

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



# TEAM **ARMY**

Serving the people. Securing the land.

[oacpa.army2012@gmail.com](mailto:oacpa.army2012@gmail.com)  
OFFICE OF THE ARMY CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

## NEWS CLIPPINGS

01 January 2019

Tuesday



*Honor. Patriotism. Duty*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## 01 JANUARY 2019

Weather Forecast- <a href="http://pagasa.dost.gov.ph/weather/daily-weather-forecast">http://pagasa.dost.gov.ph/weather/daily-weather-forecast</a>		
Page Nr.	Title	Source
<b>NATIONAL NEWS</b>		
1	92% of Pinoys enter new year with hope	P Star-1
<b>AFP/ SECURITY RELATED NEWS</b>		
2	Lawmaker backs review of Phil-US defense treaty	P Star-3
3	AFP Chief expects 2018 gains to boost military	P Star-3
4	Joma: Du30 rating 'fake, unbelievable'	M Standard-A2
5	Six NPAs, ex-town mayor, 23 others nabbed in Negros Occidental	M Standard-A3
6	6 teroristang NPA bulagta sa encounter	Ngayon-8
7	2 dead in Cotabato mall blast	P Star-1
8	More Abu, BIFF bandits surrender	P Star-9
9	Cotabato blast kills 2, injuries 32	M Standard-A1
10	Anak ng alkalde, pinalaya ng Sayyaf	PM-2
<b>EDITORIAL/COMMENTARY/OPINION</b>		
11	Rody wants to see Church on its knees?	P Star-6
12-13	Lights	P Star-7

# 92% of Pinoys enter new year with hope

By HELEN FLORES

Nine in 10 Filipinos are welcoming the New Year with hope rather than fear, according to the fourth quarter survey of the Social Weather Stations (SWS).

The survey, taken from Dec. 16 to 19, showed 92 percent of adult Filipinos, 18 years old and above, are entering 2019 with hope. Eight percent will welcome the New Year with fear.

Hope for the New Year fell four points from the record-high 96 percent in 2017, and is the same as the 92 percent registered in 2008, 2012 and 2015.

Those entering the New Year with fear increased by four points from four percent in 2017, the SWS said.

New Year hope fell by 16 points in the Visayas, from 95 percent in 2017 to a record-low 79 percent in 2018, surpassing the previous record low of 63 percent in 2000 and 2001.

It also dropped in Metro Manila, from 96 percent in 2017 to 94 percent in 2018; by a point in balance Luzon, from 97 percent in 2017 to 96 percent in 2018, and a

Turn to Page 2

## 92% of Pinoys From Page 1

point in Mindanao, from 95 percent in 2017 to 94 percent in 2018.

Compared to 2017, hopefulness for the New Year declined in all socio-economic classes, the pollster said.

It fell in class ABC, from 97 percent in 2017 to 90 percent in 2018. This was the lowest since the 88 percent in 2007.

It dropped in class D or the *masa*, from 96 percent in 2017 to 92 percent in 2018. This was similar to the 92 percent recorded in 2007, 2008 and 2015.

It fell by three points in class E, from a record-high 94 percent in 2017 to 91 percent in 2018.

According to SWS, hope for the New Year has always been high, starting at 87 percent in 2000. It was 88 percent in 2001, 95 percent in 2002, 90 percent in 2003, 81 percent in 2004 and 85 percent in 2005.

It ranged from 91 percent

to 92 percent from 2006 to 2008, before falling to 89 percent in 2009. It recovered to 93 percent in 2010 and has since then been at 90 levels, reaching as high as 96 percent in 2017.

The SWS latest survey used face-to-face interviews of 1,440 adults nationwide.

The pollster said in Germany, where the survey question was originally asked by the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 52 percent of Germans will enter 2019 with hope.

From 1991 to 2018, Germans' hope for the New Year ranged from a low 31 percent to a high 58 percent.

A store clerk offers items carved from precious stones at the Namaste Arts and Objects Shop as Baguio City prepares to welcome the Year of the Earth Pig.

ANDY ZAPATA JR.

