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Duterte included in Nazarene prayers

Hundreds injured in traslacion

By EVELYN MACAIRAN

He may be lambasting the Catholic Church at every turn, but President Duterte was included in the prayers yesterday as millions of devotees celebrated the Feast of the Black Nazarene.

Monsignor Hernando Coronel had called for prayers for the country's leaders, including Duterte, following a question from the press last week about his thoughts on the President's constant tirades against the Catholic Church and its teachings.

Presidential spokesman and chief legal adviser Salvador Panelo welcomed the prayers offered for President Duterte by the rector of the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene.

"We must pray for them. I will also pray for them. Whether you believe it or not, I really pray and everybody is included, including enemies. Prayers should be like that," Panelo said.

The good behavior of devotees made the *traslacion* or movement of the Nazarene image an orderly procession from the Quirino Grandstand

in Rizal Park to the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene, a church official said.

"By asking the devotees to make a pledge to the Black Nazarene before the start of the *traslacion*, they would be reminded that they were promising to follow the rules and regulations," said Quiapo Church parochial vicar Fr. Daniel Voltaire Hui.

Hui added that the 413-year-old image of the Black Nazarene might complete its 6.1-kilometer *traslacion* at 2:30 a.m. today.

The procession began at 5:15 a.m. yesterday and could drag on for almost 24 hours. In 2017 and 2018, the procession lasted around 22 hours.

Hui attributed the quick five-minute transfer of the image to its *andas* or carriage, as compared to previous years, to the phalanx of Philippine

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Duterte

From Page 1

National Police (PNP) and Philippine Air Force personnel that secured the stage.

Fourteen stations of the cross were also spread out along the route where there would be prayer, vigil and songs, the priest said.

Panelo pointed out that everybody should pray that the President would succeed, as the success will benefit every Filipino.

"Why am I saying that they should be praying for the President? We're all parts of one whole. A Filipino adage says: 'Pain in the little finger is felt by the whole body.' The failure of this President will be the failure of all of us," the spokesman added.

Panelo was not sure if the Office of the President would come out with a message for the Feast of the Black Nazarene.

For her part, Vice President Leni Robredo expressed hope yesterday that the Filipinos' devotion to the Black Nazarene would inspire them to unite for the betterment of the country.

"May the Feast of the Black Nazarene serve as an inspira-

tion for us to strengthen our faith and hopes that we can unite for the future of our country," Robredo said in a message posted on her Facebook account.

Manila Mayor Joseph Estrada was pleased with the peaceful and orderly *traslacion*.

In a telephone interview with **The STAR**, Estrada lauded the PNP, city government departments and Bureau of Fire Protection for a "job well done."

"The preparation and contingency plan we laid down was successful. Except for minor injuries involving the devotees of the Black Nazarene, there was no (major) incident," Estrada said.

But street sweeper Imelda Novelas seemed exhausted.

"We are always tired during the *traslacion*," Novelas said.

Another street sweeper, Mardie Brigilio, criticized the lack of discipline among the devotees who left their garbage during the *traslacion*.

"They keep on throwing garbage even if they see us sweeping the streets," Brigilio said.

PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde yesterday confirmed that the activities for the Feast of the Black Nazarene were generally peaceful.

Despite tallying at least 477

cases of injuries, Albayalde said there were no major untoward incidents during the *traslacion*.

"As of this time it's generally peaceful. So far there have been no casualties," he told reporters in an ambush interview in Quiapo Church where he inspected the security coverage laid out for the procession.

No crime was reported within the procession route, based on reports Albayalde received from National Capital Region Police Office chief Director Guillermo Eleazar.

Eleazar supervised at least 7,200 police officers deployed in Manila to secure the *traslacion*.

The procession was also faster by one hour, according to Albayalde.

'Exaggerated' presence

But militant labor group Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) yesterday expressed alarm over the "exaggerated" presence of military and police during the *traslacion*.

KMU chairman Lito Ustarez said the presence of military and police officers during the procession was an indication of the government's plan to

implement martial law nationwide.

"The real danger of violence comes from President Duterte. We cannot trust him to not use the *traslacion* as a venue to launch insidious operations that can be used to justify martial law," Ustarez said in a statement.

Ustarez noted that a big number of *traslacion* participants are working poor.

"The continuing massive support for religious exercises that highlight the suffering and persecution of the poor is a slap in the face of a President who insults the Catholic church and threatens to kill those who oppose extrajudicial killings," Ustarez said.

Sen. Richard Gordon, chairman of the Philippine Red Cross, was grateful for the services of PRC personnel.

"I'm very proud of them. They were very visible and were quick to come to the aid of those who need medical first aid," Gordon said yesterday in a telephone interview.

— **With Edith Regalado, Helen Flores, Emmanuel Tupas, Mayen Jaymalin, Rainier Allan Ronda, Jose Rodol Clapano, Sheila Crisostomo, Ghio Ong**

DEPED PROTECTS ACT MEMBERS FROM PROFILING

Education Secretary Leonor Briones says DepEd will not release personal information about public school teachers belonging to the Alliance of Concerned Teachers in accordance with the Data Privacy Act.

By Jhesset O. Enano
and Kimberlie Quitasol
@Team_Inquirer

The Department of Education (DepEd) is set to issue a directive to regional offices not to release any information about the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) after the group raised the

alarm over the profiling of its members by the Philippine National Police.

At a press briefing on Wednesday, Education Secretary Leonor Briones said the education department was operating according to law, specifically the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

"Legally, we are not bound to give personal information as a public institution," she told reporters.

"Personal information is covered by the Data Privacy Act. These requests will have to be evaluated by our central office," Briones added.

DepEd officials, including

Briones, met with Interior Secretary Eduardo Año and ACT representatives separately on Tuesday to discuss the profiling of group members.

Leaked memorandums issued by the PNP caused an uproar among teachers and rights groups over the weekend.

The documents showed the

PNP had ordered the inventory of teachers who are members of or aligned with ACT, the sole negotiating body for public school teachers in Metro Manila and several other regions.

Police officers have visited public elementary and high schools in Manila and in provinces such as Benguet, Bu-

lacan, Rizal, Laguna, Quezon, Camarines Sur and Agusan del Sur to ask for a list of ACT members.

PNP Director General Oscar Albayalde on Tuesday said identifying members of the teachers' group was part of the campaign to end the communist insurgency by the

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FROM A1

end of President Duterte's term. Albayalde said the PNP wanted to identify teachers who support armed rebellion.

The DepEd was placed in hot water after the Schools Division Office (SDO) of Manila issued a letter that forwarded the PNP memo to school heads in the city.

But the DepEd said it did not receive any such request from the PNP.

Sensitive information

It also said that the supposed letter from the SDO was not officially released, but was recalled by the director of DepEd-National Capital Region, following the order from the central office.

Education Undersecretary Nepomuceno Malaluan, also the DepEd spokesperson, said units of the department would be reminded that all interagency requests involving sensitive personal information should be referred to the central office for evaluation.

ACT national chair Joselyn Martinez welcomed the department's position.

"We bank on DepEd's promise that it will not endanger the beings of their own employees," Martinez said in a statement.

She said ACT would remain vigilant for the sake of its members' safety despite the assurance from the education department.

In Baguio, the city police have asked a school principal on Monday for an inventory of



Oscar Albayalde



Leonor Briones



Eduardo Año

teachers affiliated with ACT, prompting the Cordillera police office to investigate.

A letter, delivered to Pinsao Elementary School by a police officer, justified the request as part of security preparations for this year's elections.

