRC 4); "Ka Diding," 63, staff of Regional Urban Committee (RUC); "Ka Jao," 34, liaison staff of RUC; and "Ka Lala", finance officer and political instructor of Platoon "Derek", SYP Coy-2, Guerilla Front 68-A, SRC 4, all of the CPP-NPA North-Central Mindanao Regional Committee (NCMRC). 22

The real names of the CPP-NPA officials were temporarily withheld for their safety and security while tactical investigation is also ongoing, it said.



Año: Youth chair must be frustrated

By Kathleen Mae Bulquerin

Department of the Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año believes National Youth Commission Chairman Ronald Gian Carlo Cardema was just frustrated when he remarked over the weekend that students joining protest rallies against the government should be stripped of their scholarships.

Año stressed that Cardema doesn't need to resign from his position, despite calls for such.

"I think that as NYC chair, he just got frustrated that some of our young people, who are supposed to be part of nation-building and supportive of government undertakings, are being brainwashed into joining anti-government forces," the DILG chief said.

Año stressed that Cardema doesn't need to resign from his position, despite calls for such.

"I don't see enough reason for the NYC chairman to resign. In his sincere intention to rally the youth towards more relevant undertakings, his statements may have been misinterpreted," Año said.

In a statement, Cardema asked President Duterte to issue an executive order "removing the government scholarships of all anti-government scholars, specifically those students who are allied with the leftist CPP-NPA-NDF."

NPA declared undesirable in more areas

"Heed the people's call, they are already tired of your coercion and intimidation."

This was the message of Armed Forces of the Philippines-Eastern Mindanao Command chief Major Gen. Felimon T. Santos Jr. to the leadership of the New People's Army after more and more communities and local government units have declared them "persona non grata."

"The people believe in the government's resolve to address their issues and concern and socio-economic changes that are being pushed and that they do not want this to be hampered and stalled," Santos said.

Last Wednesday, a new set of barangays declared the Communist Party of the Philippines-NPA persona non grata. They are

Barangays Caburacanan, St. Peter, Silae, and Indalasa in Malaybalay City and Barangay Canangaan, Freedom, and Dalacutan in Cabanglasan, Bukidnon.

Davao Oriental had earlier barred the CPP-NPA-National Democratic Front and declared its members and officials as undesirable after the Provincial Peace and Order Council passed a resolution.

Surigao del Norte barangays Camam-onan and Gigaquit, both known to be places where the NPA has thrived in the past few years, have also banned the CPP-NPA-NDF.

Compostela Valley passed a resolution condemning and declaring the CPP-NPA-NDF as persona non grata. **(Francis Wakefield and Ivy C. Tejano)**

No ransom despite Abu Sayyaf threat to behead hostages— Malacañang

By Julie M. Aurelio
@JMAurelioINQ

Malacañang on Friday said the government was doing its best for the release of the hostages held by the Abu Sayyaf without paying any ransom, despite the bandit group's recent threat to behead them.

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo stressed that the government never paid ransoms and would not give in to the bandits' demands.

"We are doing our best to secure the release of the hostages—one Malaysian and two Indonesians—from the evil hands of the Abu Sayyaf, but we stand firm on our no ransom policy," Panelo said.

He issued the statement after a video, which shows Abu Sayyaf members threatening to behead their foreign captives, was uploaded on social media on Feb. 14.

One of the hostages appealed to the Indonesian government to help secure their

freedom. As he spoke, a bandit held a knife to his neck.

The hostages were abducted from a Sandakan-based fishing trawler off Tawi-Tawi on Dec. 5.

"To give in to the demands of terrorists and other lawless groups would embolden them to engage in more abductions. That would allow them to conduct extremist and other criminal activities as they could buy more arms and weapons," Panelo said.

President Duterte, he said, has already ordered the military to crush the Abu Sayyaf and other terrorist groups in Mindanao.

Unknown militant rises

Amid the loss of leaders, an unknown Abu Sayyaf militant has risen to head the Islamic State (IS) group in Mindanao.

But unlike many of his slain comrades, Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan lacks the bravado, clan name or foreign training.

Not much is known about Sawadjaan, or if his group held the three hostages, but the attacks



Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan —AP

attributed to him are savage.

He is accused of plotting the deadly Jan. 27 bombing of the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo, which authorities say was a suicide attack by an Indonesian militant couple.

The attack, which killed 23 people and wounded about 100 others, and another suicide

bombing in Basilan province in July last year that officials said he masterminded, put Sawadjaan in the crosshairs of the US-led campaign against terrorism.

A recent US Department of Defense report to Congress said that it believed Sawadjaan was the "acting emir" in the Philippines of the IS group.

IS 'emir' in Philippines

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año, however, said intelligence indicated that Sawadjaan, who is in his 60s, was installed as IS chief in a ceremony last year.

His turn at the helm came after the Abu Sayyaf took its biggest battle loss in 2017 when several commanders were killed as troops quelled a five-month siege by militants in Marawi City.

Among those killed was Isnilon Hapilon, the first IS-designated leader in the Philippines.

"I think Sawadjaan rose in rank because of seniority and there were no other leaders left," said Año, the former military

chief who oversaw the Marawi offensives, told The Associated Press (AP) in an interview.

He estimated that Sawadjaan, who only likely finished grade school, commanded about 200 combatants and followers.

Poverty drove him to work as a lumberjack in Patikul, where he married a woman from Tanum, where he would base his Abu Sayyaf faction years later, a military officer, who has closely monitored the Abu Sayyaf, told AP on condition of anonymity.

As an elderly villager, he served as a mosque preacher, earning him the religious sobriquet "hatib," the officer said.

Sawadjaan first took up arms as a member of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). His commander was Radulan Sahiron, the one-armed bandit who broke away from the MNLF in 1992. They joined the Abu Sayyaf, which had just been organized by Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani, said MNLF leader Yusop Jikiri.

Sawadjaan would later part

ways with Sahiron, including over Sahiron's refusal to accommodate foreign militants for fear they are a magnet for military air strikes, said Abu Jihad, a former militant who has met Sawadjaan and was captured by troops.

Implicated in kidnappings

When Abu Sayyaf men kidnapped an American Muslim convert, Jeffrey Schilling, for ransom in August 2000, Sawadjaan helped gather bamboos that were used to build huts for the militants, Abu Jihad said.

Sawadjaan's daughter married a Malaysian militant known as Amin Baco, who has IS connections, police said.

Sawadjaan would later be implicated in the kidnappings of a German couple, two Canadian men, Schilling and a Jordanian journalist, Baker Atyani. The Canadian men were separately beheaded on video, according to military and police officials.

--WITH A REPORT FROM
AP INQ A2

LEADERSHIP BY EXAMPLE

MURAD EBRAHIM: FROM GUERRILLA COMMANDER TO GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

By Bong S. Sarmiento
@inqmindanao

COTABATO CITY—After half a century as a Moro revolutionary, Murad Ebrahim, the chair of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), is ready to join the government as head of the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Earlier endorsed by the MILF central committee as interim chief minister of the Bangsamoro parliament, Murad took his oath on Friday in Malacañang along with the 41 nominees of the MILF to the 80-member Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA).

The BTA will run the Bangsamoro parliament until BARMM's first regular elections in 2022.

But who is Murad? What brought him to his post in the Bangsamoro?

He has been popularly known as Al Haj Murad, but his real name is Ahod Balawag Ebrahim. He adopted Murad only as a nom de guerre after he joined the Moro struggle, first as member of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNL) and later, the MILF.

"I live a simple life, with almost 50 years spent in the underground armed struggle of the Bangsamoro against the government," said Murad, now 70.

In 1968, Murad was in his final year as a civil engineering student at Catholic-run Notre Dame University in Cotabato City when he was recruited to the MNLF founded by Nur Misuari. He formed part of the "Top 300," the second batch of Moro fighters who trained in Malaysia.

He headed the MNLF's Kutawato Revolutionary Committee, which fought the military and the dreaded Ilaga paramilitary group in Central Mindanao in the 1970s.

Ideological differences

But due to ideological differences, Murad and others in the MNLF broke with Misuari and, with former MNLF vice chair Salamat Hashim, formed the MILF in the late 1970s.

When Salamat, the MILF founding chair, died of an illness in July 2003, Murad took over the position of the Egyptian-trained cleric.

Before he assumed that post, Murad had the reputation of being the MILF's top hawk and guerrilla commander as vice chair for military affairs and chief of staff of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), the MILF's armed wing.

He eluded capture during the all-out war waged by then Presi-



NINO JESUS ORBETA

dent Joseph Estrada in 2000 and the 2003 Buliok campaign during the Arroyo administration.

The MILF's Camp Abubakar Al Siddique fell in 2000, and in 2003 government forces over-



**I would like
to treat everybody
equally. I will not
allow nepotism.
I'd like to pursue
good governance
in the Bangsamoro
to counter
the lingering ills
such as graft
and corruption**

Murad Ebrahim
BTA Interim Chief Minister

ran the Buliok complex, Salamat's headquarters, which straddled parts of Pagatungan in Maguindanao province and Pikit, Cotabato province.

From early 2001 until he was

appointed MILF chair in mid-2003, Murad concurrently served as the front's chief negotiator in talks with the Philippine government.

Murad held a firm grip on power as chair for the last 15 years with no one in the MILF openly challenging his leadership.

Von Al Ilag, BIAF spokesperson, described him "as a reasonable and fair leader."

"[He exemplifies] leadership by example. When he was the BIAF chief, he would immediately address problems to prevent them from getting out of [hand]," Al Haq told the Inquirer.

Murad is also "approachable, diplomatic and does not have a temper," he added.

Murad is married to Hadja Lupia Ebrahim and they have two children and 10 grandchildren.

"I am a family man," he said.

Malaysian citizenship

The only controversy attached to Murad has been that he holds Malaysian citizenship, which he vehemently denies.

Malaysia brokered the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, the final peace agreement signed by the government and the MILF in 2014.