## Lawmaker backs review of Phl-US defense treaty

A Marine officer-turned-congressman yesterday supported the proposal for a review of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty between the Philippines and the United States.

"A review of the treaty would make way for the still ambiguous provisions of the agreement to be clarified. This is particularly needed in case of any attack by a foreign country on our territory, including the West Philippine Sea," Rep. Gary Alejano of party-list group Magdalo said.

He said previous statements by American officials on what the US would do in case of foreign attack in the West Philippine Sea have been "vague and non-committal."

"With regard to the West Philippine Sea dispute, which is the most pressing security issue now, the US has opted to assume a seemingly hands-off attitude. We hope to hear a definitive stand on the matter," he said.

Alejano pointed out that the review gives the US "an opportunity to reassure its alliance with the Philippines and a chance to clarify its commitments as one of the country's strong allies in the region."

"This is also to dispel the idea that the Philippines is left at the mercy of expansionist China," he said.

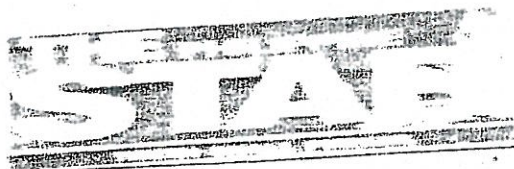
He said he hoped the review would further strengthen the Mutual Defense Treaty and US-Philippine security partnership.

On Friday, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana told reporters that the treaty was being thoroughly studied to determine if it is still relevant to the country.

"That was done in 1951. It's 67 years old. We are reviewing it because perhaps, we no longer need it," he said.

Asked if the Duterte administration's improved ties with China prompted the review, Lorenzana said it was due to the "dynamics that is going on all over the world."

- Jess Diaz



# AFP chief expects 2018 gains to boost military

By MICHAEL PUNONGBAYAN

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief Lt. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr. expressed optimism yesterday that the country's military, building on the gains of 2018, will do more in 2019 as protectors of the people and the state.

He said the AFP's accomplishments would also improve hopes for an enduring peace and development for the country.

"We have gone a long way treading the path of peace and we are optimistic that the New Year will bring us closer to our common aspirations as the AFP continues to reap more successes in the performance of its mandate to protect the people and secure the state," he said in his New Year message yesterday.

"As we welcome the New Year, we expect all our soldiers, airmen, sailors, Marines and civilian human resources to be reinvigorated and more eager to continue the significant gains that we have achieved in the past year," he said.

Madrigal noted that the AFP has made significant contribution to our country's peace effort in 2018 as it facilitated the end of conflict with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

"Moreover, our continuous focused military operations led to the countless surrender of communist rebels and supporters, the clearing of guerrilla fronts, as well as the arrest of top New People's Army (NPA) leaders and personalities," he said.

"We hope that for their New Year's resolution, more and more NPA members will heed the call to lay down their arms and join mainstream society in its nation-building efforts," he added.

Madrigal claimed that 2018 has truly been a successful year for the AFP as "we fulfill our tasks within the national thrust towards just and lasting peace and development for the Philippines."

"As this year closes, the AFP will continue its resolve in serving the Filipino nation in achieving its mission of protecting the people and securing the state," he said.

TODAY

# Joma: Du30 rating 'fake, unbelievable'

By Nat Mariano

**P**RESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte's "very good" net satisfaction rating in the fourth quarter of 2018 is "obviously fake and utterly unbelievable," Communist Party of the Philippines founding chairman Jose Maria Sison said Monday.

He made the statement after Social Weather Stations said the majority of the people it polled were satisfied with Duterte's performance.

SWS conducted the survey from Dec. 16 to 19 and used face-to-face interviews of 1,440 adults. It said the survey had a margin of error of  $\pm 2.6$  percent for national percentages and  $\pm 5$  percent each for Balance Luzon, Metro Manila, the Visayas and Mindanao.

"The high poll rating is obviously fake and utterly unbelievable. The people can easily see the shallow trickery in the ambiguity and slanted character of the

questions that invite facile affirmative responses," Sison said in a statement.

