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OFFICE OF THE ARMY CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

# NEWS CLIPPINGS

16 January 2019

Wednesday



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## 16 JANUARY 2019

Weather Forecast- <a href="http://pagasa.dost.gov.ph/weather/daily-weather-forecast">http://pagasa.dost.gov.ph/weather/daily-weather-forecast</a>		
Page Nr.	Title	Source
<b>NATIONAL NEWS</b>		
1-2	Build roads now, pay lot owners later	PDI-A1
3-4	'Diokno in-laws got P81-M commissions'	P Star-1
<b>AFP/ SECURITY RELATED NEWS</b>		
5	Daraga, Cotabato City placed under Comelec control	P Star-12
6	Cotabato City, Daraga under Comelec control	Malaya-B1
7	Election jargons clarified	D Tribune-7
8	Persistent rebellion justifies martial law extension in Mindanao-OSG to SC	M Bulletin-3
9	Calida defends martial law extension	M Standard-A6
10	Illegal logs seized in Surigao	M Bulletin-13
11	Unity walk, prayer rally, and covenant signing for HOPE in Zamboanga peninsula	M Bulletin-13
12	Gapay new Solcom chief, vice Pamonag	Malaya-B2
13	DND probes Subic scandal	D Tribune-3
14	PH firm should take over Hanjin operations-DND	M Standard-A3
15	NDFP consultant Baylosis released	PDI-A3
16	AFP Chief of Staff to LGUS: declare Reds persona non grata	PDI-A3
17	Mindanao rebels beef up NPA in Luzon-Army exec	PDI-A6
18-19	PNP not backing down on counter-intel vs Reds	P Star-5
20	3 NPAs surrender in Iligan City	M Bulletin-13
21	13 election hotspots in Iloilo	M Bulletin-12
22	Claim of backchannel talks with Reds is fake news-Lorezana	M Bulletin-1
23	'Fake news' says Lorezana of MTRCB members' claim	Malaya-B1
24	NPA 'arsonists' surrender in Sultan Kudarat	M Times-A7
25	23 NPA rebels surrender in Laguna, Iligan	M Times-A7
26	Govt to CPP: Listen to Duterte, yield arms	M Times-A2
27-28	Duterte's backdoor to peace	D Tribune-1
29	Palace denies Andal's claim on backchannel talks with Reds	M Standard-A1
30	CIDG files 'admin' case vs Baldo	M Standard-A3
31	2 NPA rebels surrender	Tempo-2
32	NPA peace talks, go uli	Balita-3
33	CPP-NPA ideklarang terorista	Balita-3
34-35	BOL plebiscite funds available, says Diokno	PDI-A6
36	SC sets BOL oral arguments after the fact	P Star-1
37	Clash erupts ahead of BOL plebiscite	M Times-A7
38	Duterte to join plebiscite rally	M Times-A2
39	Digong shores up BOL push	D Tribune-7
40	Du30 to attend pro-BOL assembly	M Standard-A6

*By 2028, a world-class Army that is a source of national pride.*

41-42	Senate to realign P75B DPWH budget insertion	Malaya-B1
<b>EDITORIAL/COMMENTARY</b>		
43	A different #MeToo: voting 'yes' to BOL	PDI-A11
44	Of beginnings and endings	D Tribune-5
45-46	That pessimist lame duck Trillanes	D Tribune-5
<b>ONLINE NEWS</b>		
47	Solcom chief retires	<a href="http://www.pna.gov.ph">www.pna.gov.ph</a>
48	AFP lauds Agusan Sur town's 'persona non grata' tag vs. NPA	<a href="http://www.pna.gov.ph">www.pna.gov.ph</a>
49	AFP to conduct final security check for BOL plebiscite	<a href="http://www.pna.gov.ph">www.pna.gov.ph</a>
50	Mindanao rebels beef up NPA in Luzon — Army exec	<a href="http://www.inquirer.net">www.inquirer.net</a>
51	Guns recovered after Army, BIFF clash in Maguindanao	<a href="http://www.retiredanalyst.blogspot.com">www.retiredanalyst.blogspot.com</a>
52	Encounter in Guihulngan as condemnation rally held	<a href="http://www.retiredanalyst.blogspot.com">www.retiredanalyst.blogspot.com</a>
53	Soldier wounded in encounter with NPA	<a href="http://www.retiredanalyst.blogspot.com">www.retiredanalyst.blogspot.com</a>

# BUILD ROADS NOW, PAY LOT OWNERS LATER

SPECIAL REPORT BY DELFIN T. MALLARI JR.

The DPWH has not paid more than \$50 landowner whose properties have been affected by the construction of a 7.2-kilometer bypass in Sariaya town, Quezon province, three years after starting the road project.

FROM A1

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.  
@dtmallarijriNQ

(Last of three parts)

LUCENA CITY—A bypass in Sariaya town, Quezon province, intended to ease traffic on Maharlika Highway should have been opened in 2017, but development of the project has dragged beyond the deadline because the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) remains grappling with right of way problems.

Under the Right-of-Way Act, the government must first acquire access to private property and pay the owners before breaking ground.

But as in other road projects in Luzon, the 7.2-kilometer, P467-million Sariaya bypass began construction without first settling right of way.

Funds were initially allocated for the project in 2014, but none of the more than 180 landowners whose properties were affected by the project had been compensated.

Not all of them, however, have submitted complete proofs of ownership. The papers of those who have complied with the requirement are still going through verification and authentication, according to Roger Crespo, head of DPWH-Quezon 2nd District.

#### Priority project

Identified by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific as a priority project in the Asian highways program, the bypass skirts the Sariaya stretch of Maharlika Highway, which will reduce by at least 40 percent the traffic volume along that section of the interprovincial road.

The bypass starts at Barangay Sampaloc 2 and cuts through the Sariaya town center. It passes through parts of Tumbaga 1, Pill and Gibanga, villages that once were mostly rice fields and coconut plantations.

It also cuts through part of Ilayang Talim village in Lucena and exits on the Quezon eco-tourism road at Isabang village in the city.

Four bridges that link the sections of the bypass complete the project.

Crespo said only a 1-km stretch of the road remained unconcreted and that the contractor had begun building the bridges.

Work on the Gibanga and Morong bridges is in progress, but no work has commenced on the bridges at Tumbaga 1 and Isabang.

#### Waste of taxpayer money

There is also no work on a stretch of the bypass from the bridge at Morong to the bridge at

Gibanga because the government has not acquired right of way.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson, who is scrutinizing the DPWH 2019 budget for hidden pork, said the allocation for the Sariaya bypass had gone to waste.

The project was suspended several times because of unresolved right of way issues, Lacson said.

Pepito Abratique, a compensation claimant, said the mess began right at the start of the project, with DPWH workers descending on property to be affected by the construction.

"They just came here and conducted location surveys on our properties without our consent," said Abratique, a farmer from Tumbaga 1 village.

Abratique said he was surprised that the DPWH was dictating the amount of compensation, initially P15 per square meter and then raised to P19.

"From the start, we sensed that there was something illegal going on," Abratique said.

#### Nonexistent lots?

He said that when staff from Lacson's office inspected the project last year, the landowners learned that the DPWH plan for the project included nonexistent property.

"We traced the location of the lots as specified in the DPWH plan. We found nonexistent lots were inserted into the plan," Abratique said.

The discovery implied fraud, with the government paying fictitious people for fictitious lots and the money going to the pockets of scammers.

Crespo declined to comment, saying he assumed office only in March last year.

But Cesar Genosa, DPWH-Quezon 2nd District "special agent for road right of way," denied Abratique's claim, saying all



**They just came  
and conducted  
location surveys  
on our properties  
without our  
consent**

#### Pepito Abratique

Farmer claimant

lots covered by the project had been identified through surveys.

"There are no nonexistent lots," Genosa told the Inquirer.

#### Lots subdivided

He said it was found during the surveys that some lots had been divided into several plots by the landowners, further complicating the right of way settlement.

There are also multiple claimants to right of way compensation for several titled properties, posing more difficulty, particularly in cases involving "lots [that] are still parts of a mother title," he said.

"It requires judicial partition. And that will cause another delay in the [right of way] settlement," Genosa said.

He also confirmed that no landowner had been compensated for right of way, adding that the unsettled claims covered the whole stretch of the bypass already concreted, about 6 km long.

#### Project proponent surprised

But some claims have already been approved and are now being processed by the con-

cerned DPWH offices, he said.

Quezon Rep. Vicente Alcala, the project proponent, expressed surprise when told by the Inquirer on Monday that the landowners had not been paid yet.

"I was not aware of that. The DPWH should have already paid them," Alcala said by phone.

He said he would immediately arrange a meeting with all the claimants to help them and ask the DPWH to explain the "unwarranted delay" in compensation.

Jhong Llubit, project manager of the contractor, JBL Construction, confirmed that right of way problems were behind the delay in the completion of the project.

"I stopped eight months ago and I only resumed this January because of the right of way problems," Llubit said by phone.

He said JBL Construction had yet to receive payment for its part of the project, a 300-meter stretch of the bypass.

The rest of the project is handled by other contractors, he said. "There are other, much bigger companies," he said.

#### Advances from contractor

One of those companies, Tantuco Construction, has no problems with the DPWH.

Rafael Tantuco, owner of the company, said his work covered most of the 7.2-km bypass and that he had not encountered problems involving payment.

"I only have more than 700 meters of unfinished work due to some technical problems," he said.

Tantuco also confirmed that right of way problems were delaying completion of the project.

He said he had been helping the DPWH solve the problem by advancing payments to claimants but only if these involved "a few thousands."

But he asks the DPWH for reimbursement, he said. INQ

# 'Diokno in-laws got P81-M commissions'

By JESS DIAZ

In-laws of Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno received more than P81 million in commissions from government contracts in Sorsogon over a six-month period last year, House Majority Leader Rolando Andaya Jr. said yesterday.

"The public funds disbursed by the DBM (Department of Budget and Management) eventually found their way to bank accounts of favored contractors, in this case, Aremar Construction, which is owned by the in-laws of Secretary Diokno," he said.

He made the statement at the start of the second hearing of the House rules committee, which he heads, on the alleged questionable DBM fund allocation practices and the multibillion-peso flood control scam under the Duterte administration.

The Hamors of Sorsogon own Aremar Construction. Romeo Sicat Jr., married to Diokno's daughter Charlotte Justine, is an incorporator and son of Sorsogon Vice Gov. Ester Hamor, whose husband, Jose Edwin, is mayor of Casiguran town. The mayor used to be a major shareholder of Aremar.

But the Casiguran mayor, who was present at yesterday's

Turn to Page 6

## Diokno From Page 1

hearing, denied being an in-law of the budget secretary.

"*Ang tawag niya (Diokno) sa akin mayor. Pero hindi ko balae (He calls me mayor, but I'm not an in-law),*" Hamor said.

"*Mas lalong hindi ko kaano-ano si (All the more I have nothing to do with) Diokno,*" he told the committee.

Andaya insisted that the mayor is an in-law of the budget secretary, Hamor being the stepfather of Sicat Jr.

Hamor denied he was close to Diokno, saying he only saw him once at a wedding.

The House majority leader said Aremar received a total of P81.1 million from different "dummy contractors" between May 5 and Nov. 7 last year, or a period of six months.

Documents he furnished reporters show that the fund transfers amounted to P10.4 million on May 4, P10.5 million on July 3, P12.5 million on Aug. 31, P11.4 million on Oct. 10, P22.4 million five days later on Oct. 9 and P13.9 million on Nov. 7.

Andaya said the transfers are reflected in six bank deposit slips unnamed contractors turned over to him.

"The deposit slips clearly indicate that the deposits are proceeds from DPWH (Department of Public Works and Highways) contracts, none of which Aremar won through bidding. These are the facts confronting Secretary Diokno. He and his family members must explain these to the (House) committee on rules

and to the Filipino people," he said.

"It is clear from documents in our possession that Secretary Diokno is directly related to the owners of Aremar Construction," Andaya argued.

Diokno has admitted that the Hamors are his in-laws but that he extended no favor to them or to their hometown of Casiguran or home province of Sorsogon.

Mayor Hamor admitted forming Aremar Construction in 2014 but claimed that he divested his shares in 2016 and that he had lost track of its transactions since then.

But Andaya said 2018 documents from the Securities and Exchange Commission show that Hamor was still a major shareholder of Aremar.

He said despite the P81-million fund transfers, Aremar paid only P15,000 in taxes.

### Wife's resentment

Hamor also said he included Diokno's son-in-law Sicat Jr. among Aremar's incorporators after a quarrel with his wife Ester, who resented not having anyone from her side of the family included in the construction firm.

Mayor Hamor also claimed Casiguran is not a favored town and ranks seventh among Sorsogon towns in terms of budget allocation.

"Eighteen out of our 25 barangays are vulnerable to flooding," he said. During the hearing, Andaya revealed more flood control project ir-



Diokno

regularities.

"I personally examined all the bidding irregularities submitted by CT Leoncio (an Aremar joint venture partner and alleged dummy) to the DPWH (Department of Public Works and Highways). What I discovered was mind-boggling," he said.

He said among his findings were "18 overlapping projects using one backhoe, 21 overlapping projects using one dump truck and 16 overlapping projects using one pay loader.

"What CT Leoncio is trying to accomplish in its infrastructure projects is humanly impossible... There is only one answer possible: it's not CT Leoncio that's doing the projects. It is just a dummy of other contractors who have connections in the highest levels of the DBM and DPWH," he said.

Andaya and his colleagues were also told that the P75 billion in "insertions" in the proposed P3.757-billion 2019 national budget came from members of Congress.

DBM Undersecretary Tina Canda told the committee on rules that the amount "includes initiatives from lawmakers."

She admitted that the huge sum was added to the budget of the DPWH without the projects and their appropriations "being vetted."

"We have no capacity to vet," she said.

During the House Question Hour on the budget last Dec. 11, Diokno admitted that he added P75 billion to the previously approved DPWH budget ceiling of P480 billion so that the administration's "Build, Build, Build" program would have more funds.

He later described the augmentation as an "adjustment," not insertion.

The rules committee and the committee on public accounts

chaired by Minority Leader Danilo Suarez are conducting an inquiry into questionable budget practices and the alleged multibillion-peso flood control scam.

Andaya confirmed that the bulk of the P75 billion consisted of projects proposed by House members.

"I already showed you the list. It is composed of many of us," he told his colleagues.

He said those with huge allocations for their districts were previous leaders of the House led by former speaker Pantaleon Alvarez.

"Senators are among the project proponents. Their funds are parked in congressional districts," he said.