On Jan. 21, voters in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Min-

danao (ARMM) ratified Republic Act No. 11054, or the Bangsamoro Organic Law, paving the way for the BARMM's creation.

Cotabato City, which twice rejected inclusion to the ARMM, although it hosts the regional government center, voted this time to be part of the BARMM.

Cotabato inclusion

In the succeeding plebiscite on Feb. 6, 63 villages in Cotabato province also voted to be part of the new autonomous region. Lanao del Norte rejected the bid of six of its towns to join the BARMM.

After Friday's oathtaking in Malacañang, the ARMM will formally hand over the reins of power to the BARMM. No date has been set for that.

What can the people expect from Murad now that he is part of the government he once fought?

"I would like to treat everybody equally," he said. "I will not allow nepotism. I'd like to pursue good governance in the Bangsamoro to counter the lingering ills such as graft and corruption." **AQ**

"My life is fully dedicated to the struggle of the Bangsamoro people," he told the Inquirer. "Whatever we achieved, it is not for ourselves but for the sake of the next generation." **INQ**

P8.1-M shabu seized in Lanao Sur, Zambo City

By JOHN UNSON and ROEL PAREÑO

LANAO DEL SUR -- Anti-narcotics agents seized a P8.1 million worth of methamphetamine hydrochloride or shabu in separate drug stings in Wao town here and Zamboanga City over the weekend.

The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) confiscated Thursday P6.8 million worth of shabu from Anrodin Alan Bantog, a sus-

pected member of the Islamic State-inspired Maute terror group.

Local officials told reporters that Bantog remitted a

fraction of his earnings to the Maute terror group, now under Owaida Marohombsar, also known as Abu Dar.

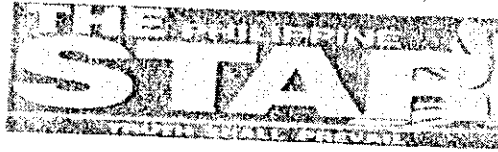
The officials added that the Maute group provides sanctuary to drug dealers in areas where it operates in exchange for money.

Meanwhile, the police seized P1.3 million worth of shabu from a suspect at a

coastal village in Zamboanga City.

Jimmy Sahibol, alias Jim, 23, was arrested at his hideout in Sitio Sibigtul by PDEA and local police.

Chief Superintendent Emmanuel Luis Licup, regional police director, said they have confiscated almost three kilos of shabu in the last three months. ((



Nur given task to help free Sayyaf hostages

Moro National Liberation Front chairman Nur Misuari was conspicuously absent at yesterday's oath-taking of officials of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority, but President Duterte urged him to help in backchannel negotiations for the release of three foreign hostages of the Abu Sayyaf.

Misuari is opposed to the abolition of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, which he used to head. He is considered to be a wild card in the peace process with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

"I would appeal to Nur Misuari to stop it," Duterte

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Nur From Page 1

said, urging the Muslim leader to intervene and stop the Abu Sayyaf from beheading the hostages.

"And tell the Abu Sayyaf that, 'Look we're talking. Don't make it hard for us to seek peace in our land,'" he said.

In a chance interview, Duterte said he has tasked known Mindanao leaders to reach out to Misuari to further pursue peace with the MNLF.

"I commissioned a few of them. Specifically, (deputy presidential peace adviser)

Nabil Tan, Gerry Salapuddin and a member of the Alonto clan. Salapuddin used to be congressman of Basilan. I told him, you break the ground there and I will talk to Nur. Whatever. No conditionalities," the President said.

"*Mukinig muna ako sa kanya, tapos kung mukinig siya sa akin* (I will listen to him first, and then when he listens to me). And maybe in God's own time, we will have (peace), then it's complete," he said.

— Christina Mendez

No-ransom policy stands as Abu threatens to behead hostages

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ

Malacañang reiterated yesterday the government's no-ransom policy amid the threat of the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf to behead a Malaysian and two Indonesian hostages if ransom is not paid.

"To give in to the demands of terrorists and other lawless groups would embolden them

to engage in more kidnappings that would allow them to conduct extremist and other criminal activities as they could buy more arms and weapons," presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said.

Panelo downplayed the threat as he maintained the government would not pay ransom in exchange for the release of the hostages held by Abu Sayyaf

militants in Sulu.

He assured the public that government forces are doing everything to rescue the hostages.

"We are doing our best to secure the release of the hostages, but we stand firm on our no ransom policy," Panelo said.

The Abu Sayyaf has released a video clip threatening to behead the foreign hostages.

Allowed to speak by their

captors, the Malaysian and two Indonesians appealed to their respective governments for help.

Five foreigners and three Filipinos are believed to be in the captivity of the bandits in the island province of Sulu.

Panelo said the government remains steadfast in the campaign against terror groups in Mindanao, which is still under martial law. — With Jaime Laude

DESPITE ABU THREAT TO EXECUTE HOSTAGES

Palace sticks to no-ransom policy

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

MALACANANG on Friday maintained the government's policy of not paying ransom for the release of hostages, despite a threat by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) to execute a Malaysian and two Indonesians who were abducted in Mindanao.

Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo expressed confidence in the capability of government forces to rescue the captives of the terrorist group.

"[We're] standing firm on no-ransom policy. The government forces will hunt

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Palace firm on no-ransom

them in the wild forests of Mindanao and unleash their might and blow them to kingdom come," Panelo told *The Manila Times* in a text message.

"The ASG continues to be on the run as a result of the order of the President to the military to crush them," he said.

The government, Panelo added, was strongly against paying ransom to the Abu Sayyaf terrorists as the money enables them to buy more firearms to carry out more kidnappings and terror attacks.

"We are doing our best to secure the release of hostages [one Malay-

sian and two Indonesians] from the evil hands of the Abu Sayyaf Group, but we stand firm on our no-ransom policy," he said in a separate statement.

"To give in to the demands of terrorists and other lawless groups would embolden them to engage in more abductions that would allow them to conduct extremist and other criminal activities as they could buy more arms and weapons," Panelo added.

He made the statement after Abu Sayyaf terrorists posted a video online threatening to execute their captives.

The ASG released a video which showed the Indonesian hostages — believed to be Heri Ardiansyah, 19, and Hariadin, 45 — being guarded by gunmen.

The Malaysian hostage, Jari Abdullah, 24, was not with the duo.

The captives, their eyes covered with black cloth and hands tied behind their backs, made an emotional appeal for their governments to save them. One militant held a bolo to the neck of Hariadin as he spoke to the camera.

The hostages were kidnapped at sea off Sandakan in Sabah on Dec. 5, 2018.

The terrorists are believed to be holding nearly a dozen captives, mostly foreigners.

The military said combat operations against the Abu Sayyaf

would continue.

"We never negotiate with terrorist kidnappers," Col. Noel Detoyato, military public affairs chief, said.

"We will continue with our ongoing combat operations; there is one ongoing right now," he told reporters in an interview.

He said the military's Eastern Mindanao Command and the Western Mindanao Command were in close coordination with its counterparts in Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta through the trilateral patrol operations in the southern seas.

On Wednesday, President Rodrigo Duterte urged Indonesia and Malaysia to join forces with the Philippines in combating crime on the high seas.

"I call upon the BIMP-EAGA

(Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines-East Association of Southeast Asian Growth Area). We are doing commerce. Our navies must be vigilant. We have to be one in our patrols. These pirates, they have no souls, I assure you. I am telling the military forces, finish them (pirates) off," Duterte said in his speech in Davao City.

"Once again, Indonesia and Malaysia, we have to band together. The world is changing including the economy. It could either go bad or very bad or where it could go well. But we have to go to a bad level and I hope we can survive it," he added.

Duterte renewed the call amid security concerns in the regional waters wherein piracy and kidnap-for-ransom activities continue to thrive.

Rescue but no ransom

By Kristina Maralit and Elmer N. Manuel

The Palace stood firm on a "no ransom policy" even as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) threatened to behead its Malaysian and Indonesian hostages abducted in Mindanao last December even as the government undertakes earnest rescue efforts.

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The ASG continues to be on the run as a result of the order of the President to the military to crush them

From page 1

"To give in to demands of terrorists and other lawless groups would embolden them to engage in more abductions that would allow them to conduct extremist and other criminal activities as they could buy more arms and weapons," presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said in a statement.

The official was reacting to an online video posted last 14 February by the bandits threatening to execute their captives.

In the said video, two of the hostages were being held at knife-point with their faces covered. One of them was shown appealing to Indonesian President Joko Widodo for help.

According to various reports, the two hostages seen in the video were believed to be Indonesians Ileri Ardiansyah, 19, and Hariadin, 46.

Panelo gave an assurance the government's security forces are exerting efforts to track down the perpetrators and rescue their victims.

Rescue bid ongoing

"We are doing our best to secure the release of hostages from the evil hands of the Abu Sayyaf Group," he stressed.

"The ASG continues to be on the run as a result of the order of the President

to the military to crush them. Our security forces are hunting them in the wild forests of Mindanao to unleash their might and blow them to kingdom come," the spokesman said.

Suppressing the terror group and rendering them helpless are one of President Duterte's main priorities.

He recently ordered the deployment of an entire division of the Philippine Army (PA) in Sulu to flush out the bandits from Mindanao.

Government forces have stepped up their offensive against the Abu Sayyaf as they aim to eradicate all of their suspected lairs in the region.

Earlier this month, the President had branded the ASG as a group that is "insane" with "no soul" and "made in hell."

Malaysian also captive

The two Indonesians were kidnapped together with Malaysian hostage Jari Abdulla, 24, from their Sandakan-based fishing trawler in eastern Sabah waters close to Tawi-Tawi on 5 December 2018, The Straits Times reported.

In the video, members of the Abu Sayyaf Group even spoke in Bahasa Malaysia while showing the Indonesian hostages. The Malaysian hostage was not with the duo.