"They hold the SWS accountable for engaging in deception as the result of payola or coercion by the Duterte regime."

Sison said SWS failed to ask the respondents' sentiments on the President's controversial remarks and some issues that became the stumbling block to Duterte administration's policies.

"The SWS did not ask people whether they like Duterte for the following: rising prices of basic goods and services, the rise of mass unemployment and low incomes, [and] the rampant corruption

of the Office of the President and downward," Sison said.

He said SWS should have reconsidered asking the respondents about the mass murder of drug suspects, Duterte's calling the God of the Catholics as stupid, and his encouragement to kill bishops, priests and lay leaders.

He said even the persecution of social activists, the bombing and destruction of Marawi City and other communities, and the sellout of Philippine sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea to China should have been included in the SWS report.

On Friday, SWS said seven out of every 10 people it polled or 74 percent were satisfied with Duterte, 11 percent were undecided, and the remaining 15 percent expressed dissatisfaction with him.

The Palace was quick to welcome the latest figures, saying the result only encouraged the President to continue his crackdown on corruption, criminality, drugs and the communist insurgency.

However, Opposition Senator Antonio

Trillanes IV, one of Duterte's harshest critics, viewed the results differently, expressing his disbelief of the survey.

"Considering how difficult the times these days and the failures of Duterte, no one will believe in the SWS survey that 7 out of 10 Filipinos are satisfied with his governance," Trillanes said in a statement.

"There might be sampling errors, or the respondents might have been in fear [of airing their sentiments]."

Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo slammed Trillanes for doubting the results.

"This latest statement from the senator has demonstrated that he is an incorrigible illusionist who has believed in his own tales. His created web of lies on PRD [Duterte] has so engulfed him that he forgets he is its creator," Panelo said in a statement.

"His invariable lust for publicity is incredible. His pathetic political analysis has only validated the suspicion that he threads in the realm of illusion."

01 January 2019

Page: 43

TODAY

## Six NPAs, ex-town mayor, 23 others nabbed in Negros Occidental

By Francisco Tuyay

SIX suspected New People's Army rebels were killed while a former town mayor and 23 others were arrested during military and police operations in Negros Oriental over the weekend.

Among those killed were Reneboy Fat, Demetrio Fat, Dondon Isagan, Constancio Languita, Jun Cubal and Jaime Revilla, all residents of Guibulngan City.

Arrested were former Guibulngan Mayor Cesar Macalua, two ex-brgy officials of Barangay Poblacion namely Misael Dagat and Alfredo Javier.

The former town executive yielded a cal. 45 and 9mm pistols and ammunition following his arrest.

The six slain suspects were among the 103 targeted personalities in Guibulngan and the municipalities of Marikina, La Libertad and Sta. Catalina

facing arrest warrant for their alleged involvement in illegal drugs.

Of the 103 suspected drug personalities, 30 are reportedly New People's Army (NPA) regular and militia members operating in Brgy Trinidad in the city.

Reports said the suspects were killed after they resisted arrest during the conduct of law enforcement operations.

The military claimed that the NPA operating in Guibulngan City were able

to continue their operations with help from big-time drug lords in Negros Oriental and nearby areas.

"The communist terrorists' illegal activities in the area indicate that the NPA survives with huge help from the illegal drug trade. Big-time drug lords operating in Negros Oriental and nearby areas are being protected by the NPA and other terrorist front organizations," the military said in a statement.

# 6 teroristang NPA bulagta sa encounter

Anim na miyembro ng teroristang New Peoples Army (NPA) ang napatay habang 24 iba pa ang naaresto sa operasyon ng Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) sa Negros Oriental.

Ang pinagsanib na operasyon ay ginawa ng AFP at Philippine National Police (PNP)

mula Disyembre 27-29 na naglalayong isilbi ang warrant of arrest laban sa may 103 target personalities sa Guihulungan City at sa mga munisipalidad ng Mabinay, La Libertad at Sta. Catalina.

Kinilala ang mga nasawi na sina Reneboy Fat, Demetrio Fat, Don-don Isugan, Constanacio

Languita, Jan Cubui at Jaime Revilla, pawang mga residente ng naharang lungsod.

