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NEWS CLIPPINGS

15 January 2019

Tuesday



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WASTEFUL PROJECTS TRACED TO KICKBACKS

SPECIAL REPORT BY DJ YAP

Senator Lacson says the going rate for commissions is 10 percent to politicians and 5 percent to government agencies. Contractors are able to make payoffs by using substandard materials, resulting in shoddy work.

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FROM A1

SPECIAL REPORT

By DJ Yap
@deejayapINQ

(Second of three parts)

Tongues have been wagging about a notorious Ilocos Norte official nicknamed "Engineer Forty," who, as the story goes, routinely pockets a 40-percent cut of the cost of infrastructure projects in the district.

It's local lore that seems steeped in reality if one considers what happened in a P10-million flood control project on the Laoag river basin tributary that runs through the villages of Bacsil, Lataag and San Mateo in Laoag City.

Barely a week after the project was completed in July 2018, the concrete structure crumbled, leaving officials red-faced and residents angry.

Pork in the budget

The incident, according to Sen. Panfilo Lacson, is one of the new manifestations of pork in the budget—where contractors shortchange taxpayers by using low-grade materials for infrastructure projects, while gifting agency officials and lawmakers with huge commissions in exchange for the contracts.

Pork, public money used to finance projects proposed by lawmakers, is a source of kickbacks.

But over the years, legislators in cahoots with agencies and contractors have become

creative in larding the government's budget, according to Lacson, who earlier exposed the insertion of multibillion-peso allocations in the districts of favored legislators, wastage of P583.5 billion in discontinued or shelved projects, and P74.6 billion in road projects marred by right of way issues.

At present, Lacson said, the going rate for kickbacks is "10 percent [of the project cost] to the legislator, and 5 percent to the agency."

It's the contractor who would shell out the money, often in the millions of pesos, to satisfy the politicians, he told Inquirer editors and reporters during a briefing in December last year.

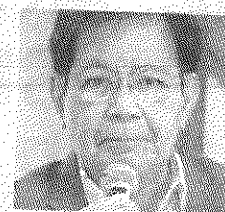
So how do contractors make money?

"Substandard materials," Lacson replied.

Public money wasted

This was precisely the case with the Laoag flood control project, which began construction on Feb. 12, 2018, and was

Panfilo Lacson
Senator



completed on July 11, 2018, Lacson said.

"One week after construction, it caved in," he said.

Former Ilocos Norte Board Member Melvin de la Cuesta, who inspected and photographed the site, said the dike "collapsed like a fallen curtain."

"Clearly, the project is substandard and it needs investigation by appropriate agency. Public money is wasted through anomalous projects," De la Cuesta said in a Facebook post on Aug. 30, 2018.

Contacted by the Inquirer on Monday, De la Cuesta said he found that no steel bars were used to build the dike, making the foundation weak.

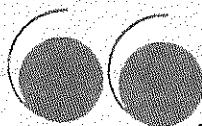
"The cement was thin," he added.

'Soil was loose'

De la Cuesta recalled the controversy the debacle stirred among officials of the Ilocos Norte provincial government and the investigation that followed.

"The excuse of engineers was that the soil was loose," he said.

The contractor, Katha Builders and Supplies, eventually bowed to public pressure and reconstructed the dike, ac-



Sometimes the congressman or the agency could get an advance from the contractor before the budget law was passed

according to De la Cuesta. It is now back in operation.

According to the records, the Laoag project was given P9,503,768.23 in the General Appropriations Act of 2018, with the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) district engineering office as implementing agency.

Katha Builders is one of the top contractors of the DPWH under the Duterte administration.

According to data compiled by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, the company based in Santa Maria, Bulacan province, cornered DPWH contracts valued at P235.5 million from July 2016 to December 2017.

The Inquirer tried but could not reach Katha on its listed contact numbers.

65-35 sharing

Lacson said pork, by definition, was a "postenactment" practice, meaning lawmakers would insert funds into the budget law after it had been passed.

But the practice stopped in the aftermath of Supreme Court decisions striking down the pork barrel system and its iterations, including the Priority Development Assistance Fund, as well as graft and plunder cases sparked by the P10-billion pork scam involving businesswoman Janet Lim-Napoles.

In the case of the Napoles scam, Lacson said it involved mostly soft projects, referring to social welfare programs.

"So with Napoles, 65 percent went to the legislator,

while Napoles got 35 percent. The costs were also shouldered by Napoles, while 65 percent went cleanly to the legislator. Napoles would get some from the remaining 35 percent to cover the operation," he said.

These days, Lacson said pork insertions would happen even before the President submitted the proposed budget, or the National Expenditure Program (NEP), to Congress.

"Sometimes the congressman or the agency could get an advance from the contractor before the budget law was passed," he said.

The official reason is "exigency," he said. "If you wait for the passage of the GAA (General Appropriations Act) before bidding, then it would take too long, because our bidding process can be quite lengthy," he said.

Laguna bridge

On Jan. 10, Lacson called attention to an Inquirer story about a portion of a bridge under construction that collapsed in Pakil, Laguna province.

The DPWH district engineer blamed the contractor, St. Gerrard Construction General Contractor and Development Corp., of Pasig City, saying the lack of scaffolding and other support systems caused the structure to collapse when the workers poured concrete.

Lacson lamented on Twitter: "If this happened in other jurisdictions, government agents would be knocking on some people's doors." INQ

US Navy exec axed for paid sex in Phi

The commander of a United States Navy submarine was relieved from his post in August following his admission of hiring female prostitutes while the vessel was docked in the Philippines early last year, according to a report published in a Washington state newspaper on Friday.

Capt. Travis Zettel, commander of the *USS Bremerton*, was fired in August "following a loss of confidence in his ability to command the Los Angeles-class fast attack submarine, which is now tied up in Bremerton for decommissioning," the *Kitsap Sun* reported.

The *Bremerton*, Washington-based daily said it based its report on documents received through a Freedom of Information Act request.

The report said the incident occurred during the submarine's port call in Subic Bay on March 1. Zettel was reportedly seen with 10 "provocatively dressed females outside the front door of (his) hotel" at dinnertime of that day, according to a tipster interviewed by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS)

agents over the Department of Defense Inspector General's hotline.

The report added that Zettel told the tipster and another sailor that he had "requested/ordered 10 girls to arrive at the hotel." Another sailor, according to the newspaper, told investigators he saw "Zettel walking around and talking to other sailors in his command with three local females holding onto his arm."

In May, almost a month after the vessel arrived in Bremerton for decommissioning, the NCIS launched a criminal probe and confronted Zettel with the allegations, the *Kitsap Sun* report said.

Zettel, a Puyallup, Washington native commissioned in 1998 and first served on board the *USS Salt Lake City*

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US Navy From Page 1

before carrying out various assignments aboard other subs, "admitted culpability in the payment of female accompani-

ment," it added.

After he was reprimanded and relieved of his command, Zettel was administratively

reassigned to the staff of Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor-based Submarine Squadron 19, the report said, quoting Navy officials then.

The other sailor, who was

also interviewed by authorities but said he "did not participate in prostitution," was not "pursued for disciplinary action," the report said.

The STAR tried to reach

the US embassy but it was unavailable for comment.

Meanwhile, Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. called the United States a "responsible state" for the

decision to relieve Zettel.

"He was fired by the US government. Now that's a responsible state," Locsin said in a post on Twitter.

- With Pia Lee-Bravo

Six of 10 Filipinos distrust China; US enjoys 84% support-survey

Six of 10 Filipinos are distrustful of China, which is embroiled in a territorial dispute with the Philippines in the South China Sea, while eight of 10 trust the United States, according to the latest Pulse Asia survey.

The survey, which polled 1,800 adult respondents from Dec. 14 to 21, showed that 60 percent distrust China, down from 63 percent in March 2017.

Fifty-four percent of the respondents also distrusted Russia, the Philippines' new ally, down from 56 percent in March 2017.

The percentage of the respondents who trust the United States rose to 84 percent, from 79 percent in March 2017, while trust in Japan remained at 75 percent.

"I believe [the low trust in China] is largely due to the [South China] Sea disputes, un-

fortunately propped up by simmering historical and cultural biases against the foreign Chinese," said Jay Batongbacal, director of the University of the Philippines Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea.

South China Sea conflict

The conflict in the South China Sea has "not been helped" by China's conduct in the strategic waterway, which Filipinos "perceive as unworthy of their trust," Batongbacal said.

Over the years, China has turned a string of reefs in the South China Sea into military garrisons.

By contrast, the United States, the country's traditional ally, has stepped up "freedom of navigation operations" in the 3.5-million-square-kilometer

TRUST RATINGS

(Dec. 14-21, 2018, in percent)

	Trust	Distrust
United States	84	16
Japan	75	25
Australia	72	27
United Kingdom	57	40
Russia	45	54
China	39	60
Asean	82	16
Apec	80	17

Source: Pulse Asia

sea to counter China's claim.

Former Solicitor General Florin Hilbay was more blunt, saying "Filipinos understand that a bully cannot be trusted."

"[It's] because [Filipinos] understand that China continues to disrespect our rights over the

[South China] Sea, that its aggression is selfish and at the expense of the rights of Filipino fishermen," he said in a text message to the Inquirer.

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo acknowledged that it may take time for Filipinos to begin trusting China.

Culturally closer

"Maybe as we go along and see China showing its sincerity with respect to agreements between the two countries, that perception might change," he said at a press briefing.

Batongbacal said Filipinos were historically and culturally closer to the United States.

Unlike the mainland Chinese, Filipinos share core values such as freedom and democracy with the Americans, and language is not a barrier

between them, he said.

"We tend to see them (Americans) in a better light," he pointed out, citing the close ties between the two longtime allies.

The Ulat ng Bayan survey, which had a margin of error of plus-or-minus 2.3 percentage points, showed that distrust was the prevailing sentiment toward China in every region and class (68 percent and 62 percent, respectively). 13

The Filipinos' high trust in the United States also did not come as a surprise to Panelo.

"It's understandable for Filipinos to feel that way... Because we've been used to the United States being our ally, so we're used to America more," he said in a press briefing. —REPORTS

FROM MARIELLE MEDINA, JEANNETTE L. ANDRADE, JULIE M. AURELIO, MARLON RAMOS AND INQUIRER RESEARCH INQ

DND 'ready to respond' to threats in disputed sea

Malacañang on Monday said the government was prepared to "respond accordingly" should any threat arise from the increased presence of Chinese fishing vessels in disputed waters in the South China Sea. But the Palace refused to speculate on the report of Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, which noted a substantial increase in the number of Chinese fishing boats at Philippine-claimed Subi (Zamora) and Mischief (Panganiban) reefs. "I am sure whoever is authorized to oversee that area will know what to do if they feel there's a security threat," presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo said at a press briefing. He said he expected the Department of National Defense (DND) to look into the reported increase in the presence of Chinese fishing vessels in the disputed areas. —JULIE M. AURELIO

Panelo confident that DND looking into presence of Chinese vessels in PH sea

By GENALYN D. KABILING

The Department of National Defense (DND) is expected to look into the reported increased presence of Chinese fishing vessels within the West Philippine Sea, Malacañang said Monday.

"I'm sure the Department of National Defense is doing that already," Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo said during Palace press briefing when asked if the government would conduct a probe on the alleged Chinese presence in the area.

"I'm sure that whoever is authorized to oversee that area ay alam nila ang gagawin nila if they feel na may security

threat [they know what to do if they feel there is a security threat]," he added.

But for now, the Palace found nothing worrisome about Chinese vessels in Subi and Mischief reefs as long as they are only engaged in fishing.

"Kung fisherman lang naman, pareho rin tayo nagpupunta tayo doon sa what they claim to be theirs, pinababayaan tayong mag-fish. Walang problem kung fishing fishing lang (If they're just fishermen, it's the same situation as ours. We go there which they claim to be theirs. We're left alone to fish. There's no problem if it only involves fishing)," Panelo said.

He said allegations that fishing vessels loitering in Philippine waters were

manned by Chinese soldiers were still "speculation."

"We don't know that yet. That's speculation," he said.