The ASG has terrorized the Mindanao region and other areas with a trail of bombings, kidnappings and beheadings since the 1990s.

Authorities recently tagged the Islamic State-inspired extremist group in the twin bombings that tore through a Catholic cathedral in Jolo, Sulu on 27 January, killing 23 people and wounding some 100 others.

Terrorism underworld late bloomer

Among those killed was Isnilon Hapilon, a fierce Abu Sayyaf leader, who was the first ISIS-designated leader in the Philippines

Unlike many of his slain comrades, the touted new leader of the Islamic State group in the southern Philippines lacks the bravado, clan name or foreign training.

Not much is known about Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, but the attacks attributed to him heralding his rise are distinctly savage.

This includes deadly bombing, which authorities say, was a suicide attack by a foreign militant couple, blasted through a packed Roman Catholic cathedral in the middle of a Mass.

The 27 January attack killed 23 people and wounded about 100 others on southern Jolo Island.

Another suspected suicide bombing on nearby Basilan Island last July that officials said he masterminded put Sawadjaan in the crosshairs of the US-led global campaign

against terrorism.

Now in his 60s, Sawadjaan is a late bloomer in the terrorism underworld.

His turn at the helm came after dozens of commanders, some initially aligned with the al-Qaida movement and later with ISIS, were killed or captured in decades of military offensives.

The biggest battle loss came in 2017 when several foreign and local commanders were killed as troops quelled a five-month siege by hundreds of militants in southern Marawi City.

Among those killed was Isnilon Hapilon, a fierce Abu Sayyaf leader, who was the first ISIS-designated leader in the Philippines.

A recent US Department of Defense report to Congress said without elaborating it believed Sawadjaan was the "acting emir," or leader, in the



Ragtag The bandit group Abu Sayyaf is said to have a new leader in the person of virtually unknown Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, but the recent attacks attributed to him were distinctly savage.

FILE PHOTO

Philippines of the Islamic State group, also known by its acronym ISIS.

It added no actual leader is confirmed to have been designated by the main

ISIS command in the Middle East as of late last year.

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año, however, said intelligence indicated that Sawadjaan, a Jolo-based commander of the brutal Abu Sayyaf extremist group, was installed as ISIS chief in a ceremony last year.

Sawadjaan was not the well-connected and media savvy strategist foreign groups would normally ally with to expand their reach.

His rise shows how ISIS would latch on desperately to any militant who could provide a sanctuary and armed fighters as its last strongholds crumble in Syria, Año said.

"For the ISIS to perpetuate their terror actions, they need a base, they need people. That's the role of Sawadjaan," Año told the Associated Press in an interview. **AP**

Gov't exerting best effort to secure release of 3 foreign ASG captives

The government is exerting its best effort to ensure the safe release of the foreign hostages – a Malaysian and two Indonesian fishermen – held by the Abu Sayyaf Group without paying ransom, Malacañang said yesterday.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo explained that the government would not pay any ransom since it would only embolden the group to acquire weapons and commit atrocities.

"We are doing our best to secure the release of hostages from the evil hands of the Abu Sayyaf Group but we stand firm on our no ransom policy," Panelo said.

"To give in to the demands of terrorists and other lawless groups would embolden them to engage in more abductions that would allow them to conduct extremist and other criminal activities as they could buy more arms and weapons," he added.

Panelo said President Duterte has earlier directed government troops to "crush" the ASG, notorious for its kidnap-for-ransom and killings in the South.

"The ASG continues to be on the run as a result of the order of the President to the military to crush them. Our security forces are hunting them in the wild forests of Mindanao to unleash their might and blow them to kingdom come," Panelo said.

The ASG has reportedly threatened to behead the hostages if ransom is not paid for their release. A video showing an Indonesian hostage appealing to his government to secure his freedom was reportedly surfaced on social media.

The fishermen were reportedly abducted by the Abu Sayyaf militants while on fishing expedition in eastern Sabah waters last December. **(Genalyn Kabiling)** 2

'No ransom' sa Abu Sayyaf - Palasyo

Nanindigan ang Malacañang na mananatili ang "no ransom" policy sa binihag na Malaysian at 2 Indonesian ng Abu Sayyaf Group.

Tiniyak din ng Palasyo na sinisikap ng gobyerno na mapalaya ang mga bihag.

"We are doing our best to secure the release of hostages (one Malaysian and two Indonesians) from the evil hands of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) but we stand firm on our no ransom policy," pahayag ni Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo.

Ito'y matapos magbanta ang ASG na pupugutan nila ng ulo ang mga bihag nito kapag

hindi nagbayad ng ransom kapalit ng kalayaan ng mga dayuhang mangingisda.

Sa lumabas na video sa Facebook noong Pebrero 14 ng isang nagpakilalang Kim Huddin, isang bihag na Indonesian ng Abu na may nakatutok na patalim sa kanyang leeg ang nagmamakaawa kay Indonesian President Joko Widodo gayundin sa Indonesian negotiator na tulongan siyang mapalaya mula sa Abu Sayyaf.

Nakilala ang 2 Indonesian fishermen na sina Heri Ardiansyah, 19, at Hariadin, 45 habang ang Malaysian ay si Jari Abdulla, 24, na nakabase

sa Sandakan.

Dinukot ang mga biktima habang nangingisda sa Sabah waters malapit sa Tawi-Tawi noong Disyembre 5.

"To give in to the demands of terrorists and other lawless groups would embolden them to engage in more abductions that would allow them to conduct extremist and other criminal activities as they could buy more arms and weapons," sabi ni Panelo.

Magugunita na iniutos ni Pangulong Duterte sa AFP na durugin ang ASG matapos ang twin blast sa Jolo cathedral kung saan 21 katao ang nasawi. (Rudy Andal)

Año: Suicide bomber still lurks about

By Francisco Tuyay

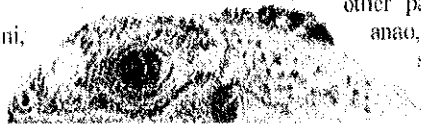
ANOTHER potential suicide bomber, a Yemeni, is currently in Mindanao, Interior Secretary Eduardo Año said Friday, and has been living in the country for over a year now along with other foreign terrorists.

Indonesian, Pakistani, Egyptian and Malaysian terrorists are also

in Basilan and Maguindanao apart from the Yemeni—who the secretary did not name—and other local anarchists, Año said in a UNTV report.

"The trained suicide bomber we are referring is a Yemeni national. There are foreign terrorists who are also living in other parts of Mindanao, but we cannot say that he is

Next page



Año:...

From A1

a suicide bomber because they are foreign tourists providing support and advice to the local Abu Sayyaf, except for this Arab-looking national inside the Sawadjaan camp," he added.

Año said the Department of the Interior and Local Government, which has control over the Philippine National Police, currently has no intelligence reports on any plans the Yemeni terrorist has.

Authorities continue to be on their guard against terrorist bombers after an Abu Sayyaf cell led by Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan bombed the Catholic cathedral in Jolo, Sulu during a Mass last Jan. 27, killing 23 and injuring over 100.

The twin blasts prompted President Rodrigo Duterte to call an all-out war against the Abu Sayyaf, the communist New People's Army, and other terrorist groups in the country.

Meanwhile, government troops on Friday launched wide-scale search and rescue operations to save three foreign hostages from being beheaded by the Abu Sayyaf.

A video posted online by the ASG, showed the hostages—believed to be Indonesians Heri Adiansyah, 19 and Hariadin, 45—blindfolded and with their hands tied behind their back, under guard by armed bandits.

One bandit held a bolo to Hariadin's neck as he made an emotional appeal to Indonesian President Joko Widodo to save them. The other hostage, Malaysian Jari Abdullah, 24, was not shown in the video.

The video was posted online after the bandits contacted Jari's wife, who made a futile appeal to the Malaysian government.

The ASG demanded an undetermined amount for their ransom.

Duterte on Friday said he would appeal to Moro National Liberation Front chair Nur Misuari to negotiate with the Abu Sayyaf to end the hostageing.

"I would appeal to Nur Misuari to stop it. And tell the Abu Sayyaf that, 'Look we're talking. Don't make it hard for us to seek peace in our land,'" the President said in a chance interview with Palace reporters.

A spokesman for the Armed Forces of the Philippines, however, rejected any talks with the bandits.

"We never negotiate with the terrorists or kidnappers," said AFP Public Affairs chief Col. Noel Detoyato. "We will just continue with our ongoing combat operations," he said.

The Abu Sayyaf are still holding eight hostages including the two Indonesians and the Malaysian, Netherlands bird watcher Ewol Horn and four others.

The Palace said it is doing all it can to guarantee the safe release of the hostages.

The three were in their Sandakan-based fishing boats in eastern Sabah waters, which is near Tawi-Tawi, when the ASG abducted them.

"We are doing our best to secure the release of hostages from the evil hands of the ASG, but we stand firm on our no ransom policy," Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo said in a statement.

"To give in to the demands of terrorists and other lawless groups would embolden them to engage in more abductions that would allow them to conduct extremist and other criminal activities as they could buy more arms and weapons," he added.

According to the Palace official, the ASG "continues to be on the run" after President Duterte declared an "all-out war" against the them, ordering the country's armed forces to pulverize the terrorist group.

"Our security forces are hunting them in the wild forests of Mindanao to unleash their might and blow them to kingdom come," Panelo said.

On Wednesday, the President urged Indonesia and Malaysia to work together with the country in combating crime across the seas.

Commander Bravo joins BARMM transition team

COTABATO CITY: Public officials have found acceptable the inclusion of the feared warrior of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Abdullah Macapaar or Commander Bravo, as one of 80 members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA).

Al-Hajj Murad Ibrahim, MILF chairman and in-coming chief minister of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), announced that Macapaar was among the 41 members the MILF endorsed for the incoming BTA.

The National Bureau of Investigation had reportedly cleared Macapaar of involvement in any criminal case that could be a legal ground for President Rodrigo Duterte not to appoint him as BTA member.

