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RCBC MANAGER GUILTY OF MONEY LAUNDERING

Mala Deguito's conviction is the first in connection with the 2016 cyberheft of \$81 million from the Bangladesh central bank. The South Asian nation's ambassador hopes cases against a former RCBC treasurer and five officers are sped up.

By Matthew Reysio-Cruz
@MatthewINQ

A former branch manager of Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. (RCBC) was found guilty of money laundering in connection with one of the world's

largest cyberheists in which \$81 million was stolen from Bangladesh's central bank in 2016.

Mala Deguito was also ordered to pay a total fine of about \$109 million.

Judge Cesar Untalan of

Makati City Regional Trial Court Branch 149 on Thursday convicted Deguito of violating the Anti-Money Laundering Act on eight counts. Each count carries a penalty of four to seven years behind bars.

The conviction of the low-

level bank official was the first in the hacking of the New York Fed account of Bangladesh Bank, the South Asian nation's central bank, on Feb. 4, 2016—a theft so far-reaching that it was probed by both the Interpol and the US Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Bangladesh Ambassador to the Philippines Asad Alam Siam, who was present during the promulgation of the decision, told reporters that he hoped the ruling would jump-start cases that had been filed in the Department of Justice (DOJ)

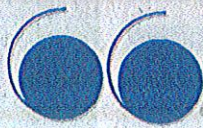
against six other RCBC officials.

"We hope that [these] will be expedited after this case," Siam said.

The DOJ said the case was not closed.

A North Korean hacker is also wanted by the Unit-

A8



Her declaration in open court that she has nothing to do with these transactions was a complete and comprehensive lie

Cesar Untalan

Judge, Makati City Regional Trial Court Branch 149

ed States on charges he and a state-sponsored hacking crew masterminded the Bangladesh heist.

Scapegoat, rogue

Deguito's lawyer, Demetrio Custodio, said his client had been turned into a scapegoat.

"She could not have done this on her own. A bank the size of RCBC could not have allowed a lowly bank officer to have planned this, so there are others involved in this," Custodio said.

In a statement, RCBC maintained that the bank was a "victim" and that Deguito was a "rogue" employee.

Fictitious accounts

The cyberheist turned into the biggest money laundering case in the country after it was discovered that the stolen cash had been deposited into four fictitious accounts at the RCBC branch on Jupiter Street in Makati, which Deguito had managed.

The money was then allegedly merged into a single account in the name of businessman William Go before being withdrawn and funneled to casinos.

Pawn, lie

Deguito has stood by her claims that she had no participation in the crime, declaring at one point to a Senate blue ribbon committee hearing that she

was a "pawn in a high-stakes chess game played by giants in international banking."

Untalan, wholly unconvinced, wrote in his decision: "Her declaration in open court that she has nothing to do with these transactions was a complete and comprehensive lie."

The judge repeatedly cited Deguito's 16 years of experience in the banking industry against her, saying that a woman of her stature would not have blindly followed instructions from higher-ranking officers to facilitate the transactions.

Untalan said that a seasoned bank official should have inquired about the source of the remittances, which he emphasized were "huge and big amounts in United States dollars."

He also said that the testimony of prosecution witness Rafael Echaluse, the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC)

secretariat officer who investigated the case, was "good enough to put accused Deguito behind bars."

Signed records

Echaluse testified that Deguito's signature was on the transaction records and deposit and withdrawal slips of the four fictitious accounts, which had been opened using fabricated documents for the purpose of receiving the stolen money.

These findings were enough to convince Untalan that Deguito had "caused the opening of these accounts."

Deguito had insisted that it was the Operation Section of the branch that oversaw the eventual consolidation of the cash from these fake accounts into Go's.

The judge, however, said that "accused forgot the principle of command responsibility."

Her mere position as busi-

ness manager of the Jupiter branch was sufficient to hold her liable, Untalan said.

Deguito's lawyer stressed that Untalan's decision did not conclude that any of the stolen proceeds had ended up with Deguito.

"Because the amounts allegedly taken have been credited to the account of William Go, my client will not be forced to turn over those amounts," Custodio said.

Casino junket operator

The owners of the dubious accounts remain at large, while several alleged conspirators have been cleared by the DOJ, including casino junket operator Kim Wong, gambler Weikang Xu and money transfer firm Philrem Service Corp.

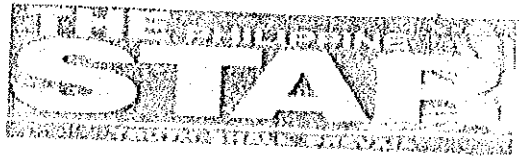
Only \$15 million of the money was recovered after it landed in the Philippines and was quickly dispersed. Tens of millions of the loot disappeared into Manila's casinos, which were at the time exempt from rules aimed at preventing money laundering.

Custodio said his client would not spend a day behind bars until their motion for reconsideration, and possible appeals all the way to the Supreme Court, had been resolved.

Deguito has been out on bail for the charges since 2017.

"This is just a momentary setback," Custodio said as he stood beside Deguito, who was silent and showed no emotion after the decision was read.

—WITH A REPORT FROM AFP INQ



Ex-bank manager guilty of money laundering

By ROBERTZON RAMIREZ

A Makati City court yesterday convicted a former bank branch manager of money laundering for her role in one of the biggest cyber-heists in history involving \$81 million belonging to the Bangladesh government.

In a 26-page decision, Judge Cesar Untalan of Makati Regional Trial Court (RTC) Branch 149 sentenced Maia Santos-Deguito to prison terms of up to 56 years, or four to seven years for each of the eight counts of money laundering.

The court also ordered her to pay \$109 million in fines. But the court allowed her to remain free on bail as her lawyer prepares to appeal her conviction.

Bangladesh Ambassador Asad Alam Siam, who was present during the promulgation, said his government was considering its next step. He expressed hope the cases filed with the Department of Justice by the Anti-Money Laundering Council against six other officials of the Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. (RCBC) would be expedited.

As manager of RCBC branch on Jupiter Street in Makati City, Deguito was found guilty of allowing the transfer of \$81 million from the Bangladesh Bank to multiple accounts under fictitious names in February 2016. The amount would have reached \$1 billion had the US

Federal Reserve not alerted the bank of the questionable fund transfer.

The court said Deguito "must be criminally liable" for violating the Anti-Money Laundering Act as she had knowingly facilitated the illegal bank transactions.

She was found to have consolidated the money into a single US dollar account under the name of Filipino-Chinese businessman William Go. The funds were withdrawn, converted into pesos and transferred to at least three casinos in Manila.

In one of her court appearances, Deguito claimed the transaction was made upon instructions from bank higher-ups. But Untalan argued that she should have protected herself from certain liability by inquiring about the source of the remittances.

"Her declaration in open court that she has nothing to do with these transactions was a complete and comprehensive lie," Untalan declared.

The judge said Deguito,

Turn to Page 6

Ex-bank From Page 1

with her 16 years of experience in the banking industry, should be familiar with the maximum requirement of P500,000 per transaction.

"A normal mind and a banker of the caliber of the accused Deguito, if indeed not guilty of committing the violation of the AMLA law, should have and must have inquired (about) the legality of the origin of these remittances," Untalan said.

"However, as the saying

goes: action speaks louder than words. Accused Deguito, indeed, facilitated these transactions to their full and complete implementation without any sign of hesitation," Untalan said.

"Accused Deguito took a few minutes to do, execute and implement these huge and million United States dollars transactions," he said.

"The defense that accused Deguito has no authority to

hold these deposits coming from and sourced from foreign remittances is quite unbelievable, to say the least. Benchmark of the law for its violation is only P500,000. These remittances were in United States dollars and in million amounts," he added.

Untalan said he is convinced that Deguito did not only facilitate the illegal bank transactions, but also "coordinated and corroborated" the execution and implementation of the illegal transactions.

'Momentary setback'

Deguito's lawyer Demetrio Custodio said the court's decision was "just a momentary setback" and that his client should be allowed temporary liberty, as there are still legal remedies available—including the filing of a motion for reconsideration—that could reverse the court decision.

"We have very good grounds to file a motion for reconsideration. We would like to point out early that this case

will follow a very long process. This is just a momentary setback insofar as Ms. Deguito is concerned," Custodio told reporters.

He said Untalan himself had noted that the bond would only expire upon the finality of the decision.

Custodio said he remains confident that Deguito would not be put behind bars.

As far as the fine is concerned, he said that Deguito would not be forced to turn over the amount as the money was credited to the account

of Go.

"My client will not be forced to turn over those amounts. The judge noted that the prosecution failed to prove that the amounts ended up in Maia's account and therefore, she's not liable to turn over those amounts," he said, referring to the fines imposed by the court.

He also emphasized that "there is no forfeiture" of money as the alleged amounts involved had not been subject to court jurisdiction and that Go was not made party to the case.

Sea row: US to blame if clash erupts, warns Chinese researcher

BEIJING—US naval operations in the South China Sea could spark conflict and the United States would be to blame if a clash occurred, a Chinese military researcher said on Wednesday.

The warning came as Chinese and US negotiating teams ended talks in Beijing that had raised hopes an all-out trade war could be avoided, but fears remained that strategic tension between the two countries were growing.

"Both countries' warships definitely have to come into close proximity and it's easy for there to be a misunderstanding or an error of judgment, even a collision," Zhang Junshe, a researcher at China's PLA (People's Liberation Army) Naval Military Studies Research Institute, told reporters.

"If there is a collision, the root cause is the United States," Zhang said.

Freedom of navigation

On Monday, a US guided-missile destroyer sailed near the disputed Paracel Islands in the South China Sea in what China called a "provocation," just as the trade talks began.

The USS McCampbell carried out a freedom of navigation operation, sailing within 22 kilometers of the Paracels "to challenge excessive maritime claims," Rachel McMarr, spokesperson for the US Pacific Fleet, said in an e-mailed statement.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lu Kang said the conduct of the US ship had violated China's and international laws, and China had lodged

"stern representations."

On Wednesday, Zhang said whenever US warships entered waters that China claimed, China had no option but to send warships to deal with them.

Since Trump took office, there have been 14 incidents of US Navy vessels entering waters that China claims to carry out what the US military calls freedom of navigation operations, Zhang said.

China claims almost all of the South China Sea and denounces the United States and its allies over naval operations near Chinese-occupied islands.

Sweeping claim void

The UN-backed Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, however, invalidated China's sweeping claim in a ruling in 2016 on a challenge

brought by the Philippines.

The tribunal ruled that China's claim had no basis in international law and that it had violated the Philippines' sovereign right to fish and explore for resources in the West Philippine Sea, waters within the country's 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea recognized under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

China claims parts of those waters, too, as well as parts of the EEZs of the other claimants in the South China Sea—Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia and Taiwan.

China ignored the arbitral tribunal's ruling and proceeded to build artificial islands on seven Philippine-claimed reefs in the Spratly archipelago and topping these with ports, airstrips.

that could receive large military planes, communications equipment, antiship and surface-to-air weapons capabilities.

Zhang said on Wednesday that China may further fortify those islands depending on threats faced by the outposts.

"If our on-island personnel and installations come under threat in future, then we necessarily will take measures to boost our defensive capabilities," Zhang said.

Xi's pledge

Pentagon officials have long said that China has failed to fulfill a 2015 pledge by President Xi Jinping not to expand development in the area.

China says the development primarily serves civilian purposes.

It insists it has the legal right

to take whatever measures it deems appropriate on the islands, as these are parts of its territory.

He Lei, former vice president of China's naval academy, said on Wednesday that "foreign forces" that attempted to prevent the unification of China and Taiwan could compel Beijing to use force to bring the self-ruled island under its control.