"Kung sino ang nagbabantay doon, alam nila kung may threat [Whoever is guarding the area, they know if there's a threat] and they will do and respond accordingly," he insisted.

An official from the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative recently reported that satellite imagery showed the huge number of Chinese fishing boats operating in Subi and Mischief reefs located within Philippine territory. Only a few Chinese vessels allegedly showed signs of actual fishing in the area last year, according to the report.

Most Pinoys say US can be trusted, are wary of China

By Nat Mariano

THE majority of the Filipinos polled believe the United States is the most trustworthy country following the return of the Balangiga bells last month, while China is the most distrusted nation, a Pulse Asia survey said Monday.

This emerged even if Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the Philippines two months ago.

In its survey on the trustworthiness of selected countries and regional organizations, eight out of every 10 Filipinos it

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Most Pinoys...

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surveyed, Pulse Asia said 84 percent considered the US as the most trusted country while 29 percent had a great deal of trust and 54 percent had a fair amount of trust.

On the other hand, only 16 percent of the Filipinos surveyed expressed distrust in the US.

The second most trustworthy country among Filipinos was Japan with 75 percent, followed by Australia with 72 percent and the United Kingdom with 57 percent.

The same survey showed that Filipinos continued to distrust over China despite the country's "enduring relationship" with the Asian giant.

The pollster recorded that a majority of the Filipinos it surveyed, or 60 percent, did not trust China amid Beijing's continuous reclamation activities, weather system installation and strong presence over the disputed South China Sea or the West Philippine Sea.

However, with the several agreements signed because of Xi's state visit to the country two months ago, 39 percent of the Filipinos surveyed believe the country should at least extend a fair amount of trust to China.

Russia also emerged as the second least trustworthy

country for those surveyed with 54 percent saying they did not trust Moscow as against 45 percent who did.

Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo said the figures showing the Filipinos' trust and distrust on US and China were "understandable."

"It's understandable [for them] to feel that way because we have been used to the States being our allies. We have been accustomed to America," Panelo told reporters on Friday.

"Maybe as we go along, the public will see the sincerity of China. With respect to the agreements between the two countries, maybe it will change their point of view."

Panelo said the survey results did not mean President Rodrigo Duterte had failed to persuade the Filipinos to like China.

"It takes some time for people to accept certain changes that they are not used to it," he said.

The Pulse Asia survey was conducted after the US Department of Defense returned the historic Balangiga bells to the country as a sign of "healing and closure" between the two countries on Dec. 11, 2018.

Xi's visit last Nov. 20, on the other hand, paved the way for Manila and Beijing to forge 29 agreements.

The said survey, conducted from Dec. 14 to 21, 2018, used face-to-face interviews of 1,800 adults.

Rice yields seeds of better China-Philippines ties

While Western media outlets keep a close eye on the dispute between China and the Philippines over the South China Sea, the two main protagonists in the story are busy with another thing: hybrid rice.

With Chinese hybrid rice technology, Philippine farmers achieved higher average yields of 4 tons per hectare in 2018 compared with 3.4 tons in 2003, media reports said, adding that rice output in the country has increased annually by 2.4 million tons.

A key to producing Philippine local hybrid rice seeds is collaboration with the Chinese team of Yuan Longping, the acknowledged father of hybrid rice.

Figures released by the World Bank in May 2018 showed some 22 million Philippine people - more than one-fifth of the population - lived below the national

poverty line in 2015. Chinese hybrid rice technology can to some extent serve as an effective tool in the hands of Filipino farmers to fight poverty and hunger.

However, farmers in Southeast Asia get scant interest from Western media outlets, which focus instead on the steps Beijing and Manila may take with the South China Sea dispute.

On Monday, a US Navy ship sailed within 12 nautical miles of the Xisha Islands in the South China Sea. Some Western observers may hope China and the Philippines return to confrontation after the two countries' ties show signs of warming up in recent years, giving the US an excuse to get more involved in the South China Sea. However, we won't make their wish come true.

No matter how tough the South China Sea issue is, it doesn't represent

the entirety of the China-Philippines relationship. While expressing territorial claims in the South China Sea, the Philippines also enjoys the economic driving force that comes from China.

Bilateral relations are complicated.

Since Rodrigo Duterte was sworn in as the Philippines' president in 2016, bilateral relations have warmed up. Economic and trade exchanges are on the upswing, as the two countries expand cooperation in fields such as agriculture, tourism, real estate, infrastructure, manufacturing and energy.

Like China, the Philippines' primary strategy is to promote economic and social development. The South China Sea dispute sometimes puts pressure on economic ties, but economic cooperation can also be the key to the South China Sea dispute. f

Thousands join interfaith rally for clean elections

By EMMANUEL TUPAS

An estimated 6,000 people yesterday joined an interfaith rally and covenant signing in Quezon City for clean, peaceful, orderly and credible midterm elections in May.

Administration and opposition candidates attended the event together with officials from the Commission on Elections (Comelec), Department of the Interior and Local Government, Philippine National Police (PNP), Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and other government agencies.

The activity started as early as 5 a.m. and ended at around 9 a.m., according to the Quezon City Police District (QCPD).

The event was preceded by a unity walk from various parts of the city and ended at the Quezon Memorial Circle.

Five of the senatorial

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Thousands From Page 13

candidates of the opposition were present. They were Sen. Paolo Benigno Aquino IV, Magdalo party-list Rep. Gary Alejano, lawyers Jose Manuel Diokno and Lorenzo Tanada III and civic leader Samira Gutoc.

Former presidential communications assistant secretary Mocha Uson, who is running for a seat in Congress as representative of AA-Kasosyo party-list, and former police senior superintendent Cesar Mancao, candidate of May Pag-asa party-list, were also in attendance.

The candidates joined other representatives from the government and private sectors in calling for peaceful and honest elections.

"*Mahalaga at maganda na nagsamasama yung iba-ibang institution* such as the PNP, AFP, Comelec and the candidates to push for peaceful elections," Aquino told reporters.

He admitted they are facing an uphill battle being part of the opposition. But he expressed confidence they could still catch up in the coming months.

"Before the start of the campaign, *mabibigyan ng oras at swing ang mga kasama sa Otso Diretso*," Aquino said, referring to the opposition slate.

The other members of the senatorial slate are former interior chief Manuel Roxas II, election lawyer Romulo Macalintal and former solicitor general Florin Hilbay.

The candidates recited and signed an Integrity Pledge, the highlight of the activity where they promised to abide by the country's laws, respect the sanctity of the electoral exercise and shun any form of violence.

PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde, in a speech read by Director Rolando Felix of the Directorate for Integrated

Police Operations for Visayas, called for the cooperation of all participants to ensure peaceful elections.

"I take this opportunity to enjoin everyone to help us sustain and strengthen our peace efforts during the entire election period. Everyone has a vital role in this effort," Albayalde said.

While there will always be evil elements out to sow fear and violence, the PNP chief said he is confident a united country will thwart any attempt to disrupt the polls.

"As long as we remain vigilant, these evil forces will not prosper in perpetrating their activities," he said.

National Capital Region Police Office chief Director Guillermo Eleazar said there were no untoward incidents in Metro Manila on the first day of the election period, except for a tricycle driver who was arrested at a checkpoint in Manila for alleged shabu possession.

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Security preparations for May polls go into full swing

By IVY C. TEJANO,
ARMANDO B. FENEQUITO JR.
and MIKE U. CRISMUNDO

DAVAO CITY – Security preparations for the 2019 mid-term elections have started to go into full-swing as Police Regional Office 11 (PRO 11) placed its forces in the whole Davao region under heightened alert and the Regional Joint Security Control Center (RJSCC) in Northeastern Mindanao, or Caraga region, announced that it is already looking into reports of Communist rebels extorting money in exchange for permits to campaign.

PRO-11 director Chief Supt. Marcelo C. Morales said all police personnel in the region have been directed to closely watch their respective assigned areas, especially with the start of the election period on January 19.

"I want you to look back on how we perform in the previous elections, fill the gaps and develop our performance, and make the voting day an ordinary one and let people choose leaders freely without retribution," Morales said, referring to police personnel in the region.

Morales also cited the Philippine National Police (PNP) Ethical Doctrine that states that PNP members shall provide services to everyone without prejudice regardless of party affiliation, following the existing laws and regulations.

To prevent their personnel from be-

ing influenced by politicians, Morales said, the region will have to reshuffle some of them, particularly those police officers who have a relative involved with a running politician.

"May I remind the city and provincial commanders to be non-partisan and that all police personnel must observe utmost discipline and professionalism at all times," Morales added.

The police regional director assured the public that the PRO-Davao personnel and its counterparts will continue working together to intensify the implementation of security plans all over the region.

Based on the intelligence community sources, the RJSCC considers the New People's Army (NPA) as the number one threat during the elec-

tion, considering that they are already reportedly collecting campaign election fees to candidates running in the May 2019 polls.

"We are still collecting reports pertaining to this alleged campaign election fees imposed by the communist terrorists," also said PRO 13 Regional Director Chief Supt. Gilberto DC Cruz. ||

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• Reservists' service

CEBU CITY (PNA) - The chief of Army reservists in Central Visayas on Sunday said they should keep serving the country despite being volunteers without compensation and benefits. Reservist Brig. Gen. Erik Miguel Espina, commander of the 1901st Infantry Brigade Ready Reserve, said the only volunteer army in the whole world could be found in the Philippines. "Under peace time condition, we have no salary, no allowance, no nothing, except that we are volunteer army for them," Espina said during the assumption of command ceremony for the new battalion commander of Army reservists in Cebu province. Espina was the guest of honor and speaker in the ceremony installing the new chief of the 701st Ready Reserve Battalion, Lt. Col. Antonio Esmero.

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• Unity walk

ILOILO CITY (PNA) – Western Visayas (Region 6) joined the entire nation in raising awareness for orderly, honest, peaceful and credible midterm elections this year through a unity walk, interfaith rally and covenant signing held at the Iloilo City Grandstand on Sunday (January 13). The event gathered hundreds of candidates gunning for various posts in the coming May elections from the city and province of Iloilo, Philippine National Police (PNP), Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Commission on Elections (Comelec) and other stakeholders. They started with a unity walk from the Iloilo Provincial Capitol grounds towards the new grandstand, passing by Muelle Loney Street. Chief Supt. John C. Bulalacao, Police Regional Office (PRO 6) Director, in his message read by Senior Supt. Remus Zacharias Canieso, Deputy Regional Director for Operation (DRDO), said they looked forward to a secure, fair and peaceful election as interested parties inked their signatures to the covenant.

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No need for birth certificates

Palace: Old or current passport is all you need during renewal

By ARGYLL B. GEDUCOS and FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

Malacañang on Monday rejected a move to require people renewing their passports to submit their

certificates of live birth.

People renewing their passports should not be burdened by requiring them to bring their birth

►6

No need for birth...

certificates just because their data was lost, said Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo.

He issued the statement after Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. said a "pissed" passport production contractor the government had terminated "made off" with the data.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on Monday confirmed Locsin's revelation that the personal database of the public was taken by the company.

"It is a security concern. I believe this happened several years ago. The DFA (Department of Foreign Affairs) is looking into it and I am sure they will come up with an appropriate solution so that nothing of this sort happens again," Lorenzana said.

"It is a very grave security concern and quite alarming. These are personal information such as full name, date and place of birth and other information that could be used illegally," he added.

The situation prompted the DFA to "rebuild" its database for passports issued before 2010 because a previous outsourced passport maker took all the data when contract terminated. Locsin said passports issued after 2009 do not need to submit their birth certificates as the digital copy of the document is already stored in their database.

But Panelo, in a statement, rejected the idea of requiring applicants to bring their birth certificate for passport renewal.

"Applicants should not be burdened by submitting original copies of their certificates of live birth, obtaining which requires another application process before the Philippine Statistics Authority, to renew their passports just because the producer lost their relevant data," Panelo said.

"The submission of the old or current passport which the applicant seeks to renew should suffice for the purpose. The ongoing practice is not only cumbersome to everyone affected but is a form of red tape which this administration frowns upon and will not tolerate," he added.

Serious matter

Despite this, Panelo said the passport breach is a "serious and grave matter."