Maguindanao Gov. Esmel Mangudadatu, also a strong supporter of the peace efforts of Malacañang and the MILF, said he was in favor of Macapaar's participation in governance after he fought the government for more than three decades.

Mangudadatu said Duterte and the MILF's top leadership core must have agreed bilaterally to Macapaar's inclusion in the BTA.

"President Duterte knows best. We believe in his sincerity in resolving the Moro issue. We believe in his propensity to address concerns and issues regarding the peace process," he said.

"Commander Bravo now wants to get involved in governance as the better means of addressing the problems besetting the Bangsamoro homeland. What is



Abdullah Macapaar alias Commander Bravo

wrong with that? We should be happy that from being a warrior he would be working in the BTA as statesman," Mangudadatu added.

Macapaar, a Maranao, and radical cleric Ameril Ombra Kato, a Maguindanaon, led bloody attacks in the provinces of Lanao del Norte and in North Cota-

bato, after the Supreme Court declared as unconstitutional the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain in 2008 that Malacañang and the MILF crafted the year before.

The document was the supposed basis for the creation of a Bangsamoro political entity.

But the Supreme Court threw out the draft agreement based on petitions by various groups and political leaders, citing the unconstitutionality of many of its provisions.

Kato, whom the MILF central committee censured for leading a mutiny in protest of the Supreme Court's decision, bled in 2009 and organized the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) a year later.

The BIFF, blamed for all the fatal bombings since, has declared allegiance to the Islamic State (IS).

The peace talks between the government and the MILF, which started on Jan. 7, 1997, culminated with the crafting on March 27, 2014 of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB).

The CAB was the basis for the passage of the Republic Act 11054, or the "Bangsamoro Organic Law" (BOL), the charter of BARMM.

The BOL will pave the way for the replacement of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) with the MILF-led BARMM.

The BTA, which Ibrahim will lead as chief minister, will manage the transfer of powers from ARMM to BARMM.

The BTA shall be comprised of 41 representatives from the MILF, among them Macapaar, and 39 members from the government.

Similarly, outgoing ARMM regional governor Mujiv Hataman, said there was nothing wrong with Macapaar being included in the BTA, saying that the MILF leadership functions as a collegial body.

JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL

Murad takes oath as head of Bangsamoro Region

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

MURAD Ebrahim, chairman of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), took his oath as interim chief minister of the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) on Friday before President Rodrigo Duterte.

The MILF signed a peace treaty with the Philippine government in 2014. Murad and his transition body will form a cabinet, as well as pass laws until the temporary

arrangement ends with the election of a regional parliament in May 2022.

The President called on the Bangsamoro Transition Authority

(BTA) to work on the decommissioning of weapons and combatants of the MILF to ensure a smooth transition towards the creation of a new government entity.

"I trust that you will oversee the transition period to the best of your abilities, especially in the decommissioning of firearms and former combatants," the President said in his speech.

Among the members of the 80-man BTA is Abdullah Macapaar, alias Commander Bravo, a rogue MILF commander who raided communities in North Cotabato and Lanao del Norte in 2008.

after the Supreme Court halted the signing of an ancestral domain agreement.

The BTA is composed of 41 representatives from the MILF and 39 others from the government. Duterte said the establishment of the new government entity in Mindanao was "not just the fulfillment of a campaign promise, it will be the realization of our collective desire."

"It will be the realization of all our dreams and end long decades of armed struggle that hindered the growth of the region and

I also consider my home," the President said.

"The road to peace may be long and rough, but I am glad that we have finally reached its endpoint. My only hope is that we put to rest the bitter memories of the past so that we can build a new region that is bound, not by ethnic or religious affiliation, but by a common aspiration for peaceful coexistence among our fellow Filipinos," he added.

"Your courage and determination will never be put to waste. I guarantee that you and this administration will use all the resources within its disposal to ensure better

governance and inclusive political empowerment in this new Bangsamoro region," he added.

Duterte also challenged the BTA members to "always embody the dreams and aspirations of the great men and women who came before you and fought for the recognition of your right to determine your future."

"As you lead this new region towards a brighter tomorrow, I ask you never to waver in your commitment to build an institution that is founded on the rule of law, the promotion of good governance, and the defense [of] our most cherished democratic values," he said.

Duterte expressed hope that the new autonomous region would be a place of peaceful coexistence among Muslims, Christians and Lumad.

"Always work for the best interest and welfare, not only of the Bangsamoro people, but every Filipino who live in that region," he said. *AS2*

MURAD HEADS BANGSAMORO TRANSITION BODY

By Nat Mariano

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte on Friday said the country had reached its "endpoint" with the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law and the creation of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority.

An "overwhelmingly proud" Duterte made the comment as he announced the appointment of Moro Islamic Liberation Front chair Al Haj Murad Ebrahim as the interim Chief Minister of the BTA, urging the 80-member council to

"never waver" in building an institution founded on the rule of law.

In his speech after the oath-taking ceremony of the members of the BTA, the President formalized Murad's appointment, hoping that the 80-member BTA would lead the newly-created BARMM towards "a brighter tomorrow."

"I am pleased to announce the appointment of MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim as Interim Chief Minister of the BTA," Duterte said in his speech.

Next page

Murad...

From A1

The President also announced the certification from the Commission on Elections declaring the ratification of the Organic Act for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

"I am elated to accept the certification from COMELEC declaring the ratification of the Organic Act for the BARMM and the expansion of its territory to include Cotabato City and 63 barangays from the Province of North Cotabato," he added.

According to the President, the establishment of the BARMM was the realization of the government and the MILF's collective desire.

"It will be the realization of all our dreams [to] end long decades of armed struggle that hindered the growth of the region and I also consider my home," he said.

"[It will] enable us to create an environment that will be conducive to the peaceful coexistence between the Muslims, Christians, Lumads, and all tribes of this planet

as indigenous peoples and settlers who will consider Mindanao as their home."

As the government and the newly-formed BTA welcomed a new era of peace and development in the war-torn region, Duterte then posed a challenge to the members of the BTA.

"I pose this challenge to the members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority: Always embody the dreams and aspirations of the great men and women who came before you and fought for the recognition of your right to determine your future," he said.

"I ask you never to waver in your commitment to building an institution that is founded on the rule of law, the promotion of good governance, and the defense [of] our most cherished democratic values," he continued.

The President also reminded them to always work for the "best interest and welfare" of the people, regardless of ethnicity and religion.

"I trust that you will oversee the transition period to the best of your abilities, especially in the decommissioning of firearms and former combatants," Duterte said.

"My only hope is that we put to rest the bitter memories of the past so that we can build a new region that is bound, not by ethnic or religious affiliation, but by a common aspiration for peaceful coexistence among our fellow Filipinos," he said, asking them to "put to rest" the bitter memories of the past.

With the creation of the BTA, the President said he would like to see an end of the violence that has rocked the war-torn region, costing the lives of many for nothing.

Duterte then assured the BTA, which will be an interim government of the BARMM until 2022, that he will abide by the law for the remaining years of his presidency.

"I will always do what the law says, what is yours, and what extent that we can give you, not only comfort but happiness to the Muslims of Mindanao," he said.

"Your courage and determination will never be put to waste. I guarantee that you and this administration will use all the resources within its disposal to ensure better governance and inclusive political empowerment in this new Bangsamoro region," he added.

'Let old wounds heal'

Interim body runs Bangsamoro

This administration will use all its resources to ensure better governance and inclusive political empowerment

By Kristina Maralit

With the hope of healing the "wounds of the past," President Rodrigo Duterte led yesterday the ceremonial confirmation of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) plebiscite results in Malacañang and with it the forming of the interim government of the new autonomous region. **Turn to page 2**

We share your dreams and aspirations. We share all. But most of all, we would like to see an end to the violence that has rocked Mindanao

From page 1

Commission on Elections (Comelec) Chairman Sheriff Abas formally turned over to the Chief Executive the official results of the two plebiscites held last 21 January and 6 February that ratified Republic Act (RA) 11054.

"I guarantee that this administration will use all its resources to ensure better governance and inclusive political empowerment in this new Bangsamoro region," Mr. Duterte said in his speech during the ceremony.

"We share your dreams and aspirations. We share all. But most of all, we would like to see an end to the violence that has rocked Mindanao and has cost so many lives for

nothing. For after all, we go to war and shoot each other, counting our victories, not by the progress or development of the place but by the dead bodies that were thrown around during the violent years," he added.

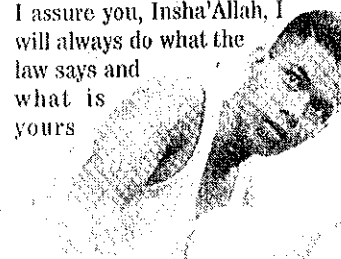
BTA in place

The Chief Executive also administered the oath of office to members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA).

Mr. Duterte called on the BTA to "work for the best interest and welfare" not just of the Bangsamoro people but also of "every Filipino who lives in that region."

He also called on the BTA to do its best for the decommissioning of firearms of its former combatants.

"If there is any problem at all or in the future, let me assure you that for the remaining years of my work as a government work here, here in this building, I assure you, Insha'Allah, I will always do what the law says and what is yours



and what to – to what extent that we can give you, not only comfort but happiness to the Muslims of Mindanao," the President said.

New beginning

As an interim government of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the BTA will exercise governance in the region for three years, coinciding with the remainder of the President's term.

We go to war and shoot each other, counting our victories, not by the progress or development of the place but by the dead bodies.

During the transition period, the BTA shall exercise both executive and legislative powers, in connection with the preparation and creation of mechanisms for the establishment of the Bangsamoro government.

About 12,000 combatants with thousands of firearms are to be demobilized starting this year under the peace deal.

Thousands of other guerrillas would disarm if agreements under the deal would be followed, including providing the insurgents with livelihood to help them return to normal life.

