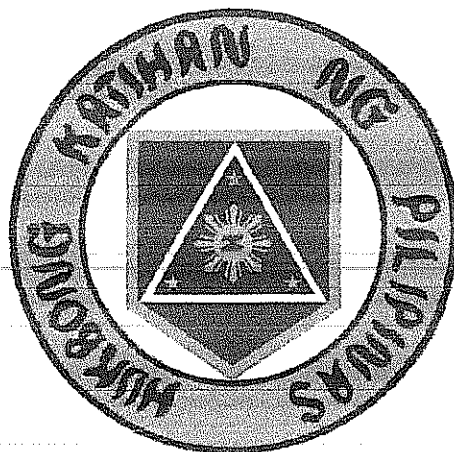


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**Wednesday**

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# DOH records 68% drop in firecracker injuries

## No stray bullet fatalities

By SHEILA CRISOSTOMO

With 139 individuals sustaining injuries from firecrackers, the Department of Health (DOH) yesterday declared a "historic" reduction in the number of fireworks-related injuries during the New Year revelry.

As of 6 a.m. yesterday, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said a total of 139 injuries were recorded from 60 sentinel hospitals nationwide since Dec. 21, or 68 percent lower than the 428 cases documented during the year-ago surveillance period from 6 a.m. on Dec. 21 to 6 a.m. on Jan. 1.

Of the 139 cases, 84 were injured while ushering in the New Year.

"We are happy to see a 68 percent decline in the number of cases... I believe this is the historic biggest reduction in the number of firecracker injuries," Duque noted at a press conference at the East Avenue Medical Center in

Quezon City.

Duque attributed the decline to two factors: the rains and Executive Order No. 28 signed by President Duterte in 2017, banning the residential and personal use of firecrackers.

"Because of that EO, the substantive downward reduction began. Last year, there was a 27-percent decline while this year, we've seen a 68-percent reduction," he added.

The EO provides that community fireworks displays must be organized to discourage the household use of firecrackers.

The DOH chief maintained

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that the second reason was the rains.

"Obviously and everybody will agree with me and I can boldly say nature, this time, took the side of DOH. It has been raining for the past several days unrelentingly and I think this also contributed to the substantive reduction in the fireworks related injuries," he added.

### Possible Increase

But Duque cautioned that the number of firecracker injuries can increase in the coming days because of late reports coming from other regions. He also did not rule out the possibility of children picking up unexploded firecrackers in the streets.

"We appeal to parents to watch over their children. Firecrackers that were soaked in rains will eventually dry and may be picked up by their children," he added.

The New Year celebration also saw *piccolo* being overtaken by *kwaitis* and *boga* as the leading cause of injuries. *Piccolo* and *boga* are illegal fireworks.

Based on reports prepared by the DOH-Epidemiology Bureau, there were 30 injuries from *kwaitis* while *boga* accounted for 16 cases; *piccolo* for 15 cases; *lucis* for eight cases and *5-Star* and *triangle* with seven cases each.

Duque said two of the injuries happened in designated fireworks display areas in Barangay and Sta. Ana in Manila. He assumed that the fireworks were not handled by professionals.

A total of 73 cases took place on the streets while 59 happened at home.

There were two cases of firecracker ingestion while there was no stray bullet injury recorded by DOH.

A majority of those injured were males at 81 percent. The ages of the cases ranged from two to 69.

Data also showed that Metro Manila had the highest number of cases at 53, followed by Western Visayas with 26; Central Visayas with 13 and Central Luzon and Calabarzon (Region 4A) with 10 cases each.

"We are gratified, on the one hand, with the reduction, but on the other hand, we are saddened because there are still cases related to fireworks.. (We) need to do a lot more to achieve zero casualty," he added.

Meanwhile, three persons were arrested for possession of illegal firecrackers in Navotas while others surrendered their fireworks to the police in Malabon.

The Southern Police District arrested two persons for selling illegal firecrackers and pyrotechnic devices while two were injured during the New Year revelry in southern Metro Manila.

The Philippine National Police (PNP) yesterday vowed to hold accountable the 23 people who were arrested for illegal discharge of firearms during the Yuletide season.

PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde said the violators will face criminal charges for their actions which could have endangered the lives of others.

"The full might of the law will be applied to these trigger-happy gun owners upon observance of all requirements of due process," Albayalde said in a statement.

The violators were caught during law enforcement operations from Dec. 16, 2018 up to Jan. 1.

Among them were seven policemen also facing administrative charges for defying Albayalde's directive not to use their service firearms indiscriminately.

He promised stiff administrative sanctions await the policemen, three of whom were caught in Metro Manila.

### Batanes, Pangasinan

In Batanes all police stations in the six municipalities reported zero injuries.

The absence of fireworks-related injuries was attributed by local government officials to the implementation of EO 28.

Firecracker-related injuries in Pangasinan decreased by 17 percent based on a report from the Provincial Health Office as of 9 a.m. yesterday.

Physician Anna Ma. Teresa de Guzman, provincial health officer, said from Dec. 21, 2017 to Jan. 1, 2018, there were 41 cases.

From Dec. 21, 2018 to Jan. 1, 2019, there were 34 cases reported, De Guzman said.

Of the figure, 26 were active cases or those who lighted firecrackers and were injured and eight passive cases or those who were hit by firecrackers lighted by other people.

The oldest victim was 75 years old.

De Guzman said all the cases were from blasts and burns. There were no amputations, stray bullet victims and mortality, she added.

The firecrackers used by the victims were *kwaitis*, *boga*, *bawang*, *triangle*, *pla-pla*, *piccolo*, *lucis*, *baby rocket*, *5-star*, *whistle bomb* and *fountain*.

The PNP yesterday recorded 40 injuries in Western Visayas from Dec. 16, 2017 to Jan. 1, 2019.

Senior Insp. Aileen Cordua said 24 were injured by firecracker explosions in eight cities and municipalities in Negros Occidental, excluding Bacolod City, from Dec. 24 to Jan. 1.

Chief Insp. Ariel Pico, spokesman for Bacolod City Police Office, reported that eight minors were injured from Dec. 31 to Jan. 1.

### Stray bullet injuries

Four persons were injured in Iloilo and Pangasinan after they were hit by stray bullets during the New Year revelry.

The PNP said there was no fatality attributed to stray bullets.

Western Visayas police authorities said two people sustained injuries in Iloilo province.

Investigators said Magdalena Dulce, 59, suffered a fracture on her head when she was hit by a stray bullet while watching a fireworks display at around 12:40 a.m. yesterday in Barangay Aquino Nobleza West, January, Iloilo.

She was brought to Janiway District Hospital for treatment but was not confined.

The victim's relatives recovered a deformed bullet fragment from a firearm of unknown caliber at the scene of the incident.

Another victim, Julius Julie

Engada, 15, was hit in the nape by a shotgun bullet at around 11:50 p.m. on Monday in Barangay Subong, Maasin, Iloilo.

Engada was brought to the Federico Tirado Memorial District Hospital and was discharged after treatment.

The third incident occurred in San Carlos City, Pangasinan yesterday.

Pangasinan police chief Senior Supt. Wilson Lopez said Rodolfo de Guzman, 64, was lighting a firecracker outside his house at around 12:03 a.m. in Barangay Turac, San Carlos when he felt pain on his right forearm.

De Guzman was brought to a nearby hospital.

The fourth victim was 29-year-old Jose Marie Baniqued, hit by a stray bullet at around 10 p.m. in Barangay Poblacion, Basista, Pangasinan.

Anna Ma. Teresa de Guzman, provincial health officer, said Baniqued was admitted at the Pangasinan Provincial Hospital in San Carlos City after he was hit by a bullet in his right thigh which exited at his right knee.

Baniqued was reportedly too drunk and failed to even notice he was wounded.

Police said the victim was reportedly walking on his way home from a drinking session when he was hit by the stray bullet.

Supt. Joem Malong, spokesman for the Police Regional Office 6, said a civilian in Manduriao, Iloilo, was arrested for indiscriminate firing.

Cordua, spokesman for the Negros Occidental Police Provincial Office, said they have not recorded any incident of indiscriminate firing or stray-bullet incident.

### More peaceful

PNP spokesman Chief Supt. Benigno Durana Jr. said yesterday the celebration of the New Year was peaceful and with fewer incidents.

From Dec. 31, 2018 to Jan. 1, a total of 85 incidents related to the New Year revelry were recorded. It is lower by 42.56 percent when compared to 148 incidents during the same period last year.

Durana said among these incidents were illegal discharge of firearms and people arrested for use and sale of prohibited firecrackers.

"It was a lot safer and more peaceful compared to 2017," he said over radio dzBB.

Director Guillermo Eleazar, chief of the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO), said there were no stray bullet victims in the latest New Year's Eve revelry.

He said two suspects were nabbed for indiscriminate firing of guns in Navotas.

Eleazar said the NCRPO's tactical operation center (TOC) recorded six indiscriminate firing incidents but only one was related to the New Year celebration. This was in Navotas with the culprits arrested and the handgun confiscated.

Alexander Ilustrisimo and Glenn Monares, both construction workers, were arrested after residents complained to the police that they were firing their guns in Barangay Northbay Boulevard during the New Year's Eve celebration.

Police confiscated from the suspects a loaded caliber .45 pistol and two sachets of suspected shabu.

Ilustrisimo is also a suspect behind shooting incidents and drug dealing in the area, according to Navotas chief police investigator Senior Insp. Aldrin Thompson.

They will be charged with illegal possession of firearms.

Another man was arrested for indiscriminate firing in

Iloilo City.

A witness said they were outside watching some neighbors at Barangay Hibao-an Norte, Manduriao, Iloilo City lighting firecrackers when Stewart Mirasol fired his gun at around 12:30 a.m.

Mirasol, 37, was arrested by responding members of the Iloilo City Mobile Force Company.

He yielded a 9 mm revolver with five bullets.

The NCRPO's TOC and the Department of Health (DOH) also recorded 55 firecracker injuries in Metro Manila, some 79 percent lower than the 248 injuries recorded during the 2018 New Year celebration.

"So far, the incidents of stray bullet, indiscriminate firing and firecracker injuries are down this year," Eleazar said.

The Manila Police District (MPD) has not recorded any stray bullet incident but eight cases of firecracker-related injuries were reported, MPD chief Senior Supt. Vicente Danao said yesterday.

Danao said the injuries in the New Year revelry are on a tolerable level.

— With Emmanuel Tupas, Marc Jayson Cayabyab, Robertzon Ramirez, Non Alquitran, Jose Rodol Clapano, Eva Visperas, Cesar Ramirez, Gilbert Bayoran, Jack Castaño, Jennifer Rendon



Moriones, Tondo residents light up firecrackers during the New Year revelry.

WALTER BOLLOZOS

# IS-INSPIRED GROUP EYED IN MALL BLAST

STORY BY EDWIN O. FERNANDEZ

The military says the bomb has the signature of the Daulah Islamiyah, a splinter of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters that has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State jihadi group in Iraq and Syria.

A2

## FROM A1

By Edwin O. Fernandez  
@inqmindanao

**COTABATO CITY**—Military and police officials are looking at an Islamic State-inspired group as possibly behind the blast that killed two people and injured more than 30 others outside a shopping mall here on New Year's Eve.

Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said the attack was apparently a retaliation for his unit's offensive against the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and a group that had broken away from it, the Daulah Islamiyah.

Both groups have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) jihadi group in Iraq and Syria.

### Fatalities identified

A homemade bomb packed with cut nails and ball bearings went off in front of the baggage counter at the entrance to South Seas Mall along Don Rufino Alonzo Avenue at 1:59 p.m. on Monday, killing the driver of a member of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) and a woman who was about to enter the shopping mall.

The fatalities were identified on Tuesday as Jonathan Tasic Torribiano, 39, driver of BTC Commissioner Melanio Ulama, and Miriam Wahab Kali, 31, of Barangay Poblacion 2, Cotabato City.

Malacañang vowed that justice would be served.

"We empathize with the families, relatives and friends of those who suffered from this unhappy occurrence. To them, we vow that we will get to the bottom of this at the soonest possible time," presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo said in a statement.

The bomb went off as people were doing last-minute shopping for the traditional New Year celebrations.

Officials said on Tuesday that 34 other people were injured in the blast. Three of them were in critical condition, they said.

Scattered debris, including items sold for New Year's Eve revelry such as horns made of cardboard and plastic, gifts and a bloody slipper lay at the shopping mall's entrance.

Windows of surrounding buildings were shattered by the blast.

Sobejana said a man was seen carrying a box that he left in front of the baggage counter of the shopping mall. It exploded

a few seconds later.

### Second bomb

The explosion prompted police to search the shopping mall, leading to the discovery of another bomb, which they destroyed, said Chief Insp. Rowell Zafra, spokesperson for the local police.

Sobejana said the bomb that went off had the signature of the Daulah Islamiyah.

He said the military had some "leads" in the attack but did not elaborate.

Abu Misry Mama, spokesperson for the BIFF and the Daulah Islamiyah, said on Tuesday that neither group had a hand in the blast.

Senior Supt. Rolly Octavio, city police director, said investi-

put on lockdown, with a "no ID, no entry" policy being enforced at checkpoints and all points of exit and entry into the city.

A militant Moro group rejected the military's theory.

Jerome Succor Aba, a spokesperson for Suara Bangsamoro, said the rush to accuse IS-inspired militants even before an investigation could be carried out would justify a military takeover of Cotabato City and other Muslim-majority areas in Mindanao as residents prepared for a plebiscite to ratify the proposed charter of a new Muslim autonomous region on the island.

#### **BOL plebiscite**

The plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), which would establish the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, is set for Jan. 21 and Feb. 6.

Aba said a military takeover could limit the campaign for the plebiscite or even lead to the cancellation of the vote for security reasons.

Lt. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal, chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, condemned the bombing and gave assurance of full-military cooperation with the Philippine National Police in the investigation of the attack.

Responding to criticism that the blast happened despite the extension of martial law in Mindanao for another year, Col. Noel Detoyato, chief of the AFP public affairs office, said, "It could have been worse without martial law."

President Duterte placed Mindanao under martial law in May 2017 to crush IS-inspired local terrorists who seized Marawi City in Lanao del Sur province.

Congress has extended military rule on the island three times on the President's request, the latest up to Dec. 31, 2019.

Gov. Mujiv Hataman of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao called the perpetrators of the explosion "evil," and urged residents of the region to pray for the people of Cotabato City.

"Evil acts like this will be punished in this world and the next, while all good deeds will be rewarded," Hataman said.

Murad Ebrahim, chief of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which has signed a peace agreement with the government and is leading the campaign for the ratification of the proposed Bangsamoro charter, also condemned the attack, describing it as "an act of cowardice, inhuman and atrocious." —WITH REPORTS FROM JEANNETTE I. ANDRADE, MART SAMBALUD, GEOFFREY MAITEM, JULIE M. AURELIO AND AFP INQ

gators were reviewing images captured by security cameras at the shopping mall for leads.

Octavio said a security camera captured the image of the man who left the second bomb at the shopping mall's baggage counter.

He said bomb experts recovered about a kilo of cut nails, a plastic container with traces of black powder, and cell-phone parts.

#### **Lockdown**

Cotabato City Mayor Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi on Tuesday claimed the authorities had "information about the suspects," but had yet to determine the motive for the attack.

Sayadi said the city had been



## Gov't can afford to suspend fuel excise tax — lawmaker

By JESS DIAZ

The government can actually afford to suspend the P1 to P2 fuel tax increase that took effect yesterday, according to congressmen belonging to the Liberal Party (LP).

Speaking for his LP bloc, Marikina Rep. Romero Qui-mbo said Assistant Finance Secretary Teresa Habitan had told a House hearing that the Department of Finance was projecting a P40-billion revenue loss if this year's fuel tax hike were suspended for the whole year.

"That could easily be offset through more efficient tax collection and through the various tax measures that the House has approved," he said.

Among the approved measures were two bills increasing levies on alcohol and tobacco products, and another bill

seeking the grant of a general tax amnesty next year to thousands of delinquent taxpayers.

Rep. Michael Romero of 1-Pacman, one of the authors of the amnesty bill, said the proposed amnesty grant is among President Duterte's legislative priorities.

"It aims to give delinquent taxpayers the opportunity to have a clean slate by paying an amnesty tax and to be fully compliant on their tax obligations moving forward," he said.

He said based on previous amnesty grants, the government could generate tens of billions of pesos from the planned new reprieve.

"It's a one-time grant that we hope taxpayers with delinquencies would avail themselves of," he added.

Romero pointed out that "even if just half or one-fourth

of the revenue target is collected, it would be a big boost to government resources that could fund vital services."

He said he expects many families that have inherited properties to take advantage of the amnesty offer since the estate tax has been cut from as high as 20 percent to just six percent under the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law.

Aside from the reduced tax, the law increased the standard deduction from P1 million to P5 million and exempts a family home worth up to P10 million (the previous limit was P1 million) from the estate levy, he stressed.

The proposed amnesty would cover 2017 and prior years. An applicant would be required to file with the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) an amnesty return accompanied

by a notarized statement of total assets as of Dec. 31, 2017. The applicant would pay an amnesty tax of two percent of such assets. On estate tax liabilities, the amnesty levy is six percent.

Romero said he expects the planned new amnesty offer to be in place in time for the first quarter tax-filing period.

Deputy speaker and Batangas Rep. Raneo Abu said the proposed estate tax liabilities amnesty "will promote the interest of heirs in developing inherited real properties and boost revenues of local government units.

"It will also result in the updating of real property records and titles," he said.

### **Mismanagement**

And while Filipinos have yet to feel the impact of the second phase of TRAIN, Rep.

Gary Alejano said the first part of the tax reform measure was no doubt a failure and had only highlighted the Duterte administration's mismanagement of the economy.

"2018 has been an extra weight on the shoulders of Filipinos with prices of basic needs rising while the government seemed oblivious to these concerns," Alejano of party-list group Magdalo said.

He said while there were more urgent problems to solve, the Duterte administration chose "to prioritize instead moves to expand power, attacks on the opposition and preferential treatment for China."

He said the TRAIN law, which administration officials claimed was the President's "best Christmas and New Year's gift" to Filipinos, had "turned out to be a huge night-

mare for our people."

"There is no need for additional taxes under TRAIN as the government is awash with unused funds," Alejano stressed.

As for Chinese aggression in the West Philippine Sea, the former Marine captain turned lawmaker said the administration "has been hesitant to file diplomatic protests and worse, has been downplaying the situation.

"Instead of asserting our claims and control in the West Philippine Sea, the Duterte leadership has only put our side to further disadvantage with agreements like the signing of a memorandum of understanding for joint exploration," he said. ✍

He added that Chinese promises of financial assistance "have mostly remained just that - promises."

# Malacañang cites gains of 'strong and decisive Duterte leadership'

By Eren Montano

**PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has shown "strong and decisive leadership" in advancing the nation's interests since taking office two and half years ago, Malacañang said in its 2018 yearend report.**

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo, in Malacañang's 54-page report, cited some of the Duterte administration's achievements in the past year which include the return of the historic Balangiga Bells, declaration of the Philippine Rise as a marine resource reserve, signing of a memorandum of agreement between the Philippines and Kuwait for the protection of overseas Filipino workers, the rehabilitation of Boracay, and the government's "anti-endo" campaign or the campaign to end the practice of labor contractualization.

Panelo also mentioned the signing of "landmark pieces of legislation" including free irrigation, free tuition in 112 state universities and colleges, a national mental health policy and a national feed-

ing program for undernourished school children.

Executive issuances were also highlighted by the Palace official, which included protecting the right of all workers to security of tenure, reviving barter in Mindanao, and increasing employees' compensation benefits in the private sector and allowance in the government.

Citing National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) data, the Palace said the Philippine economy "has been growing at least 6 percent for 14 consecutive quarters now." This is the strongest economic growth the country has seen since the mid-1970s, according to Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia. Meanwhile, 35 out of the 75 infrastructure flagship projects which have a total investment requirement of P1.54 trillion have been approved by the NEDA as of end of November 2018. Malacañang also trumpeted the administration's advancements in the country's justice system.

According to data from the Department of Justice, annual preliminary investigation backlogs were re-

duced from 59 percent in 2015 to 45 percent by the end of 2017.

Total nationwide conviction rate increased from 18 percent in 2015 to 22 percent by the end of 2017 while nationwide conviction rate on illegal drugs cases also increased from 28 percent in 2016 to 33 percent.

For the government's drive against corruption and exacting accountability and promoting good governance, the Palace cited 17 Boracay officials who were charged; 237 Ombudsman decisions; 186 local officials police deputation withdrawn; 57 complaints against local officials investigated; 16 local officials to be charged for failure to organize the Barangay Anti-Drug Abuse Council (BADAC); and eight show-cause orders issued and implemented against illegal mining operations in Caraga.

The National Security Council, according to Malacañang has monitored, discussed and resolved national security issues and concerns through the Cabinet Cluster on Security, Justice and Peace (SJJP).

On the West Philippine Sea dispute, the Palace said the Security Cluster "recommended courses of action by the Philippine (PH) government on the political, diplomatic and socio-economic impact of the Arbitral Tribunal award." For peace and order issues, the Security Cluster resolved issues and concerns related to the peace process with the Communist Party of the Philippines/ New People's Army/ National Democratic Front, Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Moro National Liberation Front.

The Security Cluster also provided recommendations that would address public reactions to the list of government officials/ personnel involved in illegal drug-related activities; and issue of extra-judicial killings (EJKs), the Palace noted.

Panelo, who is also the President's chief legal counsel, said "2019 will certainly be an exciting year" as the government looks forward to the implementation of the Philippine National Identification System, the plebiscite for the Bangsamoro

Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, the country's hosting of the Southeast Asian Games

and the entry of the official third major telco player. "With all these, the Duterte administration will

certainly enter the new year with enthusiasm and vigor in serving the people," Panelo said.

# Rody to Pinoys: Help defeat drugs, corruption

By ALEXIS ROMERO

President Duterte yesterday urged Filipinos to join the fight against social ills and to learn from the lessons of the past as the nation welcomes the New

Year.

Duterte expressed confidence that with patriotic fervor and solidarity, Filipinos would overcome the challenges that impede their march toward "a more prosperous and progressive

future."