Andaya did not name names.

Anti-pork Sen. Panfilo Lacson wants the P75-billion insertion removed from the DPWH budget.

Diokno had said Public Works Secretary Mark Villar was ultimately responsible for the huge augmentation in his budget. Villar has not said much about the controversy.

The budget chief said a list of projects supporting the augmentation came from the DPWH.

Contrary to the claim of Andaya that Casiguran, Sorsogon was favored in the alleged P51-billion budget insertions, the municipality was given zero allocation for infrastructure projects under the DPWH.

Based on DPWH records in 2018, of the provinces in Bicol region, Albay received the highest allocation with P11.2 billion, debunking Andaya's allegation that Sorsogon was unduly favored by Diokno.

Sorsogon came in second (P10.5 billion), Camarines Sur (P10.2 billion), Masbate (P4.5 billion), Camarines Norte (P3.3 billion) and Catanduanes (P2.5 billion).

At least 25 other provincial districts got a bigger share of infrastructure projects than Sorsogon's first district where Casiguran is located.

"His accusations are illusory. The numbers are wrong and the narrative he's selling is not grounded on facts," Diokno said earlier.

In a two-page document entitled "2019 DPWH Infrastructure Program based on National Expenditure Program," Sorsogon's first district was earmarked an allocation of P705 million while its second

district is poised to receive P395 million for flood and road projects.

## Blame game

At yesterday's House hearing, DPWH and DBM officials blamed each other for the P75-billion insertion.

Canda defended Diokno's assertion, saying, "The projects were encoded and uploaded into our (computer) system by the DPWH."

Andaya, who was budget secretary during the Arroyo administration, said tracing the origin of the P75-billion insertion and supporting projects "should not be difficult."

"There are codes for those appropriations. We should look at the listing and the encoding process," he said.

Senators, meanwhile, moved to restore P24.2 billion in the proposed budget of the Department of Health (DOH) this year to boost funding for its programs to rehabilitate or put new health facilities and staff them with medical personnel.

The decision to augment the DOH's Health Facilities Enhancement Program (HFEP) and the Human Resource for Health Deployment Program (HRHDP) came during the plenary deliberations on the agency's proposed P171-billion budget.

The DBM earlier slashed P30 billion from the HFEP and HRHDP, a move Health Secretary Francisco Duque III strongly protested, as it would delay the completion of facilities being built.

Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon sought on the floor to realign funds from the alleged "insertions" of P75 billion and P28 billion made by the DBM to the budgets of the DPWH and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), respectively, for the two DOH programs.

Sen. Joseph Victor Ejercito, who was defending the DOH budget, accepted Drilon's proposal, saying it would make the implementation of the anticipated Universal Health Care Program (UHCP) more effective.

"The slashing of the HFEP budget will be a disaster for the DOH and the initial year of implementation of the UHCP where more patients are expected to go to government health centers," Ejercito said.

Duque welcomed the development, echoing Ejercito's

statement that it would make the UHCP more effective.

## List of projects

Lacson, meanwhile, said he is set to present today a list of projects supposedly to be funded by the P75-billion increase in the DPWH budget.

Lacson stressed the Senate does not intend to cut the DPWH national budget but is merely trying to make sure the people's money is put to good use.

At Malacañang, presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo expressed confidence the administration would be able to find ways to implement its key projects even with the Senate's removal from the budget program of P75-billion funding for infrastructure.

"There are many ways. The executive is very creative as well as Congress. Let's see," Panelo said.

"There's the supplemental budget. That can be tapped. If it's for the good of the country, every branch of the government should cooperate," he added.

"That's the job of Congress, to amend," he said of the removal of the fund. "If they did that, they were doing their job."

Senators agreed to scrap the funds after Secretary Villar admitted not having prior knowledge of the alleged insertions, according to Lacson.

But Panelo maintained that Villar was aware of the additional funding.

"Perhaps he (Villar) was misquoted. It cannot be that he had no prior knowledge because that was discussed in the Cabinet. That was a proposal, all of us were present and all of us consented to that," the spokesman said.

"Every budget is to be presented in the Cabinet and it has to be approved by the President. The President asked us if there was any objection and there was none... He (Villar) was not just informed, he was present in the Cabinet. Unless he went out to... psee... but I doubt," he added.

Panelo expressed optimism that Congress would pass the 2019 budget within the first quarter.

"In fact, even Senator (Vicente) Sotto (III), when he texted me, said 'kami OK kami diyan (we are OK with that),' he said. -- With Paolo Romero, Alexis Romero, Cecille Suerte Felipe



# Daraga, Cotabato City placed under Comelec control

By SHEILA CRISOSTOMO

Daraga town in Albay and Cotabato City have been placed under the control of the Commission on Elections (Comelec) in connection with the May polls.

The Comelec approved yesterday the recommendation of the Philippine National Police (PNP) to place the two areas under the control of the poll body following the killing of Ako Bicol party-list representative Rodel Batocabe last month and the bomb explosion in Cotabato City on New Year's Eve that left scores of people dead and wounded, Comelec spokesman James Jimenez said.

Under the Omnibus Election Code, the Comelec is authorized to take control of an area to ensure free, peaceful and orderly elections.

This means that the poll body can exercise full control and supervision over law enforcement agencies and even political units in the areas.

## Poll watchlist

Meanwhile, 10 towns and a city in Bulacan were added to the election watchlist areas of the Philippine National

Police (PNP).

The towns of Doña Remedios Trinidad, Guiguinto and Marilao are classified under category 1 while Baliwag, Bulakan, Calumpit, Hagonoy, Paombong, San Ildefonso, San Miguel, San Rafael and San Jose del Monte are under category 2, Senior Superintendent Chito Bersaluna, Bulacan police director, told The STAR.

Those classified under category 1 have barangays where there is a reported presence of communist rebels while intense political rivalries were reported in areas under category 2.

Those listed under category 3 have violent incidents that are election-related.

Renato Magbutay, Comelec-Northern Mindanao director, expressed his reservation on the inclusion of Cagayan de Oro on the poll watchlist that the PNP released on Monday.

Magbutay said the Comelec dissociates itself from the list, noting that the PNP did not consult with the poll body.

Magbutay said he expressed his reservation during the meeting of the Regional Joint Security Coordinating Center at the PNP regional headquarters at Camp Alagar last week.

He said Misamis Oriental and Bukidnon, which are not on the list, have more violent incidents due to atrocities committed by New People's Army rebels.

Cagayan de Oro Mayor Oscar Moreno said there was no recent violent incident in the city to justify its inclusion on the poll watchlist.

Meanwhile, five persons were arrested in Luzon on Monday for violation of the election gun ban.

Police said Mark John Bicay, a resident of Bangued, Abra, yielded a caliber .38 revolver at a Comelec checkpoint in Barangay Tangadan, San Quintin.

Jayson Andres, 26, allegedly shot his father Melecio, 48, in Barangay Rizal, Cauayan, Isabela while public school

teacher Pedro Limos Jr., 41, reportedly shot his brother-in-law Reynaldo Galsim, 44, in Barangay Poblacion, Aguilar, Pangasinan.

Elias Calansi, 33, was caught carrying a jungle bolo at a karaoke bar in Barangay San Antonio North, Bambang, Nueva Vizcaya.

Police said Generoso Placido, 52, threatened to shoot his wife Liza following an argument in Balanga, Bataan.

## Loose firearms

In Sultan Kudarat, Mayor Helen Latog of Esperanza town turned over 32 unlicensed firearms to the military on Friday in support of the government's Balik Baril Program.

Latog said the guns were collected by barangay captains from their constituents.

Lt. Col. Alvin Iyog, 2nd Mechanized Infantry Battalion commander, received the guns in a ceremony witnessed by local government and police officials. -- With Ramon Efren Lazaro, Gerry Lee Gorit, Eva Visperas, Raymond Catindig, Artemio Dumlao, Raffy Viray, Ramil Bajo



## Cotabato City, Daraga under Comelec control

BY GERARD NAVAL

THE Commission on Elections (Comelec) yesterday placed Daraga in Albay and Cotabato City under its control on the heels of the recent violence in the two areas ahead of the May 13 midterm polls.

In a statement, Comelec spokesman James Jimenez said Comelec control shall be effective immediately in Daraga and Cotabato City upon publication of the poll body's resolution and until June 12, the end of the election period.

Under the law, the poll body may place under its immediate and direct control any political division, subdivision, unit, or area when circumstances, such as intense political rivalry between or among candidates; the presence of paramilitary forces, private armies, or identifiable armed bands widely perceived to have committed terrorism or other election irregularities in past electoral exercises; or other analogous circumstances, are present.

Under Comelec control, the Commission shall supervise all national and local officials and employees as well as police and military personnel that are required by law to perform duties relative to the conduct of the elections in the area.

Last December 22, Ako Bicol party-list Representative Rodel Batocabe, who is running for Daraga mayor in the 2019 polls, and his security aide were shot dead during a gift-giving program in his hometown.

Daraga Mayor Carlwyn Baklo, who is seeking reelection, has since been tagged as the alleged mastermind in the murder of Batocabe.

The case prompted recommendations for Daraga to be placed under Comelec control.

As for Cotabato City, at least two people died while several others were left injured in the New Year's Eve blast at a local department store.

This, along with other problems in security, and peace and order in Cotabato City as assessed by local election officials, has also prompted recommendations to place it under Comelec control.

Comelec called on the Civil Service Commission (CSC) to remind all civil servants on the prohibition to engage in partisan political activities ahead of the May 13 midterm polls.

"A reminder to civil servants from @PHCivilService would be welcome right about now," said Jimenez (@jabjimenez) on his Twitter account.

He issued the appeal after a social media post went viral showing that an unidentified government agency is being required to post posters of former presidential aide and now senatorial aspirant Bong Go.

And based on the post, the alleged government agency has nine designs to choose from,

See COTABATO ► Page B3

## COTABATO

with some even featuring Go and President Duterte.

A photo of a tarpaulin of Go being posted at the gates of Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig City also went viral last December.

Under the law, any officer or employee in the civil service, except those holding political offices; and members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines or any police force, are prohibited from

engaging in any partisan political activity, except to vote or to preserve public order.

Violation of the said rule can be considered as an election offense, which carries the penalty of one to six years imprisonment, removal of the right to vote, and disqualification to hold public office.

Education Secretary Leonor Briones urged teaching and non-teaching employees to avoid engaging in partisan political activities.

DepEd employees are also not allowed to receive any contributions for political purposes; wear shirts, pins, caps or any similar election paraphernalia bearing the names of the candidates or the political party; and utilize government resources for political purposes.

Briones also reminded teachers and non-teaching employees that serving as board of election inspectors in May is voluntary. —  
With Euan Orias

## Election jargons clarified

By Raymart T. Lolo

Commission on Elections (Comelec) spokesman James Jimenez on Tuesday explained and clarified various terms associated with the scheduled political exercise in May next year.

He specifically explained the difference between being "declared as hotspot area" and being "under Comelec control."

"When the PNP declares that a place is a hotspot, all it means is that there will be greater police alertness and readiness in that place for various reasons," he said.

Jimenez added the Comelec does not declare for itself too, that certain places are hotspots, but that the police will make the recommendations based on their own appreciation of various factors.



The difference being a "hotspot" and "under Comelec control" depends on the levels of threat of a particular area.

The poll body's action becomes necessary, however, when a place is recommended — by local election officials and the PNP or AFP, to be put under its control.

The difference being a "hotspot" and "under Comelec control" depends on the levels of threat of a particular area.

Currently, there are already 19 areas in the country which are included in the election watchlist due to election-related violence recorded in those places.

Among the areas of concern includes the municipalities of Sudipen and Balaoan in La Union and Jones in Isabela, Lemery, Batangas, Roxas, Oriental Mindoro, Balud and Dimasalang in Masbate and Daraga town in Albay.

The list also includes areas in the Mindanao region such as Pagadian City in Zamboanga del Sur, Cagayan de Oro City, Hadji Mohammad Ajul, Tipo-Tipo and Lantawan in Basilan.

Sultan Dimalundong, Mamasapano, Shariff Aguak, Shariff Saydona Mustapha, Datu Unsay in Maguindanao and Marawi City.

# Persistent rebellion justifies martial law extension in Mindanao – OSG to SC

By REY G. PANALIGAN

**W**ith rebellion persisting in Mindanao, the extension of martial law and the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus until Dec. 31, 2019 is justified, government lawyers told the Supreme Court (SC) yesterday, January 15.

They asked the SC to dismiss the petition filed by the group of Rep. Edcel Lagman assailing the constitutionality of the extension, the third since martial law was first imposed in Mindanao in 2017.

The plea was contained in a comment filed by the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) as ordered by the SC which decided to hold oral arguments on January 22 and 23.

Led by Solicitor General Jose C. Calida, OSG lawyers said that contrary

to the allegations in Lagman's petition, rebellion – a key requirement for declaration of martial law under the Constitution – persists in Mindanao.

Calida cited official reports of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) on "ongoing rebellion of the Daesh-inspired groups and its local and foreign allies, particularly the Daulah Islamiyah (DI) and also of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) forces in Mindanao."

He said that the "Daesh-inspired groups have shifted their strategy from establishing a Wilayat to global insurgency or rebellion" and that "they continue their recruitment and radicalization activities teaching their new members how to launch deadlier attacks and to sow chaos and instability that will extremely endanger the public."

"Based on the AFP's end of first

semester data, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) has a total of 424 members with 473 firearms. They are scattered all over Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Zamboanga covering 138 barangays. The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) has 264 members with 254 firearms and affecting 50 barangays. The DI has a reach of 16 barangays and is composed of 59 members of the Maute group with 61 firearms, 6 members of the Maguid Group with 10 firearms, and 85 members of the Turafie Group with 20 firearms. The total barangays affected are 204," the solicitor general bared.

At the same time, Calida cited the attacks by the said groups from January to December last year as well as the "consistent influx of foreign terrorists in the country who are primarily responsible for the conduct of trainings to local terrorist fighters, especially in making improvised

explosive devices and motivating locals to serve as suicide bombers."

"This is on top of the ongoing rebellion by the CPP-NPA and their attacks in Mindanao last year," he said.

"In the present case, it is apparent that the NPA continues to rise publicly and take up arms against the government. From January 1 to December 31, 2018, there have been a total of 369 NPA-initiated violent incidents. 193 of these were committed in Mindanao alone," he said.

Thus, he said, the extension of martial law and the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus for another year "is necessary to provide public safety in Mindanao," he added.

He pointed out that the cessation of the Marawi siege and the liberation of the city from terrorists cannot be the sole basis to lift martial law in Mindanao.