IS patiently waits

About 150,000 people have died in the conflict over several decades and stunted development in the resource-rich region that is the country's poorest. Duterte promised

adequate resources, a daunting problem in the past.

The Philippine and Western governments and the guerrillas see an effective Muslim autonomy as an antidote to nearly half a century of Muslim secessionist violence which the Islamic State (IS) group could exploit to gain a foothold.

"The dream that we have fought for is now happening and there's no more reason for us to carry our guns and continue the war," rebel forces spokesman Von Al Haq told The Associated Press in an interview ahead of the ceremony.

Several commanders long wanted for deadly attacks were given safety passes to be able to travel to Manila and join the ceremony, including Abdullah Macapaar, who uses the nom de guerre Commander Bravo, Al Haq said.

Bravo surfaces

Known for his fiery rhetoric while wearing his camouflage uniform and brandishing his assault rifle and grenades, Macapaar will be one of the 41 regional administrators from the Muslim rebel front.

Duterte would pick his representatives to fill the rest of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority which will also act as a regional parliament with Murad as the chief minister until regular officials are elected in 2022.

Members of another Muslim rebel group, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) which signed a 1996 autonomy deal that has largely been seen as a failure, would also be given seats in the autonomous government.

Disgruntled fighters of the

MNLF broke off and formed new armed groups, including the notorious Abu Sayyaf, which turned to terrorism and banditry after losing its commanders early in battle. The Abu Sayyaf has been blacklisted by the United States as a terrorist organization and has been suspected of staging a 27 January suicide bombing attack that killed 23, mostly churchgoers in a Roman Catholic cathedral on southern Jolo island.

BTA should "work for the best interest and welfare" not just of the Bangsamoro people but also of "every Filipino who lives in that region."

"We have already seen the pitfalls," Al Haq said, acknowledging that the violence would not stop overnight because of the presence of the Abu Sayyaf and other armed groups, some linked to the Islamic State group. "It's a very difficult and challenging process."

Sidney Jones, a Jakarta-based analyst for the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, said three of the biggest challenges will be finding a meaningful role for ex-combatants, avoiding a sense of entitlement that leads to corruption and "staying united in a way that can finally break the power clan politics in Muslim Mindanao."

Under the peace deal brokered by Malaysia, the rebels gave up their goal of a separate state in exchange for broader autonomy. The 40,000 fighters and at least 7,000 firearms that Murad's group has declared would be demobilized in three phases depending on progress in the agreement's enforcement.

Chief rebel now minister

Former Muslim rebels have secured top positions in the newly formed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) chairman Al Hajj Murad Ebrahim was sworn in yesterday by President Rodrigo Duterte as interim Chief Minister of the BARMM.

"I am also pleased to announce

the appointment of MILF chairman Al Hajj Murad Ebrahim as interim Chief Minister of the BTA (Bangsamoro Transition Authority)," said Mr. Duterte in his speech after the oath-taking.

Murad will lead the 80-member BTA, which will govern the five-province Bangsamoro region until 2022, when the regular members of the Bangsamoro Parliament are to be elected.

However, Mr. Duterte said he has yet to choose Murad's deputy despite the complete slate in the BTA.

"We begin another chapter in our quest for lasting peace in our homeland as members of the BTA," Murad said in his address. "We have fought, sacrificed and struggled for a government that would be reflective of our system of life and a governance that is

suitable and acceptable to the Bangsamoro."

He added the BTA "must make that government work, one that is promotive, responsive and protective of the general welfare of the Bangsamoro, indigenous peoples and settler communities."

Murad said the overwhelming

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majority who have voted "Yes" in the recent plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) had "set the highest expectations for us."

"They deserve no less than a government that can live up to those expectations," he said.

He added for all the milestone that the Bangsamoro pursuit had attained, thus far, "we thank the countless men and women who have been instrumental in the realization of the new political entity called the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), most especially to President Rodrigo Duterte who profoundly understands the Bangsamoro problem and had made possible the solution to it."

Murad's appointment was anticipated being the head of the Muslim group that had negotiated peace agreements with the government which eventually led to the BOL.

MILF takes rein

Under the BOL, the MILF is tasked to lead the BARMM in its critical transition period from 2019 to 2022 when the new region will elect its leaders for the first time.

The BARMM was created after the ratification of the BOL which was formerly called the Bangsamoro Basic Law during the previous regime and was the result of a peace agreement with the secessionist MILF.

A two-round plebiscite held late January and early February affirmed the new region that will make up Bangsamoro which are the provinces of Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi as well as Marawi City, Lamitan City, Cotabato City and 63 villages in North Cotabato.

The incumbent elected officials of the now defunct Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, which the BARMM replaced, will also be part of the BTA until 30 June 2019 or until their term ends.

Kristina Maralit

80-member ng Bangsamoro gov't nanumpa kay Digong

Pinangunahan kahapon ni Pangulong Duterte ang oath-taking ceremony at ceremonial confirmation ng 80-member na bubuo ng Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA).

Inaasahan namang ia-appoint ng Pangulo si MILF Chairman Al Hadj Murad Ebrahim bilang interim chief minister ng Bangsamoro gov't.

Batay sa Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), automatic na magiging miyembro ng BTA ang mga kasalukuyang opisyal ng Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) hanggang sa mapaso ang kanilang termino sa June 30, 2019.

Ang BTA ang magsisilbing interim government para sa Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) hanggang sa pagsapit ng eleksyon sa taong 2022. (Rudy Andal)

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EDITORIAL

Children as
'zones of peace'

Even as legislators push for the lowering of the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 15 to 9 years old (later raised to 12), the country is winning plaudits for the passage last month of Republic Act No. 11188, known as the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict law.

The new law declares children as "zones of peace," and is aimed at protecting children in situations of armed conflict from all forms of abuse and violence. It also mandates the prosecution of persons or groups using children as fighters, spies, forced laborers and couriers, and other roles not suited to their age and that put them in danger or harm.

Unicef, the United Nations children's agency, has joined other organizations and agencies in lauding the passage of the law. It cited a report published by the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in 2018 that revealed a "significant increase" in the number of grave violations against children caught in the crossfire between government forces and other armed groups.

The report, covering incidents occurring in 2017 in the country, documented 30 cases of recruitment and use of children by armed groups (a large number of which were linked to the Maute group), the detention of 12 children for their alleged association with armed groups, 33 verified cases of killing and maiming, three cases of rape in the context of the Marawi siege, 60 attacks on schools and hospitals (a substantial increase from 12 recorded cases in 2016), and five incidents of abduction.

The new law prohibits and punishes the killing, torture, intentional maiming, rape, abduction, recruitment of children into government armed forces and other armed groups, hamletting, food blockade, arbitrary detention, and denial of humanitarian access. Covered by this law are minors below 18 years of age, with possible penalties against violators reaching up to life imprisonment and a fine amounting to P5 million.

To be sure, efforts to protect child soldiers and children caught in the maelstrom of war have been undertaken. In 2017, Unicef and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) completed an action plan to end recruitment and use of children, with 1,869 children disengaged from the MILF's armed forces. Unicef continues to follow up the situation of these children, as well as that of their siblings, by making family visits and facilitating their access to essential services.

"The passage of this law is timely, especially since we are celebrating the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the most widely ratified treaty in the world," says Unicef Philippines representative Lotta Sylwander. "Children are innocent, they should not be in any way used as combatants and helpers, or become collateral damage."

The passage of the law brings the Philippines in compliance with international obligations, including the UN CRC, particularly the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and various UN Security Council resolutions related to children affected by armed conflict.

Also, worth celebrating are the progressive and gender-sensitive provisions in the law, including guarantees of access to education of girls even in situations of armed conflict, as well as access to reproductive health services.

Addressing a gathering of journalists some years back, MILF chair Murad Ibrahim pointed to his favorite granddaughter, who was frolicking amid the "serious" proceedings. "I was a fighter for the Moro cause at a very young age," Murad said with a rueful tone, "and so were my own sons, including her father. It is my dream that she will come of age without having to repeat our family history."

Together with the MILF chair, all Filipinos must share in the prayer for peace, a peace that will bless all children with childhoods free from harm. And, yes, including the children being targeted by the government in its relentless, ruthless and mindless campaign against children trapped in the "war" against drugs and criminality.

HOTSPOT

Cardema's problem



By TONYO CRUZ

THE besieged chair of the National Youth Commission had it coming.

As one politician notes, the furor he caused revealed his utter lack of qualification for the office he was appointed to.

NYC chair Ronald Cardema's official profile reveals as much.

Cardema's most interesting claim to fame, for instance, could be winning a national Quiz Bee where he bested 76 participants. Yes, folks, he included that in his official profile.

But seriously, Cardema's official profile could be summarized as follows:

High School Corps Commander of Maquiling School in Los Baños, Laguna; ROTC Class President in the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) ROTC Unit; UP Centennial ROTC Corps Commander in the University of the Philippines Diliman; and Supreme Commander (President) of the UP Vanguard Fraternity.

Cardema also claims to have been a "political affairs officer in the House of Representatives," without specifying which particular representative office. Also "political

consultant to 17 members of the Philippine Congress," again without mentioning their names. (The Bureau of Internal Revenue should check the taxes he paid, and the lawmakers too if he helped rivals at the same time.)

Cardema said he was a "consultant" in both the National Security Council and the Office of the President. In what specific capacities, and who contracted his services, we do not know. On what basis he was recruited as consultant, we also have to ask the NSC and the OP.

Perhaps Cardema's most noteworthy qualification that landed him this plum post as NYC chair, with a rank of assistant secretary, is this: National Chair of Duterte Youth, and Secretary-General for Luzon of a certain "Tapang & Malasakit Alliance."

Cardema also said that he is a Philippine Army reservist.

That's it. It is a thin, lackluster resume. But that's the summary of his profile, which for sure any younger person could beat in terms of personal and career achievements. As you may have noticed, Cardema didn't even mention his educational qualifications like any degrees earned or honors received, if any.