Ang nasabing mga target ay sangkot umano sa ilegal na droga sa kanilang mga lugar subalit nadiskubre na 30 sa kanila ay mga NPA at militia members na nag-ooperate

**NINA GEMMA GARCIA AT RHODERICK BENEZ**

sa Barangay Trinidad, Guihulungan City.

Ayon sa pulisya, ang anim na napatay sa operasyon ay nanlaban at nakipagpalitan ng putok sa mga otongad kaya nasugatan.

Mabilis na dinara sa pinakamalapit na ospital ang anim subalit idinektarang dead-on arrival.

Ang nasabing grupo umano ay nakaka-sur-

wive dahil sa tulong ng mga drug lords na nag-ooperate sa Negros Oriental at mga kalapit na lalawigan na pino-protektahan ng NPA at mga organisadong teroristang grupo.

Nakumpiska mula sa kanila ang 65 firearms kabilang dito ang M203, M-16, M-4 rifles, grenade launchers at mga granada.

Kabilang naman sa

mga naaresto: si dating Guihulungan Mayor Cesar Macalua kung saan nakuha mula sa kanya ang isang cal. 45 at 9 mm pistol; at mga bala. Naaresto rin ang police

escort nito na si Misael Dagat at Alfredo Javier, mga dating opisyal ng Sarangay Poblacion kung saan nakuha mula sa kanila ang mga bari at mga bala.



## 2 dead in Cotabato mall blast

By JOHN UNSON

COTABATO CITY - Two persons were killed while 20 others were injured after a powerful explosion ripped through the exterior of a shopping mall here yesterday afternoon.

Supt. Rolly Octavio, director of the Cotabato City police, identified one of the fatalities as Jonathan Tasic Torribiano, of North Upi, Maguindanao.

Radio reports said another victim died while being treated in a hospital.

The improvised explosive device (IED) used in the attack

Turn to Page 4

## 2 dead

From Page 1

was packed with concrete nails and jagged metal fragments.

The IED was left by a still unidentified person underneath one of the tables near the entrance of the Southseas Mall along Magallanes Street where ambulant vendors sell fireworks.

An unexploded IED was

found on the second floor of the mall that responding police and Army bomb experts detonated.

Elena Zombrio, a passerby, said the IED went off in the vendors' section, scattering the merchandise in areas near the mall entrance.

"We saw many of those

near the spot where the IED exploded running away, blood oozing from their bodies," Kalim Sumdad said.

The city police and the Army-led anti-terrorist Task Force Kutawato immediately locked down all thoroughfares connecting the city to nearby towns in Maguindanao, while soldiers and policemen patrolled the streets here to search for more IEDs.

Major Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said their intelligence units are now helping police investigate the incident.

Residents of Cotabato City are no strangers to deadly IED attacks, having witnessed more than a dozen in the past ten years, all blamed on the outlawed Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, which operates in the fashion of the Islamic State. - With Emmanuel Tupa

## More Abu, BIFF bandits surrender

By JOHN UNSON

**COTABATO CITY** - The year 2018 saw the surrender of more members of the Abu Sayyaf and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

In Basilan alone, authorities said 187 Abu Sayyaf men returned to the fold of law.

The military said the number of surrenderees is higher compared to the last two years.

Among the surrenderees is a 12-year-old and his 14-year-old brother. Their parents were killed in clashes with soldiers in 2013.

The child warriors are under the custody of the office of ARMM Gov. Mujiv Hataman.

In Maguindanao, 30 BIFF men yielded from March to November.

Lt. Gen. Arnel de la Vega of the Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) credited the infrastructure and socio-economic programs implemented by the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao regional government for the surrenders aside from the efforts of the military.

The military cited the almost complete transcen-tral road network in Basilan worth P1 billion. The road traverses through hinter-lands, where remnants of the Abu Sayyaf are holed out.

"Road equipment and workers are now breaking

through the mountains in Sampinit complex, where the transcen-tral road, supposedly an impenetrable bastion of the Abu Sayyaf, will reverse. With this, we are sure that more will surrender," De la Vega said.