"We welcome the new year full of hope and optimism. As we herald the start of another year, let us reflect on our storied past and learn from its lessons so that we can face the future with more

confidence," the President said in his New Year's Day message.

"Let us work hand in hand to defeat the ills of drugs, criminality and corruption that stunt our development,"

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## Rody From Page 1

he added.

Duterte wished Filipinos a blessed and bountiful New Year and asked them to unite as they face the country's issues.

"Together, let us face all obstacles head on, armed with the knowledge and brimming with hope that we can triumph over any struggle that we may face as a nation," the President said.

Malacañang asked Filipinos to pray for the President to enable him to attain his goals for the nation.

"As we express our gratitude to the Almighty for all the blessings we received in 2018, we welcome the new year as an opportune time to reflect on the past year's experiences and draw lessons from the things that had transpired, particularly how successfully the administration has overcome the challenges of the previous year," presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said in a statement.

"As another chapter of our Republic's history is about to unfold, let us continue to be united in our efforts and

prayers to help realize the President's vision of a more comfortable life for all Filipinos," he added.

### Albaya vows relentless campaign

Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Director General Oscar Albaya vowed that the government's war on illegal drugs will remain relentless this year.

"The anti-drug war must remain relentless and strong even as we must continue to sharpen our capabilities and strategies to once and for all put an end to this menace that has long been destroying many lives," he said in his New Year's message to the officers and personnel of the country's police force.

Meanwhile, President Duterte's crackdown on illegal drugs has resulted in the deaths of at least 5,050 alleged drug pushers and users in reported shootouts with law enforcement authorities.

The number of drug suspects arrested since the start of the campaign in July 2016 has reached 164,265.



Aware of the challenges and expectations from the public, Albayalde urged his fellow officers to exert more effort to ensure their accomplishments are not wasted.

"With the downtrend in crime in 2018, I thus urge every member of the organization to exert greater effort to sustain this trend and assure our countrymen of our best in ensuring more peaceful streets and safer communities," he said.

Albayalde also put emphasis on sustaining their drive to weed out misfits within the PNP.

"We will make sure to put more teeth to our internal

cleansing efforts with greater responsibility and accountability now placed on the shoulders of commanders for the erring personnel in their ranks," he said.

The PNP Counter-Intelligence Task Force has neutralized at least 100 corrupt police officers, nine of whom were killed in alleged shootouts.

Albayalde directed the police to be ready for two major events this year, the plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law this January in Mindanao and the midterm elections in May.

"While all these will be at the center of our efforts, let us not be remiss in the performance of other police duties and

responsibilities," he said.

As this developed, militant groups said they are bracing themselves for more "blood and repression" from the government's operations against activists, critics and alleged communist sympathizers.

"The regime's line of categorizing activists, political dissenters and government critics with the armed revolutionary movement makes those engaged in perfectly legal, not to mention legitimate political activities, as targets of surveillance, intimidation and armed attack by state security forces oriented in brutal tokhang-style operations,"

Teddy Casiño, Bagong Aly-

ansang Makabayan national council member, pointed out.

"Just this week, in joint operations conducted by the 302nd Infantry Brigade and 94th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army, and assisted by the (PNP), at least six persons were killed and 16 arrested in Negros Oriental on the pretext of an intensified anti-drug and anti-criminality campaign," Casiño added.

"In Mindanao, Duterte has ordered the arming of more paramilitary recruits among members of lumad communities while declaring rebels as mere criminals and bandits," he said. — With Emmanuel Tupas, Rhodina Villanueva

### **Militiaman runs amuck; 1 dead, 2 hurt**

ZAMBOANGA CITY – A militiaman went amuck and opened fire at a checkpoint in Isabela, Basilan on Monday, leaving a soldier dead and two other militiamen wounded.

The fatality was identified as Sali Tagayan, who died while being treated in a hospital.

Alejandro Enriquez and Sahadain Indanan Mustamad of the Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Unit were transferred to a hospital in this city, where they remained confined yesterday.

Chief Superintendent Emmanuel Luis Licup, Zamboanga peninsula police director, said the suspect, Faisal Alam, shot the victims without any provocation and escaped after the incident.

– Roel Pareño

## 'Usman' death toll now 75 – NDRRMC

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD  
and ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said that the death toll has risen to 75 as a result of tropical depression 'Usman', mostly caused by drowning and landslides.

Office of Civil Defense (OCD) Director for Operations and NDRRMC

Spokesman Edgar Posadas, said of the 75 reported deaths as of Tuesday morning, 59 are in the Bicol Region, 13 in Eastern Visayas, and three in MIMAROPA (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan), and elsewhere.

However, Posadas said the NDRRMC through the Management of the Dead and the Missing (MDM) Cluster, is still validating the reported

75 fatalities.

"Casualties are still subject for validation and verification," he said.

Posadas said at least 17 persons were also reported missing in the same regions while 12 persons from Bicol and MIMAROPA were reported injured.

**Rains over most of Luzon**

Meanwhile, the state weather agency warned yes-

►8

# 'Usman' death toll...

◀1

terday that flash floods and landslides are likely in Cagayan Valley, including Aurora and Quezon provinces as rains will persist over most of Luzon due to the northeast monsoon or amihan.

According to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), the amihan will bring cloudy skies with light to moderate rains over Batanes, Cagayan, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, Aurora, and Quezon.

Light rains will also be felt in Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Abra, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, Mountain Province, Apayao, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, Zambales, Albay, Catanduanes, Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, Sorsogon, and Masbate.

Metro Manila and the rest of Luzon will have partly cloudy to cloudy skies with isolated light rains.

P242 M

Meanwhile, NDRRMC Executive Director and Office of Civil Defense (OCD) Administrator Undersecretary Ricardo Jalad, said the damages to agriculture in the Bicol Region due to 'Usman' has been estimated at P242, 129,035.

Jalad said that affected by the tropical depression were 30,469 families from 321 barangays in CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon), MIMAROPA, Bicol and Eastern Visayas.

Of the families affected, 3,619 families are now at 112 evacuation centers and 128 families are in other shelters.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has provided Family Food Packs and other relief goods.

## 28 roads passable

Jalad said that 92 road sections and three bridges in Regions MIMAROPA, 5, 6, and 8 were also reported

affected by the weather disturbance. Of the number, 28 road sections are already passable.

Thirty-six domestic flights were cancelled due to the weather disturbance yesterday.

## Power interruption

Jalad also said that 67 areas in CALABARZON, MIMAROPA, Bicol Region, and Eastern Visayas had power interruption since December 29. Power in 12 cities and municipalities in MIMAROPA have already been restored.

As part of the preparedness measures, a total of 6,479 families were pre-emptively evacuated in 146 barangays in Eastern Visayas.

The DSWD, LGUs and NGOs had provided P1, 678,995 worth of assistance to flood victims in MIMAROPA, Bicol and Eastern Visayas.

## Search and Rescue in Bicol

Jalad said Search, Rescue and Retrieval (SRR) operations are still being conducted in Bicol, particularly in Legazpi and Libon where landslides and heavy flooding were reported.

He said the SRR Team are composed of 98 personnel from the Philippine Air Force (PAF), Philippine Navy (PN), Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), Philippine National Police (PNP), together with local rescuers and volunteers.

As this developed, 89 personnel from the PNP, DPWH, BFP, PAF, PN, and Coast Guard together with the Provincial Incident Management Team (IMT), are also conducting SRR operations in Tiwi, Nabua, Iriga and Buhi, as a response to reported landslides and flooding.

## Aurora rivers in critical level

Meanwhile, in Baler, Aurora, the provincial disaster risk reduction and management office (PDRRMO) ordered yesterday a preemptive evacuation in at least three low-lying

communities as flood waters continued to rise due to an intermittent heavy downpour since Dec. 30.

Engineer Leandro Dungca, Jr., acting PDRRMO chief, said rescue trucks have already been dispatched in Sitio Virrey in Barangay Pingit, Sitio Gabgab in Barangay Buhangin and Barangay Obligacion to pre-emptively evacuate families to avoid getting into danger.

Dungca said the two major rivers of Aguang in Barangay Buhangin and Kinalapan in Barangay Pingit have already reached its critical level.

Heavy equipment from the local DPWH have started clearing operations along the portion of Baler - Bongabon in Barangay Diteki, San Luis due to landslide. Heavy equipment were already on standby status in several areas which are prone to landslides, he added.

## Not passable

Quoting a report from the municipal disaster office, Dungca said that the Culat-Coso river is no longer passable making the village isolated to all forms of transportation.

Metro Manila and the rest of Luzon will have partly cloudy to cloudy skies with isolated light rains.

## Visayas, Mindanao weather

PAGASA said Visayas and Mindanao will have generally fair weather today with partly cloudy to cloudy skies, especially in the morning. Some rain showers will be felt due to localized thunderstorms. The public is also warned of possible flooding or landslides during severe thunderstorms.

Due to the surge of amihan, a gale warning remains in effect as sea travel remains risky over the seaboard of Luzon and eastern coast of Visayas.

PAGASA warned fisherfolk from setting sail into these coastlines due to rough seas that will be dangerous for small sea crafts.

The rest of the country will have moderate to rough seas. (With a report from Ariel Avendano)



## Davao Region corners P15b in investments despite ML

DAVAO CITY—Davao Region is on track to corner at least P15 billion in investments in 2018 despite martial law jitters, an official of the Department of Trade and Industry said.

Region 11 has already captured investment projects worth P14.8 billion as of January to November this year, DTI-11 Assistant Regional Director Edwin Banquerigo noted.

Of the total projects, majority are in Davao City worth P14.1 billion, followed by Davao del Norte at P687.4 million.

"This is an indication that the region is right for investment," Banquerigo said during the agency's annual yearend briefing.

Banquerigo said concerns on martial law had initially spooked the business sector this year, but these proved to be a non-factor as more businesses remain bullish with Davao Region's economic potential.

He said optimism for the region's business climate is expected to drive more investments well into 2019.

DTI-11 records show that based on the business name registration alone, Davao City has close to 10,334 new business registrants as of November 2018.

"If you move around, there are many infrastructures everywhere. The skyline is changing very fast. The number of hotels is popping up," the DTI official noted.

DTI-11 said the major projects in the region in 2018 consist of water supply, sewage and water management worth P13.32 billion; real estate activities with P665.3 million; human health and social science with P376.5 million; agriculture, forestry and fishing with P325.97 million; administrative and support services with P121.25 million; and accommodation and food service activities with P14.8 million.

The agency also noted an increase in investment promotion activities, such as the holding of trade fairs, forums, and capacity building workshops.

Banquerigo said trade promotion activities have resulted in the realization of big infrastructure projects, as the Davao South Greenspace Eco-Industrial Park, where a 450-hectare lot in Astorga, Davao del Sur will be developed into a seaport that will host a shipbuilding facility, logistics center, a business park and information technology hub.

Meanwhile, the Compostela Valley Business and Investment Conference raked in total investment leads worth P258.08 million from 15 firms.

The business sector also negotiated and booked sales amounting to P56,704 million while new and expansion projects in ComVal province are also expected in the areas of processing, production, real estate, and infrastructure development. PNA

B4

# 7 cops who fired guns face raps

Seven police officers accused of indiscriminate firing during the holidays face disciplinary action, the Philippine National Police (PNP) vowed yesterday.