"The Honorable court recognized the fact that the attack on Marawi city has spilled over to other areas in Mindanao and has spurred attacks from other rebel and terrorist groups.... As already discussed, the factual circumstances which founded the basis for the second extension of martial law adopted by congress through resolution of both houses no. 4 on December 13, 2017, still exist and continuously pose a threat to the peace and order situation in Mindanao," he stressed.

Also, Calida said the SCs

"The Congress has the sole prerogative to extend martial law and the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus. The 1987 constitution does not limit the period for which the congress can extend the same, and prohibit the congress from granting further extensions to the proclamation or suspension."

## Calida defends martial law extension

By Rey Requejo

THE Office of the Solicitor General on Tuesday asked the Supreme Court to dismiss the petition filed by opposition lawmakers led by Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman, insisting the legality of the extension of martial law in Mindanao.

In a 50-page comment, Solicitor General Jose Calida argued the anti-martial law petition should be dismissed for lack of merit.

Calida said the factual bases to extend the duration of the martial law in Mindanao under Proclamation No. 216 for another year or until December 2019 still existed, contrary to allegations of petitioners.

According to him, rebellion, a key requirement for declaration of martial law under the Constitution, persisted in Mindanao.

The chief state lawyer cited the official report from the Armed

Forces that cited "ongoing rebellion of the Daesh-Inspires groups and its local and foreign allies, particularly the Daulah Islamiyah and also of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army forces in Mindanao."

He revealed that the "Daesh-inspired groups have shifted their strategy from establishing a Wilayat to global insurgency or rebellion" and that "they continue their recruitment and radicalization activities teaching their new members how to launch deadlier attacks and to sow chaos and instability that will extremely endanger the public."

He said: "Based on the AFP's end of first semester data, the Abu Sayyaf Group has a total of 424 members with 473 firearms."

"They are scattered all over Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Zamboanga covering 138 barangays. The Bangsamoro Islamic

Freedom Fighters has 264 members with 254 firearms and affecting 50 barangays. "The DI has a reach of 16 barangays and is composed of 59 members of the Maute group with 61 firearms, 6 members of the Maguid Group with 10 firearms, and 85 members of the Turaisie Group with 20 firearms. The total barangays affected are 204."

Calida also cited the attacks by the said groups from January to December last year as well as the "consistent influx of foreign terrorists in the country who are primarily responsible for the conduct of trainings to local terrorist fighters, especially in making improvised explosive devices and motivating locals to serve as suicide bombers."

Besides the terrorist groups, he also cited the ongoing rebellion of the CPP-NPA and their attacks in Mindanao last year. M.

## Illegal logs seized in Surigao

By **MIKE U. CRISMUNDO**

**TAGO, Surigao del Sur** – A series of anti-illegal logging operations was launched by the Philippine Army's 36th Infantry (Valor) Battalion (36th IB) in coordination with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in the area of Lanuza town and Tandag City leading to the confiscation of a total of 3,071 board feet of illegal logs with an estimated market value of P126,620.

Lt. Jonald D. Romorosa, Civil Military Operation (CMO) officer of the 36th IB told the Manila Bulletin on Tuesday said the anti-illegal logging operations were launched to help the government in the preservation and protection of the remaining forest in Surigao del Sur. He said these two anti-illegal logging operations happened at 5 p.m. and 9 p.m. on Friday.

Elements of "Charlie Company" of 36th IB together with DENR Cantil-lan, Surigao del Sur, as lead agency, launched a joint anti-illegal logging operation at Barangay Sibahay, Lanuza, Surigao del Sur which resulted in a successful confiscation of illegally

sawn lumbers and banca keels with a corresponding volume of 1,471 board feet and an estimated market value of P96,620.00.

On the same day, another similar operation was launched by the elements of 36th IB troopers with CAA from Pandanon Patrol Base at Barangay Maitom, Tandag City which also resulted in the successful confiscation of illegally sawn Lawaan and Bayang lumbers with a corresponding volume of 1,600 board feet having an estimated market value of P30,000, he said.

Since January 2018, troops of the 36th IB conducted 13 successful anti-illegal logging operation in coordination with the DENR and the PNP in the province of Surigao del Sur that resulted in the confiscation of a total of 61,754.54 board feet of illegal logs with an estimated market value of P1,547,096.80.

Lt. Col. Xerxes A. Trinidad, commanding officer of the 36th IB said that "The 36th IB will support other government agencies in their mandate to protect the natural environment in our area of operation and we will perform our mandate and support the province of Surigao del Sur to attain peace and a progressive community."

"We are serious in the campaign against anti-illegal logging operation and will support other law enforcement agencies. Let this be a stern warning to all illegal loggers in the Province. Stop your illegal activities or suffer the consequences provided by law," Trinidad told the Manila Bulletin on Tuesday.

## Unity walk, prayer rally, and covenant signing for HOPE in Zamboanga peninsula

By **NONOY E. LACSON**

**ZAMBOANGA CITY** – The Police Regional Office in Zamboanga peninsula (PRO-9) led the conduct of a "Unity Walk, Prayer Rally and Peace Covenant Signing" in a bid to help promote the holding of an honest, orderly, and peaceful elections (HOPE) in May this year.

PRO-9 Director Chief Supt. Emmanuel Luis D. Licup said that the activities were simultaneously conducted by all other PNP regional offices in the country on Sunday to drumbeat the significance of the May 2019 elections and to herald the start of the election period.

Licup added the Unity Walk and Peace Covenant Signing were part of the PNP advocacy to promote awareness and encourage community sup-

port for the mid-term elections.

Among the national government agencies that participated in the activity were the PNP, Commission on Elections, National Police Commission, Departments of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Justice, Department of Education, Commission on Higher Education, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Public Works and Highways, Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, Department of National Defense, Armed Forces of the Philippines, members of the academe, students, religious groups, force multipliers, non-government organizations, and respective local candidates.

Licup said in Zamboanga City, more than 1,500 participants converged and walked from Zamboanga City Po-

lice office going to Zamboanga Central School SPED Center where a short program was held.

Meanwhile, in Zamboanga Del Norte, close to 1,200 participants met at the Dipolog City hall and walked towards the Dipolog Boulevard, Dipolog City in Zamboanga Del Norte. In Zamboanga del Sur, close to 1,200 participants walked their way from the Comelec office to Taklobo Stage, Plaza Luz, Pagadian City, where the program was conducted.

In Zamboanga Sibugay, more than 1,000 participants congregated at Ipil Municipal Covered Court, Ipil, Zamboanga Sibugay and walked their towards the Ipil Covered Court and in Isabela City, more than 300 participants converged at the Isabela City Plaza and walked towards the Isabela City Gymnasium, Isabela City where the program was also conducted.

## Gapay new Solcom chief, vice Pamongag

BY VICTOR REYES

MAJ. Gen. Gilbert Gapay, the former chief of the Army's Mechanized Infantry Division, has been named as the acting commander of the military's Southern Luzon Command overseeing counter-insurgency operations in the Calabarzon, Mimaropa and Bicol region.

Gapay, a member of the Philippine Military Academy class of 1986, assumed command as Solcom chief yesterday in Camp Gen. Nakar in Lucena City. He took over from Lt. Gen. Danilo

Pamongag, of PMA class 1985, who has reached the mandatory retirement age of 56.

Gapay was named as MID chief in January 2017. He also served as the Army chief of staff and deputy commander of the AFP's Eastern Mindanao Command.

AFP public affairs chief Col. Noel Detoyato said Gapay's appointment papers have yet to be signed by President Duterte, the military's commander-in-chief.

Detoyato said the military leadership recommended Gapay to be Solcom commander. "He

is the topnotcher of his PMA class. He is a very competent administrative and operations officer," he said of Gapay.

AFP chief Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr., who presided over the turnover ceremony, paid tribute to Pamongag, who previously served as commander of the Army's Special Operations Command.

Pamongag played a key role in the liberation of Marawi City from the hands of the Daesh-inspired Maute Group in 2017 and in the defense of Zamboanga City from rogue Moro

rebels in 2013.

"His outstanding leadership and capacity as a military commander were vital in our defense of Zamboanga City, Marawi City, and the Solcom area of responsibility which serves as a gateway to our capital and center of political and economic activity," said Madrigal.

"On behalf of every soldier, airman, sailor, and marine, I thank Lt. Gen. Danilo Pamongag for his dedicated service and for his tireless work in defending our country against any threat," Madrigal said. B2



# DND probes Subic scandal

By Kathleen Mae Bulquerin

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said yesterday he would order a probe on the possible involvement of DND personnel with a US submarine commander relieved of his post for hiring prostitutes in the Philippines March of last year.

Capt. Travis Zettel was reportedly relieved of his command last August following a "loss of confidence" in his ability to command the fast attack submarine *USS Bremerton*, now undergoing decommissioning.

Investigation conducted by US Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) had established that he paid for "female accompaniment" while the boat was in Subic Bay Freeport Zone.

He later saw Zettel with around 10 provocatively-dressed females.

However, there were allegations Zettel had help from DND personnel in securing the services of the women.

"What? There's a DND personnel involved? I'll have this investigated," Lorenzana said in a message to the reporters.

A tipster told investigators that Zettel had told him and another sailor at a hotel pool that the submarine commander had "requested/ordered 10 girls to arrive at the hotel."

One of the sailors said he later saw Zettel with around 10 "provocatively dressed females outside the front door of the hotel."

## PH firm should take over Hanjin operations—DND

By Maricel V. Cruz and Vito Barcelo

A FILIPINO company's acquisition of the shipbuilding business of the debt-ridden Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction Philippines will be beneficial to the ongoing modernization efforts of the Philippine Navy.

This was disclosed by Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana when asked Tuesday if it is possible that HHIC-Phil can be tapped for the ongoing Self-Reliance Project of the country.

"We still lack complete information

about it so I will defer any comment. Anyway, our economic managers are looking into it. [It] would be good if a local company would acquire and operate it to support our Navy modernization," Lorenzana added in a text message.

The defense chief, however, said dealing with the matter is still up to the country's economic team.

"It [is] up to them to decide but that is the ideal set up," he said.

Lorenzana earlier said that the DND will monitor those who have expressed interest to invest in HHIC-Phil as it is near

the Philippine Navy's major docking and anchorage area of its large naval vessels.

Hanjin revealed that it has USD1.3 billion outstanding loans—USD400 million from Philippine banks and USD900 million from South Korean lenders. A3

According to Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority, HHIC-Phil filed a petition Tuesday last week at the Regional Trial Court in Olongapo City "to initiate voluntary rehabilitation under Republic Act 10142, otherwise known as "An Act Providing for the Rehabilitation or Liquidation of Financially Distressed Enterprises and Individuals,"

# NDFP consultant Baylosis released

By Jodee A. Agoncillo  
@jagoncilloINQ

The Quezon City Regional Trial Court Branch 100 on Tuesday dismissed the charges against Rafael Baylosis, a peace consultant for the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), and Roque Guillermo Jr., saying their arrest was illegal with the state "failing to meet its burden of proving their guilt beyond reasonable doubt."

In her decision, Judge Editha Miña-Aguba ordered the release of Baylosis and Guillermo from jail in Camp Bagong Diwa.

The court also granted the accused's demurrer to evidence.

Following their release, a lawyers' group is set to file countercharges against members of



Rafael Baylosis

the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines for "false implication" and "faulty prosecution" of Baylosis and his companion for illegal possession of firearms and

explosives in January last year.

Baylosis and Guillermo were arrested while waiting for a ride in Quezon City on Jan. 31, 2018, after they were allegedly spotted with two .45-caliber pistols tucked in their waists.

Also allegedly found with them was a bag of red rice with a grenade inside.

## 'Inconsistencies'

The judge said the claim about the visibility of the guns was "seriously doubted" and improbable, and that the statements of the police witnesses were "peppered with inconsistencies" and were contradicting.

"[For] evidence to be believed, it must not only proceed from the mouth of a credible witness, but it must be credible in itself, such as the common experience and

observation of mankind can approve as probable under the circumstances," the decision reads.

In a statement, Rachele Pastores, a lawyer with the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL), said the judge pointed out the "incredulity of the police narrative of the surveillance and arrest."

"The defense pointed out not only lapses but grievous procedural mistakes, and thus exposed concerted, malicious efforts to fabricate the charges," she added.

Baylosis was the first consultant arrested after President Duterte unilaterally terminated the peace talks in November 2017.

Adelberto Silva, Vicente Ladlad and Rey Casambre were subsequently arrested and, similarly, falsely charged, the NUPL said.

"The dismissal of the case not only vindicates Baylosis, who has always asserted his innocence; it also exposes how the police carries out illegal actions—vilification, undue surveillance, illegal arrest, planting of evidence and filing of trumped-up charges—against peace consultants and political activists," Pastores said.

## Court decision welcomed

Relatives of Baylosis welcomed and celebrated the court decision.

"We expect the order to be carried out at the Metro Manila District Jail IV and that there will be no hindrance to his liberty," Eleanor de Guzman, Baylosis' daughter, said in an Inquirer interview.

The fight, however, does not stop with her husband, trade

union organizer Marklen Maojo Maga, who is still detained on "trumped-up" charges of illegal possession of firearms and murder, she said.

"We all know that the charges and pieces of evidence against activists and other political detainees were just fabricated. We maintain that their arrests were illegal," De Guzman said.

The lawyer's group is also set to file countercharges against "erring officers" from the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group-Manila and the Intelligence Service of the AFP.

Last year, the court also dismissed similar charges filed against peace consultant Ruben Saluta and his five companions for failure of the prosecution to prove its case. INQ A3

**COMMUNIST INSURGENCY**

# AFP CHIEF OF STAFF TO LGUS: DECLARE REDS PERSONA NON GRATA

By Jeannette I. Andrade  
@jiandradeINQ

The Armed Forces of the Philippines chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr., urged other local governments to follow the example of Sibagat town in Agusan del Sur, which formally condemned the communist rebels.

In a statement on Monday, Madrigal lauded the municipality for declaring the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) persona non grata in a Dec. 21, 2018, council resolution.

"We hope that more LGUs (local government units) will finally recognize the need to take similar

actions against the NPA and its front organizations and join the whole-of-nation approach to completely annihilate the communist armed conflict," he said.

## NPA raid

The Sibagat town council issued the resolution following a Dec. 19, 2018, raid by the CPP-

NPA at the new Tubigon Patrol Base where 12 soldiers and militiamen were abducted and several firearms were taken.