"Foreign forces that pose as world police to interfere in China's affairs, to obstruct and damage China's unification, are the main culprits that could force the mainland to use force to resolve the Taiwan issue," He said.

President Xi on Jan. 2 said nobody could change the fact Taiwan was part of China. —RE-

PORTS FROM REUTERS AND AP

Ban on public drinking not applicable in camps

By Jeannette I. Andrade
@jiandradeINQ

Philippine National Police Director General Oscar Albayalde said on Thursday that the policy prohibiting uniformed personnel from drinking in public would most likely not apply inside police and military camps.

At a press briefing in Camp Crame, Albayalde said, "Inside camps, it's [drinking] controlled. It is a controlled social activity in camps which are highly secure. We know how to control that."

During a speech in Pasay City on Tuesday, President Duterte ordered uniformed personnel, particularly policemen,

to stop drinking in public places as these often led to trouble.

He cited incidents where drunken policemen and soldiers ended up getting involved in brawls or even shootouts. He claimed that he recently beat up a policeman and a soldier who both wound up in the hospital after they shot at each other while under the influence of liquor.

Old policy

Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff Benjamin Madrigal Jr., who received his fourth star in rites at the Department of National Defense on Thursday, said that the policy banning uniformed person-

nel from drinking in public places had long been in place even before Mr. Duterte's directive.

"This has long been a policy and we will strictly enforce it to ensure that the President's order is followed," he added.

Albayalde said that as government employees, uniformed personnel were prohibited from drinking in bars and other "houses of ill repute" under the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees.

"Just the same, we issued reminders to our policemen to avoid drinking in public ... especially if you are in uniform," he said. INQ A13

PNP: Daraga, Cotabato City, poll 'hot spots'

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) is considering placing under its control Daraga town in Albay and Cotabato City, two trouble areas not among the 18 cities and municipalities listed as "hot spots" by the Philippine National Police.

The Joint Peace and Security Coordinating Committee (JPSCC) for the plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) on Jan. 21 and the midterm elections in May finalized on Thursday plans to ensure that the political exercises are credible and peaceful.

PNP Director General Oscar Albayalde on Thursday said that apart from measures that would be undertaken by the police, the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Comelec in the two electoral exercises, the implementation of the joint AFP-PNP "Kapanatagan (Stability) 2018-2022" plan was also discussed.

Aside from Albayalde, Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr., the AFP chief, and Comelec Chair Sheriff

Abas also attended the final JP-SCC conference on Thursday.

The committee finalized actions for the implementation of the nationwide gun ban, the campaigns against loose firearms and private armed groups, as well as "measures to prevent the outbreak of violence" in areas where there are intense political rivalries.

77 private armed groups

On the PNP list of hot spots are the towns of Sudipen and Balaoan in La Union; Jones, Isabela; Lemery, Batangas; Roxas, Oriental Mindoro; Balud and Dimasalang in Masbate; Hadji Mohammad Ajul, Lantawan and Tipo-Tipo in Basilan; Sultan Damalondong, Lanao del Sur; Mamasapano, Shariff Aguak, Shariff Saydona Mustapha and Datu Unsay in Maguindanao, as well as the cities of Pagadian, Cagayan de Oro, and Marawi.

According to the PNP, 77 private armed groups operate nationwide. —JEANETTE I. ANDRADE INQ *AN*

ACROSS THE COUNTRY

13 held, guns seized in Sibugay shootout

ZAMBOANGA CITY – The military is checking the affiliation of 13 men who were arrested following an encounter with soldiers in Tungawan, Zamboanga Sibugay on Saturday, the military reported yesterday.

Lt. Gen. Arnel dela Vega, Western Mindanao Command chief, said personnel of the 42nd Infantry Battalion were pa-

troling Barangay Sisay when they chanced upon the gunmen.

De la Vega said two M2 carbine rifles, a KG9, an Uzi, a caliber .38 revolver and various types of ammunition were recovered from the suspects.

Chief Superintendent Emmanuel Luis Licup, Zamboanga peninsula police director, said they received reports that criminal gangs were offering their services to politicians as private armed groups during the election. **13 – Roel Pareño**

3-day RYE 2019 up In Caraga region

BUTUAN CITY – More than 140 youth leaders and Indigenous People (IP) from the various places in Northeastern Mindanao or Caraga region gathered at CSU Sanchez Gym, Barangay Ampayon, this city yesterday for a three-day Regional Youth Engagement (RYE) 2019. The Army's 401st Infantry (Unity) Brigade and 402nd Infantry (Stingers) Brigade, initiated the RYE 2019 where youth and IP leaders will meet for this year's Regional Youth Engagement that will end on Saturday (Jan. 12). The RYE 2019 at Caraga State University (CSU) is anchored on the theme "Filipino Youth: Future Leaders of the Country." The Regional Youth Leadership Summit (RYLS) conducted by the 401st Brigade and 402nd Brigade, is the avenue for the youth leaders to discuss various topics, issues and concerns that will inspire them to be effective, responsible, skilled-minded leaders, it was gathered. (Mike U. Crismundo)

War veterans' pension raised to ₱20,000

The old-age pension of Filipino war veterans will be increased to ₱20,000 per month under the law signed by President Duterte.

Covered by the pension increase approved by the President are veterans of the World War II as well as the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Republic Act No. 11164, or an act increasing the monthly old-age pension of senior veterans, was signed by the President last December 20.

"The old-age pension of veterans of World War II, Korean and Vietnam are shall be increased to twenty thousand pesos (₱20,000) per month; provided, that the veterans of Korean and Vietnam wars are not receiving pension from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP); provided, further, that the entitlement to the increase in old-age pension shall be limited to the

eligible living senior veterans," the law read.

The law states that the pension increase will not be transferable to any family members or dependents of the senior veterans.

The initial implementation of the pension hike will be sourced from the budget of the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office (PVAO). The budget for the succeeding years will be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

Senator Gregorio Honasan II, principal author of the measure, had earlier said the pension hike was a fitting tribute and act of gratitude to the war veterans and their sacrifices. The veterans previously received ₱5,000 a month.

The new law takes effect 15 days after publication in the Official Gazette or two newspapers. (Genalyn D. Kabiling)

SC upholds junking of suit filed by journos in 2007

THE Supreme Court has affirmed the dismissal of the P10-million class suit filed against the government by 37 broadcast and print journalists arrested while covering the 2007 Manila Peninsula siege.

In a 15-page decision released on Thursday, the SC's First Division sustained the decisions of the Court of Appeals and the Makati City Regional Trial Court, Branch 56, in 2013 and 2008, respectively, that dismissed the civil complaint filed by the journalists against the Philippine National Police, Armed Forces of the Philippines and several Cabinet officials during the Arroyo administration.

The SC dismissed for lack of merit the petition of the journalists seeking reversal of the CA and RTC rulings.

In ruling against the suit of the journalists, The SC ruled that the lower courts were correct in dismissing the suit for lack of cause of action because the complainants "failed to prove that their rights were violated which constitute an actionable wrong."

The SC agreed with the findings of both CA and RTC that the constitutional freedoms of speech and of the press of petitioners were not violated when they were arrested by the PNP and AFP. **Rey E. Requejo**

Diokno hostaging salary hike—solon

By Maricel V. Cruz and Macon Ramos-Araneta

HOUSE Majority Leader and Camarines Sur Rep. Rolando Andaya Jr. on Thursday accused Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno of hostaging the salary increase due government workers this month in his bid to avoid appearing at a congressional inquiry on the alleged irregularities in the preparation of the proposed 2019 national government budget.

"The increases are not General Appropriations Act-dependent and are authorized by separate laws crafted by Congress and issued by the President himself. Delaying their release is unconstitutional," Andaya said.

Andaya said Diokno "should stop using our civil servants as pawns in his bid to avoid answering questions of public interest"

He added that "the salaries of government officials as determined by existing

pay scales are deemed in force regardless of the status of the national budget. The Salary Standardization Law 4 is for civilian employees and the second round of the pay increase for soldiers, policemen, firemen, jail guards, Coast Guard personnel are multiyear commitments. Their annual implementation as prescribed by law cannot be suspended by the whims of one man."

Andaya, chairman of the House committee on rules which initiated a probe against Diokno, said that while Diokno wants debt servicing to foreign banks to go on as scheduled, salary increases of government workers are frozen.

"What he can defer during the pen-

dency of the budget approval is the release of personnel services [PS] funds for new employees. Withholding part of the salaries for services rendered by regular employees is abuse of power," Andaya said.

Andaya said there is no truth to Diokno's claim that there is enough government money to release the salary increase under a reenacted budget.

"Under the reenacted budget, there is P100 billion allocated for salary increases under the MPBF," he said.

"Besides, who says we need to use the full amount during the reenacted period? That budget is for the entire year," he added. 13

House majority leader ouster sought

BY WENDELL VIGILIA

CAMARINES Sur Rep. Luis Raymond Villafuerte (NP) yesterday called for the ouster of House majority leader Rolando Andaya, Jr. for his relentless attacks against Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno, which he said, is also an attack on President Duterte.

Villafuerte, Andaya's political foe in Camarines Sur, said the resumption of session on Monday should be the day of reckoning

for Andaya, claiming there is an increasing number of administration lawmakers who are "fed up with Andaya's anti-DBM (Department of Budget and Management) posturing."

"Andaya has strangely become the No. 1 political arch foe of President Duterte in the House of Representatives with his continuing hatchet job against Secretary Benjamin Diokno and the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) which is obviously meant

to torpedo the passage of the proposed 2019 GAA in time for the end-January target of the senators as stated by Senate President Vicente Sotto III," Villafuerte said in a statement.

The congressman from Bicol said Andaya needs to be replaced as majority leader "for committing acts inimical to the interests of the pro-administration coalition and of the Filipino people."

Andaya has not yet replied to Villafuerte's statements at press

time.

Villafuerte said Andaya's refusal to stop his attacks against Diokno gives rise to suspicion that the majority leader "is a sleeper agent of the political opposition out to destabilize the Duterte administration ahead of the midterm elections."

"My fellow Bicolano legislator has unfortunately become the odd man out in the current House

See HOUSE ► Page B3

HOUSE

leadership, given that his No. 1 job as majority leader is to shepherd through the bigger chamber the legislative agenda of the government, including the annual GAA (General Appropriations Act), that would let President Duterte deliver on his campaign promises to the Filipino people," he said.

Andaya's committee on rules has been investigating Diokno for allegedly manipulating the annual budget to favor some individuals, especially the in-laws of his daughter Charlotte, who are involved in the construction business.

Diokno caught the ire of lawmakers for allegedly inserting P75 billion in the 2019 proposed budget of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and for allocating a huge portion to flood-control projects, even in areas that are not prone to flooding.

Villafuerte warned colleagues that Andaya's attacks against Diokno could lead to government op-

erating on a reenacted 2018 budget for the rest of the year.

"It is time for the majority coalition that is fully supportive of President Duterte to ask Andaya: Are you with us or against us?" said Villafuerte.

He said the bicameral conference committee could resolve the standoff by simply adopting the NEP when it convenes after the yearend recess.

'ABUSE OF POWER'

In a statement released earlier yesterday, Andaya accused Diokno of abusing his power and violating the Constitution by holding hostage the budget for the salary increase of state workers.

"Delaying their release is unconstitutional. The only thing it passes is the cruelty test. He should stop using our civil servants as pawns in his bid to avoid answering questions of public interest," he said.