PNP chief, Director General Oscar Albayalde said the seven police officers were arrested in separate operations from Dec. 16, 2018 to Jan. 1, 2019.

The seven cops, whose identities were withheld as of press time, are among the 23 individuals apprehended by the PNP nationwide when police units responded to 26 reports of illegal discharge of firearms during the Yuletide season.

"As I have promised, there will be no mercy for errant personnel who will fire their guns to celebrate the

holiday," Albayalde said.

According to PNP records, three of them are from the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO); one from Ilocos Police Regional Office (PRO-1); two from Central Luzon Police Regional Office (PRO-3); and one from Caraga Police Regional Office (PRO-13).

Aside from the seven cops, 16 others were also nabbed by authorities for indiscriminate firing.

They are composed of 10 civilians; two government officials; two security guards; one from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP); and one law enforcement agent (LEA). **(Martin Sadongdong)**

## ***Sa bisperas ng Bagong Taon*** **Sundalo nag-amok: 1 patay, 2 sugatan**

Hindi na umabot ng Bagong Taon ang isang Army Corporal habang sugatan ang dalawang CAFCU (Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Unit) member makaraang pagbabarilin ng nag-amok na sundalong kasamahan sa loob ng kanilang detachment noong Lunes o bisperas ng Bagong Taon sa Isabela City, Basilan.

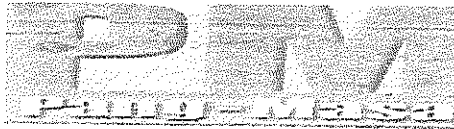
Sa ulat ni Police Regional Office (PRO)-9 Director P/Chief Supt. Emmanuel Luis Licup, kinilala ang nasawi na si Corporal Sali Tagayan habang ang mga sugatan ay nakilalang sina Alejandro Enriquez at Indanan Mustamad. Agad namang tumakas ang suspek na si Faisal Alam

bitbit ang isang M16 rifle na ginamit nito sa krimen.

Sa ulat, bandang alas-5:50 ng hapon habang abala ang mga biktima sa pagbabantay sa kanilang himpilan sa Kapatagan Grande Detachment Patrol Base, 15th Company ng Philippine Army sa Brgy. Kapatagan Grande ng siyudad nang bigla na lamang magwala si Alam.

Armado ng M-16 rifle, pinagbabaril ng suspek ang nasorpresang mga kasama kung saan napuruhan ang sundalong si Tagayan na kanyang agarang ikinasawi.

Si Alam ay desperado umano at may magigat na problema bago nangyari ang insidente. *(Joy Cantos)*



### **AMOK: ARMY CORPORAL UTAS, 2 CAFGU SUGATAN**

Isang Army Corporal ang idineklarang dead on arrival habang malubhang nasugatan ang dalawang CAFGU (Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Unit) nang sila ay pagbabarilin ng nag-amok nilang kasamahan sa loob ng kanilang detachment kamakalawa ng hapon sa Isabela City, Basilan. Kinilala ang nasawing si Corporal Sali Tagayan. Habang ang nasugatan na dinala sa ospital ay kinilalang sina CAFGU's Alejandro Enriquez at Indanan Mustamad.

Tumakas nanan ang suspek na nakilalang si Faisal Alian dala ang M16 rifle na ginamit nito sa mga biktima.

Ayon sa mga kasamahan na bago nangyari ang krimen ay napansin nila ang suspek ay may mabigat na problemang bandala. Sa ulat, bago nangyari ang insidente bandang alas-5:50 ng hapon ay abala ang mga biktima sa pagbabantay sa kanilang himpitan sa Kapatagan Grande Detachment Patrol Base, 15<sup>th</sup> Company ng Philippine Army sa Brgy. Kapatagan Grande ng siyudad nang bigla na lamang pinagtatayil ng suspek ng armalite ang mga biktima kung saan napuruhan si Cpl. Tagayan. *Joy Cantos*



# Army troops storm NPA camp, kill 2

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

**T**wo Communist New People's Army (NPA) fighters were killed in an encounter with government troops in Bukidnon Monday.

A report reaching Camp Aguinaldo said troopers from the Army's 8th Infantry Battalion and 43rd Division Reconnaissance Company overran an NPA camp in the mountainous boundary of Bukidnon and Agusan del Sur.

The camp belongs to the NPA's Sub-Regional Committee 2 of North Central Mindanao Regional Committee, the report said.

Aside from killing two rebels, the soldiers also seized two M14 rifles.

Troops were pursuing the remnants

of the rebel group, who left their dead cohorts behind.

Col. Edgardo de Leon, 43rd Division Reconnaissance Company commander, congratulated his men for the successful operation.

4th Infantry Division commander Major Gen. Ronald Villanueva, who is also the acting commander of the Eastern Mindanao Command (East-MinCom), reiterated his call for NPA guerrillas to surrender.

"Our forces on the ground are unleashing their combat skills. To the remaining NPA terrorists who still want to challenge our government, show us what you've got. For those wanting to take the path to real peace, come to us and we will help you," Villanueva said.

## Troops kill 2 NPA rebels in Agusan Sur

**ZAMBOANGA CITY:** Government troops clashed with communist insurgents and killed two of the rebels in San Luis town in Agusan del Sur, officials said on Tuesday.

According to the officials, the fighting erupted in Binicalan village after soldiers stormed a hideout of the New People's Army (NPA).

The troops recovered the bodies of the slain rebels and their weapons after the fighting on Monday.

Soldiers also captured the encampment, which the rebels were using as a springboard to launch attacks on military and police targets in the province.

There was no report of military casualties, but the government offensive is still continuing in the province, a known NPA lair.

The identities of the dead were unknown, and the NPA did not release any information on its casualties.

President Rodrigo Duterte has ordered the military to destroy the rebel group after peace talks collapsed despite repeated attempts to restart negotiations.

The communist group demanded that the government free all rebels jailed across the country before agreeing to a ceasefire.

AL JACINTO

## Top NPA leader nabbed in Mindanao

SECURITY forces on Sunday captured the top most wanted New People's Army rebel in Agusan del Norte during an operation in Carmen town, officials announced yesterday.

Joaquin Mardinian alias 'Ka Alto/Jun-jun' was described as the no. 2 most wanted criminal in the province prior to his arrest in Barangay Tagcatong in Carmen, Agusan del Norte by combined agents of the Police Regional Office 13 and the Philippine Army 4:30 a.m. last Saturday, Rizal Day.

PRO13 director Chief Superintendent Gilbert DCCruz said that Mardinian is the commanding officer of the Special Partisan Unit (SPARU) and In-

telligence Officer of the NPA's North Central Mindanao Committee's Sub-Regional Committee WANAS.

The official said that the suspect was finally caught following weeks of surveillance by members of the Army's 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Battalion under the Army's 402<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade based in Bancasi, Butuan City and the Agusan del Norte Police Provincial Office and the PNP Criminal Investigation and Detection Group.

The suspect yielded a caliber .45 pistol with a loaded magazine, 22 live cal. .45 ammunition and a hand grenade.

The suspect was accused of involvement in crimes in the region and is the

subject of several warrants of arrest for multiple murder, Cruz said.

He said that the suspect is wanted for the killings of several Lumad leaders in Agusan del Norte and Agusan del Sur specifically for the death of a Mayor Otaza, Ricardo Sulhayan alias "Datu Ka Doy Saliganan" of Nasipit, Datu Ernesto Mandahinog Burdios and civilians Jane Burdios, Junior Ligsanan, JR Castilla, and Lauro Hunasan.

The suspect was also believed to be involved in an attack on the Carmen Municipal Police Station in Agusan del Norte on March 16, 2003 and was said to be one of the men who torched a local company and harassed another

PNP patrol base in Camagong area last July 22.

The suspect is now facing additional non-bailable charges for illegal possession of explosive and firearm and ammunition.

## Mindanao's top NPA leader falls

**SECURITY** forces on Sunday captured the top most wanted New People's Army rebel in Agusan del Norte during an operation in Carmen town, officials announced yesterday.

Joaquin Mardinian alias 'Ka Alto/Jun-jun' was also described as the no. 2 most wanted criminal in the province prior to his arrest in Barangay Tagcatong in Carmen, Agusan del Norte by combined agents of the Police Regional Office 13 and the Philippine Army at 4:30 a.m. last Saturday, the Rizal Day Anniversary.

In a report to Philippine National Police chief, Director General Oscar D. Albayalde, PRO13 director, Chief Superintendent Gilbert DC Cruz said Mardinian is the commanding officer of the Special Partisan Unit (SPARU) and Intelligence Officer of the NPA's North Central Mindanao Committee's Sub-Regional Committee WANAS.

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**Alfred Dalizon**



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**NGAYON**

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**2 NPA dedo sa engkuwentro**

**NORTH COTABATO** - Dalawang mga pinaniniwalaang miyembro ng New People's Army (NPA) ang napatay matapos makasagupa ang mga otoridad sa hangganan ng Agusan del Sur at Bukidnon, partikular sa Brgy. Binicalan sa San Luis sa bisperas ng Bagong Taon. Sa ulat kay Lt. Col. Ronald Illana, commander ng 8th Infantry Battalion, nilusob ng pinagsanib na puwersa ng 8th-IB at 43rd Division Reconnaissance Company ang kuta ng mga rebeldeng komunista sa Brgy. Binicalan sa San Luis, Agusan del Sur. Maliban sa dalawang nasawi, may ilang mga kasapi rin ng NPA ang hinihinalang nasugatan sa bakbakan. Narekober mula sa kuta ng NPA ang dalawang M14 rifles. *(Rhoderick Beñez, Joy Cantos)*

## PNP, AFP defend Negros operations which slay 6

**THE** Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces yesterday defended their series of anti-criminality operations in Negros Oriental last December 27 which left 6 armed suspects dead as they assailed the New People's Army's latest propaganda on the matter.

"The Philippine National Police particularly the Police Regional Office 7 sturdily contradicts the accusations formed into propaganda by the Leonardo Panaligan Command on the issues of Extrajudicial Killings or (EJK), harassments and illegal arrests simultaneously done in the municipalities of Mabinay, La Libertad and Sta. Catalina and Guihulngan City on December 27, 2018," said PRO7 director, Chief Superintendent Debold M. Sinas.

The official said that those operations were the products of legitimate search warrants aimed at accounting for loose firearms at the hands of criminals and unauthorized persons in the province.

"We will always stand on the legitimate execution of our police functions clothed

with authority given by the courts through valid search warrants against all those who had violated the law as we are duty-bound to serve and protect the lives and properties of the people," he said.

Sinas said his men served 97 search warrants for violation of Republic Act 10591 or the Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Regulations Act of 2013 issued against the suspects last week.

"The subjects of these search warrants are those who possessed unregistered firearms that can be a great factor for criminalities to thrive in the area. These brought us up even to the extreme boundaries of the region in order to fulfill our sworn duties and responsibilities," the Central Visayas police director explained.

Sinas lambasted the NPA for riding on their anti-criminality campaign to malign the police and the military.

"Artificial statements fabricated by the Leonardo Panaligan Command of the CPP-NPA are baseless. It aims to destroy the credibility and sincerity of PNP and AFP in easing the threat out-carried by the dubious lawless ele-

ments victimizing innocent civilians," he said.