Neither did Cardema mention that he was actually a cadet of the Philippine Military Academy. Why he was discharged from the PMA, let's leave it to him or the PMA to disclose. He should disclose it, in the interest of the public he is sworn to serve and from whose tax money he gets his salary and allowances as assistant secretary.

What kind of message does President Duterte send to young people and the nation by appointing and keeping Cardema as NYC chair? Is Cardema the "best and brightest" he could find in the ranks of his supporters that could be tapped for the NYC post? It is truly disappointing, and a gross disservice to the public who expect — and deserve — nothing less than excellence from government.

There can be no better proof of Cardema's utter lack of qualification for public office than his recommendation to President Duterte that state scholarships be removed from and denied to student rallyists, activists, and those he sees as supporters or members of the CPP-NPA-NDF.

The recommendation violates rights to due process, equal protection, free speech, free association, and — of course — education. He

sees education as nothing more than a gift to be whimsically dispensed by his benevolent principal. He couldn't be more wrong. Administration officials, senators, congressmen, student organizations and the media have all rightly denounced and rejected his suggestion.

Cardema has tried to control the damage by saying he only wants to boot out those who have joined the CPP-NPA-NDF. But it is downright stupid to expect rebels to be enrolled in state colleges and universities. It is simply impossible. As we could glean from the Philippine Revolution Web Central, rebellion is a full-time career path, so to speak. They have no time to study in any of our SUCs. Heck, the rebels set up their own schools in guerrilla fronts and rebel territories, in response to the demand of their base and with funding from revolutionary taxation.

Cardema is actually targeting — without evidence and due process as to the claims that they are communist or communist-influenced — certain youth and student organizations and alliances. These are entirely operating above-ground and often duly-accredited by the schools and the government. Perhaps included in Cardema's list are student councils and student publications, and judging from his last Senate appearance, even the duly-elected youth partylist representation in Congress.

Cardema's problem is that these same organizations and alliances are popular among the youth. They form the backbone of the youth protests against tyranny. He is insulting students who have joined the protests by implying

that they have been had by the communists, that they cannot think for themselves, and that mere association with Reds who happen to be their friends and leaders is an offense.

By tagging these student organizations and alliances as enemies of Duterte, Cardema only raises their prestige in the eyes of students and young people sick and tired of corruption, cruelty, brutality, and rising tyranny.

For between Duterte Youth and Anakbayan, chances are any independent-minded, critical, and civic-minded Filipino would side with Anakbayan. Between an expelled PMA cadet-turned-partisan bureaucrat and the first UP Visayas summa cum laude, our people would trust the "iskolár ng bayan" who graduated with honors and immediately joined the mass movement.

While many agree that Cardema should resign, there's no indication he has any shred of delicadeza to make him do so.

Meanwhile, the more he opens his mouth and the longer he stays on at the NYC, the more he pushes students and young Filipinos to rallies and to activism. He has become yet another negative example on student leadership. He has ironically become a most effective recruiter for the very same student movement he seeks to destroy. ||

I could just imagine Anakbayan releasing a recruitment poster: "Reject Duterte and Cardema. Embrace the movement."

23

February 2019

The Manila Times

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Discussion now should be about insurgency's end

First
word

SAY :
SING
that he is
"not that



OBSERVER

**YEN
MAKABENTA**

cruel," President Rodrigo Duterte on Tuesday ordered the police and the military to allow the return home of National Democratic Front (NDF) chief negotiator Fidel Agcaoili, and opened the door for talks with the communist insurgents. **Yen Makabenta A4**

Discussion now should be about insurgency's end

Duterte said: "We're on a waiting period about the appropriate time to talk about peace. I am not that cruel."

The change in tone is a tonic for the CPP because the news from everywhere these days is dolorous for communists around the world.

Desperation haunts the left's vision of a new world.

What is left for the CPP-NPA-NDF to do?

Signs of the times

Consider the signs of the times:

1. In Cuba, on the 60th year of the triumph of the Cuban revolution, the government has dropped the word "communism" from the country's new constitution.

2. In France, *L'Humanité*, the 115-year-old communist daily, is on the brink of being placed on receivership. The paper's closure could be at hand.

3. In Vietnam, the communist rulers will host on February 27 and 28 the second summit meeting between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un.

4. In China, the Chinese economy is living through a major comedown from its glory days. Xi Jinping is moving close to a trade deal with the US to avert a disastrous trade war.

5. A respected Oxford University scholar has written that there are now only five remaining communist countries in the world, all of which do not follow the principles of Karl Marx and his *Communist Manifesto*.

Cuba's changing communist narrative

Author Alvaro Vargas Llosa, a senior fellow at the Independent Institute, has posted online a grim narrative of Cuba's communism, as the country marked the 60th year of the Cuban revolution. He wrote:

"Communism killed any possibility of prosperity. the Revo-

lution's 'ultima ratio' [became] the Cold War and Cuba's role in the planetary struggle between socialism and capitalism — a way to justify Cuba becoming a Soviet colony....

"The end of the Soviet subsidy — several billion dollars a year — uncovered the truth about Cuba's miserable economy.

"Then came Hugo Chavez's oil subsidy... Cuba's dependence on Venezuela was concealed under rhetoric that depicted Castro as the inspiration of Venezuela's 21st-century socialism....

"Venezuela's subsidy provided an opportunity for Cuba to export 'professional services,' sending thousands of doctors, nurses, and teachers overseas in exchange for dollars. This was close to slavery since the host country would pay the salaries to the Cuban government in dollars and the Castro regime would pay the doctors and teachers a tiny fraction of the money...in Cuban pesos!...

"When Fidel Castro fell ill in 2006 the narrative evolved. His brother Raul, a China admirer, allowed more Cubans to engage in small, closely controlled entrepreneurial activities and invited new foreign capital to partner with the state.

"Cuba's new constitution dropped the word 'communism,' but retained the one-party state....

"The well-respected economist Carmelo Mesa-Lago says the private sector represents no more than 7 percent of GDP in Cuba. The country is severely undercapitalized (gross capital formation is one half of Latin America's average); and agricultural and industrial production shrank in the last decade....

"Sixty years on, Cuba has nothing but misery to show for itself — and an extraordinary ability to delude itself and many others."

L'Humanité on the ropes

Joseph Schmid of Agence France

Presse reported the sad news about *L'Humanité* as follows:

"*L'Humanité* newspaper is facing a financing crunch that could see it placed in receivership...The clock may be ticking for the 115-year-old paper of record of diehard leftists.

"After years of operating at a loss despite millions of euros of public aid, a court outside Paris will decide if *L'Humanité* can keep printing while being placed in receivership.

"Even if this best-case scenario gives the paper some breathing room, its journalists face working under a court-appointed manager who will be watching every euro—an ignominious turn of events for a paper that has spent more than a century railing against bosses.

"*L'Huma*, as it's widely called, has already appealed for donations, the latest in a string of fundraising campaigns that periodically bring in much-needed millions to keep the presses rolling.

"But with daily circulation down to around 40,000 copies — analysts say around 30,000 are actually sold — the paper now faces the daunting prospect of finding a viable business model.

"French presidents from Francois Mitterrand to Francois Hollande have traditionally stepped in to erase debts or inject cash.

"Last week France's Communist Party, facing its own financing squeeze after dismal 2017 election results, announced it would no longer print its weekly four-page supplement in the paper."

Five remaining communist countries

According to Robert Service, Oxford University scholar, the last five remaining communist countries in the world are:

1. People's Republic of China
2. Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)
3. Socialist Republic of Vietnam

4. Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos)

5. Republic of Cuba

While China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos and Cuba officially claim to be communist states, the country that adheres most strictly to communist principles, according to Service, is North Korea. He should know, he wrote the book on it — *Comrades! A History of World Communism*.

Today, he says, Karl Marx would hardly recognize his manifesto.

Communism was meant to spread around the world. But, says Service, "when the Chinese go to Africa, they aren't taking communism. They are taking the market economy in one of its wildest forms."

"History is a sort of tangled web of contradictions. Who would've thought, 30 years ago, that we'd only be talking about five states that have any official adherence to communism — it's all happened so very, very quickly," Service said.

Terminating the insurgency

It's no wonder that Filipino communists today are wondering whether they should slog on with their 50-year-old armed struggle against the Philippine government.

As with other communist movements in the world, many in the ranks are questioning whether it's time to hang up the gloves. The thought has also danced in the minds of leaders like Fidel Agcaoili, who has come home and says he wants to talk.

Only Joma Sison, who is comfortably ensconced in the Netherlands and does not have to fight in the swamps, still talks of fighting on.

The narrative has changed.

It seems the only subject for negotiators to discuss now is the termination of the communist insurgency.

yenmakabenta@yahoo.com

EDITORIAL

Not a sterling example

IT TURNS out that the chairman of the National Youth Commission isn't such a great example to the youth.

This week, Ronald Cardema urged President Rodrigo Duterte to issue an executive order removing the government scholarships of all anti-government scholars.

Cardema's earlier statement on Tuesday also "reminded" the scholars that "the Filipino people formed the government to govern, to regulate, to discipline, to collect taxes and to allocate the Filipino people's funds into government scholarships and programs. Fighting the government means fighting the majority of the Filipino people and also not fulfilling their roles as the expected breadwinners who will uplift their families and as our hope in strengthening our country."

Later on, when the Palace and lawmakers alike rejected his notion, he qualified his statement, saying he referred only those scholars found to have taken up arms against the government. He said he only wanted the revocation

of the scholarships of "very very few" anti-government students who have joined or are supporting the New People's Army.

Cardema also later said in a television interview that dissent was a healthy element in any democracy.

Of course by this time he had enough time to think about how he should correct his earlier pronouncement, likely made in his eagerness to show loyalty to the powers-that-be. He is, after all, chairman of the party-list group Duterte Youth that is seeking a post in the coming polls; his wife is first nominee.