Sibagat Mayor Maria Liza Evangelista and the municipal legislative council unanimously approved the resolution condemning alleged atrocities committed by the CPP-NPA. INQ **A7**

## RECRUITMENT

# MINDANAO REBELS BEEF UP NPA IN LUZON—ARMY EXEC

BONGABON, NUEVA ECIIJA—Communist rebels from Mindanao have been helping local members of the New People's Army (NPA) intensify their operations in Nueva Ecija, Aurora and Nueva Vizcaya provinces, an Army official said here.

Col. Rowen Tolentino, commander of the Army's 703rd brigade based here, said the rebels had moved to Luzon since last year amid heightened military operations in Mindanao.

Citing intelligence reports, Tolentino said the recruited rebels were promised "better situation" in Luzon by the NPA leaders.

"These rebels from Mindanao move in platoons and hide in the mountain ranges of Sierra Madre and Cordillera in the eastern part of Nueva Ecija," he said.

## Harassment

"Part of their operation is to harass owners of harvesters and construction companies. They demand revolutionary tax from them," he added.

According to him, a harvester, a truck and a cement mixer were burned last year by the rebels after their owners

reportedly refused to pay revolutionary tax.

He said continuing military operations against the rebels had resulted in casualties on both sides.

Two rebels were killed in a recent encounter with government soldiers under the 7th Infantry Division at Port Magsaysay in Palayan City while a soldier died in an NPA ambush.

## Arrests

The military also recovered 24 firearms from the rebels in separate encounters and overran a major NPA camp near the Nueva Ecija and Aurora border.

Four female rebels, including a University of the Philippines student, were arrested while they were conducting teach-ins in a Nueva Ecija town.

"We got vital information from the captured rebels and from the documents recovered from those killed," Tolentino said.

"We are relentlessly operating against the beefed-up [operations of the] rebels who are on constant move and sometimes mingling with the villagers." —ANSELMO ROQUE INQ

## PNP not backing down on counter-intel vs Reds

By EMMANUEL TUPAS

The Philippine National Police (PNP) is not backing down from conducting intelligence operations of perceived front organizations of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) despite being at the receiving end of criticisms.

The PNP has been under fire for its profiling of some members of militant groups, such as the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT).

PNP spokesman Chief Supt. Benigno Durana Jr. said it is their duty to protect the country from groups with alleged links to communist rebels.

"We will be remiss in our job if we are not carrying out our role of conducting regular intelligence and counter-intelligence operations against elements of organization that are allied to the enemies of the state," Durana told ANC.

Instead of criticizing the PNP, Durana said the ACT and other progressive groups should be thanking them for their efforts to weed out communist rebels using their groups to overthrow the government.

"Those genuine progressives should actually be thankful to the state that is taking care of them," he said.

Durana reminded the ACT that it was CPP founder Jose Maria Sison who mentioned that their group is among the rebels' legal front organizations.

Durana was referring to a video of a young-looking Sison stating that the ACT is among the legal democratic forces in the country.

"That's common sense in any government. It has the right to protect itself against those out to destabilize and undermine its very existence," he said.

Opposition lawmaker Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman said the Duterte administration is also profiling other groups and non-government organizations.

"The scheme violates the following basic rights and fundamental freedoms, among others: association, expression, dissent, pursuit of legitimate advocacies, and the right to privacy," Lagman said in questioning the policy of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Lagman was referring to the November 2018 SEC Memorandum Circular 15 seeking "detailed mandatory disclosures" of some groups and organizations on their failure to comply with the requirements.

Among the new requirements are for NGOs to submit their (a) sources of financing; (b) utilization of funds; and (c) generally, the activities they undertake which is "under the pretext of money laundering, and terrorist financing abuse."

"It's a crackdown on defense of human rights in which NGOs and foundations are actively engaged in the wake of the unmitigated

war against illegal drugs and the government's continuing harassment and repressive policies against human rights defenders," Lagman said.

The SEC warned that it can "enlist the aid and support and/or deputize any and all enforcement agencies of the government, civil or military as well as any private institution, corporation, firm association or person" in conducting the investigations.

### **Condo tenants included**

Residents of GSIS Metrohomes Phase I in Manila also questioned the PNP policy of requiring them to submit a list of tenants and unit owners of a condominium building.

An advisory from building officials said the PNP has requested for a complete list of tenants and unit owners which will be submitted to the city government of Manila.

The residents were also asked to submit a copy of a government or school ID, or their birth certificates.

The data was supposedly requested by the PNP "in order to identify local residents of the area in case of any untoward incidence."

Privacy commissioner Raymund Liboro said residents may decline to comply with the request, noting possible violations of the data privacy law such as lack of the data processing consent statement that the data subjects must sign.

"Any form of collection should satisfy the requirements for data processing. If you are processing personal data, it's very clear what are covered by lawful processing of personal information. Did the data subject give his or her consent? Is the processing of personal data necessary?" Liboro remarked.

"The data subject needs to give his or her consent specific to the data processing. The process is provided for by existing laws and regulations," he added.

Liboro said the data privacy law recognizes the role of law enforcement in ensuring public order and security.

"But you just have to be sure and specific about the purpose. Secondly, make sure that the rights of the data subjects are upheld," he added.

Durana, however, said there is nothing wrong with the request of police for a list of tenants and unit owners of condominium buildings.

He said there is nothing unusual with the activity that is part of efforts to promote public safety.

Durana said he has no information if the directive came from PNP national headquarters in Camp Crame. He surmised though that it came from the local police.

"It's part of their police community relations project designed to promote peace and order,"

he said.

Providing a list of occupants for a particular condominium building can be used for proper accounting of residents during emergency situations and calamities, Durana pointed out.

Durana said the list is "an information that can be used to ensure peace and order and safety." — With Deion Porcalla, Janvic Mateo



16 January 2019

MANILA BULLETIN  
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Page: 13

### 3 NPAs surrender In Iligan City

ILIGAN CITY – One active member and two NPA militias have surrendered to the military's 51st Infantry Battalion in Brgy. Rogongon. The three also yielded two caliber pistols and ammunitions to the troops of Lieutenant colonel Jasper Edward Obar, the 51st Infantry Battalion Commander. "Based on our initial custodial debriefing, they were pressured by our troops who were relentless in combating the communists NPA terrorists in the hinterlands of Iligan City," LTC Obar said. Meanwhile, Maj. Gen. Roseller Murillo, 1st Infantry Division and Joint Task Force Zampelan (Zamboanga Peninsula and Lanao Provinces) Commander, commended the efforts of the troops that led to the surrender of the three communist NPA terrorists. "We encourage more NPAs to surrender and take advantage of the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) of the government," Maj. Gen. Murillo added. (Bonita L. Ermac) 13

## 13 election hotspots in Iloilo

By TARA YAP

**ILOILO CITY**—Authorities have identified 13 towns in Iloilo province as election hotspots.

Supt. Bonifacio Ancajas Jr., deputy director for operations of Iloilo Police Provincial Office (IPPO), said the towns are Anilao, Ajuy, Bingsawan, Concepcion, Dingle, Estancia, Lambunao, Lemery, Maasin, New Lucena, San Dionisio, San Enrique, and Sara.

The Iloilo Provincial Joint Security Coordinating Center, which is also

made up of the Army's 301st Infantry Brigade (301 IB) and Commission on Elections (Comelec-Iloilo), identified the areas based on their history of election-related violence.

Many of the areas are in the 5th District or northern Iloilo province, where a number of political supporters died in the past three elections.

Authorities are also looking at the threat from the New People's Army (NPA), which has stepped up attacks in central and southern Iloilo.

There were three separate encounters between the NPA and the Army's 61st Infantry Battalion (61 IB) since Jan. 11. A corporal, Aldrin Cablas, was wounded in the Jan. 14 attack.

The number of hotspots is not final, and can change during the whole election period.

"It remains to be seen, but we hope there will be no additional areas," Ancajas said.

## Claim of backchannel talks with Reds is fake news – Lorenzana

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD  
and GENALYN D. KABILING

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana last night said that the claim of former Philippine Coconut Authority head Avelino "Billy" Andal that he has been given the green light to hold back-door peace negotiations with the local

communist rebel group is fake news.

"Billy Andal's claim he was tapped by the President to hold backchanneling negotiations is fake news. The President says he never ordered him to do so," Lorenzana said in a text message to Defense reporters.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo, on his part, could ►8

## Claim of backchannel...

◀1

not confirm Andal's claim.

"I do not have any information on that. It could be," Panelo told reporters at the Palace.

"Kung sinabi ni Presidente sa kanya, di good. He can do his best and I hope the other side will do his best, too. But let me say that we are always positive on any development... good for all of us," he added.

But Panelo said the President remains open to the revival of the peace talks if the rebels would stop their attacks and other illegal activities "because he doesn't want Filipinos killing each other."

"What is important to me is if there is one, then the CPP-NPA (Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army) at this time and for a change should listen to the President – enough of these ambushes, enough of these extortion activities and we will sit down. And most likely, they may finally listen to the urgings of the President. I think they are also tired fighting the government," he said.

Andal, now a member of the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board, had earlier said he has already started to reach out to some representatives of the communist group who have welcomed the President's willingness to restart the peace process.

"Nagpaabot na ako agad ng feeler para makausap sila at actually tuwang-tuwa sila dahil gusto rin nila ay bumalik sa usapang pangkapayapaan [I've sent feelers to talk to them and actually, they are happy because they also want to resume the peace talks]," he said.

"They are extremely glad na magkakaroon at saka open ang Pangulo para sa pag-uusap [They are extremely glad that the President is open to the talks]," he added.

Andal said the President ordered him last week to help enable the revival of the peace negotiations with the group led by Jose Maria Sison.

"Napag-utusan ang inyong lingkod at utos mula sa Presidente na kung maari nia-resume ang pag-uusap sapagkat ang kanyang pinagdidinanan ay bilang Presidente ay siya'y kaibigan at hindi kaaway ng sinuman maging [ng] mga rebelde [I have been ordered by the President to possibly help resume the talks because he stressed that as President, he is a friend and not an enemy of anyone including the rebels]," he said in a phone interview with reporters.

"Makipag-backchannel talks doon sa mga lider ng CPP, kay Joma kabilang siempre si Joma na nasa ibabaw o lider ng lahat. Pero siyempre before doing that, kailangan muna mag-groundwork sa mga lider na nandito sa Pilipinas [I've been ordered to hold backchannel talks with leaders of the CPP (Communist Party of the Philippines), Joma who is the leader. But before doing that, there should be groundwork with leaders in the Philippines]," he added.

Peace talks between the government and the communist group collapsed in 2017 after President Duterte denounced the deadly rebel attacks on government troops and other atrocities against the people. Duterte signed a proclamation declaring the termination of the talks and designated the CPP-NPA a terrorist group.

## 'Fake news,' says Lorenzana of MTRCB member's claim

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR  
and VICTOR REYES

A MEMBER of the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board yesterday said President Duterte has asked him to lead backchannel talks with communist leader Jose Maria "Joma" Sison. Avellino "Billy" Andal, a former

administrator of the Philippine Coconut Authority, in several radio interviews, also said he has started to reach out to some people to help him talk to Sison, and the feedback he got was that "they are extremely glad" that the President is open to resuming peace negotiations. Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana last night said the

President has not tapped Andal for backchannel talks with the communists.

"Latest info on Billy Andal's claim that he was tapped by PRRD to conduct back channeling with the CPP/NPA: It is fake news. The President says he never ordered

See FAKE > Page B3

### FAKE

him to do so," he said in a message.

Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo said he was not aware of the President's supposed directive to Andal but maintained the President has always been open to returning to the negotiating table.

"He (Duterte) has been open to that ever since. The only condition is stop doing this ambushes and extortion activities because he doesn't want Filipinos killing each other. That has been his line and policy ever since, even when he was still a mayor (of Davao City)," he said.

Andal is said to have ties with some farmers and militant groups, having been an activist when he was a student. He was chairman of the Rodrigo Duterte Volunteer Foundation, which campaigned for Duterte in 2016.

The PCA's governing board ousted Andal in June 2017 for loss of trust and confidence. Andal had been investigated for alleged illegal collection of fees from harvested coconut lumber. He was appointed by Duterte to the MTRCB in January 2018.

Andal said the order was given to him by Duterte last week during an event in Manila they both attended.

"Actually, napag-utusan ang inyong lingkod, utos mula sa Presidente, kung maari i-resume ang pag-uusap sapagkat ang kanyang pinagdidiin bilang Presidente, siya ay kaibigan at hindi kaaway ng sinuman, kabilang na rebelde (Actually, I was instructed by the President, if the talks can be resumed, because his stand as

President, he is a friend and not an enemy to anyone including the rebels)," he said.

Duterte last year ordered the cancellation of peace talks at the national level and said localized negotiations would be pursued instead.

Duterte started formal peace negotiations with the communists after he assumed the presidency in 2016. Four rounds of formal talks have been held before he suspended, then finally cancelled, the peace talks because of continued attacks by the New People's Army, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines of which Sison is founding chairman.

Informal meetings were supposed to be held late last year, including one requested by Fidel Agcaoili, chairman of the negotiating panel of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, and NDFP consultant Luis Jalandoni, with Duterte. The meeting did not push through after Agcaoili and Jalandoni expressed concern they will be arrested if they return to Manila.

Jalandoni and Agcaoili are based in the Netherlands like Sison who has been on self-exile there since the late 80s.

Panelo said it is useless to talk peace with the communist rebels if they continue to engage in attacks, extortion activities and other illegal acts.

On Duterte's tapping of Andal, Panelo said, "Kung sinabi ni Presidente sa kanya, di (if the President told him, then it's) good. He can do his best and I hope the other side will do his best too."

The Quezon City Regional Trial

Court Branch 100 yesterday dismissed the charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives filed against NDFP consultant Rafael Baylosis and co-accused Roque Guillermo due to lack of sufficient evidence.

"This Court, after considering the evidence, finds the evidence insufficient to support a finding of conviction," Judge Editha Miña-Aguba said in a 27-page decision.

Aguba likewise found the arrest of Baylosis and Guillermo as illegal.

"The arrest of accused being illegal, the subsequent search on the persons of accused and the purported confiscated items cannot be used as evidence against them," she said.

Aguba said no arrest warrant was issued against the accused and they were not arrested while committing a crime.

Baylosis and Guillermo were arrested on January 31 last year at Aurora Boulevard and Katipunan Ave. after President Duterte tagged the CPP and NPA as terrorist organizations.

Police reported recovering two cal. 45 pistols, 14 ammunition, two magazines, and a grenade from the two.

The court said the confiscation of the items was also illegal because it was "not a product of a search incidental to a lawful arrest or a stop and frisk search."