"This has reference [to] the upcoming midterm election 2019. May [we] request your good office for an inventory of teachers in your school who are members of or aligned with the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT). Any information of

data from your office will be treated confidential[ly]," the letter said.

Lists mean danger

ACT is also a party-list group and has two members in the House of Representatives.

The letter reached Jeanneatte Ribaya-Cawiding, ACT Cordillera coordinator, who said it put teachers in danger.

"Nothing is normal, regular or usual about government listing ACT members. Lists, under Mr. Duterte, mean danger—even death—for the listed," she said.

The Cordillera police at Camp Dangwa traced the letter to Police Station 2 of the Baguio City Police Office (BCPO), said Supt. Pelita Tacio, Cordillera police information officer.

"As far as I know, there is no memorandum issued by [Police Regional Office Cordillera] to its personnel to check on ACT members," Tacio said.

"We have asked the city director of BCPO to [get] the commander to explain why," she said in a text message. INQ

Monitor China's coral reef rehab—Alejano

By Maricel V. Cruz

MAGDALO party-list Rep. Gary Alejano on Wednesday urged the Duterte administration to monitor China's coral reef rehabilitation at the South China Sea.

While China may be sincere in its alleged intention to rehabilitate the coral reefs it destroyed, "let us not forget that there is an existing territorial conflict. The Philippine government to take an active role in monitoring this project being a claimant of the South China Sea. The rehabilitation project could be just one of the many ploys of China to occupy land features in the area," said Alejano, an oppositionist.

China earlier announced that it will rehabilitate the coral ecosystem that it destroyed while building manmade islands in the contested territory. From 2013 to 2016, China's reclamation and construction of artificial islands caused the shredding of corals in the Spratlys.

Alejano said the process of rehabilitating the coral reefs must also be accessible to the

claimants of the territory other than China.

"To unilaterally rehabilitate them denies the other parties, such as the Philippines, of the right to cooperate. After all, environmental conservation is not only a unilateral concern, but a multi-party one. The unilateral actions of China show a clear disrespect to the Philippines as claimant of the territory," Alejano said.

He asked the administration to look into the environmental conservation effort especially now that there is an existing territorial conflict among claimants.

Alejano was referring to reports on environmental destruction and legal opinions on the implications of unilateral rehabilitation to the South China Sea dispute, since China has been occupying land features in the region quietly but aggressively.

"This issue should be given attention by the government because China's rehabilitation project is not merely an environmental issue. Our conflict with China necessitates us to be vigilant on this issue," Alejano said.

A3

4 fearless judges give hope to cause of justice—De Lima

By Leila B. Salaverria
@LeilasINQ

Detained Sen. Leila de Lima on Wednesday underscored the importance of an independent judiciary as she hailed four fearless judges whom the Inquirer had named Filipinos of the Year, saying they give hope to the cause of justice.

In a statement from her detention cell at Camp Crame in Quezon City, De Lima commended the judges and said their recognition was timely.

"They prove that in the midst of darkness and horror under the current situation and

leadership, there remains a sliver of hope from those who remain free and brave instruments of justice," De Lima said.

Warning to the abusive

"They also serve as a warning to the abusive and the oppressive. They are inspirations to the other decent members of government," she added.

The Inquirer on Sunday gave its annual honor to Regional Trial Court Judges Rodolfo Azucena Jr. of Caloocan City, Arlene Lirag Palabrica of Tagum City, Alexander Tamayo of Malolos City, and Andres Soriano of Makati City.

Azucena last year convicted

three police officers of murdering 17-year-old Kian delos Santos in an antidrug operation, while Palabrica ordered the release of activists whom the military arrested for bringing food to and rescuing "lumad" students.

Tamayo convicted retired Maj. Gen. Jovito Palparan for the kidnapping and serious illegal detention of two University of the Philippines students, while Soriano rejected the Department of Justice's plea to reopen the coup d'état case of Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV after the President voided his amnesty.

De Lima said the four judges

upheld judicial independence. "No society can call itself truly just and free without an independent judiciary," she said. "And, an independent judiciary rests largely on the integrity, competence and uprightness of its judges."

According to De Lima, judicial independence was needed for the rule of law and was a crucial component of constitutional democracy.

De Lima is detained on what she calls trumped-up drug trafficking charges that she says are retaliation for her investigation of the killings under Mr. Duterte's watch. INQ

INQUIRER

With BRP Del Pilar sidelined, DND may ask US for 4th cutter

The Department of National Defense (DND) is studying the possibility of acquiring a fourth Hamilton-class cutter from the US Coast Guard (USGC), which has been gradually decommissioning the vessels in favor of more modern types. One of the Philippine Navy's three former Hamilton cutters, its flagship BRP Gregorio del Pilar (FF-15), could be sidelined until the end of the year after it ran aground at Hasa-Hasa Shoal in the West Philippine Sea, four months ago. Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on Tuesday said his department would "not actively ask" for the fourth cutter, although the Navy lacked high-endurance vessels. "If [USGC] makes an offer, we will study if it would be favorable to us," he said. The USGC has three remaining Hamilton-class cutters from its old fleet of 12. —JEANNETTE LANDRADE A3

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Police, military map out security for midterm polls

By IVY C. TEJANO

DAVAO CITY - The police and military in Davao region have mapped out measures to ensure a peaceful and orderly mid-term elections this year, with the start of the poll period on January 19.

Though the election period is still to officially start on January 13, Sunday, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and Philippine National Police (PNP) will start implementing a gun ban on January 10, Thursday, according to Police Regional Office (PRO) 11 spokesperson Chief Insp. Jason Baria in a joint AFP-PNP press conference at The Royal Mandaya Hotel.

In line with the election gun ban, Baria said, legitimate holders of firearms with permits-to-carry (PTCs) still need to seek gun ban exemption from the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to be able to take their weapons outside their homes.

"During the election period, no per-

son shall carry or transport firearms or deadly weapons anywhere—even if the person has the license to carry. They can only carry their firearms unless authorised by the Comelec," Baria said.

He added that only members of the PNP and AFP, under the supervision of the Comelec, will be allowed to carry firearms during the election period.

It is stated in a Comelec resolution that members of the PNP, AFP, and other law enforcement agencies can only carry guns when in uniform or during the performance of their duties.

Comelec Resolution No. 10446 stipulates that those who seek exemption from the gun ban and other prohibited acts could apply for a certificate of authority with the poll body.

Army's 10th Infantry Division spokesperson Captain Jerry Lamosao also said that those who need police personnel for security will have to seek authority from the Comelec.

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Two anti-sub choppers, 4 AAVs to boost Navy's capability

The Philippine Navy (PN) is expected to receive in March its first two anti-submarine helicopters and four of eight amphibious assault vehicles (AAV) it has ordered for the Marine Corps.

This was disclosed by PN Flag-Officer-in-Command (FOIC) Vice Admiral Robert Empedrad in a chance interview at the AFP Commissioned Officers' Club in Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City Tuesday.

"(Aside from the two anti-submarine) helicopters, 'yung (the) amphibious assault vehicles (AAVs) ng (of the) Marines. Eight yun (order) pero four ang darating ngayong (but four of them will arrive in) March. Maganda 'yung capability nun (It has good capability)," he added.

Empedrad was referring to the AgustaWestland AW-159 "Wildcat" anti-submarine helicopter, which the PN has

contracted for two units in the amount of P5.4 billion, including weapons, mission essential equipment and integrated logistic support and the eight AAVs acquired from Hanwha Techwin for P2.42 billion.