Sinas said there were 5 casualties during the raids in Guihulngan City and another in Sta. Catalina municipality after they opted to fight it out with the raiders.

He said one of the slain suspects in the Guihulngan City raid was identified as Jesus 'Dondon' Isugan, a main suspect in the brutal killing of Air Force Staff Sergeant Mark Herbert Oberes in January 2018.

Sinas said Isugan is the subject of a warrant of arrest for murder in connection with the killing of the Air Force serviceman and another warrant of arrest for arson issued by a Carcar City court.

"It would have been a widespread carnage if we are not observing the protocol in police operations as what the CPP-NPA falsely accused against us. We respect the dignity of every human being that is why we followed the procedure of the law," he said.

"The Leonardo Panaligan Command of the CPP-NPA through its spokesperson Juanito Magbanua accused us of 27 illegal arrests and 6 Extrajudicial Killings. Could there be illegal arrests when the police and the army performed their functions by the strength of search warrants? Will Hon. Joan Carlo Reyes the City Mayor of Guihulngan support the said operation if it would have been illegal? People have witnessed how the mayor of Guihulngan supported the Philippine National Police and the Philippine Army on the massive service and execution of search warrants. Clearly, the intrigues of the CPP-NPA are manipulative notions deemed to persuade their supporters from returning to the folds of the law integrating back into the mainstream of our society," Sinas said.

"What we did was to deprecate lawlessness in our entire area of responsibility legitimately backed up by the Philippine Army to vibrantly display the strength of the government to preserve the precious peace and order. There were no accusations, nor proliferation of wild ideas that these people who were arrested are members of the CPP-NPA as evident in their warrants of arrests which clearly described their infractions to the law," he added.

Alfred Calanan

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## 6 rebels killed

**SIX members of New Peoples Army (NPA) were killed while 24 others were arrested in series of law enforcement operations by combined elements of police and military over the weekend in Negros Occidental.**

The fatalities died from operations conducted by AFP and PNP from December 27 to 29 in Guihulngan City and the municipalities of Mabinay, La Libertad and Sta. Catalina.

The fatalities were identified as Reneboy Fat, Demetrio Fat, Dondon Isugan, Constancio Languita, Jun Cubul and Jaime Revilla, all residents in the area.

Nearly 65 firearms were confiscated during the operations, including M203, M-16, M-4 rifles and grenade launchers and grenades.

Among those arrested was former Guihulngan Mayor Cesar Macalua.

Seized from him were a cal. 45 and a 9 mm pistol, as well as assorted ammunition.

**Zaida de los Reyes**

# Peace talks: An on and off relationship

FROM the time he won the 2016 presidential elections, President Rodrigo Duterte unequivocally said that he wanted to go back to the negotiating table with the National Democratic Front (NDF), the political wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

When he won and subsequently took his oath as President, Jesus Dureza, his then aide and adviser on the peace process told him that several NDF officials were in Davao City to talk peace with the incoming government.

CPP founder Jose Maria "Joma" Sison also held a video talk with Duterte as the new president was preparing to assume office in Malacañang. This sparked a lot of opposition, especially from the opposition.

In July 2016, Duterte approved a six-point peace and development agenda, which also included the timeline of the peace talks with the CPP, NDF and their armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA).

He then declared a unilateral ceasefire for the government during his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) but a few days later, the President lifted the truce after communist rebels ambushed militiamen in Davao del Norte.

In February 2017, Duterte declared the end of peace negotiations with the communists. Then followed the off-and-on engagement between the government and the rebels.

The President issued two proclamations: one, formally ending the talks and the other, declaring the CPP and NPA as terrorist organizations.

However, Duterte, again, changed his mind and ordered the resumption of the peace talks, ordering in April



**RED FIGHTERS** Members of the New People's Army, the armed wing of the Communist Party, march in their camp somewhere in the Sierra Madre mountains. FILE PHOTO BY RENE H. DILAN

this year, followed by a Manila City court granting the request of several NDF consultants to travel to The Netherlands for the negotiations.

Negotiators from both panels held backchannel talks in Amsterdam and both agreed to continue the peace talks in Oslo, Norway.

However, later in June, Duterte ordered another cancellation of negotiations, citing that the government would first have to study the signed documents during the backchannel talks including the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (Jasig), among others.

This earned Sison's ire. He said that the CPP would close its doors to any possible resumption of peace talks. But, he backtracked, noting that he was misquoted by some media outlets.

## Peace sans Duterte

According to Sison, the Left is no longer optimistic that the negotiations would take place under the Duterte administration.

"The NDFF is no longer optimistic as when Duterte promised on May 16, 2016 to [grant] amnesty [to] and release all political prisoners," he told *The Manila Times* in an online interview.

In November, Dureza resigned adviser on the peace process, taking command responsibility for the anomalies uncovered in the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP).

This also irked Sison, who said that Dureza had been sincere and open about holding peace negotiations with the communist rebels.

After Dureza's resignation,

Duterte picked former armed forces chief Carlito Galvez Jr. as the new adviser on the peace process, which coincidentally, came after the latter mentioned that he had applied as consultant of the Opapp.

But Sison rejected the idea.

"Duterte is practically a captive of his own security cluster whose officials dictate on him a militarist policy of suppressing the revolutionary forces and the people and seeking the destruction or surrender of the NPA," he said.

On the other end, the defense and military establishments rejected the peace talks with the rebels citing lack of sincerity from the Left.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, however, said he might reconsider his stance over the resumption of peace talks if the

CPP and NDF leadership would show "sincerity and truthfulness in pursuing peace."

Lorenzana laid down conditions that could make him change his mind about peace negotiations with the communists.

These include a stop to the rebels' extortion of businessmen, contractors, miners and plantations; a stop to attacks and killings of soldiers, policemen and other local officials; a renouncement of the rebels' armed struggle; and finally, an agreement to a ceasefire that "has a mechanism to account for all NPA regulars and their firearms."

"Absent [of these], we are just fooling ourselves or they are just fooling us," Lorenzana said in a separate interview.

"They have reaped all the benefits and advantages of peace talks held in a foreign country in the past 30 years," he added.

### 'Are you kidding?'

When asked if he foresees resumption of talks with the communists, Lorenzana replied: "Peace with the communists during the Duterte administration? Are you kidding? No, peace will not be achieved with Sison and the NDF because the President has terminated talks with them."

Lorenzana believes that achieving peace with local CPP and NPA leaders may be possible through the initiative of localized peace talks, a move the Philippine military and the Defense secretary himself had been pushing.

He also boasted of the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) that the government has put in place for NPA rebels who surrender and

return to the fold of the law.

Lorenzana explained that under E-CLIP, rebel surrenderers are provided with housing, livelihood, cash in exchange for firearms, medical care, education.

As to the security implications, he said the cancellation of the peace negotiations would be "favorable" to the country.

"I am confident that [the] government's current program, approved by the President, will finally end this national scourge, the communist insurgency," Lorenzana said.

### 'Detached'

For the military, Sison's allegations that Duterte is held captive by the Cabinet security cluster betrays that "Mr. Sison is detached from reality. His age has caught up with his line of reasoning. May I recommend that he see a geriatrician as soon as possible," said Col. Noel Detoyato, AFP public affairs chief, in an interview.

Detoyato also responded to Sison's accusation of the supposed militarization of the government's peace panel after Galvez was appointed to the Opapp.

"No peace talks will be affected because there is no peace talks involving him in the first place. Has he forgotten that it was already cancelled?" Detoyato asked.

He assured that the government has been addressing the root cause of the communist insurgency in the country, which he said was started by Sison.

Sison said the NDF would keep its doors open should the Duterte administration change its mind over the resumption of the peace negotiations, despite Lorenzana's rejection of the idea.

**DEMPEY REYES**

## Zambo Norte mayor's son freed by Abu captors

ZAMBOANGA CITY – A son of Mayor Eddie Quimbo of Labason, Zamboanga del Norte, who was kidnapped by Abu Sayyaf bandits in September 2017, was reunited with his family on Sunday.

The military said businessman Jelster Ed Tiu Quimbo, 28, was released by his captors in Barangay Anuling, Patikul, Sulu. He was turned over to former Sulu governor Abdusakur Tan Sr. before he was presented to personnel of the Joint Task Force Sulu.

Quimbo picked up Jelster at the Western Mindanao Command headquarters.

"I would like to thank President Duterte, (former special assistant to the President) Bong Go, (former secretary (Jesus) Dureza and the military leadership for...

the safe release of my son," Quimbo said.

"I have been advising (my son) to lose weight and it seems going up to the mountain did it," he added in jest.

Jelster said he experienced at least 10 encounters between his captors and the military during his captivity.

"There was an instance when I thought it was my last... we were sleeping when... we were attacked and bombarded with cannons by the military," he said.

Quimbo claimed no ransom was paid in exchange for Jelster's release, but admitted giving an unspecified amount of money for "expenses."

The military said three foreigners and three Filipinos remain in the hands of the Abu Sayyaf. — Roel Pareño



## Maute, Abu ally tagged in mall blast

By JAIME LAUDE  
and EMMANUEL TUPAS

Security forces have linked the terrorist group Daulah Islamiyah to last Monday's bombing of a shopping mall in Cotabato City that left two people dead and over 30 others wounded.

*UK issues travel advisory on Mindanao. See Page 5.*

Regional military commander Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana yesterday said initial investigation showed the design of the bomb was similar to those used by extremists who have pledged allegiance

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to Islamic State (IS).

"We are looking here at the Daulah Islamiyah as the perpetrators," Sobejana said.

Philippine National Police (PNP) spokesman Chief Supt. Benigno Durana Jr. also said police investigators have found similarities in the type of explosives used by the Maute group and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

"Based on the modus operandi and signature, our investigators have initially found as a result of the post-blast investigation that an ISIS-inspired local terrorist group was behind the bombing," Durana said, referring to the IS.

Daulah Islamiyah is a group of local and foreign Muslim extremists, which in alliance with the Maute and Abu Sayyaf led the attack and occupation of Marawi City last year.

While the terror group is known to be operating on their own in Central Mindanao provinces, they were monitored to have worked several times alongside BIFF.

Government forces launched an offensive against militants belonging to Daulah Islamiyah last week and at least seven of the militants died in the fighting, Sobejana said.

He said the Cotabato mall bombing could be part of retaliation from the group.

"But the problem is they're victimizing innocent civilians," Sobejana said.

Sobejana said aside from Daulah Islamiyah, the military and police are still looking at other homegrown terror groups.

The bomb went off near a baggage counter at the entrance of the South Seas mall in Cotabato City, wounding shoppers,

vendors and commuters.

Two people were killed instantly while 36 others were brought to different hospitals for medical treatment. Officials said 10 of the wounded were minors.

Durana, however, pointed out that police have yet to determine who are behind the attack.

"It's a good principle in any investigation that we are not (limiting) ourselves to just one possible suspect," he said.

Durana also defended the local police over questions about possible lapses in security.

He said security forces cannot guard every inch of Mindanao, the reason why they need the cooperation of the public.

PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde ordered the formation of a task force to focus on the investigation of the Cotabato bombing.