The court also ordered the release of Baylosis from the Special Intensive Care Area 1 in Bicutan, Taguig City. It also ordered the return of the P120,000 cash bond Guillermo had posted. — *With Evan Orlos*

**NPA 'ARSONISTS' SURRENDER IN SULTAN KUDARAT**

**SHARIFF AGUAK, Maguindanao:** Two members of the New People's Army (NPA) communist guerrilla in Sultan Kudarat province surrendered to government troops in Senator Ninoy Aquino town, two weeks after the rebels torched a heavy construction equipment in the government's infrastructure project in Barangay Hinlaan of Kalamansig town. Ka Glen, 55, and Ka Jongle 35, claimed to be members of "Platoon My Phone," the group that was flushed by the 33rd Infantry (Makabayan) Battalion (33IB) out of Esperanza-Bagumbayan area in the second quarter of 2018. Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc, commanding officer of the 33IB presented the rebels to Lt. Col. Jorge Garcia of the Marine Battalion Landing Team 2, at the Makabayan Battalion's headquarters here. The surrenderers turned over two 9mm M11 Ingram submachine. Ka Jongle said they realized the futility of their cause saying, "We were made to believe that the communists can help us claim back our ancestral lands." But he added, their involvement in the communist group had brought more suffering to them and their communities. Meanwhile, Garcia pledged to assist the former rebels by processing them to receive the social benefits under the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program of the government.

A7  
**JULMUNIR JANNARAL**

## 23 NPA rebels surrender in Laguna, Iligan

**CAMP VICENTE LIM, Laguna:** Twenty members of the New People's Army (NPA) surrendered to the Police Regional Office-Calabarzon in Kalayaan, Laguna, while another rebel and two militia also yielded to the 51st Infantry Battalion (51IB) Iligan City recently.

Chief Supt. Edward Carranza, Calabarzon Police director, said the rebels were under the Sub-Regional Military Area (SRMA) 4A operating in Laguna and adjacent provinces.

The surrenderers were mostly chieftains and members of "Samahang Dumagat," an ethnic group based in the Mountain Range of Laguna, Rizal and Quezon, who were recruited by the NPA and serve as advance post in the mountains.

Carranza identified the rebels as Ka Saro, a runner/courier; Ka Ruben, a Dumagat from Sierra Madre; Ka Bonay, NPA spotter and a Dumagat chieftain based in Sitio Pulot, Barangay

San Antonio; Ka Raul, helper/courier and Dumagat chieftain in Sitio Magalolon, Barangay San Antonio; Ka Kanlas, spotter and a Dumagat chieftain in Sitio Balat Kahoy, Barangay San Antonio; Ka Banal, NPA intelligence officer; rebel couriers Ka Anto, Ka Nosa, Ka Gibo and Ka Tata; Ka Deling, organizer of the Samahang Dumagat/Kabatas/Kababaihan and mother of Ka Mario, secretary-general of Bigkis at Lakas ng Katutubo sa Timog Katagalugan (Balatik), and wife of slain Dumagat leader Tatay Kardo who was killed in 2003 by soldiers in Luisiana, Laguna.

Ka Deling's two sons — Aldin and Koykoy, both NPA members — had to leave their homes in Kalayaan town after allegedly being harassed by the soldiers to surrender.

Other surrenderers were recruiters Ka Joseph and Ka Grace; Ka Orlan, courier/Dumagat leader/village councilman; Ka Bob,

supporter/spotter; Ka Olan, Ka Lindo, courier Bundok Dumere; Ka Mentong; Bundok Amuroy; Ka Male, a helper; and Ka Aman.

The group is based in Barangay San Antonio, a remote area of Kalayaan, Laguna.

They served as letter couriers, delivering rice, canned goods and vegetables to the rebels in the mountains, and as lookouts against government troops operating in the area.

The rebels, who also surrendered various firearms, grenades and ammunition, underwent custodial debriefing at Camp Vicente Lim in Calamba City, Laguna.

One of them claimed to have participated in the 2010 ambush slay of Special Action Forces (SAF) personnel in Antipolo City; ambush of SAF in Barangay Sari, Quezon in 2011; and the encounter with the 11B in 51st Infantry Battalion in Quezon.

The NPA recruited the Dumagats, known as "Bagoing Hukbo ng Bayan," from 1997 to

2016. They were issued firearms such as 9mm, AK 47, M-16 rifle, shotgun, M14 rifle, caliber .357 firearm, and caliber .45 pistol.

They also provide provisions and rations to the NPA twice or thrice a week.

Carranza said the surrenderers revealed that several students from the University of the Philippines and Polytechnic University of the Philippines periodically visit Sitio Pulot, Sitio Magalolon and Sitio Balay Kahoy in Barangay San Antonio.

Meanwhile, another NPA rebel and two militiamen surrendered with their firearms to the 51IB in Barangay Rogongon, Iligan City.

Lt. Col. Jasper Edward Obar, Army's 51st Infantry Battalion commander, said the rebels admitted they were pressured by the troops' relentless in combating the NPA lairs the hinterlands in the region.

**ROSELLE R. AQUINO AND  
MASIDING NOOR YAHYA**

## Govt to CPP: Listen to Duterte, yield arms

MALACANANG on Tuesday urged members of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) to listen to President Rodrigo Duterte and lay down their arms to give peace negotiations another round.

This statement came from Avelino Andal, former Philippine Coconut Authority administrator and now Movie and Television Review and Classification Board member, who said the President himself asked him to lead backchannel talks with CPP founding chairman Jose Ma. "Joma" Sison.

While this was not confirmed by Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo, he said he would not be surprised if the President indeed reopened the backdoor negotiations.

"I said it could be possible. But what is important to me is if there is one, then the CPP-NPA at this time and for a change should listen to the President. Enough of these ambushes, enough of these extortion activities and we will sit down," Panelo added.

The NPA is the New People's Army, the armed wing of the CPP.

"And most likely, they may finally listen to the urgings of the President. I think they are also tired fighting the government," according to Panelo.

The spokesman said Duterte has been open to the peace talks with the communist rebels, as long as the government's conditions are met.

"He has been open to that ever since. The only condition is stop doing this ambushes and extortion activities because he doesn't want Filipinos killing each other, that has been his line and policy ever since, even when he was still a mayor," he said.

Duterte was a long-time mayor of Davao City in southern Mindanao.

Panelo said if the rebels would not heed the President's conditions, the peace talks would be virtually useless.

"That cannot be, because the peace talks will be inconsistent. There are peace talks, why would

you fight? That is the problem, begging the pardon of Joma Sison, I think the problem is there is a disparity between him and the ground. He is not being followed. Otherwise, if his ground forces are obeying him, he wants to talk, then they should follow the conditions," he added.

Still, Panelo said the government was always positive about any development on the peace talks, since it would be for the good of all Filipinos.

In May last year, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process said the government and the CPP were engaged in "informal backchannel talks" in Europe.

The meetings aimed to address the resumption of the peace negotiations.

The government, however, pulled the plug on the plan when Duterte said he wanted the peace negotiations to be held in the Philippines, infuriating Sison.

Duterte terminated the peace talks in November 2017 amid the NPA's continued attacks on state troops.

He then declared the CPP a terror organization and ordered the arrest of its officials.

Duterte even mulled the idea of creating a "Duterte Death Squad" to combat the so-called Sparrow units of the NPA.

Last year, Duterte issued Memorandum Order 32, which reinforced the guidelines of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police in implementing measures to suppress and prevent such lawless violence; and Executive Order 70, which directed the creation of a national task force to end the local communist insurgency, as well as the adoption of a national peace framework that will contain policies addressing root causes of the conflict.

He also tried his hand in holding "localized" peace talks, which Sison slammed.

The government said such talks have resulted in the surrender of thousands of NPA rebels.



# Duterte's backdoor to peace

By Kristina Maralit

Peace between the government and the communists has seen

a silver lining after President Rodrigo Duterte ordered former Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) chairman Avelino "Billy"

Andal to start backchannel talks with Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding

Turn to page 6

I was asked by the President to relay to Mr. Sison his wish to resume the peace talks

From page 1

chairman Jose Maria Sison.

Andal, a political detainee during the regime of the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos, bared that the President personally directed him to reach out to the exiled leader at an event they both attended the past week.

"I was asked by the President to relay to Mr. Sison his wish to resume the peace talks," he related. "Mr. Duterte reiterated that as President, he is not a foe but a friend of everyone, including the rebels."

Andal is currently a member of the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board. He was interviewed over the phone by Palace reporters yesterday to confirm Mr. Duterte's order.

He said he initially wanted to maintain his silence about his task. But Mr. Duterte's order had already reached the media and not even the President's spokesman, Secretary Salvador Panelo, was able to confirm it right away.

He also divulged that he reached out to some of his connections in left-leaning groups to help bridge him and Sison and hopefully resume peace talks between government negotiators and the CPP and its armed unit the New People's Army (NPA) soon.

"We have sent feelers," Andal said. "Many of them in the Left are actually elated that there is a chance for us to go back to the peace table."

Peace negotiations between the Duterte administration and the communists fell through in July 2017 due to the alleged continued attacks by the NPA against government forces and civilians.

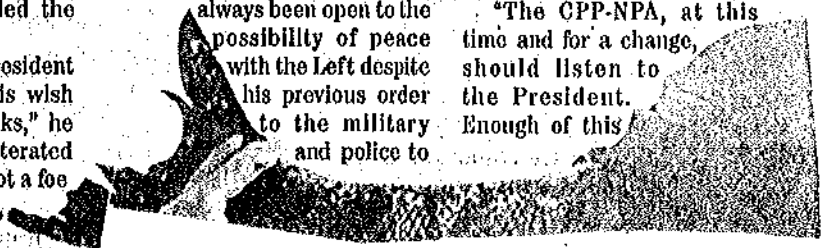
Malacañang, meanwhile, reiterated that the President has always been open to the possibility of peace with the Left despite his previous order to the military and police to

"end insurgency and its legal fronts."

The Left, however, should show sincerity in its desire to smoke the peace pipe and comply with the conditions set by Mr. Duterte, Malacañang said.

"The only condition is for them to stop doing the ambush and extortion activities. He does not want Filipinos killing each other. That has been his line policy ever since even when he was still a mayor," Panelo said.

"The CPP-NPA, at this time and for a change, should listen to the President. Enough of this



ambuscade, enough of these extortion activities and we will sit down. And, most likely, they may finally listen to the urgings of the President. I think they are also tired of fighting the government," he added.

The former PCA administrator said among the reasons the President chose him to lead the backchannel talks is the fact that he and Sison had been together in the CPP.

He added he was able to talk to one of the CPP leaders who

welcomed the development.

Andal said militarization will not solve the rift with the communists. Peace, he said, is the answer.

**Mr. Duterte reiterated that as President, he is not a foe but a friend of everyone, including the rebels.**

Meanwhile, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana opposed Duterte's suggestion to arm civilians to fight communist rebels, saying, "It may not be

more militiamen or members of the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit (Cafgu), he said.

"The beauty of the Cafgu program is that it is under the AFP and subject to military justice," he added.

In another development, the local government of Sibagat, town in Agusan del Sur, which declared members of the NPA persona non grata, was lauded by AFP chief of staff Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr.

In Municipal Resolution 137-18 approved last 21 December 2018, the Sangguniang Bayan of Sibagat unanimously decided that the NPA communist rebels are not welcome in their town.

"On behalf of the soldiers who on a day-to-day basis risk their lives for the peace and security of the country, I thank and laud the local officials of Sibagat, Agusan del Sur for standing up against the NPA," Madrigal said.

Sibagat Mayor Maria Liza Evangelista led the signing of the resolution.

The NPA on 19 December 2018 raided the New Tubigon Patrol Base in the area.

The rebels also kidnapped two soldiers and 12 Cafgu active auxiliaries and stole several firearms of the military troops.

"The kidnapping and abduction perpetrated by the NPA is a manifestation of betrayal of achieving peace, thus disrupting the peace and security of the community," the resolution said. **With Marlo J. Mallari and Kathleen Mae Bulquerin**

advisable to arm everybody for all the problems that it may cause."

The President said in a speech on 9 January that he is "just telling the NPA, I don't want to arm everyone, but if push comes to shove, I will allow the purchase of individual firearms. Even the mayors, I will give them arms. I have no choice."

"I would suggest not arming everyone. Who are the people to be armed? Do we have enough firearms to arm everybody?" Lorenzana said, adding they should get proper training first.

What the government can do instead is to train and hire

## Palace denies Andal's claim on backchannel talks with Reds

By Nat Mariano  
and Francisco Tuyay

A FORMER chief of the Philippine Coconut Authority claimed he was tasked by the President to open backchannel talks with the Communist Party of the Philippines, only for the Palace to deny it hours after.

"The President ordered me to resume the talks because he has been stressing that he, as a president, should be considered a friend and not an enemy, even to communist rebels," former PCA chief Avelino Andal said Tuesday.

"He wants me to have backchannel talks with the leaders of CPP, including, of course, Jose Ma. Sison who's on top of everything. But we also need to do the groundwork for those leaders who are in the country," Andal said in Filipino. *Next page*

## Palace...

From A1

Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo, however, said he knew nothing of Andal's mission.

"He is not involved in the negotiation process," Panelo said, but added that backchannel talks would not be unusual, saying the President is open to talks as long as the communist New People's Army stop their attacks and extortion activities.

"Enough of these ambushes, enough of these extortion activities and we will sit down. And most likely, they may finally listen to the urgings of the President. I think they are also tired of fighting the government," he added.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said there was no such order from the President.

"It is fake news. The President says he never ordered him to do so," Lorenzana told Palace reporters.

Andal, a current member of the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board, said Duterte personally instructed him in Manila last week.

"I kept mum on this. I didn't know the media will know about it. I would even prefer not to talk about this until I have successfully delivered what the President has asked me to do," he said.

He said he has already reached out to communist leaders, who were "extremely glad" to find out that the government has opened the door for peace anew.

"I will talk to the people who are involved in this. I would also persuade them that the President is serious in his desire to have peace in the country," he said.

Andal said the President might have chosen him for his connections and background with leftist groups.

He said he was a member of the CPP decades ago when President Ferdinand Marcos imposed martial law.

He said he has not yet coordinated with the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process.

In November 2018, National Democratic Front of the Philippines consultants were supposed to return to Manila to have informal talks with Duterte.

But NDFP leader Fidel Agcaoili said the Duterte administration's peace negotiators informed him and his fellow NDFP consultant Luis Jalandoni to cancel their trip for unknown reasons.

Panelo said the NDFP leaders only feared that they might be arrested once they set foot in the country.