The anti-submarine helicopters will give the PN the capability to detect and neutralize underwater threats while the AAVs will boost the Marine Corps' sea-based capability.

Meanwhile, Empedrad said personnel who will man the "Pohang-class" corvette donated by South Korea are expected to depart within the month and start training with the intention of sailing it home within the soonest possible time. (PNA) 3

Navy ramps up strength

The Philippine Navy (PN) will get a boost in its capability this year with the expected return to service of its flagship *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* before the end of 2019, as well as the delivery in March of two anti-submarine helicopters and four amphibious assault vehicles.

BRP Gregorio del Pilar, which ran aground off Hasa-Hasa Shoal last August, is expected to be available for operations before the end of 2019, according to Vice Admiral Robert Empedrad, PN flag-officer-in-command.

The ship sustained extensive damage to its two propellers as a result of the grounding, requiring total replacement.

"We need to get replacement propellers from the US. It is expected to be available by yearend. But if the delivery of the propellers is hastened, we will be able to fix them immediately," he said.

At the moment, the patrol and other duties of *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* are being carried by her two sister ships, the *BRP Ramon Alcaraz* and *BRP Andres Bonifacio*.

The *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* is one of three Hamilton-class cutters acquired by the PN from the United States Coast Guard and converted into frigates.

The frigates have a gross tonnage of 3,250 tons, a length of 378 feet, a beam of 43 feet and draft of 15 feet while their propulsion systems consist of two diesel engines and two gas turbine engines, giving them a top speed of 29 knots.

These vessels have a cruising range of 14,000 miles and have a sea and loiter time of 45 days. They are armed with a 76 mm Oto Melara automatic cannon, 25 mm and 20 mm light cannons and .50-caliber machine guns.

Meanwhile, Empedrad added the PN is

set to receive in March its first two anti-submarine helicopters and four out of eight amphibious assault vehicles it has ordered for the Marine Corps.

"Aside from the two anti-submarine helicopters, there are amphibious assault vehicles for the Marines. We actually ordered eight but the first four will arrive in March," he said.

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Empedrad was referring to the AgustaWestland AW-159 "Wildcat" anti-submarine helicopter, which the PN has contracted for two units worth P5.4 billion, including weapons, mission essential equipment and integrated logistic support and the eight AAV acquired from Hanwha Techwin for P2.42 billion.

The anti-submarine helicopters will give the PN the capability to detect and neutralize underwater threats while the AAV will boost the Marine Corps' sea-based capability, according to Empedrad. **CRP**

with photo

PH Navy to receive 2 anti-sub helis, 4 AAVs in March

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This was disclosed by PN flag-officer-in-command Vice Admiral Robert Empedrad during a chance interview shortly after the New Year's Call at the AFP Commissioned Officers' Club in Camp

Aguinaldo, Quezon City Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the PN flagship BRP Gregorio del Pilar (FF-15), which ran aground off Hasa-Hasa Shoal last August, is expected to be available for operations before the end of 2019.

This was confirmed by Empedrad, who said: "We need to get the propellers from the US because these were the ones that were damaged. It will be available by

yearend. If the delivery of the propellers is hastened, we will be able to fix these immediately.

"The determining factor of the replacement work is the availability of the propellers."

For the moment, the patrol and other duties of Del Pilar are being carried by its two sister ships, the BRP Ramon Alcaraz (FF-16) and BRP Andres Bonifacio (FF-17). *M*

Devotees, cops rebuff terror

A mammoth crowd of mostly Filipino Catholics joined a raucous procession yesterday of the centuries-old image of the Black Nazarene under extra tight security due to fears of terrorism and recent bomb attacks in Cotabato City.

Police estimated up to five million people joined the dawn-to-midnight festivity that also celebrated the anniversary of Quiapo Church.

Police said they have not monitored any specific security threat, but they deployed more than 7,000 personnel, including bomb squads backed by a surveillance helicopter, to secure the annual procession of the wooden Black Nazarene along Manila's streets.

No liquor, phone signal

Authorities imposed gun and liquor bans and cell phone signals were jammed in the vicinity of the procession. Flights over the area were prohibited along with sailing in nearby

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The spectacle reflects the unique brand of Catholicism which includes folk superstitions, in Asia's largest Catholic nation

From page 1

Manila Bay and along a key river where special police and Coast Guard forces watched over bridges that the mass of devotees passed through.

Despite the threats and the tropical heat, mobs of devotees garbed in maroon-color shirts dangerously squeezed their way into the tight pack of humanity around a carriage carrying the life-sized statue of Christ. They threw small towels at volunteers on the carriage, which was being pulled by ropes, to wipe parts of the cross and the statue in the belief that the Nazarene's powers cure ailments and ensure good health and a better life.

Iconic image

Crowned with thorns and bearing a cross, the Nazarene statue is believed to have been brought from Mexico to Manila on a galleon in 1606 by Spanish missionaries. The ship that carried it caught

fire, but the charred statue survived. Some believe the statue's endurance from fires and earthquakes through the centuries and intense bombings during World War II is a testament to its powers.

Crowned with thorns and bearing a cross, the Nazarene statue is believed to have been brought from Mexico to Manila on a galleon in 1606 by Spanish missionaries.

The spectacle reflects the unique brand of Catholicism, which includes folk superstitions, in Asia's largest Catholic nation. Dozens of Filipinos have themselves nailed to crosses on Good Friday in another tradition to emulate Christ's suffering that draws huge crowds and tourists each year.

Full alert

Police forces have been placed on full alert ahead of Wednesday's

Just in case Members of the police and the military are all over the route of the procession to guard against violence and terrorism.

BOB DUNGO JR.

religious gathering amid military offensives against Muslim militants aligned with the Islamic State group who have been blamed for a spate of bombings and other attacks in the volatile south.

Last week, suspected Muslim

militants remotely detonated a bomb that killed two people and wounded about 30 others near the entrance of a shopping mall in a southern Cotabato city as people did last-minute shopping ahead of the New Year's Eve celebrations.

AP

DILG employee held over bomb joke

By EDD
REYES

A 57-YEAR-OLD employee of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) was arrested after she joked that she has a bomb in her bag before noon Tuesday at the inspection area in the entrance of Cuneta Astrodome in Pasay City.

Elsie Castillo, local government operation officer VII of DILG and resident of Santan Road, Almar Subdivision, Caloocan City was charged with violation of Presidential Decree 1727 or the unlawful dissemination or making false threat concerning bombs before the Pasay City Prosecutor's Office.

Pasay City Police chief Senior Supt. Noel Flores said members of the Presidential Security Group (PSG) were deployed at the Cuneta Astrodome on Tuesday to provide security measures for the

arrival of President Rodrigo Duterte who was set to attend the Barangay Summit on Peace and Order.

At around 11:50 a.m., when Castillo presented her bag for inspection to Cpl. Junalyn Ungab of PSG at the entrance of the Astrodome, she uttered a word "Ma'm hindi mo ba kakal-

kalin ang bag ko, may la-

man sa ilalim na bomba yan", prompting Ungab to place her under arrest.

Senior Supt. Flores said that prior to the start of the event, Castillo was frequently seen going in and out of the Astrodome and every time she entered at the main entrance, Cpl. Ungab subjected her to body and bag inspection.

DU30 to cops, soldiers: Don't drink in public

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has ordered members of the police and military not to drink in public.

Duterte made the statement as he recalled beating up two uniformed personnel for throwing a drunken fit that led to an altercation.

"Kayong mga pulis, [I'm] warning you. Do not drink in public. Sa Davao pinagbawalan ko 'yan pati kayo na ngayon. All over the Philippines," Duterte said during the Barangay Summit on Peace and Order in Pasay City.