Diokno had warned that the release of the funds for the salary

hike of soldiers, policemen, teachers and civilian employees will be affected because of the delay in the passage of the P3.757 trillion proposed national budget for 2019.

Andaya, a lawyer and a former budget secretary, said Diokno should release the pay increase because these are not dependent on the passage of annual General Appropriations Act and is authorized by separate laws.

He said the salaries of government officials as determined by existing pay scales are deemed in force regardless of the status of the national budget.

The SSL 4 for civilian employees and the second round of the pay increase for soldiers, policemen, firemen, jail guards, Coast Guard personnel are multiyear commitments, he added.

"Their annual implementation as prescribed by law cannot be suspended by the whims of one man. Under the Diokno doctrine, debt servicing to foreign banks will go on as scheduled but salary hikes

of government men are frozen. Why is it like that?"

Andaya said what Diokno can defer during the pendency of the budget approval is the release of personnel services funds for new employees.

Andaya slammed Diokno for saying that government's funds cannot support the salary increase because the 2018 budget is reenacted.

"Under the reenacted budget, there is P100 billion allocated for salary increases under the MPBF (Miscellaneous, Personnel Benefits Fund). Double the amount of what is in the 2019 proposal. Common sense for the Budget Secretary to use this amount to pay for salary increases due our civil servants," he said.

"Besides, who says we need to use the full amount during the reenacted period? That budget is for the entire year. We will be acting on a reenacted budget for only more than a month or shorter. This is the only period that the DBM should pay for," Andaya said.

Madrigal gets fourth star

BY VICTOR REYES

PRESIDENT Duterte, the AFP's commander-in-chief, promoted Armed Forces chief Lt. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr. to the next higher rank of four-star general a month after he assumed the top military post.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana donned the new rank of Madrigal yesterday in rites held at the DND building in Camp Aguinaldo, according to AFP public affairs chief Col. Noel Detoyato.

The lone four-star rank is reserved for Madrigal in his capacity as AFP chief. He was a member of the Philippine Military Academy class of 1985.

Madrigal replaced retired Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr., his PMA classmate, who was designated by Duterte as the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, vice Jesus Dureza who resigned.

Also promoted to the next rank were now Lt. Gen. Noel Clement and now Maj. Gen. Pablo Lorenzo, who were recently designated as

AFP Central Command chief and AFP deputy chief of staff for intelligence, respectively.

Clement assumed command of the Central Command vice Lt. Gen. Paul Atal, who was earlier assigned as the AFP's inspector general. Clement was previously the commander of the 10th Infantry Division in Compostela Valley.

Lorenzo was named AFP deputy chief of staff for intelligence, vice Maj. Gen. Fernando Trinidad who earlier assumed the post as commander of the 9th Infantry Division in Camarines Sur.

Lorenzo was previously the senior military aide to Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana.

"Their solid record of service speaks of their capability, capacity, and commitment to be promoted," said Madrigal, referring to the promotion of Clement and Lorenzo.

"They are committed and capable officers; professionals who display the highest standard of leadership, competence, and character," added Madrigal. 32

JUST JOMA, 7 OTHERS LEFT ON LIST

600 'TERRORISTS' STRICKEN OFF REVISED DOJ PETITION VS REDS

By Kimberlie Quitasol
@kquitasolINQ

BAGUIO CITY—The Department of Justice (DOJ) has removed about 600 individuals and groups from a list of "terrorists" in a petition it filed last year to declare the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), as "terrorist and outlawed organizations."

In an amended petition it submitted to the Manila Regional Trial Court (RTC) Branch 19 on Jan. 3, the DOJ kept on its terrorist list CPP founding chair Jose Maria Sison, alleged NPA National Operations Command chief Jorge Madlos, alleged NPA southern Luzon commander Jaime Padilla and alleged CPP Visayas Commission head Francisco Fernandez.

Also included on the much shorter list were alleged Visayas CPP deputy secretary Cleofe Lagtapon, alleged CPP Mindanao Commission secretary Antonio Cabanatan and alleged Mindanao NPA leaders Leonido Nabong and Myrna Sularte.

Among those removed from the original Feb. 21, 2017, DOJ proscription petition were Joan Carling, who was bestowed the title 2018 Champion of the Earth by the UN Environment Program, UN special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples Victoria Tauli-Corpuz and five Baguio-based activists, including Jeanette Ribaya-Cawiding.

Cawiding, former chair of urban poor group Tongtongan ti Umili and a coordinator for the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), said the amended petition only removed the immediate danger of being tagged as terrorists.

"This is a partial victory, but we cannot let our guard down," Cawiding said.

Gov't spying

Government spying on political groups and nongovernment organizations remained a threat to free speech and the assertion of human rights, she said.

She cited the profiling of ACT members by the police, which was justified by the December 2018 Executive Order No. 70 that created, among other things, a national security task force to end the 50-year-old communist insurgency.

The DOJ petition followed President Duterte's move to clamp down on leftist groups after he terminated the peace talks between the government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) in November 2017.

It was also in accordance with the Human Security Act of 2007 (Republic Act No. 9372), which requires a court order to declare the CPP and the NPA as terrorists.

If the court grants the petition, the government could monitor people and groups more closely, track their finances and restrict their access to resources.

UN appeal to Duterte

The United Nations had defended Carling and Corpuz and called on the Duterte administration to drop them from the list.

Corpuz chaired the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues before she was appointed special rapporteur in 2014, a post she was to hold until 2020.

The Manila RTC has already ordered the DOJ to remove Corpuz and former Baguio Councilor Jose Molintas from its list.

Windel Bolinget, another Baguio activist who was on the DOJ list, said the government wanted the proscription of the CPP and the NPA "as soon as possible."

"Once the court issues that order, the government could once more link people they suspect as [members of] front organizations of the communist rebellion. This is the danger," said Bolinget, chair of the indigenous peoples rights group, Cordillera Peoples Alliance.

Sherwin de Vera, a regional coordinator for environmental group Defend Ilocos and a provincial journalist, was also removed from the list.

But Bishop Vermilon Tagalog of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, chair of the group's regional coordinating committee, said he still feared for De Vera's safety.

"The mere existence of the DOJ petition remains a clear threat because of the continued communist-tagging of activists and progressive organizations by President Duterte," Tagalog added. —WITH A REPORT FROM INQUIRER RESEARCH INQ

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OFFENSIVES

NPA REBS BURN ROAD EQUIPMENT IN KUDARAT

By Edwin O. Fernandez
@inqmindanao

ISULAN, SULTAN KUDARAT— Suspected communist rebels torched heavy equipment being used for road construction in the upland village of Hinalaan in Kalamansig, Sultan Kudarat, a police report said.

Chief Supt. Eliseo Tam Rasco, police regional director for the Soccsksargen region, told the Inquirer that gunmen in fatigues, believed to be New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas and numbering about 20, arrived at the construction site of Janmerc Construction Co. at 4:50 a.m. Monday and set ablaze several construction equipment.

Rasco said authorities counted at least eight pieces of heavy equipment set on fire by the rebels.

Seven of the construction equipment were torched in the village center of Hinalaan while a backhoe was burned in another location in the same village.

Among the burned equipment were payloaders, cement mixer, cargo truck, road roller, dump truck and backhoe.

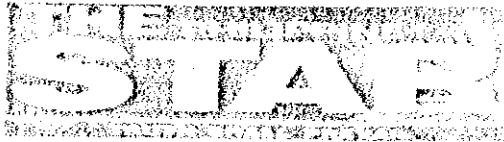
Marines

Rasco said policemen and Marines had been deployed to Hinalaan, one of the upland villages of the coastal town of Kalamansig where communist rebels operate.

Janmerc construction firm is completing a road concreting project from Ninoy Aquino to Kalamansig, both in Sultan Kudarat province.

A police official said the communist rebels have been "mulcting" the construction firm, demanding revolutionary taxes and "protection money" so it can continue road construction. *AP*

The demand was repeatedly denied by the firm management. INQ



Local execs warned vs supporting leftist groups

By GILBERT BAYORAN

BACOLOD CITY – Local chief executives have been warned against extending material and political support to rebel groups.

Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año issued the warning in memorandum circular No. 2018-211, tasking the local peace councils to recommend sanctions against local officials supporting the communist rebels.

Año cited a provision of Republic Act 10168, or the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act of 2012, that "any person who, directly or indirectly, willfully and without lawful excuse, possesses, provides, collects or uses property or funds, or makes available property, funds or financial service, or related services by any means to carry out or facilitate the commission of any terrorist act by a terrorist organization, or by an individual terrorist, shall suffer a maximum period of reclusion perpetua and a fine not less than P1 million."

Any person who organizes or directs others to commit financing of terrorism shall likewise be guilty of similar offense and meted corresponding penalty, Año said.

He added the law was fur-

ther reinforced by the pronouncement of President Duterte that local chief executives should not give any aid to rebel groups.

Col. Benedict Arevalo, commander of the Army's 303rd Infantry Brigade here, said even before the issuance of memorandum order by DILG, they have been requesting some government officials, suspected to be aiding communist rebels, to stop.

Arevalo said Año, former Armed Forces chief, may have been aware that there are some local officials sympathetic to the rebels, prompting him to remind peace and order councils to recommend sanctions against erring officials.

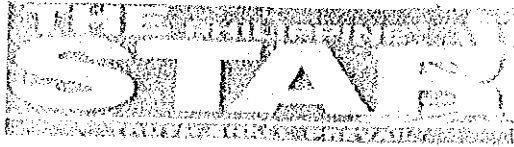
Meanwhile, Senior Supt. Romeo Baleros, newly designated officer-in-charge of the Negros Occidental Police Provincial Office, urged politicians not to use policemen as bodyguards during the campaign period.

Baleros said policemen have many jobs to perform, especially during the campaign period leading up to the May 13 local elections.

Baleros suggested hiring former policemen and retired military men, most of whom are being hired as consultants of private security agencies.

— With Cecille Suerte Felipe

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Gov't using drones in anti-insurgency campaign

By ALEXIS ROMERO

Government forces are using drones and helicopters provided by the United States and Israel to determine the location of communist rebels, President Duterte said.

Duterte said the drones made it easy for the military to pinpoint rebel locations as targets but he refused to do so to avoid harming civilians.

"Many are helping us, Israel, US. I can see you because of the drones and helicopter. They want me to take you from above. I stopped them from doing so," Duterte said during a forum on small businesses in Dimasalang, Masbate last Wednesday.

"I said, no need. Just ask the soldiers to meet with them. They might be convinced to surrender," he added.

Duterte said communist rebels should find another enemy and stop fighting fellow Filipinos. He promised to provide livelihood training to rebels who return to mainstream society and to implement the land reform program.

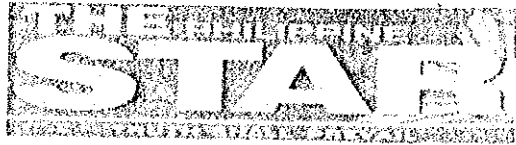
Despite his readiness to accept rebel returnees, Duterte threatened to arm civilians if the violent activities of the communist New People's Army (NPA) intensify.

"If the ambushes continue, my people will be forced to respond. Then I'll be forced to order the arming of everyone," Duterte said. "Just relax or we will have a big problem. I just can't stand here while my policemen and soldiers are dying."

Armed Forces of the Philippines-Public Affairs Office chief Col. Noel Detoyato said military helicopters and other air assets with day and night ground surveillance capabilities are now being used to track the location of rebels.

He added the military's deployment of its air assets for anti-insurgency operations is making it more difficult for the NPA rebels to move around in large numbers.