According to the Palace official, the National Privacy Commission (NPC) has been directed to investigate the incident and ascertain whether certain provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012, have been violated, particularly with respect to the personal information of the data subjects.

"The investigation should not, however, end here since the current arrangement for the printing of passports should also be examined to determine if there are violations of pertinent laws which may be detrimental to the public," Panelo said.

"We are one with the Filipino people in their quest for truth and so we will not treat this issue lightly," he added.

In a tweet, Locsin said he was wondering why the previous contractor was terminated in the first place.

"Why was the previous contractor terminated? New technology? Then demand it to acquire the new technology but leave the job to it. Di ba (Right)? But that means no kickback. In short, people made money by changing contractor," he said.

Locsin also said the DFA did nothing about it or could not do anything about it because they were in the wrong... However, he assured that such incident will not happen again.

"We did nothing about it or couldn't because we were in the wrong. It won't happen again. Passports pose national security issues and cannot be kept back by private entities. Data belongs to the

state," he said.

In a response to a netizen, Locsin said he was not sure how affected passport holders could be assured that their personal information would be protected.

"How can we be sure? I don't know. Why you guys who understand data acquisition and protection should keep up the attacks," he said.

Lorenzana said the Department of National Defense (DND) is ready to assist the DFA should they need their help to retrieve the personal information if still retrievable.

"We will get in touch with the DFA to find out the details of this issue and how to mitigate its ill effect," Lorenzana said.

Earlier, Secretary Locsin vowed to "autopsy" those behind the alleged data breach in the passport system, as well as the "yellows" who orchestrated the existing service contract to manufacture the E-passport.

In a series of tweets over the weekend, Locsin suggested that a Senate probe should be held in order to unmask those who perpetrated the crime and for the Department of Justice (DOJ) to file the appropriate charges.

"I will autopsy the 'yellows' who did the passports deal alive. This is called evisceration," Locsin said, apparently referring to people closely identified with the Aquino administration.

Locsin's reactions came following reports that former private contractor, Oberthur, reportedly took all the passport data when its contract was abruptly terminated to give way to the entry of APO Printing Unit, a tiny and little-known division under the Presidential Communications Office (formerly the Office of the Press Secretary).

Oberthur is a French company that was hired by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) through bidding, to supply all the materials necessary to produce the machine-readable electronic passports (MREPs).

The BSP was the official printer of Philippine passport from 2006 to 2015. Its agreement with the DFA was terminated three years ago to give way to APO's entry.

Locsin said the current problem that the DFA is facing started under the administration of former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and "got worse" under the term of President Benigno Aquino III.

"It will be solved by PRRD (President Duterte) and DFA under Locsin. The yellow crowd who perpetrated the passport fraud are in panic because we are gonna autopsy their crooked deal. Period," he said.

He further assured that "no power on earth" could stop him from unravelling the truth behind the passport mess.

"I just want it fixed and not repeated," the foreign affairs chief said.

Since Locsin assumed office last October, his Twitter account has been swamped with complaints from netizens about the new DFA regulation requiring those who are renewing their passports to present their birth certificates.

Meanwhile, Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines Episcopal Commission on Migrants and Itinerant People chairman and Balanga Bishop Ruperto Santos said the alleged data breach in the passport system should be probed.

Santos said the matter should be thoroughly investigated and those guilty punished for the sake of overseas Filipino workers who will also be affected by this incident.

"We appeal for thorough investigation, no sacred cows, those guilty be prosecuted," he said. (With a report from Leslie G. Aquino)

Yasay: No passport data stolen

BY ASHZEL HACHERO

FORMER Foreign Affairs Secretary Perfecto Yasay Jr. yesterday said current Foreign Affairs chief Teodoro "Teddy Boy" Locsin Jr. could have been "misinformed" about the supposed breach of data of passport holders as he belied Locsin's claim that data was stolen by a private passport printer after its services were terminated by government.

Yasay also said Locsin may have been given the wrong information by certain DFA officials to "deflect the real issue of the passport mess," which he said is the violation of provisions of the contract awarded to APO Production Unit Inc. (APUI) for the production of machine-readable electronic passports, which states the agency could not subcontract the project to a private firm.

"So it was, to my mind, on that score that Secretary Locsin was misinformed," he said.

Locsin said he was not misin-

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formed.

"I love Perfecto Yasay but I am not 'misinformed' although I lack more information on what (Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador) Panelo rightly says demands deep investigation: the anomalous DFA-BSP-Oberthur/APO passport contracts. My predecessors seem to be panicking. I don't know why," Locsin said.

Yasay, who served as DFA chief from June 2016 to March 2017, said it is impossible for French firm Francois-Charles Oberthur Fiduciare (FCOF or Oberthur) to run away with the data as claimed by Locsin last week.

He said when the DFA awarded the production of a new electronic passport system to APUI in October 2015, which subcontracted it to United Graphic Expression Corp. (UGEC), Oberthur simply "withdrew" as it already completed its contract.

"When APO and UGEC came in, Oberthur withdrew. After all it was just assisting the government in the management of the operating system for free. Oberthur already completed its contract. To say now that Oberthur ran away with the data is completely false," Yasay said in an interview with ANC News.

"There is no data breach by Oberthur. Computerized passport data has

always been with the DFA which it turned over to APUI-UGEC," he added.

Earlier, Yasay said in a Facebook post that sometime in October 2015, the DFA awarded the contract for the printing of the e-passports to APUI which then "subcontracted" it to UGEC. He added that when the APO and UGEC took over the passport production, the data, which was initially in the facility of Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, was moved to a facility in Lipa, Batangas.

With this, Yasay said the DFA may not have been able to access the data because of the new system by APUI and UGEC.

"It is preposterous and malicious and completely false for the DFA or anyone else to say that Oberthur ran away with the data because they could not run away with it," he said.

Yasay, in the same interview, also said he tried to resolve the is-

sue on the passport printing mess but "some powerful members of Congress intervened, powerful members who are also members of the Commission on Appointments (CA), and said there was nothing wrong with the contract."

Yasay failed to get the CA nod for his appointment as foreign affairs secretary, leading to the appointment of Alan Peter Cayetano to the post in 2017.

He declined to identify the Congress members who allegedly intervened.

Locsin reiterated the current administration has nothing to do with the mess. He said the problem started during the time of then President, now Speaker Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

He also said there is "no leak so far" of the passport data.

"But the data is possibly hopelessly corrupted and at any rate inaccessible now or we are being lied to as usual," he said, adding that Oberthur, out of irritation, deposited the data in a warehouse in Lipa and refused to give the access code so it could now be "corrupted."

The National Privacy Commission appealed for the public to stay calm and to wait for official findings of any inquiry.

In an interview over radio dzBB, NPC Commissioner Raymund Liboro said the agency will conduct an investigation and inform the public about the status of their personal data.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and PNP chief Oscar Albayalde said the DND and the PNP are ready to assist the Department of Foreign Affairs in investigations.

Lorenzana described the incident as a "security concern."

Albayalde said he considers the data breach "not only a threat to national security but also a threat to our identities because many Filipino who acquired passports, all their information are there."

Panelo said his office is looking into the incident which he said Malacañang considers as a "serious and grave matter."

Panelo, concurrent presidential spokesman, said he is asking the DFA, the Presidential Communications Operations Office and its attached agency APUI, and UGEC for documents. — *With Jocelyn Montemayor and Victor Reyes*

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Central Luzon PNP conducts simultaneous checkpoints

By FREDDIE C. VELEZ

CAMP OLIVAS, Pampanga — Police Regional Office 3 has launched simultaneous checkpoint operations across the region to intensify security as the election period starts for national and local elective posts.

Chief Supt. Joel Napoleon M. Coronel, Central Luzon police regional director, said that 151 checkpoints were established on Sunday for police interdiction operations and gun ban violators as the nationwide Commission

on Elections (Comelec)-imposed gun ban marked its first day.

As a result, two gun ban violators were apprehended during checkpoint operations while two died in a shootout with authorities and five firearms were confiscated.

"Aside from apprehending gun violators, Comelec checkpoints have also proven effective in the anti-criminality and gun control campaign of the PNP particularly against syndicated crime groups, local insurgents, and holders of loose firearms in the previous elections," Coronel further stated.

By advocating "secure and fair elections 2019," Police Regional Office 3, in collaboration with the Commission on Elections, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) held a Unity Walk and Peace Covenant Signing early last Sunday in the City of Malolos, marking the official start of the 2019 election period.

The unity walk was attended by prominent election stakeholders composed of leaders, personnel and

members of concerned government agencies, religious groups, academe, students, civic and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) started at the Barasoain Church where the participants also converged and held an interfaith prayer rally.

The event was highlighted by the signing of a pledge for clean and honest elections and the releasing of doves.

Chief Supt. Coronel said that similar events were held in the national headquarters and different regional offices to drumbeat the significance of the midterm elections this May.

2 killed, 10 nabbed at checkpoints

TWO unidentified persons were killed while 10 others were arrested on the first day of the setting up of the Philippine National Police and Commission on Elections checkpoints in Bulacan on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the candidates running for national and local posts should coordinate with military units during the campaign period for their security from possible rebel attacks, Armed Forces of the Philippines public affairs office chief Noel Detoyato said on Monday.

Detoyato said candidates could request security but it was up to the Commission on Elections to approve it.

Supt. Orlando Castil Jr., City of San Jose Del Monte City chief of police, said the two slain men were riding on a

motorcycle without plate numbers and ignored the police and Comelec personnel manning the checkpoint around 1:15 a.m. at Graceville Village.

"The personnel tried to flag down the motorcycle but instead of yielding it accelerated, which prompted the police to chase the suspects," Castil said.

He said all Police Community Precincts were ordered to establish dragnet operations while possible exit routes were blocked by mobile patrols.

"The suspects, sensing they would be overtaken, immediately got off from the motorcycle and fired shots toward the responding personnel, prompting them to retaliate," Castil said.

The police collected a .45-cal. pistol, a 38-cal. revolver and the motorcycle used by the suspects.

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Meanwhile, Senior Supt. Chito Bersaluna, chief of the Bulacan Provincial Police Office, said the 10 people were arrested in the PNP-Comelec checkpoint in Angat town.

"The suspects shouted towards the police manning the checkpoint and accelerated their tricycle and tried to evade arrest. They were immediately chased and arrested. The suspects were under the influence of liquor," Bersaluna said.

"Appropriate criminal complaints against the arrested suspects are now being prepared for filing before the court." PNA

DILG to local execs: Don't pay campaign fees to rebels

By EMMANUEL TUPAS

The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) yesterday warned local officials against paying "permit to campaign fees" to communist rebels.

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año has issued a memorandum circular reminding all governors, mayors and electoral candidates that they could be held liable under Republic Act 10168 or the Terrorist Prevention and Suppression Act.

"Many reelectionists are in the heat of campaign mood,

whether discreetly or openly, as the May 2019 midterm elections near. *Paalala lang po na huwag magpaloko at magbayad ng 'permit to campaign' or 'permit to win' sa mga komunistang grupo na itinuturing ng gobyerno na mga terorista* (Just a reminder not to be duped and pay 'permit to campaign' or 'permit to win' to communist groups the government considers terrorists)," DILG spokesman Assistant Secretary Eduardo Malaya said in a statement.

The DILG directed all regional, provincial, city and municipal peace and order coun-

cils to recommend sanctions against local chief executives who are known to have supported the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed component, the New People's Army, through the payment of permit to campaign fees.

"Under this scheme, they demand money from candidates in exchange for allowing them to enter and campaign freely in the hinterlands that are within their area of operations," Malaya said.

He described the act as a form of extortion of the rebel to raise funds to fuel their

campaign to overthrow the government.

"The DILG is calling all (local government units) and law enforcement agencies to ensure that all candidates and political parties are allowed unhampered entrance in every LGU and to ensure the peace and order in all areas, including those considered as hotbeds of insurgency, so that all candidates and political parties are given access to the electorate during the campaign period without intimidation or manipulation by any group," he said.