Col. Gerry Besana, Westmincom spokesman, said dozens of Maute militants also surrendered to local officials.

Among the BIFF surrenderees are bomb makers trained by slain Malaysian terrorist Tulkiffi bin Hir, alias Marwan. They are now beneficiaries of livelihood and education assistance from the Maguindanao provincial government.

Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, 6th Infantry Division commander, cited the Program for Education and Community Empowerment (MagPEACE) of the provincial government for the surrenders.

The program, which provides college education to poor but deserving Muslim, Christian and Ibanags, has produced more than 3,000 professionals in the past six years.

"Many of the MagPEACE beneficiaries are from areas where there is BIFF presence... Some of them are relatives of BIFF members. This is the kind of diplomatic community-building initiative that will help address the security woes in Muslim-dominated areas," Sobejana said.

TODAY

# Cotabato blast kills 2, injures 32

By Nash B. Maulana and  
Francisco Tuyay

COTABATO CITY — Two people were killed and at least 32 others were wounded when a bomb went off on a busy street outside the South Seas shopping mall here at 1:30 p.m. Monday, police said.

Initial police reports said the explosion took place just outside the main entrance of the mall along Don Rufino Alonzo Street in this city.

Police said they found and disarmed a second bomb in the baggage counter of the mall, which is reportedly owned by

Moro Islamic Liberation Front chairman Nur Misuari.

Police Sr. Supt Rolly Sionosa Octavio, city police director, identified one of the fatalities as Jonathan Tasic, 39, a resident of Upi, Maguindanao.

Hospital officials said Meriam Usman, 35, a resident of Capucan village, died on arrival at the Cotabato Regional Medical Center.

Cotabato City Mayor Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi denounced the bombers as "heartless" and called on city residents to avoid speculation as authorities conducted a full investigation.

Next page

## Cotabato...

From A1

"We are in close contact with the Armed Forces and the Philippine National Police; and I understand that they are now pursuing a lead," she said in a press conference. "But as of now, the least that we can do is to sympathize with the victims and pray."

She added: "We have had good security plans. There were no lapses in the local security preparations for the holiday season. But there are instances when things like this are really unpredictable."

Tasic worked for the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) as a driver for Commissioner Melenio Ulama, who represents the indigenous people.

One of the injured victims is a member of the Joint Salam Force of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the AFP, his companion told local reporters.

Octavio said at least 27 people were taken to different hospitals for shrapnel wounds.

In a statement, the MILF's United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP) condemned the attack and called on the authorities to conduct a thorough investigation of the incident and make the results public.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines put the city on lockdown.

May Gen. Danilo Sobajana, Commander of the 6th Infantry Division said the explosion occurred near a row of stalls selling firecrackers and fireworks and that many of the injured were minors.

A military explosive ordnance team was at the scene to determine what triggered the blast.

Sobajana blamed the attack on the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, saying it was in retaliation for recent military offensives against the group that killed seven bandits.

01 January 2019

Page: 2

## Anak ng alkalde, pinalaya ng Sayyaf

Isang anak ng alkalde ang pinalaya karnakalawa ng mga bandidong Abu Sayyaf Group, matapos ang mahigit isang taong pagkakabit sa Patikul, Sulu.

Ang pinalayang biktima ay kintalang si Jed Quimbo, anak ng Labason, Zamboanga del Norte Mayor Eddie Quimbo.

Sa sulat na Police Regional Office (PRO) 9 Director P/ Chief Supr. Emmanuel Luis Licop, bandang alas-4:40 ng hapon ay pinakawalan ng kaniyang mga abductors ang batang Quimbo sa Brgy. Agutling, Patikul ng masabing lalawigan.

Si Jed ay kinidnap ng andar na mga amadong bandido sa puwersahang isinakay sa isang van sa bayan ng Labason noong Setyembre 6, 2017 kung saan ang buhay ay tinanggap at kinagay ng mga kidnaper sa lalawigan ng Sulu.

Ang biktima ay sinalubong naman ng kapatid nitang si Justo Quimbo, matapos na patayin ng mga kidnappers.