In November 2017, peace talks between the government and communist rebels bogged down after Duterte walked away from the negotiating table, repeatedly blaming the rebels for violations of the unilateral ceasefire.

Duterte then had imposed a number of conditions for a revival of the talks, but Sison shrugged off the government's push for localized peace talks, labeling it as a "cheap trick" that has failed many times.

In the town of Sibagat, local officials declared the NPA persona non grata after communist rebels abducted 14 militiamen and two army troopers on Dec. 19, 2018.

The declaration was signed by Sibagat Mayor Maria Liza Evangelista, and through Municipal Resolution 137-18, approved by the Sibagat's Sangguniang Bayan on Dec. 21 last year, two days after the NPA abduction.

"The kidnapping and abduction perpetrated by the NPAs is a manifestation of betrayal of achieving peace, thus disrupting the peace and security of the community," the resolution said.

On Tuesday, the Quezon City Regional Trial Court has dismissed the illegal possession of firearms case filed against NDF consultant Rafael D. Baylosis and his companion Guillermo Roque.

In a decision released Tuesday, RTC Branch 100 Presiding Judge Editha G. Mina-Aguba ordered the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology in Taguig City to release Baylosis.

Roque, who posted a P120,000 bail for his temporary liberty, was also cleared and allowed to get back the bail he posted.

"The search being illegal, the evidence confiscated cannot be used as evidence against the two accused," Aguba said, stressing that any evidence obtained in violation of the right against unreasonable searches and seizures shall be inadmissible for any purpose in any proceeding.

"This rule prohibits the issuance of general warrants that encourage law enforcers to go on fishing expeditions. (I)t is viewed that the confiscation of the subject items is illegal. It is not a product of a search incidental to a lawful arrest, or a stop and frisk search, or the plain view doctrine," she said.

Police charged Baylosis and Roque with illegal weapons possession after they were arrested at the corner of Aurora Boulevard and Katipunan Avenue in Quezon City on Jan. 31, 2018.

Police said they found two .45 caliber pistols and a fragmentation grenade inside a plastic bag containing brown rice from the two suspects. **With PNA**

# CIDG files 'admin' case vs Baldo

*Daraga, Cotabato City placed under Comelec control*

**A**SIDE from murder and frustrated murder, Daraga Mayor Carlwyn Baldo, the alleged mastermind behind the killing of AKO-Bicol Party-list Rep. Rodel Batocabe has been charged with an administrative case before the Office of the Ombudsman.

The case was filed by the Philippine National Police-Criminal Investigation and Detection Group.

Batocabe was slated to run against Baldo in the mid-term elections in May.

Baldo was earlier charged with murder for the killing of Batocabe and his aide, Senior Police Officer Orlando Diaz, and the wounding of seven others

last Dec. 22, 2018, during a gift-giving activity in Daraga.

Baldo, however, has denied the allegations.

Meanwhile, Batocabe's murder has prompted the Commission on Elections to place Daraga under its control until the end of the election period.

Aside from Daraga, the Comelec also

placed Cotabato City under its control after the southern city was bombed on New Year's Eve.

The bombing left at least two people dead.

Under the law, the Comelec can place any area under its immediate control if there is a history of or there is a prevailing intense political rivalry among contending parties, as these could lead to violence.

Once an area is under Comelec control, the commission is given full control and supervision over law enforcement agencies and military officers assigned to the said area.

The election period officially began last Sunday, Jan. 13.

## 2 NPA rebels surrender

COTABATO CITY — Two members of the New People's Army wanted in Sultan Kudarat province for various offenses including arson surrendered to military authorities late Sunday night, Army officials said.

The surrender of Ka Glen, 55, and Ka Jongle, 35, came about two weeks after the communist guerillas, allegedly including the duo, torched heavy construction equipment of the Janmerc Construction Company implementing a government infra project in Hinalaan village of Kalamansig coastal town in Sultan Kudarat, according to Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc.

Cabunoc, commander of the

Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion, said the two returnees claimed membership in the NPA's Platoon My Phone, which his battalion forces flushed out of Esperanza-Bagumbayan area in the second quarter of 2018.

At its Monday flag-raising rite, Cabunoc presented the duo and their two 9mm submachine pistols to Lt. Col. Jorge Garcia, commanding officer of the Marine Battalion Landing Team 2, for official processing under the government's Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP).

In their messages, Cabunoc and Garcia reminded the returnees that their surrender meant their vow to

peaceful and productive life and to collaborate with government authorities in thwarting the rebel movement's activities in Sultan Kudarat.

Ka Jongle, in response, aired regret for having joined guerilla life, saying he and his comrades were made to believe that communism could help them retrieve their ancestral lands.

Meanwhile, Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, head of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, lauded the Infantry and Marine units under his operational jurisdiction for their continuing efforts in either neutralizing or winning enemies back to the folds of law. **(Ali Macabalang)** 2

## NPA peace talks, go uli

Nina BETH CAMIA at GENALYN D. KABILING

Inilarga ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte ang backdoor peace negotiations sa Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) at inatasan si dating Philippine Coconut Authority head Avelino Andal na pamunuan ang pagsisikap.

Sinabi ni Andal, miyembro ng Movie and Television Review and Classification Board, na inatasan siya ng Pangulo nitong nakatang linggo na buhayin ang peace negotiations sa grupong pinamumunuan ni Jose Maria "Joma" Sison.

"Napag-utusan ang inyong lingkod at utos mula sa Presidente na kung maari ma-resume ang pag-uusap sapagkat

ang kanyang pinagdidilinan ay bilang Presidente ay siya'y kaibigan at hindi kaaway ng sinuman naging mga rebelde," aniya sa panayam ng reporters sa telepono.

"Makipag-backchannel talks doon sa mga lider ng CPP, kay Joma kabilang siyempre si Joma na nasa ibalaw o lider ng lahat. Pero siyempre before doing that, kailangan muna mag-groundwork sa mga lider na nandito sa Pilipinas," duglong niya.

Aniya, sinisero ang Pangulo sa peace initiative nito at naniniwala na ito ang susi upang maliyak ang kaunlaran at katatagan ng bansa. Gayunman, hindi nagbigay si Duterte ng timeline para

sa backdoor talks sa mga komunistang rebelde.

"Wala naman specific timeline pero ang ramdam ko gusto talaga ni Presidente Duterte na magkaroon ng katahimikan sa bayan at magkasundosundo ang lahat ng mga puwersa at grupo," aniya.

Tinanggap naman ni Sison ang muling kahandaan ng gobyerno para sa peace talks.

"Nagpoabot na ako agad ng feeler para makausap sila at actually tuwang-tuwa sila dahil gusto rin nila ay bumalik sa usapang pangkajayapaan," aniya.

Hindi na nagbigay ng iba pang detalye si Andal.

14 January 2019



Page: 3

### CPP-NPA ideklarang terorista

Kinalampag ng isang grupo ng anti-terrorism ang tanggapan ng Department of Justice (DoJ) para maghain ng motion to resolve sa Manila Regional Trial Court (RTC) at hilingin sa hukuman na magpalabas na ng pinal na desisyon na nagdedeklara sa Communist Party of the Philippines, New People's Army, at National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF) bilang isang teroristang grupo.

Ayon sa grupo, masyado nang tumalakaw ang epekto ng pamamerhuwiso ng mga komunistang rebelde sa mga sibilyan at pribadong korporasyon.

**Ruth Camia**



# **BOL plebiscite funds available, says Diokno**

**Allocation included in maintenance and other operating expenses in 2018 GAA, 2019 proposed expenses, according to budget chief**

By Ben O. de Vera  
and Christine O. Avendaño  
@Team\_Inquirer

Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno on Tuesday said the plebiscite to ratify the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) had "adequate funding and will push through as planned."

Diokno issued the statement after House Majority Leader Rolando Andaya Jr. claimed that the proposed P3.757-trillion national budget for 2019 had no allocation for the BOL plebiscite, which will be held on Jan. 21 and Feb. 6.

"In the 2018 General Appropriations Act (GAA) and the 2019 National Expenditure Program (NEP), P111.8 million and P95.8 million are allocated, respectively, under maintenance and other operating expenses for the conduct and supervision of elections, referenda, recall votes and plebiscites in the budget of the Commission on Elections (Comelec)," the budget chief said.

"Furthermore, the Comelec has prior years' continuing appropriations (from 2015 to 2017), amounting to P409.5 million as of end-September 2018, which they can tap to cover the funding requirements of the plebiscite," he said.

#### 'Misplaced statement'

"To appease concerns that there is not enough money for the Bangsamoro plebiscite, the Comelec may also request for more funding through the contingent fund, subject to approval of the Office of the President," Diokno said.

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo also belied Andaya's claim.

"In the first place, if there were no funds, then the plebiscite would have been canceled or reset. So obviously, the plebiscite is pushing ahead, so there are funds," Panelo told reporters in a briefing.

On Andaya's statement that Diokno had wasted efforts of the administration to gain last-



**RALLYING SUPPORT** Residents in Maguindanao province join a caravan to show support for the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law. —JEFFREY MAITEM

ing peace in Mindanao, Panelo said this was a "misplaced statement and without basis."

He said Andaya was probably "misinformed."

Diokno, in his statement, said: "We want to give peace a chance in the Bangsamoro region, and we are prepared and willing to fund this exercise to the fullest."

#### Duterte support

Panelo said President Duterte would go to Cotabato City on Friday to rally support for the BOL.

The President will attend a peace assembly for the ratification of the BOL at the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) office in Cotabato City, three days before the first of two plebiscites in Mindanao on Jan. 21.

"The President's voice is a powerful influencing voice," Panelo said.

The Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) drafted the BOL that was signed by President Duterte in July last year. The law was anchored on the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, the final peace deal signed by the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2016 after almost four decades of conflict that claimed over 120,000 lives,

including civilians.

Once ratified, the BOL will establish the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) to replace the 28-year-old ARMM.

The plebiscite is set on Jan. 21 for all areas under the ARMM and Isabela City in Basilan and Cotabato City. A plebiscite is also set on Feb. 6 for voters in Lanao del Norte, six towns in North Cotabato and other areas that petitioned for inclusion in the future BARMM.

#### Voice of the people

Panelo said the government was hopeful the BOL would be supported by the people as he stressed that Mr. Duterte nevertheless "will abide by whatever decision of the voters there."

"The President cannot do anything but to comply with the sovereign voice of the people in Mindanao," he said.

Ghazali Jaafar, MILF vice chair for political affairs and chair of BTC, said the matter of funding for the plebiscite was not discussed during a meeting with Comelec in Manila on Monday.

"The discussions focused on the preparations for the plebiscite," he said.

Officials from the Comelec, BTC, Office of the Presidential

Adviser on the Peace Process and the Philippine National Police attended the meeting.

#### High expectations

Jaafar said Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana had assured him that there was no problem with the budget for the plebiscite.

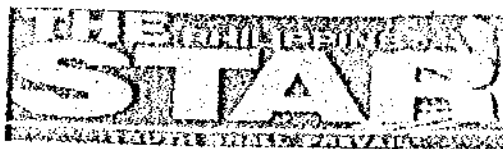
Mohagher Iqbal, chair of the MILF peace panel, said his group was "moving tooth and nail to campaign for the ratification of the BOL."

Lawyer Benedicto Bacani, executive director of the Cotabato City-based think tank, Institute for Autonomy and Governance, said he was more worried about the prospects of lack of appropriation for the implementation of the BOL, especially on the first year of transition.

"If this will come true, high expectations on the BOL cannot be met," he said.

The MILF will lead the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) once the BOL is ratified. The MILF central committee has endorsed MILF chair Murad Ibrahim to lead the BTA that will serve as a parliamentary government until regular elections are held in 2022.

—WITH REPORTS FROM BONG SARMIENTO AND JULIE ALIPALA INQ



## SC sets BOL oral arguments after the fact

By EDU PUNAY

The Supreme Court (SC) has set the oral arguments on a case questioning the constitutionality of the Bangsamoro Organic Law – but only after the first part of the BOL plebiscite is over.

In session yesterday, the SC justices decided to hear next month the arguments on the petitions filed by the provincial government of Sulu, led by Gov. Abdusakur Tan II, and the Philippine Constitutional Association (Philconsa).

Both petitioners seek to stop the BOL implementation as provided under Republic Act 11054.

An insider, who requested anonymity due to lack of authority to speak in behalf of the high tribunal, told **The STAR** that the SC agreed to hear the arguments in February, after the holding of the first phase of the plebiscite on Jan. 21.

However, the magistrates have yet to decide on the exact date. The second phase of the plebiscite is on Feb. 6.

Turn to Page 4

## SC From Page 4

Solicitor General Jose Calida has filed his comment on the petition of Tan and is expected to file comment on the Philconsa petition this week.

The BOL seeks to expand the political territory of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which will be known as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

### Rody to rally BOL support

President Duterte is expected to rally support for the BOL in a public assembly in Cotabato on Friday.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo is optimistic that Duterte would be able to persuade Cotabato residents to support the BOL.

"The President's voice is a powerful influencing voice," Panelo said at a press briefing yesterday.

Cotabato City Mayor Cynthia Guiani earlier said her constituents would likely reject the city's inclusion in the BARMM, citing the supposed "abuses" by some groups pushing for the BOL.

Guiani said a commander of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) warned people opposing Cotabato's inclusion in the BOL of consequences.

Panelo said Duterte would respect the will of those who would vote in the plebiscite for the BOL.

"The President cannot do anything but to comply with the sovereign voice of the people in Mindanao," Panelo said.

The DBM yesterday refuted House Majority Leader Roldando Andaya's claims that there is no funding for the BOL plebiscite under the 2019 national budget.

## SC From Page 1

The SC's schedule for the month is full and the magistrates will hold oral arguments on Jan. 22 and 23, on petitions questioning the third extension of martial law in Mindanao.

"The court does not see the need to immediately hear the Bangsamoro case even with the plebiscite set on Jan. 21," the source said.

The high court earlier said the plebiscite on BOL could proceed in the absence of a restraining order from the court.

It opted to first seek the comments of the respondents – Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, members of the

Senate and House of Representatives headed by Senate President Vicente Sotto and Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, respectively – before deciding on a plea for the issuance of a temporary restraining order (TRO) as well as on the merits of the case.

"The Court may still issue a TRO on the implementation of the law as sought in the petitions even after the plebiscite, if warranted," the source clarified.

The two petitions raised the same arguments against the BOL.

Turn to Page 6

Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno said the BOL plebiscite has adequate funding and would push through as planned.