UP, PUP execs hit 'old Red scare'

PNP presents NPA members who say students visit rebel camps as part of immersion activities

By Matthew Reysio-Cruz
@MatthewINQ

Officials of two state universities on Monday expressed alarm over the Philippine National Police's claim that their students were visiting New People's Army (NPA) camps as part of immersion activities, then being intimidated by rebels into joining the insurgency.

The fresh allegations levied against University of the Philippines (UP) and Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) students left officials with a sense of déjà vu months after both schools, along with 16 others, were linked by the military to a supposed plot to oust the President.

"We're very, very disturbed," UP Diliman Chancellor Michael Tan told the Inquirer.

"It's the old 'Red scare' at work."

Both Tan and Jose Dalisay, UP vice president for public affairs, said it was their first time to hear of these immersions at hinterland communities in Laguna province, information the police allegedly gleaned from NPA surrenderers.

Wrong basis

Tan said he would not be surprised if the PNP were to use the former rebels' statements as a basis for monitoring UP students, similar to its recent and widely criticized profiling of members of the militant Alliance of Concerned Teachers.

For his part, PUP's student regent, Ron Cervantes, called the allegations "nothing but lies," saying these placed "students, teachers, officials and all members of the PUP com-

munity in danger."

Cervantes, a student of the PUP extension school in Maragondon, Cavite province, said the police had recently administered a survey inside the campus that sought to elicit information about members of progressive organizations.

The PNP Calabarzon office that conducted the survey was also the one which revealed the alleged immersions in Laguna province.

"They are using these as an excuse because UP and PUP are known for being at the forefront of the fight against the administration's policies. That is how desperate they are," Cervantes said.

According to Tan, the PNP's use of immersion activities as a means to stoke fear was an attack on the philosophy behind a UP education, which places a

primacy on learning outside the classroom.

"We continue to uphold our right to educate students in a holistic way which includes exposure to realities. We are not about to stop our field activities," he said. "We cannot be an ivory tower—that is to betray our mission as educators."

PNP's claim confirmed

At a press conference in Camp Crame on Monday, the Calabarzon police director, Chief Supt. Edward Carranza, said that 20 NPA members from Kalayaan, Laguna province, who surrendered over the weekend confirmed the PNP's claim that students from the two universities were being recruited by insurgents.

The surrenderers said the students periodically visited Sitios Pulot, Magololon and

Balay Kahoy at Barangay San Antonio in Kalayaan.

"It's part of their immersion to see what life is like in the mountains, [but] we also have reports that while [the students] are there, [the NPA] will tell them that they can never come down because they will be targeted by the military and police," Carranza said.

"That's why we have a project to monitor schools because there are groups that are just front organizations for [the recruitment of students]," he added.

One of the NPA members presented to reporters said that the students—two to eight at a time—were supposed to stay for just one night with the group only to be scared by the NPA into joining the movement.

—WITH A REPORT FROM
JAYMEET GAMIL INQ

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Ex-rebel leader confirms NPA recruitment of college students

By **AARON B. RECUENCO**

Communist rebels formerly operating in Laguna and nearby provinces confirmed yesterday the recruitment

of college students by the New People's Army (NPA) who are reportedly first lured to visit poor communities in the Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon) region for immer-

sion that end in frequent visits to rebel camps.

The 20 rebel returnees said students from the University of the Philippines (UP) and the Polytechnic

►6

Ex-rebel leader...

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University of the Philippines (PUP) regularly visit them.

"They would go to some far-flung communities for research but some of them would no longer go back and would choose to stay," said alias Ka Ruben, one of the communist leaders based in Laguna revealed in an interview at Camp Crame.

The revelation reinforced the allegations of the Philippine National Police (PNP) that the New People's Army (NPA) has been recruiting in colleges and universities through the rebels' legal fronts.

Chief Supt. Edward Carranza, director of the Calabarzon PNP, said their focus now is on persons who served as point men in recruiting the students.

"We really have to find these people because they are not only putting the lives of these students at risk but also destroying the future and hope of their families," Carranza told reporters.

The official said they have long been receiving intelligence reports of the supposed visits of college students in known areas where communist rebels operate in Calabarzon.

While some may have voluntarily joined the local communist rebels, Carranza said some have been tricked into joining rebel groups.

The students, Carranza revealed were first lured into visiting indigenous people and poor communities living in the mountains of Calabarzon. After the visit, the communist rebels would reportedly tell the students they have to stay a little longer due to the presence of police and military forces who detected their arrival.

The students are reportedly led to join the regular communist rebels in finding safe routes out of the rebel lair.

The problem, according to Carranza, is that the students are sometimes pinned down once the operating military units chance upon the rebel group.

He cited a case in Batangas a few years ago where some of those killed in military engagements were college students.

Carranza said some of the rebel surrenderers were members of the Dumagat tribe living in the mountainous areas of Laguna.

"These Dumagats were recruited from 1997 to 2016 under Bagong Hukbong Bayan. They were issued handguns and long firearms such as AK-47 and M16 rifles," said Carranza.

The firearms were turned over to the government when they surrendered.

The rebel returnees will be given livelihood and cash assistance by the government.

Huge mistake

Meanwhile, the Liga Independencia Filipinas, a group of former NPA rebels picketed The Netherlands Embassy and asked the Dutch government to terminate the asylum status of Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founder Joma Sison and repatriate him to the Philippines to face punishment.

Nolan Tiongco, leader of the anti-communist group said Sison has conveniently made The Netherlands his safe haven while the communist group he founded lost touch of its purpose to bring injustices to light in the country.

"Ang nangyayari pa, mas marami pang injustices na idinulot ang mga giyera ng New People's Army (NPA). Maraming nasaktan at namatay, wala naming naligtas katulad ng dapat sanang mithiin ng grupo (What happened here is more injustices were brought by the NPA. Many were wounded; nothing has been resolved)," Tiongco said.

The 50-year struggle of the communist group showed no proof that the group's fight is legitimate.

Tiongco said most of the rebels who joined during his time dropped the fight because they realized it made no sense.

"Malaking pagsisi namin na dating kabahagi ng movement ang pagsali. Mali yung pakikipaglaban, mismo yung mga kasama na nakikibaka, sila mismo yung nag-aaway away at karamihan ay terroristic act (Joining the movement was a huge mistake. Fighting was wrong, our comrades in the group were fighting against each other, mostly terroristic acts)," he added.

Early this year, Senator Panfilo Lacson reminded the Department of Justice to follow-up in its petition seeking to tag the CPP-NPA as a terrorist group.

"I urge the executive branch, particularly the DOJ to follow up with the judiciary the case that they filed calling for the prescription of the NPA as a terrorist group which is provided under Section 2 of the Human Security Act of 2007," Lacson said on Twitter.

"They have not succeeded for the past five decades so I don't see how they can. Right now, they are reduced to a band of extortionists, arsonists and robbers, even a terrorist group," added Lacson, former PNP chief. (With a report from PNA)

Students forced to join NPA – police

BY ROY D.R. NARRA

STUDENTS from the University of the Philippines (UP) and Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) were being forced by the New People's Army (NPA) to be part of the rebellion, according to the police and recent rebel group members who surrendered to authorities on Monday.

Chief Supt. Edward Carranza, Calabarzon regional director, said UP and PUP students would usually visit the mountains in their region for immersion in communities living there, but would later be told by NPA members that they could not return to mainstream society as they were already targeted by the government army and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

Carranza said the information came from the 20 NPA members who surrendered on January 11 in Kalayaan, Laguna to Sub Regional

Military Area 4A.

The 20 former NPA members, including a minor, were presented in a news briefing in Camp Crame.

The group yielded one rifle, two shotguns, three homemade shotguns, four revolvers, one submachine gun, one rifle, one fragmentation grenade, one rifle grenade, and 442 ammunition.

One member, who identified himself as Ka Ruben, said students were threatened by NPA members to join the communist rebel group.

"You will be scared if a gun is

facing [you], so they just say 'yes,' he said.

He added that their group surrendered to the government because they could not see the goal of the communist group anymore.

PNP Chief Director General Oscar Albayalde said they were still conducting dialogues with the Commission on Higher Education and Department of Education on how to prevent college students from joining rebel groups.

"I think they were already informed and now are aware about what's happening with their students. These students sometimes get their minds poisoned, so they will go to the mountains, have their immersion, and then be forced to stay there," he said.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines on October 2018 released a list of 17 universities in Metro Manila, including UP and PUP, where the Reds are allegedly recruiting students to join their group.

UP, PUP students target of NPA recruitment – surrenderees

By Alfred Dalizon

STUDENTS from the University of the Philippines and Polytechnic University of the Philippines are among those being targeted for recruitment by the New People's Army, a group of New People's Army rebels who surrendered to police authorities in Calabarzon region claimed.

The information was given to police and military investigators by some of the 20 NPA rebels who yielded to the Police Regional Office 4-A and the Army's 202nd Brigade in Kalayaan, Laguna last Friday and Saturday, said Philippine National Police chief Director General Oscar Albayalde.

"We welcome the return of 20 members of the communist New People's Army, some belonging to the Indigenous Peoples tribe in Southern Tagalog region who surrendered over the weekend in Kalayaan, Laguna. Upon their surrender, they turned in 12 different types of high-powered firearms and several grenade projectiles. They now enjoy the state-guaranteed liberty to lead normal lives with their families and possibly benefit from the government's Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program," Albayalde said.

The PNP chief said that the surrender of the 20 was another indication of the weakening of the rebel movement, particularly in Calabarzon region.

Albayalde placed the nationwide strength of the NPA at a little over 3,000, with around 170 in Region 4-A.

According to PRO4-A director Chief Supt. Edward Carranza, the former NPA members gave formal statements that UP and PUP students were visiting them as

part of the "immersion program."

However, after living for at least a day in NPA sanctuaries, the students will be told they can't return anymore to their homes and universities since they will be targeted by the police and the military.

Carranza said that there was nothing really new with the ex-rebels' claims. He mentioned several incidents wherein young government scholars were killed in clashes between NPA guerrillas and security forces in the countryside.

The Calabarzon police director, particularly cited an incident on November 30, 2017 in Nasugbu, Batangas that left 15 suspected NPA gunmen dead, one of them later identified as a UP Manila student. All 15 were identified as members of the NPA Guerrilla Unit 3 of the CPP/NPA's Southern Tagalog Regional Party Committee.

Albayalde said that 19 of the rebels operating under the NPA's Sub-Regional Military Area 4-A based in Laguna and the nearby provinces surrendered last Friday in Bgy. San Antonio, Kalayaan municipality while another, who was armed with an M-1 Garand rifle, surrendered last Saturday.

"An information obtained also revealed that several students from UP and PUP were periodically visiting Sitio Pulot, Sitio Magololon and Sitio Balay Kahoy in Bgy. San Antonio, Kalayaan, Laguna and that Dumagats were providing provisions/rations to the rebels twice or thrice a week," the PRO4-A director said.

He identified the surrenderees as "Ka Saro," an NPA runner/courier; "Ka Ruben," a Dumagat chieftain; "Ka Bonay," another Dumagat chieftain-turned NPA spotter; "Ka Raul," an NPA helper/courier; "Ka Banal," an NPA intelligence agent; "Ka Anto,"

an NPA courier; "Ka Nosa," another NPA courier; "Ka Gibo," an NPA member; "Ka Tata," an NPA courier;

"Ka Deling," an NPA Dumagat organizer who was said to be the wife of a Dumagat leader who was shot dead by Army soldiers in Luisiana, Laguna in 2003 and whose two sons reportedly fled their homes in Kaya town after being harassed by the military; "Ka Joseph," an NPA member; "Ka Grace," an NPA recruiter; "Ka Orlan," an NPA courier and Dumagat leader; "Ka Bob," an NPA supporter/spotter; "Ka Olan," an NPA member; "Ka Lindo," an NPA courier; "Ka Mentong," an NPA member; "Ka Male," an NPA helper; and "Ka Aman," also an NPA member.

Speaking for the group, "Ka Ruben" said they were forced to yield due to the hardship they were experiencing while living in the mountains and convinced of President Duterte's sincerity to help them return to the mainstream of the society.

"Maraming gustong magbalik-loob at hindi na po namin alam kung ano ang aming pinaglalaban," he said.