"Aside from our ground troops, we already have an eye in the sky against these insurgents," Detoyato said. - With Jaime Laude, Edith Regalado



Rody wants Masbate under land reform

President Duterte has vowed to place Masbate under land reform to address communist insurgency.

"I will implement land reform in Masbate. Believe me, with or without the communists, we can. I still have three years. I will distribute all the lands owned by the government," the President said at a forum of small businesses in Dimasalang town on Wednesday.

"I will tell DAR (Department of Agrarian Reform) Secretary (John) Castricio-nes to study it. We will distribute everything. By the end of my term, all government lands would have been distributed," Duterte said.

Castricio-nes said he would call a meeting of DAR officials to come up with a plan to implement the President's order.

Last November, Duterte said he is studying the possibility of placing Negros island under land reform as he ex-

pressed concern over the "incessant" recruitment of New People's Army (NPA) rebels.

Duterte slammed communist rebels anew, saying their armed struggle has claimed the lives of many innocent people. He said communist insurgency also failed to gain public support.

In Occidental Mindoro, seven communist rebels, who are members of the Mangyan tribal community, surrendered to the military in Sitio Culasasi, Barangay Batong Buhay, Sablayan.

Lt. Col. Mario Lito Retirva, 76th Infantry Battalion commander, said the surrenderees were involved in extortion and killings perpetrated by the NPA.

On Tuesday, soldiers recovered three M16 rifles buried by NPA rebels in a forested area in Sitio Kabilugan, Barangay San Vicente, Abra de Ilog also in Occidental Mindoro. — Alexis Romero, Ed Amoroso

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ACT: Teachers not criminals or terrorists

By Kimmy Baraoidan
and Jeannette I. Andrade
@Team_Inquirer

LOS BAÑOS, LAGUNA— Teachers are not enemies of the state who sow crime and terror to bring down the government, a coordinator of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) in Southern Tagalog said on Thursday.

"Teachers are not criminals or terrorists," said Alexander Joshua Villalon, coordinator of the Division of Cabuyao City, as he condemned the profiling of ACT members by the Philippine National Police at a press conference at the University of the Philippines-Los Baños (UPLB) campus here.

The ACT Region IV-A Union is a legal organization recognized by the Civil Service Commission and the Department of Education, he said.

In a statement, the group said it documented several profiling incidents in Rizal, Quezon and Laguna provinces involving school visits by policemen to inquire about certain ACT members.

"This kind of intimidation should not be done to teachers or to any sector," Villalon said.

Despite these, the group said "no form of harassment and repression can possibly stop the organization from expanding and establishing strongholds in different schools nationwide, especially in time of economic crises."

like the NPA. Everything that ACT Region IV-A does is in accordance with the law," Herrera added.

In a recent Inquirer report, PNP Director General Oscar Albayalde said the profiling of teachers was part of police efforts to end the communist insurgency.

But ACT insists that the group does not serve as a front for the Communist Party of the Philippines or its armed wing, the New People's Army.

'A big joke'

"If we are infiltrated by the CPP-NPA, then most probably we are not here," Villalon said.

"We are teachers who are teaching students from elementary to college. This is a big joke," he added.

After the press conference, the ACT contingent proceeded to an area near the main gate of the UPLB campus and held up banners to protest the profiling of ACT members.

But Albayalde on Thursday said that his men had not violated any law in tracking the movements of ACT members.

Activist group

"ACT is known for being an activist group," said Maricel Herrera, secretary of the ACT Region IV-A Union.

"We do not understand why the PNP thinks that if you are an activist and if you are fighting for your rights, you are a member of a leftist group

At a press conference in Camp Crame, Albayalde said: "These are not spying. These are merely intelligence gathering [operations]."

"There is no provision in the Constitution or in the law that prohibits anybody, specifically the PNP or the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) as a law enforcement agency, [from gathering] intelligence information," he added.

Albayalde explained that intelligence gathering was inherent in the PNP's mandate, particularly in operations against persons of interest and suspects.

He clarified that not all 2,000 members of the ACT were subjects of "intelligence gathering" operations. INQ

PNP ready to explain 'profiling' of ACT members

By EMMANUEL TUPAS

There is nothing wrong with "profiling" members of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), the Philippine National Police (PNP) said yesterday.

The PNP also expressed readiness to

explain the issue before the National Privacy Commission (NPC).

PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde said they will give their side to the NPC, which sought an explanation from them on the reported profiling of members of the militant teachers' group.

"We have not violated anything here," Albayalde told a news briefing.

Albayalde insisted there was nothing wrong with what they are doing, saying the intelligence gathering on ACT members is part of their mandate as a law enforcement agency.

"There is no provision in the Constitution or in the law that prohibits anybody, specifically the Philippine National Police or Armed Forces of the Philippines as a law enforcement agency, to gather intelligence information," he said.

According to Albayalde, they would not have conducted the profiling were it not for Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founder Jose Maria Sison admitting ACT is one of their legal front organizations.

Albayalde was referring to a video uploaded on YouTube, showing a much younger Sison mentioning ACT as among the legal democratic forces in the country.

"It was announced by no less than Mr. Sison on YouTube that these are all their legal fronts. Not only ACT, but there are other groups as well, so who is lying here," Albayalde said.

Albayalde allayed fears from critics who accused them of launching a crackdown.

He said ACT members have nothing

to be afraid of as long as they are not committing illegal acts.

"If you are a law-abiding citizen, you don't have to fear anything," he said.

The ACT accused the PNP of sending personnel to schools to gather information about its members.

ACT said PNP had issued two memoranda directing its personnel to conduct an inventory of all public and private school teachers who are "members of or aligned with ACT." The visits send a "chilling effect" on teachers, the group added.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo maintained it is not the policy of the government to conduct surveillance on teachers.

Panelo also claimed the government was not behind the "red tagging" of other groups, such as the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP).

Last week, three Manila-based tabloids published stories claiming the NUJP has ties with communist rebels. The reports quoted an alleged former rebel as saying that communist rebels are running the NUJP, which has about 500 members.

A day after the tabloids published the story, the state-run Philippine News Agency (PNA) came up with an article about a group of former rebels that wanted to know whether NUJP is a legal front of the rebels.

NUJP said the PNA article had confirmed suspicions that the government is behind the "nefarious" effort to link its members with rebels. The group also claimed that the red tagging is an orchestrated effort to silence journalists.

Panelo yesterday called the NUJP "paranoid."

"Perhaps they are just paranoid. *Wala* (none), there is no such thing. PCOO (Presidential Communications Operations Office) will not do that. (The) PNP does not do that also," Panelo said.

Panelo echoed Albayalde's statements in saying profiling is part of intelligence work of the police and there is nothing wrong with it.

"If you are not doing anything, they don't have to worry," the spokesman said.

— Alexis Romero

Davao authorities update 'Ewas' list for mid-term polls

By IVY C. TEJANO and MIKE U. CRISMUNDO

DAVAO CITY – Authorities in the Davao region are already updating and validating the previous list of Election Watch list Areas (Ewas) that has been identified in the 2018 Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections (BSKEs) as the country gears up for the 2019 mid-term polls.

Police Regional Office (PRO) 11 spokesman Chief Inspector Jason Baria said there were 2,025 total barangays in the authorities' Ewas list during in 2018 elections. He added that the changes will be made after the validation of the previous list.

"As of now, there are no identified election hotspots here in Davao region. It [The list] is still the same," Baria said, adding that under the watch list, areas in the region are still identified under three categories to specify the level of concerns.

Inclusion into the list would include intense political rivalry, the presence of armed groups, activities of criminal gangs, proliferation of loose firearms, and activities of threat groups.

Areas included under Category 1 are barangays where politically motivated violent incidents are likely to occur due to intense partisan political rivalries.

Baria said the occurrence of violence could be due to the presence of private armed groups (PAGs), loose firearms, and the availability of force multipliers like gun-for-hire gangs and other armed groups.

He said villages in Category 2, on the other hand, have serious armed threats posed by organized threat groups including the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA), BIFM/BIFE, the Abu Sayyaf Group, and rogue elements of the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

Meanwhile, areas in Category 3 are places where risks found in the first two categories exist.

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) may place areas placed in Category 4 under its immediate and direct control, following the history of intense political rivalries among the candidates, serious armed threats, fraud or other election irregularities and threats that tend to disrupt the hold-

ing of free, peaceful, honest, orderly and credible elections in any political unit or area.

Data obtained from PRO-11 showed that Davao City has seven districts placed under Category 2; Davao del Sur has three municipalities under Category 1 and another 3 under Category 2/3, respectively; two municipalities in Davao Occidental under Category 2; eight in Davao del Norte under Category 2; 11 in Compostela Valley under Category 2; and six in Davao Oriental under Category 2.

No exemption to gun ban

CAMP COL. RAFAEL C. RODRIGUEZ, Butuan City -- The regional command of Northeastern Mindanao Police Regional Office 13 (PRO 13) warned yesterday all candidates in the upcoming mid-term elections that nobody will be exempted from the election gun ban that is set to begin on Sunday, Jan. 13, 2019. The six-month election gun ban will end on June 12, 2019.

During the election gun ban, all licenses to carry firearms outside of residences are suspended.

Only members of the Philippine National Police (PNP), Armed Forces

of the Philippines (AFP), National Bureau of Investigation and other law enforcement units who are on duty are issued written permits by the Comelec to carry firearms.

The regional command of PRO 13 reminded the candidates as well as the general public to abide by the election gun ban, particularly civilians who are not authorized to carry guns.

"We are appealing to the different candidates in any party group or individual in this midterm election to safe-keep or to surrender their firearms to the police station near them," PRO 13 Regional Director Chief Supt. Gilberto DC Cruz said.

The region's police chief already ordered field unit commanders to intensify checkpoints, as well as police visibility in their respective areas of responsibility during the campaign and election period.

The officials and members of the Regional Joint Security Coordinating Committee (RJSCC) in Northeastern Mindanao or Caraga region are set to reconvene to tackle pressing issues and guidelines in relation to the May polls rules and regulations in an effort to achieve a peaceful and orderly election. 12

8 more NPAs surrender in Mindoro

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

Another eight members of the New People's Army (NPA) who belong to the Mangyan tribe surrendered to government authorities in Oriental Mindoro over the weekend.

A report from the Army's 2nd Infantry Division Public Affairs Office said the eight rebels to the Community Support Program (CSP) troops of the 76th Infantry Battalion (76th IB) in Sitio Culasisi, Barangay Batong Buhay, Sablayan, last Sunday.

Lt. Col. Mario Lito Retirva, 76th IB commander, said the surrenderers served as NPA contacts in the villages.

"They also operate along with the NPA regulars when the group is in need of additional manpower to conduct atrocities such as ambush, sniping, and extortions," Retirva said.

During interviews, the rebels admitted they held key positions in communist organizations, from the "Samahan ng Magsasaka" to "Samahan ng Kababaihan" and "Samahan ng Kabataan." These are organizations created by the rebels in barangays where they wield an influence.

Still in Mindoro, the 76th IB recovered on Tuesday three M16 rifles buried by the NPAs in the forested area of Sitio Kabilugan, Barangay San Vicente, Abra de Ilog, Occidental

Mindoro.

The location of the arms cache was revealed by former rebels who surrendered last December. Soldiers trekked for two days to reach the cache site.

Last October, two arms cache were also discovered by the 76th IB in Mindoro which led to the recovery of 12 high-powered firearms.

Col. Marceliano Teofilo, 203rd Infantry Brigade commander, who has operational jurisdiction over Mindoro island, said the events are clear signs that the NPA leadership in Mindoro is incompetent, their strength diminished, and they have lost control over their members.