Inaalam pa ng mga otoridad kung nagbawal ng kanilang ang pamilya Quimbo kapadig ng Labason, nina-Joy Cuntos-

## POSTSCRIPT

FEDERICO D. PASCUAL JR.

### Rody wants to see Church on its knees?

THERE is no way that a Rodrigo Duterte can bring the Catholic church in the Philippines to its knees – as he seems to want to do unless it “corrects itself” – by escalating his tirades against the faith of some 80 million Filipinos.



If the Church kneels, it is to pray for the return of the sheep that has strayed from the flock. The dawning of a new year could be an auspicious moment to pray for enlightenment and reconciliation.

Shifting to attack mode in his speech during the distribution last Saturday of land reform certificates in Kidapawan City, Duterte said: “*Dahan-dahan lang kayo* (Go slow)... (The church) has to correct itself... *Pag hindi, kalaban talaga nila ako* (If not, I will remain its enemy)... And I will continue to attack them.” Watch video: [bit.ly/2LEgg7n](http://bit.ly/2LEgg7n)

We could laugh off Duterte's threat to the Church as another of his misplaced jokes, but he has not himself bothered to clarify or take back his words. Pressing his attack, he recited a litany of more alleged misconduct of priests.

He said a 30-year-old priest in Davao City died of AIDS last week, that another one beat up a minor who failed to feed his pet dog, and that a priest celebrating mass prayed for Duterte's death. He also accused the Church of inventing hell to scare people into obedience.

Duterte comes as a latter-day protestant. There is no issue on faith and morals that he has brought against the Catholic church that has not been raised before by more consequential cynics and profound thinkers.

His recurring questions, including those on basic tenets like the creation, original sin, the communion of saints, and the Holy Trinity have been adequately answered. All the lucid answers have been there all along, one only has to open his mind in good faith.

In some cases, parental guidance and enrolment in a Catholic school like the Ateneo de Davao have proved inadequate in helping a lackadaisical youth in growing in his faith.

From personal experience we can say that the farther and longer we stray from the Church – especially the mass and the sacraments – the more difficult it is to find our way back. Sin has a way of beclouding rationality and judgment.

Meanwhile, the pealing of church bells in Balangiga and elsewhere invites us, including our political elders made cynical and scarred by unfortunate losses in their lives, to go on a spiritual retreat, and

relearn the faith of our fathers.

In his speech where he also criticized the communist seniors led by Jose Ma. Sison in the Netherlands, Duterte reiterated his masgivings about the Bible and the veneration of saints.

He said: “Look, these documents were written, if at all, 3,000 years ago. What is their relevance to our lives today? Who wrote them? Who is St. Thomas? We do not know who he is. Perhaps it was just a name of a camel then. *Magdasal ka na sa isang Diyos, magdasal ka pa dito sa mga santong gawa*. (You pray to God but you also have to pray to these devil saints).”

Some of us were shocked hearing the President of the Philippines sharing in his speech a confession he made in his youth of how he sneaked into the room of their maid, lifted her blanket and touched her genitals, mentioning even the detail of his using his finger.

Duterte mistakes the laughter of his audience for approval of his dirty talk. His story-telling spiced with curses and attacks on his critics and detractors has thus become his main fare when he entertains homesick Filipino overseas workers during his trips.

• **Duterte to NPA: Why die for Sison?**

PRESIDENT Duterte makes sense asking communist rebels why they should be loyal to Jose Ma. Sison who leads a motley group of ageing revolutionaries directing the guerilla fighters by remote control from the safety of the Netherlands.

There is something odd about supposed leaders living a life of comfort in their European haven while members of the New People's Army, the armed component of the Communist Party of the Philippines, are doing the fighting and the dying.

In his speech Saturday in Kidapawan, Duterte asked why NPA warriors should suffer and die for someone whom they have not even seen. Sison, CPP founder and chairman, was once a professor of Duterte at the Lyceum of the Philippines. He has been on asylum in the Netherlands since 1987.

