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06 January 2019

Sunday



Honor. Patriotism. Duty

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Honor. Patriotism. Duty



More Batocabe slay suspects surrender

By ROMINA CABRERA

All six suspects in the killing of Ako Bicol Rep. Rodel Batocabe are in police custody, but the alleged mastermind remains free.

Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Director General Oscar Albayalde said Daraga, Albay town Mayor Carlwyn Baldo is the final "piece of the puzzle" in their effort to uncover the truth behind the killing of Batocabe and police escort SPO1 Orlando Diaz.

Albayalde said the last two suspects, Rolando Arimado and Danilo Muella, surrendered yesterday.

Arimado, whom witnesses tagged as the other gunman, and Muella, Baldo's security aide, surrendered separately to police in Masbate and the regional PNP Intelligence Group in Legazpi City, Albay.

With their surrender, Albayalde said the PNP is all set to "complete the puzzle" with the impending arrest of Baldo.

Police had filed charges of murder and frustrated murder against Baldo and the other suspects before the Albay provincial

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More

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prosecutor's office.

The charges came following the separate statements of the suspects and witnesses, all pointing to Baldo as the alleged mastermind in the killing.

Supt. Dennis Balla, Daraga police chief, explained the apparent delay in the arrest of Baldo.

He said the charges have to undergo the regular filing process since it is not a case of inquest filing since the suspects are already in police custody while complaints against them are being filed.

An official of the Daraga town mayor's office said Baldo has yet to receive the subpoena from the Albay

Prosecutor's Office.

The official claimed Baldo is just waiting for the opportunity to answer all the accusations linking him to the killing of Batocabe and his police bodyguard.

Baldo held a press conference on the same day the police linked him to the killing of the lawmaker. He just read a prepared statement denying his role in the killing.

Baldo said he would answer the allegations in the proper forum.

The regional PNP has confiscated Baldo's three firearms, a 12-gauge shotgun and two .45 automatics.

Baldo failed to turn over a rifle that was issued to him,

which he claimed has been missing since last year.

The PNP also requested the Department of Justice (DOJ) to issue a lookout bulletin against Baldo to prevent him from leaving the country.

Justice Secretary Medardo Guevarra said they would take "appropriate action" on the PNP's request.

Guevarra noted the DOJ cannot take the initiative to issue a hold order bulletin as it will be in violation of the constitutional right to travel by an individual.

The Supreme Court approved a Rule on Precautionary Hold Departure Order (PHDO) that allows the trial courts to issue a directive barring personalities facing charges from leaving the country.

Step up law enforcement

Baldo has been consistently tagged as the one who ordered the assassination of Batocabe.

Albayalde said the suspects who had surrendered gave separate statements, consistently pointing to Baldo as their principal.

The alleged main gunman, Henry Yuson, and Jaywin Babor, the driver of the getaway motorcycle in the ambush, surrendered to authorities on Thursday.

Already in police custody were Christopher Naval and Emmanuel Rosello.

Yuson admitted to police that Baldo sometime in August ordered the killing of Batocabe after he announced

his bid for the mayoralty post.

Yuson, who is being held without bail for an unrelated case of rape, claimed he was double-crossed by Muella and Naval, who plotted the fatal ambush.

He said he did not get any of the promised amount, which authorities said was pegged at P5 million.

The double-cross apparently led to the surrender of the suspects.

Batocabe and Diaz were gunned down as they were about to ride their vehicle after a gift-giving event for senior citizens in Barangay Burgos on Dec. 22.

Six other people were wounded in the incident.

Sen. Joseph Victor Ejercito noted the Batocabe slay case might be an exception to

the general perception that majority of political killings remain unresolved.

Ejercito urged the authorities to solve all the other political killings and step up law enforcement to prevent political violence ahead of the May 10 elections.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson said he will call for a public hearing on recent killings, including Batocabe's and former Kadingilan, Bukidnon Mayor Joelito Talaid within hours of each other last week.

Lacson, chairman of the Senate Committee on public order and dangerous drugs, said the PNP should lose no time in imposing stricter gun control measures ahead of the elections in May. — With Cet Dematera, Evelyn Macairan, Cecille Suerte Felipe

PNP TO DOJ: KEEP WATCH ON BALDO

STORY BY JAYMEE T. GAMIL AND JEROME ANING

The Philippine National Police has requested the issuance of an immigration lookout bulletin against the Daraga mayor, the alleged brains behind the killing last month of the Ako Bicol representative, even as it announced the surrender of the backup gunman and one of the planners of the hit job.

A4

FROM A1

By Jaymee T. Gamil
and Jerome Aning
@Team_Inquirer

The Philippine National Police on Saturday asked the Department of Justice (DOJ) to issue an immigration lookout bulletin against Daraga Mayor Carlwyn Baldo, the suspected brains behind the killing last month of Ako Bicol Rep. Rodel Batocabe and his police escort.

The request for DOJ assistance came as the fifth and sixth suspects in the assassination surrendered to the police in Albay province and Masbate City on Saturday morning.

Police said Rolando Arimado, the alleged backup gunman, and Danilo Muella, tagged as the supplier of the guns for the

hit job, were now detained at the regional police office detention cell in Albay.

In a brief statement, Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra acknowledged the police request for the issuance of the lookout bulletin against Baldo.

"We shall take such action as may be appropriate," Guevarra said.

Entry, exit monitored

According to Justice Undersecretary and spokesperson Markk Perete, the lookout bulletin is intended only to monitor the entry or exit of a subject through the country's airports and seaports.

PNP Director General Oscar Albayalde on Saturday said the surrender of Arimado and Muella was "expected to complete the puzzle in uncovering the truth behind this double murder and

multiple frustrated murder case."

Arimado, 50, surrendered an Uzi machine pistol when he turned himself in to the police at Barangay Nursery in Masbate City. He was accompanied by his wife, Amelita, and a son, also a militiaman like his father.

Batocabe and SPO2 Orlando Diaz were shot dead by four to six men during a Christmas event for the elderly at Barangay Burgos, in the mountainous part of Daraga, on Dec. 22.

Seven people, mostly senior citizens attending the event, were wounded in the attack.

The primary gunman, former militiaman Henry Yuson, surrendered to the police on Thursday and admitted his role in Batocabe's killing.

Presented to the media by Albayalde on Friday, Yuson pointed to Baldo, Muella and Christopher Naval as the plan-

ners of the attack.

Yuson said he was ordered to kill the party-list lawmaker because Baldo wanted to "permanently" remain as mayor of Daraga.

Family members said Batocabe received death threats after a local poll showed him leading the field in the town's mayoral race.

Militia unit

Naval, a former Army soldier and head of Yuson's militia unit in the Visayas, was the first to surrender on Dec. 30. Fellow suspects Jaywin Babor and Emmanuel Rosello surrendered to the police on Friday and Thursday, respectively.

Babor was the driver of the motorcycle Yuson rode to escape, police said, adding that Babor fled to Metro Manila following the killing.

Rosello drove the other mo-

torcycle ridden by Arimado, a former member of the Army's Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit, who acted as the back-up gunman, police said.

The PNP earlier filed murder and frustrated murder charges against Baldo and the six-man hit squad.

Quoting from Naval's statement after his surrender, Albayalde said Baldo offered P5 million for the killing of his rival in the May elections.

Baldo faced reporters in Daraga on Thursday to deny involvement in the killing of Batocabe and said he was being used as a "convenient scapegoat."

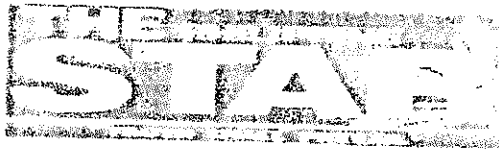
Interior Secretary Eduardo Año earlier said the suspects may have turned on Baldo after a delay in the payment of their fee for killing Batocabe, and because of "pressure" applied on them by their former colleagues in the

military intelligence community.

Albayalde on Thursday said Baldo's involvement was first disclosed by Emmanuel Judavar, a former employee of the mayor who claimed he was part of the planning, but not the execution of the assassination.

Sen. JV Ejercito hopes that the resolution of Batocabe's assassination would put an end to politically motivated killings in the country by sending the message that guns for hire and masterminds wouldn't be able to escape accountability anymore.

Also on Saturday, the communist New People's Army (NPA) in Bicol denied Albayalde's claim that Yuson was a member of their organization, and said the "black propaganda" was meant to drag the NPA into the killing of Batocabe. —WITH REPORTS FROM STEPHANIE FLORIDA, SHIENA BARRAME-DA AND LEILA B. SALAVERRIA INQ



China could occupy more areas in WPS – expert warns

By JANVIC MATEO

China may end up occupying more areas in the West Philippine Sea if it would be allowed to unilaterally rehabilitate coral reefs in the disputed region, a maritime expert warned.

Jay Batongbacal, director of the UP Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea, said China's announcement that it would carry out coral reef rehabilitation and restoration in the South China Sea should be taken with a grain

of salt.

"Interested states should take the position that no such activities should be undertaken except under conditions of full transparency, equal participation and mutual co-operation by all," he said.

"Despite its apparent environmental benefits, activities of this kind, if unilaterally undertaken, may be used to justify exclusive and effective control of reef areas similar to how China currently controls Scarborough (Panatag) Shoal," he added.

Batongbacal noted China's statement saying it will survey other areas aside from those that it currently occupies, saying it indicates carrying out such works in other reef areas outside of those that they currently occupy.

"Doing so may result in new, additional areas being placed under exclusive control and administration, tantamount to occupation but short of 'new inhabitation' (which the Parties said they will not do, per the 2002 Declaration of Conduct)," said the UP professor.

"Carrying out coral restoration/rehabilitation activities in the South China Sea unilaterally, and within the exclusive economic zones of the Southeast Asian littoral States, would be tantamount to an exercise of civilian administration and control and undoubtedly could be used in the future as evidence that China treats these areas no differently from their own resources in their territorial seas and internal waters," he added.

Batongbacal said states

should question the plan, saying silence would be evidence of acquiescence to China's assertion of such administration and control.

He said China should not unilaterally undertake marine environmental conservation and protection if it is serious about its goal of rehabilitating the coral reefs.

"Any coral restoration project in the South China Sea should be transparently undertaken, with full access and participation of the other claimant states, in accordance

with formal agreements that transparently lay out the intentions of the Parties and ensure no prejudice will be created in favor of/against their respective claims/positions," he said.

"The China-ASEAN Decade of Marine Environmental Protection could be used as a platform for this kind of cooperative activity (up to now, this remains a piece of paper, another of many papers that were announced with much fanfare but have very little substance)," he added.

AMID ESCALATING ISSUES WITH US

CHINA LEADER XI CALLS ON ARMY TO BE BATTLE-READY

SHANGHAI—China's armed forces must strengthen their sense of urgency and do everything they can to prepare for battle, President Xi Jinping told a meeting of top brass on Friday.

China is keen to beef up its armed forces amid territorial disputes in the South China Sea and escalating tension with the United States over issues ranging from trade to the status of Taiwan.

The official Xinhua news agency said Xi told a meeting of the top military authority that China faced increasing risks and challenges, and the armed forces must work to secure its security and development needs.

Xi, who is also chair of the Central Military Commission, said the armed forces must devise strategies for the new era and take on responsibilities for

preparing and waging war.

Period of major changes

"The world is facing a period of major changes never seen in a century, and China is still in an important period of strategic opportunity for development," he was quoted as saying.

He said the armed forces needed to be able to respond quickly to emergencies, needed

to upgrade their joint operations capabilities and nurture new types of combat forces.

Xi's comments followed his remarks on Wednesday that China still reserved the right to use force to achieve "reunification" with Taiwan and prevent the island's independence.

In response, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen has said the island would not accept a "one

country, two systems" political arrangement with China, while stressing all cross-strait negotiations needed to be carried out on a government-to-government basis.

Tsai on Saturday also urged China to have a "correct understanding" of what Taiwanese think and said actions such as political bullying were unhelpful in cross-strait relations.

She also called for international support to defend the self-ruled island's democracy and way of life in the face of renewed threats from China.