US, Israel extend...

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US, Israel extend military aid to address Communist threat in PH

By GENALYN D. KABILING

The United States (US) and Israel have extended military assistance to the Philippines in addressing the threat of the Communist rebellion, President Duterte disclosed last Wednesday.

The President said helicopters and drones have been deployed to track down armed rebels although he has barred them from drop- ▶7

ping bombs on the enemies of the state.

"Maraming tumutulong... Israel, USA. Kaya nakikita kayo sa drone, helicopter. Gusto nila na titirahin kayo diyan sa taas. Ako lang ang tiga-pigil (There many helping us such as Israel and USA. You've probably seen the helicopters and drones. They want to blast you from above but I was the only who stopped them)," Duterte said during his visit to Masbate last Wednesday.

The President, who remained open to the possibility of resuming the peace talks, said he prefers the rebels to lay down their arms and surrender to authorities.

"Sabi ko, huwag na. Pasa-lubungin mo na lang ng sundalo, baka makumbinsi mo pang mag-surrender (I told them not to. Just deploy the soldiers on the ground and hopefully they will be convinced to surrender instead)," he added.

Duterte has offered to give the rebels housing and livelihood assistance if they surrender to the government. He reiterated that the communist movement was a failed rebellion that only led to deaths and misery of people.

"Sumurrender kayo. Bigyan ko kayo ng lupa, i-land reform ko nina (to at italayuan ko kayo ng bahay (You should surrender. I will give you land. I place it under land reform and build houses for you)," he said.

"At for the meantime napinag-aralan ninyo paano maghanap-buhay, papapasukin ko dito ang TESDA, (yung livelihood, electricians, tapos ang DSWD kung ano pang matulong nila (And for the meantime, you can learn job skills. I'll enroll you at the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority to learn livelihood, become electricians. The Department of Social Welfare and Development can also assist you)," he said.

He also hit back at communist leader Jose Sison for duping the people to join his rebellion. He told the rebels to use their head and realize Sison was not a good leader.

"Kung bright 'yang leader ninyo si Sison bakit ako ang Presidente hindi siya? Eh gamitin utak ninyo. (If Sison is a bright leader, why am I the President not him? You should use your head)," he said.

Meanwhile, President Duterte is considering the "arming of everyone" if the communist rebels would intensify atrocities against the government and the people.

The President said he could even be forced to acquire firearms for local government executives so they can help deal with the threat posed by the communist insurgency.

"Sinasabi ko lang sa NPA, ayaw kong armas ang mga tao. Pero 'pag sige ganun ang ano, I will allow the purchase of individual firearm (I'm telling the NPA, I don't want to arm the people but if they continue to attack, I will allow the purchase of individual firearms)," Duterte said during his visit to Masbate last Wednesday.

"Pati 'yung mga mayor bigyan ko 'yan ng armas talaga if they continue with this kind of... Mapipilitan talaga ako - siyempre kasi ang mga mayor they would feel naked without... Maskikaw naman makipag-giyera ka nang walang armas (I can also give weapons to the mayors if the rebels continue with this kind of... I will be forced to. Of course the mayors they would feel naked without arms, even you if you go to war without weapons)," he added.

Duterte made the proposal after urging anew rebels to stop their attacks against government troops and surrender to authorities instead.

He offered anew to resume the peace talks with the rebel group if they would end their atrocities.

Duterte wants to 'arm' Pinoys in war on Reds

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte is mulling the "arming of everyone" if the communist rebels continue their hostilities against innocent civilians and government forces.

By Aron A2

ARM FROM A1

Duterte

In a speech at the birthday celebration of Masbate Gov. Antonio Kho on Wednesday, Duterte said he could be forced to allow the purchase of individual firearms to help deal with the threat posed by the communist insurgency.

"Sinasabi ko lang sa NPA, ayaw kong armasang ang mga tao (I al-

ready told the NPA, I don't want to arm the public). *Pero 'pag sige ganun ang ano* (But if they continue their atrocities), I will allow the purchase of individual firearms," he added.

The NPA (New People's Army) is the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

Duterte added that he would also give high-caliber firearms to local government officials if the communist rebels sustained their

attacks on troops and civilians.

"Pati 'yung mga mayor bigyan ko 'yan ng armas talaga... if they continue with this kind of... Mapipilitan talaga ako, siyempre kasi ang mga mayor they would feel naked without... Maski ikaw naman makipag-giyera ka nang walang armas (I can also give weapons to the mayors if the rebels continue with this kind of... I will be forced to. Of course the mayors they would feel naked without arms, even

you, you won't go to war without weapons)," he said.

But Duterte said he was willing to talk peace with the rebel group if they would end their attacks against government troops.

"If they can tone down, walang ambush, walang patay ang pulis ko, sundalo ko, pwede pa kaming mag-usap (If they can tone down, stop the ambush, killing of my policemen and soldiers, we can still talk)," he added.

Peace negotiations between the government and communist rebels bogged down in November last year after Duterte denounced continued attacks by the rebels on troops and civilians.

The President has since been issuing tirades against communist leaders such as founding chairman Jose Maria Sison, calling their decades-old Maoist rebellion a "failed dream."

CATHERINE S. VALENTE

8 back-up groups of NPA operating in Occidental Mindoro surrender

By Francisco Tuyay

AT LEAST eight active back-up groups of the New People's Army operating in the hinterlands of Sablayan town in Occidental Mindoro voluntarily surrendered to the military while an operative was arrested in Nueva Ecija.

Capt. Patrick Jay Retumban, Public Affairs officer of the 2nd Infantry Division based in Camp Capinpin, Tanay, Rizal, said

the surrender of the support group also resulted in the recovery of arms cache in Sitio Culasis, Barangay Batong Buhay, Sablayan.

He said the surrenderers belonged to the Mangyan tribe that the NPA was using under its "Milisyang Bayan."

"They also operate along with the NPA regulars when the group is in need of additional manpower to conduct atrocities such as ambush, sniping, and extortion," said Lt.

Col. Mario Lito Retirva, commander of the 76th Infantry Battalion.

Retumban said the arms cache consisted of three M16 rifles which were buried by the NPA in the forested area of Sitio Kabilugan, Barangay San Vicente, Abra de Ilog town.

The discovery of the said firearms was facilitated by former NPA rebels who surrendered to the military last December.

"Soldiers trek two days before reaching

said arms cache," said Retirva.

The surrenderers admitted holding several key positions from the "Samahan ng Magsasaka," "Samahan ng Kababaihan," and "Samahan ng Kabataan," organizations created by the CPP-NPA.

Maj. Gen. Rhoderick Parayno, commander of the Army's 2nd Infantry Division, said "it's a great kick-off for the new year. This decision in choosing to live a peaceful life is right."

'Courier' ng NPA, dinampot sa Ecija

DAGUPAN CITY - Inaresto ng mga tauhan ng Northern Luzon Command (NOLCOM) ang isang umano'y courier ng New People's Army (NPA) sa Rizal, Nueva Ecija, kamakailan.

Sa pahayag ng NOLCOM, hindi na nakapalag ng rebeldeng kinilala lamang sa "Ka Pui", nang dakmain ito ng grupo ng 703rd Infantry Battalion (IB) ng Philippine Army (PA) sa Barangay Paco Roman sa nasabing bayan, nitong Enero 8 ng umaga.

Ang nasabing rebelde ay contact person din ng mga kaanib ng Kilusan Sierra Madre, ayon sa militar.

Sinalakay ang pinagtataguan nito sa bisa ng search warrant na ipinalabas ni Executive Judge Ana Marie Joson-Viterbo, ng Regional Trial Court of Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija, sa kasong paglabag sa Republic Act 10591 (Comprehensive Law on Firearms and Ammunitions).

Nakunipiska sa nasabing rebelde ang isang cal. 45 pistol, isang magazine assembly ng cal. 45, isang stainless magazine assembly ng naturang baril at isa pang magazine ng M16 armalite rifle.

Liezle Basa Iñigo



NPA CAMPS GUSTONG BAGSAKAN NG BOMBA

Pinigilan lang ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte ang militar na bagsakan ng bomba ang mga kampo ng New People's Army (NPA) upang maubos na ang mga ito.

Aniya, kung wala lamang sanang sibilyan na madadamay ay matagal na niyang iniutos na hulugan ng bomba ang mga NPA dahil nakikita naman sila sa pamamagitan ng drone ang

NI RUDY ANDAL

kanilang mga kampo.

"Nakikita kayo sa drone, helicopter. Gusto nila na titirahin kayo diyan sa taas. Ako lang ang tiga-pigil. Sabi ko,

huwag na. Pasalubugin mo na lang ng sundalo, baka makumbinsi mo pa mag-surrender," wika pa ni Pangulong Duterte sa kanyang mensahe kamakalawa sa Masbate.

The waging of war kinokontrol ko 'yan. Lalo na paggamit ng bomba. Kasi alam mo pagka bomba, bomba. Kung i-landing diyan 'yang isa, ubos tayo dito lahat. Eh paano 'yung

mga civilian? Kasi kung wala lang civilian, medyo matagal na sigurong malinis ito. Hulugan ko na lang ng bomba," paliwanag pa ni Pangulong Duterte.

Hinimok muli ni Duterte ang mga NPA na sumuko na lamang sa pamahalaan at nangako siyang bibigyan niya ang mga ito ng disentang pabahay at livelihood assistance. 2

Pagbomba sa NPA kontra ang Pangulo

Iginiliit ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte na, kung ginusto lamang niyang lipulin ang mga miyembro ng New Peoples Army (NPA) na nagtatago sa kabundukan, ay matagal nang naubos ang mga ito kung pumayag lamang siyang hulugan ng bomba ang

mga ito.

Sinabi ni Pangulong Duterte na hindi siya pumayag sa kagustuhan ng militar na bombahin na lamang ang mga kampo ng NPA na nasa kabundukan upang tuluyang maubos na ang mga rebeldeng komunista.

Aniya, kung wala lamang sanang sibilyan na madadamay ay matagal na niyang iniutos na hulugan ng bomba ang mga NPA dahil nakikita naman sa pamamagitan ng drone ang kanilang mga kampo.

"Nakikita kayo sa drone, helicopter. Gusto

nila na tilirahin kayo dyan sa taas. Ako lang ang taga-pigil. Sabi ko, huwag na. Pasalubungin mo na lang ng sundalo, baka makumbinsi mo pa mag-surrender," wika pa ni Pangulong Duterte sa kanyang mensahe kamakalawa sa Masbate. (Rudy Andal)

Maguindanao governor narrowly escapes bomb attack

By ALI G. MACABALANG

COTABATO CITY – An improvised explosive device (IED) was discovered in a village in Rajah Buayan town hours before the visit of Maguindanao Gov. Esmail Mangudadatu and other provincial officials to render assorted outreach services.

Residents found the IED past 9:30 a.m. Wednesday by the roadside in Barangay Tabungao where the governor and his party were scheduled to visit, according to civilian and military officials.

Responding Army ordnance experts, who successfully disarmed the IED before the visiting party's arrival, said the explosive was designed for "strong impact" because it was fashioned out of three combined 81mm mortar shells with a triggering device for activation from a distance.

Host Rajah Buayan Mayor Zamzamin Ampatuan praised Gov. Mangudadatu and his party for pushing through with their visit despite the discovery of the bomb.

In text messages, Mayor Ampatuan admitted receiving earlier unverified information about a plan to bomb field events that would be attended by the governor and his younger brother, provincial mayors' league president Freddie Mangudadatu. The latter is the administration's gubernatorial candidate for Maguindanao in the May 2019 elections.