"I have immediately directed the creation of a special investigation task group to get to the bottom of this incident. We appeal to the public to remain calm but watchful and to immediately report to the authorities any information that may lead us to the suspects and help us crack this case," he said.

Albayalde condemned the attack which happened hours before the New Year.

"We vow to mobilize all available resources in order to quickly bring to the bars of justice those responsible for these cowardly attacks against innocent civilians," he said.

The latest bombing comes as Mindanao prepares for a plebiscite in January for the creation of a Muslim autonomous area as part of an effort to end the separatist insurgency.

Many of the IS-linked groups have openly rejected these peace efforts. —With John Unson

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## INQUIRER

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**Son of Sulu town mayor freed after 1 year**

After more than a year in captivity, the son of Mayor Eddie Quimbo, of Labason town, Sulu province, was freed by Abu Sayyaf in the town of Patikul. Chief Supt. Emmanuel Licup, regional police director, said Jed Quimbo was freed past 4 p.m. on Dec. 30. Jed was kidnapped on Sept. 6, 2017, by six unidentified men who forced him at gunpoint into a van. Licup said after Jed's release, he was handed over to his brother, Justin, at the residence of former Sulu Gov. Abdusakur Tan. Jed will undergo debriefing and medical checkup at Camp Teodulfo Bautista Station Hospital. He would be transferred to another hospital after. —JULIE ALIPALA

## INJURY TOLL IN COTABATO BLAST CLIMBS UP TO 34

THE number of injured victims from a bomb explosion in Cotabato City on New Year's Eve has risen from 30 to 34, police said on Tuesday.

The number of fatalities stood at two, they added.

The two casualties, who were identified as Jonathan Torrebiano and Mariam Kali, succumbed to wounds caused by an improvised explosive device (IED) that exploded in front of South Seas Mall around 1:59 p.m.

Torrebiano was brought to the Cotabato Regional and Medical Center where he died and Kali to Cotabato Medial Specialist Hospital where he also died.

The 34 who were injured were brought to other hospitals, where three of them will undergo operation, seven are still confined but already in stable condition and 24 were already released.

Another IED was found in the

baggage area on the second floor of the mall around 2:40 p.m., but it was defused.

This allegedly contained black powder.

Those behind the explosion are

yet to be identified, but Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of 6th Infantry Division, said the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and the Daulah Islamiyah were the ones behind the attack.

He added that this attack could be part of the two terrorist groups' retaliation for an attack on them on December 27.

Philippine National Police chief Oscar Albayalde condemned the

attack and immediately ordered the creation of a Special Investigation Task Group to look into the incident.

"We sincerely express our deep sympathy and offer our fervent prayers to the families of those killed

and injured even as we vow to mobilize all available resources in order to quickly bring to the bars of justice those responsible for these cowardly attacks against innocent civilians," he said.

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## MILF chairman, ARMM gov condemn bomb attack

**CAMP DARAPANAN, Simuay, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao:** The chairman of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Central Committee and the regional governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) on Tuesday condemned the mall incident that killed two persons and injured 34 others, including 10 minors.

MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim said the attack was an act of cowardice.

"We call on all concerned authorities to sincerely and thoroughly investigate this evil act," Murad added.

"We should not allow any party or

group to make premature conclusions or draw insinuations so as to advance their own personal interest and political agenda," the MILF chairman said.

He added that they were saddened that the incident took place at a time while they were in the thick of preparations for a plebiscite on ratification of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BOL) on January 21.

Murad recalled that in the past, similar incidents derailed the Bangsamoro peace process.

"We must forge ahead with the same resolve as before so that we may finally achieve peace," he said.

Murad called on the citizens of Cotabato City to stand united in securing the community and ensuring that peace would finally reign there.

One of those killed was Jonathan Toribiano, the driver of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission head, and MILF First Vice Chairman Ghazali Jaafar.

Murad expressed his deepest condolences to the victims of the attack.

Hataman called the culprits "evil."

"We are irrevocably grieved about the casualties incurred, thoroughly condemn this act and call for a thorough investigation.

"We need to make sure acts like these never happen again, and that the perpetrator is brought to justice," he said.

Cotabato City is not part of the ARMM, but the city hosts the regional government center of the region.

Hataman urged investigators to look deeply into the case and ensure that "civilians not be caught up in the chaos surrounding this terrorist act.

"We cannot afford to be divisive at this moment. Only by melding together can we bring about peace and justice."

He urged civil leaders and security

officials to remain united.

"What we need is to be composed, to redouble our efforts and to hold on to our dream of peace in the region. We cannot be divided on this front," Hataman said.

Calling the incident an evil act, he also urged the people of ARMM to pray for the people of the city.

"Evil acts like these will be punished in this world and the next, while all good deeds will be rewarded. Let us remember the good people of Cotabato for the sake of our community," Hataman said.

**JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL**

## MILF denounces Cotabato mall blast; military sees terror hand

By Nash B. Maulana

COTABATO CITY—The Moro Islamic Liberation Front has added its voice to those condemning the bomb attack that killed two persons and wounded 31 others along a busy thoroughfare outside a mall on Monday.

At the same time, the Bangsamoro Transition Commission under MILF first vice chairman Ghazzali Jaafar urged the Office of the President to direct national law enforcement agencies to help determine the real perpetrators of the bomb attack and bring them to justice.

In an official statement sent to news organizations, MILF Chairman Hadji Murad Ibrahim said the MILF “condemns in the highest possible terms” Monday’s bomb attack.

“The dastardly act of [placing] an improvised explosive device [IED] with intent to kill or harm civilians is an act of cowardice, inhuman, and atrocious,” Murad said.

Murad called on “concerned authorities to sincerely and thoroughly investigate this evil act”—saying that ascribing any motive would be too premature at this time.

“We ask the authorities to examine all angles and make the result of the same public. We should not allow any party or group to make premature conclusions or draw insinuations so as to advance their own personal interest and political agenda,” he said.

He said the MILF sympathizes with the victims, and that the families of the

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## MILF...

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fatalities and the wounded deserved true justice.

He said it is for the reason of securing the community that the MILF and the government, together with all their partners in the peace process, have pushed hard for the passage of Bangsamoro Organic Law to establish a "government that can really protect and promote the peace and security of the place and its peoples."

In a BTC statement, Jaafar said it was unfortunate that one of the fatalities was an employee--Jonathan Torribiano, who was a driver for BTC Commissioner Melanio Ulama.

Lawyer Naguib Sinarimbo, secretary-general of the MILF's United Bangsamoro Justice Party, said while residents should be thankful for a prompt defusing of "explosives found in the baggage counter of the mall," reports falsely identified Nur Misuari, founding chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) as the owner of the South Seas Mall.

Sinarimbo said residents knew that the mall is not owned by Misuari but by the Lim family, who have been engaged in legitimate businesses after settling in Tawi-Tawi in the early 1960s, when Misuari was still virtually unknown.

Military officials said they believed the Islamic State-linked Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters had a hand in the bombing.

Among those injured in Monday's bombing, which came at about 2 p.m., were 10 minors, according to Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, the commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Division (ID).

He said initial investigation led to the BIFF, which has shifted to attacking non-combatants, starting with the twin bombings in Isulan in September 2018.

"We are not discounting the possibility that the Daesh-inspired group was responsible in the bombing," Sobejana said.

Senior Supt. Rolly Octavio, city police director, said police are reviewing the closed circuit TV (CCTV) camera footage taken at South Seas Mall to help identify the perpetrators.

"Our authorities have the information about the suspects, as to the motive, that is being determined," Cotabato City Mayor Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi said in a news conference some two hours after the blast.

Octavio said bomb experts recovered about one kilo of cut nails, a plastic container with traces of black powder and broken parts of a mobile phone at the blast site.

In a follow-up operation inside the mall, police found another bomb in the second-floor baggage counter left by a still unidentified man.

"A CCTV captured the man's facial features," Octavio said.

Gov. Mujiv Hataman of the 00 Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao also condemned the attack, calling those behind it "evil."

"We are irrevocably grieved about the casualties incurred, thoroughly condemn this act, and call for a thorough investigation. We need to make sure acts like these never happen again, and that the perpetrator is brought to justice," Hataman said in a statement released Monday.

Cotabato City, though not part of ARMM, hosts the administrative center of the region through its Shariff Ka-

bunsuan Complex here.

Hataman urged investigators to look deeply into the case and ensure that civilians do not get caught up in terror.

"We cannot afford to be divisive at this moment. Only by melding together can we bring about peace and justice," he said.

He urged civil leaders and security officials to remain united.

"What we need is to be composed, to redouble our efforts, and to hold on to our dream of peace in the region. We cannot be divided on this front," Hataman added.

The Japanese government and the European Union on Tuesday stood in solidarity with the Philippines following the mall bombing.

As a country "strongly condemning violent extremism," Japan stands in solidarity with the government and the people of the Philippines, Japanese Ambassador Koji Haneda said in a statement.

EU Ambassador Franz Jessen, meanwhile, said his thoughts and prayers go to the victims as he reiterated the bloc's support to the ongoing peace process in Mindanao.

"The EU fully supports the ongoing peace process in Mindanao. I frequently visit Cotabato and am impressed each time by the progress made, and the commitment of my counterparts to build a better future for the region. Peace and reconciliation is the way forward. Violence and hatred will never succeed," he said in a separate statement.

"The New Year brings new hope to us all, and we stand together with the Philippine government in its efforts to make the country more peaceful and safer," he added. With PNA

# Task force formed to probe bombing

By MARTIN SADONGDONG

The Philippine National Police (PNP) has created a special investigation task group (SITG) to investigate the bombing attack in front of a mall in Cotabato City that left two persons dead and 34 others injured Monday.

Of the 34 injured, three will have to undergo medical operations due to the severity of their condition; seven are still confined in hospitals but are already out of danger; while 24 others have been released.

PNP chief, Director General Oscar Albayalde condemned the bomb attack in front of South Seas Mall along Magallanes Street, Barangay Poblacion which investigators said were likely perpetrated by Islamic State (ISIS)-inspired local terrorist

groups in Mindanao.

"We sincerely express our deep sympathy and offer our fervent prayers to the families of those killed and injured even as we vow to mobilize all available resources in order to quickly bring to the bars of justice those responsible for these cowardly attacks against innocent civilians," Albayalde said.

"I have immediately directed the creation of a special investigation task group to get into the bottom of this incident," he added.

In a radio interview Tuesday, Chief Superintendent Benigno Durana Jr., PNP spokesman, said that bomb experts raised the possibility that the improvised explosive device (IED) used in the attack was created by a local terrorist group.

"Mayroon po kaming mga tinitig-

nan but based on the modus operandi and signature [of the IED], our investigators have initially found as a result of the post blast investigation na ito po ay ka-yagawan ng local terrorist group, ISIS-inspired local terrorist group," he said.

According to initial results of the post blast investigation conducted by Cotabato police's Explosive and Ordnance Division (EOD), a white plastic gallon believed to be used by the suspect as the container of the IED was found at the crime scene.

Police said the plastic gallon contained a kilo of one-inch concrete nails which were used as an enhancement, and black powder used as a low explosive charge.

A still unidentified man was seen dropping the container amid rows of stalls in front of the mall before it

exploded, police added.