Xi's speech about Taiwan came just days after US President Donald Trump signed the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act into law, reaffirming the US commitment to the island's security. —REUTERS

China's Xi calls on army to be battle-ready

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LOCSIN, US NAT'L SECURITY EXEC BOLTON TACKLE PH-US TIES

FOREIGN Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. met with United States National Security Advisor John Bolton to "deepen" Philippines-US ties.

According to the Philippine Embassy in Washington DC, the two officials recognized the role of the two nations' alliance in maintaining regional peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

This is the first time Locsin met with Ambassador Bolton since he became the Philippines' top diplomat.

Locsin said the meeting was "vastly enlightening, frank, wide-ranging yet sharply focused on the key issues"

The meeting comes a week after the Department of National Defense called for the

review of the Mutual Defense Treaty between the US and the Philippines.

Last week, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana called for the MDT's review to see if it is still relevant to the Philippines' "national interest."

Former Philippine Permanent Representative to the United Nations Lauro Baja agreed that

the 1951 MDT must undergo reassessment to determine whether or not the pact is still attuned to current regional and global dynamics.

"For the Philippines, the review will provide the opportunity to re-examine and clarify the degree and depth of US commitment to defend us, including the area of coverage of the Treaty." PNA A3

US keeps up charm offensive

American courting of the Philippine government continues a week after the Department of National Defense called for the review of the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) between the US and the Philippines.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. met with United States National Security Advisor John Bolton supposedly to "deepen" Philippines, US relations but he did not say the

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meeting was in relation to the 68-year old deal.

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Envoys size up each other

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Locsin said the meeting was "vastly enlightening, frank, wide-ranging yet sharply focused on the key issues."

Ambassador to the United States Jose Manuel Romualdez accompanied the Foreign Affairs chief in the meeting which took place last Friday.

Review set

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Representative to the United Nations Lauro Baja said the 1951 MDT must undergo reassessment to determine whether or not the pact is still attuned to current regional and global dynamics.

"For the Philippines, the review will provide the opportunity to re-examine and clarify the degree and depth of US commitment to defend us, including the area of coverage of the Treaty," he said.

Pompeo also visited

In December last year, Locsin and US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo also met in Washington.

In separate statements, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the US Embassy in Manila cited the meeting as a huge boost to the historic alliance.

Locsin and Pompeo tackled issues concerning the West Philippine Sea (WPS), among other emerging challenges.

"The two officials discussed cooperation on issues of mutual concern, including counterterrorism and regional concerns, such as the situation in the Korean Peninsula and the WPS," the Department of Foreign Affairs said. **CL**

Armed forces enter the missile age

By JAIME LAUDE

While the Philippine Air Force (PAF) is gearing up this year for a good harvest in its capability upgrade projects, the year 2018 was a banner year for the Philippine Navy (PN).

Last year, the Navy started making waves as it transitioned into developing a credible maritime and territorial defense, experiencing so-called four "firsts."

First was deployment of a Naval Task Force aboard its newly-acquired Strategic Sealift Vessel, *BRP Davao del Sur*, and one of its refurbished frigates, the *BRP Andres Bonifacio* to represent the country in the US-sponsored Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), the biggest naval exercise held in Hawaii.

The second was the deployment of *BRP Tarlac*, with more than 300 Marines and sailors, to the port city of Vladivostok upon the invitation of the Russian Navy. It was a six-day reciprocal visit to Russia's Pacific Fleet in the Far East.

The visit, part of the Philippines' diplomatic offensive, also had a week-long port call in Jeju Island in South Korea.

Third was the Navy's participation at another maritime drill hosted by China. The PN sent its cargo and logistic ship *BRP Dagupan City* with a contingent of Marines and sailors to take part in the maritime exercise with navies from ASEAN member-states held inside China's waters off the coast of Zhangjiang.

The latest first for the Navy last year was the missile testing of its newly acquired short-range missile platform from Israel.

The Israeli-made Spike Extended Range (ER) missile system is now integrated into three of the Navy's high-speed and locally manufactured Multi-Purpose Attack Craft (MPACs).

"We considered everything that happened to the Navy (last) year as the series of firsts in its recent history," a senior naval officer said.

In 2020 the Navy is expecting delivery of a brand-new and long-range missile-armed frigate from South Korea, with another frigate coming the succeeding year.

This is on top of the scheduled deliveries this year of Agusta Westland AW-159 "Wildcat" fully armed anti-submarine attack helicopters and the Pohang Class frigate, a donation from South Korea.

"Year 2018 can be considered as a banner year for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), especially the Philippine Navy, as it formally entered the missile age and demonstrated its capability to sail beyond the country's maritime and territorial waters," the Navy said in its blog.

The PN is also conducting a thorough study for its submarine acquisition project where it intends to buy two of these subsurface warships in the future.

"It's a go but it will not be immediate as we need more time to prepare in terms of training as well as putting up submarine support facilities and also the funding," Navy chief Rear Admiral Robert Empe-drad said earlier.

PAF in 2019

The Air Force, on the other hand, is also looking forward to the scheduled deliveries of newly procured air and land defense platforms.

Former Air Force chief Lt. Gen. Galileo Gerard Kintanar said that by this year, they will be "reaping the fruits of hard labor."

Despite his replacement, Kintanar said he is not going out of the service until his mandatory retirement in January 2020.

Under Kintanar's term, the Air Force has completed major procurement projects. This is on top of the ongoing processes to acquire land-based and air assets to secure the country's skies as well as the nation's maritime domain.

There will be deliveries of six Super Tucano aircraft, a close air support aircraft from Brazil, two fixed-wing command and control aircraft from Airbus, two radar systems from Israel and 13 Hermes Unmanned Aerial Vehicles also from Israel this year.

"We also anticipate to receive the following year (2020), two C130s and four OV10s from the United States as we also look forward to the completion of three big contracts early this year for 16 Black Hawks from the US. The best combat utility helicopter in the world today as well as six AT-129 attack helicopters from Turkey, which are at par with the best in the world today, as well as three ground-based Air Defense Systems from Israel are also scheduled," Kintanar said.

The Air Force's quest for strategic basing for power projection is also gaining greater heights, through the active support of security and defense stakeholders with key advisers led by former defense secretary Gilberto Teodoro, a reservist Air Force officer and a pilot.

This support is translated into lot acquisitions and construction of facilities and air bases in Llalo, Cagayan, Guiuan Airport in Samar and soon at Ubay in Bohol.

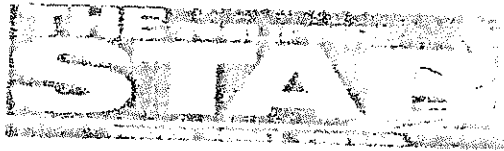
The Air force was also gifted with a 300-hectare lot in Balabac Island in South-

ern Palawan where it is currently building an airfield.

Balabac Island is highly strategic to the country's air and maritime domain awareness operations as it is directly facing the country's Kalayaan Island Group in the disputed Spratly archipelago.

The Air Force is also building an air base in Lumbia airport in Cagayan de Oro to replace the Danilo Atienza Air Base in Cavite, with the Department of Transportation and

the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines in the loop. **A**



'No continuing rebellion in Mindanao'

A report of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) belies President Duterte's claim that "rebellion persists in Mindanao," Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman said yesterday.

Lagman said the report submitted to him by Maj. Gen. Fernando Trinidad of the office of the AFP deputy chief of staff for intelligence on Dec. 13 shows that for the entire second extension of martial law from January to December 2018, not a single person had been captured, arrested or charged with rebellion.

Lagman said he received information that Trinidad was relieved from his post four days after submitting the report.

He said the AFP report "repudiated" the President's assertion that there is still rebellion in Mindanao after almost two years of martial law.

Duterte asked the Senate and the House of Representatives last month to extend martial law up to the end of this year due to continuing rebellion.

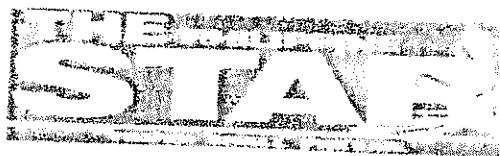
On Friday, Lagman and six other opposition lawmakers asked the Supreme Court to declare the third extension of martial law as unconstitutional.

Quoting the AFP report, Lagman said government forces arrested only four persons during the second extension of martial law last year.

"But not one of them was charged with the crime of rebellion," he said.

"The report also contradicted the claim of AFP chief Lt. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr. who told the joint session of the Congress that during the second extension... 143 individuals were arrested and... charged with rebellion," Lagman said.

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3 Russian ships to visit Manila

By JAIME LAUDE

Three Russian warships will be dropping anchors in Manila Bay today for a five-day goodwill visit, the Philippine Navy (PN) announced yesterday.

Navy spokesman Commander Jonathan Zata said Russia's anti-submarine ship *Admiral Pantelev* along with guided missile cruiser *Vargyag* and large sea tanker *Boris Botum* will be arriving at the Manila South Harbor early morning today.

"Welcome ceremony and port briefing will be conducted upon arrival of the Russian vessels after customary meeting procedures with the designated PN vessel at the vicinity of Corregidor Island," Zata said.

The three Russian warships will be in the country from today up to Jan. 11 for a series of friendly na-

vy-to-navy engagements, Zata said.

Navy-to-navy relations between Russia and the Philippines have greatly improved over the last two years, as highlighted by goodwill visit exchanges between the two naval forces.

Last year, following two port calls made earlier by the Russian warships in Manila, the Philippine Navy reciprocated Moscow's good deeds by sending *BRP Tarlac* to Vladivostok, home of Russia's Pacific Fleet in the Far East, for a six-day goodwill visit.

The Vladivostok port visit gave the Philippine Navy the opportunity to widen its reach in the region while the Filipino Marines and sailors earned extra skills in the series of friendly engagements with their Russian counterparts.

The Russians are coming – again

By Miguel Paolo Togonon

Manila will play host to three Russian naval vessels today until 11 January at Pier 9, South Harbor, according to Philippine Navy (PN) spokesman Commander Jonathan Zata.

The anti-submarine ship *Admiral Pantellev*, the guided missile cruiser *Varyag* and the

sea tanker *Boris Botuma* will dock at approximately 7:30 a.m. today for the five-day goodwill visit.

The *Pantellev* is returning, along with the *Varyag* and the *Botuma*, in response to a visit of a Philippine naval ship to Russia.

The *BRP Tarlac* (LD-601) became the first PN ship last October to make a port visit to

Vladivostok, Russia. It carried a 300-member contingent from the various services of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

During the six-day visit, the PN contingent toured a Kilo-class diesel-electric submarine and was given a chance to inspect a Russian marine firing range.

"The welcome ceremony and port briefing will be

conducted upon arrival of the Russian vessels after a customary meeting procedure with the designated PN vessel at the vicinity of Corregidor Island," Zata said.

In October 2017, thousands of assault rifles, helmets and some military trucks were donated by the Russian government to the Philippines during a visit of

Russian ships to Manila.

President Rodrigo Duterte personally received the 5,000 AK-47 rifles and 5,000 steel helmets on board the *Admiral Pantellev*. A million rounds of ammunition for the Kalashnikov rifles were also donated by Russia, along with 20 army trucks.

The Philippines has expressed interest in buying both Chinese

and Russian arms as President Duterte has cultivated warmer relations with the two countries.

Moscow has been offering to sell arms to the Philippines since the mid-1990s, a top defense official had said during the turnover of the donated weapons.

"They were willing to barter guns for bananas," the official said.

Groups slam 'tokhang-style' crackdown

ORGANIZATIONS under the umbrella of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) condemned the "tokhang-style" crackdown on activists in Negros Oriental which resulted in the death of six and the arrest of 16 others.

The group reacted to the joint operations of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) in Cauhulungan and Mabinay in Negros Oriental on December 27.

"Activists are not criminals or terrorists. We condemn the PNP and AFP for being part of Duterte's bloody crackdown on critics and everyone else opposed to his oppressive and tyrannical regime," Bayan said in a statement.

Bayan claimed that the operations were conducted on the pretext of an intensified anti-drug and anti-criminality campaign, calling it a "tokhang-style" crackdown.

The group also denounced planted evidence and "spurious warrants" against leaders and members of peasant groups as reported by human rights groups and residents in the area. **DIVINA JOY DELA CRUZ**

'USMAN' TOLL: 126 DEAD, 26 MISSING

A TOTAL of 126 people were reported dead from flash floods and landslide caused by tropical depression "Usman" while 26 are still missing, according to the latest report from the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council (NDRRMC) on Saturday.