"Matagal nang may information ibinigay sa akin na mag-ingat ang key

political leaders sa kampo ni Governor Toto (Mangudadatu) dahil may gagawa ng pambobomba sa events na dadaluhan nila," Ampatuan said.

The Mangudadatus officiated past noon Wednesday three events at Barangay Tabungao – the turnover of a two-classroom school building constructed by the provincial government at the Pidsalenggian Elementary School, the surrender of loose firearms from some residents, and the conduct of a medical mission for villagers.

Lyenette Estandarte, provincial medical team focal person, said 600 classroom pupils received a corresponding number of school bags alongside 200 pairs of slippers and 200 hygiene kits.

Adult villagers received free health services and medicines and 600 food packs, while resident farmers were given 10 bags of rice seeds and 10 sacks of corn seeds, she said.

Estandarte said Gov. Mangudadatu delivered a brief message, reiterating his advocacy for his constituents to seek formal education not only to abate high illiteracy rate in Maguindanao but also to foster a bright future among the youth.

"Islam obliges us to seek knowledge... The youth can prosper only after gaining education, something that can make them future leaders... But education should lead one towards the right path in Islam, not the way of those who erred and earned the wrath of Allah (God)," Estandarte quoted the governor as saying. 12

Two bomb plots foiled

Maguindanao governor among terrorists' targets

By Francisco Tuyay, Nash B. Maulana and Vito Barcelo

GOVERNMENT troops foiled two bomb attacks in Maguindanao and Cotabato provinces, military officials said Wednesday.

In the town of Radjah Buayan, Maguindanao, soldiers defused an improvised explosive device where Maguindanao Gov. Esmarel Mangudadatu was to turn over a school building in the company of some family members, officials and a medical mission.

Brig. Gen. Diosdado Carreon, commander of 601st Infantry Brigade, said military personnel on security duty discovered a bundle of three live 81 mm mortar shells wrapped in a plastic bag, apparently planted to go off during the ceremony. *Next page*

Two bomb...

From A1

The governor continued with the scheduled turnover despite the bomb threat.

Soldiers, meanwhile, seized anti-personnel mines from two Islamic State-inspired terrorists in the town of Sultan sa Barongis in Maguindanao.

Major Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of Joint Task Force Central, said the land mines were recovered by troops of the 40th Infantry Battalion after a five-minute gunfight with terrorists.

The mines were made of three unexploded 81 mm mortar shells with a triggering device, and taken from two members of the Dawlah Islamiya Toraype Group under Salahudin Hassan, Sobejana said.

He said the soldiers had been tipped off that the explosive devices were being moved to Cotabato City or Midsayap, North

Cotabato for a terror attack in an urban area.

"After the bombing in Cotabato City, I instructed the men of our Joint Task Force Central to be on heightened alert to prevent more bomb attacks in Central Mindanao," Sobejana said, as he commended the troops for their fast action.

On New Year's Eve, an improvised explosive device planted by suspected fighters of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters went off outside the South Seas Mall in Cotabato City killing two people and injuring dozens.

Ten days after the explosion, a suspect, Salipudin Pasandalan, 56, surrendered to the authorities but his cohorts are still being hunted.

Chief Supt. Eliseo Rasco, director of Police Regional Office-12, said two counts of murder and 34 counts of frustrated murder were filed against Pasandalan and a certain Saed Odin Kasin, who is still at large.

The Commission on Elections said

Wednesday it is considering putting Cotabato City and the municipality of Daraga in Albay province under its control due to the bomb attack in Cotabato and the killing of Ako Bicol Rep. Rodel Batocabe in Daraga.

Comelec chairman Sheriff Abas said the Comelec en banc received recommendations to place the two areas under its control to prevent more violence before the May elections and to ensure the safety of candidates and voters.

Areas under Comelec control will be secured by a task force headed by one of the commissioners of the poll body and the regional commander of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police and will be in charge of the area's security management.

The Comelec official said should the two areas are placed under the poll body's control, the AFP, in coordination with the PNP, can start deploying troops there. **With PNA**

PEACE DEAL SOON?

Galvez draws MNLF back to table

The MNLF and the people of Sulu fully support Federalism but are against BOL

By Porsous Echeminada

President Rodrigo Duterte's appointment of former AFP Chief of Staff Carlito Galvez quickly spelled boon on government's effort to draw the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) back to the peace table.

Two days after Mr. Duterte's announcement of Galvez as his new peace adviser, the MNLF also bared it will regroup through a general assembly of most Tausug civic, youth and political leaders to tackle their stand on the proposed Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

This despite the MNLF's refusal to accept the BOL as it has a standing agreement with government for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

(ARMM) forged between its founding chairman Nur Misuari and former President Fidel Ramos.

The MNLF assembly will also tackle issues concerning the proposed shift from unitary to a federal form of government.

Emmanuel Fontanilla, MNLF spokesman, told *Daily Tribune* a 7 July schedule is being looked at to get the sentiment of Tausug Muslims in Sulu, Basilan and Tawi Tawi.

"The MNLF and the people of Sulu fully support Federalism but (are) against BOL," he said.

Fontanilla also bared establishing contact with Galvez for the possible resumption of the peace talks aimed at the full implementation of the 1996 peace agreement that was abandoned by former President Benigno Simoon Aquino III.

Earlier, President Duterte had announced willingness to enter a new round of talks with Misuari.

"With the appointment of rethred General Carlito Galvez as the new

peace adviser, we are optimistic that MNLF and government panel will soon return to the negotiating table," Fontanilla said

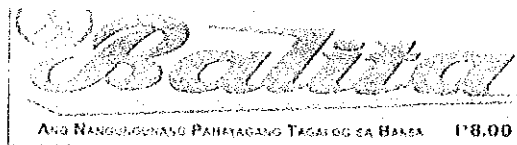
Fontanilla added the resumption of the peace talks with government will be confined to three still unresolved issues for the final implementation of the accord which was brokered by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

The government and MNLF panel were in the final stage of a peace deal when Aquino abandoned the talks.

Among the remaining issues hanging are about governance, wealth sharing and territory.

Fontanilla earlier had said although they oppose the BOL, they will just counter it through a no vote in the referendum.

Government had entered into a peace deal with the Moro International Liberation Front (MILF) an offshoot of the MNLF in the 1990s, that led to the crafting of the BOL.



Abu Sayyaf member, sumuko

Sumurendersa pamahalaan ang isang umano'y miyembro ng Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), kasama ang dalawa nitong anak sa Sulu, kamakailan.

Sinabi ni Lt. Col. Ronaldo Mateo, commanding officer ng 32nd Infantry Battalion (IB) ng Philippine Army (PA), si Abdulbaki Boyohan, 53, ay sumuko sa Camp Bud Datu, Indanan, Sulu.

Binanggit ni Mateo, si Boyohan ay supporter ng bandidong si Idang Susukan.

Matatandaang nagbalik-loob sa

gobyerno ang dalawang anak ni Boyohan na sina Ban Baki Rajili at Padi Kali, noong Disyembre ng nakaraang taon.

Isinuko rin ni Boyohan ang armas nito an M79 grenade launcher at mga bala nito.

Kaugnay nito, umaasa namansi Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom) chief, Lt. Gen. Arnel Dela Vega, na mas marami pang bandido ang susuko sa pamahalaan sa susunod na mga araw.

Fer Taboy

Stay away from politicians, Caggu members warned

ARMED Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr. on Thursday warned militiamen they would face prosecution if they allow themselves to be used by politicians during the 2019 midterm elections or during the plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

Madrigal said all Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (Caggu) members are under the operational control of military commanders and as such, they will be punished within the bounds of military law.

The AFP chief said they could also be criminally charged in civilian courts.

"They cannot be used by the politicians. [We are] very strict especially with the security coverage during the campaign period," the military chief told reporters in a news conference at Camp Crame, Quezon City, alongside Philippine National Police chief Oscar Albayalde and Commission on Elections Chairman Shariff Abas.

Abas and Madrigal were in Camp

Crame to hold with Albayalde the tri-agency conference in preparation for the BOL plebiscite on January 21 and February 6, and the midterm elections on May 13, 2019.

Madrigal said the Armed Forces would not provide any soldiers as security for a candidate, unless approved by the Comelec.

"What we are doing is actually providing area security to all candidates while they are in the conduct of the campaign or the whole exercise to make sure that they will be moving

around freely without threat from any group," he said.

According to Madrigal, 10,400 soldiers have been deployed in the covered areas, with a standby force prepared as well. **AB**

The BOL plebiscite on January 21 covers voters within the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao areas, Isabela City in Basilan and Cotabato City. Voting on February 6 are those residing in Lanao del Norte except Iligan City and six North Cotabato municipalities. **DEMPSEY REYES**

10,000 soldiers secure plebiscite

By Mario J. Mallari

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has deployed more than 10,000 troops in Mindanao to help ensure the peaceful holding of the plebiscite for the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

AFP chief of staff Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr. yesterday said 10,400 soldiers are now deployed in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the cities of Cotabato and Isabela in Basilan to help secure the area for the 21 January plebiscite.

The number of troops deployed is sufficient to address any contingencies

"We still have on standby (these troops) to ensure the peaceful conduct of the plebiscite," said Madrigal, who will personally visit military units in the area to ensure their readiness.

Madrigal said according to AFP-Western Mindanao Command chief Lt. Gen. Arnel de la Vega, the number of troops deployed is sufficient to address any contingencies.

"The AFP and PNP (Philippine National Police) are prepared for contingencies if ever," Madrigal said.

In particular, he said government security forces are on the lookout against threat groups and the "peace spoilers" operating in Mindanao.

"We have laid out all security measures. Martial law is in effect and we have added security measures and intelligence monitoring of these groups," Madrigal said.

Madrigal added the AFP is closely working with the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process for proper coordination with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The MILF is pushing for the ratification of the BOL which is the result of its decades-long peace negotiations with the government. Leaders of the MILF gave assurance they are committed to the peaceful conduct of the plebiscite and vowed to respect its results.

Earlier, PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde had said a battalion of the elite Special Action Force (SAF) will be sent to Cotabato City for the plebiscite.

It will be recalled that last New Year's Eve a bomb attack erupted at a shopping mall in Cotabato City -killing two persons while dozens of others were injured. There were suspicions the bombing was meant to derail the ratification of the BOL.

Comelec, law enforcers gear up for BOL plebiscite

By Francisco Tuyay

MILITARY and police officials met with the Commission on Elections Thursday to ensure the peaceful holding of a plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law this month and the mid-term elections in May.

In a joint statement, the Joint Peace and Security Coordinating Committee said they had lengthy

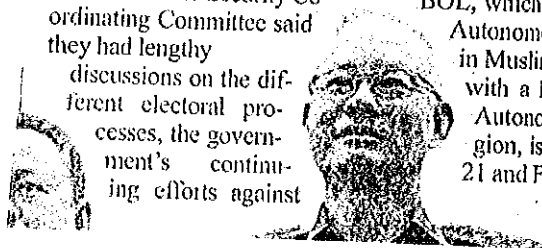
discussions on the different electoral processes, the government's continuing efforts against

loose and undocumented firearms and the nationwide gun ban imposed by the Comelec from Jan. 13 to June 12.

The group also discussed the ongoing campaign against private armed groups and efforts to preempt the outbreak of violence in areas where political rivalry is intense.

The plebiscite to ratify the BOL, which replaces the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao with a Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, is set for Jan. 21 and Feb. 6.

Next page



Comelec,...

From A1

On Thursday, Armed Forces chief of staff Gen. Benjamin Madrigal vowed to punish all members of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit or CAFGU who moonlight for politicians.