The surrenderees turned over a Garand rifle, two 12-gauge shotguns, four cal. .38 revolvers, three home-made 12-gauge shotguns, one Ingram machine pistol, one fragmentation grenade, a rifle grenade, 10 live M-203 ammunition, 175 rounds of 12-gauge ammunition, 62 cal. .38 bullets and 195 rounds of cal. 9mm ammunition.

Carranza said that the 20 surrendered as a result of their implementation of their own "Coplan Terminator 1" and "Coplan Katutubo 2018" aimed at convincing more NPA members and sympathizers in the region to yield.

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NPA recruits UP, PUP students, ex-rebels confirm

By **ALFRED DALIZON**

STUDENTS from the University of the Philippines and Polytechnic University of the Philippines are among those being targeted for recruitment by the New People's Army in the countryside, a group of NPA rebels who surrendered to police authorities in Calabarzon region claimed.

The information was given to police and military investigators by some of the 20 NPA rebels who yielded to the Police Regional Of-

fice 4-A and the Army's 202nd Brigade in Kalayaan, Laguna last Friday and Saturday, said Philippine National Police chief, Director General Oscar D. Albayalde.

"We welcome the return of 20 members of the communist New People's Army, some belonging to the Indigenous Peoples tribe in Southern Tagalog region who surrendered over the weekend in Kalayaan, Laguna. Upon their surrender, they turned-in 12 different types of high-powered firearms and several grenade projectiles. They now enjoy the state-guaranteed liber-

ty to lead normal lives with their families and possibly benefit from the government's Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP)," Gen. Albayalde said.

The PNP chief said that the surrender of the 20 is another indication of the weakening of the rebel movement particularly in Calabarzon region. Gen. Albayalde placed the nationwide strength of the NPA at a little over 3,000 with around 170 in Region 4-A.

According to PRO4-A director, Chief Superintendent Edward E. Carranza, the NPA members gave formal

statements that "UP and PUP students were visiting them as part of their 'immersion' program."

However, after staying for at least a day in NPA sanctuaries, the students will be told they can't return anymore since they will be targeted by the police and the military.

Gen. Albayalde said that 19 of the rebels operating under the NPA's Sub-Regional Military Area 4-A based in Laguna and nearby provinces yielded 5 p.m. last Friday in Barangay San Antonio, Kalayaan municipality while another who was armed

with an M-1 Garand rifle surrendered in the area Saturday.

Carranza said that the 20 surrendered as a result of their implementation of their own Coplan Terminator 1 and Coplan Katutubo 2018 aimed at convincing more NPA members and sympathizers in the region to yield.

He identified the surrenderees as 'Ka Saro,' an NPA runner/courier; 'Ka Ruben,' a Dumagat chieftain; 'Ka Bonay,' another Dumagat chieftain-turned NPA spotter; 'Ka Raul,' an NPA helper/courier; 'Ka Banal,' an NPA intel-

ligence agent; 'Ka Anto,' an NPA courier; 'Ka Nosa,' another NPA courier; 'Ka Gibo,' an NPA member; 'Ka Tata,' an NPA courier; 'Ka Deling,' an NPA Dumagat organizer who was said to be the wife of a Dumagat leader who was shot dead by Army soldiers in Luisiana, Laguna in 2003 and whose two sons reportedly fled their homes in Kalayaan town after being harassed by the military; 'Ka Joseph,' an NPA member; 'Ka Grace,' an NPA recruiter; 'Ka Orlan,' an NPA courier and Dumagat leader; 'Ka Bob,' an NPA sup-

porter/spotter; 'Ka Olan,' an NPA member; 'Ka Lindo,' an NPA courier; 'Ka Mentong,' an NPA member; 'Ka Male,' an NPA helper; and "Ka Aman," an NPA member.

Carranza said that the surrenderers turned over a Garand rifle, two 12-gauge shotguns, four caliber .38 revolvers, three home-made 12-gauge shotguns, one Ingram machine pistol, one fragmentation grenade, a rifle grenade, 10 live M-203 ammunition, 175 rounds of 12-gauge ammunition, 62 cal. .38 bullets and 195 rounds of cla. 9mm ammunition.

Students recruited by NPA

Suspected communist rebels operating in Laguna and nearby provinces confirmed yesterday the recruitment of college students whom they said have regular interactions with them in small batches.

The 20 communist rebels who surrendered to the police specifically mentioned some students of the University of the Philippines (UP) and the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) as the ones regularly visiting them.

"They would go to some far-flung communities for research but some of them would no longer go back and would chose to stay," said alias Ka Ruben, one of the leaders of the Laguna-based communist rebels in an interview at Camp Crame.

Chief Supt. Edward Carranza, director of the CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon), said their focus now is on the persons who served as pointmen for the visit of the UP and PUP students in the mountains of Rizal, Laguna and Quezon. (Aaron Recuenco) 1

UP, PUP students nililalang, pinupuwersang sumapi sa NPA

Nililalang umano at pinupuwersang sumapi sa kilusan ng mga rebeldeng New People's Army (NPA) ang mga estudyante ng University of the Philippines (UP) at Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) sa mga baluarte nitong teritoryo partikular na sa Southern Tagalog.

Ito ang nabulgar kahapon matapos namang sumuko sa CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon) Police ang 20 NPA rebels na karamihan ay mga kabataan na nakasuot ng itim na bonnets nang iharap sa media-men sa Camp Crame.

Ang 19 NPA rebels ay sumuko sa mga awtoridad sa Brgy. Sto Niño, Kalayaan, Laguna noong Enero 11 ng taong ito habang sumunod namang sumuko ang isa pa ng sumunod na araw.

Kinumpirma ng isang alyas Ka Ruben na biktima ng panlilalang ang mga kabataang estudyante ng UP at PUP na nire-recruit ng NPA rebels na ipinagsasama

sa kabundukan upang magsagawa umano ng pananaliksik sa kanilang mga aralin.

"Batch by batch sila umaakyat sa bundok iyung mga estudyante ng UP at PUP para sa immersion," ani Ka Ruben na kinumpirmang marami nang mga kabataang mag-aaral ang umakyat at nagtungo sa kanilang kuta sa isang lugar sa kabundukan ng lalawigan ng Laguna kung saan nire-recruit ang mga itong sumapi sa NPA movement.

Si Ka Ruben ang isa sa mga lider ng NPA na

kumikilos sa kabundukan ng Laguna, Rizal at Quezon.

Lumilitaw pa sa imbestigasyon na ang mga estudyante ay nililalang na may bibisitahing mahihirap na komunidad na naninirahan sa kabundukan ng CALABARZON pero dadalhin pala sa kuta ng mga rebelde kung saan pinagsasabihan ang mga itong kailangan nilang manatili nang matagal dahil sa presensya ng militar at pulisya na posible silang mapatay sa operasyon. (Joy Cantos)



Ipinisinta nina PNP Chief Director Gen Oscar Albayalde at CALABARZON Police Director CSupt Edward Caranza (kanan) ang mga sumukong NPA rebels habang nakamasid naman si PIO Spokesman CSupt Benigno Durana.

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NPAs surrender

CAMP BANCASI, Butuan City - Four members of the Communist New People's Army (NPA) voluntarily surrendered to government forces in Surigao del Sur province. Lt. Jonald Romorosa, Civil Military Operation (CMO) officer of the Army's 36th Infantry (Valor) Battalion (36th IB) told The Manila Bulletin on Monday. Initially, the three rebels voluntarily gave up to the field units of the 36th IB on January 9, before another, a resident of this city, also surrendered to the same group. They were all members of the Platoon 8, Guerilla Front 19 (GF 19) of the CPP-NPA Northeastern Mindanao Regional Party Committee (NEMRC). They were officially presented yesterday to the 36th IB commander Lt. Col. Xerxes A. Trinidad. (Mike U. Crismundo)

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20 Dumagat rebels surrender

By **DANNY J. ESTACIO**

CAMP VICENTE LIM, Laguna — The Police Regional Office-CALABARZON (PRO-CALABARZON) has announced the mass surrender of members of the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army/National Democratic Front (CPP/NPA/NDF) belonging to "Katutubo" here yesterday.

Chief Superintendent Edward Carranza, director of the PRO4A said the rebels surrendered on January 11 and 12 at Brgy San Antonio, Kalayaan, Laguna. They were reported to be under Sub-Regional Military Area (SRMA) 4A operating in Laguna province and its

adjacent provinces.

Some of them hold sensitive positions like organizer, intelligence, recruiter, and leader of Dumagat tribal group.

Carranza said the surrenderers were received by the combined elements of Regional Intelligence Division 4A, 202nd Brigade and 1st Infantry Battalion, Philippine Army through COPLAN "Terminator 1" 2018 and COPLAN "Katutubo" 2018.

The Dumagats who are from a remote area of Kalayaan, Laguna, served as letter courier, delivering rice, canned goods and vegetables to the NPA rebels in the mountains. They also served as a lookout against government troops operating in the area.

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New life for returnees

Ex-rebels get aid, reveal Reds' illegal recruitment

Each returnee received P65,000, including P50,000 for livelihood and P15,000 for immediate assistance

By Maya M. Padillo
and Kathleen Mae Bulquerin

Some 76 former rebels received livelihood assistance and firearms remuneration from Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte during the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) benefits awarding ceremony at the Grand Men Seng hotel.

Each returnee received P65,000, including P50,000 for livelihood and P15,000 for immediate assistance. Twenty-seven of them will soon receive their firearms remuneration depending

on the value of the firearms surrendered. "This monetary assistance is really for you. I just hope that you will use it properly," Duterte told the returnees.

The awarding rites coincided with a revelation by a rebel surrenderer in Camp Crame that the New People's Army (NPA) is illegally recruiting students from the University of the Philippines and Polytechnic University of the Philippines to join the movement.

Ka Ruben, together with 19 other surrenderers, was presented by the police to the media wearing masks to conceal their faces.

Calabarzon Police Regional Office Chief Supt. Edward Carranza said these students were originally part of immersion activities in the mountainous parts of Laguna.

"(The students) who conducted immersion activities in the area were being threatened (by NPA) that if they

go back to urban area, they will also be the target of police and military operations," Carranza said.

Brig. Gen. Ernesto Torres Jr., commander of the 103rd Infantry Battalion, said the cash assistance of the returnees comes along with livelihood training, rehabilitation and monitoring before they return to the community.

"I hope you will be able to make the money grow," Torres told the former rebels (FR).

Each FR will have his/her own integration plan depending on his skills. The city government of Davao will help facilitate for their certificate that they can use for employment.

Torres said the assistance aims to help and assist former rebels who are expected to help bring peace to the region.

Duterte assured the FR of safety

and security guarantee from the Local Government of Davao and the Philippine National Police (PNP) in coordination with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

Duterte likewise promised relocation support from the LGU. She said a housing program in Los Amigos in Tugbok District has already been prepared for the FR. She also encouraged them to urge other rebels to avail of the E-CLIP.

Representatives from Landbank were present during the distribution.

E-CLIP is a locally-driven, managed and implemented program aiming to respond to the circumstances, needs and concerns of the FRs through provision of assistance.

Under the E-CLIP, the province or highly urbanized city serves as the focal point of authority and management of integration program to provide more sustainability and consistency.

PNP tags 19 towns, cities as election hotspots

By AARON B. RECUENCO

The Philippine National Police (PNP) has placed 19 towns and cities in Luzon and Mindanao in its election watchlist areas for the midterm polls in May.

PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde cited history of violent elections in the past, as well as presence of armed groups and other threat groups such as communist rebels, as the reason

for including the 19 areas in the election hotspot list.

He identified these as Sudipen, Balan-on, and Jones towns in Isabela; Lemery in Batangas; Roxas town in Oriental Mindoro; Balud and Dimasalang towns in Masbate; Daraga in Albay; Pagadian City in Zamboanga del Sur; Cagayan de Oro City; Hadjih Mohammad Ajul, Lantawan, Tipi-Tipi in Basilan; Marawi City; Sultan Dumalondong, Mamasapano, Shariff Aguak, Shariff Saydona Mustapha, and

Datu Unsay in Maguindanao.