Based on the latest update, 109 of the reported casualties were from Bicol while 13 were from Eastern Visayas, three from Mindoro (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan) and one from Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon).

Sixty people were also injured due to the natural disasters in the wake of Usman.

The Philippine Army deployed its men in Bicol and Eastern Visayas to coordinate with local DRRMC and local government units (LGUs) in disaster response and rescue operations in affected areas.

A total of 140,105 families or 624,236 people were affected in

876 *barangay* (villages) in Calabarzon, Miraropa, Bicol and Eastern Visayas, while 13,135 families or 57,786 are currently being served in 119 evacuation centers.

Eighty areas in the said regions remain flooded due to torrential rains.

In Bicol and Eastern Visayas, Usman caused damages to infrastructure worth P2.073 billion and agriculture worth P758 million.

A total of 6,005 houses were damaged, with 1,081 totally destroyed and 4,924 partially damaged.

Oriental Mindoro, Albay, Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur and Sorsogon are currently under the state of calamity.

The Office of Civil Defense, Department of Social Welfare and Development, various LGUs and non-government organizations have already given more than P47 million worth of assistance.

ROY D.R. NARRA

More troops sent to Bicol for 'Usman' search, rescue

More soldiers were sent to the Bicol region and other areas to assist in the search and relief missions in communities ravaged by flashflood and landslides due to tropical depression "Usman."

As of yesterday, 126 persons were killed by Usman, 109 of them are in Bicol region. Twenty others are still missing.

Lt. Gen. Macairog Alberto, commanding general of the Philippine

Army, said he has ordered the transport of four search and rescue teams, as well as other equipment needed for the clearing and rehabilitation of areas affected by landslides in Bicol.

"These teams will augment our forces in Bicol region who are currently assisting the local government units for they needs," said Alberto.

The bulk of deployment will be in Camarines Sur and Albay where most of the fatalities were recorded due to landslides that hit several residential communities.

Thirteen fatalities were reported in Eastern Visayas and four in the Southern Tagalog.

More than 341,000 persons were affected by Usman in the Bicol region.

Rescue teams from the Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, police, and the Bureau of Fire Protection are also in the Bicol region to locate and provide the necessary assistance to people especially those who have been isolated by floods and landslides. (Aaron B. Recuenco)

P46B for Bicol shelters

HUDCC priority ordered

For me, if they would listen to my appeal that we use part of the money for the pressing problems of Bicol

By Kristina Maralit

Setting aside politics, President Rodrigo Duterte said his administration is "ready to spend" P46 billion for rehabilitation and to build at least 300 sturdy evacuation centers in the Bicol region after the destruction caused by tropical depression "Usman."

Some of his fiercest critics, Vice President Leni Robredo and Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV hailed from the Bicol region.

The President said he will ask Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council Chairman Eduardo del Rosario to initiate the construction of houses in the region.

During a situation briefing in Pili, Camarines Sur, after an aerial inspection of the calamity-hit region late Friday, Mr. Duterte said the government intends to draw most of the funds needed from proceeds of the motor vehicles users charge which will be transferred to the treasury once the graft-prone Road Board is abolished.

"For me, if they would listen

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It has to be a durable one, cement. But this can only be used for evacuation purposes and to keep the people safe

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to my appeal that we use part of the money for the pressing problems of Bicol. It's about P46 billion," Duterte said, stressing that he wanted the houses to be more disaster resilient.

"I'm ready to spend the money to improve the topography of the place and make it safe for people to build houses," Duterte said.

"If it can be freed and transferred to another department for good use, I said I will ask Ed (Del Rosario) to initiate the construction of some of these houses here in areas which you think are safe. Maybe I'll give you 300 houses," Mr. Duterte said.

Contact Año

Duterte said he wanted the houses to be made of cement and used solely for evacuation purposes.

"It has to be a durable one, cement. But this can only be used for evacuation purposes and to keep the people safe and not to disturb the resumption of

the governmental functions that we have, the ministrant schooling and everything," Duterte said.

I'm ready to spend the money to improve the topography of the place.

He also noted since Del Rosario is currently busy with the rehabilitation of Marawi City after the Islamic State-inspired Maute Group occupied the city on 23 May 2017, the housing chief could order someone to do it for him.

"If you are not so loaded with work in Marawi, you might also want to assign one guy here to do just the observation and for you to go around and suggest what would be the best remedy. You can always contact General Año (Interior Secretary retired Gen. Eduardo Año)," Duterte said.

Mistakes admitted

The President also admitted having erred in his appreciation of the narcotics problem when he assumed the presidency.

"I was wrong," Mr. Duterte admitted as he added he underestimated the scale of the country's drug problem.

The President, however, said he is not apologetic and is ready to take responsibility for the vigorous methods employed against narcotics.

Mr. Duterte, during the 2016 presidential campaign, vowed to eradicate illegal drugs within six months should he be elected into office. Nearly three years since his ascension to the presidency, the Chief Executive said ridding the Philippines of narcotics will require every minute he is on the job up until he finishes his term.

"I was mistaken because I thought that I could fix it just like Davao. When I was mayor, that's what I said. Do not destroy my city, because I will kill you. Do not destroy my country or you'll get it from me," the President said.

Complex woe

It was when he assumed office that he realized the magnitude of the drug problem plaguing the country. Adding to it the fact that high-ranking officials from the police and Bureau of Customs personnel as coddlers of drug pushers or themselves acting as drug lords.

I said I will ask Ed (Del Rosario) to initiate the construction of some of these houses here in areas which you think are safe.

"I could not really fulfill my promise to do away with drugs within six years. Impossible. It's going to be a continuing one. It's the bane of all countries right

now," the Chief Executive said.

Still, he vowed to not let up in his controversial campaign against illegal drugs and personalities he called "psychos" involved in the trade as he promised a bloody clampdown against narcotics until he steps down.

"I can take risks. I can go to prison. I am used to being behind bars," he added.

Fair warning

"I'm just giving a warning, that for the remaining three years, the big players will be hit. And if you ask me if they die, they will really die," Mr. Duterte stressed.

"That goes for everybody and until now, to the last day of my term," he added.

He even challenged drug lords and human rights advocates to kill him first or he would get his hands dirty and rid the country of all addicts and pushes.

The Chief Executive also said he is unfazed by the possibility of being thrown behind bars once he is out of Malacañang.

Troops help Bicol typhoon victims

By Kathleen Mae Bulquerin

Help is on the way for the victims of typhoon "Usman" as the Philippine Army (PA) on Saturday deployed additional troops in Bicol to help in the search, rescue and retrieval operations in the areas affected by landslides brought by the weather disturbance.

PA head Lt. Gen. Macairog S. Alberto, ordered the deployment of four teams from the 525th Engineer Combat Battalion of the 51st Engineer Brigade to augment the 9th Infantry Division in its humanitarian assistance and disaster response efforts.

The order came after the region endured heavy flooding and massive landslides earlier in the week, particularly in the provinces of Albay and Camarines Sur, that claimed the lives of at least 87 people while at least 20 are still missing.

Rescue teams from other services of

the military along with Philippine National Police and Bureau of Fire Protection are also engaged in rescue operations and providing assistance to those affected by flashfloods and landslides.

At least 45,348 families or 191,597 persons from Bicol, Eastern Samar, Calabarzon and Mimaropa were directly affected by "Usman."

The troops will also provide rescue equipment, medical supplies, carpentry tools, cadaver bags, folding beds, shovels and portable generators to help the affected local government units.

At least 45,348 families or 191,597 persons from Bicol, Eastern Samar, Calabarzon and Mimaropa were directly affected by "Usman."

Alberto said the deployment was part of their organization's sworn duty and vision to become relevant and responsive to the needs of the citizenry.

Who's afraid of 'Bong Ghost?'

By Kristina Maralit

Former Special Assistant to the President Christopher Lawrence "Kuya Bong" Go took in stride an online report he was killed when a Philippine Air Force (PAF) helicopter supposedly crashed in the mountains of Albay over the weekend.

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Go confirmed he was in Albay when President Rodrigo Duterte did an aerial inspection last Friday, 4 January, of the damage left by typhoon "Usman," particularly in Camarines Sur. He also joined the Chief Executive in the distribution of relief goods to displaced residents.

"Now, I am the ghost of Bong Go," he said jokingly.

The Philippine Air Force (PAF), in a statement, said the social media post was faked "as the photo used was taken from another incident and location not in Albay."

"We humbly advise everyone to be vigilant and refrain from sharing unreliable news," it added.

A Twitter post by an account with the handle @AltGovPH claimed Go was on board the PAF chopper that crashed. The photo posted in the Twitter, upon checking, was a screenshot of the chopper crash in Tarlac last 22 November 2018 that injured Coop-NATCCO partylist Rep. Anthony Bravo and several others.

Go stressed that he is alive and well and will continue giving help to those badly affected by the weather disturbance in Bicol.

The former Palace official likewise said he will leave to karma the fate of those who wished him dead.

"This is Bong Go's ghost you are talking to," Go told reporters in jest when asked to comment about the report of the supposed crash landing.

"Let's pray for him. Dis is bong Ghost texting you," he also said in

a text message to reporters and friends. Go was in Quezon yesterday morning as the guest of honor at the grand alumni homecoming of the Recto Memorial National High School.

News fakers go to hell

Go recalled that the President had always reminded him that "when it's your time to go, then it's your time to go" and that anyone who ventures into politics "should be ready to die."

"I'm not afraid to die. If I die serving our fellow Filipinos, I'm willing to die anytime. And I'd be happy if I die serving our people," Go said.

Jesting again, Go said he had a dream where he was met in heaven by St. Christopher who told him to go back to the land of the living because he still needs to serve his fellow Filipinos.

"But when I went to hell, I was told to tell those responsible for fake news to go there. It appears Lucifer want them there and he is already waiting for them. So, you (maker of fake news) should hasten because Lucifer has prepared a welcome party for you there," he added.

I'm not afraid to die. If I die serving our fellow Filipino, I'm willing to die anytime. And I'd be happy if I die serving our people.

The Twitter account of anti-Duterte group GovPH (@AltGovPH) posted on 7:36 a.m. on 5 January 2019 saying: "Developing: AFP chopper carrying Bong Go crash landed in Albay."

Fate up to karma

The post showed a television screen grab of the ABS-CBN report on the 22 November 2018 crash landing of a helicopter carrying Rep. Anthony Bravo and former House Secretary General Cesar Pareja but changed the label to say the AFP chopper bearing Bong Go had crash-landed in Albay.

"Let karma catch up with them. They just inspired me to work even harder," Go said when asked for his message to his detractor.

The fake news was posted in the wake of the release of the 16 to 19 December Social Weather Stations survey showing Go had climbed to the 14th to 15th rank, tied with former Philippine National Police Chief Ronald "Bato" de la Rosa, from as low as 22nd to 27th place in another pollster's survey in September last year.

While in Bicol with the President on Friday, Go gave relief goods donated by his supporters to various municipalities hardest hit by "Usman," including Castilla in Sorsogon, Tiwi in Albay and Sagñay in Camarines Sur. The relief goods consisted of rice, canned goods, noodles and bottled water.

The food packages for Mercedes in Camarines Norte and for Catarman in Samar are expected to arrive in the two towns by Saturday.

For the nth time, Reds willing to talk peace

By JOSE RODEL CLAPANO

The Communist Party of the Philippines-National Democratic Front (NDF) is open to talk peace with the government, CPP founding chairman Jose Ma. Sison said yesterday.

In a statement posted on the NDF website, Sison said he is ready to reciprocate the pronouncement of President Duterte that he is open to conduct peace talks with the NDF.

"Enemies need peace negotiations before they can become friends or partners for

the sake of the Filipino people who desire social, economic and political reforms as basis for a just and lasting peace," Sison said.

He said peace negotiation is a standing policy of the NDF despite his being locked in a verbal tussle with Duterte for the past several years, particularly in 2018.

"I welcome the statement of Duterte that he is still open to peace negotiations even as there is still an exchange of hostile words in the mass media and of bullets in the battlefield," Sison said.