Duterte said in Filipino: “Why listen to Sison? What does he know? Social justice? You have not even seen that b\*\*\*\* yet you die for his beliefs. It's that simple. xxx You just listen to lectures but you have not seen him. You have not seen the guy. He is in Amsterdam experiencing the cool weather there. Even his b\*\*\*\* have become frozen.”

On the other hand, the administration, particularly the armed forces, also needs Sison and the NPA. Without rebels and such insurgents, government troops could find themselves relegated to building infrastructure or planting crops to justify their huge budget.

Without the Sison group ensconced in the Netherlands, where would the government's so-called negotiating panel go for the much-awaited junkets for the never-ending peace talks?

And then, Sison's hyped revolution could come in as an additional excuse when Duterte decides to declare martial law.

Talks between the government and the rebels collapsed in 2017 after Duterte accused the communists of demanding a power-sharing deal. The communist side denied making such a demand.

## FROM THE STANDS

DOMINI M. TORREVILLAS

### Lights



The little town of Carmen (a little more than 20,000 population) in Agusan del Norte attracts tourists during the Christmas season for its splendidly lit up municipal building and grounds located on a hill. The scene is a spectacular wonderland, with 3,000 tiny Christmas bulbs strung around the façade of the three-story edifice, animal wire figures, a 30-foot Christmas tree, and a walkway. Motor vehicles create traffic jams with drivers and passengers crawling turtle-paced for pictures to take home and invite friends to go look. This happens every year, since 2005, when Ramon Calo took over as mayor, starting a reign of four terms.

Many years ago the municipality was just a *barangay* of the municipality of Nasipit, Agusan del Norte. It was formerly named "Kabayawa" by its native Manobo inhabitants. Its present name is said to be an allusion to a historical event where the image of the Virgin del Carmen was believed to have felled bandits in the place. Father Saturnino Urios, a Jesuit priest who was instrumental in the Christianization of Agusan during that time, suggested that the name of Kabayawa be changed to Carmen.

The late congressman Marcos Calo was behind Republic Act 380 creating Carmen as a municipality on July 1, 1949.

Ten years later, on March 14, 1959, Ramon Calo was born in Carmen. His political roots are traced to a great grandfather on his mother's side, Jose Malimot, who served as mayor, then to a grandfather on his father's side, who was mayor then vice mayor, and then to his father, Atty. Tranquilino Calo, who served as mayor.

Ramon worked as staff of Assemblyman Antonio Tupaz from 1980 to 1995. Ramon's own political career began with his election as provincial board member. He studied at San Sebastian College in Manila, but he did not pass the bar examinations. No matter, because by that time he was already elected provincial board member for 1988 to 1995. One does not have to be a lawyer to get elected to a government post.

He ran and won the mayor's seat three times, serving from 1995 to 2004, or three terms. After his third term ended, he let his wife Jovitt run for mayor in the 2004

elections, which she won and served until 2007. She is a native of Cabadbaran, several kilometers east of Carmen, and a graduate of San Carlos University in Cebu City. Interestingly, her losing opponent was her husband Ramon's brother, Jesus Calo. Why Ramon allowed Jovitt to run was, in his words, to have continuity of his projects for the town.

Having a wife run is nothing unusual. Philippine politics allows husbands whose terms have run out, to appoint their wives to take over the post they would vacate; mothers run for mayor and daughters for vice mayor; then in the next election, it's daughters running for mayor, and the mother, as vice-mayor. Also, brothers fight brothers and brothers fight sisters in the race for a government post. On the higher level, uncles and nephews run for president of the Republic. Weird. But that's Philippine politics, although the protagonists say, "In fairness. . ."

In the elections of 2007, Ramon ran and won his fourth bid for mayor again. He would run up to 2019. But his opponent, his own brother again, Jesus Calo, was declared by the municipal judge as the winner because according to him the votes listing Monching, the nickname of Ramon, were invalid. Ramon was surprised, because the judge knew that he was called Monching. His brother Jesus then served as mayor, but for only eight months, as the Comelec declared Ramon to be the rightful winner.