"You do not enter into drinking places kasi wala kayong gawin 'pag lasing

na, kayo ang ligas, pati Army, huwag kayo magdala ng baril."

He also lamented the involvement of uniformed personnel in kidnapping and "high profile" killings.

Duterte previously threatened policemen caught in the premises of a casino with dismissal, saying they have no business to be there.

Issued by then-President Ferdinand Marcos in 1977, Presidential Decree 1067B prohibits all government officials and employees, including policemen and soldiers from entering and playing inside casinos.

3 Efren Montano

Soldiers, cops barred from drinking in public

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has ordered members of the police and military not to drink in public.

Duterte made the statement as he recalled once beating up two uniformed personnel for throwing a drunken fit that led to an altercation.

"Kayong mga pulis, [I'm] warning you. Do not drink in public. Sa Davao pinagbawalan ko 'yan pati kayo ngayon. All over the Philippines," Duterte said during

the Barangay Summit on Peace and Order in Pasay City. "You do not enter into drinking places kasi wala kayong gawin 'pag lasing na, kayo ang tigas, pati Army, huwag kayo magdala ng baril."

He also lamented the involvement of uniformed personnel in kidnapping and "high profile" killings. Duterte previously threatened policemen caught on the premises of a casino with dismissal, saying they have no

business to be there.

Issued by then-President Ferdinand Marcos in 1977, Presidential Decree 1067B prohibits all government officials and employees, including policemen and soldiers from entering and playing inside casinos.

Also covered by the ban are persons under 21 years of age or students of any school in the Philippines.

TABLOID REPORTS LINK MEDIA GROUP TO COMMUNISTS

NUJP: RED-TAGGING OF JOURNALISTS 'IDIOTIC' AND PUTS

THEM IN DANGER

A group of journalists found itself the subject of Red-tagging even before the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) was subjected to profiling by the Philippine National Police as part of state efforts to defeat communist rebels.

The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) decried reports alleging that the media group was a "legal front" of the Communist Party of the

Philippines (CPP), its armed wing New People's Army, and umbrella organization National Democratic Front of the Philippines.

The reports, which came out in tabloids, were based on claims made by a certain Mario Ludades in the run-up to the CPP's 50th founding anniversary on Dec. 26 last year and by a certain "Ka Ernesto," supposedly a former CPP member.

The reports referred to Ludades as a self-proclaimed founder of the communist movement in the country.

"The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines denounces continued efforts to link us to the communist revolutionary movement, which we see as part of an orchestrated effort to intimidate us into silence," the NUJP said in a state-

ment issued on Monday.

In defense of press freedom

The group stressed that its membership "represents a broad spectrum of creeds and political beliefs bound by a common dedication to defending and expanding the bounds of freedom of the press and of expression."

"We were initially tempted to ignore the fantastic and, to be

honest, hilarious account of 'Ka Ernesto,' but for the fact that, as idiotic as this attempt to smear the NUJP is, it exposes our members and other colleagues to potential danger from those who might readily believe this canard," the media union said.

"With at least 12 colleagues slain [on] the watch of a president who has actually justified the murder of journalists... and openly and

constantly curses and threatens [the] media, we are taking this matter very, very seriously," it added.

Dismayed that other journalists had "allowed themselves to be used by cowardly enemies of press freedom even if it endangers colleagues," the NUJP said it was consulting legal experts on how to deal with the allegations.

—REPORTS FROM JAYMEE T. GAMIL AND MELVIN GASCON INQ 14

Sison doubts government could end insurgency in 3 years

Communist Party of the Philippines founding chair Jose Maria Sison on Wednesday said he doubted the government's target of ending insurgency within the remaining three years of President Duterte's term. Saying that Mr. Duterte would be more concerned with his political survival for the duration of his presidency, Sison suggested the resumption of genuine peace talks as the only way by which he could deliver on his promise at a shorter time. "The scheme [of ending insurgency] will surely fail from day to day, week to week, month to month, and from year to year as the NPA (New People's Army) will intensify tactical offensives and mass work," Sison said in a statement posted on his Facebook account. Government security forces, he said, "cannot accomplish in three years what they failed to accomplish in 50 years." —JEANNETTE I. ANDRADE 13

Joma: New deadline to crush NPA will fail

The new deadline set by the Duterte administration to finish off the communist movement will fail, Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chairman Jose Ma. Sison said yesterday.

"The... military and police of the same exploiting classes cannot accomplish in three years what they failed to accomplish in 50 years," Sison said in a statement posted on the website of the National Democratic Front.

"The scheme will surely fail from day to day, week to week, month to month and from year to year as the NPA (New People's Army) will intensify tactical offensives and mass work," he said.

President Duterte pushed back the deadline to beat communist insurgency by the middle of this year to the end of his term in 2022.

"These are lame duck years for him during which infighting among his followers will be debilitating and challenges will rise from within the ruling system as well as from the revolutionary forces," Sison said.

P30-M heavy equipment burned

Meanwhile, suspected NPA rebels burned several

heavy equipment worth around P30 million in Kalamansig, Sultan Kudarat on Monday.

Chief Inspector Badrudin Esmael, town police chief, said the rebels stormed the compound of Janmerc Builders in Barangay Hinalaan at around 4 a.m. and poured gasoline on two payloaders, a road roller, a transit mixer and a backhoe before setting them on fire.

Prior to the incident, another group of rebels reportedly burned heavy equipment parked along the road in the same barangay.

June Buendicho, project engineer of Janmerc, said some of the equipment were new.

Janmerc is building government infrastructure projects in Lebak and Kalamansig towns.

In Abra, police are looking into the possible involvement of the NPA in the killing of military informant Modesto Carsola Sr., 64, in Pilar town on Tuesday.

Carsola was harvesting tomatoes in Sitio Kabayugan, Barangay Gapang when he was reportedly shot at close range.

— Jose Rodel Clapano, Ramil Bajo, John Unson, Artemio Dumlao

Joma: Gov't can't defeat NPA

BY VICTOR REYES

COMMUNIST leader Jose Maria "Joma" Sison yesterday said government cannot defeat the New People's Army in the next three years or during the remainder of President Duterte's term because "the NPA will intensify tactical offensives and mass work."

Sison, founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines, was reacting to the military statement Tuesday that its goal is to end the NPA, the CPP's armed wing, this year.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana has said defeating the NPA within the year may not be feasible. He gave a timetable of three years, or the remaining term of the Duterte administration.

There are about 3,500 NPA members nationwide. The military has regularly been reporting NPA

surrenders.

Sison, who has been on self-exile in the Netherlands since the late 80s, said the new timetable is bound to fail, just like the previous military objectives to end the rebel movement over the past 50 years.

"The same military and police of the same exploiting classes cannot accomplish in three years what they failed to accomplish in 50 years," he said.

Sison, who acts as chief political consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, said President Duterte "will have difficulty surviving politically" in the next three years.

"These are lame duck years for him, during which infighting among his followers will be debilitating and challenges will rise from within the ruling system as well as from the revolutionary forces,"

said Sison.

Sison last week said the communist group's priority this year is President Duterte's ouster.

Duterte revived peace talks with Sison's group shortly after he became president in 2016. He finally cancelled the peace talks last year, after several suspensions, because of the NPA's continued attacks on security forces. The Duterte government has turned to holding peace talks with local leaders instead of those based in Europe.

Recently, Duterte expressed openness to resuming the peace talks, provided the talks will be held in the Philippines.