He said it is a consistent policy of the NDF to be open to peace negotiations with the Duterte regime despite the determination of the NDF to seek the ouster of this regime.

"It is for the benefit of the people that the peace negotiations resume and stop the Duterte regime from proclaiming martial law nationwide - from calling off or rigging the May 2019 elections to pursuing the scheme to imposing a fascist dictatorship on the Filipino people through charter change for a bogus kind of federalism," Sison said.

He said the NDF presumes that when peace negotiations resume, the way is open to the forging of agreements on social, economic and political reforms that are desired and needed by the people.

Sison commented on the alleged failure of the government to destroy the revolutionary movement and the possible ouster of Duterte.

He said that in the last quarter of 2017, Duterte's ranking military officials were claiming that they would destroy the CPP and its armed wing the New People's Army (NPA)

by the end of 2018.

"They utterly failed. They have moved their goal to the middle of 2019. They will certainly fail again. It is pure hallucination for them to imagine that they can easily destroy an armed revolutionary movement that has grown in strength by fighting a 14-year fascist dictatorship and the strategic plans of military suppression by a series of pseudo-democratic regimes," he said.

"The reactionary military and police are in a more difficult situation than ever before. Their strength is limited

and insufficient to destroy the revolutionary movement," he added.

Sison said the reactionary government is bankrupt and offending the people by raising taxes that "are wasted on military expenditures, bureaucratic corruption, overpriced infrastructure projects and foreign debt service."

He said the military and the police are ineffective against the revolutionary movement as "they serve the interests of a tyrannical regime and the exploiting classes of landlords and bureaucrat capitalists.

Du30 open to talks with Reds again, but...

By Christine O. Avendaño
and Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
@Team_Inquirer

President Duterte on Friday said he was still open to peace negotiations with communist rebels but didn't want to hold talks with any of their top leaders and chief negotiators.

He also suggested that they must first abandon their armed struggle, which the rebels have repeatedly said they would not do before a final peace deal.

In a message intended for

the exiled rebel leaders, he said: "You come (here), cut and cut cleanly. You adopt the democracy that we find ourselves in."

Jose Maria Sison, founding chair of the 50-year-old Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), Fidel Agcaoili, head of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and Luis Jalandoni, Agcaoili's predecessor as chief rebel peace negotiator in the aborted talks, have lived for decades in the Netherlands.

Mr. Duterte spoke on Friday

night during a briefing by disaster officials in Camarines Sur on the effects of Tropical Depression "Usman."

'Hopeless'

He said Sison was "hopeless" while Agcaoili and Jalandoni were "more difficult" to talk with.

"At this time, Sison and I do not understand each other. But I'd like you to know that we are keeping the fire burning, and you cannot really close [the door on the talks]," Mr. Duterte

said. "You cannot afford to lose all channels of communication. You would have to leave even a small opening."

Mr. Duterte terminated the talks in November 2017, accusing the rebels of continuing attacks on government troops despite the ongoing negotiations.

He later moved to legally proscribe the New People's Army, CPP and NDFP as terrorist groups.

In response to Mr. Duterte's latest remarks on a possible resumption of peace talks, Sison

on Saturday said in a statement: "I welcome the statement of Duterte that he is still open to peace negotiations even as there is still an exchange of hostile words in the mass media and exchange of bullets in the battlefield."

In an online interview with the Inquirer, Agcaoili said the two sides should soon take steps to resume the talks.

"From experience, the first step is feelers being relayed through mutually known and acceptable persons, sometimes

through the third-party facilitator or the Royal Norwegian Government if (both parties) agreed to negotiate again," he said.

Agcaoili said both parties should make public their stand in separate statements to the media.

"Then calls or messages are exchanged between representatives of both sides to make arrangements for quiet and confidential informal talks which would decide on the resumption of formal talks," he said. INQ A2

Duterte: Govt still open to peace talks with Reds

DESPITE his earlier order to "destroy" the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), President Rodrigo Duterte has changed his mind and again said his administration was still open to the possibility of reviving peace talks with communist rebels.

In a situation briefing in Camarines Sur after the onslaught of Tropical

► Talks A2

Depression "Usman" on Friday night, Duterte said the government "cannot afford to lose all channels of communication."

"*Ngayon di na kami magkaintindihan ni Sison* (Sison and I do not understand each other anymore). We'd like you to know that we are keeping the fire burning. *Hindi mo pwedeng sarhan e* (You cannot close the door)," he added.

"You cannot afford to lose all channels of communication. *Mag-iwan ka talaga maski maliit. So meron diyan, sabi ko 'sige basta walang coalition'* (Leave even a small opening as long as there's no talk about a coalition government)" the President said.

He made the remarks even after he renewed his attacks against exiled communist leader Jose Maria "Joma" Sison and the New People's Army (NPA).

"*Ang talagang medyo matigas na nakikita ko na wala talagang pag-asa, ito si Sison. And dito sa Bicol, malakas ang NPA* (Sison is hopeless and hardheaded. Here in Bicol, the NPA is strong)," Duterte said as he slammed the rebels for believing in Sison, whom he said they have never seen in person.

"They never saw him *tapos maniwala sila sa utak ni Sison* (but they believe Sison)," the President added.

"*Ang problema lang nito is they really don't know the real score and what is the impact of the insurgency sa kanilang buhay* (The problem is that they really don't know the real score and what is the impact of the insurgency on their lives)," he said.

Sison, in a Facebook post, said that while the National

Democratic Front (NDF) remained open to peace negotiations with the government, the communist movement's efforts were now geared toward Duterte's ouster.

The CPP and its armed wing the NPA are members of the NDF, an umbrella group.

During a news conference on Thursday, Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo reiterated that Sison, who has been in self-exile in the Netherlands since 1987, has no capability of toppling the Duterte government.

"Well, he has been saying that and as I said much earlier and even recently, his is a failed rebellion. It's about time that he realizes that fact that 50 years of rebellion have not borne any fruits, insofar as the intention of the rebellion he has launched is concerned," Panelo told reporters.

"In fact, the very people that he has sought to fight for *eh sila ang nagiging biktima ng kanilang ginagawa* (they end up as victims)," he said.

The military in October last year floated an alleged plot of communist rebels to overthrow the government dubbed as "Red October," only to claim later that the plan had fizzled out.

Ties between Sison and Duterte soured last year after the President accused communist rebels of continuing their attacks against government troops despite ongoing peace talks.

In November 2018, Duterte formally ended the government's peace talks with the communists and ordered the military to "destroy" the CPP a month later.

The government then pursued localized talks with the rebels.

CATHERINE S. VALENTE

Joma OK talks while scheming

By Elmer N. Manuel

Taking his duplicity to the extreme, Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chairman Jose Maria Sison said

he is willing to talk peace with President Rodrigo Duterte while at the same time seeking his downfall.

Sison welcomed Duterte's
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Sison and I cannot understand each other anymore but we are keeping the fire burning

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call to resume peace negotiations with rebels, "despite the determination of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) to seek the ouster of this regime."

In a speech during the command conference in Bicol after the President visited areas hit by typhoon "Usman," Mr. Duterte said the government "cannot afford to lose all channels of communication" with the revolutionary movement.

"Now, Sison and I cannot understand each other anymore. But I'd like you to know we are keeping the fire burning and we cannot close (the door). You cannot afford to lose all channels of communication. You have to leave even just a little room," Duterte said in the situation briefing on the effects of "Usman" in Pili, Camarines Sur.

"So there's one. I said yes as long as there's no coalition (government)," he added.

"Enemies need peace negotiations before they can become friends or partners for the sake of the Filipino people who desire social, economic and political reforms as basis for a just and lasting peace," Sison replied in a statement.

"Thus, I welcome the statement of Duterte that he is still open to peace negotiations, even as there is still an exchange of hostile words in the mass media and exchange of bullets in the battlefield."

There is a slim chance of pursuing peace talks.

The communist leader added that Duterte's recent stance "is for the benefit of the people" that the peace negotiations resume.

"The NDFP encourages and supports the broad united front and mass movement to oust Duterte from power," Sison said.

"Definitely, it appreciates highly the expected intensification of New People's Army (NPA) tactical

offensives as contributory to the weakening, isolation and overthrow of the Duterte regime," he added.

Duterte added that leftist personalities previously in his Cabinet pushed for questionable policies.

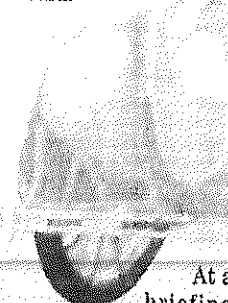
Ties weakened

Ties between Sison and Duterte soured last year after the President accused communist rebels of continuing their attacks against government troops despite the ongoing peace talks.

Another resumption was scheduled in late June but was canceled, as the government sought to review all agreements entered into by the communists with past administrations.

In November, Duterte issued Proclamation 360 formally ending the government's peace talks with the communists. A month later, he signed Executive Order 70 ordering the creation of a national task force to "end local communist armed conflict."

There is a slim chance of pursuing peace talks, Mr. Duterte said.



At a situational briefing after his aerial inspection in the aftermath of "Usman" in Camarines Sur, Duterte said unlike the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) founding chairman Nur Misuari, who is open to peace negotiations, Sison is difficult to negotiate with.

Hard to deal with

"We cannot get anything from the NPA. Even if they say they do not want a coalition, but they want to join our economic bodies like the NEDA (National Economic and Development Authority), it's a hard thing to do," he said.

The President said Sison's fellow CPP-NPA-NDF negotiators Luis Jalandoni and Fidel Agcaoili are also hard to deal with.

"Agcaoili is always mixing things with legal jargon. They came and wanted to talk to me, I said, 'No,'" he said.

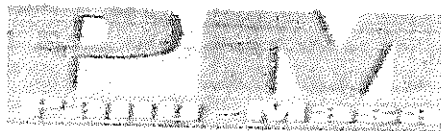
Duterte added that leftist personalities previously in his Cabinet, particularly former Department of Agrarian Reform Secretary Rafael Mariano and former Department of Social Welfare and Development Secretary Judy Taguiwalo, pushed for questionable policies, with Mariano allegedly urging people to occupy vacant lots

and Taguiwalo allegedly prioritizing NPA members in the distribution of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program benefits.

Red occupation

"He (Mariano) was there, a Cabinet member at that. He was egging people to occupy, if there is a vacant lot. So I was forced to come up, I said do not do that because I will order the law enforcers to arrest you, if you fight, to shoot you dead," the President said.

NPA members, he said, do not know the impact of their insurgency and just blindly follow Sison. **With Kristina Maralit**



Joma ok uli sa peace talk

Sa kabila ng plano na umano'y 'ouster plot' o pagpapabagsak sa administrasyon ngayong 2019, pabor si CPP-NPA-NDF founder Jose Maria Sison sa nais ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte na bukasang muli ang peace talks sa hanay ng komunistang grupo.

"Enemies need peace negotiations before they can become friends or

partners for the sake of the Filipino people who desire social, economic and political reforms as basis for a just and lasting peace", ani Sison sa isang press statement.

Sinabi ni Sison na para sa kapakanan ng mamamayan kaya kailangang magpatuloy muli ang peace talks sa rehimen ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte.

"Thus, I welcome the statement of Duterte that he is still open to peace negotiations even as there is

still an exchange of hostile words in the mass media and exchange of bullets in the battlefield", giit pa nio.

Una nang matasan ni Pangulong Duterte ang AFP na durugin ang New People's Army (NPA) rebels, ang armed wing ng CPP.

Gayunman, nitong Biyernes sa biglang pagbabago ng ihip ng hangin sinabi ni Pangulong Duterte na bukas ang kaniyang administrasyon sa peace talks sa CPP-NPA-NDF. -Joy Cantos -

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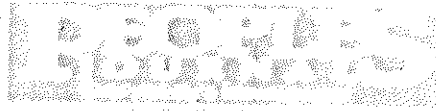
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Still open to peace talks

By Efren Montano

DESPITE their exchange of harsh words, President Rodrigo Duterte and communist leader Jose Maria Sison are not closing their doors on peace talks.

In a speech in Camarines Sur Friday night, Duterte said the government remains open to resuming peace negotiations with the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), which has waged a five-decade armed insurgency -- the longest-running in Asia.