Madrigal's statement came after two rebel returnees who became members of the CAFGU carried out the assassination of Ako Bicol Party-list Rep. Rodol Batocabe.

"We make sure that if there are reports regarding some CAFGUs that are being utilized, we will act and make sure that they will be properly punished," Madrigal said.

Henry Yuson, the gunman in the killing of Batocabe, and Rolando Arimado, both former CAFGUs were among the six suspects tagged in the assassination.

CAFGUs are deployed all over the country and led by commanders under the direct supervision of the military.

"We will ensure that they will be non partisan and apolitical in this exercise," said Madrigal said, referring to the upcoming midterm elections in May.

"They are under the military justice system and aside from that they can be charged criminally depending on the gravity of violations they have committed," Madrigal added.

Madrigal said they are not just focused on midterm elections but also the BOL plebiscite in Mindanao with 10,400 troops scattered in Mindanao to ensure a peaceful plebiscite.

"Security measures are already in place, especially in the case of Mindanao and we have added security measures and intelligence monitoring of threat groups," Madrigal said.

Also on Thursday, Pulse Asia president Ronald Holmes said former senator Lito Lapid got a boost in his company's most recent opinion poll because he is in the top-rate TV show, "Ang Probinsyano."

Speaking to the ANC news channel, he also said Liberal Party stalwarts Manuel Roxas II and Paolo Benigno Aquino IV were pulled down by criticism leveled against their party by President Rodrigo Duterte.

"The so-called anti-dilawan, it's a factor," he said.

On the otherhand, Holmes said having a high ranking in the surveys was no guarantee of victory in the May elections.

"We've seen changes in the past, in the previous elections, where people in the first to seventh rank eventually go down in terms of electoral preference later because of strategies that are adopted by other candidates," he said on ANC's Headstart.

AFP, PNP handa na sa BOL plebiscite

Handang-handa na ang pinagsanib na elemento ng Armed Forces of the Philippines at Philippine National Police kaugnay ng gaganaping plebisito sa Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) sa ilang piling bahagi ng Mindanao sa Enero 21.

Ito ang nabatid kahapon matapos ang isinagawang Joint Security Coordinating Center meeting ng mga opisyal ng PNP, AFP at Commission on Elections sa Multi Purpose Hall ng Camp Crame na tinalakay ang ipatutupad na seguridad upang matiyak na magiging mapayapa ang plebisito sa BOL.

Ang unang plebisito sa BOL ay gaganapin sa Enero 21 na sasaklaw sa buong Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) at mga lungsod ng Isabela City, Basilan at Cotabato City.

Ang ikalawang plebisito ay idadaos naman sa Pebrero 6 sa lalawigan ng Lanao del Norte at North Cotabato. (Joy Cantos)

COMMONSENSE

MARICHU A. VILLANUEVA

Is there sense in common towers?

Long before he could assume his post in the Cabinet of President Rodrigo Duterte, Sen. Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan II may face loyalty test as Secretary of the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT). The loyalty check is not about his checkered past as an erstwhile rebel soldier before he became a politician.



It's more of how Honasan would settle the raging policy feud between two former superiors on the controversial common towers proposal with the entry of a third telecommunications company (telco) to operate in the Philippines.

The feud is between Ramon "RJ" Jacinto, presidential adviser on economic affairs and information technology communications and "acting" Department of Information and Communications Secretary (DICT) Secretary Eliseo Rio.

Rio's comments on the common tower have been deemed irrelevant by Jacinto. Jacinto was quoted saying: "The implementation of the policy will be done by incoming Sec. Honasan and the NTC, so Rio will have little or no say in it."

It was in response to Rio's social media post earlier when the "acting" DICT Secretary expressed grave concern over the draft common towers policy as proposed and being pushed by Jacinto. According to Rio, RJ's proposed policy faces possible challenge in court from telcos because it potentially violates their legislative franchise that gives them the right to build their own telecom infrastructure, including towers.

During the Cabinet meeting in Camarines Sur on Jan. 4, Jacinto argued, the President directed Rio not to be cowed by legal impediments that might delay things that need to be done to improve the services from the country's telco industry "and not to be afraid" of lawsuits and temporary restraining orders from courts.

Honasan will take over from Rio, his former senior officer when they were still together in the active service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Both were graduates of the Philippine Military Academy (PMA). Rio comes from PMA Class 1968 while Honasan is from PMA Class 1971.

Is this the looming blowback for Honasan as a result of the Jacinto-Rio feud?

On the other hand, Honasan previously worked as head of one of the sequestered companies owned by the Jacinto Group of Companies. The industrial conglomerate, owned by RJ's family, were among those run by elite military officers designated by former Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile during the martial law regime of the late president Ferdinand Marcos.

In a trial balloon so to speak, Jacinto staunchly proposed a common towers following the policy decision of President Duterte for a third telco. The third telco is sup-

posed to break up the existing duopoly of the country's two biggest telcos, namely the Philippine Long Distance and Telephone Co.-Smart Communications (PLDT-Smart) and the Ayala-owned Globe Telecommunications Company.

Initially, President Duterte gave this task to Rodolfo Salalima, his first DICT Secretary. Salalima, however, resigned from the Duterte Cabinet on Sept. 5, 2017 over alleged "conflict of interest" issues. The President would later admit he asked Salalima to resign because of complaints regarding his alleged preferential treatments to some "giant" telecommunication companies.

"There are many complaints so I asked someone to tell Rudy (Salalima) to resign. Many complained to me that he appeared to be partial because he's a former vice president of Globe. I'm not saying he's protecting other giant telecommunications in China [or] Singapore but there's no action [on his part]," the President explained.

On Sept. 21, Malacañang disclosed Salalima resigned because of "personal and work-related" reasons. Salalima, on the other hand, cited "corruption and interference" as reasons behind his resignation from office as he failed to deliver on the President's desire for a third telco to come in.

It was Rio who finally delivered the third telco after China-based Mislitel Corp. won the controversy-marred public bidding late last year. But before Rio could finish the task on the third telco, words came out about Honasan being tapped by President Duterte to be his permanent DICT Secretary.

On Nov. 20, the President officially appointed Honasan as DICT Secretary. Malacañang earlier expressed confidence that Honasan could effectively lead the DICT and implement genuine reforms, especially following the entry of the third telco player in the country.

Malacañang immediately submitted Honasan's nomination to the Commission on Appointments (CA) for his immediate confirmation. Nomination of Honasan and fellow newly appointed Cabinet officials suffered technical by-pass when the CA failed to confirm them before the 17th Congress adjourned for their month-long Christmas break.

Turning 71 years old this March, Honasan assumes the DICT post if he gets confirmed by his CA colleagues. As of this writing, Malacañang has yet to resubmit Honasan's nomination anew to the CA.

As far as confirmation is concerned, Honasan has nothing to worry about because he previously served as CA member. Besides, the 25-man bicameral body is chaired by Senate President Vicente Sotto III who happens to be Honasan's bosom buddy.

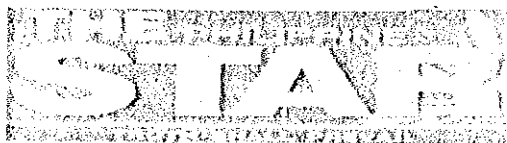
In his press conference at the Senate yesterday, Sotto rather gave ominous remarks that things are not going well for Honasan's assuming his DICT post. Sotto refused to elaborate and Honasan could not be squeezed to comment on the latest rumored developments of his DICT posting.

The President has repeatedly expressed his preference to appoint former military and police officials in key government posts because they get the job done fast and without complaint nor argument.

Is this the looming blowback for Honasan as a result of the Jacinto-Rio feud over common towers issue?

As I've known him, Honasan is someone who would do a lot of study before taking any definitive stand or action. The CA's technical by-pass is more of a blessing in disguise of sorts for Honasan while this common towers issue is not resolved yet.

But is there sense in pushing duopoly on common towers while President Duterte has already broken up the duopoly in the telco industry?



GOTCHA

JARIUS BONDOC



PNP priority should be to crush private armies

The public slaying of Rep. Rodel Batocabe last month won't be the last in this election season. The financial stakes are so high and murder-for-hire so easy. Politicos will resort to guns, goons and gold to get the upper hand. As of the Oct. 2018 deadline for filing of candidacies, 11 town mayors and six vice mayors already had been eliminated from the race with bullets. Most prominent were daylight assassinations of Mayor Antonio Halili of Tanauan, Batangas, and Vice Mayor Alex Lubigan of Trece Martires, Cavite, five days apart in July.

All were blamed on hit men of political rivals. In most, they were dishonorably discharged soldiers, policemen and militia men, and surrendered communist and separatist rebels.

Inventorying those scalawags would be just the first step to solve and prevent political and other murders. The Armed Forces and National Police have their profiles on file. Their present locations and pursuits must be updated. Such discards and deserters were trained to kill. In need of money, they could turn to that skill, with tools likely stolen from government arsenals (see *Gotcha*, 7 Jan. 2019: <https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2019/01/07/1882887/guns-hire-letting-slip-dregs-war>).

For keener law and order, the National Police must reread too the 2010 Zenarosa Commission report. Led by Justice Monina Arevalo Zeharosa, the group was formed in the aftermath of the Maguindanao Massacre of 2009, also during an election season. Its mission was to study private armies and how to eradicate them.

The findings are instructive. For six months, Jan.-Jun. 2010, the commissioners fanned out to election hotspots Abra, Masbate, Lanao del Sur, Marawi area, Davao region, and Zamboanga peninsula. From

interviews and analyses they gleaned the motivations of private army patrons, how those are formed and maintained, and why members obey patently illegal orders.

Snippets were released to the media. Bulk of the report was kept confidential because of names and incidents mentioned, some from intelligence units. A copy is with Malacañang. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo received it during the last days of her Presidency; Noynoy Aquino reviewed it during the first weeks of his.

Some recommendations were legislative: tougher gun controls, punishments for private armed groups. Most were for enhancement of old laws, like:

- Command responsibility of police chiefs for private armies and loose firearms in their jurisdictions;
- Recording of and intelligence on politicians' and henchmen's registered and unregistered guns, especially long arms;
- Removal from local officials of the authority to appoint and dismiss police chiefs and men, to prevent misplaced loyalty to them;
- Strict monitoring of soldiers, policemen, militia men, provincial jail guards, and other armed officers in any locale;
- Strict enforcement of permits

to transport, carry firearms outside residences, mission orders;

- Interdictions through court searches, confiscations, checkpoints;
- Arrest of wanted criminals;
- Do away with perennial amnesties for loose firearms, that only embolden keeping such illegal items till the next announcements.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson, a former PNP chief, advises the hierarchy to stop picking on activist teachers and start disbanding private armies.

A state employee was arrested Tuesday for making a bomb joke hours before President Duterte was to speak at a Pasay City sports arena. Elsie Castillo had told entrance guards, "Aren't you going to inspect my bag as there might be a bomb at the bottom?" Police didn't find it funny and at once booked her for breaking a presidential decree against alarmism.

At the venue that night Duterte ranted against overly strict state auditors. "Let's kidnap and torture them," he told the audience of barangay chairmen. His spokesman quickly claimed it was just a joke, don't you get it?

Speaking before local officials last Dec., the President said, "Kill all those Catholic bishops; all they do is criticize." The spokesman clapped, as it was just Duterte's usual hyperbole, so live with it.

Go-Jek, Indonesia's largest ride-hailing service, has been barred from operating in the Philippines. So Grab, which gobbled up Uber-Asia early last year, will continue its virtual monopoly of the private cars-for-hire. Five or so accredited competitors are too small to take up even only five percent of the market. Riders still have no free, fair choice.