Sison said Duterte's demand to hold talks in the Philippines is meant to expose NDFP negotiators, consultants and negotiators to "surveillance, control, duress and manipulation."

B2

NPA hit squad kills CAFGU in Negros

By MINERVA BC NEWMAN

CEBU CITY—Members of the New People's Army's (NPA) assassination

squad killed an off-duty CAFGU Active Auxiliary (CAA) member in Linantuyan, Guihulngan, Negros Oriental, Sunday. Armed Forces of the Philippines'

Central Command (Centcom) acting spokesman Maj. Abel Potutan identified in a media release to Manila Bulletin the militiaman as Joseph Gabia, a resident of Linantuyan.

Potutan said Gabia was on his way back to his patrol base in Linantuyan after settling a family problem when he was killed by an NPA Special Partisan Unit (Sparu) team.

The Sparu killed 19 people in Guihulngan alone in 2018, Potutan said.

It also acts as the private army of NPA-supported political bets and resort to coercion to intimidate the bets' rivals, Potutan added.

Lt. Gen. Noel Clement, Centcom commander, condemned the killing of Gabia and vowed to put a stop to the spate of NPA killings in Negros.

"We decry the terroristic acts and brutality of the NPA bandits. Guihulngan town has been covered with fear since these terrorists lord over the lives of the people through Sparu operations," Clement said.

Clement said that last Dec 27, the government launched the one time serving of 97 search warrants and arrested 27 armed personalities, killed seven others alleged to be NPA members.

CAFGU nilikida ng NPA-Sparu

Isa na namang miyembro ng CAFGU Active Auxillary (CAA) ang nalagas matapos likidahan ng Sparu hit squad ng New People's Army (NPA) sa Negros Island sa Brgy. Linantuyan, Guihulngan City, iniulat kahapon.

Kinilala ni Major Abel Potutan, acting chief ng AFP Central Command ang biktima na si CAA Joseph

Gabia, residente ng nasabing lugar na nasawi agad sa lugar dahil sa dami ng tama ng bala sa katawan.

Sa tala, sinabi ng opisyal na si Gabia ay ika-19 pinaslang ng SPARU unit sa lalawigan ng Negros simula noong nakalipas na taon hanggang sa unang bahagi ng Enero ng 2019. Bandang alas-5:30 ng hapon

kamakalawa habang pabalik sa patrol base sa Brgy. Linantuyan ang biktima nang siya ay tambangan at pagbabarilin ng mga rebelde.

Tinukoy ng opisyal na ang NPA's Special Partisan Unit (Sparu), ang hit squad ng komunistang grupo ang nasa likod ng pamamasiang sa biktima.

(Joy Cantos)

NPA rebels burn heavy equipment in Sultan Kudarat

SHARIFF AGUAK, Maguindanao: The Philippine National Police (PNP) in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat province on Wednesday said suspected communist rebels torched eight heavy equipment of a construction firm completing a road project in a village there.

Chief Supt. Eliseo Tam Rasco, director of the Police Regional Office 12 (Soccsksargen), said about 20 gunmen in fatigues, believed to be New Peoples' Army (NPA) rebels, arrived at about 4:50 a.m. on Monday at the site where Janmerc Construction Company's machines were parked and set these ablaze.

"Eight pieces of heavy equipment were set on fire," Rasco added, quoting a report from the Kalamansig municipal police office.

Seven of the machines were burned in Barangay Hinalaan center, while a backhoe was torched in Sitio Saniag, also in the same village.

Among those burned were a payloader, cement mixer, cargo truck, road roller, dump truck and backhoe.

Rasco said the police and the Philippine Marines have been deployed to the village of Hinalaan, one of the upland villages of the

coastal town of Kalamansig where communist rebels operate.

The Janmerc construction firm is completing a road concreting project from the town of Sen. Ninoy Aquino to Kalamansig.

A police official said the communist rebels had been harassing the construction firm, demanding revolutionary taxes and "protection money," so it could continue the road construction.

The demand was repeatedly denied by the management of the firm.

AY JULMINIR I. JANNARAL

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50-year-old communist rebellion 'failed dream'

THE 50-year insurgency of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) is a "failed dream," President Rodrigo Duterte said Tuesday, as he again criticized the rebels and branded them as "extortionists."

Duterte also dismissed the alleged goal of communist rebels to take over government as "stupid thinking."

"Hindi mo makuha ang Pilipinas, hindi mo makuha ang isang barangay sa isang araw tapos papasok ka ng ganoong palayan?" Duterte said in a speech during the Barangay Summit on Peace and Order in Pasay City.

The President said he could easily order the military to bomb mountains where the rebels are hiding.

"Ako nagho-hold lang talaga ako, napakarami kong helicopter, sabi ko 'wag muna," he said.

"Linisan mo 'yang buong gubat, plantsahin mo 'yan ng bala. Nagho-hold lang talaga ako," he added.

The rebels, according to Duterte, have been "an irritation" for the government.

"Wag ka maniwala diyan sa ano [revolution]... it's a failed dream," he declared. He even suggested to the

military not to take rebel returnees anymore, and again threatened to issue a "shoot-to-kill" order against the NPA.

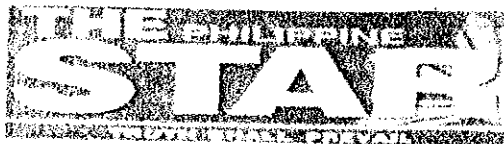
"Anong mangyari pag orderin ko 'yan sa military na shoot-to-kill? 'Wag na kayo magkuha ng prisoner, basta deretsona lahat," he said.

But despite his harsh words, the Chief Executive said the government is still leaving a "small window" for peace talks.

"Nag-iwan akong kon-jing butas, small window. Just in case you want to resume, at least there is a window where we can use," Duterte said.

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10 January 2019



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BIFF bomb plot foiled; 3 IEDs seized

Government forces foiled an attempt of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) to set off a bomb in Sultan sa Barongis, Maguindanao yesterday.

Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, 6th Infantry Division commander, said soldiers recovered three improvised explosive devices (IEDs) following an encounter with the BIFF men in Sitio Landing Fish, Barangay Darampua at around 9 a.m.

"Their usual targets are urban centers in Central Mindanao... Their possible intention is to disrupt the upcoming plebiscite," Sobejana said.

↑
- Jaime Laude

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Troops seize bombs after clash with BIFF

GOVERNMENT forces yesterday seized three improvised bombs yesterday in Maguindanao after a firefight with members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters in Maguindanao.

The military said the seizure of the bombs, made from 81 mm mortar shells, preempted planned bombings by the ISIS-inspired group.

No one was reported killed or injured in the firefight, said Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Division.

Troops from 40th Infantry Battalion were on a combat operation when they encountered the BIFF group in Sitio Landing Fish, Barangay Darampua in Sultan sa Barongis town at around 9:30 a.m.

Sobejana said soldiers are pursuing the BIFF which is being blamed for December 31 bombing at the South Seas mall in Cotabato City, which left two persons dead and scores others injured.

A suspect in the mall bombing

was surrendered to the police on Sunday by his relatives, after they saw his picture on TV tagged as a suspect.

He did not admit involvement, according to police.

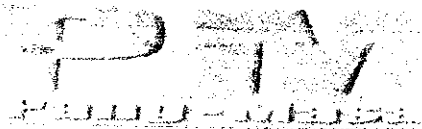
Sobejana said the recovery of the improvised bombs foiled potential bombings by the BIFF. As to the targets for bombing, Sobejana said the "usual targets are urban centers here in Central Mindanao."