"Ngayon, hindi na kami magkaintindihan ni Sison pero (Now, Sison and I can no longer understand each other but)

I'd like you to know that we are keeping the fire burning and hindi mo pwedeng sarahan eh (you cannot close it entirely). You cannot afford to lose all channels of communication, mag-iwan ka tala-ga maski maliit (you will leave it even slightly open)," Duterte said.

In response, Sison in a statement on Saturday said it has been the "consistent policy" of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, which represents the communist rebels in peace talks, to remain open to the negotiations.

"I welcome the statement of Duterte that he is still open to peace negotiations even as there is still an exchange of hostile

words in the mass media and exchange of bullets in the battlefield," Sison said.

He, however, stressed communist rebels are determined to oust the Duterte government, which he earlier said is their "principal work" now.

The CPP, founded by Sison in 1968, has always aimed to overthrow the government and replace it with a "national democratic" state.

The Duterte administration is the sixth to try to end the communist group's armed struggle, but the President walked away from peace negotiations in November 2017, after repeatedly accusing rebels of violating their unilateral ceasefire. A,

Six-man Batocabe hit squad now under custody — PNP

By MARTIN A. SADONGDONG

All members of the six-man hit squad reportedly hired by Daraga Mayor Carlwyn Baldo to kill Ako Bicol Party-list representative Rodel Batocabe are now under police custody. The hit job also killed Batocabe's police escort SPO2 Orlando Diaz.

Philippine National Police chief Director General Oscar Albayalde said two other suspects -- Danilo Muella alias Manoy Dan and Rolando Arimado alias "RR" -- surrendered Saturday.

Muella whom police said pur-

chased the guns used in the assassination surrendered to elements of the Regional Intelligence Office of the Bicol Provincial Police Office (PRO-5) around 1 a.m. yesterday.

Arimado, 50, an alleged rebel-
returnee who reportedly served as a back-up gunman surrendered to the Masbate police at about 7 a.m. after three days of negotiation. Chief Insp. Malu Calubaquib, Police Regional Office 5 (PRO-5) spokesperson said Arimado was disarmed of his Uzi rifle by the escort of Vice Mayor Eric Castillo of Aroroy, Masbate in a hotel where he was

billeted.

Calubaquib said Arimado confessed to the crime in an affidavit.

Muella, a former Technical Sergeant in the 97th Military Intelligence Company of the Philippine Army and trusted aide of Mayor Baldo allegedly purchased two home-made pistols used by the hitmen.

"This latest development is expected to complete the puzzle in uncovering the truth behind this double murder and multiple frustrated murder case," Albayalde noted.

Muella and Arimado's surrender came after the surrender of Henry Yuson, the self-confessed main gunman and Jaywin Babor, one of the drivers of the get-away motorcycles on Friday.

Chips falling

Albayalde first announced a major breakthrough in the Batocabe-Diaz twin slay Thursday after they located Emmanuel Judavar, a former military man and security aide of Mayor Baldo who was initially part of the assassination plot. Judavar allegedly backed out of the plan after Mayor Baldo refused to lend him money for his sick wife and child.

It was Judavar who identified members of the hit squad and the suspects began to surrender one by one.

The first to surrender was Christopher Naval alias Tuping, a discharged Army man

once assigned with the Military Intelligence Battalion of the 9th Infantry Division, Philippine Army stationed in Bicol and also a close security aide of Mayor Baldo. He surrendered on December 30, 2018.

Naval was said to have formed the team after allegedly receiving P250,000 from Mayor Baldo in September 2018. The assassination plot was hatched as early as August 2018, when Batocabe declared he was running for mayor of Daraga, Albayalde said.

Last Thursday, police arrested Emmanuel Rosello alias Boboy, who served as one of the drivers of the get-away motorcycles. Police seized from his possession a black SYM motorcycle believed to be used by the suspects in the escape. Albayalde said Rosello is a former member of the Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU), an auxiliary force of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

On the same day, Henry Yuson alias "Romef" and "Eno", the self-confessed main gunman, surrendered to the Philippine Army in Sorsogon. Yuson has a standing warrant for rape.

Yuson, an NPA rebel, later became a CAFGU.

On Friday, Jaywin Babor alias "Jie," yielded to authorities in Taguig City.

Babor, a former Army man was assigned to drive the get-away motorcycles of the team, Albayalde said.

2 more Batocabe suspects surrender

BY ROY D.R. NARRA

THE six prime suspects in the killing of AKO Bicol Rep. Rodel Batocabe are now in the custody of the police as two more suspects surrendered to authorities on Saturday.

Rolando Arimado alias RR, a rebel returnee who allegedly acted as the look-out and back-up gunman, gave himself up in Masbate Island at 7 a.m. yesterday.

He was taken to the Bicol mainland under heavy guard.

Six hours before Arimado surrendered, another suspect, Danilo Mueña alias Manoy Dan, surrendered to the Regional Intelligence Office 5 in Legazpi City.

It was Mueña who purchased the guns

► Batocabe A2

2 more Batocabe suspects

used to assassinate Batocabe. Reports said Muella was a security aide of Daraga, Albay Mayor Carlwyn Baldo, who had been tagged by the suspects as the mastermind.

Batocabe's bodyguard, Senior Police Officer 1 Orlando Diaz, was also killed in the attack.

The gunman, Henry Yuson alias Romel/Eno, surrendered to police authorities on Thursday night. He admitted killing the lawmaker upon the order of Baldo, who promised to pay them P5 million for the job.

Yuson apologized to the Batocabe family for the crime he committed. He said the mayor failed to deliver on his promise to give them P5 million reward for killing Batocabe.

The self-confessed gunman said the mayor and the other suspects plotted to kill the lawmaker after he announced that he would run for mayor of Daraga.

Yuson added that Baldo wanted

to "permanently sit as mayor of Daraga" and promised him and the other suspects continuous supply of money if he remained the mayor.

The first suspect to surrender was Christopher Naval alias Tuping on Dec. 20, 2018. Naval executed an extrajudicial confession and named Baldo as the brains behind the assassination.

Another suspect, Emmanuel Rosello alias Boboy, was arrested in Daraga, Albay and the getaway motorcycle used in the assassination was confiscated on Thursday.

Haywin Babor alias Jie surrendered to police authorities in Taguig City on Friday.

Rosello and Babor were the alleged drivers of the getaway motorcycles used in the assassination.

Justin Batocabe, the eldest son of the slain lawmaker, told *The Manila Times* that the latest development brings them closer

to justice.

"I understand it is a long road ahead before we obtain full justice, but so far the evidence is both logical and solid. I will continue to maintain my trust in the justice system," he said.

However, authorities have yet to arrest Baldo, who denied involvement in the killing. Philippine National Police chief Oscar Albayalde said they are close to completing "the puzzle in uncovering the truth behind this double murder and multiple frustrated murder case."

The PNP filed double murder and six counts of frustrated murder before the Albay Provincial Prosecutor's Office against the six suspects and Baldo.

Albayalde has ordered the removal of Baldo's police security and the confiscation of his firearms.

The mayor surrendered three of his four registered firearms.

Ruined

Legazpi City Mayor Noel Rosal, the concurrent chairman of the Regional Peace and Order Council in Bicol, said the killing of Batocabe ruined the "good political practices" in the province.

"Albay has a good political reputation in Bicol because the opposing candidates and politicians warred on different ideas and platform of government without firing a single bullet in the past. We treat political intramurals in Albay as intellectual form of battle," he said.

"But the killing of congressman Batocabe completely ruined our good political practices. The people of Albay were enraged. Whoever introduced this dastardly and cowardly act will be dealt with. We will not allow this to flourish in Albay because this is not our way of political exercise," Rosal said.

Albay Gov. Al Francis Bichara agreed.

"We will not allow political killings to thrive in Albay. This never happened to us in the past," the governor said.

BATOCABE SLAY: 2 MORE SUSPECTS SURRENDER

By Francisco Tuyay and Maricel V. Cruz

THE two remaining suspects in the twin murder of Ako Bicol Party-list Rep. Rodel Batocabe and security escort SP01 Orlando Diaz on Dec. 22 surrendered separately to police in Masbate and Bicol Saturday, hours after self-confessed gunman Henry Yuson linked Daraga Mayor Carlwyn Baldo into the killings following his surrender.

This brings the number of six prime suspects now in police custody.

Philippine National Police Chief Oscar Albayalde said suspects Rolando Arimado, alias RR, yielded in Masbate at 7 a.m. Saturday while Danilo Muella, alias Manoy Dan, surrendered past midnight on the same day.

This latest development is expected to complete the puzzle in uncovering the truth behind this double murder and multiple frustrated murder case, the PNP chief said in a statement.

Arimado, a rebel returnee, was tagged as look-out and back-up gunman in the assassination.

Muella, another trusted security aide of Baldo, surrendered to the Regional Intelligence Office 5 at 1 a.m. Saturday.

He was identified as the suspect who purchased two cal.45 pistols used in the murder.

Aside from Arimado and Muella, four other suspects are in police custody: Christopher Naval alias Tuping, Emmanuel Roseito alias Boboy, Henry Yuson alias Romet, and Jaywin Babon alias Cae.

A key witness, Emmanuel Bonita Judavar, has also provided investigators with what investigators described as relevant information regarding the case from planning to execution stages.

Albayalde noted that only one of the seven indicted suspects had yet to surrender, Baldo, tagged as the mastermind who allegedly contacted the services of the gunmen in September 2018 to assassinate Batocabe. *turn to A2*

BATOCABE...

From A1

A witness in the investigation of the slay claimed Baldo was anxious he might not win the mayoral elections in May against the congressman.

According to Mariz Umali's report on "State of the Nation with Jessica Soho" which was beamed nationwide, Emmanuel Judavar, reportedly part of the planning of the slay, was now considered a witness in the case.

In a related development:

- A lawmaker from the Visayas on Saturday lauded the PNP under Albayalde for the prompt investigation and resolution of the murder.

But Samar Rep. Edgar Mary Sarmiento noted that this case should stand legal scrutiny when cases had been finally filed against the alleged mastermind and his accomplices.

"We want justice for Congressman Batocabe. We appreciate the swift action of the PNP in solving this case but the next thing to do now is make sure that the mastermind and his cohorts

should be arrested and convicted. We've seen so many cases that were eventually dismissed because the evidence presented by the police was not good enough," Sarmiento said.

Sarmiento said Baldo had denied any involvement in the killing and would definitely challenge the PNP's allegations once the case was filed in court.

This, as the PNP should ensure that it has all the necessary evidence for the swift and proper prosecution of all alleged suspects, Sarmiento said, adding the suspects should be immediately arrested and brought to court.

"Anything short is not justice. The PNP must make sure that the perpetrator of this dastardly act is immediately arrested and convicted. It must not make any room that would allow the mastermind and his minions to post bail because the case is weak," Sarmiento said.

Albayalde said Arimado was shuttled to the Bicol mainland after he turned himself in to the police in Masbate.

He was then taken into custody

under heavy guard by operatives of Albay and Masbate Police Provincial Office after negotiation through his wife and son.

Muella, on the other hand, surrendered to the Regional Intelligence Office-5 at about 1 a.m. Saturday.

Albayalde provided no specific details on the testimonies of Arimado and Muella to investigators surrounding the circumstances behind the murder.

Instead, Albayalde said, "This latest development is expected to complete the puzzle in uncovering the truth behind this double murder and multiple frustrated murder case."

In his expose, Judavar told investigators he was part of the group that planned the initial stages in the killing of Batocabe in August 2018, but he backed out when execution time came.

Christopher Naval, alias Tuping, a trusted security aide of Baldo followed through, claiming the mayor offered P5 million for the job to kill Batocabe in September 2018 and paid an initial P250,000 intended for the purchase of guns and motorcycles.

A day thereafter, Emmanuel Ro-

sello, alias Boboy, Jaywin Babor and lately Henry Juson surfaced and made vital disclosure on the circumstances behind the kill plot.

Yuson unleashed an earthshaking disclosure when he accused Baldo as the one who ordered him to kill Batocabe.

While the PNP has named Baldo as the mastermind, Sarmiento said police had yet to arrest the suspect.