As head of the commission that is supposed to champion the interests of and empower the youth, Cardema cannot afford to be vague, confusing or ambiguous. What he says reflects not his sentiments but the government position with regard to the youth.

For example, discouraging

the youth from being critical of the government is outright wrong. It is, after all, not any one administration or politician who is enabling them to get an education.

Second, to be learned is to be critical of anything and everything that is heard. We do not succeed when we produce a generation of "yes" men and women who do not question the actions of their leaders. Questioning what they see and hear does not make young people automatically rebellious or anti-government. They do so always with what they think best serves the interest of the country and its people.

A bigger question is whether Cardema truly espouses the interest of the Filipino youth when the conflict of interest is so flagrant.

Then again, it is useless to point out that all this would be in violation of election laws. The Commission on Elections, a constitutional agency that is ideally independent of any branch of government, has shown itself to be only able to selectively implement the law. *AF*

ONLINE NEWS

23 FEBRUARY 2019

Army commander to public: 'Avoid spreading unverified information'

From the Philippine Information Agency (Feb 22, 2019):

COTABATO CITY – Army's 6th Infantry Division (6ID) Commander Major General Cirilito Sobejana has appealed to the public to refrain from spreading unverified information on social media following the recent twin explosion at the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Jolo, Sulu and the lobbing of grenade inside a mosque at Barangay Talon-Talon in Zamboanga City.

In his official statement, Sobejana said that with the very volatile situation, there are some individuals who are circulating messages in the social media threatening the public of more bombings triggering fear among the populace.

"I am appealing for sobriety and request everyone to stop from spreading unverified stories and reports that could aggravate the current situations in the affected areas," the commander said.

Sobejana said he had already directed all the units under his command to strictly heighten the alert level and secure all places of worship, public places, and areas of convergence.

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

"I urged everyone to be watchful and extra vigilant at all times. Peace and security is everybody's responsibility. Hence, report to authorities any security related issues for the safety of everyone," he added.

Sobejana said the Joint Task Force Central which he leads and the 6ID maintain its partnership with Local Government Units (LGU) to strengthen and ensure the safety and security of everyone.

"I should say that we are on top of the situation and we have enough forces to protect the people and secure the area," he said.

Sobejana also called on the public to be united and cooperate with authorities to resolve any looming security threat.

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

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DILG turns over 'reintegration assistance' to Army

From the Philippine Information Agency (Feb 22, 2019):

NEGROS OCCIDENTAL -- The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Provincial Office turned over P231,000 worth of reintegration assistance to the 62nd Infantry Battalion (62nd IB) and 3rd Civil-Military-Operations Battalion (CMOBn) of the Philippine Army.

The reintegration assistance is a component benefit of the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) of President Rodrigo Duterte by virtue of Administrative Order No. 10 – 2018 that centralizes all government efforts for the reintegration of former rebels.

According to a release from the 303rd Infantry Brigade, the P21,000 assistance will be provided to each of the 11 former rebels, of which seven surrendered to 62nd IB and four to the 3rd CMOBn.

The reintegration assistance will be in support to the receiving unit to which the rebels surrendered which will be spent on their daily subsistence or meals while in custody of the military unit as well as for other incidental expenses necessary for their reintegration like securing birth certificate, identification card, and mobility expenses.

Engr. Carmelo Orbista, DILG provincial director, turned over the checks to the military here represented by Colonel Benedict Arevalo, commander of 303rd Infantry Brigade; Lt. Col. Egberto Dacoscos, commanding officer of 62nd IB; and Major Uddie Villan, acting commanding officer of 3rd CMOBn.

"This shows the sincerity of the government to accept NPAs who want to return to the folds of the law and live normal lives," Arevalo said.

Other E-CLIP benefits include immediate assistance of P15,000; livelihood assistance of P50,000; firearms remuneration of P12,000 to P500,000; halfway house assistance; PhilHealth enrolment and medical assistance; education assistance; housing assistance; legal assistance; and healing and reconciliation initiatives.

Arevalo added that the Army strongly supports the E-CLIP initiative and welcome those who want to lay down their arms.

For inquiries about surrender, the 303rd Infantry Brigade can be reached through hotline numbers, 0956-328-2415 and 0947-5240587.

<https://pia.gov.ph>

Army expects hike in NPA surrenderees with E-CLIP implementation

From the Philippine Information Agency (Feb 22, 2019):

CAMP PERALTA, Jamindan, Capiz, Feb -- Army's 3rd Infantry Division commander Major General Dinoh Dolina is anticipating a snowball of Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) terrorist surrenderees in Panay and Negros Islands.

"The growing number of former NPAs in the region receiving reintegration assistance under the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) will encourage the remaining communist terrorists to return to the folds of the law and live normal lives," Dolina said.

Recently, 11 former NPAs in Negros Island who surrendered to the 62nd Infantry Battalion and 3rd Civil-Military Operations Battalion each received P21,000 worth of reintegration assistance from the Interior and local government of Negros Occidental.

In January 29 of this year, a former rebel from the municipality of Cuartero, Capiz who voluntarily surrendered to the government authorities also received a financial assistance amounting to P10,000 from the provincial government of Capiz.

"These E-CLIP beneficiaries are the living proofs of the government's sincerity in helping those who courageously abandoned the senseless and bloody armed struggle. This sincerity will erase the reluctance of the communist terrorists to give up their selfish fight," Dolina said.

Further, he reiterated his call to the remaining members of the CPP-NPA terrorists to lay down their arms and avail the E-CLIP for them to start a new and normal life together with their family. (Capt. Eduardo Precioso Jr./DPAO/PIA-Capiz)

<https://pia.gov.ph>

4 NPA 'amazons' surrender in Bukidnon

From the Philippine News Agency (Feb 22, 2019):

MANOLO FORTICH, Bukidnon -- Four women officers of the New People's Army (NPA) have surrendered to the Army's 1st Special Forces Battalion (SFBn) in Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon from January to the present.

In a statement Thursday, the Army's 4th Infantry Division (ID), identified the NPA surrenderers as Lorena Micabalo, 24, a political officer who surrendered on February 14; Gloria Jandaya, 63, a staff member of the NPA's regional urban committee who yielded on February 11; Glicería Balangiao, 34, a liaison staff of the NPA's regional urban committee and daughter of Gloria Jandaya, who surrendered on February 11; and Jackielyn Ann Elaco, 34, a finance officer and political instructor who surrendered on January 21.

According to the 4th ID, Elaco turned in assorted medical and dental kits, and medicines that she claimed were used to treat injured NPA members. She also surrendered cellphones and a tablet that are now undergoing "contents forensics and analysis."

The four were members of the NPA's sub-regional committee 4, North Central Mindanao regional command, whose task was to radicalize communities and recruit members to the rebel group, the 4th ID said.

Col. Edgardo de Leon, commander of the Army's 403rd Brigade, lauded Lt. Col. Sergio Macarandan, commander of 1st SFBn, for "gaining the trust of the people in the communities."

"The four ladies who surrendered are all victims of the CPP-NPA terrorists' exploitation. That is why they deserve to receive assistance from the government," de Leon said. CPP stands for the Communist Party of the Philippines.

"Their being among the marginalized sector of our society was exploited by CPP-NPA cadres who posed as 'poverty liberators' promising better living conditions, but in reality, brought them into the armed terrorist movement," he added.

Brig. Gen. Franco Nemesio Gacal, 4th ID commander, commended the troops "for painstakingly reaching out and convincing the four individuals to return to the fold of the law and enroll in the E-CLIP program."

Gacal was referring to the Enhanced Comprehensive Localized Integration Program (E-CLIP), the government's strategic flagship program to achieve its peace and development agenda.

"They (four surrenderers) were actually rescued by the soldiers and the civilians who acted as conduits. We thank our peace partners for believing, trusting, and joining our call for a united effort to foster peace in our communities," he added.

<http://www.pna.gov.ph>

Maute 'fundraiser' yields P6.8-M shabu in Lanao Sur

From the Philippine News Agency (Feb 22, 2019):



BUY-BUST. Operatives of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency–Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao account the illegal stuff seized from alleged big-time drug peddler Amarodin Bantog in Wao, Lanao del Sur on Thursday (Feb. 21). (Photo courtesy of PDEA-ARMM)

COTABATO CITY – An alleged fundraiser of the Maute terror organization was arrested by anti-narcotic operatives during an anti-drug sting operation in Wao, Lanao del Sur on Thursday and seized some PHP6.8-million worth of illegal drugs.

Juvenal Azurin, director of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) at the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, identified the suspect as Amarodin Allan Bantog who has four aliases based on identification cards seized from him that all bore his photo.

Bantog was believed to be peddling illegal drugs for the terrorist organization still fighting the government in Lanao del Sur.

Azurin said Bantog carries the following aliases: Amroden Skak Bantog, Said Macarampat Gandawali, Amroden Iskak Bantog, and Datu.

"Bantog, who is 34-years-old and resident of Barangay Bumiga, Malabang, Lanao Del Sur, is a PDEA high-value target," Azurin said.

Seized from the suspect was an eco-bag Bantog containing some 1,000 grams of shabu with an estimated market value of PHP6.8 million, the buy-bust money made of fake P1,000-peso bills in a plastic bag, shabu paraphernalia, assorted identification cards, and mobile phones.

Azurin said the shabu was repacked into small pieces of plastic packs while the supposed buy-bust money was placed in a black paper bag that contained one original PHP1,000 bill and 17 bundles of fake PHP1,000 bills which PDEA described as "boodle money."

A PDEA confidential agent acted as a buyer of the shabu and they agreed to have an exchange at 1:30 p.m. along Purok 4, Barangay Easter in Wao, particularly in front of the Western Pilot Elementary School.

Bantog is now at the PDEA-ARMM custodial facility in Cotabato City while charges of violation of Republic Act 9165 or the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 are being prepared against him.