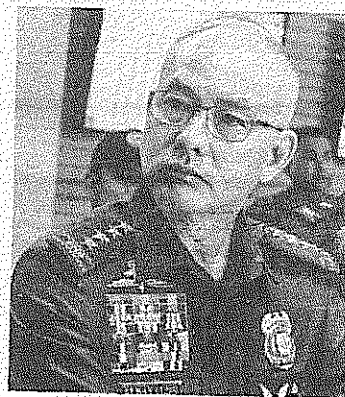
After the explosion, another IED was found at the baggage counter of the mall located at the second floor.

It was successfully defused by bomb experts who recovered several 1/2 inch nails and metal ball bearings as enhancement, disintegrated 9-volt batteries, slide switch, improvised blasting cap, leg wires and LED.

However, Durana is not ruling out other suspects.

"We are casting a wider net so that we will not be missing some areas that are usually [being missed] if you focus on only one angle," he said.

"We narrowed down the investigation but the SITG created by the PNP based on Director General



ALBAYALDE

Albayalde's directive are following a lot of leads to identify the perpetrators and arrest them, and crack this case as soon as possible," he said.

## Cotabato mall bombing 'act of terror' – AFP

Idineklara ng Armed Forces of the Philippines na isang "act of terror" ang nangyaring pambobomba sa isang mall sa Cotabato City na ikinasawi ng dalawa katao nitong bisperas ng Bagong Taon.

Kinondena ni AFP chief of staff Lt. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal, Jr., ang pagpapasabog na nagdulot ng pinsala sa mga inosenteng sibilyan na naghahanda sana sa pagsalubong sa bagong taon.

Sa inisyal na ulat mula sa 6th Infantry Division ng Philippine Army, isa umanong suspek ang nagtagay ng nakabalot na kahon sa Magallanes Street sa siyudad sa harap ng mall entrance nang bigla na lamang sumabog dakong ala-1:59 ng hapon.

Tinukoy ni Gen. Madrigal na ang teroristang grupo na BIFF at ang breakaway group na Daulah Islamiyah ang may ganitong buktot na hangarin na maghasik ng karahasan.

Maging si Army 6th Infantry Division commander Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana ay nagsabi na ang mga teroristang grupo ang nasa likod ng pambobomba dahil umano sa "retaliation" sa inilunsad niyang opensiba laban sa grupo kamakailan.

Sa kabila nito, ayon sa AFP chief, hindi pa rin nila isinasantabi ang posibilidad na may iba ring grupo na may interes ang nasa likod ng pagpapasabog sa mall.

Nitong Lunes, bandang ala-1:59 ng hapon ay niyanig ng malakas na pagsabog ang harapan ng nasabing mall sa Don Rufino Alonzo Avenue, Poblacion 5, Cotabato City kung saan maraming mamimili na nagra-rush para sa mga ihahanda nila sa pagsalubong ng Bagong Taon. Napuruhan ang dalawang biktima-na-kanilang ikinasawi at nasugatan ang 34 iba pa.

Sa Camp Crame, ipinag-utos na ni PNP Chief Director General Oscar Albayalde ang pagbuo ng Special Investigation Task Group (SITG) upang imbestigahan ang pagpapasabog sa South Seas Mall.

Narekober sa clearing operations ang isang plastic galon na may lamang isang kilong pako at black powder. Samantala dakong alas-2:40 ng hapon nang madiskubre ang isa pang improvised explosive device (IED) sa baggage counter sa ikalawang palapag ng mall na na-detonate bandang alas-2:50 ng hapon. (Joy Cantos/Rhoderick Beniez)

## Cotabato bombing ISIS-inspired terror group eyed by PNP

By ALFRED DALIZON

**POLICE** are eyeing an ISIS-inspired terror group in the bombing of a mall in Cotabato City on New Year's Eve which killed 2 and wounded 34 others, the spokesperson of the Philippine National Police said.

"Most probably, an ISIS-inspired local terror group was behind the attack," said PNP spokesman, Chief Superintendent Benigno B. Durana Jr. without elaborating.

Journal Group sources also said investigators are looking into the possibility that the bombing could be the handiwork of the group of one Salahuddin Hassan whose son and brother had been killed in recent anti-crime and anti-

terror operations by security forces in the region.

Hassan is a known bomb-maker, who along with Esmael Abdulmalik alias 'Abu Toraife of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters were among the more than a dozen suspects charged last September in connection with bomb attacks in the region last August 28 and September 2.

Charges of multiple murder and multiple frustrated murder charges were filed against the suspects by the police. Hassan was identified by security agents as having been trained in bomb-making by slain Southeast Asia's most wanted terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan, the main target of a top-secret PNP Spe-



**ALBAYALDE**

cial Action Force operation in Mamasapano, Maguindanao in January 2015 which killed 44 SAF commandos.

Durana also said the extended martial law in Mindanao has probably stopped the terrorists from carrying out more attacks in the region.

"There could have been more attacks from local terror groups if martial law was not imposed in Mindanao," he said while maintaining the need for the local citizenry to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activities to the local police and military.

"The security forces cannot guard every inch of Mindanao. That's why the people's cooperation and vigilance, not just security sector's vigilance is equally if not much more important in keeping our communities safe and secure. But one way or the other one or two incidents may fall on some cracks. This is true not only in the Philippines but also in much more developed countries like in Europe who are likewise facing the same global problem of terrorism," he said.

## COMMONSENSE

MARICHU A. VILLANUEVA

### Spoilers of peace

As expected, arch critics of President Rodrigo Duterte were frothing in the mouth for his no-show last Sunday at the annual commemoration of the death anniversary of our country's national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal. President Duterte skipped attending the event to rest, according to his close aide, Christopher "Bong" Go, former special assistant to the President.



Malacañang has yet to release an official statement on the President's absence. Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte, the President's daughter, did the honors for him during the 122nd anniversary of the execution of our national hero in ceremonies held in Davao city's own version of Rizal Park.

Go claimed the President's doctor advised the 73-year-old Chief Executive to take a rest because he was "very busy" in the past few days. On the eve of Rizal Day, the President flew from Davao City to Cotabato and back. He led the distribution of land titles to 6,424 farmers in the province in rites held at Kidapawan City in North Cotabato.

Meanwhile, Vice President Leni Robredo led the traditional raising of the giant Philippine flag at rites held in Luneta last Sunday morning. There was nothing unusual in President Duterte's skipping this year's Rizal Day commemorative event.

President Duterte skipped the 112th Independence Day anniversary rites — also traditionally held during flag-raising ceremonies at the Rizal's monument in Luneta — on June 12 last year purportedly due to exhaustion. According to former Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano, who substituted for Mr. Duterte at the flag-raising rites, the President got exhausted in leading government efforts to meet its target to liberate Marawi City from the Islamic State (IS)-influenced terrorists led by the Maute brothers who laid siege in the capital city of Lanao del Sur.

The Maute-led siege in Marawi City that erupted on May 23, 2017 triggered the imposition of Mindanao-wide martial law and suspension of writ of habeas corpus. Under the 1987 Constitution, martial law can only be imposed for a maximum of 60 days upon concurrence by Congress. It was only on October 17 last year when President Duterte declared Marawi City has been finally liberated after 148 days of the war since the infamous Maute siege started. Although Marawi City was liberated already, President Duterte still asked Congress to continue the Mindanao-wide martial law extension until December 2018, citing continuous threat and insurgency of the New People's Army in the region.

Before it lapsed, the President asked for a third extension of Mindanao-wide martial law. In making this request to Congress, the President noted a significant

**The third Mindanao-wide martial law remained in effect starting yesterday, January 1 and will last until December 31, 2019.**

progress in putting the rebellion under control, that this has been achieved during the implementation of martial law in the region and that it also resulted in economic gains. The presidential proclamation invoked the security assessment submitted by the police and the military that "certain essential facts which indicate that rebellion still persists in Mindanao and that public safety requires the continuation of martial law in the whole of Mindanao."

The President impressed upon the 17th Congress the need to extend the Mindanao-wide martial law because the kidnap-for-ransom Abu Sayyaf bandit group; the breakaway Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF); the Daulah Islamiyah; and other terrorist groups continue to defy the government by perpetrating hostile activities against the people and the government.

The President underscored the extension of martial law will enable the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP); the Philippine National Police (PNP); and the other law enforcement agencies to finally put an end to the ongoing rebellion in Mindanao and continue to prevent the same from spreading to other parts of the country.

The opposition lawmakers argued there is no actual rebellion happening in Mindanao to warrant a further extension of martial law. They tried but failed to block the overwhelming approval of the extension of martial law in Mindanao last December 12 before the 17th Congress adjourned for the Christmas recess.

The third Mindanao-wide martial law remained in effect starting yesterday, January 1 and will last until December 31, 2019.

But even before the second extension of martial law could lapse on December 31, 2018, an improvised explosive device (IED) – laden with concrete nails and jagged metal fragments – exploded in front of a shopping mall along Magallanes St. in Cotabato City. At least two persons were killed and more than 30 others were injured after a powerful explosion.

The IED was reportedly left by still unidentified suspect/s underneath one of the tables near the entrance of the mall where there were some ambulant vendors selling fireworks. Another IED placed inside a suspicious-looking bag left unattended was allegedly found on the second floor of the mall. Responding police and Army bomb experts detonated it.

As of this writing, police and military authorities were still trying to piece together the IED that could lead authorities to the suspects. While residents of Cotabato City are no strangers to deadly IED attacks, government officials strongly believe the outlawed BIFF might be behind this latest IED attack.

The BIFF, another IS-influenced group, broke away from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) as they objected to the terms of the peace talks with the government on the proposed Bangsamoro framework agreement. There were reports that the blast could be the handiworks of the BIFF to spoil preparations for the forthcoming Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) plebiscite later this month.

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) set on January 21 and on February 6 this year the plebiscites for the ratification of the BOL that would create the BARMM, replacing the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

The IED attack in Cotabato City sadly took place as the Philippines joined other peace-loving people from other countries in celebrating World Peace Day. The bombers are nothing but spoilers of peace.

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# Beyond misconceptions about the Bangsamoro

## COMMENTARY

AMIR MAWALLIL

There is obviously a need for further discourse on the matter of the Bangsamoro as part of the Philippines and Philippine history, especially in reaction to Jesse Angelo L. Altez's piece, "Beyond autonomy" (Opinion, 12/18/18). We need to take a clear look at the obvious dichotomy between Moros and Filipinos—a cultural artifact from the Spanish colonial period and the American colonial period that still hurts all of us like a stake in the heart.

We should remember that, prior to colonization, there was no such thing as "The Republic of the Philippines." There were self-governing communities, mostly ethnic groups, that later became part of the Republic of the Philippines, a country that was cobbled together after bloody battles with the colonizers who became the common enemy of these communities. These self-governing communities, including the sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao from whom many residents in the Muslim areas of Mindanao are descended, all had a culture of service. They would not have functioned at all without this.

We must also remember how the colonizers stayed in power for so long: by dividing the peoples of our country along tribal lines and lines of religion and regional loyalty.

But there is no reason these days to continue believing and propagating what, clearly, are lies. One would think we've outgrown these, but we haven't—and it is high time that we did. For the Bangsamoro, we'd like to see the end of some erroneous preconceived notions about us that are so 1800s. We would also like to see an end to

and, where possible, amends made for historical injustices against our people, not just during the colonial periods of our history, but more recently. The martial law era began only 46 years ago; many Moros in Mindanao died because of the atrocities committed during this painful period in our history, something we all share as Filipinos.