He said the PNP should act quickly in filing a case against Baldo and ensure that their case could stand any legal scrutiny.

Sarmiento said any delay in Baldo's indictment while the media were feasting on this issue could muddle the integrity of the case.

"Real police work requires solid police investigation and evidence gathering because in the end, the court will decide on the basis of the evidence presented to them," Sarmiento said.

Sarmiento added that the case of Batocabe would hopefully prompt the PNP to revisit other unsolved murder cases involving other political personalities.

2 more Batocabe gunmen surrender

By MARTIN A. SADONGDONG

Two more alleged members of the kill team behind the twin assassination of Ako Bicol party-list Rep. Rodel Batocabe and his escort, SPO2 Orlando Diaz, surrendered to authorities yesterday as the Philippine National Police took a step closer in clearing the case.

PNP chief, Director General Oscar Albayalde, identified the two suspects as Danilo Muella, alias "Manoy Dan," whom police said purchased the guns used in the killing; and Rolando Arimado, alias "RR," who allegedly served as a back-up gunman.

Albayalde said that Muella first surrendered to the Regional Intelligence Office of the Bicol Provincial Police Office around 1 a.m. while Arimado submitted himself to police in Masbate around 7 a.m.

Muella, reportedly a former Technical Sergeant in the 97th Military Intelligence Company of the 9th Infantry Division, Philippine Army, allegedly acquired the two home-made pistols used by the gunmen in the hit job.

Albayalde said Muella is a trusted security aide of Daraga, Albay Mayor Carlwyn Baldo, who was the pinpointed mastermind in the killing.

Albayalde noted that Arimado is an alleged rebel returnee who acted as a lookout and back-up gunman of the group.

After Arimado's surrender and a brief negotiation with his wife and son, the suspect was shuttled to Bi-

col and was taken into custody under heavy guard by the Albay and Masbate Provincial Police Offices, Albayalde disclosed.

"This latest development is expected to complete the puzzle in uncovering the truth behind this double murder and multiple frustrated murder case," Albayalde noted.

Muella and Arimado's surrender came after Albayalde announced the other day that Henry Yuson, the self-confessed main gunman; and Jaywin Babor, one of the drivers of the get-away motorcycles, also yielded to authorities.

Excluding Baldo, all members of the six-man kill team have been arrested or surrendered to authorities.

Albayalde first announced a major breakthrough in the case of Batocabe and Diaz's killing last Jan. 3 at the PNP headquarters in Camp Crame, Quezon City.

According to Albayalde, police were able to get a good lead in the case when they located Erimanuel Judavar, a former military man and security aide of Baldo who was initially part of the assassination plot. He allegedly backed out of the plan after Baldo refused to lend him money for his sick wife and child.

Judavar identified all the members of the kill team, the PNP chief noted. One by one, the suspects started yielding to authorities after a sustained pressure from the investigators.

The first to surrender was Chris-

topher Naval, alias "Tuping," a discharged Army man who served with the Military Intelligence Battalion of the 9th Infantry Division, Philippine Army stationed in Bicol and also a close security aide of Baldo. He yielded to the PNP-Intelligence Group on Rizal Day.

Naval allegedly formed the kill team after he received P250,000 from Baldo in September 2018.

The assassination plot was hatched as early as August 2018 when Batocabe announced in public his desire to be the mayor of Daraga, Albayalde said.

Last Jan. 3, police arrested Emmanuel Rosello, alias "Boboy," who served as one of the drivers of the get-away motorcycles. Police seized from his possession a black SYM motorcycle believed to be used by the suspects in their escape.

Albayalde said Rosello is a former member of the Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Unit, an auxiliary force of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Henry Yuson, alias "Romeo" and "Eno," the self-confessed main gunman, surrendered to the Philippine Army in Sorsogon on Jan. 3. Police later served an arrest warrant against him over a rape charge.

Yuson is a former member of the New People's Army who later became a CAFGU after he was arrested by the military intelligence operatives of the 9th Infantry Battalion, Philippine Army.

Govt to intensify offensives vs enemies of state

FIL: government is expected to launch "more focused and intense" military offensives against enemies of the state this year, Malacañang said amid alleged moves to kick President Rodrigo Duterte out of office.

In a statement over the weekend, Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo said a "relentless" campaign would be pursued against lawless elements including communist insurgents and terrorists, with the ultimate objective of crushing them by 2022.

"We expect military offensives to be more focused and intense in 2019 as we are geared to crush enemy forces by the end of the President's term in 2022," Panelo added.

"The government will remain relentless in its fight against all forms of criminality, including the Muslim rebellion and the communist insurgency, correctly described by former secretary of National Defense Gilbert Teodoro as a 'syndicated criminal terrorist enterprise,' as well as other terrorist groups," he said.

Panelo made the statement after Duterte revealed that he has an "evil plan" against the enemies of the state.

The President's statement came after a recent bombing in Cotabato City that killed two persons and injured 34.

Meanwhile, Panelo rejected an allegation made by communist leader Jose Maria "Joma" Sison that Duterte was the

mastermind of state terrorism.

"There is also no such thing as state terrorism, as maintained by Mr. Sison, but only state-applied measures to end the bloodshed and deaths of our fellow Filipinos engineered by the CPP/NPA/NDF (Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army/National Democratic Front)," he said.

Sison recently declared that removing Duterte from office is the top priority of the communist party this year.

He said the CPP would keep in touch with its "possible allies" to fulfill its ultimate goal to "isolate and oust the Duterte regime from power."

► **Offensives A2**

■ OFFENSIVES FROM A1

Govt to launch 'more intense'

"Its [communist party] principal work now is to work for the ouster of the Duterte regime," Sison added.

Unfazed by Sison's pronouncement, Panelo taunted the communist leader, whom he branded as a "visionary" whose plans against

the current administration were based on illusions.

"He is an illusionist, a visionary that has become illusory. *Palagay ko panahon na magkaroon siya ng enlightenment* (Perhaps, I think it's time for him to have enlightenment)," he said.

Panelo said the Duterte administration was not worried about Sison's "empty" threat.

He, nevertheless, added that government troops were ready to fight communist guerrillas who would attempt to destabilize the government.

CATHERINE S. VALENTE

CCTV images of mall bomb suspects out

By JOHN UNSON

COTABATO CITY – Police have released photos of two men seen leaving a bag containing an improvised explosive device (IED) inside the Southseas Mall here, just outside of which an explosion about an hour later would kill two people and hurt several others on New Year's Eve.

Supt. Rolly Octavio of the Cotabato City police said the release of the photos or videograb of the suspects might prompt them or their accomplices to launch diversionary attacks to cover their escape.

Octavio said the photos were taken from recordings of security cameras positioned at the second floor of the Southseas Mall where the two were seen leaving a bag near a lotto outlet. "This for now is already a good lead to start with," Octavio said.

About an hour after the deadly blast, police found the unattended

Turn to Page 10

bag and defused the IED inside the bag.

Octavio said Cotabato City Mayor Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi, chair of the local inter-agency peace and order council, offered a P500,000 reward for anyone who could provide information that could lead to the arrest of the two men.

Major Gen. Cirilito Sobejana of the Army's 6th Infantry Division (ID) covering Cotabato City and the nearby Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat provinces, said they have established the identity of one of the two suspects but declined to reveal it.

"One is positively identified. He was a former follower of ex-Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighter vice chairman, Mohamad Ali Tambako who transferred to the group of (Kasan) Indal, a certified bomber trained by then Abdulbasit Usman," Sobejana said.

He urged local communities to help prevent or stop terror acts aimed at misleading authorities pursuing the suspects.

Sobejana is helping oversee, along with Chief Supt. Eliseo Rasco of the Police

Regional Office-12, the newly formed Task Group Southseas, an interim inter-agency bloc investigating the New Year's Eve explosion.

Officials of the 6th ID, which has three brigades and more than a dozen battalions scattered in central Mindanao, earlier said the Dec. 31 attack may have been fueled by "vendetta."

The attack came after the killing of four members of a local Islamic State-inspired group in an encounter with military operatives last Dec. 22 in a marshland in Barangay Tatak bordered by Mamasapano, Rajah Buayan and General Salipada Pendatun towns in Maguindanao.

Cotabato City, under Administrative Region 12, is inside Maguindanao, a component province of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Two of the fatalities in the Dec. 22 encounter were foreigners – Singaporean Abu Hud Zain and Indonesian Abdulrahid Ruhmisanti.

Local officials and traditional Moro elders in the three towns identified the

From Page 1

two other fatalities as Salamuddin, son of the cleric Salahuddin Hassan, and Mohammad Ali Hassan.

Mohammad is a younger brother of Hassan, a henchman of the radical cleric Abdulmalik Esmael, also known as Abu Toraife.

A Marine captain led the clandestine operation that led to the death of the four militants.

Local officials had suggested to President Duterte the granting of either medals of valor or the distinguished conduct star citations to the agents involved in the raid, which also killed Army Sgt. Melanio Diaz.

Traditional Moro *datus* and members of the municipal peace and order councils in Maguindanao said Hassan, notorious for stoking hatred for non-Muslims through *khutab* or Friday worship sermon, still has four foreign terrorists under his protection.

Two of them are Asians identified only as Ridhum and Hirman, possibly aliases, and two others – East Yunos Amagandhi and a certain Sharbatli – were possibly from the Middle East, based on their facial

features.

Abu Toraife's group was blamed for the deadly Aug. 28 and Sept. 2 bombings in Isulan town in Sultan Kudarat that left five people dead and 30 injured.

"The Cotabato City peace and order council, the police and the 6th ID are doing their best to solve that case, a clear act of terror. They are on top of the situation," ARMM Gov. Mujiv Hataman said yesterday.

ARMM's Chief Supt. Graciano Mijares on Friday ordered all municipal police offices in Maguindanao and in nearby Lanao del Sur province to monitor possible movements of groups sympathetic to the four terrorists killed on Dec. 22.

Hataman reiterated anew his appeal to netizens not to post "wild speculations" on social media like Facebook in order to prevent confusion and panic among the people.

"We in the ARMM care for Cotabato City and all its Christian, *lunad* and Muslim residents because it is the seat of the ARMM government. Our regional capitol is located in the city," Hataman said. – Jaime Laude, Romina Cabrera

'BOMBER' LEFT BAG AT LOTTO OUTLET

COTABATO BLAST: SUSPECTS' CCTV IMAGE OUT;

P500K REWARD UP

By Edwin O. Fernandez
@inqmindanao

COTABATO CITY—Police on Friday released CCTV images of two men suspected of carrying out the New Year's Eve bombing in front of South Seas Mall here that killed two people and wounded 34 others.

Senior Supt. Oliver Enmodias, head of Special Investigation Task Group-South Seas, showed the media the images of the two suspects, each carrying a bag, as they entered the mall.

The male suspects—one between 25 and 30 years old and the other between 50 and 60—later placed a bag next to the lotto outlet and baggage counter on the second floor of

the mall minutes before an improvised explosive device (IED) exploded outside the mall around 1:50 p.m.

The blast ripped through sidewalk stalls at the Don Rufino Alonzo Avenue exit of the mall.

Bomb experts later discovered the unexploded second IED on the second floor.

"[The images of the two suspects] were clearly captured by CCTV and we have strong evidence they were behind the bombing," Enmodias said.

Days before plebiscite

Enmodias and Senior Supt. Rolly Octavio, city police director, have appealed to the public for help in locating the suspects in the blast, which came days



AT LARGE Police say the man on the left was the carrier of the second IED. —PHOTOS COURTESY OF POLICE REGIONAL OFFICE 12

before the holding of a plebiscite on a law that will give Muslims an autonomous homeland in Mindanao.

Moro Islamic Liberation Front chair Murad Ebrahim condemned the attack, saying it

was "an act of cowardice, inhuman and atrocious."

With the release of the CCTV images, the city government of Cotabato put up a P500,000 cash reward for any information leading to the arrest of the

suspects, said retired police Senior Supt. Rolan Balquin, city civil security chief.

Chief Supt. Eliseo Tam Rasco, Soccsksargen police director, said the task force was still hunting seven cohorts of the suspects, three of them women. He did not reveal the cohorts' roles in the blast.