"In the 2018 General Appropriations Act and the 2019 National Expenditure Program, P111.8 million and P95.8 million are allocated, respectively, under the maintenance and other operating expenses for the conduct and supervision of elections, referenda, recall votes and plebiscites in the budget of the Commission on Elections," Diokno said. – With Alexis Romero, Delon Porcalla, Mary Grace Padin, John Unson, Ramil Bajo

## Clash erupts ahead of BOL plebiscite

TROOPS on patrol clashed on Tuesday with pro-Islamic State fighters in Shariff Saydona Mustapha, Magulindanao even as the Joint Peace and Security Coordinating Council (JPSCC) of Lanao del Sur sees a peaceful conduct of the plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) on January 21.

But officials said there was no immediate report of casualties on the side of the militants who were members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

There were no military casualties and the 6th Infantry Division (6ID) said soldiers from the 40th Infantry Battalion (40IB) under Lt. Col. Edgar Catu recovered from one improvised explosive, three M14 rifles and one AR18 rifle at the encounter site in Barangay Inaladan.

The military has blamed the BIFF for the spate of attacks against security forces and bombings of civilian targets in the Muslim autonomous region. The militant group is also being linked to the deadly New Year's Eve bombing outside the South Seas Mall in Cotabato City that killed two and wounded 34.

Residents are to decide whether to approve the proposed expansion of the moderate Muslim region that will be called Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and ruled by Moro Islamic Liberation Front rebels whose group signed an interim peace deal with the government in 2014.

Meanwhile, the JPSCC of Lanao del Sur sees a peaceful conduct of the plebiscite during meeting here on Monday at Camp Bagong Amai Pakpak in Marawi City.

The assessment was aired by Senior Supt. Madzgan Mukaram, acting director of Lanao del Sur Police Provincial Office, and Col. Jose MA. Cuervo, deputy commander of the 103rd Infantry (Haribon) Brigade, Philippine Army.

Norjana Ducol, general manager of Lanao del Sur Electric Cooperative (Lasureco), also gave assurance that there would be sufficient electric supply during the plebiscite.

The meeting was also attended by election officers in different municipalities of the province, chiefs of city and municipal police stations, Lasureco representatives, the police and military personnel, the Department of Education, and other stakeholders.

Mukaram said the final JPSCC meeting, presided by the Commission on Elections, would be held three days before the plebiscite.

AL JACINTO AND  
MASIDING NOOR YAHYA

## Duterte to join plebiscite rally

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte will fly to Cotabato City to join an assembly on Friday in support of ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), Malacañang said on Tuesday.

In a news conference, Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo confirmed Duterte's participation at the mass rally, which will be held three days before a scheduled plebiscite for the BOL in Bajau Hall, Cotabato City.

Panelo said Duterte will use his "powerful influencing voice" to ensure the successful ratification of the BOL.

"The President's voice is a powerful influencing voice. Kung impluwensya lang ang boses niya, bakit naman hindi [If his voice is influential, why not use it to persuade the people to support the BOL]?" he told reporters.

"From the point of view of the President, the BOL will solve the age-old problem of the Muslim rebellion," Panelo said.

The Palace official, however, said the President will let the people decide on the ratification of the BOL.

"Kung [If] despite the support and the campaign, the overwhelming majority or even a slight majority say *ayaw nila* [they don't want it], the President cannot do anything but to comply with the sovereign voice of the people in Mindanao," he added.

The plebiscite for areas comprising the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), Cotabato City and Isabela City in Basilan will be held on January 21.

The plebiscite for Lanao del Norte and other Bangsamoro core areas is scheduled for February 6.

The BOL creates the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), replacing the current ARMM.

This new region will have wider control over its resources and political power.

Under the BOL, a 75-25 wealth sharing in favor of the new Bangsamoro region will be implemented to raise its share in tax revenues.

The government will allocate P5 billion to the Bangsamoro annually for 10 years or P50 billion to rebuild areas ravaged by the armed conflict.

The European Union and the United Nations, among others, have lauded the enactment of the BOL and have promised to continue supporting peace efforts in Mindanao.

Duterte signed the law in July 2018.

## Digong shores up BOL push

By Kristina Maralit

Proponents and supporters of Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) on Tuesday received much-needed shot in the arm after Malacañang confirmed President Rodrigo Roa Duterte's attendance in an assembly that aims to garner support for the ratification of the proposed measure.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said the President will use his "powerful influencing voice" to campaign for the ratification of the landmark proposal.

The Comelec has scheduled the plebiscite for ratification of BOL on 21 January to be held in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) areas, Isabela City in Basilan and Cotabato City.

Panelo reiterated the President believes the ratification of the BOL would solve the decades-old problem of rebellion in Mindanao.

He, however, stressed that the President would respect whatever the result of the plebiscite.

Panelo reiterated the administration had nothing to do with legal woes and that the executive could not dictate what the courts would do to his cases.

"We cannot determine the pulse of the people. We can only speculate," Panelo said.

During the same press briefing, Panelo dismissed Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV's latest tirades against the administration as baseless.

Panelo reiterated the administration had nothing to do with legal woes and that the executive could not dictate what the courts would do to his cases.

The opposition senator flew to Davao City

yesterday to be arraigned for the four libel cases, filed against him by former Davao City Vice Mayor Paolo Duterte and lawyer Manases Carpio.

"He must remember that the charges have been filed in court and the court found probable cause on his libelous remarks. This administration (had) nothing to do with that," Panelo said.

Meanwhile, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) intensified its campaign for the shift of form of government to federalism from unitary system.

"We believe that under a Federal system, the BOL will be absorbed by the new constitution even if it is ratified this coming plebiscite" MNLF spokesman Emmanuel Fontanilla said. "It will be a short-lived law," he added.

He said MNLF is conducting information campaign in their communities to promote Federalism.

With Perseus Echeminada

# Du30 to attend pro-BOL assembly

By Nat Mariano, Francisco Tuyay and Maricel V. Cruz

**I**N ORDER to persuade people into believing that the Bangsamoro Organic Law will solve the age-old Muslim rebellion days before the upcoming plebiscite, President Rodrigo Duterte will participate in an assembly this Friday supporting its ratification.

According to the President's schedule relayed by Malacañang on Tuesday, the President will attend the pro-BOL rally to be held at the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Office of the Regional Governor compound.

Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo said Duterte's personal appearance and appeal to the people would help ensure the successful ratification of the BOL.

"Well, certainly the voice of President is always a powerful influence on whatever matter he gives his voice into," Panelo said in a Palace press briefing.

The Palace official also said the President would abide by the result of the upcoming plebiscite, even if the people decided not to support Duterte's call.

"If despite the support and the campaign, the overwhelming majority or even a slight majority say they don't want it, then the President cannot do anything but to comply with the sovereign voice of the people in Mindanao," Panelo said.

In related developments:

- Security forces said they thwarted anew a plan by terrorists to spoil the BOL plebiscite following the recovery of large quantity of explosive material during a firefight with Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters in Maguindanao, one of the critical areas in Mindanao.

The fighting erupted in Barangay Inaladan, Shariff Saydona Mustapha, one of the five election hot spots in Maguindanao, six days before the plebiscite.

Aside from Shariff Saydona Mustapha, the

towns Masasapano, Shariff Aguak, Shariff and Datu Unsay in Maguindanao were also declared as election hot spots.

There are 19 municipalities and cities that were declared critical areas during midterm elections.

Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of Joint Task Force Central, said troops from the 40th Infantry Battalion were able to recover one component of "anti-personnel mines in a 4-liter container, three M14 rifles and a unit of Assault Rifle 18 minutes after the cloud of smoke vanished at the battle site.

- Muslim lawmakers on Tuesday expressed confidence the people in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao would support and vote for BOL's ratification.

## Senate to realign P75B DPWH budget insertion

BY RAYMOND AFRICA

THE Senate on Monday afternoon adopted the motion of Sen. Panfilo Lacson to realign the P75-billion insertion from the Department of Public Works and Highways' (DPWH) budget to other agencies in need of additional funding.

Senate President Vicente Sotto III said part of the amount should be used to fund drug rehabilitation and treatment centers of the

Department of Health and mental health facilities.

Lacson recalled that the Senate did the same thing in 2017, when it realigned P8.3 billion in insertions to the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education.

"This time, it's P75 billion, since the senators unanimously agreed to remove it from the DPWH because the agency does not know where it came from and where to use it," Lacson said in a chance

interview.

The DPWH proposed a P651-billion budget to the Development Budget Coordinating Committee but the Department of Budget Department (DBM) set a "budget ceiling" of P480 billion.

But in the National Expenditure Program, which was prepared by the DBM, the DPWH allocation went up to P555 billion, or a dif-

See SENATE > Page B3



## SENATE

ference of P75 billion.

Lacson, during Monday's deliberations, asked what the additional P75 billion was for. Sen. Loren Legarda, chair of the Senate finance committee, said DPWH Secretary Mark Villar knew of the P75 billion only at the Question Hour at the House of Representatives.

Senate President protempore Ralph Recto said senators should study very well where to align the P75-billion insertion, to ensure that it is really used.

"That's why we have to really think about it. Put it into good use instead of the budget just hanging around without the DPWH knowing where to use it. If ever, it will be an unused fund. We will go back to our old problem of defective planning or no planning at all and then they will implement a project without even using the budget allotted," Lacson said.

"Now if some senators have reservations on the P75 billion, it will not be deleted, we will find ways on where to place it. For me, the bottom line is it should not be from pork to pork," he added.

Presidential spokesman and Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo said Malacañang is confident the removal of P75 billion from the DPWH would not derail the infrastructure program of the Duterte government.

Panelo said the Executive branch can be "creative" when a need for additional funding arises. He said the Palace could seek additional appropriations or a supplemental budget should the need arises.

The Senate was not able to pass the DPWH budget last Monday due to questions on the "insertions." Deliberations will continue today.

## DOH BUDGET

The Senate yesterday afternoon passed the Department of Health's (DOH) budget, restoring the P24.5 billion which was slashed by the DBM from its initial funding.

In yesterday's budget deliberations, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said Senate minority leader Franklin Drilon and Sen. Joseph Victor Ejercito agreed to give back to the DOH the P16.4 billion taken away from the Health Facilities Enhancement Program, and the P7.1 billion slashed from the salaries of more than 26,000 health workers.

With the restoration, the DOH and its attached agencies will now have a budget of P107 billion for 2019.

Duque said the restored P16.4 billion budget will be used for the completion of government hospitals that are under construction.

He said the common sight of patients lying on corridors of government hospitals due to lack of beds is expected to be lessened, if not totally eliminated, with the completion of at least 900 health facilities nationwide.

During the deliberations of the DOH budget, Sotto revealed the alleged modus operandi of a certain neurologist from South Cotabato, whom he identified as Dr. Mark Mengulfa, whose henchmen pay P1,000 to PhilHealth members to fake their illnesses for them to be confined.

"This doctor will connive with the hospital where he is affiliated particularly the St. Louis Hospital, Allah Valley Medical Specialist Center, Inc., Dr. Arturo R. Pingoy Medical Center, and St. Louis Medical CL and Hospital in order to collect from PhilHealth for the supposed expenses incurred by the hired PhilHealth members," Sotto said.

Sotto said the money allegedly goes to the neurologist's pocket and the hospitals also get their share.

Sen. Joseph Victor Ejercito, speaking on behalf of PhilHealth as sponsor of the DOH budget, said an investigation is ongoing in the regional level.

"According to the PhilHealth, they will go there personally to check on the status of this case that you have mentioned," Ejercito said.

Sotto also asked what PhilHealth is doing in cases of fraudulent claims from hospitals and doctors.

Ejercito said PhilHealth investigates first and if found guilty, the hospital will be suspended and its license may even be revoked depending on the gravity of the case. He said the doctor's professional license may also be revoked.

## GO FOR BOL

The Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) plebiscite has adequate funding and will push through as planned, contrary to claims by House majority leader Rolando Andaya, Jr., Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno said.

Diokno said in a statement that

P111.8 million and P95.8 million have been allocated in the 2018 General Appropriations Act and the 2019 National Expenditure Program, respectively, for the conduct and supervision of elections, referenda, recall votes and plebiscites under the budget of the Commission on Elections (Comelec).

"Furthermore, the Comelec has prior years' continuing appropriations (from 2015 to 2017) amounting to P409.5 million as of end-September 2018, which they can tap to cover the funding requirements of the plebiscite," he said.

The DBM said the Comelec may use unobligated allotments amounting to P10.4 billion, as of end-September 2018, for preparatory activities in the national and local elections.

Diokno said Comelec may also request for more funding through the Contingent Fund, subject to approval of the Office of the President, "in case the above cited sources are fully utilized."

Muslim House leaders are confident that the BOL will be ratified in a plebiscite.

In a press conference, Deputy Speaker Bai Sandra Sema of Maguindanao and Reps. Amihilda Sangcopan (PI, Anak Mindanao) and Mauryag Papandayan Jr. (PDP-Laban Lanao del Sur) are upbeat that the people of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) will agree to the BOL.

Sangcopan said state forces, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) have joined forces to ensure the honest and peaceful holding of the historic political exercise.

Sema said Muslims, Christians, Lumads, and people from other faiths will hold a prayer rally this Friday in Cotabato City for peace, unity, and the success of the ratification of the BOL.

Malacañang said President Duterte will attend the assembly.

Sema filed House Resolution No. 2404 declaring January 18, 2019 as "a Day of Prayer to pray for peace in the Bangsamoro Homeland as the voters prepare to ratify Republic Act no. 11054 or the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao."

At least 2.8 million voters are expected to participate in the plebiscite. — *With Jocelyn Montemayor, Wendell Vigilia, and Angela Celis*

## Of beginnings and endings

**“The plebiscite presents a litmus test for the poll body and its officials.**

January, the first month in the calendar year, is named after Janus, the solitary Roman god not adopted from the Greek pantheon. Commonly depicted as the bearded god with two faces, Janus holds dominion over all transitions – of beginnings and endings.

It is but apropos to view the first of month of the year as the period to start afresh, to set priorities, select programs and implement policies that take cognizance of the successes, missteps and failures of the past.

For communities in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), January is of critical significance as the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) will be submitted to the people for approval through a plebiscite. If the BOL gains the people's favor, its ratification strikes the death knell of the ARMM, bandied as a “failure”



**MOORINGS**  
Salma Rasul

by the previous administration. In its stead, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao will be constituted, with a regional government having more expansive fiscal autonomy, a parliament and a *shari'ah*-based judicial system.