<http://www.pna.gov.ph>

AFP backs sanctioning pols giving in to Reds' extortion

From the Philippine News Agency (Feb 22, 2019):

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) supports efforts to punish politicians and candidates found giving aid to communist terrorist groups who extort money and demand permit-to-campaign from them, an official said Friday.

"The AFP will always support the efforts of the DILG (Department of Interior and Local Government) in sanctioning the erring candidates and politicians who violate these specific instructions and the laws pertaining to giving aid and comfort to the enemy of the state," AFP Public Affairs Office chief, Col. Noel Detoyato said Friday.

"We will monitor and gather information and report same to the DILG. Our field units are given specific tasks to carry this out while performing security and combat operations against the armed group of the CPP-NPA-NDF (Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front)," he added in a message to the Philippine News Agency (PNA).

The NPA, the armed wing of the CPP, is listed as a terrorist organization by the United States government and European Union.

Last Thursday, DILG Secretary Eduardo Año revealed that 349 local and national government officials are supporting the communist rebels by giving in to the extortion demands and permit-to-campaign rackets of the NPA.

"We now have a watchlist, we know you. So if you are supporting communist rebels, in any way, you ascertain yourself as a supporter of terrorism and an enemy of the state, you establish yourself as an accomplice to their cause," he said.

<http://www.pna.gov.ph>

Gov't firm on no-ransom policy for Abu Sayyaf hostages

From the Philippine News Agency (Feb 22, 2019):

Malacañang on Friday stood firm on its policy not to give ransom money to the extremist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in exchange for the release of its hostages.

"To give in to the demands of terrorists and other lawless groups would embolden them to engage in more abductions that would allow them to conduct extremist and other criminal activities as they could buy more arms and weapons," Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo said in a statement.

Panelo said the government is doing its best to secure the release of the two Indonesian and one Malaysian hostages.

"The ASG continues to be on the run as a result of the order of the President to the military to crush them. Our security forces are hunting them in the wild forests of Mindanao to unleash their might and blow them to kingdom come," he said.

The Abu Sayyaf threatened to execute the hostages, currently held captive in Mindanao, if ransoms are not paid.

The Indonesian hostages, believed to be Heri Ardiansyah, 19; and Hariadin, 45, were shown in the video in a forested area posted by ASG being guarded by gunmen.

The Malaysian hostage, Jari Abdulla, 24, was not with the two in the video.

The hostages were kidnapped at sea off Sandakan in Sabah on Dec. 5, 2018.

<http://www.pna.gov.ph>

Trillanes rebellion raps trial resumes Mar. 20

From the Philippine News Agency (Feb 22, 2019):

The Makati City regional trial court has set the continuation of the trial of the criminal case against Senator Antonio Trillanes IV for his part in the 2007 Manila Peninsula siege.

In an order dated February 6, Judge Elmo Alameda of Branch 150 said "considering that there is no more legal hindrance such as TRO [temporary restraining order] or injunction that enjoins this court from continuing with the hearing of the case, the court hereby sets the continuation of the presentation of prosecution evidence on March 20, 2019".

The court has allowed Trillanes to post bail last September 25.

The case had been hampered by pending motions and efforts by the court to recover destroyed pages of the original court records, which had been included for disposal and destruction under the directive of the Supreme Court on disposed cases five years and older.

In an order dated Dec. 18, 2018 Alameda denied the motion for reconsideration filed by defense counsels, ruling that Trillanes failed to provide sufficient basis to reverse the earlier ruling of the Makati court.

Alameda reiterated that contrary to Trillanes' insistence, the so-called "best evidence" rule applies in the case.

The legal principle means that in case the contents of a document are part of a legal controversy, which in Trillanes' case was whether he filled up forms seeking amnesty, the original document would be the best evidence.

Last September, the Makati regional trial court issued an alias warrant of arrest and hold departure order against Trillanes in connection with his rebellion case and other Magdalo soldiers over the Manila Peninsula siege in 2007.

Alameda said the burden of proving compliance with the minimum requirements to be entitled to amnesty under Proclamation No. 75, which was issued by the previous administration, rests on Trillanes.

Trillanes, the judge said, failed to convince the court that he complied with the minimum requirement to personally fill-up and file the official amnesty application form as required in Section 5, 6, and 11 of Department of National Defense Amnesty Committee Circular dated Dec. 21, 2010.

The Makati court noted that Trillanes failed to present the original hard copy, a duplicate copy, or even a photocopy to substantiate his claim that he personally accomplished and filed his official amnesty application form.

The court also gave weight to the online news report published on Jan. 5, 2011 presented by the prosecution, which indicated that Trillanes failed to expressly admit his guilt for the crimes committed during the Oakwood Mutiny and Manila Peninsula siege.

<http://www.pna.gov.ph>

BARMM 'realization' of Moro dreams and end armed struggle: PRRD

From the Philippine News Agency (Feb 22, 2019):

The newly-established Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) is a realization of everyone's dream to end the armed struggle in Mindanao, President Rodrigo R. Duterte said on Friday.

"The successful ratification of this Organic Law will enable us to create an environment that will be conducive to the peaceful coexistence between the Muslims, Christians, Lumads, and all tribes of this planet as indigenous peoples and settlers who will consider Mindanao as their home," Duterte said in his speech during the ceremonial confirmation of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) plebiscite canvass results and oath-taking ceremony of the members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) at Malacañang Palace.

Duterte assured various stakeholders that his administration will ensure good governance in BARMM.

"Your courage and determination will never be put to waste. I guarantee that you and this administration will use all the resources within its disposal to ensure better governance and inclusive political empowerment in this new Bangsamoro region," he said.

The President recalled the hardships of the peace process and expressed hope for permanent peaceful co-existence with the ratification of the BOL.

"We would like to see an end of the violence that has rocked Mindanao and have cost so many lives for nothing. If there is any problem at all or in the future, let me assure you that for the remaining years of my work as a government work here, here in this building, I assure you, Insha'Allah, I will always do what the law says and what is yours, to what extent that we can give you, not only comfort but happiness to the Muslims of Mindanao," he said.

Duterte challenged the 80 newly-appointed members of the BTA to fulfill a better future for the people of BARMM by committing to the values of the rule of law, good governance, and democracy.

"Always embody the dreams and aspirations of the great men and women who came before you and fought for the recognition of your right to determine your future," he told them.

The President announced the appointment of Moro Islamic Liberation Front Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim as Interim Chief Minister of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority.

The BOL, considered as one of President Rodrigo R. Duterte's biggest legislative achievements, is expected to give the Moro people the basic legal tools to chart their own destiny within the country's Constitutional framework.

<http://www.pna.gov.ph>

PH envoy receives documentary evidence of IPs vs. CPP-NPA

From the Philippine News Agency (Feb 22, 2019):



National Security Council Deputy Director General Vicente Agdamag (right) on Feb. 21 hands over to Ambassador Evan P. Garcia, Philippine Permanent Representative to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva, the documents containing the official complaints of the different tribal communities represented by the Mindanao Indigenous People Council for Peace and Development pertaining to the 17 atrocities committed by the Communist Party of the Philippines - New Peoples Army - National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF). The complaints will be submitted to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (PNA photo by Gigie Arcilla-Agtay)

GENEVA, Switzerland – The National Security Council on Thursday handed over to Ambassador Evan P. Garcia, Philippine Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) and other International Organizations in Geneva, the documents containing the official complaints of the different tribal communities.

In a simple ceremony held at the Philippine Mission office here, National Security Council Deputy Director General Vicente Agdamag gave Garcia the official documents from IP groups represented by the Mindanao Indigenous People Council for Peace and Development pertaining to the 17 atrocities committed by the Communist Party of the Philippines-New Peoples' Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF) against IPs.

"Thank you for these information. Rest assured that this will be properly handed over and move forward for the sake of our country and prosperity of our IPs," Garcia said in his brief remark.

The submission of documentary evidence was in reference to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' Resolution 33/12 dated Sept. 29, 2016 which defines the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur for Indigenous People.

"We humbly submit the official complaints of the different tribal communities represented by the Mindanao Indigenous Peoples Council for Peace and Development relative to the ongoing persecution of peace-loving IPs by the CPP-NPA-NDF and their front organizations like Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, Mindanao Interfaith Service Foundation, Incorporated, IBON Foundation and KARAPATAN," said the letter dated Feb. 21, 2019, addressed to the UNHCHR.

"The 17 violations of tribal culture and tribal rights include: the recruitment of IP children to become child warriors; encroachment of tribal ancestral domain through the CPP schools without free and prior informed consent (FPIC); rape and molestation of IP children in these schools; trafficking of IP children by CPP allies;

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and the continuous killing of tribal leaders opposing the CPP-NPA programs in the ancestral domain," the letter signed by Agdamag added.

The documents also include IP affidavits and resolutions.

The NSC letter said "all the violations have been going on for years since the communist groups indigenized the revolution (communist) in the 1980s.

"It must be noted that the current UN Rapporteur Victoria Tauli-Corpuz seems to have never lifted a finger to intervene in these communist terrorist groups' (CTGs) violations and has rather trained her attention to government forces who have been trying to defend the human rights of the IPs," the letter said.

Tauli-Corpuz, a Filipina development consultant and an international indigenous activist of Kankana-ey Igorot ethnicity, assumed responsibilities as the third UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on June 2, 2014.

Agdamag, in a separate interview, said this is the first time that the Philippine government submitted documentary evidence against the CTGs.

"It becomes very clear that the government is serious in ending the local communist armed conflict," he added.

President Rodrigo R. Duterte, on December 4, 2018, signed Executive Order No. 70, which also institutionalizes a "whole-of-nation approach" in attaining an "inclusive and sustainable peace, creating a National Task Force to end local communist armed conflict, and directing the adoption of a National Peace Framework. "

"There is a need to create a national task force that will provide an efficient mechanism and structure for the implementation of the whole-of-nation approach to aid in the realization of the collective aspiration of the Filipino people to attain inclusive and sustainable peace," the order read.

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