Investigators said results of the analysis conducted by a police bomb disposal team showed the blast radius at 38 meters, making the IED more lethal than a fragmentation grenade.

"We are still investigating the group behind the blast as well the explosive they use," said Army Capt. Arvin Encinas, the region's military spokesperson.

The CCTV footage showed the younger suspect, wearing a blue shirt with red short sleeves, leaving the bag next to the lotto outlet, with the older suspect acting as lookout, said Supt. Aldrin Gonzales, chief of the Public Information Office of the Philippine National Police-Region 12.

The bag contained black powder that emitted foul odor, he said. **A4**

On Jan. 21, residents of Mindanao's five provinces and two cities will hold a plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law that will allow Muslim Filipinos to form a parliament and administration. —WITH REPORTS FROM JEOFFREY MAITEM AND FAYE ORELLANA INQ

PNP releases photos of 2 suspects in Cotabato blast

By **MARTIN A. SADONGDONG**

The Philippine National Police (PNP) released on Saturday the photos of the two suspects linked to a deadly bombing incident in Cotabato City on New Year's Eve.

Superintendent Aldrin Gonzales, regional director of Soccsksargen Police Regional Office (PRO-12), said the photos of the two suspects were lifted from the closed-circuit television (CCTV) footages obtained from the management of the South Seas Mall, the establishment where the bombing incident happened.

The PRO-12 has yet to release the official description of the suspects but based on the photos alone, the primary suspect appears to be a man in his late 20s or early 30s. He had a back pack.

"Siya yung nag-iwan ng IED sa loob ng mall at yung nakita na naghulog ng isa pa sa labas (He was the one who left the IED [improvised explosive device] inside the mall and the one seen dropping another one outside)," Gonzales told the Manila Bulletin in a phone interview.

Meanwhile, the second suspect was a bit older compared to the primary suspect. Gonzales said the accomplice acted as a lookout. However, Gonzales said the investigators

have yet to identify the suspects.

He urged the public to report to the police any information which could lead to the arrest of the two men.

"Pinag-aralan ng investigators natin yung CCTV na nakuha ng SITG South Seas at sila talaga yung nakita sa mga footage (The investigators studied the CCTV obtained by the SITG South Seas and the suspects were really the ones seen in the footages)," he stated.

According to Gonzales, the next objective is to identify the suspects and determine what group they belong to so that the police could arrest and file double murder and multiple frustrated murder charges against them.

Earlier, PNP chief, Director General Oscar Albayalde said the police are looking at the possibility of a terror attack perpetrated by Islamic State (ISIS)-inspired terror groups in Mindanao behind the incident.

The bombing incident occurred in front of the South Seas Mall in Poblacion, Cotabato on December 31, 2018.

Aside from the IED that exploded outside the mall, bomb experts also found and detonated another IED at the baggage counter on the second floor of the mall. The explosion claimed two lives and resulted to the injury of 34 others.

PNP releases photos of mall bombing suspects

COTABATO CITY: The Philippine National Police (PNP) special task force released the closed circuit television (CCTV)-captured images of two men suspected to have carried out the New Year's Eve bombing outside the South-Seas Mall that left two dead and 34 wounded.

Senior Supt. Oliver Enmodias, head of the Special Investigation Task Group (SITG-SouthSeas), presented to media the images showing the suspects carrying bags as they entered the mall a few minutes before the blast.

One of them was about 25 to 30 years old, while the other is about 50 to 60 years old.

Enmodias said the two were seen placing what appeared to be a bag beside the lotto outlet and baggage counter at the second floor of the mall, a few minutes before the improvised explosive device (IED) blast outside.

Bomb experts from the explosive ordnance division later discovered the IED at the second floor during the clearing operations after the 1:50 p.m. blast that ripped through the stalls of the sidewalk vendor at the Don Rufino Alonzo Avenue exit of the mall.

"They were clearly captured by CCTV and we have strong evidence they were



ONCAM CCTV images of the two suspects allegedly responsible for the detonation of the improvised explosive device at the Cotabato City mall on New Year's Eve. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

behind the bombing," Enmodias said.

Enmodias and Senior Supt. Rolly Octavio, city police director, appealed to the public to help the PNP and other law enforcers locate the suspects now that their photos are very clear.

Retired Senior Supt. Rolan Balquin, civil security chief, said the Cotabato City government also offered P500,000 cash reward for anyone who could provide information that could

lead to the arrest of the suspects.

Earlier, Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Philippine Army's 6th Infantry Division, said the Dawlah Islamiyah Torayfe could be the main group responsible for the IED explosion.

He did not also rule out the possible link of some politicians to the bomb attack but said they have to gather evidence to prove that.

Sobejana added that the bomb attack could also be a retaliation of terrorists after the

Army made the attack on its lair on December 27.

Meanwhile, Chief Supt. Eliseo Rasco, regional director of Soccsksargen police, said they are also looking for cohorts of the two suspects — four men and three women.

Soccsksargen is comprised of the provinces of South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos City.

**ROY D.R. NARRA AND
JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL**

Cotabato bombers being hunted

By Vernadeth de los Santos

At least two suspects who may be involved in the New Year's Eve bombing outside a mall in Cotabato City that killed two people and injured several others are now being hunted down by authorities.

It also showed one of the two men leaving the small package near a Lotto outlet. The container was later found by a saleslady who showed it to another person and called the police.

Special Investigation Task Group Southseas chief Supt. Oliver Modias said Saturday that they already have CCTV footage from the mall that showed the suspects carrying a small container similar to the size of a beauty cream on the second floor of the establishment.

It also showed one of the two men leaving

the small package near a Lotto outlet. The container was later found by a saleslady who showed it to another person and called the police.

"The package contained another improvised explosive device that was however detonated in time by authorities," Modias said.

Military officials had earlier said the bomb design was similar to explosives assembled by the Daulah Islamiyah, an Islamic State-inspired group in Southern Philippines. Police investigators, however, said they have yet to identify a particular group responsible for the attack.

The city government has offered a P500,000 reward for anyone who could provide information that would lead to the arrest of those responsible for the blast that killed two people and injured 34 others, including several minors. The explosion occurred at about 1:49 p.m.

Ten of the 34 injured are still recuperating in the hospital.

2 Cotabato mall bombers identified

By **ALFRED DALIZON**

THE Police Regional Office 12 Special Investigation Task Group created to probe the New Year's Eve bombing in a Cotabato City mall which killed two persons and injured 34 others yesterday released the photos of two men

believed to have carried out the attack.

The suspects who remained unidentified were caught by CCTV cameras installed at the South Seas Mall in Cotabato City moments before the deadly explosion.

One of the suspects was caught leaving the improvised explosive device at the mall while the other served

as a 'lookout.'

The bomb carrier was seen wearing a blue t-shirt and carried a backpack while the 'lookout' sported a green shirt. Police released the pictures of the two lifted from the CCTV footage hoping that the public can give them information that would lead to the capture of the bombers.

A P500,000 reward has

been offered by the Cotabato City local government for the capture of the suspects.

Security officials maintained that the blast in Cotabato City was the handiwork of a breakaway faction of a secessionist group based only in Mindanao and whose motive is to retaliate against ongoing military offensive against them which have caused them major losses.

Officials placed the terror threat level in Central Visayas at a 'moderate level' and said that enough security measures are already in place in all places of convergence including airports, seaports and bus terminals to prevent any terror plot as early as before Christmas.

Western Mindanao covers the provinces of Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay, Zamboanga City and Isabela City in Basilan province.

On the other hand, Central Mindanao covers the provinces of Cotabato, Sarangani, South Cotabato,

and Sultan Kudarat, as well as Cotabato City and General Santos City.

Police are eyeing an ISIS-inspired terror group in the bombing of the South Seas Mall in Cotabato City. "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 that 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 bomber, 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. / 2

2 'bomber' sa Cotabato blast tukoy na

Natukoy na ng mga awtoridad ang dalawang suspek sa pambobomba sa South Seas mall sa Cotabato City na ikinasawi ng dalawa katao noong bisperas ng Bagong Taon.

Sa report ni Police Regional Office (PRO) 12 Director P/Chief Supt. Eliseo Tam Rasco, nakita ang dalawang suspek sa nirebyung CCTV ng nasa-bing mall.

Sa kuha ng CCTV, kitang-kita ang mga suspek na nag-aabutan ng isang bagay at kinalaunan ay isiniksik ito ng isa sa gilid ng lotto outlet sa 2nd floor

ng mall at saka umalis.

"The photos were extracted from the CCTV footages inside and outside the mall and along the road," anang opisyal.

Ayon naman kay Supt. Oliver Modias, hepe ng Special Investigation Task Group Southseas, na ang nasabing container ay nakita ng saleslady na ipinakita sa isa nitong kasamahan na tumawag naman sa himpilan ng pulisya.

Nang magresponde ang mga tauhan ng Explosives Ordnance Team, nadiskubre na isang improvised explosive device

ang laman ng package.

Nakuhanan ito ng CCTV mahigit isang oras makalipas ang pagsabog ng unang IED sa labas ng mall.

Tinatayang nasa 20-30 years old at 50-60 years old ang mga edad ng dalawang suspek.

Una nang tinukoy ng PNP at AFP na alinman sa Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) at

Dawlah Islamiyah na pawan ng mga Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) ang nasa likod ng pambobomba.

Samantala, nag-alok ang pamahalaang lungsod ng Cotabato ng P500,000 reward para sa sinumang makapagluturo at makapagbibigay ng impormasyon sa pinagtataguan ng naturang mga suspected bombers. (Joy Cantos/Rhoderick Beñez)

Sayyaf threatens to kill Indonesian hostage

BY AL JACINTO

ZAMBOANGA CITY: Abu Sayyaf group (ASG) bandits have threatened to execute an Indonesian fisherman if the Jakarta government or his employer ignores their demand for ransom in exchange for the safe release of the hostage.

In a video the ASG sent to his family, Samsul Sanguni, was appealing to his employer to save him. The clip showed the hostage with both hands tied behind his back, inside a hole in what appears to be a forest; heavily armed bandits stood on guard as Sanguni cried and pleaded for help.

Sanguni, 40, along with another Indonesian fisherman, Usman Yusuf, were kidnapped at sea near Caya Island in Sabah's Semporna town and brought to Sulu, one of five provinces under the Muslim autonomous region.

Yusuf, 35, was freed in De-

cember in Barangay Bual, Luuk town. He was released after the chief of the Indonesian Consul-General's Office in Sabah, Sulistijo, Djati Ismojo, appealed to Malaysia to resolve the kidnapping of its citizens.

It was unknown whether ransom was paid to the kidnappers in exchange for Yusuf's release.

In September last year, the ASG also released other Indonesian hostages to Nur Misuari, chief of the former rebel group Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and his wife Tarhata, and former Indonesian army general Kivlan Zein.

On the same month, the ASG, whose leaders pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, also released to the MNLF three other Indonesian hostages — Hamdam Salim, Subandi Sattuh and Sudarlan Samansung, who were kidnapped off Sabah in January 2018.

Despite the anti-terror campaign in Sabah, ASG bandits abducted the three crew of an Indonesian fishing boat off Sabah and took them to Sulu, Malaysian media reported. It said the victims — Heri Ardiansyah, 19; Jari Abdullah, and Hariadin, 45 — were working for a fishing company in Sandakan town when seven gunmen seized them on December 5 near Pegasus Reef, the same area where four armed men attacked a tugboat two days later and wounded an Indonesian crew in what police said was a failed abduction.

Sabah police recovered the trawler of the missing Indonesian crew with its engine still run-

ning. Citing intelligence sources, it said, the gunmen were led by Abu Sayyaf commanders Al Mujir Yadah and Hajan Sawadjaan, who teamed up with another militant commander, Indang Susukan.

The group was tagged as behind the spate of ransom kidnappings in the waters of Sabah and the attacks on fishing boats there. The Star Online, quoting unidentified intelligence sources, said three fishermen had been taken by their abductors to Pata Island and later transferred to Panamao town.

The bandits have been targeting Indonesian fishermen because their employers and the Jakarta government are paying ransom to the ASG, which the bandits use to purchase weapons, recruit members and finance other kidnappings and terror attacks in the country.