The PNP initially listed 18 cities and towns but Daraga town in Albay was included after its sitting mayor, Carlwyn Baldo, was accused of ordering the killing of AKO Bicol Party-list Rep. Rodel Batocabe who was supposed to run for mayor of the town.

"We also included intense rivalry and presence of big threat groups as the reasons for the inclusion in the list," said Albayalde.

Special case for security preparations, according to Albayalde, is Cotabato City and nearby areas following the December 31 bombing that left three people dead.

Albayalde said they deployed a battalion of police commandos in Cotabato City for the conduct of plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law next week — which is said to be the reason behind the bomb attack.

"In some areas, we will see. We just

have to consolidate our troops or re-deploy our personnel particularly coming from the police regional mobile groups," said Albayalde.

The PNP has already started positioning its troops around the country, especially starting Sunday when the 150-day election period began.

Albayalde said the police deployment will be reinforced by the military, especially in areas where big threat groups such as the communist rebels operate.



19 bayan, lungsod sa Luzon at Mindanao inilagay sa election hotspots

Tinukoy kahapon ng Philippine National Police (PNP) ang 19 bayan, lungsod sa Luzon at Mindanao ay nasa election hotspots sa napipintong midterm elections.

Kabilang dito ang mga bayan ng Sudipen, Balaon at Jones sa lalawigan ng Isabela; Lemery sa Batangas; Roxas sa Oriental Mindoro; Balud at Dimasalang sa bayan

ng Masbate; Daraga sa Albay; Pagadian City sa Zamboanga del Sur; Cagayan de Oro City sa Misamis Oriental; Hadjih Mohammad Ajul, Lantawan, Tipo-Tipo sa Basilan; Marawi City; Sultan Dumalondong, Mamasapano, Shariff Aguak, Shariff Saydona Mustapha at Datu Unsay sa Maguindanao.

Humabol ang Da-

raga, Albay matapos na mapatay dito si Ako Bicol Partylist Rep. Rodel Bato. Noong Disyembre 22, 2018 kung saan ang alkalde dito na si Mayor Carlwyn Baldo ang itinuturing mastermind.

Sinabi ni Philippine National Police (PNP) Chief Director General Oscar Albayalde na ang

nasabing mga lugar ay may mga kasaysayan ng karahasan sa mga nagdaang halalan at kasalukuyang may mga presensya ng mga armadong grupo at mga banta sa pambansang seguridad tulad ng mga rebeldeng New People's Army (NPA), Abu Sayyaf Group, Bangsa-

Fighters (BIFF), Dawlah Islamiyah terrorists at iba pa.

Pinaigting na rin nila ang seguridad sa Cotabato City at mga karatig lugar matapos ang pambobomba noong Disyembre 31, 2018 na ikinasawi ng dalawang katao habang 34 pa ang nasugatan. *Joy Cantos-*

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• Negros firefight

CEBU CITY - Government troops figured in a gunfight with suspected members of the New People's Army in Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental yesterday morning. The firefight lasted for about 20 minutes before the suspected rebels retreated, said Capt. Oliver Usog, civil military operations officer of the Philippine Army's 94th Infantry Battalion (IB). Usog said there was no casualty on the side of the government while it was not immediately known if someone was killed on the NPA side. Contrary to some media reports, Usog said what happened was not an ambush staged by the NPA but an encounter. (Calvin Cordova) 10

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● Soldier wounded

ILOILO CITY - A soldier was wounded in the third round of clashes between the Philippine Army's 61st Infantry Battalion (61 IB) and the New People's Army (NPA) in Iloilo province. Authorities identified the wounded in the early Monday clash in Lambunao town as Corporal Aldrin Cabias, who belongs to the 61 IB's Squad C. Col. Orlando Edralin, deputy commander of the 301st Infantry Brigade (301 IB), said the troops and rebels have been engaged in sporadic firefights since Friday. "We cannot speculate if the attacks are related to the start of the election period," Edralin told Manila Bulletin Monday. (Tara Yap)

Troopers launch pursuit operations vs NPAs in Samar

By Francisco Tuyay

TACLOBAN CITY—Government troops have launched pursuit operations against heavily-armed rebel fighters whom the soldiers engaged in a gunbattle Saturday morning.

Nine Army soldiers were injured in the encounter which occurred in the municipality of San Jorge in Samar.

According to Lieutenant Colonel Rizaldo Laurena, commanding officer of the 63rd Infantry (Innovator) Battalion of the Philippine Army, his troops and a group of fully armed Communist Party of the Philippines-NPA terrorists (CNTs) had a brief firefight when they chanced upon the rebels in a remote area in Barangay Bay-ang at around 6:50 a.m.

The soldiers were injured by shrapnels from a blast. 13

The Philippine Army's 803rd Infantry (Peacemaker) Brigade and the 8th Infantry Division said the rebels also suffered casualties but they have yet to determine the exact number.

The injured soldiers were brought to the nearest hospital for treatment.
With PNA

9 soldiers hurt in clash with NPA in Samar

NINE soldiers were injured Saturday in Samar during a clash with New People's Army rebels who are supposedly plotting attacks in San Jorge town, the military said yesterday.

The soldiers were hit by shrapnel wounds from explosives detonated by the communist rebels during the firefight, said Capt. Ryan Velez, civil military operations officer of the Army's 803rd Brigade.

Velez said the soldiers, from the 63rd Infantry Battalion were on security operations in Barangay Bay-ang at around 6:50 a.m. on Saturday when they chanced upon the NPA group.

Brig. Gen. Ramil Bitong, commander of the 803rd Brigade, said military sources informed them the communists "were planning to launch tactical offensives" in the Eastern Visayas region "to stay relevant."

In Laguna last Friday, 19 NPA members surrendered to the police. Another one surrendered the following day.

The 20 were presented to PNP chief Oscar Albayalde yesterday.

Calabarzon regional police director Chief Supt. Edward Carranza said the rebels belonged to the NPA's sub-regional Military Area 4-A. They also surrendered 12 rifles, a rifle grenade, and assorted ammunition.

Citing information from the NPA rebels, Carranza said UP and PUP students have been visiting NPA areas in Laguna and members of Dumagat tribe are providing supplies to the rebels twice or thrice a week. — *Victor Reyes*

9 sundalo sugatan sa bakbakan

Malubhang nasugatan ang siyam na sundalo matapos na pasabugan ng eksplosibo na nauwi sa bakbakan sa mga rebeldeng New People's Army (NPA) sa isang liblib na lugar sa Brgy. Bay-ang, San Jorge, Samar, kamakailawa ng umaga.

Ayon kay Captain Ryan Velez, Civil Military Operations (CMO) Officer ng Army's 803rd Infantry Brigade (IB) bandang alas-6:50 ng umaga nang makasagupa ng tropa ng militar ang hindi pa madeterminang bilang ng mga rebelde sa kagubataan ng nasabing lugar.

Ayon sa ulat ni Lt. Col. Rizaldo Laurena, Commanding Officer ng Army's

63rd Infantry Battalion (IB) kasalukuyang patungo ang tropa ng militar sa Brgy. Bay-ang, San Jorge, Samar nang masabat ang grupo ng NPA.

Agad nagpasabog ng eksplosibo ang mga rebelde laban sa tropang gobyerno kung saan nasugatan ang siyam na sundalo hanggang sa mauwi sa bakbakan ang insidente.

Ang mga rebelde ay mabilis na tumakas patungo sa direksyon ng kagubatan bitbit ang mga sugatan sa kanilang hanay.

Samantalang agad namang isinugod sa pagamutan ang mga sugatang rebelde para malapatan ng lunas. *(Joy Cantos)* 9

Cops ordered back to camp

By Elmer N. Manuel

The Philippine National Police (PNP) seeks to ensure the orderly conduct of the campaigns and the midterm polls with the order to recall

the security detail of local officials from barangay councilors up to senators.

In a statement, the PNP said a total of 457 police escorts were ordered to report back to national police headquarters in

Camp Crame and the recall was formalized through an elaborate program headed by PNP Police Security and Protection Group (PSPG) director Chief Supt. Filmore Escobar yesterday.

Turn to page 6.

Cops ordered back to camp

The PNP said a total of 457 police escorts were ordered to report back to national police headquarters in Camp Crame

From page 1

The recall is part of the routine election ban as prescribed by Commission on Elections (Comelec) Resolution 10466. The resolution was passed to limit violence during the heated election period.

Exemptions allowed

The PSPG added that politicians who face serious threats on their lives can file a case before the Comelec to obtain a Certificate of Authority for Security Detail (CASD) to be provided with security escorts despite the ban.

Politicians can then submit their CASD to the police Regional Joint Security Control Center, which can issue them a 30-day Temporary Authority for Security Detail and it will also be the PNP's reference before assigning police escorts.

Also, government officials are exempted from the security recall, including those for the president, vice president, Senate president, Speaker, chief justice, secretary of the Interior and Local Government, secretary of National Defense, Comelec chairman and commissioners, Armed Forces chief, Army, Air Force and Navy chiefs, PNP chief and policemen with rank of superintendent or higher.

Skills improvement

The PSPG also assured the public that the police escorts will not be left idle during the entire election

period. Assigned security detail will be undergoing "competency and skills enhancement" training to refresh them of their past training and schooling regarding protecting VIP (very important persons).

The cops will stay in police camps, depending on orders issued by the PSPG based on the guidelines.

The recall is part of the routine election ban prescribed by Commission on Elections Resolution 10466.

AFP to help in security

Poll bets were also advised to coordinate with military units during the campaign period for their security from possible rebel attacks, especially in New People's Army-infested areas.

Satur, other CPP leaders not yet off the hook—DOJ

THE Department of Justice will continue to pursue its terrorism cases against former Bayan Muna Rep. Satur Ocampo and other alleged leaders of the Communist Party of the Philippines and New People's Army despite being delisted from government's petition seeking to declare them terrorists.

Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra said the decision to drop the names of Ocampo, National Democratic Front of the Philippines peace consultant Rafael Baylosis, United Nations special rapporteur on rights of indigenous peoples Victoria Lucia Tauli-Corpus and former Asia representative to the UN Expert Mechanism Jose Melencio Molintas in the government's proscription case before the Manila regional trial court did not mean that they will no longer be linked to the terrorism cases.

Rey E. Requejo

5 nabbed, bombs seized from terrorists' camp

MAGUINDANAO – Authorities arrested five alleged members of the terrorist Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters following a raid on the BIFF's camp in Paglat, Maguindanao on Saturday.

The raid in Barangay Damakling also resulted in the recovery of three improvised explosive devices and three pistols, according to Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, chief of the Army's 6th Infantry Division.

Sobejana attributed the success of the operation to the cooperation shown by residents and local officials.

Members of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group based in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and the 4th Special Action Battalion of the police assisted the military during the raid.

The arrested suspects were followers of radical clerics Yasser Saligan and Sheik Makakena, Sobejana said.

Saligan and Makakena were tagged in separate attacks in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat last year.

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MILF chief sets foot in Maguindanao military camp

By JOHN UNSON

MAGUINDANAO – The leader of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) yesterday set foot in a military camp here since the Muslim rebel group was founded in 1980.

Hadji Murad Ebrahim, chairman of the MILF's central committee, visited the Army's Camp Gonzalo Siongco in Maguindanao.

It was his first time to set foot in a military camp since leading the MILF in bloody encounters with the Army's 6th Infantry Division.

"This for me is very historic. This is my first time to enter this military camp," the 71-year-old Murad told his erstwhile enemies in Camp Siongco.

Murad graced the invitation of Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the 6th ID.

The 6th ID's engagement with Murad was meant to sustain the cordiality between the MILF and officers and men of the military unit in Central Mindanao.

The MILF has more than 30 government-recognized



Hadji Murad Ebrahim of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front signs the guest registry of the Army's 6th Infantry Division during his first ever visit to Camp Siongco in Maguindanao yesterday.

JOHN UNSON

enclaves in the region under its July 1997 interim ceasefire accord.

"Our enemies are oppres-

sion, injustice and exploitation, not the military as an organization. The armed conflicts we had were only

circumstantial because the military is part of the government's defense structure. We were never enemies," Murad told the troops.