He said the BIFF is out to spoil the January 21 plebiscite for the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law, which will establish a new political entity in the South as part of the 2014 peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The BIFF is composed mostly of former MILF members. The BIFF pledged allegiance with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria a few years ago, along with the Maute and the Abu Sayyaf groups.

— Victor Reyes





PLANONG PAMBOBOMBA NG BIFF, NASILAT

Kung hindi umano sa sumbong ng mga residente sa militar tungkol sa pagbibiyah ng mga bomba ng mga pinaghihinalaang Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) ay hindi masisilat ang bala-kin ng mga bandido na maghasik ng terorismo ng mga markakober ng mga bomba na pinaghihinala sa Suro Landing Fish.

Brgy. Darampua, Sultan sa Barongis, Maguindanao, kahapon.

Ayon kay Army's 6th Infantry Division (ID) Commander Major Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, dakong alas-9:30 ng umaga nang marekober ang mga "anti-personnel mines" ng tropa ng Army's 40th Infantry Battalion sa hapon ang railong BIFF pa sumasabog na bomba na 81

MM ang triggering device matapos ang mahigit limang minutong palitan ng putok sa pagitan ng tropa ng mga sundalo at ng mga Dawlah Islamiyah Torayfie group, isa sa paksyon ng BIFF.

Ang nasabing Anti-Personnel Mines ay galing sa marshy area sa Sultan sa Barongis na nagpapakita ng mga markakober na bomba sa kahapon. *Star Tribune*

'CHARTER COMPLIANT'

**ZUBIRI THANKS
SC FOR JUNKING
PLEAS TO BLOCK
BOL PLEBISCITE**

Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri on Wednesday thanked the Supreme Court for turning down petitions to block the Jan. 21 and Feb. 6 plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

"This will now pave the way for a smooth and orderly plebiscite that I believe will usher in the peace and prosperity that we sorely need in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)," he said in a statement.

Zubiri noted that he and his colleagues in the Senate and the House of Representatives voted almost unanimously for the measure's approval.

"We trust the Office of the Solicitor General to defend our measure on the cases pending with the Supreme Court and that we, legislators, are willing to lend a helping hand to strengthen our case for the BOL," he said.

Charting new path

Also on Wednesday, Sen. Aquilino Pimentel III defended the constitutionality of the BOL, saying the 1987 Charter did not restrict the government from charting a new path for Muslim Filipinos.

Two weeks before Mindanao residents decide the fate of the BOL in a plebiscite, Pimentel said Congress had enacted a law that complied with the provisions of the Constitution.

"Our Constitution is a living document. It is not a strait-jacket which should restrict us from adjusting to changing times and circumstances," Pimentel said. —DJYAP INQ

Be liberal in discussions on BOL, SC asked

Senators appealed yesterday to Supreme Court (SC) justices to be liberal in their deliberations on the constitutionality of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri, who chaired a sub-committee on the BOL, thanked the SC for not issuing a restraining order on the plebiscite for the ratification of the law.

"I am appealing to the honorable magistrates of the highest court of the land to... be liberal in their discussions on the BOL and consider the measure as an instrument of peace for our Muslim brothers and sisters," Zubiri said.

He said not issuing a restraining order paves the way for a smooth and orderly plebiscite that would "usher in the peace and prosperity that we sorely need in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao."

Zubiri noted that members of the Senate and the House of Representatives unanimously voted for the approval of the BOL.

"We appeal as well to all parties, including those who opposed the measure to give this law a chance to uplift the lives of our Muslim brothers and sisters after decades of

fighting and deaths of close to 100,000 people due to never-ending conflicts between the government and secessionist groups," Zubiri said.

Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon also expressed confidence that the SC would uphold the constitutionality of the BOL.

"I personally devoted time and attention to the crafting of the law to make sure that... it is compliant with the Constitution," Drilon said.

— Paolo Romero, Jose Rodel Clapano

Duterte urged to do more to ensure passage of BOL

By **ALI G. MACABALANG**

COTABATO CITY – Peace advocates have urged President Duterte to give more vocal support to for “yes” or ratifying votes in areas outside the existing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) to ensure the passage of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

Ratification of Republic Act (R.A.) 11054, or the BOL, is already expected in component areas of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), namely, Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi provinces

and cities of Marawi and Lamitan, where votes in the January 21 plebiscite will be counted as one, according to officials.

But the opposition, they said, appears to be very strong in the cities of Cotabato and Isabela (in Basilan) and Lanao del Norte as well as parts of North Cotabato, which are being considered for coverage under the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) proposed under BOL.

Voters in these areas, as well as in some 100 other barangays petitioning for inclusion in BARMM, will decide in a separate plebiscite on February 6.

Known supporters of BOL ratification like ARMM Governor Mujiv

Hataman and four of his five provincial governors, as well as local civil society organizations (CSOs), have acknowledged the circulation of President Duterte's video asking stakeholders to “give peace a chance” and vote for “yes” in the plebiscites.

“Talagang sinusuportahan ng Pangulo ito (BOL). Pero ang tingin ko dapat mas actively mag-involve si President rito sa kampanya na dapat manalo ang ‘yes’ (in areas outside ARMM),” Hataman was quoted as saying.

Hataman was hinting at a popular clamor for the President to meet all key leaders in ARMM, Cotabato and

Isabela cities, Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato, and persuade them to appreciate brighter potentials in the ratification of BOL.

Local CSOs have corroborated Hataman's views, saying the President “should at least ask reigning politicians to let their constituent voters to decide free.”

The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), as well as local leaders of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), have focused their campaign on Cotabato City, considered the “crown jewel” for the Moro fronts, and Lanao del Norte.

SAF battalion tapped for BOL

The plebiscite would be held just four days before the fourth anniversary of the Mamasapano massacre

By Mario J. Mallari

The Philippine National Police (PNP) will deploy a battalion of its elite Special Action Force (SAF) in Mindanao to beef up security forces and ensure peaceful and orderly conduct of the plebiscite for the ratification of Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

Even as this developed, the Armed Forces of the Philippines reported it foiled an armed group's bid to transport an improvised explosive device to Cotabato City after a brief firefight in Sultan Sa Barungis, Maguindanao resulting in the recovery of three 81mm mortar shells with a triggering device.

PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde yesterday said the SAF troopers will be sent to Cotabato City three days before the 21 January scheduled plebiscite.

The government security cluster identified Cotabato City and some parts of Lanao provinces as among the "critical areas" in connection with the BOL plebiscite.

"We will be sending troops from the SAF and we will be having a sendoff on 18 January. Right there in Cotabato, we will be sending one battalion as augmentation," Albayalde said.

The plebiscite would be held just four days before the fourth anniversary of the 25 January 2015 Mamasapano massacre when 44 members of the elite police commando were killed in a firefight with Moro rebels which doomed the approval of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law.

This will now pave the way for a smooth and orderly plebiscite that I believe will usher in the peace and prosperity that we sorely need.

Regional Public Safety Battalion units in Luzon were also placed on standby for possible deployment in Mindanao, if necessary, according to Albayalde.

Last 31 December, an improvised explosive device exploded at a shopping mall in Cotabato City — killing two persons and wounding more than 30 others. Cotabato City Mayor Cynthia

Guiani-Sayadi claimed they received the threat from a Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) leader prior to the bomb attack.

The MILF has already committed to the peaceful holding of the plebiscite for BOL which was the result of its decades-long peace negotiations with the Philippine government.

Meanwhile, Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri yesterday lauded the Supreme Court (SC) for refusing to issue a temporary restraining order (TRO) against the BOL plebiscite.