The ASG is still holding nearly a dozen foreign and local hostages in the restive region. *AT*

CALAMITY-HIT AREAS GET PRIORITY—RODY

By Vito Barcelo

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte urged his economic planners to prioritize other regions in terms of infrastructure projects and give less importance to Davao, his home province, so that people would not say something against his administration.

"I told the planners, Dominguez and Pernia to prioritize [other regions]... Never mind us. Make this place the last, if there is..." Duterte said during birthday celebration of Atty. Francis Tolentino last Thursday.

He said Mindanao did not suffer

any serious calamities and had not been usually hit by typhoons, which he described as the number one enemy of agriculture.

"...if we can have peace in this generation, maybe the next, our children would not suffer so much hardship.

I think we have to really find a way," he said.

"You'd notice that we from Davao [still have] everything in the blueprint. But that is really scheduled on the last may be years of my term, and you will just learn if we still have funds for the projects," Duterte said.

"I just want to assure you that we are governing for all Filipinos. I am no longer a politician. I cannot run anymore. And after this, I do not even know what I should or will be doing," the President told the guests.

Also during the event, Duterte called on the people of Mindanao to support the Bangsamoro Organic Law in the upcoming plebiscite, which he said was an important

component of the government's push for lasting peace in the south.

"I hope and I pray that something good will come out of the BOL. Though the plebiscite is forthcoming, we have every reason to believe that it would pass the people's will and I hope we could have peace because if not it will be hard for us," Duterte said.

The President said that if the BOL did not make it, he would just dedicate the remainder of his term in addressing violence in Mindanao.

Once ratified, the BOL will pave the way for the replacement of the ARMM with an MILF-led Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. *AR*

Basilan hero needs help

Tubil reinforced the beleaguered members of the Philippine National Police who tried to arrest the ASG leader

Incapacitated in an ambush, the soldier who once helped neutralize Abu Sayyaf leader, Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani, in 1998, deemed a hero in the Philippine military, is now seeking help for his medical treatment.

Pain from a gunshot wound is now making it difficult for Master Sgt. Jose

Juanillo Tubil to sleep.

Tubil, who lives in Isabela, Basilan, has reached out to Undersecretary Joel Sy Egco, executive director of the Presidential Task Force on Media Security, for assistance to come to Manila to seek treatment.

Egco said he has forwarded Tubil's request to the Armed

Forces of the Philippines (AFP) for proper action.

In a story titled "An Almost Forgotten Story of Heroism," narrated by Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc and posted on Facebook by Josephine Jaron Codilla, it was said that Tubil, then a Scout Ranger, who guided them in two operations in February and December 1998 against Janjalani and his men, including the one that eventually resulted in the terror leader's death.

"Janjalani died in the same

house where we confiscated high-caliber rifles. He and his men were killed by Ranger Tubil and at least 10 other CAGU (Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit) from Barangay Ulami sometime in December 1998," the post read.

"Tubil reinforced the beleaguered members of the Philippine National Police led by PCI Romo who tried to arrest the ASG (Abu Sayyaf Group) leader but was met with overwhelming fires, killing the police officer and some of his men." 3 **CRP**

Wanted terror suspect collared

A ranking official of the notorious terror group Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighter (BIFF) was arrested at a checkpoint set up by government forces in Pantukan, Compostela Valley over the weekend.

Police Regional Office-11 spokesman Chief Insp. Jason Baria, identified the suspect as Dimpo Jikiri, also known as Commander Ustadz Gulam Jikiri.

The suspect is listed as the third "most wanted" BIFF combatant in Mindanao region.

The suspect is listed as the third "most wanted" BIFF combatant in Mindanao region.

Baria said Jikiri, 71, is a Davao Oriental-based operative of the BIFF, a breakaway faction of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front that has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.

Jikiri, who is wanted for murder, was heading back to Davao Oriental when arrested at a checkpoint in Barangay Tambongon, Pantukan. X

Prior to his arrest, police said Jikiri was spotted several times by their informants at his brother's residence in Tambongon. **BR**

3RD MOST WANTED BIFF MEMBER ARRESTED

DAVAO CITY—Police arrested a "most wanted" member of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighter at a checkpoint in the Compostela Valley town of Pantukan Friday afternoon.

Chief Insp. Jason Baria, spokesman of the Police Regional Office 11, said Cristobal Dimpo Jikiri, also known as Ustadz Gulam Jikiri, is listed as the third most wanted BIFF member in the region.

Baria said Jikiri, 71, is a Davao Oriental-based member of the BIFF, a breakaway faction of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front that has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.

Jikiri, who is wanted for murder, was heading back to Davao Oriental when he was arrested at a checkpoint in Barangay Tambongon, Pantukan.

Before the arrest, police said Jikiri was sighted several times at his brother's residence in Tambongon.

Chief Supt. Marcelo Morales, PRO-11 director, said the arrest of Jikiri was part of the government's continuous campaign against terrorist elements.

Morales noted that police units in the region have been carrying out arrest warrants against wanted persons, even during the holiday season.

Two hours before New Year's Eve, police arrested murder suspects Robert Calipsan, Jobert Dinglasa Calipsan, and Jeccris Calipsan Dinglasa in Digos City.

On Thursday, Davao City policemen also arrested 18 persons wanted for various crimes. PNA

MINDANAO LEADERS OPPOSE INCLUSION IN BANGSAMORO

By Ayunan Grande Gunting

TWO Mindanao political leaders are advocating the "no" vote to the Bangsamoro Organic Law in the forthcoming plebiscites.

Lanao del Norte Rep. Khalid Dimaporo said his province is not part of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, which he said failed to govern itself professionally and deliver its promises of improving the quality of life of its constituents.

The proposed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao might just be a continuation of the old ARMM system, Dimaporo said.

Cotabato City Mayor Frances Cynthia Guiani likewise said leaders from various sectors oppose the creation of the new region.

The first plebiscite day is scheduled on Jan. 19 in ARMM, Cotabato and Isabela cities.

The second voting day will be held on Feb. 6 in Lanao del Norte (except for Iligan City) and North Cotabato.

Dimaporo said he is not in favor of an independent government which lacks transparency and accountability, shows biases for ethnic groups and implements Islamic-based laws that are practiced in

other Muslim countries which are too harsh for the local culture.

"We don't want to take a chance," he said. "Bangsamoro might be a repeat of ARMM."

The solon cited Marawi, Lanao del Sur as an example of long years of neglect that resulted in the penetration of the Maute and ISIS terrorist groups.

"The MILF wanted to create the Bangsamoro. They didn't address the national power. Everything will be controlled by the local government units. It merely adds another layer of bureaucracy," he said.

"Bangsamoro will be having a system of *kanya-kanyang mundo* (to each to his own). The LGUs can have their Internal Revenue Allotment, the congressman can get funds from the Department of Public Works and Highways, and the regional government will get the block grant. Money will be spent the way they please. Projects will overlap. How do you account for them? That was the problem with ARMM which ended up with ghost projects." A4

"We don't want to be a part of that system. We'd rather deal with Malacañang than deal with another layer of bureaucracy," Dimaporo said.

Too long and wasted

The founding of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) 50 years ago by the young Red Turks who deemed the old and now nearly-defunct Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP-1930) dysfunctional and on the verge of collapse was not indefensible.

“The NPA had managed to recruit quite a good sum from the universities and the factories to boost the army somehow. But it could not bring back its old strength.

Maoist communists, who in their heydays had almost equaled the nation's military strength.

The Reds did not see the strength of the middle forces. They failed to maximize their influence on the “other” peoples’ movements. The Maoist group and its legal fronts have even antagonized the leading forces and leaders of those “other movements.”

“Vanguardism,” or so it was called, isolated the groups from each other. The CPP-NPA was that strong at that time.

But as Maoism and its Asian flavor were aberrations to the Marxist-Leninist theory of communism, Edsa had also abruptly halted the gains of the CPP and its military arm — the New People's Army (NPA) — which quickly went on a decline, a large part of it due its own mistakes and paranoia.

In not a few books written by former members of the CPP-NPA themselves, they described how the Maoist party had killed its own children to feed its own persecution complex. It became a political Kronus, devouring its

History proved right the local Left movement, along with the people, was to suffer more attacks from the State after the PKP-1930 had lost its moral ascendancy when it cooperated with Ferdinand Marcos. It gained support from the equally persecuted masses with majority of its recruits harboring grievances against the state and government, their employers, landlords and anyone supporting the abusive order.

In three years, the country was to be placed under martial rule and for 14 more years it would not be able to escape the firm grip of a dictator who was ousted by a mostly middle class-led revolution in 1986.

EDSA — now known as a clogged artery of a dilapidated infrastructure than the revolution once sparked by a demand for change — sidestepped the Maoist communists, who in their heydays had almost equaled the nation's

own after it castrated its father, the old Marxist-Leninist party.

Two massive purging campaigns had devastating effects on the CPP. Activists working in its legal fronts had been invited to meetings in the backwoods, never to come back.

Top officials suspected of working with the military as spies have been tortured, many of them killed in more ways that violated human rights the Maoist legal fronts have been championing to fodder populist calls.

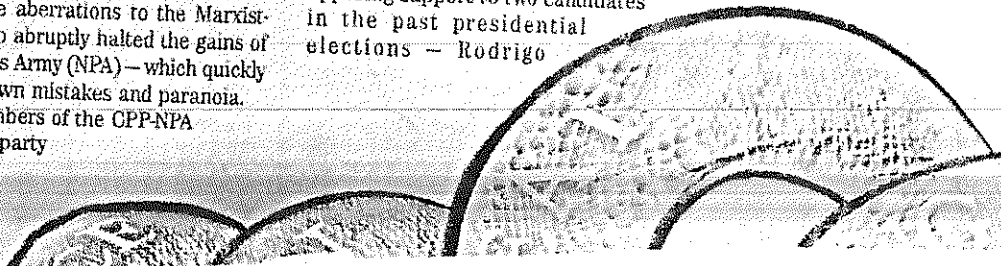
The Cory government also initially welcomed the martyred Ninoy Aquino's former communist partners back into the mainstream fold. Many of them stayed and more were lured by the lucrative shine of government service, business and NGO work.

From an estimated army force of 26,000, the NPA is now said to number just around a fifth of that.

Those who survived the harsh guerilla life, those who did not perish in battles, those who did not fall into the military dragnet and got jailed, have grown older. Many of them have retired from the fronts. Imagine, 50 years in the battlefield.

Last month after Christmas and coinciding with the 126th birth anniversary of Mao Tse Tung, the CPP celebrated five decades of its struggle to lead the Philippines to a national democratic government, a jump off point to socialism based on the Maoist blueprint. In March, the NPA will also mark its 50th anniversary. They have the longest communist revolution on record, truly a protracted war but one they have wasted winning long ago when the CPP and the NPA failed to advance the war further and concentrated on killing their own.

Division was evident among its leaders was highlighted by their opposing support to two candidates in the past presidential elections — Rodrigo



Duterte and Grace Poe — proved this aside from conflicting stands on the peace process at the fronts. The result was expected, the CPP-NPA remained where it was after 1986.

Its legal fronts, however, had won back support from the mostly young masses. The NPA had managed to recruit quite a good sum from the universities and the factories to boost the army somehow. But it could not bring back its old strength.

“

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The CPP-NPA had also lost what was once a massive support from the Communist Party of China after its top cadres, led by Deng Xiaoping who succeeded Mao after his death. It was Deng who swerved the Maoist path towards the kind of capitalism now being practiced by China, now also being described as an imperialist superpower, like the United States, by the CPP-NPA and the various organizations under its sphere.

The CPP-NPA's protracted war had also taken this long, its call to “surround the city” to seize power had come to it in reverse that cities and development are fast coming to them, denying them of the hills and forests that once provided them with cover.

Roads were built to the communities that were once theirs, or at least were under Maoist influence. These same roads give the military easy access to conduct raids which were mostly triggered by tips from the same communities which informed authorities about NPA presence through texts and cellular phone calls. Technology had also taken over the once-awaited revolution.

It is so because it has taken that long.

It is so because of lost opportunities — for them and those who should have taken over its leadership.

It is so because the CPP-NPA denied its youth of growth even within the party.

Jose Maria Sison, founding chairman of the CPP long based in The Netherlands, should know.

He's been on top of the party for 50 years now.