Sobejana said he was elated with Murad's positive response to their invitation for him to meet the officials of 6th ID and its troops deployed in Central Mindanao.

A Moro officer in 6th ID, Col. Markton Abo, also the division's civil-military relations officer, with their spokesman, Maj. Arvin Encinas, helped Sobejana facilitate the reception honors for Murad.

Murad and Sobejana have agreed to cooperate in ensur-

ing the safety of the Jan. 21 plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

Murad started as a guerrilla in the Moro National Liberation Front in the early 1970s.

He and the Egyptian-trained cleric, Salamat Hashim, bolted from the group and organized the MILF shortly before 1980 due to irreconcilable differences with MNLF founder Nur Misuari.

The meeting of Murad and Army officials in Camp Siongco was also attended by representatives from the 1st Marine Brigade from Sultan Kudarat, where there is also a strong MILF presence. 12

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MILF chief visits Army division headquarters

CAMP SIONGCO, MAGUINDANAO—For the first time on Sunday, the leader of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) set foot on the headquarters of soldiers that he and his men had fought fiercely in the past. Major Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the 6th Infantry Division, the Army unit that battled MILF fighters since 1987, welcomed MILF chair Murad Ebrahim at 10 a.m. on Sunday. "Never in my wildest dreams that I will set foot here and rub elbows with military officials, many of whom were my arch enemies," the Ebrahim said. His visit reciprocated that of Sobejana who went to the MILF's Camp Darapanan in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, in August last year. The military used to describe Darapanan as "lion's den." Ebrahim told his hosts that "our enemies now are not each other but oppression, injustices, exploitation." —EDWIN O. FERNANDEZ

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Historic meeting

Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr., said a meeting between Lanao del Norte 2nd District Congressman Abdullah "Bobby" Dimakuta Dimaporo and Hadji Abdullah G. Makapaar alias Commander Bravo, commander of the North Western Mindanao Front of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), who are long-time rivals in Lanao del Norte, on Sunday, January 13, was a success. Galvez said both have agreed to work collectively for peace and bring development in the area. "As part of our mandate to bring peace by building relationships, I am happy to announce the successful meeting between Dimaporo and Commander Bravo at Camp Bilal in the town of Munal in Lanao del Norte. "It is worth noting that this is the first time both parties have met after four long decades," he said as he also bared that Dimaporo and Makaapar have agreed to set aside their political differences in preparation for the plebiscite that would ratify the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL). (Francis T. Wakefield)

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MILF, AFP 'were never enemies' – Murad

By ALI G. MACARALANG

COTABATO CITY – Buoyed by a series of accolades from state authorities, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Chairman Murad Ebrahim on Sunday claimed that the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) as an institution has never been the enemy of his revolutionary group.

"We were never enemies," Ebrahim, popularly called Hadji Murad, told the rank and file personnel of the Army's 6th Infantry Division (6ID), referring to the MILF and AFP as organizations.

"Our enemies are oppression, injustice and exploitation, not the military as an organization. The armed conflicts we had were only circumstantial because the military is part of the government's defense structure," Murad stressed.

Murad unveiled his perspective of the AFP during his unprecedented visit at the 6ID headquarters in Camp Siongco, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao.

Combatants of the 6ID and the MILF have figured in countless bloody encounters that waned only when the country's largest Moro revolutionary group saw feats in its 2013 and 2014 ma-

jor peace deals with the government.

Murad thanked Major Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, 6ID commander, for arranging his "first ever" and "historic" visit to the camp.

The 6ID covers operationally the provinces of Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, North Cotabato and parts of Lanao del Sur where the MILF maintains more than 30 major enclaves.

Murad's visit to the 6ID was his second in an AFP camp. The first was in Camp Aguinaldo where then AFP Chief of Staff Carlito Galvez Jr. hosted the MILF chieftain on Nov. 19, 2018. It was a reciprocation of Galvez's first visit too at the MILF's Camp Darapanan in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao on Oct. 6 of same year.

Murad and Galvez have since maintained their partnership bolstered by their common push for the ratification of RA 11054, also known as Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), in two upcoming plebiscites. The latter, who once served as 6ID commander, is now the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process.

The two MILF-GPH accords, especially the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro (CAB), were the main bases for RA 11075, which the 17th Congress and President Rodrigo Duterte enacted in July last year as a major instrument in ending

the decades of secessionist rebellion in the country.

Gen. Sobejana's hosting of Murad visit jived with the conduct of caravan by several thousands of pro-BOL supporters aboard motorbikes and four or more-wheeled vehicle around the highway of Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat and North Cotabato that started early morning and winded up here in late afternoon.

Sobejana and his staff officers presented to Murad some memorable presents citing the latter's continued assurance for MILF forces' shift from combat orientation to peace advocacy.

He and Murad have agreed on mutual cooperation in ensuring the safe and orderly conduct of two plebiscites set on Jan. 21 and Feb. 6 for the ratification of the BOL, which seeks to create the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (BAR) in replacement of the 29-year-old Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

The BOL prescribes for BAR's absorption of all ARMM component areas – Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi provinces and the cities of Marawi and Lamitan – as well as the cities of Cotabato and Isabela in Basilan, six towns in Lanao del Norte and 39 barangays in six North Cotabato towns.

Rising from Marawi's rubble

FIRST OF TWO PARTS

By Ayunan G. Gunting

FOLLOWING the battle between government troops and extremist groups in 2017, Marawi City could only dream of getting its former status back. It was once distinguished as the economic hub of Lanao del Sur and the center of Islam in the country. Today, the business district and the surrounding barangays have been reduced to rubble.

Homes of well-to-do families, including Marawi Mayor Majul Gandamra's, were demolished by blasts or damaged by artillery. It's the equivalent of the Makati Central Business District and its surrounding elite villages being bombed out.

In spite of the spoils of war, some cultural icons have remained, such as the scenic Mindanao State University and the "torogans," the traditional Maranao homes with intricate carvings.

On a personal initiative, Gandamra, his family and friends donated 46 hec-

tares of land for settlements, consisting of temporary shelters built by the National Housing Authority and the municipality. Many poor families who were displaced during the war have returned to Marawi and have moved into these homes.

In Barangay Sagonsongan, families have occupied 1,050 temporary shelters. An additional 300 houses are being put up.

Of the 1,500 temporary shelters in Barangay Boganga, 600 have been turned over to other residents.

Meanwhile, a thousand homes in Barangay Dulay are on the rise.

The temporary shelters are just the start of Marawi's urban renewal, which officials said could probably take more than a decade.

The five-month Marawi siege was said to be the country's longest urban war. Fighters of ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) and the local radical Islamic groups of the Maute and Abu Sayaff tried to conquer the city, including the capitol building.

When the siege began in May 2017, Gandamra, his immediate family, and his staffers were holed up at the city hall.

"It was the target of the ISIL and the Maute so that they could conquer [the city] and install their flag. They were well equipped and tried to kill us, but we stood our ground," the mayor said.

"The City Hall is the symbol of our sovereignty. Our retaliation was calibrated. After four days, the military strengthened our forces. We were then able to extricate ourselves from the city hall," said Gandamra.

The mayor and his family have since been staying in their other residence in

Iligan City, Lanao del Norte, which is 38 kilometers or an hour's drive from Marawi.

Unable to sack city hall, the extremist groups took over Marawi's central business district instead.

"There was least resistance there," said Gandamra.

While government forces bombed several areas, 95 percent of Marawi's residents fled to their relatives away from the city or lived in evacuation centers. The battle ended in October 2017.

Gandamra said out of Marawi's 96 barangays, 72 have tried to return to normalcy. Over 800 households are still staying in evacuation centers outside of Marawi.

Task Force Bangon Marawi, comprised of various government agencies, is slowly working on the rehabilitation of Ground Zero or Marawi's devastated city center.

As part of the cleanup, it has to get permission from homeowners to demolish the ruins of their homes that are deemed unsafe. There are plans to build roads and install underground cables. (to be continued) 54

"Exhausted" Maute gang men yield

By Kathleen Mae Bulquerin

Tired of being on the run and dissatisfied with the way their group was being managed by their leaders particularly Abu Dar, three members of the Islamic State-inspired Maute group over the weekend decided to yield to government troopers in Piagapo, Lanao del Sur.

Lt. Col. Jason Jumawan, Philippine Army's 82nd Infantry Battalion commander, said the bandits whose names were withheld, also handed over one rocket propelled grenade (RPG), one grenade launcher and one caliber .30 M1 Garand rifle with ammunition.

Last Friday, two members of Maute group who confessed to being part of the Marawi City siege last May 2017, also voluntarily surrendered to authorities.

During interrogation, the suspects confessed that they were followers of Owayda Benito Morohomsar alias Abu Dar who is now one of the top leaders of the Maute Gang.

"While we are supporting the recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation of Marawi, our efforts against Maute group remnants will continue, in order to achieve a peaceful and progressive community in our area of operation," Col. Romeo Brawner Jr., commander of the Army's 103rd Infantry Brigade said.

Last Friday, two members of the Maute group who confessed to being part of the Marawi City siege last May 2017, also voluntarily surrendered to authorities.

The two surrenderers were also followers of Abu Dar and decided to escape the group and surrender to the authorities for the same reason that "they are already tired of running and evading the troops."

The Maute group gained notoriety when it seized Marawi City last 23 May 2017 and openly challenged government authorities, resulting to more than five months of occupation that virtually reduced the once prosperous city into rubbles.

The war left more than 150 government forces dead, thousands of Islamic fighters killed, 87 civilian casualties and displaced nearly one million residents.

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Galvez, UN to beef up ties for Bangsamoro transition

By JOSE RODEL CLAPANO

Presidential adviser on the peace process Carlito Galvez Jr. has urged the United Nations to continue its assistance in providing capacity development to key leaders in the Bangsamoro.

"Our focus now is how to have good governance on the new Bangsamoro government. I would like to request the UN family to help us in mentoring key leaders on how to be efficient and effective in governance," Galvez told officials of various UN agencies who paid

him a courtesy call last Friday.

Galvez also thanked the UN for its continued support for the peace process.

"I think your projects that are people-centered and those on human resource development are good. I would like to thank you for helping us and sharing the same goal," he said.

Galvez cited the role of UN agencies in helping counter violent extremism, preventing the recruitment of child soldiers, empowering women and developing the whole Mindanao region.

"I believe that if we have

peace in Mindanao, we have peace in the Philippines. If we have development in Mindanao, we have development in the Philippines," he said.

The United Nations' partnership framework is anchored on the Sustainable Development Goals 2019-2023. It aims to achieve outcomes related to people-centeredness, economic prosperity and peace.

In his remarks during the courtesy call, UN resident coordinator Ola Almgren expressed interest in Office of the the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPPAP)'s

practices in the peace process.

"OPAPP has contributed a lot to the global practice. The UN is looking forward to your experiences and best practices, hoping that you can participate in global fora and share them as well as to work with you and your staff," Almgren said.

Among the UN agencies present in the meeting were the United Nations Development Program, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, UN Women, International Organization for Migration, and Prevention on Violent Extremism. 12

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PRIVILEGE SPEECH

ANDAYA: WHERE ARE FUNDS FOR BANGSAMORO PLEBISCITE?

**By Marlon Ramos,
Taher Solaiman
and Edwin Fernandez
@Team_Inquirer**

President Duterte's efforts to bring lasting peace to Mindanao may come to naught after Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno failed to allocate funds for the plebiscite on the proposed new Bangsamoro juridical entity, House Majority Leader Rolando Andaya Jr. said on Monday.

In a privilege speech, Andaya wondered how the Commission on Elections (Comelec) would be able to conduct the plebiscite on Jan. 21 and Feb. 6 as mandated by the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) without any appropriation approved by Congress.

He said he had told Diokno about the matter, but the budget secretary failed to act on it.

"(Diokno) completely forgot about it. Had we listened to him and passed the budget without even looking at it, then we would have been part of that negligence," Andaya said.

"Maybe he has other things in mind other than the President's peace and order agenda," he added.

In a statement, Andaya said the "prospect of lasting peace in Mindanao is in peril."