Zubiri maintained the BOL Congress passed almost unanimously and signed by President Rodrigo Duterte last year could stand questions on its constitutionality.

The Sulu provincial government and the Philippine Constitutional Association filed separate petitions against the BOL last year. On Tuesday, the SC consolidated the two cases and gave the parties 10 days to file comment without granting the petitioner's prayer for a TRO.

"I laud and thank the Supreme Court on their decision not to grant a TRO on the plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law," Zubiri said.

"This will now pave the way for a smooth and orderly plebiscite that I believe will usher in the peace and prosperity that we sorely need in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao," he added.

SAF securing BOL plebiscite

A battalion of elite police commandos will be deployed in Cotabato City and other areas in the central and western part of Mindanao as part of security for the Bangsamoro Organic Law plebiscite.

Director General Oscar Albayalde, chief of the Philippine National Police, said the send-off ceremony for a battalion of PNP Special Action Force commandos will be held on Jan. 18 or two days before the plebiscite on Jan. 21.

"We will be sending there troops from the SAF and we will be having a sendoff on Jan. 18 there in Cotabato. We will be sending one battalion as augmentation," said Albayalde.

The deployment of additional troops came after the Cotabato City bombing that killed three persons and injured more than 30 others.

The blast is being linked to the BOL plebiscite.

Albayalde said that he had met other top government security officials to discuss the security preparations, particularly in Cotabato and Lanao.

"These are the areas which we see as critical," said Albayalde.

Local officials of Cotabao were reported to have second thoughts in supporting the BOL

following the bomb attack on New Year's Eve.

Some local officials in Lanao, on the other hand, are reportedly opposing the inclusion of some of their barangays in the proposed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region.

The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters was among those groups initially tagged as responsible for the bombing. The BIFF, a breakaway faction of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, has been opposing a peace agreement with the government — the reason of which is that the BIFF is rooting for an independent Islamic state in Mindanao.

A bombing suspect is now currently under custody but police said they have yet to establish his group affiliation. The suspect has denied involvement.

Albayalde said they will implement measures to ensure the security of the plebiscite and part of it is to put on standby police forces for any eventuality.

"For other regions which are not involved in the BOL like those regions in Luzon, we will have them prepare for standby companies from their Regional Public Safety Battalions in case na kailanganin pa natin 'yung additional troops sa Mindanao," said Albayalde. 10

A GREAT BRITISH VIEW

DANIEL PRUCE

Vibrant democratic traditions

Manigong Bagong Taon po sa inyong lahat! 2019 will be an important year for both our countries. In the UK we will leave the European Union on 29 March, in line with the results of our referendum held in 2016. Here in the Philippines there will be two important popular votes, the first later this month in the plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law and the second in the Mid-Term elections in May. A referendum, a plebiscite and country-wide elections are testimony to the vibrant democratic traditions common to both our countries.



2018 was a great year for our bilateral relations. In September Finance Secretary Dominguez led the biggest ever senior level delegation from the Philippines to visit the UK. This was tribute to our close commercial partnership. The UK remains the biggest European investor in the Philippines. Two-way trade and investment has now grown to almost £1.4 billion, while UK exports grew by 25 percent in 2017.

And Secretary Dominguez and his delegation were customers at the first of 25 Jollibee restaurants opening in the UK in the next five years!

Meanwhile growing numbers of British companies are active here in the Philippines – over 200, spanning all sectors – from retail to engineering.

And we are both committed to ensuring this commercial relationship can prosper in the future.

Through our annual High Level Talks (most recently here in Manila last November) we are driving forward our Joint Statement of Intent on Enhanced Economic Cooperation. We were delighted when the government recently passed the Ease of Doing Business (EODB) Act, inspired by some of our measures in the UK.

The links between our peoples are going from strength to strength. More Filipinos are choosing the UK to live, work, study and go on holiday. Nearly 250,000 now live in the UK. And we are the leading European holiday destination for Filipinos. We are granting more visas than ever!

Nearly 17,000 Filipinos are working in our National Health Service. I was delighted to see that one of them – Nurse Joy Ongcachuy – has just been awarded the Order of the British Empire for her work in the aftermath of the London Bridge terrorist attack in June 2017.

Our Chevening Scholarships programme is growing rapidly. We sent a record 36 scholars to the UK last year and hope to send even more in 2019. Alongside this we have a dynamic and expanding Newton Agham programme, offering research grants and PhD scholarships in the fields of science and innovation.

And as we look to the wider world the UK and the Philippines are working together on the shared challenges facing today's global community such as the Illegal Wildlife Trade, Climate Change, Organised Crime (our police forces signed their first ever memorandum of understanding last year) and international

terrorism. I also hope that as we move through 2019 our two countries will be able to stand together in defence of the rules based international system which has served past generations so well.

I began by noting that the Philippines and the UK are both vibrant democracies. Our countries have proud histories of support for the institutions which guarantee the freedoms essential to any democracy. In 2019 the British Government will launch a global campaign in support of media freedom. I look forward to working closely on this with the full spectrum of our partners here in the Philippines.

Over the course of my diplomatic career I have learned from personal experience that the relationship between government and media can sometimes be bumpy. But I have enormous respect for the work of journalists around the world. They perform an important role in all our societies and we all have a strong interest in ensuring they are able to go about their profession with freedom and without fear. As the great British Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill said, "A free press is the unsleeping guardian of every other right that free men prize; it is the most dangerous foe of tyranny."

I look forward to working with all of the UK's partners in the Philippines on all of these issues throughout 2019 as we continue to build an ever closer, richer and deeper relationship.

* * *

(Daniel Pruce is the British Ambassador to the Philippines. Twitter @DanielPruce)



Another drinking ban

To reduce the risk of fights breaking out during drunken moments, President Duterte has ordered members of the military and police to stop drinking in public places. Both the Philippine National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines are drawing up the guidelines to implement the President's order.

The President noted that the risk of fights breaking out in bars and other watering holes is heightened when cops and soldiers are packing guns. He said some fights erupt merely over the use of the karaoke microphone, even when those fighting are all singing out of tune.

Whether the order will be carried out remains to be seen. There have been similar orders in the past, under different administrations, but after a brief period of compliance, cops and soldiers return to their old ways.

The President's order came on the heels of another one prohibiting police and military personnel from playing in casinos. He said he ordered the ban after receiving reports of policemen kidnapping patrons at a casino in Metro Manila.

The casino ban on all govern-

EDITORIAL

ment officials and employees including military personnel dates back to the Marcos regime. Benigno Aquino III during his presidency had to let go of his Land Transportation Office chief Virginia Torres, after she was caught on video using slot machines in what she described as a gaming arcade rather than a casino.

The casino ban, embodied in two Marcos-era presidential decrees, was reaffirmed by the Duterte administration in a circular issued in September 2016. The reports that reached President Duterte about the recent kidnappings showed that the ban has been ignored.

Police and military personnel have managed to ignore prohibitions on drinking in public places and playing in casinos by simply wearing civilian clothes. It can be impossible for authorities to monitor the movements of every member of the PNP and AFP. But with technology, barangay monitoring and private sector cooperation, violators of the prohibitions may be apprehended at random and meted punishment. The administration must show that the President's order will not turn out to be just another idle threat.

The Trillanes conundrum

THE question, of course, is whether or not



LOWDOWN

JOJO ROBLES

Sen. Antonio Trillanes 4th will ever be

► RoblesA6

■ ROBLES FROM A1

Trillanes

seen in this country again, or at least until the end of the Duterte administration. No one is seriously betting that he will, especially now that a Makati City court has thrown out his appeal against the revocation of his amnesty on an old rebellion charge.