The perception that Moros cannot be trusted has become so very tiresome. So has the perception that there is no "culture of service" among Moros. Even more tiresome are the negative perceptions we Moros have to swim upstream against, including the perception that we Moros are to blame for the politics of patronage we are trying so hard to get away from.

Gaslighting like this does nothing to help the situation improve. Trustworthiness is not something that belongs exclusively to one group of people or another; as in all other communities, there are many more trustworthy Moros than untrustworthy ones.

A culture of service takes generations to restore—and we in the Bangsamoro have been quietly working to inculcate the highest possible standards for public service, to improve communications and interaction between the government and the governed. Those who have time to bandy this outdated notion that there is no such culture of service in our communities have probably not visited us in the last decade or so.

As for patronage politics, that's a

nationwide problem, not just a Moro problem. We must all, as one nation, make this degenerative practice obsolete.

Though the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao was created to enable the Bangsamoros' self-determination, we sought autonomy in full—and that is the promise of the Bangsamoro Organic Law that will soon be put to the plebiscite before our people, in what we hope will become the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

One should abandon the privileges of living in a Filipino settlers' community in Mindanao to see the bigger picture: There is life beyond dispossession. The struggle must continue, albeit peacefully now.

It's 2019. It's time we stopped saying what the colonizers said way before the Philippines came into existence as a nation. Why are we still drinking this poisoned water? If we are to have peace and prosperity in Mindanao and also improve the prospects of peace and prosperity across the nation, we need to forge a new path forward. We can begin doing this by dropping the derogatory, pejorative mindset about the Moro people and getting to work earnestly, honestly and with open minds.

Amir Mawallil (amir\_mawallil@yahoo.com) is a proud Moro writer and a Tausug. He has worked as a journalist, and now works in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao as the director of the region's public information office. He is the author of the book, "A Constant Retelling: Exploring the Bangsamoro Narratives," published in 2018 by Balangiga Press.

had become the new leader of the independence movement.

Canoy had served as my under-secretary of public information, but decided to reclaim his elective position as CDO city mayor after a short while. In 1982, after I resigned from the Cabinet, we co-founded the Social Democratic Party of the Philippines (SDP). Neither the SDP nor I had anything to do with the Mindanao independence movement. In 1987, I ran for senator under SPD in coalition with the Grand Alliance for Democracy, of which I eventually became the chairman. In Manila, Canoy released copies of the proposed Mindanao official passport, and the proposed Mindanao dollar. But he resented the fact that no one was paying him enough attention.

Gen. Renato de Villa, Cory's AFP Chief of Staff, was forced to put his 159,000 men on alert, but Cory herself did not quite know what to do with Canoy. In the end, they decided to detain him. I visited him in jail and said he posed no danger to the state, despite his Mindanao passport and Mindanao dollar. The government had no choice but to release him.

In 2016, we heard of the Mindanao independence movement again, after DU30 made Davao del Norte Rep. Pantaleon Alvarez Speaker of the House and Mindanao Sen. Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel 3rd Senate president. Alvarez was known as a strong advocate of DU30's "federalism," reportedly because of his being secretary-general of the MIM. Under the Constitution, as tirelessly pointed out in this column, the President has no lawful role to play in proposing any constitutional revision or amendment. But DU30 created a consultative committee of so-called constitutional experts, with questionable funding, to propose a federal charter. He has been the principal engine of this campaign, which is patently illegal.

### Arroyo's intervention

Now Speaker Arroyo has offered an apparent way out. The former president has mobilized her forces

to propose a shift to parliamentary government, rather than to a federal one, getting DU30's unconstitutional proposal out of the way. But it has introduced a separate problem. Arroyo is being termed out by June 30 next year, having already served three terms as a House representative for Pampanga. However, in a parliamentary government, she could run again as member of parliament, and then seek the position of prime minister.

Arroyo has a better chance of throwing a monkey wrench into DU30's federal project than DU30 has a chance of halting Arroyo's proposed move toward a parliamentary government. Neither option seems suitable for the nation right now, mainly because the Filipino people have no clear interest in it; only a few may be persuaded to believe that the nation is capable of holding an honest plebiscite on this question.

The Senate is the best hope of making sure the House initiative does not prosper. Filipinos have a duty to make sure the Senate resistance does not crumble. In May 2012, 19 of 23 sitting senators accepted a bribe of P50 million or more each from President B. S. Aquino 3rd and his budget secretary Florencio Abad to convict the late former chief justice Renato Corona, whom 188 congressmen had impeached without reading the Articles of Impeachment they had signed.

### Scuttling the elections

Filipinos must stop all plans, obvious or not so obvious as of now, to scuttle the May 2019 senatorial elections, and install a military junta composed of active or retired military generals. This sounds all irresponsible talk, but it is all we hear from people making a political pilgrimage to Davao. And it seems to get closer to reality as every retiring AFP Chief of Staff is offered a Cabinet post. DU30's only program of government these days is how to find a way of continuing in office on top of the three co-equal and coordinate branches of government, without having a

real program of government. We need to end this nonsense.

Beyond the drug killings, we must now stop the growing number of enforced killings and disappearances of political rebels. At the beginning of his term, DU30 named top communists to the Cabinet and asked the nation to prepare for a coalition government with the CPP/NPA/NDF. Now he wants a death squad to take care of his former bosom friends. He still talks of imposing martial law nationwide with the CPP/NPA/NDF as a major provocation, but on the recent 50th anniversary of the CPP as a revolutionary party, the government shot itself in the mouth by calling the CPP/NPA/NDF a "failed rebellion."

### Unbridled corruption

The unbridled corruption in Congress and in local government, as shown by the most notorious flood control projects in Sen. Chiz Escudero's Sorsogon, has exceeded all previous levels; this has prompted DU30 to decree the abolition of the utterly corrupt Road Board, with its reported loot of P50 to P60 billion. The uncontrolled spike in drug traffic from outside the country and the role played by drug lords with Chinese-sounding names — these must now receive our people's urgent and unforgiving attention.

Finally, DU30 must now know that if there's anyone who has earned any right to rebuke God, the Pope, San Isidro Labrador or plain Catholics, it is not this foul-mouthed gentleman from Davao. He must know that he has done enough dirty talking since 2016, and that he cannot remain the same obnoxious boor he has been these past three years. We are entitled to cleaner air after the midterm.

After three years, Filipinos should be ready to confront moral and political vileness and evil, wherever they find it. Confrontation is now unavoidable. The only way for DU30 to avoid it, is for him to undergo radical change — for the better.

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## ONLINE NEWS

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#### PNP tags local terrorist groups in Cotabato blast

By Christopher Lloyd Caliwan January 1, 2019, 4:42 pm

**MANILA** — The Philippine National Police (PNP) said on Tuesday that local terror groups could be responsible for the mall blast in Cotabato City which left two persons dead and 34 others wounded on New Year's Eve.

Chief Supt. Benigno Durana, PNP spokesperson, said based on the result of the post-blast investigation, they found that the modus operandi and "signature" on the bombing incident, initially tagging ISIS-inspired local terrorist groups in the area.

"Terrorism, extremism and terror attacks coming from these extremist groups most of them are ISIS and Daesh inspired. *Itong* (this) Maute group, *ito yung* (this is the) local ISIS-inspired elements of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters etc. *Ito po ay kagagawan nila sa kanilang mga 'signatures'* (This is their handiwork based on their 'signatures')," Durana said in a radio interview.

He said PNP chief, Director General Oscar Albayalde has ordered the creation of a special investigation task group to probe the incident.

"It's a good principle in any investigation that we are not in just one possible suspect at the early stage of the investigation. We are casting a wider net, so we will not be missing some areas. The Special Investigation Task Group (SITG) that the PNP chief ordered to probe is now following a lot of leads to know these perpetrators, the individuals so that we can arrest them as soon as possible and we can crack this case as soon as possible," he added.

Durana said there could have been more attacks from local terror groups had martial law not been not imposed in Mindanao.

"The security forces cannot guard every inch of Mindanao. That's why the people's cooperation and vigilance not just security sector's vigilance is equally if not much more important in keeping our communities safe and secure. But one way or the other one or two incidents may fall on some cracks. This is true not only in the Philippines but also in much more developed countries like in Europe who are likewise facing the same global problem of terrorism," Durana said.

Durana said the safety and security of the people in Mindanao are better now due to the signed peace agreements with Moro National Liberation Front and recently the Moro Islamic Liberation Front that brought, despite some challenges, more stability and more positive economic outlook in the region.

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Based on reports, a loud explosion occurred in front of South Seas Mall located on Don Rufino Alonzo Avenue, Poblacion 5, Cotabato City at around 1:59 p.m.

Senior Supt. Rolly Octavio, Cotabato City police director, immediately ordered the nearby police units to cordon off the area, secure the people, flash an alarm to all concerned units and evacuate all the casualties to different hospitals.

Police found a second bomb at the baggage counter on the second floor which was eventually disarmed by military bomb disposal experts. (PNA)

www.pna.gov.ph

## **CPP-NPA failed due to lack of credibility: nat'l artist**

December 31, 2018, 5:57 pm

**MANILA** — The Communist Party of the Philippines - New People's Army (CPP-NPA) has failed to attract the masses with its ideology due to its lack of credibility and blindness of reality, National Artist F. Sionil Jose said.

In an opinion column published by Jose in the Philippine Star and in his online blog, he said this lack of touch on reality "doomed" the communist party.

"Wide social divide, as evidenced by widespread poverty, is in itself the "objective reality" that every revolutionary must understand. From the very beginning, however, the Communist Party and the NPA were blind to this and to the other objective realities in this country. This willful blindness doomed the Party," he said.

Jose noted the "supreme irony" of the CPP-NPA collecting revolutionary taxes from businessmen.

"By exchanging the revolutionary tax for protection, the NPA has emasculated the very foundation of the revolution itself and has joined the ranks of the very enemy it wants to destroy," he said.

Jose said the CPP-NPA should have worked with the Philippine Army instead of treating them as their enemy.

"What they ignored is that the Army, including its officer corps, is composed primarily of the very poor. It is also a patriotic institution, its heroism tested in Tirad Pass, in World War II. It is also the Army, and only the Army, that can hold the country together. The Party should have worked to win the Army to their side," he said.

Jose, who was awarded as National Artist for Literature in 2001, blamed CPP founder Jose Maria Sison for numerous deaths and huge amount of money wasted due to the CPP-NPA's armed fighting for 50 years.

He called Sison "a brilliant ideologue, a narcissist, and a second-rate poet".

"The Party (CPP-NPA) must eventually be led by selfless leaders like Ho Chi Minh, who are willing to live poorly as their own people," he said.

Sison has been in exile in The Netherlands since 1987 after peace talks with then-President Corazon Aquino's government failed.

Aside from being a National Artist, Jose has been known for his writings on national sovereignty and social justice since the late 60s.

He has also been a publisher, lecturer on cultural issues, and the founder of the Philippine chapter of the international organization PEN.

The US State Department and the European Union have both tagged the CPP-NPA as terrorist bodies. (PNA)