P857M for plebiscite

He said the Comelec needed P857 million in holding the plebiscite, but the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) did not include this in the proposed P10-billion budget of the Comelec for this year.

"The budget for BOL plebiscite is not the only item which Diokno forgot to include in the 2019 budget. Even the budget for the BOL implementation is missing from budget documents submitted by the DBM to Congress," he noted.

At least 2.8 million people are expected to cast their votes in the plebiscite for the ratification of the BOL, based on records of the Comelec.

Enacted last year, the BOL provides for the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

The BARMM will cover the existing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), including Cotabato City and Isabela City, six towns in Lanao del Norte, and 39 barangays in

six North Cotabato towns.

Some barangays in Iligan City and Zamboanga City, five towns in Lanao del Norte, and some barangays in Zamboanga Sibugay also petitioned to be included in the BARMM.

The Comelec said the Jan. 21 plebiscite would be conducted in areas comprising the ARMM as well as Isabela City in Basilan and Cotabato City.

The plebiscite for the province of Lanao del Norte, except Iligan City; the towns of Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Mid-sayap, Pikit and Pigkawayan in the province of North Cotabato; and the 28 areas contiguous to any of the Bangsamoro core areas, where either the local government or at least 10 percent of registered voters asked for inclusion in the plebiscite, shall hold theirs on Feb. 6.

The Comelec expects to finish this week the printing of the official ballot, said Ma. Victoria Dulcero, vice chair of the Comelec's printing committee.

North Cotabato leaders

In North Cotabato province, unlike their Moro counterparts in Sulu and Lanao del Norte, non-Moro leaders are throwing their all-out support for the BOL despite the prospect of losing some of their barangays that would opt to join the Bangsamoro territory.

North Cotabato Gov. Emmylou Taliño-Mendoza expressed her support for the BOL on Saturday at a forum attended by national and local officials, and leaders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Moro National Liberation Front at the gymnasium of the provincial capitol in Kidapawan City.

"Yes to Bangsamoro Organic Law because it is high time we end the suffering of children, women and the elderly from the conflict," Mendoza said. "The BOL will pave the way [for] genuine peace in [North] Cotabato."

In Carmen town, where seven barangays had petitioned the Comelec to join the BOL plebiscite but only five were approved, Mayor Rogelio "Roger" Taliño said he would let go of the barangays in his town that would opt to join the Bangsamoro.

—WITH REPORTS FROM TINA G. SANTOS
AND JULIE M. AURELIO

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Printing of ballots for BOL plebiscite to be finished this week

By **LESLIE ANN G. AQUINO**

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) expects to finish the printing of the ballots to be used for the February 6 plebiscite for the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL)

this week.

Vicky Dulcero, vice chairman of the Comelec Printing Committee, said they are targeting to finish the printing of the 600,000 ballots either Tuesday or Wednesday.

According to Dulcero, they started

printing the ballots for the February 6 Plebiscite at the National Printing Office (NPO) in Quezon City over the weekend.

These are the ballots for Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato.

"We are almost done. So I think in a

day or two we will be able to deliver to our packing and shipping committee for deployment of the ballots," said Dulcero.

To note, the Comelec already finished printing the more than two million ballots for the January 21 Bangsamoro Plebiscite December last year.

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COMPEL

able DBM to implement the salary adjustment this year.

"We have to wait for the passage of the 2019 General Appropriations Act. Otherwise, we do not have legal basis for the implementation of the fourth tranche," he said.

Diokno earlier said government workers will get their salary increase next month, retroactive to January 1, upon the approval of the P3.7-trillion 2019 national budget.

Government is currently running under a reenacted 2018 budget.

Budget Undersecretary Janet Abuel said DBM is preparing its response to the petition for mandamus and would state provisions of the law including EO 201 that guided their actions.

Budget Assistant Secretary Myrna Chua said DBM needs about P45 billion to P50 billion to cover the fourth tranche of salary hike for some 1.3 million government workers.

Chua said the MBFP under the reenacted 2018 budget cannot be used for the new wage hike because it was specific only to the third tranche of salary increase.

Presidential spokesman and concurrent Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo dismissed the claim of Andaya that the executive branch is holding the salary hike hostage, saying "the one holding (the salary hike) hostage would be Congress, not the executive department."

Senate majority leader Juan Miguel Zubiri said senators in a caucus set January 23 as the target approval date of the 2019 budget.

Zubiri said senators will try to

finish the plenary debates on Jan. 16, approve the proposed budget on third and final reading on Jan. 21, and conduct a bicameral conference the following day which they will try to finish on the same day.

If everything goes smoothly, Zubiri said the proposed budget can be ratified by both chambers on Jan. 23.

Senate President pro tempore Ralph Recto said they can tackle the budget in two or three weeks, while other bills can be discussed on the remaining time before their break on February.

SUBPOENA

Andaya had a change of heart, saying the House of Representatives will subpoena Diokno if he will continue to snub the committee on rules' hearing on the alleged flood control scam under his leadership.

"We will subpoena him (Diokno) if he does not show up," he told a press conference. "We will play hide and seek in Luneta if he doesn't show up."

Andaya earlier said he would no longer force Diokno to attend his committee's hearings because it would be too confrontational.

Diokno snubbed the panel's initial hearing in Naga City early this month, saying he was advised by the Executive not to attend it.

The Andaya panel has formally invited Diokno, his daughter Charlotte Justine, and her in-laws who are incorporators of Aremar Construction to appear as resource persons in the hearing.

Andaya's panel has been investigating Diokno for allegedly

manipulating the annual budget to favor some individuals, especially the in-laws of Charlotte, who are involved in the construction business.

Andaya said the House remains optimistic that Diokno will cooperate and attend the hearing, especially since his integrity is at stake.

"He needs to clarify himself. His son-in-law has already hired a lawyer to help him face us tomorrow (today). He (Diokno) should also get his own lawyer," he said.

Andaya said officials of Aremar Construction, which is partly owned by the in-laws of Diokno's daughter, might be liable for plunder for using dummy corporations after cornering billions worth of public works projects in exchange for hefty commissions.

He said some Triple A contractors gave him copies of deposit slips worth around P70 million to prove the allegation.

NO BUDGET FOR BOL

Andaya also blamed Diokno for allegedly imperiling the prospect of lasting peace in Mindanao when he allegedly forgot to include the budget for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) plebiscite in the P3.757-trillion proposed national budget for 2019.

"Everybody is praying for the success of the BOL plebiscite on January 21 and February 6. Yet nobody is asking if we have the funds necessary to conduct the plebiscite. I hate to be the one to burst the bubble. The DBM has not allocated a budget, not even a centavo, for the BOL plebiscite," he said.

Andaya said while the Comelec

needs P857 million for the plebiscite, Diokno forgot to include the amount in Comelec's P10 billion 2019 budget.

He said even the budget for the BOL implementation is missing from budget documents submitted by the DBM to Congress.

He said Senate debate records show that the implementation of the BOL will cost P109 billion in the first year, P369 billion in the first three years, and will reach P1.981 trillion for a period of 10 years.

The amount does not include funds for social services like the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program or 4Ps, and pension for senior citizens.

ABUSE OF POWER?

Rep. Luis Raymond Villafuerte (NP, Camarines Sur), Andaya's political nemesis, accused Andaya of abusing his position to get back at Diokno.

"This is a bizarre situation in which the House majority leader has for the first time ever orchestrated a demolition job on the DBM and on Secretary Benjamin Diokno, who is an alter ego of the President, in tandem with the House minority bloc," Villafuerte said.

Villafuerte, who earlier called for Andaya's ouster as majority leader, said pursuing the hearing would be "against the wishes of a majority of our peers in the ruling coalition who wants a speedy congressional approval of the 2019 GAA in support of President Duterte's vision for high and inclusive growth."

— *With Jocelyn Montemayor, Wendell Vigilia and Raymond Africa*

Should we end our alliance with US?

Is it still relevant to our security? Maybe not," said Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana in a press conference last month, revealing his plans to review the 1951 Philippine-US Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT).

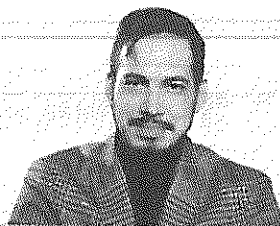
The surprising announcement came shortly after the return of the Balangiga bells, which was warmly welcomed by no less than President Duterte, who had demanded their repatriation.

After all, many expected a thaw in frayed bilateral relations, which have been undermined by disagreements over human rights and democracy concerns as well as divergent approaches to dealing with the China challenge in the West Philippine Sea.

Lorenzana raised the stakes by making it clear that scrapping the treaty altogether is an option on the table. "Let's see... We are going to approach this MDT, look at it in the backdrop of what's happening in the area, in the interest of the nation, not the interest of other nations," he said.

It's not really clear what the exact intent is behind calling for the MDT review, but it clearly reflects lingering anxieties in the Philippines vis-à-vis the precise coordinates of American security commitments.

There are two fundamental concerns with the MDT, namely lack of temporal automaticity as well as clarity of spatial scope. According to the treaty, each party "would act to meet the common dangers [in their area of jurisdiction] in accordance with its constitutional processes." This means that in an event of conflict between the Philippines and a third party, the US government will still have to rely on the deliberation and approval of the US Congress, which has a say on the war powers of the country's presidency. If the conflict is a major one, and American public opinion is divided on



HORIZONS

RICHARD HEYDARIAN

the issue, it's unlikely that any American president would try to completely bypass the Congress even if he/she deems the need for expedient intervention.

As for the geographical scope of the treaty, it makes mention of "an armed attack on the metropolitan territory of either of the Parties, or on the island territories under its jurisdiction in the Pacific or on its armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific..."

Yet, it's far from clear whether "island territories" include Scarborough Shoal and other claimed and controlled Philippine land features in the West Philippine Sea. Since the 1970s, Washington has equivocated on this issue.

As former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger argued, "[Philippine] occupation could hardly be termed uncontested in the face of claims and protests of Chinese and Vietnamese."

Crucially, the Richard Nixon administration made it clear that the "MDT may apply in event of attack on [Philippine] forces deployed to third countries," which "is fundamentally different from a case where deployment is for purpose of

enlarging Philippine territory."

Thus, this could mean that Washington is only willing to intervene if Philippine troops and vessels operating in the contested area come under attack.

This, however, raises questions on the coercive occupation of Philippine-claimed land features, where Filipino troops are either absent or were driven away without a firefight.

In more concrete terms, does the treaty cover the Scarborough Shoal? What if China managed to completely cut off the supply lines of our troops in Second Thomas Shoal (Ayungin) and the Kalayaan Group of Islands, driving them away without any actual armed conflict?

This is particularly relevant in light of China's rapid militarization of reclaimed islands, laying down the foundation for an effective imposition of an Air Defense Identification Zone and other forms of exclusionary measures in the area, with potentially dire consequences for the supply lines of other claimant states.

Doubts over American commitment to the Philippines were only reinforced during the Chinese occupation of Mischief Reef (1994) and Scarborough Shoal (2012), where Washington stood largely idly by.

Washington has consistently argued that it is "neutral" vis-à-vis the sovereignty disputes in the area, thus its reluctance to intervene on behalf of the Philippines against other claimant states. But what about helping its ally to protect its sovereign rights per international law?

The proposed review of the MDT, thus, could serve as a much-needed springboard to push for greater American clarity on these fundamental questions.

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ONLINE NEWS

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AFP willing to provide security to poll bets

By Priam Nepomuceno January 14, 2019, 11:27 am

MANILA -- Poll bets running for national and local posts are advised to coordinate with military units during the campaign period for their security from possible rebel attacks, especially in New People's Army (NPA)-infested areas, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato said on Monday.

Detoyato said candidates can request for security but it is up to the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to approve it.

"They can update their campaign trail with the AFP unit in their area to give them area security as long as they coordinate in advance so that troops can be pre-deployed," he said in a message to the Philippine News Agency.

The election period began on Sunday (Jan. 13).

Earlier, Detoyato said the AFP would ensure the peaceful conduct of the May polls and all election-related activities this year, including the Bangsamoro Organic Law plebiscite on January 21 and February 6. **(PNA)**

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