This is the same Trillanes, after all, who would not leave his office in the Senate because he was deathly scared of being arrested late last year. He would rather rot in the Senate, perhaps, than suffer once again the indignity of being dragged by his belt out of his office, like in that unforgettable photograph of him being taken out of the posh Manila Peninsula hotel in 2007.

Now that Trillanes is out of the country for "a series of speaking engagements," as he told the court hearing on the various cases filed against him, you think he'd risk the embarrassment of arrest like an ordinary citizen upon his return? I don't think so.

It also comes as no surprise to me that Trillanes' first reaction to the revival of the rebellion charges filed against him is to blame President Rodrigo Duterte. As far as I can tell, the only involvement of Duterte in the Trillanes cases is passive — he empowered and emancipated the various courts that had been under tremendous pressure from the Palace in the two previous administrations to "sit" on the cases involving the senator.

The issue is truly a legal one, that hinges on the constitutionality of the presidential proclamation that voided Trillanes' amnesty during the Aquino years. That case is pending before the Supreme Court.

The government alleged that the amnesty granted to Trillanes was void from the start because he failed to comply with two requirements — an official amnesty application and an admission of guilt. Despite Trillanes' arguments, a Makati judge agreed with the prosecution by ruling that the primary evidence to prove the supposed filing was a copy of the application form itself.

The background is this: Although Gloria Arroyo was forced to put down Trillanes' and his Magdalo group's rebellion at both Oakwood and the Peninsula, she was also always painfully aware of the political cost of doing so.

On the one hand, Arroyo knew that there was unrest among the junior military officers disgruntled by corruption in the armed forces. But, she could not push too hard or the senior officers who were also silently backing Magdalo could turn against her and start a full-blown rebellion.

So, she did a delicate dance of appeasing the senior officers who supported her while winning over those in the lower ranks who had actual soldiers in their command. Arroyo basically sold her soul for peace throughout the military.

As far as the courts that were hearing the

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NPA's supply cache found in SurSur town

From the Philippine Information Agency (Jan 8, 2019): NPA's supply cache found in SurSur town



SAN MIGUEL, Surigao del Sur – A cache of ammunitions and several materials of the Communist New People's Army Terrorists (CNTs) were discovered by the Army's 36th Infantry (Valor) Battalion in Sitio Kiskis, Barangay Siagao, San Miguel town.

Civil-Military Operations (CMO) Officer Captain Francisco Garelo Jr. said the troops captured the following materials used by the CNTs: four IED switches, one digital tester, one roll scotch tape, one piece Talk N Text Simpack, 10 pieces Icom commercial radio, two pieces Extra Battery Pack for commercial radio, two pieces CP charger, two pieces Nokia cellphone battery, 10 pieces HH Icom antenna, 40 pieces assorted transistors, one piece comb, 56 rounds of 76.2 ball ammo of M14, two M14 empty magazines (Unserviceable); three pouches (Small Size), 11 pcs ballpen; one topographic map, nine pieces notebooks/primers/ leaflets, one piece bandolier, four pairs combat boots, one round 60mm mortar (Unserviceable), and one scissor.

According to Capt. Garelo, the supply cache owned by the CNTs was kept hidden in the said area, as per information from the concerned citizens in Barangay Siagao.

Lt. Col Xerxes Trinidad, Commanding Officer of the 36IB, said "the successful capture of said supplies is a result of the yearning of the residents to achieve peace and in support to the Army's commitment to bring normalcy even in the far-flung areas previously influenced by the CPP-NPA Terrorist."

NPA unit surrenders to Army in AgSur

From the Philippine Information Agency (Jan 9, 2019): **NPA unit surrenders to Army in AgSur**

An entire unit of the Communist Party of the Philippines – New People’s Army (CPP-NPA) Guerilla Front 3 (GF3), Southern Mindanao Regional Committee (SMRC) surrendered recently to 75th Infantry Battalion (75IB) and 26th Infantry Battalion (26IB) in Agusan del Sur, a night before the CPP-NPA anniversary on Dec. 25, 2018.

Joint operatives of 75IB under Lieutenant Colonel Jaimer Datuin and 26IB under Lieutenant Colonel Romeo Jimenea facilitated the surrender of 19 NPAs in Loreto, Agusan del Sur at around 10:00 p.m. on Tuesday.

The said NPA unit, composed of 19 personalities, was headed by alias ‘Boss’ the commander of GF3. Alias Boss brought with him his sub-unit leader alias ‘SK’, commander of Platoon Basill and alias ‘Sniper’, commander of Platoon Andoy.

The surrenderees brought with them a total of 14 firearms (nine high powered and five low powered). They also surrendered several magazines, three commercial icom radios and more than 1,300 ammunitions.

The following are the surrendered firearms: three M16 rifles; three M16 Bushmaster rifles; one M653 rifle with scope; one M14 rifle; one M203 Grenade Launcher; one Carbine rifle; three Cal .45 Colt; one Cal .38 pistol; one hand grenade; and one rifle grenade.

According to 401st Brigade Commander BGen. Andres Centino, the surrender of almost the entire GF3 in time for the CPP anniversary showed that more NPA members are now heading to the call of the government for peace.

This is also based on the revelation of the commander of GF3 himself that said they returned to the folds of the government because they trusted the sincerity of the government in helping the former rebels under the Comprehensive Local Integration program or E-CLIP.

<https://pia.gov.ph/news/articles/1016893>

www.pna.gov.ph

CPP-NPA will never get control of PH: Duterte

By Earl Jed Roque January 9, 2019, 5:17 pm

MANILA - The Communist Party of the Philippines - New People's Army (CPP-NPA) will never hold control over the Philippines, President Rodrigo R. Duterte said Tuesday.

In a speech at the National Capital Region (NCR) Barangay Summit on Peace and Order in Pasay City, Duterte assured the public of peace and order and protection from the communist rebels.

"Hindi mo makuha ang Pilipinas. Hindi mo nga makuha ni isang barangay isang araw, tapos papasok ka ng ganun, patayan? Ako nagho-hold lang talaga ako. Karami kong helicopter, sabi ko, huwag muna (The CPP-NPA will never control the Philippines. They can't even control one barangay in a day, then they engage in threats of killing? I'm really just putting things on hold. Government has lots of helicopters, I said, do not use them for now)," he said.

The President said he is controlling his temper on using the armed forces to combat the communist rebels as he considers the situation of the group's hostages.

"Kung gagamitin mo 'yan, linisin mo 'yang buong -- buong gubat. You, plantsahin mo 'yan ng bala. Anong mangyari 'pag orderin ko 'yang military, 'Shoot to kill.' Huwag na kayong magkuha ng prisoner. Basta diretso na lahat (If we use state weapons to clean entire highlands with guns, what will happen if I order the military, 'Shoot to kill,' and not secure the prisoners? Just merely attack.)," he said.

Duterte said the government is already doing the CPP-NPA's call for land reform, but does it without media publicity.

"Until now, ako lang ang nagdi-distribute pero ayaw ko lang ng publicity (I distribute land titles myself but I do not want publicity). Hindi ako nagdadala ng media. Basta ako bigay lang. (I don't bring media with me. I just give it.)," he said.

Duterte said he is leaving a "small window" for the communist rebels to resume with peace negotiations.

The CPP-NPA, in earlier reports, had been allegedly involved in mass murders, extortion, and violation of indigenous people's rights.

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