Quite auspiciously, the BOL plebiscite has been set on 21 January for the core territory of ARMM and the cities of Cotabato and Isabela. The second voting day is set on 6 February for North Cotabato, Lanao del Norte, excluding Iligan City and

other local government units that have petitioned to be included in the autonomy. Of the 99 petitions for inclusion, the Commission on Elections (Comelec) has so far granted 20, denied 24, with the remaining petitions still to be adjudicated.

The Comelec has predicted a high voter turnout for the plebiscite. Voters will include the

estimated 150,000 former combatants of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), their families and those residing in MILF camps. Interestingly, no corresponding estimate for former combatants of the fractious Moro National Liberation Front has been put forth.

**“If the BOL gains the people's favor, its ratification strikes the death knell of the ARMM, bandied as a “failure” by the previous administration.**

most of ARMM drastically reduce the number of areas that can be visited.

The plebiscite presents a litmus test for the poll body and its officials. Past electoral exercises have seen the region denigrated by reported high incidence of electoral fraud.

International poll experts are expected to observe areas closest to potential “hotspots.” However, the extension of martial law and the existing travel ban over

The campaign is also propelled by local political rivalries and grander ambitions. For provincial kingpins, the plebiscite will reflect their control and influence through the number of municipal politicians kowtowing their line. Those with national aspirations, would want to convince leaders of their “winability” by securing the votes – whether for or against the BOL.

Meanwhile, vast multitudes have pinned their hopes of salvation from poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment on the BOL's establishing the needed foundation for economic and social progress.

Will the plebiscite signal the end or the beginning?

May our leaders be then guided by Rizal's Crisostomo Ibarra: “I have observed that the prosperity or misery of each people is in direct proportion to its liberties or its prejudices and, accordingly, to the sacrifices or the selfishness of its forefathers.”

# That pessimist lame duck Trillanes

Towards the end of December 2018, an opinion poll survey revealed that President Rodrigo Duterte's public satisfaction rating rose to a very high 74 percent, up by 11 points since June 2018. As expected, the President and his supporters were elated by the survey results. It means the people are behind the President's program of government, notwithstanding what his critics, who are in the minority, have to say about him.

**“  
Why  
should  
anyone  
believe  
Trillanes  
anyway?  
He is an  
ex-mutineer  
who  
violated  
his oath to  
defend the  
Constitution  
by staging  
a failed  
coup.**

The President's documented accomplishments are the reasons for the surge in his popularity.

With the exception perhaps of President Ferdinand Marcos who had a drug lord executed by musketry during the martial law period, President Duterte is the only President who has seriously addressed the drug menace plaguing the nation. Under his term, many drug traders, drug pushers and drug users have been arrested and detained. Duterte's antidrug war is so serious even drug users in high levels of the government have surrendered, something which never occurred in past administrations.

Because President Benigno Aquino III tolerated the drug menace by official inaction during his term, the drug menace reached extraordinary proportions by the time Duterte took over. Imagine, drug users among high ranking government officials and politicians identified with the drug trade, all at the close of the Aquino administration!

Marawi City has been a historically troublesome area during past administrations. In May 2017, terrorists in the city attacked military troops in an attempt to establish an Islamic

republic.

President Duterte retorted by placing Mindanao under martial law and directed the Armed Forces of the Philippines to neutralize the rebels. The proclamation of martial law was approved by Congress and the Supreme Court. Two more extensions were allowed by Congress.

Martial law in Mindanao has brought peace, law and order and stability to the region. Nobody in the island is complaining. Only the publicityseeking Rep. Edcel Lagman and his minions are opposed to it.

President Duterte is the only President who has spoken up against the abuses and the hypocrisy of

the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines. Other Presidents before him did not dare court the ire of the Church.

Once a cesspool, Boracay is now truly a world-class destination, thanks to Duterte's order to clean up the place.

The accomplishments speak for themselves.

Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV, however, threw cold water at the survey results and questioned its reliability as an indicator of the public pulse. He assumed that the survey respondents were afraid of expressing their true sentiments and simply gave the President high grades.

That statement is arguably the most speculative and pessimistic public comment the lame duck senator has

ever made. Nothing, not even his false accusations and predictions in the past, can even compare to it.

In the first place, Trillanes' comment is an unfounded opinion, a conjecture devoid of any empirical explanation or justification.

Second, Trillanes has no academic background in opinion research. The survey was conducted by a known opinion polling agency. Polling agencies are expected to conduct their surveys in a scientific way, using statistical inferences and gauges of data integrity and reliability.

Since Trillanes has no statistical basis to discredit this recent survey, he has unwittingly emphasized to the Filipino people that he is an opinionated politician engaging in unfairly discrediting whosoever he happens to dislike.

Why should anyone believe Trillanes anyway? He is an ex-mutineer who violated his oath to defend the Constitution by staging a failed coup against the then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Since he has no respect for the Constitution, his statements should not be taken seriously.

Remember the way Trillanes disrespected Sen. Richard Gordon during a Senate investigation on the drug menace. Observers note that each time Trillanes did not get his way, he resorted to behavior unbecoming of a statesman. In the process, his petty tantrums embarrassed the Senate, which is supposed to be an institution of law and dignity, notwithstanding the presence of several shady characters there.

Trillanes' recent rant underscores his status as a lame duck, a politician desperate for publicity, because his days in the Senate are numbered. His term will end in June this year and he is disqualified from seeking a third term.

Once out of power and devoid of an expense account paid for by taxpayers, Trillanes will be relegated to the political dustbin.

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Martial  
law in  
Mindanao  
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law and  
order and  
stability to  
the region.”

SENATE  
TERM  
END

## **ONLINE NEWS**

### **16 JANUARY 2019**

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#### **Solcom chief retires**

By Priam Nepomuceno January 15, 2019, 2:21 pm

**MANILA** -- Southern Luzon Command (Solcom) chief, Lt. Gen. Danilo G. Pamonag formally retired from the military on Tuesday after 35 years in service.

He will be retiring after participating in the two biggest urban battles, Col. Noel Detoyato, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) public affairs office chief, said in a statement.

Prior to his stint at Solcom, Pamonag led the AFP Special Operations Command.

After working alongside then Joint Task Force Marawi commander retired Lt. Gen. Rolando Bautista, he was designated as ground commander in the battle for Marawi City in October 2017.

Pamonag was also ground commander in the defense of Zamboanga City in 2013 against rogue members of the Moro National Liberation Front. He will be replaced in an acting capacity by Major Gen. Gilbert Gapay, concurrent head of the Mechanized Division.

"His outstanding leadership and capacity as a military commander were vital in our defense of Zamboanga City, Marawi City, and the Solcom area of responsibility, which serves as a gateway to our capital and center of political and economic activity," AFP Chief-of-Staff, Gen. Benjamin Madrigal, said in a ceremony held at the Solcom Headquarters in Quezon.

"On behalf of every soldier, airman, sailor, and marine, I thank Lt. Gen. Danilo Pamonag for his dedicated service and for his tireless work in defending our country against any threat," Madrigal added, praising Pamonag's accomplishments in suppressing the communist threat in the Southern Tagalog and Bicol regions. **(PNA)**

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## **AFP lauds Agusan Sur town's 'persona non grata' tag vs. NPA**

By Priam Nepomuceno January 15, 2019, 12:20 pm

**MANILA** -- The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has lauded the municipal government of Sibagat in Agusan del Sur province for declaring members of the New People's Army (NPA) as "persona non grata".

"On behalf of the soldiers who on a day-to-day basis risk their lives for the peace and security of the country, I thank and laud the local officials of Sibagat, Agusan del Sur for standing up against the NPA," AFP Chief, Gen. Benjamin Madrigal, said in a statement released late Monday.

"We hope that more LGUs (local government units) will finally recognize the need to take similar actions against the NPA and its front organizations and join the whole of (the) nation approach to completely annihilate the communist armed conflict," Madrigal added.

In Municipal Resolution No. 137-18, approved on Dec. 21, 2018 and released to the media on Monday, the town's Sangguniang Bayan declared communist rebels as "persona non grata" or unwelcome and unacceptable people.

Sibagat Mayor Maria Liza Evangelista led the signing of the resolution, which cited the NPA attack on a Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU) Active Auxillary Patrol Base in New Tubigon on Dec. 19, 2018, as a form of betrayal.

"The kidnapping and abduction perpetrated by the NPAs is a manifestation of betrayal of achieving peace, thus disrupting the peace and security of the community," the resolution reads.

The NPA, the Communist Party of the Philippines' armed wing, is considered a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union. **(PNA)**

[www.pna.gov.ph](http://www.pna.gov.ph)

## **AFP to conduct final security check for BOL plebiscite**

By Priam Nepomuceno January 15, 2019, 11:55 am

**MANILA** -- The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) will conduct a final check on the security arrangement for the plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) within the week.

This was bared by AFP public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato when asked Tuesday on whether the military will hoist its alert status and security preparations for the coming polls.

"AFP troops are pre-deployed so as of now, very minimal *na ang* movement. We will have a final check on the security arrangements this week to determine if there are gaps to be filled and adjustments to be made as situation usually becomes fluid as the event comes closer," he said in a message to the Philippine News Agency.

The military is earmarking around 10,000 personnel and support units to help secure the BOL plebiscite, along with the Philippine National Police (PNP).

"Rest assured, the AFP together with the PNP and with the big help from OPAPP (Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process), the LGUs (local government units) and MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) leadership, the coming plebiscite will be conducted smoothly," Detoyato added.

Earlier, the AFP public affairs office chief said the military will do everything in its authority to ensure the successful and peaceful conduct of all election-related activities this year.

"(The) AFP is deputized by the Comelec (Commission on Elections) so we will dedicate our efforts for the successful conduct of the BOL plebiscite and the incoming midterm elections," Detoyato said.

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

"Our combat operations and other security operations will always be in support to the honest, orderly and peaceful conduct of Comelec-sanctioned activities," Detoyato said. **(PNA)**

[www.inquirer.net](http://www.inquirer.net)

## **Mindanao rebels beef up NPA in Luzon — Army exec**

*Philippine Daily Inquirer* / 05:18 AM January 16, 2019

BONGABON, Nueva Ecija UEVA — Communist rebels from Mindanao have been helping local members of the New People's Army (NPA) intensify their operations in Nueva Ecija, Aurora and Nueva Vizcaya provinces, an Army official said here.

Col. Rowen Tolentino, commander of the Army's 703rd (Agila) Brigade based here, said the rebels had moved to Luzon since last year amid heightened military operations in Mindanao.

Citing intelligence reports, Tolentino said the recruited rebels were promised "better situation" in Luzon by the NPA leaders.

"These rebels from Mindanao move in platoons and hide in the mountain ranges of Sierra Madre and Cordillera in the eastern part of Nueva Ecija," he said.

### **Harassment**

"Part of their operation is to harass owners of harvesters and construction companies. They demand revolutionary tax from them," he added.

According to him, a harvester, a truck and a cement mixer were burned last year by the rebels after their owners reportedly refused to pay revolutionary tax.

He said continuing military operations against the rebels had resulted in casualties on both sides.

Two rebels were killed in a recent encounter with government soldiers under the 7th Infantry Division at Fort Magsaysay in Palayan City while a soldier died in an NPA ambush.

### **Arrests**

The military also recovered 24 firearms from the rebels in separate encounters and overran a major NPA camp near the Nueva Ecija and Aurora border.

Four female rebels, including a University of the Philippines student, were arrested while they were conducting teach-ins in a Nueva Ecija town.

"We got vital information from the captured rebels and from the documents recovered from those killed," Tolentino said.

"We are relentlessly operating against the beefed-up [operations of the] rebels who are on constant move and sometimes mingling with the villagers." —**Anselmo Roque**



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## **Encounter in Guihulngan as condemnation rally held**

From the Visayan Daily Star (Jan 15, 2019): **Encounter in Guihulngan as condemnation rally held**

Army soldiers yesterday figured in an encounter with suspected New People's Army rebels in Brgy. Banwage, Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental, while barangay residents held a rally condemning atrocities perpetrated and claimed by communist rebels.

No casualty was reported on the government side during the gunbattle that lasted for 20 minutes, Brig. Gen. Ignacio Madriaga, 302nd Infantry Brigade commander, said.

Despite the running gunbattle, Madriaga said that a condemnation rally, which was participated in by Linantuyan barangay residents, was pushed through in the barangay.

Linantuyan barangay residents condemned the killing of CAGU member Joseph Gabia, a resident in the area, by the NPA two weeks ago, Madriaga said.

Gabia, who was off-duty, was on his way back to his patrol base in Linantuyan after settling a family problem when he was killed by NPA Special Partisan Unit (Sparu) team members.

Madriaga said he believes that the rebels encountered by soldiers of the 94th Infantry Battalion are companions of the SPARU team members behind the summary execution of Gabia.

The Army soldiers, on board a military truck, were on their way to the rally of residents in Brgy. Linantuyan, when they chanced upon the group of communist rebels, estimated to be between five to seven, that triggered a firefight for about 20 minutes.

It had not determined as of press time if the NPA had suffered casualties, Madriaga said, stressing that no ambush had taken place contrary to reports being circulated on social media.

The military claims that the NPA has killed 19 people in Guihulngan alone since last year.

## **Soldier wounded in encounter with NPA**

From the Philippine News Agency (Jan 15, 2019):

**A member of the Philippine Army's (PA) 61st Infantry Battalion (61IB) was wounded in an encounter with the New People's Army (NPA) in Barangay Cabatangan, Lambunao town, Iloilo province at about 5:50 a.m. Monday.**

Cpl. Aldrin S. Cablas sustained an injury on his left leg and is currently recovering in a hospital in Calinog town, **61IB commander, Lt. Col. Sisenando Magbalot**, said in a phone interview.

He narrated that the troops received information that a group of rebels were on their way to the **Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU) detachment**.

"They conducted a combat patrol and encountered the enemies," he said, adding that it was "really their intention to harass the troops."

The exchange of gunfire occurred some 400 meters away from the detachment and lasted about 30 minutes.

**The more or less 20 rebels are believed to be members of the Baloy Platoon, Central Front led by a certain Carl Teodosio.**

Magbalot said on Sunday that government troops also had an exchange of gunfire with an undetermined number of rebels **in Barangay Dalije, Miagao.**

The battalion commander said the spate of encounters with the communist group is a manifestation that government soldiers are working continuously.

"The information that is provided to us is accurate. Our continuous awareness (campaign) bears fruit and they (community) are giving us information," he added.

Magbalot noted that the rebel group is "getting weaker every day," as the continuous operation of government troops is putting pressure on the rebels, prompting them to move from one place to another.

"By this time, we know that they are not on extortion because their focus is on combat (operations)," he added.