Ramon's fourth term ends this year. He is running for vice-mayor, not as mayor in this year's election because of term limitation. Not surprisingly, his wife, former Mayor Jovitt, is the candidate for mayor, "as requested by the *barangay* leaders under the PDP party of Gov. Angel Amante Matba."

When Ramon was out of work for eight months, he was at the Mall of Asia in Pasay City, conferring with his lawyer every day to get Comelec to ferret the truth of his victory over his brother. Persistence is one of Ramon's virtues; his daily visits with his lawyer, a known lawyer of opposition candidates, paid off.

The mayor proudly says his projects

are designed and built by his government's own engineering department and employees, and not by outside private contractors. He did hire a few job orders. That way, there is no corruption involved, he says. Only P25 million went into the construction of the administration building and furnishings. Somebody told him a structure like Carmen's would cost P50 million elsewhere. "We don't owe anybody for the buildings," he says. "This is a good example of local autonomy. *Imitang ko sa mga hardware.*"

To save on government money, the mayor insists on using old Christmas bulbs, and when new ones are needed he personally buys them at #168 Binondo. "Our town is the most beautifully lighted town. Sure, Tagum (Davao) probably has more lights, but Tagum is a city, and Carmen is a small town. We spend P700,000 on the lights, while Tagum spends P2 million."

The lighting fest provides livelihood opportunities for residents and out-of-towners who put up barbecue stands and eateries across the street. The vendors rent their stalls and roadside cafes for P15 a day, and give the government around P30,000 at the end of the festival. This year's lighting carnival of sorts opened last Nov. 30 and will end on Jan. 6 this year.

Even before he was elected mayor, Ramon told himself he wanted his town to improve. "*Kaliway ang bayar ko.*" (My town's so poor) he "imported" Butuan basketball players to be in his team, and beauties also from Butuan to participate in the local beauty pageants.

He says Carmen is a must-see tourism place, as it has 42 caves, as well as a good Punta Diwata beach. He developed his private property, Benapar Blue Water, "but this is to improve tourism. Our sea is considered an equivalent of Anilao in Batangas for scuba diving, and its coral reefs are intact."

One of Agusan's moneyed men, Calo has been president and general manager of Nasipit Integrated Arrastre & Stevedoring Services Inc. (NIASSI) from 1993 up to the present.

As to problems in his town, he says, "Anywhere you go there is the NPA

problem." He shrugs off drugs as a major problem. Even policemen making money is found everywhere, he says.

Carmen depends on agricultural crops for revenue. It is in partnership with Spanish and American businessmen for developing a dried mangoes industry. The mayor says mangoes in Carmen are considered "the best in Mindanao and are comparable to those in Guimaras."

He keeps fit by going to his own gym called Ramon's Fitness Gym. "One of the best," he says. He wants his constituents to see that he is healthy and fit. "I've never been into sports, but now, at age 59, I want to be in good health."

The past days have been happy for me, what with my family flying in from Manila to join me and my husband in our home in Gingoog. We moved to this city in Misamis Oriental (sandwiched between Cagayan de Oro and Butuan cities) seven months ago. It was such a nice feeling, seeing, and embracing members of my small family once more—son Andoy and his wife Joabi Cahag and their son Santi, and my nephew who's like my second son, Oliver Alfonso Estrella and his girlfriend Kay Cera. In three days all they could be taken to were the town plaza bedecked with Christmas lights, a trip down the seaside boulevard called "Pahayahay," lunch at the city's popular resto Fusion, dinner at Garaje for broiled seafoods, a trip to see the famous Christmas lights in Carmen, Agusan del Norte, and lunch at a Talisayan seaside restaurant. There was of course the family feast, ending with the almost until dawn frolicking with Gingoog-based cousins. Alas, the day came when they had to leave. Too soon! If only I could rewind the hands of time, for them to stay one more hour, one more day, one more week, all year round. I am left clutching at Michael Jackson's song, "Gone too Soon." . . . "Like a comet/ Blazing across the evening sky/ Gone too soon; Like a rainbow/ Fading in the twinkling of an eye/ Gone too soon; Shiny and sparkly/ And splendidly bright/ Here one day/ Gone one night. . . ."

★