The Land Transport Franchising and Regulatory Board rejected Go-Jek because of a new 60/40 equity rule for foreign transport network companies (TNCs). A pre-accreditation committee, headed by LTFRB executive director Samuel Jardin, reportedly junked the application last Dec. 20. It was filed by Velox Technology, Go-Jek's Philippine subsidiary.

The Philippine Competition Commission might wish to look into the issue. Grab and Uber, both foreigners, had been allowed into Manila in 2013-2014 because LTFRB said then that TNCs were "new forms of transport services." A Dept. of Transportation order was issued in June 2018 authorizing LTFRB to regulate TNC fares. But it quietly designated them as "public utilities subject to the 60/40 equity rule." Then-LTFRB board member Aileen Lizada expressed apprehensions during a congressional hearing in Nov. 2018 that there were no public consultations. She allegedly found out about the new classification only when Jardin began to object to Grab's re-accreditation. Grab eventually passed, but not Go-Jek.

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Catch *Sapol* radio show, Saturdays, 8-10 a.m., DWIZ (882-AM).

Gotcha archives on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Jarius-Bondoc/1376602159218459>, or The STAR website <https://beta.philstar.com/columns/134276/gotcha>

★

Fanaticism or sheer faith?



CALL it "choreographed craze," fanaticism or sheer faith. But don't mock the millions of devotees who flocked to the route of the Black Nazarene procession. There is no harm in believing even if you're one of those non-believers in the power of prayers and the miracle bestowed on those seeking deliverance from life's hardships like a lingering disease, other forms of sickness or poverty.

This is more than the feeding frenzy of the faithful. Some of the cynics call the annual event on January 9 as

"Foreigners are just amazed at our fervor."

pure theater that has drawn even foreign tourists to Quiapo church and its basilica. Foreigners are amazed that Filipinos have such strong faith. The reenactment of Christ's crucifixion on Good Friday during the Holy Week has also become a tourist attraction. This is a testament to the Filipino people's unwavering faith despite the desecration and mockery by officials in high places.

I cannot join this procession as I am already old and a person with disability. Even if healthy, I'm afraid to be crushed by the frenzied crowd who jostle against each other to climb and touch the image of the Black Nazarene.

I have two brothers-in-law who did so very year and they lived to the ripe old age of 80 plus. And so did their widows, my sisters. There has to be something good about devoting religious fervor to the Black Nazarene.

History tells us that the Black Nazarene was carved by an unknown Mexican out of dark wood in 1606. The finished life-sized statue of the Christ in a kneeling position shouldering the cross was later shipped to Manila to be the centerpiece of the altar in the Minor Basilica of Quiapo church. Mexico and the Philippines, then colonies of Spain, had a strong relationship during the Galleon trade. In Mexico there is also an annual religious event—the Feast of the Lady of Guadalupe. People from across Mexico and other parts of the world go on pilgrimage to the basilica in Mexico City to pray and pay homage to the image of the Lady of Guadalupe which is actually the Virgin Mary.

Don't ask me more about it as I'm sure the historians and the devotees of Guadalupe and the Black Nazarene know more about the lore surrounding these two revered icons.

Stories about the miracles of the Black Nazarene can only be the reason why its Feast Day on Jan. 9 has become such a big event causing classes and offices in the City of Manila to be closed. With streets along the procession closed to traffic, vehicular movement in the Quiapo district come to a standstill. More than 6,000 policemen are deployed in the district to keep order and prevent possible attacks by terrorist groups. Injuries among the crowd of devotees are recorded every year in the Traslacion which starts at 5 a.m. and often lasts up to 8 in the evening when the Black Nazarene winds its way back to Quiapo church.

Me, I stay home and simply follow the procession covered live by the three major television networks. Because of my age and disability, my own way of keeping faith and sacrifice is by not watching programs on the other channels.

Turn to A5

Fanaticism...

From A4

As of 8 a.m. on Wednesday, an estimated crowd 800,000 were already in attendance which swelled to millions by dusk with 1,000 needing medical attention. Yet, no matter how hard it is to attend the Feast of the Black Nazarene, the same throng keep coming back every year. This speaks volumes about the Filipinos' faith whether

their prayers have been answered or the favors sought still to be granted by the miraculous powers of the Black Nazarene.

* * *

Quote of the week from National Chairperson Jocelyn Martinez of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT): "We are underpaid, and now we are also under surveillance."

Ms. Martinez was reacting to profiling of members of their organization by the Philippine National Police which is investigating the alleged in-

volvement of teachers in subversive anti-government activity.

Jose Ma. Sison, the founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines based in Utrecht, the Netherlands, said in a statement that ACT is not a front organization of the CPP, adding ACT is a legitimate non-government organization who simply want to improve their lot and living condition.

What say you, Education Secretary Leonor Briones? Do the teachers have to pray to the Black Nazarene for answers to their underwhelmed lives?

Can martial law restore peace in Mindanao?



ABOUT
TOWN
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CLOSE on the heels of the recent extension of martial law in Mindanao for another year starting January 1st, we ask: Was it justified? And will it lead to elusive peace and development in Mindanao?

We recall that the political opposition stoutly opposed this move of the Duterte administration, pointing out that there was no actual rebellion or lawless violence in the island that required emergency rule.

"We don't see any diminution of the terrorist threat in the island, with or without martial law."

Martial law was first declared over the whole of Mindanao after the outbreak of the Marawi siege in late May 2017 by an estimated 800 to 1,000 members of the

Islamic State-influenced Maute Group. When the siege ended in early November after five months of fierce fighting, martial law was extended until the end of 2017, then extended again for the whole of 2018 to mop up the remnants of the Maute Group and prevent them from regrouping. The third extension, the government said, was necessary as various rebel groups continue to pose a threat to peace and order in the island as a whole.

That we still have an unstable peace and order situation in Mindanao cannot be denied. This is clear in the Dec. 31 bombing of the Southseas shopping

Turn to A5

Can martial...

From A4

mall in Cotabato City that led to the death of two people and the wounding of 37 others. Another improvised explosive device found near a lottery outlet on the second floor of the establishment was deactivated by bomb experts about an hour later.

The bomb attack took place after the deaths of four members of a local Islamic State-inspired group in an encounter with covert military operatives last Dec. 22 in Maguindanao province. Two of the fatalities in that incident were foreigners, one a Singaporean and the other, an Indonesian.

Local officials and traditional Moro elders in the three towns identified one of the two other fatalities as the younger brother of a radical cleric named Abdulmalik Esmael, more known as Abu Toraiife, figurehead of the third faction of the outlawed Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, which had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. Abu Toraiife's group has been blamed for the deadly Aug. 28 and Sept. 2 bombings in Isulan town in Sultan Kudarat that left a total of five people dead and injured more than 30 others.

The threat from IS-linked groups ap-

pears very real, from where we sit. The Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research believes that there are up to 100 foreign fighters in Mindanao who want to pursue their goal of putting up an east Asia wilayah (or Islamic State province). The foreign fighters in Mindanao are said to have mainly travelled not only from neighboring Indonesia and Malaysia but also from Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Middle East.

The armed forces also believes that there are about 40 foreign fighters remaining in the country, with 40 others in their watchlist.

The presence of foreign fighters is likely to embolden local pro-IS groups in their bid to declare a caliphate in Mindanao.

The continuing terrorist threat is borne out by the suicide bombing by a foreign fighter from Morocco in July that killed 11 people. It was claimed by IS as a "martyrdom" operation.

The terrorist threat in Mindanao is also underscored by the apparent establishment of a pro-IS coalition composed of at least three factions of the BIFF, Abu Sayyaf, Ansar al-Khilafah and the Maute Group.

The problem is that Mindanao's borders with Malaysia and Indonesia are porous, thus allowing foreign fighters to easily cross over to the island. Hence, the Philippine government is working

with both Malaysian and Indonesian authorities to block the border through joint maritime patrols and sharing of intelligence.

A keen observer of the Mindanao conflict, Zachary Abuza, Southeast Asia analyst at the National War College in the US, concludes that based on the Marawi experience, foreign fighters "play a very important role in bridging the parochial divides between Filipino groups." He shares the view that there could be around 40 foreign fighters in Mindanao at present, perhaps doing training for locals and waiting for the right opportunity to do another Marawi. He stressed the serious threat they posed, amid what he feels is increased support especially among the youth for pro-IS groups in Mindanao.

To the question of whether martial law can immediately restore peace in Mindanao—or a modicum of it—within the year through military operations and vigorous law enforcement, we think that's not likely given the extent of the terrorist threat and the pervasive poverty in Muslim Mindanao that can be exploited by the Mautes and similar groups to draw more recruits to their cause. In short, we don't see any diminution of the terrorist threat in the island, with or without martial law, in the next few years.

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ONLINE NEWS

11 JANUARY 2019

AFP chief now a 4-star general

By Priam Nepomuceno January 10, 2019, 2:50 pm



(Photo courtesy: AFP Public Affairs Office)

MANILA -- Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief-of-Staff, Lt. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal, Jr. was promoted to the rank of 4-star general in a donning ceremony in Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City Thursday morning.

Madrigal's fourth star was donned by Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, AFP public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato said in statement.

Madrigal was installed as AFP chief in December last year, replacing now Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr.

Also promoted to the next higher rank of Lieutenant General and Major General, respectively, were Major Gen. Noel Clement, Central Command's acting commander, and Brig. Gen. Pablo Lorenzo, AFP deputy chief of staff for intelligence.

Prior to his present assignment, Clement commanded the 501st and 602nd Infantry Brigades and the 10th Infantry Division serving under the Eastern Mindanao Command, which was then commanded by Madrigal.

He was also designated as AFP deputy chief-of-staff for operations.

Clement replaced Lt. Gen. Paul Atal who was designated as AFP Inspector General in November last year. Meanwhile, Lorenzo was Senior Military Assistant to the Secretary of National Defense before his appointment as intelligence chief.

"Their solid record of service speaks of their capability, capacity, and commitment to be promoted," Madrigal said of Clement and Lorenzo.

"They are committed and capable officers, professionals who display the highest standard of leadership, competence, and character," the AFP chief added. **(PNA)**

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AFP to ensure peaceful, orderly conduct of 2019 polls

By Priam Nepomuceno **January 10, 2019, 2:09 pm**

MANILA -- The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) will do everything in its authority to ensure the successful and peaceful conduct of all election-related activities this year.

This was stressed by AFP public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato Thursday when asked what role the military will play in the coming elections.

"(The) AFP is deputized by the Comelec (Commission on Elections) so we will dedicate our efforts for the successful conduct of the BOL (Bangsamoro Organic Law) plebiscite and the incoming mid-term elections," Detoyato said in a message to the Philippine News Agency.

The BOL plebiscite is slated for Jan. 21 and Feb. 6 while the mid-term election is on May 13.

"Our combat operations and other security operations will always be in support to the honest, orderly and peaceful conduct of Comelec-sanctioned activities," Detoyato pointed out.

Meanwhile, he also defended the Philippine National Police (PNP)'s action for conducting "profiling" against a group of teachers.

"Teachers of public schools are government employees. And it is idiotic if a government employee is undermining the government that hired them and the government will not do anything, even though it has already been brought up to (its) attention," Detoyato noted.

He added that the government should not just sit down and let these groups carry out their unscrupulous acts.

"It is idiotic if the government will just let this happen and not take any action to protect its citizens from idiots masquerading as championing for the government employees while secretly supporting a group who is attempting to bring down the government that employs its member teachers," he added. **(PNA)**

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